University of California Bancroft Library/Berkeley
Regional Oral History Office

Glenn A. Wessels

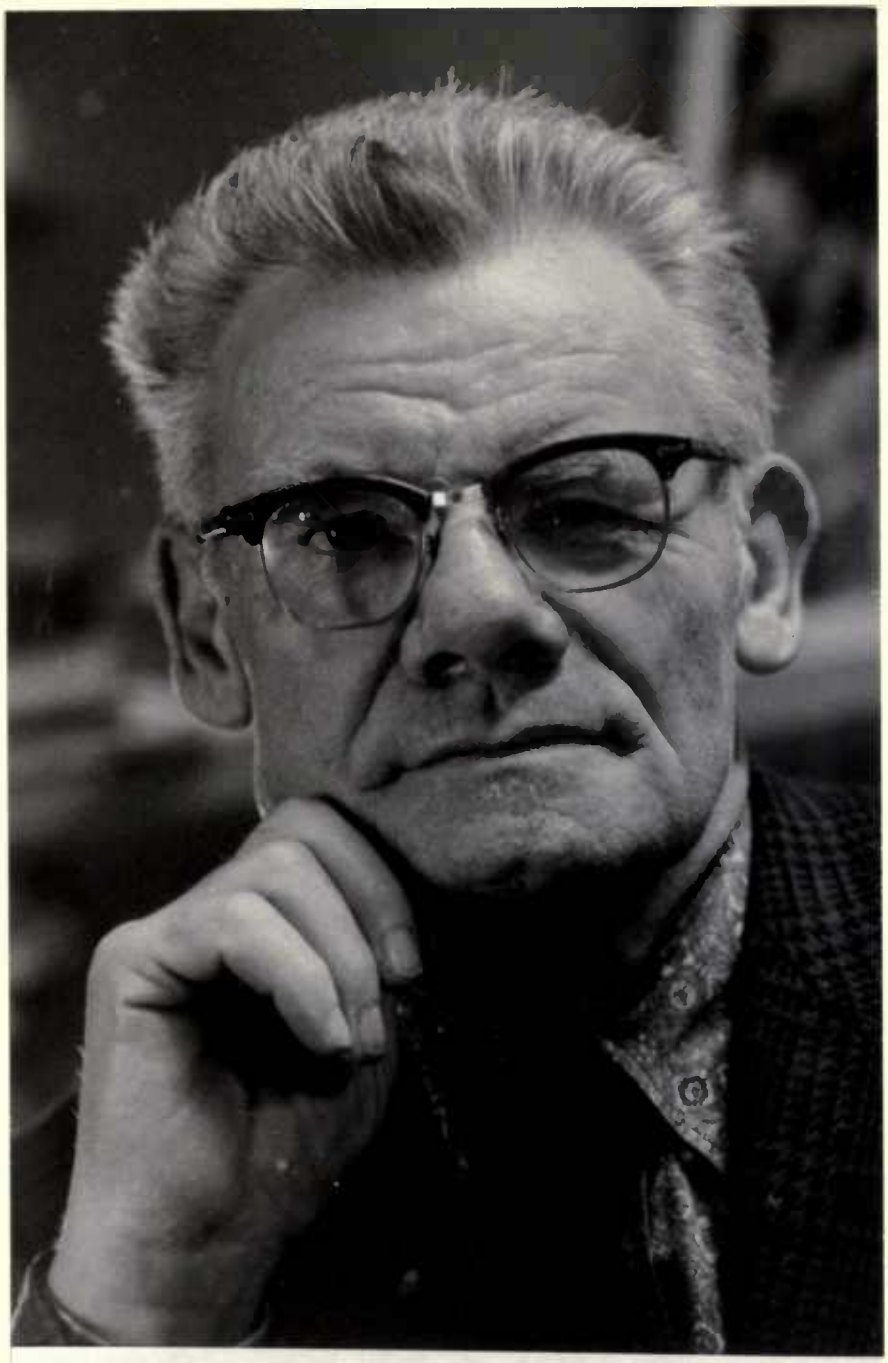
EDUCATION OF AN ARTIST

With an introduction by

Stephen C. Pepper

An Interview Conducted by
Suzanne Bassett Riess

Berkeley
1967



Glenn Wessels - 1967
Photo by Gilbert Sully

FOREWORD

My first introduction to Glenn Wessels was at a lively--jazz in the background--University Gallery opening in January 1966. He was talking with Stephen Pepper (a former Regional Oral History Office interviewee) and when my job was explained to him, Mr. Wessels jokingly suggested, "Why not interview me?" So when University Librarian Donald Coney proposed in March 1966 that Glenn Wessels' knowledge of Hans Hofmann, and of the campus and Bay Area cultural development, should be made into oral history, it was a pleasure to remind Mr. Wessels of his offer.

Our interviews took place later that spring in his Kroeber Hall office-studio, always with instant coffee, always with a sense of great rush and busyness. The scene, of course, was everchanging as the paintings in the background changed. And there was always a certain flow of student interruption. At the beginning of our meetings Mr. Wessels wished to speak as uninterruptedly as possible, getting it all said as it occurred to him. At the end we went back and considered more questions. He was willing and co-operative and it was fun.

After a painting summer in Scandinavia and the south of France, Mr. Wessels was back, now found in California Hall's great top floor studio. A visit there in October 1966 gave a real sense of the painter at last at work nearly full time--though never without some commitment to teaching--and his work was exciting and various after his summer. He was a busy man still, simultaneously at work on some five canvasses, scenes from years back, from walks in hills here and everywhere, large compositions of large subjects, small bright, beautiful paintings. Always instant coffee, always a tight schedule, now seen under a vast skylight, wearing a green eye-shade. He will never have enough time to paint, but it must by now be an ingredient of his work.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The Office, headed by Mrs. Willa Baum, is under the administrative supervision of the Director of the Bancroft Library. Mr. Wessels' interview forms one of a continuing series of interviews on the history of the University of California and was partially financed by a grant from the Alumni Fund.

After a punishing summer in Sacramento and the
[illegible] of Oregon, Mr. Tweedie was back, now found in
[illegible] Hollywood Grand Jury Room studio. A vital
[illegible] in Lincoln Lane gives a [illegible] hours of the pulsing
[illegible] most nearly full size--in [illegible] never without
[illegible] to [illegible]--[illegible] man rocking
[illegible] at his armchair. He [illegible] man still,
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[illegible] conversations [illegible], small [illegible],
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the Albert Zuno.

Interviews with Stephen C. Pepper, Grace McCann Morley, Louis and Lundy Siegriest, Constance and Spencer Macky, Eugen Neuhaus, and Elsie Whitaker Martinez may be of particular interest to the researcher in Bay Area art history.

Stephen C. Pepper, whose history in and of the Department of Art is available in his Art and Philosophy at the University of California 1919 to 1962, is Mills Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy and Civil Polity, Emeritus. Still very much on campus, he is an advisor and friend to the University. As a good friend of Glenn Wessels', he was a logical and happily agreeable introducer to Mr. Wessels.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer

INTRODUCTION

Well do I remember when I first saw Glenn Wessels. I was just a young professor. He came into my office at the top of Wheeler Hall, a boy with rumpled hair and clothes, and overflowing with eagerness. He was really more than a boy, for he has always looked younger than he is. What was he so eager about? He had heard somehow that I was supposed to know things about art. He was studying to be a painter at the California College of Arts and Crafts. He was earning something there too. He admired his teachers there. But they had conflicting ideas and did not seem to be able to tell him why they were doing what they did. He wanted to know the why's, to get to the bottom of these things. I soon found that much of what he wanted to know just was not known, and I advised him to get in touch with the psychology department and ask to do some experimenting in visual aesthetics.

He eventually got his A.B. majoring in psychology in this University, and starting so many fruitful lines of experiment in aesthetic matters that later students obtained their Ph.D.'s completing some of his special problems. He had a gift for experiments, ingenious in

finding ways of establishing correlations and constructing mechanisms to bring his ideas to fruitful testing. He had more ideas than he could use and the psychologists were fascinated with him. They had never seen a man like him, and I am sure they never have since. For what he really wanted was to paint, not just to know.

I saw a lot of him over this period, but the next vivid memory of a special occasion is again in the same office at the top of Wheeler Hall, when he came in with his father. His father was a man not to be forgotten, a man of dignity,with a beard like Moses. He was, to my amazement, asking me for advice about his son's career. I was embarrassed--just a young teacher to be offering advice to this impressive person who could have been my father and who wanted to know what was most advantageous for his son's future. What specifically he wanted to know was whether it would be a waste of his son's money--some little sum of which he was trustee, I believe--to let him have it and be off on his own in pursuit of this strange craze for art off in Europe. In spite of my embarrassment, I never gave a piece of advice with such unqualified assurance as to tell him he could be certain it would be all right. To my further amazement, Glenn's father accepted my authority, and turned the money over to Glenn.

No money could have been better spent. Glenn discovered Hans Hofmann while in Europe, just the man whose own experiments in painting could teach Glenn more than anyone could about what Glenn wanted to know. Hofmann thought a lot of Glenn and made him his assistant in his art school for two years. When Glenn returned to America in 1931, it was I who was learning from him. And again I was seeing him a lot.

In fact, there was no one whom I thought so sympathetically understanding of my approach to aesthetics both in theory and in teaching as he. Our conceptions of the proper structure of a college art department were also identical, and the ways of administrating it. When I became chairman of the Berkeley Art Department, I had him in mind as a person we should eventually want on the staff. For besides his growing reputation as a painter, he turned out to have a talent for administration. He acquired good practice at this as a Supervisor on the WPA Federal Art Project, and also at the State College of Washington. We added him to our staff in Berkeley in 1946, and he was acting chairman of the Department during my absence in 1948. Few members have given more to the Department over the years than he. His youthfulness and buoyancy remain permanently with him. Never has his painting been so vigorous and expressive as now.

And now it is I who have been substituting for him in his visual aesthetics class while he is away on leave. And, of course, it is he who now is the authority on matters of visual aesthetics--than whom I would maintain there is none better to be found.

Stephen C. Pepper
Mills Professor of Intellectual and
Moral Philosophy and Civil Polity
Emeritus

November, 1967
University of California
Berkeley, California

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Glenn Anthony Wessels

Birthplace: Capetown, South Africa (naturalized American citizen)
Date: December 15, 1895
Parentage: Father, John James Wessels, born Johannesburg
Mother, Ruby Electa Anthony, born Nova Scotia
Marital Status: Married to Katheryn Foster Wessels

Education: California public schools from the age of seven on. A.B. (psychology), U.C.B. B.F.A., Cal. College of Arts and Crafts. M.A., U.C.B. European Art Study: two years travel and museum study in England, France, Italy and Germany; art school study chiefly with Hans Hofmann, Schule für Bildende Kunst at Munich and St. Tropez, also with Andre L'hote, Paris, Academie Colorossi, Paris, and Karl Hofer, Berlin.

Teaching Experience: California College of Arts and Crafts, 1924-28, instructor in antique, life drawing, watercolor, advertising art, stage design. 1930-42, assistant professor teaching composition, with still-life, figure and landscape subject-matter; art techniques, art history, aesthetics, science for artists and craftsmen, principles of camouflage.

Hofmann Schule für Bildende Kunst, 1929-30. Assistant and interpreter for Hans Hofmann in Munich and St. Tropez, then on lecturetour in the U.S. with a summer session at U.C.B.

State College of Washington, Pullman, 1942-45, assistant professor of fine arts. 1945-46, associate professor, teaching beginning and advanced drawing and composition, design, aesthetics, art history, mural painting, art teaching methods, principles of camouflage.

University of California, Berkeley, 1946-, associate professor of art, teaching fundamentals of drawing and composition, advanced painting and composition, history and theory of criticism of pictures, lithography and etching; acting chairman of department, Spring 1949. Full professor, 1950-1966.

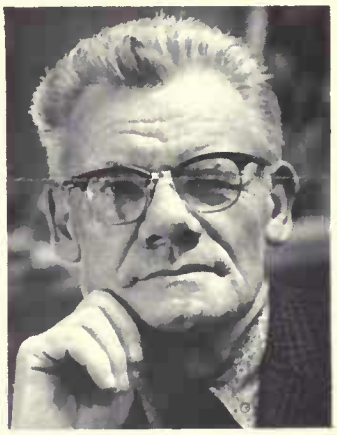
Summer session engagements: Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., 1931. Mills College, Oakland, 1932. State College of Washington, Pullman, 1940, 1941. California College of Arts and Crafts, 1942,1943. U.C.B., 1946,1947,1950-1966. U.C.L.A., 1948. State College of Montana, 1949.

GLENN WESSELS, NEWEST BOARD MEMBER

This is the story of a boy who ran away from home and became an artist.

Glenn Wessels didn't want to be a doctor; he wanted to paint. He didn't like the study of medicine and the strange smells that went with it. But the smell of paint — that was quite agreeable.

"You'll end up starving in a garret," said his father. But today Wessels lives in a substantial house in Berkeley with his charming wife, and they are not starving. Over the years his paintings have won innumerable awards in many exhibits in this nation and abroad, and are in notable collections. He is in great demand as a lecturer, often serves as an advisor on art councils, as a consultant for museums and other important collectors. He is revered as a teacher, has long been a Major Advisor for the University of California Art Department and very active in other University affairs. He recently spent a year painting in Italy on a grant from the U.C. Institute of Creative Arts, and 24 of the works he brought back are being shown at Mills College Art Gallery through Feb. 13.



Artist Glenn Wessels

Wessels had already held several jobs after leaving his pre-med course at U.C. before he began his studies at the California School of Arts and Crafts. He had worked in the oil fields and in shipyards and on the old S.F. Call Bulletin where a staff artist told him, "Go to art school, learn to draw better and I'll give you a job."

Wessels worked on the waterfront for money enough to start art studies. As his art skills increased he was asked to teach. Then Frederick Meyer, CCAC's founder, suggested he return to U.C. for his degree. Majoring in Psychology of Perception, he received his A.B. and journeyed to Europe. There he traveled for two years, studying with Andre Lhote and at the Academie Colorossi, Paris; with Karl Hofer, Berlin; and studying and working with Hans Hofman in Munich — incidentally teaching Hofman English and pursuading him to come to the U.S. for a summer of teaching. Wessels himself returned to CCAC as a faculty member.

During his student days he had become close friends with Mr. and Mrs. Meyer, and now he became Meyer's assistant. Glenn Wessels gives great credit to Frederick Meyer for helping him find his life's directions, and, among many of CCAC's early teachers, particularly to the friendship and teaching of Xavier Martinez and of Isabelle Percy West.

But the depression struck — at CCAC as elsewhere. With a decreasing number of students, Wessels had to take on numerous additional jobs. He was a Northern California Supervisor for W.P.A., the Federal Arts Project; and was probably the first art columnist in San Francisco, writing for the noted Argonaut newspaper. An offer from Washington State College took him to serve on its art department for five years. He was then invited to join the U.C. art department, where he is at present.

Today, with a long record of exhibits, honors and prizes for his brilliant and joyous paintings and his many other contributions to our world, Glenn Wessels returns to the place where his art education started, to serve in yet another capacity as the newest member of CCAC's Board of Trustees. The honor, in this case, is ours. It is a pleasure to welcome the boy who ran away from home.

Appeared in California College of Arts and Crafts
Vol. LIX, No. 7, December, 1965

Villis Foster

O. Box 917, Berkeley, CA 94701 (415) 528-8344

November 24, 1986

Mr. James Elliott, Director,
University Art Museum,
2626 Bancroft Way,
Berkeley CA 94720

Dear Mr. Elliott:

The November issue of the California Monthly alerted me to the Hofmann exhibit, now at the gallery. It is an impressive show, and you are to be congratulated for presenting it so well, without letting the artist's spectacularly bright colors overwhelm the surroundings.

The show does, however, perpetuate an oversight in the history of the Hofmann collection, and does an injustice to the man who actually brought Hofmann to Berkeley the first time - Professor Glenn Wessels, formerly of the Art Department. Without him it is doubtful that the German master would have taught here, or that his collection would have been given to the University.

This does not diminish Worth Ryder's efforts. It was he who first had the idea of bringing Hofmann to the campus for a summer session assignment in 1930. However, execution of the plan was hampered by distance and by the language barrier. To overcome both Ryder recruited his friend and colleague, Glenn Wessels, who was in Munich at the time.

Wessels had gone there at Ryder's suggestion, two years earlier. He got along so well with his mentor that the two became close friends, tutoring one another in his native language, so that Wessels became intimately familiar with Herr Hofmann's views and methods.

When the invitation came from Ryder, Hofmann was reluctant to take such a big step, although he was becoming uneasy with the political situation in his homeland. He finally agreed to come, provided Wessels accompanied him as guide and translator.

The hegira almost ended in New York City. Hofmann was impressed by the size and vitality of the city, and considered accepting an invitation from the Art Students' League to teach there. It took some strong persuastion by Wessels for him to continue westward.

En route the pair stopped several times to lecture, with Wessels sharing the platform to translate and elaborate on Hofmann's talks. Among other places they visited Minneapolis, where Hofmann met two future members of the University Art Department - John Haley and Erle Loran.

It was because of his pleasant experiences in Berkeley that Hofmann decided, some years later, to give his paintings and a bequest of $250,000 to the University to establish the Hofmann Gallery. By then neither Ryder nor Wessels was in the Art Department, and negotiations for the transfer were conducted by others.

Verification of Wessels' important role in the bequest was given by former Chancellor Roger Heyns at the dedication of the Gallery on November 6, 1970. He awarded the Berkeley Citation - highest honor the campus could give - to Wessels for "long years of loyal and enlightened service -- service which included the inspired move of bringing Hans Hofmann to the campus." Somehow, when the history of the Gallery was recounted, Wessels' part in the affair fell through the cracks.

Since I believe that this is the first time that the complete collection of Hofmann paintings has been displayed, it would be an appropriate occasion to restore the true story, giving Worth Ryder and Glenn Wessels joint credit for the acquisition.

I want also to suggest that some corner of the Hofmann Gallery be reserved for biographical and historical information about Hans Hofmann. It might be appropriate to include there a rotating show of works by Hofmann students, of whom there are many distinguished ones around the country. It could be inaugurated with a comprehensive exhibit of works by Vaclav Vytlacil, Anton Refregier, Cameron Booth, John Haley, Erle Loran, Worth Ryder, Glenn Wessels, and many others who were taught and influenced by Hofmann. You probably have representative paintings from several of them in your permanent collection, and could readily supplement it from other local museums.

I would like also to suggest that you forward a copy of this letter to Cynthia Goodman, in case she revises or supplements her recent book on Hans Hofmann. She can find a full account of much of the above material in Wessels' oral autobiography, "Education of an Artist," in the Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library on the campus. I would be glad to supply additional information about him, if she cares to get in touch with me by mail to the above address, or by phone.

Sincerely,

Willis Foster

Willis Foster

cc Dean Kuhi
Allen Temko
John Haley
Karl Kasten
Russell Schoch

CONTENTS

THE FAMILY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Wessels: You asked me where the family came from. My own racial background is very scattered--my mother was Nova Scotian, English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh. My father was South African Dutch and Belgian French. I recently found the Wessels name important in Norwegian history. Family names on my father's side were Duplessis, Botha, Wessels, and Rousseau. And on my mother's side Maine was English, and Anthony probably Welsh. O'Brien was the Irish; and Wallace was the Scottish. So I call myself a North European salad. [Laughter] (Since the recent trip to Norway, I am convinced the name Wessels originated in Norway.) To trace all these family lines back to the origin is a little unnecessary, I think, but the first Wessels of my family I ever heard about appeared in Friesland. Then they show up again in connection with St. Bartholomew's Eve, Cardinal Richelieu and all that. They were on the wrong side as Huguenots and they left for religious reasons for South Africa for very much the same reasons as the Puritans came to America.

Riess: You were interested in finding out about them?

Wessels: Yes, I went to Holland not long ago, just curious to see how the boys who had stayed home had done. And I found

Wessels: seven Wessels in the phone book in Haarlam and five in Amsterdam. I walked out into the street and saw a big green traveling sign that said that "Wessels shoes tread the world" and also the Wessels family owns all the rock and roll record shops in Amsterdam. I did not make myself known to them but apparently they did all right, the ones who stayed home.

The family as I knew it began with my grandfather whose father was Voertrekker, one of the Boers (Boer means farmer, like the German, bauer),who moved out when the British moved into Cape Colony. He moved into the Transvaal, the more northerly regions of South Africa. They got into covered wagons much as the pioneers who came across the plains did and moved out and left the place to the British whom they did not approve of. British colonists are not the kind of people who appealed to the good Dutch Reformed religious farmers; they felt that they were being debased by this association so they got out.

This feeling carried through the Boer War and carries through into the apartheid movement today, the antipathy due to a kind of Boer conservatism, and a Dutch stubborn

Wessels: feeling that they want to be assured of their own traditional customs nd so on and so forth. You detect the same kind of stubbornness in the Pennsylvania Dutch too, in their resistence to educational changes and all this sort of thing. This is part of the Dutch attitude, I think.

Now kind of bringing it down to date, my grandfather's family all became very involved in the government of the Transvaal region and several family relatives became important in the government. The Boer War really began as an imperialistic grab--I am telling this now from the Boer side--on the part of England. Gold and diamonds were discovered, not quite simultaneously, but diamonds were discovered on some of the family holdings and gold elsewhere. Father was one of the original founders of the deBeer's Diamond Mining Company and the family became very rich. And when Grandfather Wessels' holdings and farms were divided up they each one found themselves well off. So they were each in their own way very independent financially and able to do what they wanted to do.

Seventh Day Adventism

Something very peculiar happened however; my Uncle

Wessels: Peter, the oldest brother, fell very ill. All of them had been more or less conventional Lutherans up to this time. Uncle Peter made a great vow--they were very religious people--that if the Lord cured him of his illness, he would restudy the Scriptures and follow the Lord's word as exactly as he could. So while he was sick, he started to read the Bible all over again and weighed each part of it in the light of his vow, and he could not find any place in the Bible where it said that people should go to church on Sunday. So he decided that somewhere or another an error had been committed since there was absolutely no provision in the Bible for changing the worship day from Saturday to Sunday. So, Saturday was the proper Sabbath day. He was all alone in this so he began holding his private prayers on Saturday instead of Sunday.

Riess: I take it he was cured?

Wessels: Yes! He became very well and very rich and so a rich man who is also well holds some influence. Other people in the family thought that he was a little nutty but went along with him. But the whole thing took on another dimension when he heard that there was a sect in America which also kept the seventh day of the week so he said that he would finance a teacher to come over and tell him about it--maybe he could find some other things out that he had not thought about. He wanted to know what they had.

Wessels: The person who was sent was a doctor, R.S. Anthony, who was my mother's brother. He came to South Africa to teach the seventh-day-keeping Boers (and now there were several of them), the doctrines of Seventh Day Adventism. The result was that most of the family converted. Then their aim became the betterment of mankind. My father particularly was very idealistic about it and decided to devote his fortune to the founding of institutions which would make healthy people out of people who were not healthy. And also to instill in them the principles of right living . In order to learn how to do this, he went to Battle Creek and fell under the influence of J.H. Kellogg, who was doing the same kind of thing there.

Riess: What are these institutions, are they hospitals?

Wessels: They are sanitariums. One of them is up here at St. Helena. One of them is in Glendale. The famous Battle Creek one was the first one. That was the J.H. Kellogg Sanitarium in Battle Creek. Corn flakes, vegetarianism and all of that came out of this. J.H. invented them and later, when his brother, W.K.,stole cornflakes, J.H. started rice flakes. Father helped these enterprises.

Riess: This all seems fantastic.

Wessels: It is fantastic; it is fantastic even to me, I hardly believe it is true. But not very many years ago, before my father and mother died, a huge caravan of trailers drew up in front of their little house in Glendale and who should

Wessels: Pop out but a very aged W.K. Kellogg--J.H.'s brother--come to see my father, who had probably financed his first corn flake. [Laughter] This is true, I have seen it with my own eyes. W.K. had never been a Seventh Day Adventist and later split with J.H.--taking corn-flakes with him. (Later, Post, who had been an employee, stole his secrets!)

The health food movement in America started right there, this whole reason that you eat hay for breakfast. It all began right there with the doctrine of J.H.Kellogg, that man was by the nature of his teeth and his physiology a fruit and grain eater, not a meat eating animal. Kellogg went to considerable pains to prove that it was wrong to eat meat and so forth. So the Seventh Day Adventists accepted this as part of their doctrine and as a result I had very little meat in my home until I ran away from home late in adolescence.

Riess: Was Kellogg a nonvert?

Wessels: He was one of the Seventh Day Adventist doctors. He later split off from the Seventh Day Adventists. The movement had developed in this country--I did not go into that purposely--but the movement developed in this country beginning with the Millerites. You know the thing about the stars falling... Well, there was a sect in America

Wessels; that found something in the Bible referring to the stars falling and prophecies that after that certain things would happen in world events and so forth. They felt that when the stars fell that was the sign of the end of the world and that the heavens were going to descend on earth at that moment. So a lot of them gathered on a high mountain peak, I don't remember just where but somewhere in Illinois or around there, after a particularly active meteoric shower in 1866, I guess it was. They stood there and expected to see divine beings descending immediately after the shower stopped. Well, they did not come, so the Millerites fell into altercations and discussions and thought there must be something wrong with their figuring somewhere. One of these people was Mrs. E.G. White, who was sort of an inspired mystic really, the kind of person who started the Christian Science Church, the same sort of person as Mary B. Eddy, with a lot of drive and a lot of ability and with a belief in her own intuitions. (This Mrs. Ellen G. White used to rock me on her knee, by the way, when I was a small boy in Australia).

She had visions, and after this stars falling thing did not come off she went home and she had a vision, and this vision explained that there had been a misinterpretation

Wessels: and that the end of the world was to come quite a bit later and that in the meantime certain things had to be done. So she set about doing them. She organized along with others the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The health part of their activities, setting up the hospitals--healthy mind, healthy body, and all that sort of thing--is what my father came to join when he came to America.

Riess: Now Doctor Anthony...

Wessels: He was a graduate of the medical school at Battle Creek.

Riess: Why did your father not want to set up things in South Africa?

Wessels: He did, he wanted to learn though, so he came to Battle Creek to learn. At the same time his brothers, Uncle Francis, and much later, Uncle Andrew, also came. There were eight brothers altogether and most of them became Seventh Day Adventist in one way or another. One or two of them did not. One is a lawyer and lawyers are more sceptical.

But at any rate, the family threw its fortunes into this health movement. My father came with the idea of becoming a doctor so he could do good, but his training was financial and his business ability was considered more valuable, so he was persuaded to go into the business end, organizing things and so on.

So my early childhood was spent on the move constantly.

Wessels: Father was traveling around the world organizing institutions.

Riess: Nineteen-thirteen, when you were naturalized, wasn't the time when he had first came over was it?

Wessels: No, that was much later, when dad was managing St. Helena Sanitarium.

I had better jump back. My father met my mother in Battle Creek when he was there and this was in 1893 or 1894. I came along about a year later and you have to allow a certain amount of time. What happened was he married her very much against the Kellogg hierarchy's desires--they had better things in mind for him. Mother was the chambermaid OR "MATRON" in charge of one wing of the hospital and this was considered a marriage beneath father's station.

Riess: In spite of the fact that her brother was a doctor?

Wessels: Yes, for some reason or another. I understood that they saw each other with great difficulty and they had to practically elope.

At any rate, he married my mother and traveled around the world for a year and then went back to South Africa, where he organized and built a great sanitarium in Claremont, South Africa and I was born in the process of developing this institution. (This is my earliest memory--wandering in the halls of the great building. This was before the tragedy which occurred later.)

Wessels: But we were very rich and after organizing the sanitarium and getting it on its feet in South Africa, Father set out for Australia. I won't go into all the runnings to and fro. We went to France, England, to California to see my mother's relatives again, back to Africa again, and then from Africa to Australia. I don't remember those things except in the form of various fragmentary childhood memories. I remember sitting on a stack of baggage in a big, dark railroad station and so on. I remember these little flashes of things. I was very young, but I was always with my parents; I was not left behind. (As I say, I am trying to shorten here, but if anything turns up that you want to know about, ask.)

The Boer War

Anyway, we turned up in Australia where Father was to organize a sanitarium. During this time the Boer War broke out and Father's fortunes were very much menaced because most of the family were on the wrong side of the fence. He had to get back to South Africa to tend to things immediately and left my mother and myself behind. My consciousness through a chain of events begins here.

Wessels: I was about three at the time although I can go back to one and a half with memories that are spotty.

Riess: How are you able to go back?

Wessels: I was supposedly very unusual in being able to do this. My mother told me that at the age of one and a half I was able to read a few things and draw intelligibly and so forth. So I have a pretty good recall. Today this is useful to me in my painting. I have almost total recall of things that I see.

What happened was that my father went back to South Africa and the British. I must not appear to be prejudiced because I have not got anything at all against the British as people, but the people who were running the Boer War appeared in a very bad light. They inevitably must because it was very badly managed, shall we say, from a humanitarian standpoint. They put the Boer people in concentration camps where they died off of yellow fever and typhoid, and they committed all sorts of atrocities almost unwittingly such as soldiers do in war time. These things loom large in our family history and of course my grandmother spared no pains in making me hate the "Roinecks" ("Rednecks") as she called them (which I don't do, but nevertheless it was a sad business for my family).

Wessels: As soon as my father arrived he was locked into jail. He was unable to communicate with anyone or retrieve anything. He sent helpless letters back to my mother in Australia that the best thing to do was to return when she could and at least they would be together during this trying time. So my mother and I set out. We tried to get passage on a steam-ship over the Indian Ocean, but all the ships were troop ships. All the transportation was being used for Australian troops going to South Africa. So the only thing we could get on was an old windjammer and this old windjammer was a tramp cargo ship that sailed up around the north of Australia and to Singapore, bummed its way around the Bay of Bengal, then from the tip of India sailed across the Indian Ocean to Madagascar and then down around the point to Cape Town. This I remember pretty well.

I remember I was the pet of the ship; all the sailors were good to me. I remember that when anything spectacular or interesting showed up, I was always brought to see it, even in the middle of the night. My mother woke me up one time and said, "You must get up. You must remember this. The most beautiful thing has happened." She took me up on the deck and in the warm stillness of the night with the bright moonlight shining on it, the whole sea was

Wessels: covered with paper nautilas, flourescent and shimmering over the whole sea. It looked like blue fire or something. Then when the flying fish came aboard, I was hauled out of my afternoon nap and taken on deck to be shown the flying fish and so on.

I can remember leaning over the ship at Singapore harbour and being amazed at the smell of the water; the Singapore sewage is special. [Laughter.] The fish loved it and there were chains of goldfish swimming around the ship. These vivid little impressions I don't think are extraordinary except that they seem to be particularly vivid to me. I remember that I have other ones that are only flashbacks and not consistent like the ones I am talking about now.

One of the earliest is of my grandmother's house in the suburb of Cape Town. Years later I said, "Mother, there is an image coming through my mind again and again, so much so that I want to paint it, of a gate, kind of a cattle corral gate of wood, with bushes of blue flowers all growing up and red geraniums and pine trees in the distance and green grass." I said, "Now why should I keep being haunted by this particular image?"

Wessels: She said, "That is where you played when you were between one and two in your grandmother's backyard."

So I have checked up on these images and I know that they are authentic.

Anyway, when we arrived, my father was allowed to meet us under guard and we were taken to a little house that we owned and we were immured there with guards standing around the outside. The British were afraid that my father would communicate with the Boers and somehow or another put some of his resources to their aid.

I must explain that the Boers were able to fight well because they were trained frontiersmen and very skillful in the use of small arms and they were getting help, not really recognized help, but help from across Africa from the Germans who were sending them Mauser rifles, which were superior to the British arms, all the way from Central Africa from Egypt. So, they were able to hold out for two years under circumstances that would have been impossible otherwise.

My family was very deeply engaged in this war. General DeWet , who was one of the generals, was a relative of my grandmother's. General Botha, who later became the first premier of South Africa, was a relative of my grandmother's. They were all cousins or uncles and so

Wessels: forth. General Cronje was related. All the people who were deeply in the Boer side were related. So the British were playing it safe in keeping my father holed up. However, he himself, because of his religious ideas was completely pacifist.

Soon the British who had been guided by ambitious Cecil Rhodes and his friend Joseph Chamberlain, realized that they were up against something that would not be licked. DeWet was for an honorable peace in which the Boer people were to be given certain privileges of immunity and so on. But the British wanted unconditional surrender and they did their very best to destroy the Boer government or any semblance of organization that the Boers might have. They could not do it as long as General DeWet kept the Boer government out of their hands. The word "commando" comes from this war, that was the Boer word for their troops, it means guerilla fighter, really, and they all were. They had small groups of mounted men who were able to live off the land as they went and move very quickly from place to place. These were the commandos. General DeWet was in charge of a rather large group of these people and in the middle of their group of horsemen was a wagon with fast horses and in it was the Boer President,

Wessels: poor old sick President Steyn, another relative! He was the government; as long as they had him safe, they could treat as a separate power. If they lost him, then they would have no nucleus for their government. So there was poor old President Steyn who was desperately sick at the time, and with a wagon full of doctors and nurses and that was the Boer government.

Riess: A symbol?

Wessels: Yes, as long as they had a president, as long as they had a government, they could hold out for a treaty, and they did. They won that; the British tried again and again to capture them, but with DeWet's skill as a fighter, they escaped them every time. The British--it reminds me a little bit of Vietnam--brought in more and more troops. They shot away for each Boer killed 9 tons of British ammunition! And, of course, I think the figure was something like 12 ounces on the Boer side. That shows you the relative efficiency. [Laughter] They were just steam rollered and they were holding out for an honorable peace and this meant a lot. It meant that things could not be confiscated and so on.

Well, I'll describe one maneuver. Where we were, the news would come in an underground way and we would hear what happened and we heard one time about the British

Wessels: having completely surrounded DeWet's band and the wagon on the veld and they thought for a while that all was lost, but the Boers discovered that a huge herd of wild cattle had also been enclosed in the great British circle so they got in the middle of the herd of wild cattle and stampeded them through the British camp at night and escaped and then it went on for another year or so.

And I can remember as a small child being very proud of my race; you know how that sort of thing would effect a youngster. But at any rate, they held out and they had an honorable peace and the first premier of South Africa as a dominion state was General Botha, my grandmother's cousin.

Riess: I'd like to know what you remember about your family's feelings about Africans.

Wessels: I came from a household in which an indefinite number of Negroes were in service. So I had very much the same background as the Southern plantation person might have in his relationship with the blacks--who definitely were believed to be an inferior race and so on. This, of course, remains part of the apartheid difficulty.

I, however, developed an affection for these people as a child. They played with me; they nursed me; they took care of me and so on, and it had an opposite

Wessels: effect on me and I always loved them very much. As a recial group, although there are individual variations, I have always had a strong affection for them as people.

I am at the opposite end, personally, on the opposite side of the apartheid thing. I think that this is a terrible thing... I sympathize with the present situation (Southern Rhodesia, 1966) because the black outnumbers the white over 100 to one and if they had political power, the whites would be snowed under. This sets up terrific problems, In spite of the fact that I believe in democracy, I realize there that it might just have the same disastrous effect as it had in the Congo. I think this is what the white people are afraid of. Even the ones with a more idealistic approach to the racial problem are afraid. This is one of the things that produces apartheid, as I understand it.

Riess: So the solutions are all in gradual kinds of actions?

Wessels: The only thing that I could see would be gradual action. It seems that the extremists on both sides have delayed, if not made impossible, these adjustments. I fear and look for a blood bath of some sort and the extermination of the South African whites and I think they feel it too. What

Wessels: little communication I have with that part of the world seems to all confirm this idea. The white men do not go out onto the streets at nights unless they are armed, a state of siege, really.

Riess: Were there very many housekeeping people taking care of you?

Wessels: Yes, quite a large number. In those days they were sort of like slaves, though not exactly, because they were paid. My grandfather freed all his slaves, but when he did the chief of the tribe who lived on the ranch came to him and said, "Well, boss, what do we do now?"

"Well, you are free; you can go away if you want."

"But we do not want to go away."

My grandfather said, "Well, this is the way it is. You work so many hours per day and for each hour I give you so much mealies. [corn] And I give you the privilege of living in your kraal [in your little compound of huts] in return for your work."

The head man said, "Well, what is the difference about it?"

"I can not explain it to you but it is different. Anyway, you are free. You can go away if you want to."

Wessels: The head man said, "But we do not want to go away, and you give us our mealies anyway."

So that was the way they solved the social problem of being free.

Riess: Was there any problem about religion and slave holding?

Wessels: The Boers interpreted the Scriptures clear back to Noah. Noah, if you look in the Old Testament, came out of the Ark and he had three sons and one of them, Ham, was black. Noah got drunk and more or less disgraced himself and his son Ham made fun of him and laughed at him. For this, when Noah got well again, he told his son that he had to work at hard labor to make up for the insult that he had given his father. This is taken as a directive for the blacks from then on because Ham was supposedly the progenitor of all the black races just as Shem was the progenitor of all the Semite races, and Japheth is the progenitor of the rest, I guess. I don't know. This does correspond roughly to what I understand of the rather vague history of the spread of the human race from the Mesopotamian Delta. Ham was condemned to slavery by the Bible so the apartheid people use the Scripture as backing.

Now we are back to the end of the war, 1902. My father then tried to retrieve his fortune. He had

Wessels: put a great deal of his money in buildings and these had been confiscated for British war offices and all this sort of thing, and upkeep was simply not considered. They were ruined.

Riess: These were sanitariums?

Wessels: No, business buildings. The sanitarium was the only thing that was really kept up because that was used as a British hospital. But he was practically bankrupted, not quite, because these office buildings were in such a state of disrepair. The whole area underwent a state of real depression, things financially were at a standstill, so father lost a lot of his property at that time. But he patched things together the best that he could and it was decided that we would come to California where mother's relatives were.

Riess: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Wessels: No, my mother lost a child in Australia probably due to the worry and disturbances. There was no child until another sister later.

CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLING IN CALIFORNIA

Wessels: We came to St. Helena, Napa County, where my mother had a brother. The idea was the Father would stay here for awhile and then go back to South Africa and try to pick up the family fortunes again. My Uncle Johnny taught school at the Crystal Springs school in Pratts Valley and that is where I had my first formal schooling. Before that I had a French governess, but now I go to the first grade and at that time I'm very good at reading and very bad at arithmetic, (which has dogged me all the rest of my life).

Riess: Did you have a second language?

Wessels: My mother was afraid that I might pick up a Boer accent which was pretty vile to her. She insisted that I learn only good English. (I much later learned German rather well) And I am able to understand, I have always been able to understand, "Afrikaans" but I can not speak it. Father spoke with an accent and Mother was very afraid that I would get an accent too, so she insisted that I speak only English. I think it was a mistake. But nevertheless that is the way it was.

So we are now in Pratts Valley near St. Helena, Napa County, which is really the place I think of when I think of a childhood home. All the South African things happened

Wessels: when I was so young that it seems almost like a vivid dream. Reality began for me, I think, right up here in Napa County. I went to this little green schoolhouse with eight grades in it. My uncle taught it. He was my mother's brother. We lived in a garden house near there. My father did not stay very long after he saw that Mother was safely settled and everything was going all right. He went back to South Africa and stayed for four years trying to pull his fortunes together.

During this time the family became poorer and poorer and it became evident to Mother that she was going to have to do something to help out because Father was unable to get any money out of anything in South Africa.

Riess: How about the rest of the family?

Wessels: All of them in various ways underwent difficulty. Things were tied up legally; they had gone into bankruptcy; people who owed them mortgages could not pay them. Anybody who had investments suffered particularly; they had no fluid cash. They might own the place but they could not pay the taxes, you see, and that sort of thing.

Poor Father stayed there and wrestled with the situation but he was not able to send money. Mother, who was a practical soul and who never really thought of herself as a rich woman at all, said, "Well, I know how to do a lot of things; I am going to go where I can

Wessels: earn some money." So we moved to Mountain View where the Seventh Day Adventist organization was building an institution called the Pacific Press Publishing Company, which is still, I think, at Mountain View. She was determined to go there and run a boarding house for several contracting people who were building this thing. So the next I remember is that my grandmother on my mother's side and my mother had a boarding house for the contractors and the carpenters who were building Pacific Press in Mountain View. And I went to school in Mountain View during that time. I would be probably in the third or fourth grade.

Mother later on gave up the boarding house business which did very well and she was able to build a house to suit her and she began teaching music. She was a good pianist and she sang. My mother's side of the family--I guess it is the Welsh strain coming out--they were always singing. My memory of my mother is a person who was always singing while she was working. So she taught music and was very active in everything that had to do with musical affairs. I can remember sitting as a youngster between two grand pianos on which four women were hammering out Tannhauser's Grand March and I thought it was the most wonderful thing in the world. I've always loved to sit right in the middle of a band! I cannot

Wessels: think of a musical experience which tops it and I have been to many concerts since. [Laughter] At home music was going on all the time, all day. There was somebody practicing or singing or somebody rehearsing for something all the time. And my mother was in the thick of it.

Riess: Who were the other somebodies who were in the house?

Wessels: Our family group consisted of my grandmother, my mother, and myself, and for a time a cousin on my mother's side who lived there.

This went on, a happy small town life with Father sort of receding in the distance; I hardly remembered him except for occasional letters.

Then one day my mother felt unaccountably ill with a very sudden migraine. She was really in distress and seemed to be upset in a way that the doctor could not figure out. We were all upset and couldn't figure out what was the matter with her. I think it was that night that a telegram came that Father's last property had burned to the ground and that he himself was in the hospital in a state of shock. It was a very strange thing that she should have responded thus at the same time. I've always wondered about ESP.

This then made it evident that it was no use for him to stay any longer; he had lost everything. He had

Wessels: barely enough fare to get home. Mother's little nest egg that she had built up was all that the family had.

Riess: Was this the sanitarium which had burned?

Wessels: Yes.

At this time another thing happened which quite literally shook us all up and that was the San Francisco earthquake. It hit particularly hard in Mountain View and destroyed the house that Mother built. We lived outside in the orchards for awhile, and then we again went to Uncle Johnny's place in St. Helena and there again I had fun playing with my cousin, John Elwyn Anthony. He and I were like brothers in those days. Now we are very far from one another; we hardly see each other. (He, by the way, is the Barney in Barney's Beanery that has recently been in the news. [Kienholz sculpture] And the name Barney was my nick-name first. I gave it to him and I will explain later how that happened. I was the original Barney of Barney's Beanery. He came out of the Navy and took it over and I went to art school. I was running a restaurant till then, in order to put myself through art school at the time. (Well, I will tell you about that later.)

I told you it would sound fantastic, but to go back to the San Francisco earthquake, it was useless to stay

Wessels: in Mountain View any longer and my father was coming home. My mother felt that if she retreated from the defeat of Mountain View to her long-suffering brother's home that things would be better, so we went there and stayed with Uncle Johnny's family for awhile. Oh, I didn't say that before we went to Mountain View my mother went to a hospital in San Francisco and brought home my little sister Jean who is seven years younger than I am. This was approximately eight months or so after my father had left for Africa. So part of my fun was helping bring up my little sister in Mountain View, playing together and so forth in spite of the fact that she was much younger. I taught her to ride a bike, to swim, I taught her how to do everything I could do. We are still very close; she is a doctor now is Placerville. Part of the life at Mountain View was the delight of this little sister.

We moved back to St. Helena and then something happened that probably had a traumatic effect on me and had a good deal to do with my later life. I was playing on the hillside with some youngsters and one of them threw a stick. It put out my left eye. I was very ill and blind for quite a while. My father came back to find that the son he had...he had always cherished the idea that I

Wessels: would become a great doctor and what it amounted to was that here I was probably incapable of being anything. The poor man had had enough suffering, goodness knows, and here was another trouble. I developed feelings of rejection as you can well imagine.

I had had comparative freedom with my mother and a normal childhood development. Then when my father came back he was a ruined man financially, completely frustrated, everything that he had worked for and thought worthwhile seemed to be dissolving and I was part of it. So I got kind of a feeling of alienation from him which I have always regretted although we later became friendly again. But I always felt that he had very little sympathy for me or anything that I did and it was only in the last years of his life that we changed that.

The only thing that my father could do then was to work as business manager for the same organization that he had so heavily endowed earlier--he was a skilled hospital manager. They had several hospitals which were not doing very well. One was in San Diego in Paradise Valley so we moved there from St. Helena and Father set to work rebuilding the Paradise Valley Sanitarium. My Cousin Pete and Uncle Andrew had come at the same time

Wessels: as my father. We stayed there for a year and a half and during that time I was recovering from the operations on my eye. I had had several. Finally the eye had to be removed. The operation was done by the same uncle who brought Seventh Day Adventism to South Africa, who was now a well known surgeon in Fresno. My life at this time began to open up in a curious way.

Riess: Were you more or less bedridden?

Wessels: No, but I was kept out of school and had to amuse myself. So, I began reading a lot. When I got my vision back, it seemed important to look at things and read. I was given a library card at a rather early age. And I'm afraid this developed my leanings toward agnosticism and so forth. I discovered in books a world that I did not know existed and it seemed to be a much larger world than the world of ideas in which my family lived. I would smuggle books home and read them at night with my electric light under the covers. I generally became kind of liberal beyond my years--if you know what I mean. I was reading H. G. Wells' Tono Bungay and things of that sort.

Riess: How did you get steered to these things?

Wessels: I was not steered; I found them. I went to the library shelf and picked out a book arbitrarily and tried to read it. If it went well, then fine. I found out that

Wessels: H.G. Wells had a lot to give me so I read everything.

Riess: Then you did not talk about these things with your parents?

Wessels: No, I knew very well that they had a rigid Lutheran and Seventh Day Adventist attitude towards religion. My mother not so much, she had an Irish sense of humor and a kind of jolly scepticism which she herself was afraid of--she felt that she was too liberal and that she should be more religious, she could not believe everything implicitly the way that my father could. But at any rate there was an increasing alienation which began about then because I began to see that I could not believe some of the things that they did, and that their ambitions were not my ambitions at all.

Riess: What were their ambitions?

Wessels: They wanted me to become a doctor and I had a growing conviction that I wanted to be a painter. This seemed to be no career in my father's eyes and he thought it was nonsense. So this slowly built up through the years until I ran away from home to become a painter--that is all there was to it. But back to Paradise Valley.

In Paradise Valley I was not well and not in school and since all the other kids were in school and I needed a friend to play with, I found a large Mexican macaw

Wessels: that was flying wild and this has i portance, although it may not seem to have importance, because it resulted in my getting my very first job as a commercial artist when I got out of art school! I drew the first parrot for the Ghiradelli ads!

Riess: What do you remember as your first experience with art?

Wessels: One of my earliest memories is that my mother was recording South African wildflowers in water color and at the end of her period of painting, I had the great joy of being allowed to mess with the pallette and paint for myself. This is my first conscious effort at using art material. The joy has never left me.

I think that the joy and expectation at the end of her painting period must have become pretty firmly ingrained because I have always loved to just manipulate paint. And I think that is where it began.

Riess: I had no idea that your mother was artistic.

Wessels: In a very Audubon style, very careful rendition of South African plants. I still have them and they are still beautiful. In the family, the tendency to express oneself in terms of visual art crops up on a non-professional way on both sides. A couple of my uncles drew and painted for pleasure. Almost all of my mother's side of the family did at one time or another. None of them

Wessels: made a profession out of it, but it was considered clever.

My Uncle Richard, the one who went to South Africa to bring religion to the Boers, was a good enough charcoal portraitist to draw pictures of his captors while he was in the British concentration camp and he got very good treatment from them on account of this. In fact it was thought that this led to his eventual release, rather than being shot, but I don't know how true that is. Anyway there is sort of a natural bent toward this sort of thing, particularly on my mother's side but it also cropped up on my father's side. Not in my father himself, but in some of his brothers. So I had an early exposure.

But actually on account of the life, religion, and philosophy of the family and the pioneer values which they adhered to, art was something not to take seriously. It was a plaything; it was a pleasure perhaps, but that was all. Although it was there in the pioneer standard of values, it just didn't butter any parsnips", that is all. It was not valuable.

Riess: What kinds of paintings and things were around the home?

Wessels: Pretty much Victorian type. I had lots of picture books, pretty much the candy box, Mother Goose illustrations and

Wessels: things of that sort. My mother's paintings were the only ones that I remember being around the home. She painted romantic scenes, ruined castles at twilight and that sort of thing occasionally. Some of these things were around for a long time.

Riess: They must have been good if she thought they were good enough to hang them.

Wessels: She never had any lessons that I know of but she was pretty good at it. In her later years her chief delight was hooking these things in her rugs. And for a long time I treasured these sort of semi-primitive treatments of things. For instance, one time I went up to Shasta Dam when it was being built and Mother, from her imagination recreated the scene in a hook rug. This was when she was eighty. I suppose you are asking for evidence of some kind of family trait here and I think there was plenty of it, particularly on my mother's side, and to a lesser degree on my father's side.

Riess: When you became successful, did you find that your parents were saying, "Oh, yes," remembering seeing the signs all along the way?

Wessels: In the later years, although I don't think they recognized anything I did as successful, they did recognize the fact that other people thought so, so they said, "Well,

Wessels: we just did not understand these things." That was their attitude then. In fact my father in his last years when I was teaching here at the University and he was terribly impressed, particularly with the salary, said, "Well, you know, if we had only known; we did not understand these things. In our day we did not value these things."

Riess: As you grew older, did you go out and sketch and things like that?

Wessels: Oh, I always did. I led the most elaborate imaginative life as a child. All the books I read, I illustrated. I found some of them a few years ago. And in the margins and flyleafs, I inserted pieces of paper, every event illustrated in detail. Everything that I read I turned into pictures. With pencil, with water color or what have you. That was all during my early childhood.

I always excelled in the little art exercises in grammar school. There would be a day when we would be supposed to paint. During the time allowed to painting, I was usually able to turn out my work and that of about half a dozen other people. I traded them for arithmetic problems. [Laughter] This was my first venture into commercial art! I was able to make passable pictures for my seatmates in school, and for these they were happy to

Wessels: do my arithmetic problems.

Riess: And did you have different styles for everybody? [Laughter]

Wessels: No, I don't think I was that intelligent.

You know, when my father came back and discovered that I was a very sick and apparently useless youngster who was probably going to be an invalid, partly blind, I think that this brought a good kind of a stubborn resistence in me that I would see very well. I found that I was looking harder at things than ever before. All during the period of convalescence I kept being curious about what I saw. It seemed to focus my attention on vision to an extent that had never occurred before. I discovered that with one eye I could do things that people did not think I could. I could play tennis, for instance. I could judge the position of the ball if I could only move my head quickly enough to get bifocal vision. I kept making these little tricky experiments to find out how much I could see and how normal I could be with seeing.

At this time it seemed to be just a natural attempt to adapt to a difficult circumstance but I see now that it did have a very definite effect of making me vision-conscious to an extent which I had never been before.

After Father put the Paradise Valley Sanitarium on its

Wessels: financial feet and so was given a larger commission, a larger institution, also more important financially, we moved to Glendale outside of Los Angeles, where he proceeded to do the same troubleshooting job as he had done in San Diego.

My schooling began first in a church school, but now there was no Adventist high school near-by so I went to Glendale High School which probably furthered the ruination which had been begun by H.G. Wells and so forth. In other words, my secular education began there. Before that time I had been pretty much in church schools. Any rebellion that I had was strictly private and very much kept to myself. But here the outside world opened up to me again. We stayed at Glendale until Father got that institution on its feet. I had a year of high school in Glendale and was just beginning to swim in these new waters when Father was called to aid the St. Helena Sanitarium in Pratts Valley where we had previously lived so it was like coming home again.

While there I went to the St. Helena High School. By this time I had developed, what shall I say, a grasp of events so that in the St. Helena High School, rather to my own surprise, I became the president of the student body, judge of the student court, and editor of the student paper all at once.

Riess: Amazing--how did your parents feel about this?

Wessels: They were rather proud of me. Oh, I also was head of the debating team. At any rate, this showed that I had been developing somewhat as a person and was overcoming the early difficulties. I rather think that this was over-compensation--it was very hard to achieve. A particularly sympathetic high school principal had something to do with this too.

Riess: Do you think that this made you more acceptable to your father?

Wessels: I think not. He was not intellectual; he never was. Intellectual achievement did not mean much to him. Financial achievement did, practicality as he called it.

Riess: Not the social, popular kind.

Wessels: Well, it was not in his social circle. You see, I joined in and went places, and made friends, but most of the Adventist people remained in their own Seventh Day Adventist group. They were called the "cracker-eaters" by the local people.

Riess: Why?

Wessels: Health food, they had their own health food factory. I was brought up on granola, which is an earlier form of grapenuts!

Yes, my parents thought I was doing pretty well in school. I was getting good grades and that sort of thing. My mother was pleased, yes, but my father did not have much

Wessels: time to give me; he worked terribly hard; he drove himself. He was always haunted by the idea that he had lost his fortune and he wanted to get back there again. He was a man I hardly ever saw; he worked all the time. He had no social life at all. He just worked and came home and fell in bed, that is all.

Riess: Was your mother still teaching piano, and so on?

Wessels: No, she did not teach anymore. She was busy with the family, keeping it together and keeping Father well. He was not too well and was always driving himself very hard.

But again, you see, I am more or less on my own and making the grade at St. Helena High School. These were relatively happy times because when a kid is accepted and gets recognition, achieves and so forth, it is good for the little ego. Everything was going swimmingly. I was the leader in my own set and not only that,I made a place for myself on the town band and was tootleing a baritone horn. You know, all the things that a kid in high school would want to do.

So it was something of a shock when my father, whose practical sense did not always agree with the idealistic sense of the ministerial elements in the Seventh Day Adventist Church who had a part in running this institution--Father wanted to do certain things, and I will not go into

Wessels: all of it, but he did not want to spend money for certain things, he wanted the institution to be financially sound -- they disagreed with him and the disagreement resulted in his resignation. He resigned from the St. Helena Sanitarium and we came down to Berkeley and that is how I got here.

Riess: Was this sort of a period of trouble for the family? Do you remember discussions of things like the resignation and so on?

Wessels: Yes, there were lots of them.

Riess: This was all shared among the family?

Wessels: Father would tell us all about it. It was a feeling in his conscience that the institution had to be financially sound regardless of what idealistic enterprise it was engaged in. He was not going to sacrifice the soundness of the institution so he resigned.

Mother accepted it. We came down here and they bought with their slender funds, I suppose with a good deal to pay off, the apartment house which formerly stood at the corner of Telegraph and Bancroft, the "Berkshire". My very first introduction to the University began there. In those days, the area which was Sather Gate had nothing there but a couple of litte stores. Sather Gate was the edge of the campus.

Wessels: They ran the apartment house there and I went to Berkeley High School. We all worked very hard. There was a mortgage on it and all that. Father, as usual, worked very hard toward financial security. I worked mopping and dusting and doing all the things that it takes to keep the apartment going.

Riess: In high school did you confide your interest in becoming as artist to anybody?

Wessels: Oh, other things deflected my energies in that direction. I think I did draw for the student magazine but I've forgotton about it. Drawing was just part of life, like tootleing instruments.

Riess: Did you have an art teacher in high school?

Wessels: Well, yes, but they always kept me busy doing posters. They just used what ability I had. I would come into the art class and other people would be drawing but they would say, "Glenn, the basketball team needs a poster. You do that." I really had not had any art training formally at all. I could draw and paint after a fashion but it was immediately put to use rather than training me. It did not occur to me that I could get a job anywhere being an artist and I probably would not have anyway.

Riess: It must have been sad to leave St. Helena.

Wessels: Yes, it was a kind of halcyon period, I was getting a

Wessels: feeling of importance and being a part of things. All this was associated with St. Helena and Pratts Valley in my mind. Then coming down to Berkeley, I found myself lost. I came into a school where the students had completely different interests than mine. The only outlet that I had at all was the bass horn, which did let me join the school band and which later got me into this little combo that was playing an early form of jazz. The pianist was Horace Heidt, and his band was formed right there. I played the bass in the first Horace Heidt band! Our first date was during the musicians strike at the Claremont Hotel.

I did that only for a short while because my parents got wise to what was going on and felt that for their son to become a jazz musician was the end and they could not have it so I was forbidden. This was cut off; I have always been an ardent Dixieland follower ever since, but my career was cut short.

I later came to the University of California and joined the military band and in those days the R.O.T.C. used to parade down by where the Life Sciences Building is now. They had a big day called the president's parade. I had been sick, in the hospital with housemaid's knee, to tell you the truth, from wrestling. I came out and the band

Wessels: leader insisted that he had to have me because I was the only one who could play the bass while marching. I played more or less by ear and they had a particularly hard piece and he couldn't depend on the other bass to play those chromatic runs in the piece ~~and~~ they were going to play for this great day.

Somewhat weak and shaky but nevertheless able to tootle, I came out of the hospital, donned the bass horn and was confronted by a piece of band music that I had never seen before in my life and in my effort to hit all the notes, with the breeze blowing and the music plopping this way and that as you marched, I fixed my attention on playing so thoroughly that I did not hear the band leaders whistle for reversing--the conventions are that you march and then someone goes "tweet, tweet" and you count "one, two" and then turn around and go in the other direction. I did not hear the "tweet, tweet" so I kept on going and ran into the oak tree and shoved all my front teeth down my throat. So that ended my life as a bass player. [Laughter]

It was very funny. Everyone, I believe, even President Barrows, laughed, but I just kept on going off into the brush and that was the end of my music career.

SOME VOCATIONAL SIDE-TRACKS

Pre-med Student

Wessels: I graduated from Berkeley High and my father absolutely insisted that I register in pre-med courses at the University of California, so I did. I fumbled, I got by, I was mediocre to good, but I did it with great effort and had the increasing feeling that I was a fish out of water.

Riess: Were you liking sciences at all?

Wessels: Yes, in a curious way I found myself attracted to some areas but not others. Anything that was visual I seemed to be good at, but a lot of things were pretty hard. For instance, I was good in chemistry so far as I could diagram the molecules and things of that sort , but I was a fish out of water when it came to theory that could not be visualized. I did not know that at that time but I see now that it was true.

This all came to a climax in a course in comparative zoology. We were doing dissections and I was particularly awkward in dissecting. I kept thinking--God help the humans that I have to operate on! But it came to a climax when a certain instructor in comparative zoology called me

Wessels: into his office and said, "Wessels, for some time I have noted the excellence of the drawings in your notebook. (This was a particularly stuffy teacher, I still think of him as that.) He said, "You are copying those drawings from some text, but I have not yet been able to find the text with the original drawings." He said, "Those are supposed to be the original drawings taken from the material and no one could make such good drawings from such bad material as you prepare. Hence you must be copying them from some book I can't find."

I said, "But those are my drawings".

He said, "Well, we will test it. There is a microscope; look in there and draw what you see and I'll be able to tell whether you really drew it or not."

So I looked into the microscope and I made a drawing of what I saw there and he looked at it and said, "By George, you can do it!" He thought a minute and said, "I tell you , you are so bad at dissecting that I would not have passed you, but I'm writing a book on shark scales and I need a lot of line drawings of shark scales. Now you know that from the nose of the shark to the end of the tail, each ring of scales varies slightly and I want every tenth scale all the way down to the tail. So, if you will do this for me, I will pass you in zoology."

Wessels: Well, I drew the shark scales until I was blind and in the process I came to the great discovery that if I had to pay my way through courses by making drawings, why didn't I become an artist-illustrator? It was evident that this was the thing I could do best and that I should get at it, but I still had no clear idea about how I was to eat by it.

So again I raised the subject with my father that I wanted to become an artist. He was very angry and terribly upset and said artists live in garrets and they starve and it is all very impractical, you won't be of any use to the world,and all the usual things that pioneer parents said about artists and poets came out. So that was that.

Oil Field Work

Finally things came to sort of an impasse. I became so dissatisfied and feeling so frustrated and futile about the whole thing that I sold my horn to get enough money to leave home on. First I tried to enlist; this was during the period of the First World War. The eye accident though put me into 4-F so I could not enlist. They said, however,

Wessels: that I could work in essential special industry.

I said, "Where would that be?"

They said, "In the California oil field work."

I had some friends down there and so I sold my horn and lit out for Coalinga and Kettleman Hills and to make a long story short, I became a tool-dresser in the oil fields--one of those men who works up in the derricks. It was discovered that I could climb well so I worked with the steel cables and the blocks and pulleys in the top of the oil derricks for two years and finally progressed to a toolie job. There were pleading letters from home to come back home to reconsider. Finally, I had a little accident, not too serious. An oil well blew up and I broke up a hand so I did come home. I might have been an oil driller, eventually, if I had stayed! (Sometimes I wish I had!)

Riess: Your career as an artist definitely seems to have gone on despite all the major calamities that one would think of.

Wessels: Well, you could hardly call it a career; it was a compulsion. I was not even aware of it myself.

Newspaper Reporter

Riess: I don't find any kind of advisors cropping up along the way, anyone that you could really...

Wessels: There weren't any. The people that my family happened to know had the same values. I led a life comparatively apart from the whole community until we finally came to Berkeley and then that was changed. I had lived pretty much in the community of people with my parent's religion and in their work, and church and all this sort of thing, this was the life. I was alone in it for the last years, reading and dreaming all sorts of atheistic thoughts, and being absolutely isolated. I was lost until I finally decided to find the way myself.

So I came back home and after a futile attempt on the part of my parents to make me into a minister by sending me to a theological school, the Seventh Day Adventist theological school--they thought some expert in good doctrine would reconvert me, but no--then I came down to Berkeley and my father thought maybe I could go to business school. So I learned how to typewrite but I was not very good at figures so I quit that and got a job on the old Call Bulletin.

I still was not aware that a person could earn one's living by drawing and painting but I got this job as a circulation man and cub reporter at $18 a week. Part of my duty was circulation. I reported murders and ran

Wessels: the circulation department over in the Butchertown area, San Francisco, Islais Creek area out Potrero way, on the way to San Bruno. I stayed on this job a short time.

Riess: Did this mean living away from home?

Wessels: Oh yes, by this time I had left home and was living in Berkeley on Durant Avenue with four other boys. Two of them were also renegades from a theological school, and one of them was an awfully good cook. This later lead to our starting Barney's Beanery in Berkeley.

But soon I left the newspaper because--this is a very quickly changing period --while I was beginning to be a cub reporter I was disturbed, things did not seem quite right somehow, I was getting by but I did not know if this was my career or not and I wanted to find out. I got an appointment with the editor finally,after great difficulty. I wanted to know whether he thought I was really doing a good job or not, whether this was where I should work. It was getting time for me to settle down and decide what I wanted to do in life and was this it--that is what I wanted to find out. Was I a newspaper man?

The poor man was a little astonished at the question. He reached over into a waste basket of wet copy paper all smeared up with ink and he shoved it right in my face and said, "Does that smell good?"

I said, "Well, no. Not particularly."

Wessels: He said, "Then you don't belong here."

You know, this put an idea into my head, though: you should do the kind of work that you find you can do with the least pain to yourself. So I thought well, heck, John Argens, cartoonist down in the newspaper's art department, had said, "If you only go to night school and learn how to draw a little bit and come back, I will give you a job." (He had been giving me little jobs to do for him on the newspaper.)

So I said, I am going to take the big step; I am going to art school in spite of my parents. I was sort of out of communication with them anyway by now. Now, how?

Strikebreaker

Well, the first waterfront strike was paying immense wages for strikebreakers and I went down to the waterfront and found myself on a gang with a bunch of thugs and juvenile delinquents who were unloading the cargoes at strikebreaker's pay. I worked there almost three months and got up enough money so that I could go to art school full time for maybe about two years. What really discouraged me about stevedoring was that I was not able to

Wessels: move fast enough when they dropped a cotton bale and I got a little squeezed. So I decided that now was the time to pick up my winnings and leave.

Riess: Were you a tough kind of kid or what?

Wessels: Oh, not really. I am really a timid soul. I really have gotten through the world mainly by diplomacy, and by adjustment rather than by fighting. I will fight if I am in a corner and I have usually been successful at it but I don't like it.

One occasion, since you bring this up, I will give a typical illustration. I had been a pretty good wrestler in the University gym. In fact I made the wrestling team--freshman wrestling team--but broke my knee and so never got a chance to do anything with it, but I had been a pretty good wrestler.

Once in the oil fields I was coming up a little stairway to the bunk house and coming down was a particularly large, particularly tough truck driver who everyone was afraid of when he became a little bit inebriated. And I was starting up and he was starting down and the first thing I knew I was confronted by this large hunk of a man. I was all for giving way but he thought that I was not giving way fast enough so he swung at me and I don't know what caused it, but I saw red and grappled with him and we broke the bannister and went down to the ground.

Wessels: The next conscious moment as far as I was concerned I had him in the body scissors and he was groaning. My wrestling training had come to the surface and quite unconsciously I followed through. He was groaning and I thought maybe the fall had hurt him, but apparently I was squeezing too hard. I said, "Now if you will lay off I will let you up." He could not even say anything. He just rolled over and was sick! So I helped the poor guy to bed and got hot cloths to put on his sore back.

He got over his inebriation and his back-ache about the same time and the next day he went all around the camp saying, "Look out for that guy, he is one of the toughest, quietist fighters I ever saw. Don't touch him, he is dynamite." [Laughter]

Since there was only one bathtub in the whole bunkhouse, of 25 rooms, there was a tremendous line for the bathroom on Saturday night because we went around all the week smeared with crude oil. It got into your pores and you really had to first mop yourself off with kerosene and then with what they called "sweet-oil" which was engine oil, and then maybe you could get it off with soap and hot water. Then you could get enough out of your

Wessels: pores so that you could wear a white shirt. This all took time, and the bathroom on Saturday nights was in tremendous demand. If you stayed in the bathroom too long, people would bang on the door. But no one ever banged on the bathroom door when I was in there! [Laughter] I was very grateful to my truck driver friend for establishing a reputation which protected me and it has always been more or less that way. I have never had to fight very much. When I did it usually came out okay.

Well, let me see. Where were we? We got off the track a bit.

Riess: You had the money to go to art school.

Wessels: I had a toothbrush moustache and a hard derby hat, the tough appearance which the strike breakers cultivated in order to protect themselves, because when you stepped off the pier you were very apt to be attacked by people. So you swaggered and threw out your chest, tipped the derby down over one eye and scowled as well as you could. This was your protection. I showed up in this garb at the old School of Arts and Crafts in Berkeley on Center Street where Mrs. Meyer was the secretary in the office and I came in and declared that I had money enough to go there for two years so I was going to have to go through there in two years although it was a four-year curriculum. She was so frightened of me that she more or less assented.

Wessels: She said, "Okay, we'll try it and see what you can do." The upshot of the matter was that two years later I was teaching. I had done very well.

Barney's Beanery in Berkeley

During this time I was living with some other friends in a little backyard cottage down here on Durant near Ellsworth. We put our wits together as to what we could do to increase our incomes. One of the boys was an excellent cook, as I said. I was in art school at that time and learning about advertising art--and I thought we could probably run a restaurant and slant it in such a way that it would appeal to the college boys who did not then seem to have a proper ~~forea~~gathering place. So Doc Watson (the cook) who is now in engineering in Hollywood someplace and Harry Beckberger who was another friend from the theological school, and I started Barney's Beanery.

It was my brainstorm that what we would do was serve a very inexpensive plate of beans and this would be the staple that anyone could get , a plate of beans and a good thick chocolate malt for cost price, our loss leader.

Wessels: We needed a name to go with "beans". I had picked up, as a stevedore, the name Barney Google (because I wore glasses). People called me Barney Google and "Barney" went with beans so ... I was back of the counter at night, I washed dishes, which was then called "pearldiving", in the back of the restaurant until the wee small hours and I worked in the restaurant evenings shoveling out beans and everyone called me Barney during this period.

Then my cousin came out of the Navy and he was at odds and ends. By that time my art school interests were growing and being back of the restaurant counter interfered with the time that I wanted for other things so I sold out my interest in the thing which was not a tremendous amount, but it enabled me to go on to art school. However, I continued thinking up promotional ideas for the Beanery. And Barney's Beanery became an overnight success. So much so that people were cued up for two blocks to get in there for lunch.

Riess: Where was it?

Wessels: It was right where Sproul Hall stands now, right in the middle of that block. Alongside of it a little Hungarian lady opened something she called "The Black Sheep". That is where all the women went and all the men went to Barney's.

Wessels: They would yoo-hoo at each other from Fritzie's balcony. Women were not allowed in Barney's Beanery; they were not forcibly ejected, but things were made slightly unpleasant for them. So only an occasional group crashed it.

Riess: Was this entirely student population or did the faculty...

Wessels: Students mainly, although there were some younger faculty. The whole thing was a play on the rebellious instincts of the students--what I thought was that the boys wanted something rather tough. And although we ran the cleanest kitchen in Berkeley we made a great display of being dirty, and a great play of being indifferent to customers and so forth. We would sweep out the kitchen and all the kitchen sweepings would be right at the front door. You had to step over them when you came in. [Laughter]

Riess: How were you making money? You said it was at cost?

Wessels: No, no, that was a loss leader, but other things paid reasonable profit. We always hired campus figures, athletes and so forth, to be our cashiers. It got to be the approved hangout for a humber of years. It was so popular that at one time in the senior extravaganza the chorus sang, "This is Barney's Beanery, look at all the scenery," and so on. It was quite the thing for some years. (The "scenery" was portraits--by me--of the 1923 Wonder Team -on the walls)

I pulled out but by this time I had learned about

Wessels: advertising art from the art school and I created the "image" of Barney's Beanery and designed their wobbly lettering and so on. I still ran their publicity campaigns. Barney himself, my cousin, turned out to have a kind of gift that way himself. He had a good sense of humor and a way of turning words that was attractive. So it became a great success until a dishonest cook got into the kitchen and bankrupted poor Barney. I was out of it by then. He had to leave Berkeley, so he went to Hollywood and started over again with the same public image, the same thing, and it became a hangout for young movie stars and went on to its present status. I had nothing to do with that, though. Now, we really don't have very much communication any more, sad to say. But that was my Barney's Beanery phase.

Then my art school business became more and more important.

IN SEARCH OF AN EDUCATION: COLLEGE OF ARTS AND CRAFTS

Frederick Meyer

Riess: How did you like art school? How did you react to it?

Wessels: It seemed like I had come home for the first time in my life. An old German directed the school to whom I owe everything--Frederick Meyer. He was the president and the founder of the school. It was a very poor school, not endowed; it was a struggling enterprise at that time. I worked for him in his yard. He and his wife found out that my resources were slender. He liked me and so they put me to work as the janitor for awhile.

And in two years I wasateacher: I was in this class working one day. The teacher was sick and was not there. Meyer stormed in and was really angry because the teacher was absent again. So he looked around and said, "Wessels, you take the class!" I had had no preparation. I stood up in the desk where I had previously been a student. I thought, "Well, now what do I do? If I were in their place, what would I need to know?" That has been my basic principle of teaching ever since.

I was working very hard and perhaps was a little

Wessels: ahead of some of the other students in the course. By dint of hard preparation I was able to make some successful impression on them even though I was not any further ahead in the actual work than they were.

Riess: This leaves you still then without much real schooling in art?

Wessels: Yes, but I kept reading, and studying and pumping everyone I could find. In that way I was able to stay ahead of the elementary classes that I taught. I was studying in advanced classes at the time that I was teaching in elementary classes.

Riess: What teachers do you remember?

Wessels: Fred Meyer himself, who in my estimation was a wonderful stubborn German with a wide knowledge and kind of a William Morris philosophy. He had a respect for materials and for art in daily life that has never left me. I became an assistant to Perham Nahl who at the same time was one of the early instructors in the University of California art department. In the evening classes which I later taught in antique drawing from casts, one of my students was Margaret O'Hagan who later taught at Berkeley, too. The other teacher who helped me the most was a Frank Brangwyn protege. Hardly anyone remembers Brangwyn now, but he painted the murals in the Veterans Auditorium in San

Wessels: Francisco, which were previously in the Panama Pacific Exposition. I was used as a perennial assistant to all sorts of people who taught various phases of art at the California College of Arts and Crafts. They would bring a person in who had had no teaching experience but had something to give and I would be assigned to furnish the teaching. This occurred with an expert type designer, a famous lettering man and industrial designer, Joseph Sinel. (Incidentally, at one time I thought I would become a book designer, a type designer, and I studied with Frederick Goudy briefly one summer with that idea in mind. I had become very enamored with the abstract design of lettering, but it was pretty hard on the eyes and I decided it was not for me.)

Mrs. Isabelle Percy West

My other encouragement came from Mrs. Isabelle Percy West, who took me under her wing. I don't know what she saw but she seemed to think that there was something there and she was particularly nice to me. So I used to spend weekends over at her house in Sausalito which was at that time a kind of foregathering place for the avant garde intellectuals, liberals, and so forth. I used to help her serve drinks and generally made myself useful for the

Wessels: privilege of staring at people like Charlie Chaplin, Fremont Older, Carl Sandburg and who have you. So her sort of taking me up and lifting me out of the ordinary run of the students was another encouragment.

Riess: She was one of the teachers?

Wessels: Yes, she was a fine teacher, particularly in picture structure and the composition of pictures. She was one of the persons who rapped into my head that life drawing in the life class was not everything, that one should draw the figure only in relation to other things, that one had to compose pictures, that a picture was a thing in itself, it was not a thing that you copied from nature. These ideas I got first from her.

Riess: Who was she?

Wessels: Well, her husband was George West and he was a liberal writer who was one of the associate editors of the old Call Bulletin with Fremont Older and all that--early San Francisco's so-called radicals but they were really Fabian Socialists, I think, most of them. George later became a contributing editor to the Nation magazine. He was, in short, quite a person. We liked each other.

Isabelle is the daughter of a prominent architect. Early she exhibited feminist tendencies, unusual independence and all that. As a young girl she traveled through Europe alone and studied painting and print-making and so

Wessels: on and came back just about the time that Frederick Meyer was starting the little college of arts and crafts (after the San Francisco fire closed the Mark Hopkins Institute) above the poolroom, on Center Street in Berkeley and she joined his staff there. I think she was the second or third to join up. She was also a student of the once famous English muralist Frank Brangwyn.

She was pretty much of a pioneer. When, for instance, I asked Spencer Macky, who had been dean of the California School of Fine Arts, "How about composition?" he said, "Oh, it is just something you feel. You can't teach that."

Well, Isabelle did teach it. She was the first person I ever knew who put things in a logical way about putting a picture together. I still use ideas of picture structure I got from her. In a certain way this was a fundamental grammar of picture construction which with her was still vague, but nevertheless, she was teaching this and assigning problems--"I want a composition in a triangle and I want that triangle to be the main feature of the picture, and I want it to be a figure and ground situation with the triangle as the figure, and I want the background to be back of it". She showed us how these things occurred in the works of the old masters, Raphael's use of the same device and so forth. We would learn to draw, not just

Wessels: figures, but figures within certain spaces doing certain things in the movement and the structure of the picture. This to me was invaluable.

Riess: That is interesting. And art criticism did not look at things in that way?

Wessels: No, not at that time. This was at a time when everybody was enamored with impressionist atmosphere; there was not much structure in the average painting. It was just a sort of a continuum, a "floating world" as somebody has called it. But here she was teaching structure, pictorial structure. Then I found evidence of it in the work of the classic masters. Years later, when I went to Munich and found Hans Hofmann teaching exactly the same thing except much more profoundly worked out, I was ready for it.

Riess: Actually, I think looking at black and white reproductions brings out certain things.

Wessels: Very often it does, yes; but the fundamental structure of the picture is not necessarily in black and white. It is in some artists. Michelangelo is probably seen as well (if not better) in black and white as he is in color. His color is not structural at all. On the other hand if you take a black and white photo of Titian it goes mushy because his structure is color. If you don't get the hues, you don't get the structure. And so you have painters who are

Wessels: colorists, who construct through color on the one hand and then you have people who are fundamentally graphic artists. They may use some color incidentally but it does not really work functionally, it plays a secondary or tertiary role.

You can draw a line right down through the whole history of painting; you could put Rembrandt on one side with the colorists, I would put Matisse on the side of the colorists, I would put Picasso on the side of the draftsmen. It is not saying that one is much better than the other. It is just that they use their media in different ways to say what they have to say. Some had to depend more on black and white and others depend less on it. Rouault, for instance, because of his perpetuation of the stained glass style of painting based on his very early experience as a stained glass designer, is distinctly dependent on the black and white line for his structure. Other people kind of hedge and parry both sides like, for instance, Dufy where you have some line and then lots of color. Contrast between hues themselves is the essence of painting as such, as I see it. The artist who draws a line around everything and then fills it in with color is not meeting the challenge of painting at all. What he is doing is simply coloring a

Wessels: drawing.

All that did not come to me until later, but this business of thinking of pictures as abstract problems even though they may be representational pictures came to me first from Mrs. West. And she is now living retired in Sausalito, over 80. She has excellent possession of her wits although her health is a bit frail, and I still visit her and think of her as being one of my strongest early influences.

Riess: She commuted from Sausalito to Oakland to teach?

Wessels: Oh, the ferr boat was fun, now it is a chore to drive across the bridge in traffic. In the old days you got on the ferry boat, sat down and fed the sea gulls and had a restful 15 minutes. You went down stairs maybe and had a beer or a plate of corned beef hash or something. You had to rest 15 minutes no matter what you were doing and it was very good for everybody.

Riess: Was Sausalito a great kind of artistic place?

Wessels: It always was kind of away from San Francisco, I don't want to say Bohemian, they were not like we would think of as Bohemians, they were liberals really. Sausalito was sort of a haven for people who wanted to live out on the edge of the city in the woods where they were not interfered with by conventional people. I don't think

Wessels: anything very scandalous went on, but they did have their parties and so on. And as I mentioned, quite early in my art school days Isabelle took a shine to me and used to invite me over the weekends where I would meet people like Mike Shannon, Frederick O'Brien, Julian Hawthorne, oh various journalists, and Charlie Chaplin was there one time, people like that who knew George West and came and stayed over the weekend. Very often they had parties and very often I helped get the drinks and pass the sandwiches.

It was fun for a kid who knew absolutely nothing of the outside world and was absolutely a "green pea", to find himself in this company. I could not believe it; I would pinch myself every so often.

Riess: What do you think that they found in you?

Wessels: I don't know. Excepting that Isabelle quite early thought of me as a person who belongs and that was all there was to it. She seemed to think that I had a head on me and was going to amount to something and she was going to help it out. I guess that is the best I know. We are still very fast friends and she insists that this is why we became friends--because I was so much more intelligent than most of the students she came against. [Laughter]

Xavier Martinez

Wessels: The other person that I owed a great deal to and who still has my deepest affection was a Mexican named Xavier Martinez.* Martinez had come from Paris and could talk intimately about such people as Whistler and Steinlin and Carriere and so on. As a teacher, Marty was a student of Gerome and he believed in the strict life class training. The reason for it, he believed, was that the artist must begin all things with observation. Regardless of what he does, Bohemian he may be, and drunk he may be when he paints, but he must have accurate observation. He must train his eye and his hand so that he can set down the exact model as he sees it and he must be able to do this with a minimum of means. In other words the accent on line was all important for Marty, a minimum of romantic shading and a maximum of classic line was Marty's doctrine. He himself drew beautifully. It was rather simple but rigid doctrine which did train you in observation and in proportioning the thing. You were asked to always draw the figure exactly in the same way. That is to say, the head had to touch the top of the paper and the feet had to

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*An interview by the Regional Oral History Office with Elsie Whittaker Martinez is in progress.

Wessels: touch the bottom and woe betide you if it overlapped or underlapped even so much. You had to make the whole figure come out right in that space; you had to learn to fill space accurately. Now this may seem rigid but it was a valuable discipline. It trained one to appreciate the exact limits of the field on which you were working and was the basis for any decent, rhythmic composition in which you later were engaged. As a basic training I thought it was invaluable and I got that from Marty.

He married, I think it was the daughter of Herman Whittaker, who was also one of the Jack London group of authors, painters, writers, and what have you. My recollections are those of a very young, awe-struck student who was invited up to the Martinez home in Piedmont on Sunday afternoons when various people of this group would visit Marty and drink prohibition red wine from a bottle which stood behind the stove to keep it warm enough to suit their taste. [Laughter] The people who showed up were Jimmy Hopper, an author, who had stories in The Saturday Evening Post and other places. And George Sterling, a good poet. Oh doubtless other people could fill you in on that crowd better than I could; I only saw them as visiting celebrities at Marty's house.

Riess: When famous artists from other parts of the country would arrive, would they come to somebody like Martinez?

Wessels: Once in a while, yes. For instance, Arthur B. Davies visited there.

Marty was a member of the San Francisco Bohemian Club which started out as an artist organization and slowly became a businessman's club because the artists, being broke, let the businessmen in to finance them. And the businessmen took over and now the artists are distinctly decorative, serve mostly a decorative purpose around there! They invite in only the ones they want to. The Bohemian Grove, as you know, became a national gathering place for celebrities of many sorts.

I think part of Marty's appeal to them was that he was a somewhat unusual-looking person in attire. He was an Indian, he claimed, a Mayan Indian, born in Guadalajara in Mexico. He always wore his hair cropped in the Pueblo Indian style, a short bob sort of, and he wore a leather band with silver studs in it around his head. He was the first man that I ever saw wear Indian jewelry. He usually wore very baggy corduroy clothes. He was the first man, as I say, that I ever saw that affected the Indian style of dress around here. And in those days he looked somewhat unique, to say the least. But his wife on the other hand,

Wessels: was very pale, golden blonde. There is a portrait of her out at the Oakland Museum painted by Marty, very beautifully and sympathetically. Marty himself in training was really of the Parisian stage of Whistler's school. He knew Whistler in Paris and had studied along with the men of that period. He was an acquaintance of Carriere's and the later Romantics, he came out of the later Romantic School in Paris.

The Romantic School is the school which broke away from French academic classicism and in some cases went to the extremes of anarchy and rebellion against accepted norms. In its sanest aspects it was a healthy thing in that it freed the artist from academic cliches, and in its looser aspects it was moral decay.

Riess: Who exemplifies the "looser" aspects?

Wessels: Well, it was generally thought that anything that could be done to excite the imagination was legitimate. Nowadays people are taking LSD for the same purposes; then they took other forms of dope and a good deal of alcohol was considered necessary by many Romantics. Eccentricity was cultivated though, rather than restrained, by the better Romantics. Whereas with the Classicists, of course, eccentricity was vice.

So, Marty was definitely a Romantic, but sort of naturally

Wessels: and honestly one. I must say that he was the most important early influence that I had, in that he kept my mind open to all sorts of things in painting which were mysterious and not exactly explainable but nevertheless fascinating. He first introduced me to the works of Picasso who was then comparatively unknown. And he was certainly not even heard of around here at that time.

Marty's own latest work was, I would say, that of a good Impressionist painter, and in his earlier work he was a somber Romantic of the kind of thing...well, Whistler's Mother was a very well known painting done in that manner. Whistler's Battersea Bridge, shall we say, is a sort of presupposition of Impressionism? Marty's work was in there.

Riess: He did go to Impressionism rather than to something like Picasso?

Wessels: Yes, he didn't go that far because Impressionism comes before Picasso. But later on in his drawings he began to draw with a peculiar clarity and vehemence which partook partly out of primitive Mexican expression and partly out of Picasso's primitive stage. He was a very stimulating person in that he opened up these avenues of inquiry. He didn't explain things; he simply said they were good, that was all. Then you looked at them.

Wessels: This friendship had a decided influence on my thinking and I began to read avidly before anyone else I knew did all the avant-garde stuff of that day. Clive Bell, the English critic, and Roger Fry, the English critic, Willard Huntington Wright's Modern Painting and things about Africa. I can remember a novel called Batuala which was a translation from Rene Maran, I think, who won the Goncourt Prize in Paris. It was a sensation. Our direction at that time was definitely towards a primitive violence of expression and so forth. We began to value African art and the art of children for the first time.

Riess: Were there any courses in that kind of thing that were taught at Arts and Crafts?

Wessels: No. And Marty was not able to explain the theory, but he had a great respect for these things. No one in the school could explain modern art to me which explains the reason why later I came back to the University.

The questions raised in conversation with the teachers at Arts and Crafts were things that they could not answer for themselves. I got to looking at Matisse and wondering why things were as they were in his paintings.

Riess: Where were these contacts with Matisse? Reproductions?

Wessels: Books, reproductions, and things like that. And I fell in with a group of people who haunted book stores and looked

Wessels: at reproductions.

Riess: How about galleries?

Wessels: There were not very many in San Francisco then, and the dominant art in San Francisco then was Impressionism, until the Mexican Revolution. Spencer Macky and Lee Randolph were practically the "Establishment" in those days. They were both Impressionists--one a portrait painter, a la Monet, and the other one a pointillist color man, a la Monet. So that was the avant-garde art at the time in San Francisco.

Riess: Was Clive Bell kind of a revelation?

Wessels: Not so much a revelation as a reaffirmation of what I was beginning to suspect. Of course, I was not satisfied with "significant forms". What was significant form? And how did one go about creating a significant form? This is what worried me. [Laughter] But this led me to other things, amongst others a book by a somewhat obscure Harvard philosopher known as Denman Ross. He wrote a couple of books among which was The Theory of Pure Design. The Theory of Pure Design gave me the first orderly idea of what this might all be about. Again I wanted more but I did not get it until I got to Munich and Hofmann. But this was all a burning curiosity on my part. I could not let it alone. I kept coming back to it whenever I had time from all the other enterprises. I had to earn my living all the time,

Wessels: and I was working first with the theater and then as a night club decorator and doing all sorts of things. But I kept coming back to these queries about what on earth modern painting was all about.

FOSTER AND KLEISER AND OTHER JOBS

Riess: Were the students at Arts and Crafts mostly aiming at jobs in advertising art?

Wessels: It was then a vocational school, primarily. It at one time had taught more than one half of all the high school art teachers in California.

It became inevitable that the only career open to me there was as a teacher. I was forced more or less into a teacher training program because there did not seem to be anything else, although I did not want to become a high school art teacher. I was more interested in the fine arts, but it all sounded terribly impractical so I compromised by trying to make very good commercial illustrations. That is how I got into that line of work.

Well, by this time I had gone through four years of art school. And by the way, I heartily agree with what I read in the paper this morning that very often the drop-out student is more intelligent than not because this is the way it was with me. By leaving school and going to work and then going back to school again, I found my way a whole lot sooner than if I had stayed in school. I was in and out of several institutions several times and every

Wessels: time I came back, my purpose had become clearer and my determination stronger. I had found out something by going to work that implemented and motivated me and when I came back to school, I did better and better. And this is the way it was with art school,too. I think that very often when we are thrust from the home into the school, we are there because our parents say that it is the thing to do and we haven't any real motivation. It is not until we get out and brush up against life as it is that we find what we can do best and what we should go back to school for.

As a counselor here, and I did most of the department counseling for years, until retirement, I tell a student who shows a disinclination for the work at college, "Well, you really don't see the sense in all this unless you go out and do what you want to do and maybe find out that you would learn how to do it better by going back to school." Very often they've been grateful for this advice. I firmly believe that t is four year thing that we are supposed to adhere to is absolutely silly, educationally speaking. I think that the youngster should be encouraged to go out and fall on his face a few times, then come back to school, and then go out and try it again. Maybe he should spread those four years over seven or so. I believe a good time to break off from school would be at the end of the sophomore

Wessels: year and work a year someplace.

I am very much against the idea of hurrying the student through four quarters in one year, for instance. This quarter system is a dangerous speed-up and the values of slow assimilation and of work and study are lost. I personally feel that they are very important. I think that the student should probably do four years in five. That is about the proportion it should be.

Riess: It seems that to administer a work-study program would be easy enough.

Wessels: Well, I had my own work-study program. In my later years at Arts and Crafts I worked first with a commercial artist whose name was George Kegg. The way I got the job, I simply decided that I had to know more and more about this thing called the commercial world of art and so I went to him. I did not propose to let myself out as an artist, but I said that if he would pay my carfare, I would clean his studio out and wash his brushes for him. His brushes obviously needed washing at the time. That is the first thing I saw when I went into the studio, that his brushes were all gooed up and that his easel was smeared with paint and that there was dust all over everything in the studio. I said, "You know, you could use a janitor around here."

He said, "That I could."

I said, "Well, how would you like one? I'll do it for my carfare, if you will just let me watch what goes on

Wessels: around here." This was my first art job really. And before I left there, things that he did not want to do, he let me do. So I began doing chewing gum labels and various little commercial jobs of this sort. They were unimportant things but things nevertheless which taught me a lot. I went back to school with much more intelligence after that.

Anyway, after graduating from Arts and Crafts, with the usual portfolio of my sketches, illustrations, strips of lettering, and so forth, I tramped the streets of San Francisco looking for a job but no one seemed to want me or my talents and I tramped for three months. In the meantime I had made some friends in Foster and Kleiser, the agency which in that time was most attractive to the commercial artist because one could use color there. In those days color reproduction was not as common as it is now, most advertisement was black and white. But in Foster and Kleiser where they painted billboards you could paint in color and this was considered to be a wonderful place to work where you could actually design in color. I had made friends with some of the people who were in this agency so

Wessels: I had free run of the place although I had no job there. I had never in the world dreamed that I would be good enough to get a job there. There were 24 of them then in their stable of designers. Maynard Dixon was one of them, and I got a speaking acquaintance with all these people: Joseph Sinel, Otis Shepard.

One day I came in and all these men were gathered around a table arguing and I came up and stuck my nose in it and said, "What is going on?"

Ray Bethers, a friend of mine, turned and said, "Do you know how a parrot's foot goes?"

I said, "Sure!"

He said, "How does it go?"

I said, "Well, let me draw it." So I sat down and drew the parrot's foot. Otis Shephard said, "That looks convincing. Can you draw the rest of the parrot?"

I said, "What kind of a parrot do you want? There are lots of kinds."

"We had the idea of one of these big Mexican jobs."

I said, "Oh you mean a macaw." I said, "Which color scheme do you want? Do you want the red with the blue and"...and so forth.

Wessels: So they all looked at one another and said, "He knows all about these parrots."

And the upshot was that I drew and sketched the parrot for them, and they said, "Looks like you've got a job."

I said, "What is the job for?"

They said, "Well, there is a chocolate company down here and they want us to put out a billboard and have a parrot saying, 'Say, Gear-ar-delli'."

"But," I said, "They don't talk."

They said, "Don't tell them that!" [Laughter]

So anyway I did nothing but parrots for quite a long time for Foster and Kleiser. The people at Foster and Kleiser, of course, were enough to stimulate the imagination of the neophyte. Besides the famous western illustrator, Maynard Dixon, there was another very good painter, a landscape painter, Maurice del Mue. He and I became very good friends. And Otis Shephard who later became famous as the man who made Wrigley's Gum famous through a kind of plagarized Cubism in style, was the art director. Ray Bethers, who is now in England writing books, had a desk next to mine and we became very good friends. And some of the well known names around advertising art in San Francisco right now, Lonnie Bee and a lot of the current crop of

Wessels: leading advertising illustrators and commercial illustrators and so forth were there.

Harold von Schmidt who for years was art editor of Cosmopolitan magazine had just left there and I knew him quite well. Joseph Sinel, who later became famous as an industrial designer (he did those scales that you've undoubtedly stepped on yourself, the first "skyscraper" scales that said "Step on me" on the step). Joe came from Australia, a craftsman and a skilled lettering man, and I became his assistant in Arts and Crafts in ~~the~~ his ~~first~~ classes in type design and lettering design.

In those days billboards were a lot closer to mural painting than to signs. Foster and Kleiser found it expedient to hire the best talent. They were engaged in a hassle with the legislature about billboards. They had to say that they were decorating the highways with the finest art.

Riess: There was even a hassle about it back then?

Wessels: Oh, yes. And they won their case, you see, because they hired the best artists they could find anywhere. These billboards were really pretty good to look at and if they put them up in front of a mountain or some scenery, why they were not as objectionable as a mere sign. Then, after they got the laws they wanted passed, they simply fired all their expensive artists. [Laughter]

Riess: Why did it dissolve?

Wessels: Well, the great days for Foster and Kleiser were when the billboard advertising was the most influential general advertising. What really bowled it over was the coming of radio and tv. Then this became the most effective popular advertising and billboards went downhill immediately and became mere signs.

Riess: Now tell me about the physical set up. Were you all in one big room?

Wessels: Foster and Kleiser had moved about the time that I came there to a new building, I think at Pierce and Steiner. We rode out on the Geary car and walked over, I remember. The studio was all along the second story of the front of the building. There were 24 desks which were divided into two halves, the local area in which I worked and the national area. The local area was presided over by Emil Grebbs and the national area presided over by Otis Shephard as directors. And salesmen would come up from downstairs and tell us what their client's ideas were and so forth. Then we would make sketches and they would try them out on their clients and then we would make changes and so forth until there was a meeting of minds on them.

Riess: So you did not deal directly with the clients yourself. Did the art directors?

Wessels: Sometimes. Art directors generally are idea men and layout men. They will often dash out an arrangement, a sketch, you see. Quite often this sketch will be filled in by several different people who are specialists in different things. For instance, myself on parrots and appetite appeal.

Applesauce... I painted the first chopped pineapple that was ever run in an ad. I had found out all sorts of tricks about making inedible things look edible. For instance, a dish of stewed prunes is one of the most ghastly things you could look at when you really look at it realistically. So I learned to glamorize stewed prunes and chopped pineapple and so forth. The way to glamorize anything that is sweet is to make it look sticky by pouring oil over it which looks like thick sugar syrup, and then you look at it through thin amber cellophane and it looks nice and golden and that is how you paint it to give it appetite appeal. [Laughter] Most of the good foods that you see on TV are made of plaster of paris.

I think one of the most puzzling things that happened to me--and this is significant, although it may not sound like it--I was later working for another agency, not Foster and Kleiser, and this man sold a lot of Schillings products.

Wessels: He said,"Here is some goo from Dole Pineapple Company that they are putting on the market, chopped pineapple, and we have to make it look good to eat. Now you take it home, put it in a good-looking bowl and paint it. See what you get out of it."

I had been doing some applesauce very successfully, so now here was chopped pineapple. I took it home and painted it and brought it back. And the art director said, "Applesauce?"

I said, "No, chopped pineapple."

He said, "It reads applesauce."

So I took this pineapple stuff home again and I looked at it and it looked just like applesauce excepting it didn't. I wasn't too sure. I began to look closer and closer and I saw that in each little piece, there were little white fibers and that the edge was serrated in a certain way. I looked at a piece of applesauce and it did not have the same texture or consistency. But you could not see this without holding it way up here close to your eyes. So I thought, this is funny, if I put those threads in it won't be realistic because you can't see them from a distance, but maybe that is what it needs. So I painted the little threads in the little pieces and took it back. The art director said, "Chopped pineapple."

But I said, "You can't see those threads!"

Wessels: He said, "That is all right, that reads."

And it dawned on me that sometimes you have to emphasize things that you know at the expense of what you see in order to tell what you want to say. This became a keystone idea with me, that painting that was realistic in its effect very often had to be non-real in actuality, that you had to paint what you knew and what you felt as well as what you saw in order to put the idea over, even with pineapples and applesauce. You can not simply go by the appearances of things; reality is something more and the information that you must put into a work of art has to come also from your sense of touch and from your feelings about things, from your memories about things, all sorts of sources besides the immediate vision in your eye. The reality is a much broader, deeper thing than your immediate visual experience.

Riess: Why on something like chopped pineapple wasn't a photograph the best thing?

Wessels: In those days they did not have color film. Mark Twain's son-in-law and another man invented Kodachrome some years after that. But even now they have to retouch appetite

Wessels: appeal photos to get a convincing effect. The artist has to get the feeling into it. Visual realism isn't enough alone.

There are so many things nowadays in the way of color reproduction that have changed the whole business of visual arts. Although a color slide is by no means accurate and a good many color reproductions are way off, nevertheless, the chance is that the artist or art student can see works of art reproduced with at least reasonable accuracy...I can remember trying to study modern art out of books; the reproductions were all black and white with one or two very amazingly bad color reproductions.

I remember I was particularly taken with the works of Andre Derain when I was beginning to worry about modern art, and I had a book with one little colored reproduction in it that I treasured. It was the only one that I could find, a little landscape maybe three inches by five inches and this was great. I modeled my work after this, I studied this thing, looked at it through a magnifying glass, and everything else. Finally when I got to Paris and was able to look at the original painting, I was terribly dashed because the print I had been lavishing all this care on was way of ; it was much too pink!

Color reproduction was inaccurate, was vague what there

Wessels: was of it, and it was very expensive. Nowadays, color slides are much better but still not perfect, and color reproductions are closer now, but still not very good. The art student who depends on color reproduction to furnish what he does not have from experience with the painting itself, is simply fooling himself even now.

Riess: People like Maynard Dixon who were at Foster and Kleiser, were they working there full time?

Wessels: Yeah, these people were earning enormous salaries for those days--something like $25 a day or something like that.

Riess: And then would somebody like Dixon go home and do his own work?

Wessels: Oh, sometimes. But we were supposed to--we came to the studio and did our work there. We were there because salesmen had to be able to come in and consult us and ask for sketches.

Riess: I thought of someone like Maynard Dixon as somebody who was doing free-lance art.

Wessels: Well, he may have arranged with his art directors to be there only four days a week or something like that. But the art director could demand his presence.

Riess: Was there any feeling that this was just a pot-boiling

Riess: kind of thing to do?

Wessels: Oh, yes, sure. It was just a pot-boiling kind of thing. There was a certain amount of pleasure in a certain job if you had a chance to cut loose and do something pretty good. Other times, for instance when you had a client like old Bernstein who did not understand anything but oysters, if you gave him anything but realistic oysters, why, he would not take it. But some people let you let your imagination go a bit.

Maurice Logan brought in the style of Impressionism. He was working at another firm. He was a pretty good Impressionist painter and still is a very good water colorist in his manner. He brought in a kind of breath of fresh air into commercial illustration, a good many of the visual appearances of Impressionist painting, the freer style of painting, and so on. This became acceptable, particularly in real estate advertising; you could glamorize a headland with a lot of red tile houses on it, make it look like a Monet or a Pissarro. All of us were looking for fine artists to copy. A good many of the values of commercial art are frankly plagiarized. The successful commercial illustrator is one who can adapt himself rather quickly to any style. He can skim the cream off of some work of art that has visual appeal and then use this style to glamorize something as awful as chewing gum, for instance.

Riess: It is interesting to think how that perpetuates certain kinds of things.

Wessels: Yes, you will find that the commercial art today is usually the style of fine art of twenty years ago. There is that much cultural lag.

Riess: Was there much mediating between the artists or did everybody get along?

Wessels: Oh, this business of artists fighting, I don't think they fight more than anybody else ! Usually they are pretty genial fellows. They will fight with somebody outside the art world, but not with each other.

Riess: So it was kind of a fun place to work?

Wessels: It was a nice easy-going atmosphere with everybody sort of helping everybody else out. Very often two or three of us would have to work on one thing. For instance, we would have one man who was an expert at painting tin can tops and another man might be good at something else; we would often combine our talents. A lettering man might put the letters in and somebody else might do the animals and somebody else might do the girls' faces.

We had one boy named David Rivera who could do a very chic fashion figure type. And when we had pretty girls in bathing suits, he would always do those. We were specialists. I was an appetite appeal person and parrot special-

Wessels: ist. But as Foster and Kleiser became more sign painting and less design, I left.

Then I received an offer from Irving Pichel, who was the first community playhouse man in Berkeley, to be his scenic designer and factotum, man of all work. I became the stage manager of sorts in the theater, working with lighting, set building, and so on. This was an avant garde experimental thing and I had very close contact with it, though I never was an actor and never wanted to be. But I had lots to do with staging some of the early Berkeley little theater things. I was still teach-in art school, part of the time, part of the time being a commercial artist, and then part of the time being a scenic designer and so forth and so on.

Riess: And still learning on your own?

Wessels: Yes. I kept wondering about painting as a thing in itself. It seemed like I was going around the outside edges of it and there must be something in the middle. I could not quite accept the idea that painting is only an applied art. The only thing that I could conceive of in those days was perhaps mural painting. I thought that might be an important thing and I should strive in that direction. Scene painting seemed to be somewhat on the way to it so I could work in that area.

Wessels: I was curious and eager to solve all these problems. When anybody would show up with some information, I would be there asking questions. While I was working with Irving Pichel in the community playhouse, which was in a little church, now defunct, down here on Center Street (I believe the U. C. Press is there now), a lady showed up with some weird stuff that really put me on edge. That place was used for occasional cultural events such as lectures. And one time--I was the man of all work around the place at that time--I was asked to show slides for a certain Galka Scheyer. And the slides she showed were works of the Bauhaus in Germany and the work of a group called "the blue four" and these were Klee, Kandinsky, Jawlensky, and Feininger, and I had never heard of them before. As these slides were thrown on the screen, I was completely bowled over.

Riess: These were in color?

Wessels: Yes, color slides, I think they were perhaps the first good color slides I ever saw. I was completely bowled over by these strange things. It aroused the greatest curiosity. I didn't know about Galka Scheyer except that she was a sort of a fanatic about this stuff. She was determined that people should see it and value it. Later she went to Pasadena to live, and later gave this collection

Wessels: that she brought from Europe to the Pasadena Museum, and they now have it, and it still is a very good collection.

Riess: Who was she?

Wessels: I don't really know. I don't know much about her except that she was from Germany, the name would indicate Polish German, and that she had some connection or other with the Bauhaus school in Weimar at that time and had brought this work to America when she came and that is all I know. You can find out more about Galka Scheyer from the Pasadena Museum, I am sure, because they have that collection. Peter Selz, who is here now, was the director of that museum--I think at the time when it acquired that collection.

Riess: You say that she really put you on edge. Are you thinking of her or of the paintings themselves?

Wessels: Well, "on edge," I mean this in a good way. It opened up a world which was completely mysterious and exciting to me. I saw some curious connection that I could not quite trace between what I heard from people like Isabelle about picture structure and what was going on here, but this was so much further out. I could not quite make a clear connection.

Riess: What was the nature of her lectures? Was she a good

Riess: interpreter?

Wessels: You know, I can't remember the things that she said, I imagine it was mainly the enthusiasm. She imparted a kind of feeling of fanatic enthusiasm for what she had. I suppose that is what you have to have for it. I don't think it explained very much to me.

Riess: And did you talk to her afterwards?

Wessels: No, not very much. I did a little bit. She thanked me for putting the slides on, and I said, "Where can one find out more about this?" and she told me and so on.

Riess: Where could one find out more?

Wessels: Well, there was one book, only one book in English, Cubists And Post-impressionism, by A. J. Eddy. And I found this one book and it was full of much of the same sort of rather vague rhapsodic writing. I was a person who had had enough scientific training as a pre-med student so that I wanted some facts. So, although I could see that people were very enthusiastic, I wanted to know what they were enthusiastic about.

After the Berkeley theater folded, I went through a rather painful time trying to put my scenic knowledge to work as a cafe decorator. In those days we had pro-

Wessels: hibition, and illicit cafes were springing up and being closed by the police everywhere. They constantly needed new decor, not too permanent. What they wanted was someone to do it in stage terms. I designed a series of places, one called The Sheik's Tent, another one called Hades, and another one called Insane Inn, and so on. [Laughter] All these were bootlegger's outlets. All of them were closed up after a month or two. I got paid off pretty well by the bootleggers because I had crazy ideas which suited them. But finally one of them got jugged and did not pay his bills, and I was left holding the bag on the material expenses.

I had in the meantime also been employed by Dr. Popper, who was running the Greek Theater in these days, after the demise of Sam Hume's enterprise. Through him I came in contact with Margaret Anglin who was doing a series of Greek plays. She employed me to do a set that could be used in the Greek Theater and then be transplanted to Hollywood to the Hollywood Bowl, and then transplanted to Soldier's Field in Seattle, and then to some place or other in Hawaii. Now I thought I was in.

Wessels: I thought now I'm set, this is the career, this is it. I'm going to be a stage designer. But poor Margaret Anglin drank too much gin and went to the hospital, and they had to abrogate all her contracts and so I was left with quite an amount of money in my hands at the time of the year when it was impossible to get any other scenic jobs. So I said, "By golly, why don't I find out about this painting thing that has been bugging me."

IN SEARCH OF AN EDUCATION: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AND PARIS

Wessels: So I had the money in hand, not too much, and a great burning curiosity and nothing to do. My parents by this time had kind of given me up and were willing to give me $30 a month just to keep me eating, but they felt that I was pretty lost as far as they were concerned. They by this time had built the apartment down here which has been torn down and dormitories put up over on Durant. It was called the Beverly Apartments. They were doing rather well with that and so they were willing to say, "Well, until you find something, we will help you out to this extent." They were pretty generous, considering their religious attitudes.

So I went to the University and looked over the old units of credit that were still lying around, the pre-med units, and the only thing that I could turn them into that was anywhere near where I wanted to go was psychology. I had now had five years of art school and a lot of practical experience and I wanted to find out about form and color. I talked to UC counselling people, and they looked at me in amazement that I thought there might be such a thing as a kind of visual music and that I wanted

Wessels: to find out what the scales, keys, and the chords and so forth in visual music were. They did not have anything like that. I said, "Who should I talk to?"

"Well, a philosopher named Stephen Pepper knows about these weird ideas, You can probably go to see him."

This was my first contact with Stephen, and it developed into a fast friendship, which still continues.*

I can remember going into his office and talking to him for the first time and saying, "I want to find out the principles of picture structure, and what effect form has on color and vice versa. I want to know what the relationship between music and visual form is. I want to know, for instance, the validity of such things as this color organ that had just been invented. It seems to me that there must be something in visual art that had some analogy to music and I would like to find it out."

He said, "You know, the questions you are asking are very difficult and important questions, but no one seems to be able to answer them. The only way I can think of is for you to go and take a course in experi-

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*S. C. Pepper, Art and Philosophy at the University of California, 1919-1962 (Regional Cultural History Project, Berkeley, 1963).

Wessels: mental psychology and try to find these things out for yourself."

So I enrolled as an experimental psychologist under Edward Chase Tolman and we became fast friends also. He was very sympathetic, but he said, "For goodness sake, this all sounds so terribly interesting, but I don't dare leave the rats. Don't ask me these questions because it will get me all excited and off my subject." [Laughter]

But at least I realized that these questions were valid and there was something that could be done. I soon found out that the behavioristic psychological method of gaining truth was a very long, slow, and expensive one. I found out certain things and originated certain experiments which were useful and which later were used by the psychologists.

Riess: What kinds of things?

Wessels: I'll describe one. It became evident to me that space in a picture was due to certain things and at that time I thought that perhaps one of the things was that contrast was intrinsically an advancing factor and that lack of contrast was a recessive factor and that you could bring things forward or sink them back in the way that Carriere and Whistler did, by making them dimmer in the distance, you see. So I set up a machine to prove

Wessels: this. The machine consisted of a board with a line on it. Black was opposed to white on one end of the board and this slowly went through a gradation until two things were back to the same at the other end of the board. So you had grey at one end of the board and you had a strong black and white contrast at the other. Then the trouble became that people could tell what position the board was in by looking at it. So I set it behind a screen so they saw it only through a slit and on the exact level of their eyes.

Then they were given an endless cord and they could sit there and look at this and they could rotate the board. For instance, I would say, "This is the behavioristic experiment--please set the board parallel with your face." They were shown the whole thing first and they knew what it was and they were told. But they had no visual clues whatsoever except this line, and that it was black against white over there and grey over here. The experiment killed itself off when I found out that 50 out of 50 pulled the contrast side away from them in their effort to set the board parallel. In other words, there was no use to chase it any further, it was a fact.

This apparatus was accepted and later used by

Wessels: another friend I made in connection with psychology, a Viennese psychologist who died, named Egon Brunswick. He was very sympathetic to all this and used some of the apparatus that I originated to learn about implied space. He came to some conclusions himself about it. Until he became ill, we were close friends, and he encouraged my experiments. Another one was the man who later became the director of the experimental lab in Princeton, Dr. Weaver. Weaver took these things seriously, and we began working with such problems as when you look at a form, at a rectangle bounded by four lines, where is the eye most apt to fall? Is there any sequence in eye movement following from one point to another in such an area? And how can this sequence be influenced if there is one, and so on? I am only summing up here a great deal of speculation and work. Prof. Edward Barnhart carried that on further.

Weaver and I built a fog chamber together in which we would set up a visual pattern at a certain distance from the eye. It could be viewed with two eyes and then if we put fog in one and diminished the contrast, did it apparently recede in space? These were things we tried out behavioristically to see whether or not people would make judgements such as that this thing

Wessels: was further away than that just because it was dimmer. It is not profitable here to go into all these various experiments, but all this demanded physical equipment and expensive electrical equipment, and I was somewhat skilled in these matters because I had been a stage electrician and I could build apparatuses of this sort, but I had no resources, no grant. Stephen tried to get me some funds, but it did not seem important enough to the people of that time.

Riess: It sounds like you were beginning a new field, the psychology of perception.

Wessels: I later read of this in a book by Rudolph Arnheim, Art and Perception, and I realized that I was fumbling toward writing such a book but that I was 20 or 25 years before the data was there to write it from.

In the process of all this and with the feeling of increasing frustration and the feeling that somehow or another this was going much too slow, I had as a kind of release from the psychological work, allowed myself a bit of cake, I joined a class in play production under the late Sarah Huntsman Sturges, who was the only one who taught ~~diameter~~ dramatic art on campus outside of Von Nuemeyer at that time. I did not want to become an actor. I thought there would be someplace for me to play around

Wessels: with scenery in connection with the work. But in those days you could not get out of a class once you were in it.

This woman was a terror, she was really a terror, and I love her; I think she did more for me than any other individual that I ever met! Because she taught me to talk. She insisted on doing it. Her method was terrific. I was a timid, stammering person, very afraid to appear in public, still conscious of my bad eye, afraid to look anyone straight in the face. And she made me stand up on a platform and talk, and heckled me until I got over being afraid. I have always been very grateful to her.

Riess: It's very hard to believe that you were in any way a timid, self-conscious person.

Wessels: Personally I was. I could stand up in front of a class when I had something to say, but I felt that I was unimportant and it was what I had to say that was important. This is what carried me through with her. She kept saying, "You have something to say. I am going to make it so that you can say it." She would sit there and I would speak and I would lisp perhaps. She would say, "Learn to say 'The thistle sifter successfully shifting three thousand thistles', and so forth, and

Wessels: learn to say it until you can make it without a mistake." So I went through this painful exercise in public speaking which has stood me in very good stead since. I now am able to say it even with dentures. [Laughter] At any rate, this apparently was an essential preparation for what I was to do later.

But the really important thing that came out of this was that she was a cousin (or something) of Worth Ryder's wife. While she was beating me over the head, she was at the same time apparently very approving and determined to help me. She realized that I was struggling down the long psychological road toward a knowledge of painting. She asked Worth Ryder whether he would talk to me. He had just come from Europe. Maybe something could be done about this.

In short, Worth came down to the little red barn which I had as a workshop studio down here on Dana Street. I remember he showed up one day and came in and looked at things and talked. I was at that time painting a series of geometric forms which were whirling in space, I was trying to find out about formal relationships. He realized what I was trying to do although he also realized that I had very little basic

Wessels: information on this. He began talking about these things, and said, "You know, you ought to go to Munich. There is a man there named Hans Hofmann who knows just the things that you want to know. You don't have to go through all this agony and experimenting in psychology, there is a shorter road." He convinced me that this is what I should do. Well, I took my remaining money and sold everything I had and borrowed all I could and I lit out for Europe.

Riess: Who was Worth Ryder?

Wessels: Well, Worth Ryder had been brought in to break the standoff between Eugen Neuhaus and his particular ambitions and ideas, and Perham Nahl and his. Nahl and Neuhaus worked at loggerheads so that the art department was at a standstill as a result. It was felt that Worth Ryder would bring in the latest information from Europe and might solve the dilemma. He came into the University under Stephen Pepper's enthusiastic support. His way was hard but he broke the log jam and started the art department on its present path. Really he was the founder of the present art department.

Anyway, I lit out to Europe and landed in Paris with the assurance of what little money I had and $30 a month. But in those days the European currencies were terribly

Wessels: inflated, and they were very cheap in American terms, so I got by.

Riess: First you studied with Andre l'Hote in Paris?

Wessels: Andre l'Hote was a doctrinaire Cubist really. He was a minor member, as a painter, of the early Cubist group, whom I think formulated a kind of a Cubist dogma. It was not of tremendous scope either, but he was, the people told me when I studied in Europe, the only place other than the Hofmann studio in Munich where you could find these things out. I tried his workshop out during the summer before I went down to St. Tropez to Hofmann.

L'Hote's mode of teaching left me a little cold. I wanted to ask questions of somebody ~~and~~ when I walked into the studio. He was not there for four days a week. The fifth day he would show up with a monitor and a huge palette, and he would repaint everything you did and not say a word. I wanted to ask him questions. Once in a while he would talk in French, which I did not understand very well, and I gathered that there was such a thing as a picture surface, and I gathered ideas to the effect that the drawing must be flat but the color must be deep. In other words, you should achieve space through advancing and receding color, but

Wessels: you must draw like an Egyptian, everything on the surface.

Well, this seemed to me to be a limited approach, at the least. I knew that you could get depth with drawing more effectively than you could with color and I wondered then why his paintings seemed to come out pretty much warm and cold, brown and blue. The dimensions of color were simply not enough to carry the whole burden of space. He used to give us an exercise such as making a checkerboard and then animating this checkerboard spatially through color. You would have to paint certain squares so that they would advance and certain squares so that they would recede, and so forth. Obviously he was working with the idea of equivocal space, which is now pretty well understood, the picture surface and the imaginal space behind the picture surface, but in kind of a limited way.

I found when I got in contact with Hofmann in Munich that the German **Expressionists** had a much freer way of dealing with these matters. They showed how Matisse, and Picasso for that matter, sometimes used drawing as a spatial implement; sometimes they used it as a flattening implement; sometimes they used color as a space implement; sometimes they used color as a flat-

Wessels: tening implement and so on. You were free to work with a larger keyboard, as it were, than you could under l'Hote. This may be an unfair criticism. I was only there for a month or thereabouts, maybe only three weeks, I am not sure. But I gathered that it was a rigid, dogmatic kind of teaching of undoubted value, but it seemed limited to me, particularly after I got to St. Tropez and started to understand what Hofmann was doing.

Riess: Spencer Macky went there in 1926 too.

Wessels: Yes, l'Hote's was the place to go. In those days very few people saw beyond Paris. When you went to Europe, you went to Paris and that was particularly so for artists. Actually, just as much of importance was going on beyond the Rhine as was going on there, but the Americans had been Paris-oriented for various reasons, and they never got out of Paris or beyond Paris, but Paris wasn't necessarily everything, by any means.

Riess: People like Benton and Curry and so on who rejected Paris, would they have studied with a man like l'Hote?

Wessels: They show signs of having--Benton, particularly in his more technical articles, shows signs of having come under the influence of modern picture structure. They worked out their own compromises with it. I think their rejection of Paris was partly propaganda. I think they

Wessels: were right in trying to assert that an American barn was just as good as a French barn to paint, that American subject matter and American legend were just as good as the European legends--here they were right. Where I think they were wrong was the...

There is always the tendency to overemphasize when you are trying to start a new religion. They were trying to put American art on its own feet, and it was time that it did get on its own feet too. They were trying to say that America could get along without Europe and it could. But you must realize what they were reacting against in their day. It was the fact that no one could have any culture, no one could amount to anything unless he had been to Paris. You had to go abroad and do the grand tour, otherwise you just were not counted. Actually now most of the good art teachers are here in America. A great deal of the good museum stuff is in America, although not all by any means. The things that can be removed, a good many of them have come here in one way or another.

And most of the good art teachers and the people with the real ideas migrated to America after the first

Wessels: World War, Hofmann amongst them. So when I went back to Europe again, I was appalled at the state of European art schools. They were not as good as American art schools. The monuments, the great cultural monuments we all should know about are still there, but I don't think it is necessary for a student to go to Europe now. If he does go, he should not go to an art school most of the time, he should spend his time looking at the things that are too big to bring over here. He should go and see El Greco and Toledo and look at the first four rooms of the Uffizi and spend a little time with Chardin and a few others in the Louvre and a few other things that we don't have over here. This you should go for; but to go over there to study, you probably get worse teachers than you will here, and that is saying a good deal. [Laughter]

HANS HOFMANN, FROM MUNICH TO BERKELEY

Wessels: After studying with l'Hote in Paris, I later went down to the Hofmann summer sessions in St. Tropez. There I discovered that Hofmann spoke only German and French and I had neither. So I sat up nights with a high school text book in German learning German because I was desperate. Here I was, and here was the man who had what I had to have, and I could not communicate with him. [Laughter] It was an awful situation.

After about three weeks work, I could not understand what was going on, and I had to ask questions. I would make drawings and destroy them and more drawings and tear them up in anger. One time I was slashing into a drawing--mostly in desperation, I think--and I did not know that Hofmann had come up behind me. The first thing I knew I got a slap on the back, and he said, "Courage, courage," [Laughter] and I got the idea that perhaps this was the right way to do it. But I determined that I was going to be able to make a better communication than that so, as I said, I worked hard at German and I painted all day as best I could, with the result that at the end of the summer, six weeks, I had

Top: Left to right: Ruth Hoffman (no relation, but a student of Hans Hofmann, who is next right); next is G. Wessels, taking notes on what Hofmann is saying and translating from German to English as Hofmann speaks; the girl back of Wessels is unidentified. [This is in St. Tropez, Hofmann's summer session of 1929, where I was his assistant and translator. Ruth Hoffman is co-author of several books along with her sister, Helen. They were identical twins. One of their books is entitled We Married an Englishman. Somewhere in their books is an account of their St. Tropez visit in which both Hans and I are mentioned. (These books are in the Berkeley Public Library.) G.W.]

Bottom: Left to right: Helen Hoffman; H.H. giving a crit; next two not identified; Wessels standing far right. This is a typical scene in the St. Tropez Hofmann school.

St. Tropez: Hofmann's Summer Session of 1929

Wessels: taught myself rudimentary German.

One day Hofmann and I were seated together in a restaurant, and I can still remember this as one of the great moments. He said, "Ich wollte, dass wir studieren zusammen. I want that we should study together. I would like you to teach me English; I would like to teach you German." This was just what I wanted.

Then a friend who later became one of the directors of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Fred Hauck, now dead, and myself, traveled through Italy and I saw the tremendous things to be seen there, at least for a painter. We ended up in Munich for the winter, and Hofmann invited me to come to his studio every morning at six o'clock in the morning. It would be hard, and I would have to wade through the snow to get there. The French were taking all the coal for reparations at the time, so the studio was cold. Hofmann had designed a very efficient stove, however (by the way, he had a patent on it). It was a kind of improved Franklin stove. We sat by that, but in order to keep ourselves warm, we were wrapped up in still-life drapery! We looked like a couple of sultans or Turks all wrapped in draperies with different patterns

Wessels: to stay warm.

When we started out he said, "I don't want to learn about the 'pen of my aunt'. I want to learn the words I use in criticism." This is just exactly what I wanted, too, so we were able to communicate just a little bit. We started out at first simply with the words you use in class criticism-- **auf**, **unter**, **rechts**, **links**, ~~fort~~ vor, **zurück**, and so forth. I learned the words and he learned the words in English along with the gestures. Then I would write a question in English and translate from the dictionary into German the best I could, and he would take this and correct the German and learn the English. Then he would write the answer in German, and I would then translate the answer as best I could. Then he would correct the German and I would learn the German and he would learn the English. Slowly we built up communication.

This went on for two years. I was able to ask all of the art and philosophy questions that had been bothering me and get his attitudes on them. He, in doing this, gained the vocabulary that he needed. I can still remember a sense of triumph during the second year when in the studio correction he immediately changed over into English and everyone almost fell over dead!

Wessels: [Laughter] He delighted in the moment because it was dramatic, but he was a proven success. He never became very good at speaking English because he has a tendency to mix French and German with it, but he was understandable and was able to get along in English.

Riess: Did he have many foreign students?

Wessels: Yes, it was an international school, really, with some Americans. Amongst the Americans who had discovered him were Vaclav Vytlacil and later Worth Ryder. Ryder and Vytlacil had become friends in Capri during an Hans Hofmann summer session. Capri was the summer session place for the Hofmann summer school previous to his coming to St. Tropez. Vytlacil, who later taught here at the University--a sort of prelude to Hofmann's coming--and Ryder became fast friends and Vytlacil persuaded Ryder to join the Hofmann group in Munich.

Now then the significant thing, as far as the University was concerned: I received a communication from Worth Ryder that he thought he could arrange a summer session job for Hofmann if I could persuade Hofmann to come, and if I could prepare him to come. So my job then became one of diplomacy--Hofmann was

Wessels: viewing the growing Hitler thing with alarm and so the moment was ripe for him to make a change, but he was a man along in years and to make a change from one culture to another was a serious step at that time in his life. He pumped me for everything about America: the kind of a place it was, and so forth. I did the very best I could to sell him on the notion that he should go to the University and use that as a stepping stone. Later perhaps he could find a career in America.

We began preparing talks that he would give in America, and I began teaching him how. He wasn't a good public speaker particularly, so I tried to teach him what little I knew about it. He would give a speech, and I would criticize--we were just like two brothers together. Both of us worked very hard to improve his means of communication, but still by the time we were ready to go he was not able to make a public speech in English, so it was determined that I should be his impromptu translator. He could communicate with me, and then I would tell the audience, and that is the way we carried it out until he came to Berkeley. I helped him through the first summer session at Berkeley, then Worth Ryder took over. By

Wessels: that time Hofmann was doing well enough to do it almost all alone. I went back to the College of Arts and Crafts to teach.

But before that there were certain curious and significant things that happened. We met in Paris with the idea of coming to America and immediately, due to one of these kinds of accidents which always seem to follow me around, I was in a gallery with Hofmann and I was backing up to look at a painting, I think it was a Derain, and I stepped on a very large foot. I turned around to apologize (in English) and a man who had squinty eyes and a very large nose and a very amiable looking face said, "Oh, you are an American."

I said, "Yes, I'm sorry about the foot."

He said, "Oh, the foot's all right. What do you think of the picture?"

So we fell into a very interesting discussion of the picture's construction and of criticism in general and he seemed to brighten when he found out that I had something to say, and we moved from picture to picture and finally came around to where Hans was standing at the other end of the room. I said, "I want to introduce you to my friend, but I don't know your name."

Wessels: He said, "I am Leo Stein."

Hofmann looked at him and he looked at Hofmann and they realized that they were old friends and that they had known one another before. But to make a long matter short, we were then taken up by Gertrude Stein's group, and the last three or four weeks in Paris we met everybody who was of any note at all--we visited Picasso's studio, Braque's studio, and everybody, we were right in the thick of it. It was so dazzling to a person like myself that I still remember it as sort of a high period. I was able to actually ask Braque why he painted five pictures from one still life. I said, "Isn't that terribly hard? Like playing five games of chess?"

He said, "Oh, no, it is much easier. You see, so many ideas come from one still life that I have to sort them out in five canvasses." And other questions like that.

This was a bar at the corner of Boulevard St. Michel (the "Boul' Mich"), and Montparnasse. Leo Stein took me there and told me what had gone on there. That time we [Stein and Wessels] talked way late into the evening about the future of American architecture, I can remember. But this had been kind of a meeting

Wessels: place and an arguing place, kind of a Cedar Bar--(the New York Cedar Bar, I understand, has been that for the New York people for some time). It was a place where young men with ideas, very avant garde ideas, could compare notes. It was not official, it wasn't a club, it is just that they met each other there and had extended discussions, arguments, and bull sessions. Delauney and Hofmann, who were very close friends and who I believe shared the studio at that time, at least part of the time, were part of this group.

I struck up a very odd, short-lived, but nevertheless close friendship with Leo Stein. I was an inquiring mind, and apparently he liked inquiring minds, and he filled me in. He even took me to some of these places where he had met Hofmann before in years past. Apparently before the First World War, Hofmann had been one of--not a very well known one--but one of the same group that was made up of pretty near all the early Cubists, Picasso, Delauney, Gris, Picabia, Matisse, all these men, and had known them, rubbed shoulders with them, and had argued with them.

We finally--after about two weeks--set out for America, and on board ship we worked on our notes for

Wessels: the talks that Hofmann would be giving. We landed in New York. I won't go into the details, the amusing adaptations and the funny things that happened, but for some reason or another, I don't know quite how, the Art Student's League heard that a very important European teacher was in town so they got the idea that he should not go to California, he should stay there and teach. I found myself confronted by the board of directors--or whatever--of the Art Student's League, and I had to defend Hofmann's contract with the University of California. I told Hofmann privately, "This is fine later, but not now. Americans are wonderful at blowing you up to tremendous size and then exploding you. Don't get blown up too quickly, go slowly." In the later years when we met in New York, Hans slapped me on the back, and said, "You are so wise; you were so right. How can a young man be so right?"

Riess: Yes, really, how did you know that?

Wessels: Well, I had this idea that Americans have a way of making a saint of a man, then dropping him.

The way that I got Hofmann out of the idea--he was sort of attracted to the idea of teaching for the Art Student's League--I said, "Look out, don't take

Wessels: this important position. The only condition under which you should accept is to have a contract that you should be director of the school. Otherwise you will find yourself in all kinds of political difficulties, and they will kill you. Don't accept unless you can be the boss. If you can be boss, all right, then we will telegraph the University of California that you can't come. Unless they let you be boss, don't take it."

So he flatly presented it to them this way. He could not teach unless he was the director. He had always directed his own school in Europe, and he could not work unless he could order the whole situation that surrounded him. Only then could he accept their offer.

Well, they fell immediately into internecine warfare and jealousy, and political strife, and it became evident how wise he was in refusing. So Hofmann was not stopped in New York. When he later came to New York and taught at the Art Student's League, he discovered exactly the same thing was true, and he retired from the Art Student's League to start his own school over the Village Inn on 8th Street, where his reputation as an American teacher grew to the point where it is today. He was still the director of his own school.

Riess: What was the sort of lecture that Hofmann gave en route?

Wessels: It was purely on picture structure. It was very dull, really. The sensation-seeker got nothing from him. When I worried about that a little bit, why, he would say, "You know, I'm only talking to the one or two, I don't care about the rest."

Riess: But he talked; not just a demonstration.

Wessels: No, he had to lecture. I had to stand just two paces back, and translate.

On one occasion, I remember it still with shock, he turned to me at the beginning of the lecture and said, "I don't think anyone here speaks German, do they?" I said, "No."

He said, "You know the lecture; I don't have to say anything." So he began making outrageous puns and comments on the appearance of the people in the audience. Here I was having to give a sober lecture on art, [laughter] and all the time having to watch him laugh at me squirming. But at any rate, we made it across the continent.

Riess: Who had arranged the lectures?

Wessels: Friends, Cameron Booth in Minneapolis who was head of the school at St. Paul; John Haley, now on our staff,

Wessels: was one of Cameron Booth's private students, Earl Loran another. They were all there then. Cameron Booth had been an early Hofmann student. In Chicago there were early Hofmann students; Vytlacil had been there. So we hopped from New York to Chicago to Minneapolis to San Francisco, with lectures all along the way.

Riess: Was Hofmann's reputation mostly as a teacher?

Wessels: His reputation was almost entirely as a man who evolved a method for unfolding personality in art. His school began, as I understand it, with the permission of the German government during the First World War as a means of rehabilitating shell-shocked soldiers. He started a little group for rehabilitating these people through drawing and painting, sort of therapeutic art. His theories were that the act of creating form--I am thinking in German here, Gestaltung is the word--that the act of constructing something has an integrative force on the personality, that this could help a man whose wits were scattered get them together again. As I understand it (and this is all very vague) in the background of the Hofmann school was this beginning.

Then foreigners began to discover this, and it

Right to left: G. Wessels, H. Hofmann, J. Haley, E. Loran
Taken by Mrs. Wessels. San Francisco Airport 5 April 1964

Hoffman's departure after receiving an honorary degree on Charter Day at U. C.

Wessels: changed slowly from a sort of therapeutic thing over to a teaching of the fundamentals of contemporary painting. Hofmann's early associations in Paris with Delauney and Picasso and the Cubists and his real knowledge and appreciation of German Expressionist trends was the basis of his teaching. He was in on the foundations of Cubism in Paris, and the basis of his teaching was Cubism.

Riess: Just when was he in Paris?

Wessels: He was a studio mate of Delauney and I think he sat in on those famous arguments in the Cloiserie de Lilas when Picasso and the others were discussing the basis of Cubism. He was in Paris up until the First World War broke when as a German he was expatriated immediately back to Germany. He had not been back to Germany for years, and the only way he could stay out of the German army was to teach shell-shocked soldiers. That is where it all started.

When I knew him, he was feeling his way with his new doctrines in teaching, and foreign students were gathered at this very obscure two-room art school in Munich out in Schwabing, which was the Munich art quarter, and 40 Georgenstrasse was the address of the Hofmannschule. There were other, better known teachers

Wessels: in Munich who ran private studios, but Hofmann had as an idea man drawn the attention of the liberals in Germany already and when the red putsch took place --you know they had a series of changes in government between the liberals and the conservatives in Germany for awhile--and the liberals took over in Munich for maybe two or three weeks, immediately they appointed Hofmann as the head of the Munich Academy. Then two or three weeks later the whites took over again, and they ousted him, and he went back to his school in Georgenstrasse. But this showed that he had already become an idea man, a figure among the Munich artists.

His school increasingly became a meeting ground for people from all nationalities. You met Turks and Swedes and Norwegians, and Greeks, and all sorts of people there besides a few Germans and some Americans. When I went there, there were maybe three or four Americans. Altogether there would not be more than thirty students. Classes consisted of figure drawing class in which the figure was always composed in context (and I recognized Isabelle West's old figure and ground problem). Then there would be a still-life painting class.

Wessels: Hofmann, unlike most art teachers in Europe, religiously attended to each student at least twice a week. You always knew that you would get at least two periods of communion with him to talk things over. Of course, I had much more than that because I also worked with him from six to eight every morning. But you really got considerate attention and careful analysis of your work. Having tried several other ateliers in Europe both in Germany and France, I know that this was not the case elsewhere. The French teachers are particularly apt to think that you are studying with them just so that you can say that you have the right to use their name, and they just don't pay much attention to you. Most European art classes are even now run by a monitor and the teacher shows up and looks things over grandly maybe once a month or so. That is about all the contact you have with the private European teacher of art. Hofmann, though, was always in there pitching, counseling, helping. You never missed seeing him at least twice a week.

Riess: Did he enjoy teaching?

Wessels: I think he took it very seriously as a kind of mission. He would sit down and you had made a drawing and he would say, "Now maybe this is one way of seeing it, but I don't

Wessels: think it is the best way of seeing it. I think you should see it perhaps this way." Then he would make a little diagram and show you how the main parts--and it would be a Cubist diagram--how the main parts of what you were drawing should fit together.

"I think this would be a better way of seeing it."

"Why would it be a better way to see it?"

"I think this is a better way of seeing it because it becomes a foundation for a much richer visual experience." And he would give you a good reason why. Then he would say,"Now you could also see it this way, or you could also see it this way, but I think this is the most productive way to see it." I have sketches of his in which he has analyzed a model--sitting on a podium with drapes in the background--in seven different ways, and then putting a circle around the one that he thought was the best way of thinking about it. This kind of teaching very much appealed to me.

The people that I found there all became leading American teachers later. The man who immediately preceded me as Hofmann's translator for his American students was Edgar Ruprecht who was a leading teacher for years in the Chicago Art Institute, and his wife Isabelle still is teaching at Chicago, I believe.

Wessels: Just preceding him as Hofmann's translator was Vytlacil who was a brilliant painter also from the Chicago Art Institute. He had been working with Hofmann for seven years and came back to New York to teach at the Art Student's League and became a very influential teacher and painter in New York. Then the mural painter, Anton Refregier, who did the murals in the Rincon Post Office--Anton Refregier is a former Hofmann student, and adopted Hofmann's ways of analyses and so forth in his own mural painting successfully. Cameron Booth who was the director of the St. Paul School of Design where John Haley and Earl Loran both learned their fundamentals, was an early student of Hofmann's. I think that is why John went to Munich to study. Worth Ryder had been roped in, as I told you before, by his friendship with Vytlacil.

Everybody kept discovering that here was something especially good and he'd pass it along to his friends. Worth Ryder passed it on to me in the same way. It was a school where each person was dealt with as an individual and yet general problems were discussed. The classroom was a quiet hive of experiments and learning. It was really a wonderful association.

Wessels: There were a few dilettantes around, a few came over to play in Europe and study a little art incidentally, but there weren't enough to disturb us.

Riess: When I talked to Neuhaus about Hofmann, he did not have much use for his teaching methods.

Wessels: Neuhaus never got it. Neuhaus filled his place in U.C., I think, very well, but I think Neuhaus' jealousy of Worth Ryder soured any possibility that anything that Ryder would sponsor could have any good in it. Neuhaus started out with a prejudice and he just did not get very far. He ~~was~~ became anti-modern art although he himself was responsible for opening the University's ideas in that direction in the first place. It is very funny how the avant garde thinker of one generation becomes the conservative of the next. I have always tried not to be that way. I have seen it happen too many times. A man when he was young, and his mind was flexible, opened himself to new ideas and became the leader of these new ideas. Then when another value comes up over the horizon it suddenly changes this thing that you have come to believe in as the be-all and end-all of art, and you are not ready to accept it, the change, that is all. You have too much energy and money invested in this thing that you have learned and you

Wessels: simply will not change. If there is anything true about life and art it is that they do change! But very often the most radical avant garde of one generation become the most dogmatic of the next. And as I say, this is something that I hope that I have successfully combatted in myself.

Riess: When Hofmann accepted the one summer session in America, did he realize that this might lead to a complete move?

Wessels: Hofmann was an adventurer in the sense that he was ready to take a chance. He always did have a rather dangerously gay attitude towards his own importance. I guess I could best illustrate this by telling you about the Buick.

The first thing he did when he got over here--he had always wanted to own an automobile and he could not drive--was to buy an old, blue Buick. This was the second summer that he came over here, and he began to have a little money. He bought this big old blue Buick, and he was determined that he was going to be modern and drive, and he had never driven a car. He came up here from Los Angeles. He had been teaching at the Chouinard art school, and he had with him Harry Bowden, who had been his assistant at Chouinard. He

Wessels: had learned to drive after a fashion, and I would underline that! I was supposed to meet him and go for a ride in his monster. He picked me up over here someplace, and we went over here onto Bancroft, and before you could say "Scat" we were down at the Bay. He had no regard for Stop signs, speed signals, or anything else. He just stepped on the pedal and said "Whoopee" and away we went. I was frozen with horror, but I did not say anything. He was just in a seventh heaven; he was just having himself a ball! I think he was rather, what shall I say, the kind of a man that will say, "Well, here goes nothing; I am going to try it." I think it is much in that same spirit that he came to America.

Riess: He does not sound very German at all.

Wessels: He was the more adventurous kind of German. Those people who come from around Würtenberg and Obenfranchen are not the stodgy German type. Hofmann was gay and had quite a bit of the French elan about him. Hofmann always was a man who enjoyed a good laugh and would take a chance on a thing.

He tells very humorously about the man who tried to pick him for $600 in a dark alley one time and who pointed a gun at him. Hofmann was no athlete, but

Wessels: apparently he took the gun away from the man rather than give up all the money he had in the world. He had a kind of foolhardy courage. He was always willing to jump into the unknown. This was also true of his painting. He was always,up to his very last day, willing to take it on the chin. Coming to America was one of these. He felt pretty much, I think, like an astronaut. When we started out across the ocean, he said, "I feel like Columbus."

I can't overemphasize this as an element in his character; he was a researcher; he was trying new things, he wanted to see if they would work. I think that is one of the reasons that he accepted. He said, "Europe is sick. Maybe America is healthy." This is one of the things that he said on the way over; I think that he found it healthy and he came back here again and again and finally stayed.

Riess: So each time he went back, he knew that he was going to come back.

Wessels: Yes, I think he went back only to arrange his affairs.

Riess: Then his wife did not come over until quite a bit later, did she?

Wessels: No, after he got things arranged over here so that he had an economic base, he brought her over. They had

Wessels: property to take care of in Germany. Everything they had, after all, was there. There were very difficult economic circumstances in Germany at the time. They had an inflation and then the deflation. This wiped out practically all the middle class; the money they had became worthless. And new money took its place and so on. You have to realize what a terrific effect the inflation and deflation had on Germany when the Reichsmark came in. And when the Rentenmark came in instead of the Reichsmark, the Reichsmark was no good. Why, I paid for a dinner for 12 people with one American dollar, and there was not enough change in the inn to give me change for my dollar! This was how cheap the dinner was. And one year later the same dinner cost just as much as it would have over here.

Well, Hofmann escaped that by coming to America and establishing confidence here before everything he had went down the drain in Germany.

Riess: I noticed there was a show at the Palace of the Legion of Honor the year after he came.

Wessels: Yes, a show of drawings. I had seen Hofmann draw, but he was very secretive about his drawings, he did not show them to most of the students. All they ever saw were his diagrams. His argument was, and I think that

Wessels: it was a good one, that he did not want people to copy his style of work. He wanted them to work with essential principles and develop themselves and so he was very chary about showing his things. It is the most mistaken kind of idolatry when the student tries to adopt the mannerism of the master instead of the basic principles on which the master works. Hofmann drummed this into me. He said, "Now you have seen these things; they are not for you--these are my things!"

This is one of the reasons that he has had such a diverse group of students, each one developing his own style. He taught the grammar but the style was yours; he taught the basics but the development was yours; he tried to point out that you could not teach a person to paint in the way that you paint. The old, traditional way of teaching art had been...well, I can best describe it, I think, by a picture I saw in an art magazine one time: a cartoon of the master with his brush poised standing before the class and a little string goes from his brush to the ceiling and it radiates in a number of threads, finally to a string on every brush in the whole room and everybody is making the strokes in exactly the way as does the teacher.

Riess: I was surprised that the Legion of Honor had done the show. I had thought that their bent was more conservative.

Wessels: They were at that time, very much so. But Worth Ryder's influence, reputation, and diplomacy was so good that he was able to wangle the thing. It was really almost unnoticed as an art event because the people in San Francisco who were interested in art were all agog about the Mexican Revolution art at that time.

Riess: What did Hofmann think of the Mexican Revolution art?

Wessels: Well, when he talked about art from political conviction, he said, "All art comes from a conviction. If you believe in a political party and you are an artist, it may be that you may do some art on these grounds. But first you have to be an artist."

Riess: Implying that he did not think that...

Wessels: I think Orozco came higher than Rivera in his estimation, simply as an artist; although their political convictions may have been alike, one was an artist and the other was probably not so much of an artist, more of a decorative illustrator. He liked very much some of the other Mexicans that did not fit into the Revolutionary pattern so well. Who was the man who was named after a

Wessels: place in Yucatan? Merida. Carlos Merida was the one that Hofmann thought was the most significant Mexican at that time.

Riess: Now, if you would tell me more about the teaching.

Wessels: The classes were limited. Worth Ryder was a great man for keeping "guild secrets." He thought in a sort of Medieval way about imparting knowledge. Really sometimes this was detrimental and sometimes very good. He wanted to protect Hofmann from the usual foohfarah that attends visiting dignitaries. So he carefully sifted the people that he allowed to come into the classes and allowed in only people he thought would take advantage of it and would not disturb Hofmann and would be already predisposed to be friendly rather than indulging in violent arguments and so forth. So many people were fighting to get into these classes, but they could not make it past Worth Ryder.

The formal part of his instruction was in the old shingle building which is still there where city planning used to be on the other side of the campus. This great tall structure has marvelous studios in it. It originally was built for art studios and still should be used so because they are the best studios on the campus.

Wessels: We had one of those studios for Hofmann's life class. His system of using the model was to arrange an environment and then to place the model in the environment, and the student had to draw not only the figure but the figure in relation to other things because Hofmann kept saying, "Things only exist in relation." This same pose in another environment would become a different compositional problem and so forth.

He arranged the objects in the room with great care. For instance, all the light came from one side in the room and that cast deep shadows in certain areas. I can remember Hofmann before class-time going around with huge sheets of bright colored paper and illuminating the shadows so that one could look into them and see something. Then killing the glare of white walls by darkening them with sheets of paper and so forth. So when you looked around the room, you got an alternation of dark and light that was kind of alive. Nothing was dead. He said, "The human mind only thinks when there are contrasts." He felt that the whole studio should be conducive to the way that the person worked so that from whatever view you got the model you got a background of something there, something you could compose with and work with in relation to the figure.

Wessels: This was rather unusual in those days because the traditional way to use the model was simply to stand the model on the podium in the middle of the room and you just drew the figure as a closed form; you did not relate it to anything. The idea that forms exist in relation was not part of the formal art instruction in the typical school of the time. I never had it before Hofmann and I don't think that a great many other people did either. This idea that form exists only in relation, well, this was pre-Einstein perhaps. It became obvious once the thing was demonstrated to you. But it was part of Hofmann's teaching method.

Riess: Then when you approached a blank piece of paper, a blank canvas, how did you fill it?

Wessels: He would say when you approached the blank canvas, first you must know where you are before you can say anything. What is your relationship to that out there? Are you to the left; are you to the right; are you looking straight at it? Everything depends on the first few basic lines you put down to describe the kind of space. There is left hand space; there is right hand space. Now, for instance, if I sit here and do a portrait of you, you are a little over to my right side.

Wessels: The edge of my picture would probably come right down the line of this table here. There is my center of vision over there, but this whole picture would be composed on the right side. All of the forms which would move back, would move back in this way which is characteristic of right-hand space, the right-hand half of the total perspective pattern. He would say that it was terribly significant for you to be absolutely sure where you are before you grasp what is out there. You have to express your relationship to nature, otherwise you express nothing. We usually were very careful about how we set our easels, always in the same way in relationship to the model on account of this dictum.

This idea that things exist only in relation went all the way through Hofmann's teaching. The "push-pull" thing, for instance (it came to be kind of a slang phrase later in his teaching, an over-simplification of action and reaction if you like), was a statement of relations.

Riess: Maybe it does have something to do with Einstein and relativity.

Wessels: It does very definitely. But Hofmann pointed out that this is implicit in the art of the old masters.

Wessels: There was nothing new about it except that it had not been stated in words before. He showed you how an El Greco head which is right in the upper left hand corner of the picture if transposed to the lower right hand corner of the picture does not fit at all: it is neither good anatomy nor is it good composition in a different position. It just has to be the way it is where it is. The form is subject to the total always. He also said, "It is like you play on a team. You play a certain position and you are conditioned to fit that position."

Riess: Would he say then that any good art would have embodied this principle?

Wessels: Yes, the highest art always embodies this principle. In fact, he thought the higher the quality of the art, the more thoroughly the principle of relativity went down with every brush stroke.

Riess: So he could illustrate this with the Cubist kind of thing.

Wessels: Yes, he would show how one brush stroke in a Cezanne related to the total and if you moved that brush stroke that whole picture would have to be re-composed.

Riess: When he was coming across the country, how did he illustrate the kinds of talks that he gave?

Wessels: He talked and he used some diagrams.

Riess: Did he show slides?

Wessels: No, he didn't. He just talked about what the fundamentals of art were. His talks were not at all, I think, what people hoped and expected to hear. He simply would not talk about Mexican Revolutionary art. And he would not talk about art movements in the way that the critics talked about them at all. It was all one thing to him, good or bad. He just talked about the fundamentals of the picture structure, and perhaps only about one person out of ten was interested in that.

Riess: About the kind of thing that you were just talking about?

Wessels: Exactly, this was what his message was--that a house to be sound must be built on this foundation and that was all there was to it, and this was the most important thing; if it is to live as a work of art, it must be well formed, it must be built right.

Riess: Yes, I guess that really would surprise people who would like to hear a little gossip about Paris.

Wessels: That's right, that is exactly it. Hordes of people came expecting all kinds of entertaining gossip and so on, and stories of his acquaintanceship with this famous artist and that famous artist. He would not bring those things into

Wessels: it. He would talk only about the fundamentals.

Riess: Did he answer questions from the audience?

Wessels: Sometimes, yes. There was some discussion.

Now there were specifically two major talks. There was one minor one to the officials of the Art Student's League of New York explaining why he did not want to join their organization. We stopped in Chicago and there was a very informal session there in the home of one of his former students. Then we went to Minneapolis where the ground had been laid and Hofmann talked not only in the St. Paul School of Art which is right next to Minneapolis but also at the university. Cameron Booth, who was a very influential person there, had been a Hofmann student, and so he drew large audiences there. There was real discussion and clarification during these talks.

But then again it was very silly that he should be asked by the Deutsches--American Bund or something or other to talk about his impressions of America when his impressions were limited to a day in New York and a day in Chicago and a day in Minneapolis [laughter]. He said, "I simply haven't any impressions yet. I have impressions about your Middle West architecture--it looks very ascetic. I have some impressions about

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Wessels: New York, and so forth." But there I think they went away disappointed. It was kind of a banquet dinner thing where they expected a witty after-dinner speaker and a good many of them had confused him with the Hofmann who was a teacher in Vienna, I think, who was better known at the time. And Hofmann laughed about all this. He said, "They did not come to hear me; they came to hear some ideas of their own." He said, "Really, these people are potentially in old Germany; they don't realize that things have changed in new Germany." Germans everywhere were always reaching out for him just because he was a German. And he was not a German. If he was anything, he was an internationalist.

Riess: How did you get across country? Was it by train?

Wessels: Let's see, the Lakeside Limited to Chicago, and then from Chicago to Minneapolis by whatever the shortest way is, I don't know what railroad that is. It seems to me that we had to change at Kansas City or something, yes, I know we did. Then by Union Pacific through the Feather River Canyon and so forth to Sacramento and through to here. I told you about Hofmann sitting up all night to look at the Rocky Mountains, didn't I?

Riess: No, I was going to ask you how he liked it visually.

Wessels: Well, he said--and I could expand on this because I

Wessels: got a car and drove him around a bit when we got out here--but first, he was astounded by the size and vitality of New York. I think he said, "There is no question of it; this is the heart throb of the world. This is going to be the leading city of the world." This is what he said after we had only been there a few days. And, "It is very beautiful in a very hard and efficient way."

When we began going across the country, he began to realize the Middle West country was rich in its way also. He kept saying, "Ein reichesland : a rich land, a rich country. You have everything. In Europe we have exhausted everything. A rich land, a place where things can grow, and will grow. A place where there is place to put down roots for art." He kept saying that you should build a great art here because there is a place for art to put down roots. In Europe the soil is already full of old roots. He said, "I don't want to build a dogma but I want to build a school." Even then he began to say that this might be the place where one could build a school without all the interference of older ideas and so on. So he reacted to America as a new land, as a virgin territory artistically speaking; instead of thinking of it as ignorant and provincial, he

Wessels: thought of it as an opportunity.

By the time he got to Chicago...we had a very amusing incident in Chicago. Hofmann had insisted on going by a Baedecker which he carried with him which was 12 years old. I tried to convince him that a 12-year-old Baedecker might work in Europe but it would not work in America. He insisted on going to a hotel which he found in this Baedecker, so we got in a cab and this hotel was on the south side and it turned out to be a headquarters for either Al Capone or his henchmen--full of ladies of light virtue, gamblers, with all night poker games going on in the adjacent room and so on. Hofmann was in seventh heaven; he said, "I have always wanted to see a gangster."

I said, "Now you have!" I shook in the sheets all night, I was kind of afraid to be there. [Laughter] Next day we got into a cab to go someplace and we went around the corner and the first thing we saw was a man with a gun, a shotgun, and another man with a pistol. Hofmann immediately dropped to the floor of the cab in the approved gangland movie manner which he had seen in Germany. I dropped too because it frightened me to see him go down like that. And I peeked over the edge and said, "It's all right." It was only two bank guards

Wessels: there unloading some money into a bank over there. But, I told you about his adventurous streak, and he was getting a great big kick out of being in the middle of gangland as the various movies had displayed it to him. [Laughter] In Minneapolis, however, the red carpet was out, and we saw no gangsters there.

Then coming across the plains, he marveled at the wheat and all that. He kept saying, "A rich land, a rich land, what unspoiled country." He had his nose to the window pane all the way across the continent, asking me innumerable questions, most of which I could answer, thank goodness. But he asked me some questions I could not answer. He was interested in every aspect, economic and everything else. If a person on the train talked to him, he would immediately ask him what he did and how he lived, and where did he live and what did he do, and so on.

When we first came to the Rockies, when the mountains first began to move past us, it was just early evening. We sat out on the back platform quite a while and watched the scenery go by. I got sleepy and finally I said, "I think it is time to go turn in." He said, "Oh, I am going to sit for a while." So I went in. He had the double berth below and I had the little shelf above in

Wessels: the sleeper. I went in and crawled onto my shelf and fell asleep. In the morning, quite early, I woke up and as usual I leaned over and peeked through the curtains to see that everything was all right down below there. And there was no Hofmann there, and it looked as though his bed had not been used. I had the next thing to heart failure.

I got dressed quickly and clambered down and thought, "He must have gotten off at some station and got left behind or something." So I went running down the aisle looking for him everywhere toward the observation car where I had last seen him. And here came Hofmann up the aisle, his face absolutely black with soot and his eyes red-rimmed. "I have not been able to go to bed all night. I have seen the first day of creation!" [Laughter] He was absolutely bowled over by the grandeur of the mountains that the train had rolled through and he sat there in the soot all night. He said, "I am excited," He used his favorite German adjectives like "colossal" and so forth to describe this tremendous experience.

Later, when we were here, my parents and Hofmann and myself, we wanted him to see something of the things that we are proud of in California. He particularly wanted to see the big trees so we took him to the Wawona

Wessels: groves and we took him to Yosemite. He walked around one of the big tree stumps and he got up on one that had fallen down, the "Fallen Giant", I think it was. Then he looked at the postcards that were being sold at a little stand nearby. I said, "Are you going to send one to Frau Hofmann in Munich?" He said, "No, even she wouldn't believe it! I would not dare tell anyone in Munich a word of this because they would tell me that I was a liar."

He responded to the California landscape in a peculiar way. When he first saw the Berkeley hills, for instance, he said, "This is a feminine landscape. In Germany we have masculine hills. These are feminine hills." He said that he had never seen such a gentle land. When he began to draw and paint around here, he said, "You know, I am not used to drawing only a womanly landscape. I am used to angles; I am used to a more masculine type of landscape." This is the way he expressed it. "It is very hard for one to fasten onto a positive thing here. This landscape undulates and flows."

Again we see here a little bit of anthropomorphism. I think this was always characteristic of his thought and teaching that he projected himself and his feelings

Wessels: into inanimate objects that he was working with, and felt them as a human being would feel them, not as something out there, but as something of which you partook, with which you related yourself. This goes back to his statement in St. Tropez when I caught him sketching some of the distant mountains across the bay from St. Tropez. I said, "What is it that you are drawing?"

He said, "My sweetheart mountains."

This is an essential part of his doctrine, this identification with whatever he was painting and working with. And, of course, he had quite a job on his hands identifying with the whole of America in one big trip across the continent. [Laughter] But he was in a constant state of jubilation just to be here.

Riess: Did he sketch when he saw the Rockies?

Wessels: No, and we talked about sketching years later in Provincetown when I came through about seven or eight years ago. He said, "Do you still sketch from nature?"

And I said, "Not as much as I used to. Sometimes."

He said, "I don't very much. I have sketched for 50 years and now my mind is so full and I am able to remember what I need. I believe that when you have trained your memory, your memory learns to accept that

Wessels: which is necessary and discard that which is not necessary automatically. And perhaps it is better to paint from memory after this happens." In other words, this was, of course, Whistler again, selective emphasis. Hofmann believed in letting the personality operate as an arbitrary filter, you might say. What do I retain and what do I reject? This becomes my art. He felt that this happened. He always felt that you must digest the appearance before it became reality for you, and there was a process of selective emphasis. And so the direct sketching thing became less important in his later life, although he still avowedly painted from memories of nature.

Riess: Sounds like something that would just come with maturity though.

Wessels: Yes. He said that you must go through the sketching period. And he said that he "drew, and drew, and drew for 60 years."

Riess: When he thought about having his school, had he thought originally about being on one coast or the other?

Wessels: I think he came with a completely open mind and he took my judgment that California was a more open and less restricted place than the East Coast. I have heard this said from other quarters too. That at that time

Wessels: at least, the atmosphere was freer and less dogmatic here. He felt it was the better place to start, he took my word for that. I may have been wrong, but he later insisted I was very right, and that was the way it went.

Riess: What was the Chouinard School?

Wessels: The Chouinard School was a private school in Los Angeles. It is now called something else, I can't think what it is, ~~the Los Angeles Art Institute or something like that.~~ It has another name. But it was--as I remember it, then there were only three schools in Los Angeles, the Art Center School, which was primarily vocational, the Los Angeles County Art Institute, which used to be the Otis Art Institute, and then the Chouinard School which was run by a Mrs. Chouinard, partly fine arts and partly commercial, but a well-rounded, successful art school in Los Angeles. This is the school which approached Hofmann to teach down there, and after the second time he came out to U. C., he went down to Chouinard and taught. They managed the classes and so on. This is how Hofmann got a large Los Angeles following.

Riess: If Hofmann had been invited to join the staff here, what would you have advised him?

Wessels: I'm not sure that I would have advised him to do so because at that time he had become mature as an individual and he wasn't an organization man, particularly. I think that he would have attempted to convert the University instead of letting the University convert him. There were many aspects of the University life that he admired, but there were others that he didn't even come into contact with or even know about, and Worth and I saw to it that he didn't. I can't see Hofmann sitting through a three hour committee meeting. I can't see him being very patient with administrative red tape, and so on.

I felt, and as I said, I counseled him on the occasion of the New York Art Student's League offer, that he didn't really belong in an organization, he belonged in his own organization. He said, "Yes, this is true, at my time of life, my affairs must center around me." He said this very quietly. For instance, in his later years, he refused to work on juries in which he had to compromise with other people. He said, "At one time maybe I could have compromised with other people, but now it is not important for me to do so." He said, "I think I know." And in the studio also he said, "Alles muss auf mir gerichtet sein--everything

Wessels: must be directed at me--"if I am to do my best work." His idea of the proper environment for the mature artist to work in is one in which the artist dominated the environment. This is what the studio is--where things are where you want them to be, not where the janitor says they must be! [Laughter]

Riess: It is funny that when you quote him talking about himself in 1930, he talks about himself as well past his prime almost.

Wessels: Well, he was.

Riess: And yet he went on for another thirty years.

Wessels: I don't think he expected to. I think that he thought of himself as old enough not to worry any more. He said, when the robbers started to take the $600, all the money he had, off him in a dark alley, he said, either he kept the $600 or he didn't live, and it didn't seem to make much difference which [laughter],, so he decided to keep the $600.

Riess: He had such a different kind of success in the last thirty years.

Wessels: Yes, he himself regarded his last 20 years as kind of an unexpected miracle that things should come out so right.

What a sense of adventure and delight in new things

Wessels: he had! One time when I landed in Provincetown, I was met by a pink Thunderbird, of all things, and Hofmann driving just as crazy as ever! [Laughter]

Riess: Jubilant kinds of things.

Wessels: Jubilant was the word for Hofmann. He was grateful for every bit that life offered him and he did his utmost with it. It was optimism, optimism, optimism, courage, courage, courage all the way through. There was nothing else ever. I never saw him down-hearted. I have seen him sit down with a twinkle in his eye and analyze a difficult situation and say, "This is our best way out," but he would be laughing while he did it.

Riess: Why Greenwich Village and Cape Cod instead of California?

Wessels: He felt, and I think rightly, that at that time the cultural center of the world was moving to the East Coast of the United States. He felt like I did that eventually it would get out here. It hasn't quite gotten out here yet but it is getting here.

Riess: But it sounds like he was able to be above whatever the cultural center was.

Wessels: Yes, but he wanted to be in the area where things happened--it was like being in the middle of the spider web. He felt that what he had to give could best take place there. He liked it out here and in later years when I was acting chairman here, I arranged to bring

Wessels: him out again, asked him if he would like to come, and he said, "No, I haven't built my way of life here, and to me it is very important to be in the middle and this is now the middle. It may not always be the middle but it is now the middle."

Riess: Was he a social kind of person?

Wessels: Oh, very much so and in a very informal way. In Provincetown, for instance: he bought the old Wyeth House in Provincetown, and Wyeth must have turned over in his grave because Hofmann painted the floors cobalt blue and the ceilings cadmium yellow pale, and there would be one vermillion wall and one green wall and so forth. You walked into a kind of spectrum illumination when you walked into the house. Yet, it was one of these old houses with all sorts of seacarpenter do-dads around and so on. He hung his very colorful paintings in appropriate places so they would get the maximum effect against these colored walls. You had the effect almost of walking into a soap bubble when you walked into the place with all the colors all around. It was all light, all dynamic and all--I can only say--iridescent, almost. This is where he lived and loved to live, and he loved to meet people.

His studio was adjacent. There would be company;

Wessels: he'd have six or eight people talking. Hofmann got deaf as the years went on and he often took refuge in his deafness not to hear things that he did not want to hear. But he always heard what he wanted to hear. So when the conversation got dull he would complain about his earpiece and then drift off into the studio and paint a while. He did that on one occasion when I was there, with Mark Rothko and somebody else. (There were always museum people around, usually a lot of people begging him to leave his paintings to them!) While I was there, there were two museum men after him. He was smiling and putting them off. When they left and we were talking afterwards, he looked at me with a twinkle, and I said, "What are you going to do with all these paintings anyway?"

He said, "Perhaps I give them to you."

I said, "Me, I couldn't even pay the taxes on them!"

He said, "Oh, when I say you, I mean California." He was thinking of it even then before any arrangements could be made. But I sort of prodded him into deciding what he should do with the works of his own that he had kept. I said, "You should put them in some place

Glenn Wessels and Hans Hofmann, Provincetown, 1964

Wessels: that would appreciate you; you should not just let them be scattered. They should go to some definite place and they should be a monument to you."

Then it came out that he meant to give them to the University of California, perhaps, if it could be arranged. He thought it all over very carefully. He felt that this was where he had been given his start in America and this is the place he would like the kernel of his work to be.

Now that social life thing. He liked people and people often called on him in his Provincetown house. One characteristic afternoon, around four or five o'clock, he poured drinks very liberally, but he never seemed to show any effects of alcohol himself at all, but people used to leave that place weaving mostly. [Laughter] He was always twinkling and always happy, but I have never seen him drunk. I only saw him once, in Munich on a Fasching evening, late in the evening, when he showed signs of having had a glass or two of champagne, more perhaps than usual. But he could apparently ingest immense amounts of alcohol with no real effect on his mental powers whatsoever.

Riess: You mean he actually celebrated Fasching?

Wessels: Oh yes, he believed in a big toot once a year. He said that the students always worked better when they got this out of their system. He always partook of Fasching once a year. He did not believe in a party every week or every night, but when Fasching came around all Münchners and all good Bavarians believed that this was the time to blow off the accumulated steam and he joined in with it. I don't know if you know how it is in Bavaria. It gets so depressing and so cold and you get to the point where you can't wait for spring to come, and then there is Fasching! Street-car conductors dress up in costumes and people run around all day in crazy clown costumes, in the snow. People just go from one party to another, every evening for six weeks! And by the time you're done all your sins are washed away and you are ready to take up Lent. It ends precisely with Lent. They bury King Fasching the night before Lent, and the next day everybody appears sober and in drab garb and goes to Church. It seems very fitting after all that hoopla. You find Church restful!

Fasching in the southern and central part of Germany is still a big thing. Hofmann believed in this. This was part of his push-pull. He believed

Wessels: in the dichotomy between good and evil--you have to be bad before you can be very good. He did not believe in being a vegetable, anything but that.

Riess: It seems if you get 20 or 30 years lease on life--why, you would feel differently about each day, about worries and about fun in a very different way.

Wessels: Yes, he appreciated every day that he had. And I am absolutely sure that he could not have been... I was delighted when I learned about the way he died, I'm sure that he could not have picked a better way. I have forgotten exactly how old he was, but he was over 80. He was about to go out to dinner with his young wife, and she went in the other room and he was all dressed in his meticulous best. He always dressed something like an orchestra conductor, with a Borsalino felt hat and a figured vest, and he looked very sharp, even during those later years. And he was all dressed up ready to go out to dinner with his wife and she came in from powdering her nose or whatever, and he had slumped down with his head on the table. And I'm sure that is the way he wanted it.

In his late years his first wife Miz died. She had heart trouble and I think it had been aggravated somewhat by the fact that for so many years they lived

Mrs. "Mitz" Hofmann

Provincetown beach. Taken by Glenn Wessels (1963?)

Wessels: in a five story cold water flat in New York, and she had to toil up and down the stairs for anything. Later they moved to Washington Square Village in a really palatial apartment, but she soon had a heart attack and died. This was the only time that I ever saw Hofmann unhappy. He wrote me a heart-rending letter at that time. In fact, he wrote me the letter, I think, within a half hour or so after his wife died, saying he did not know how to express it, but he felt that half of him was gone. He was terribly depressed, but he was a person who also had a quick rebound.

Kootz, his dealer, who was everything that an art dealer is supposed to be--that is to say, he was a sharpie and all that, but he sold Hofmann's paintings and made Hofmann famous in America--Kootz decided that Hofmann needed some kind of relief from his grief, so he introduced him to a very personable young German girl who was a widow, I think, and who spoke German and who was a distant relative of Hofmann in some far-off connection. When I went through New York at that time, Hofmann was recovering from the loss of Miz, but he said that he might meet us in Italy--Kate and I were going on this creative arts grant, and we were settling down on the Italian side of the Alps

Wessels: to work awhile and then we were going to Sicily--and he said, "I might come with you." And he was quite frankly casting around for ways to push his grief aside and reconstitute himself, and we hoped that he would come.

Then we got a letter from him that said,"I have decided to go to Puerto Rico with my cousin instead," and I got another letter from another friend, who took a very dim view of this designing female who was going to get her claws into Hans, saying, "He's vulnerable right now, very vulnerable." I wrote back and said, "He will always take his own way so you can't do anything about it." This is just exactly what happened. (I am not condemning her.) Shortly after that they did get married and he seemed very happy about it all. He had a new lease on life, and I am sure that up to the very last day of his life, he was very happy.

Riess: You mentioned the incident of running into Leo Stein in Paris and getting introduced to that crowd. It must have been something of a temptation for you once you had met those people to sort of linger more in Paris.

Wessels: Yes, but I was--what shall I say--nowadays the kids say involved and committed, but for me the most important job that I could see that I might have would

Wessels: be to get Hofmann safely launched in America. There was not anything that seemed more important than that. I was, I guess, kind of a fanatic. He was the future as far as the immediate development of art was concerned, and if I could deliver him safely to the University of California and if he could plant the seeds here, why, that was the most important thing I could do. Everything went down before that.

Riess: Why did you think that the University of California represented the future?

Wessels: Well, my views on that matter were amplified in other ways. We took Horace Greeley literally; "Westward, the course of empire," we took literally. And we felt that even then New York was showing signs of decay and that the Eastern Seaboard was no longer the center of American civilization. There were signs even then of the shift in population which has occurred. There were signs even then that there would be a cultural explosion on the shores of the Pacific Ocean where there was a new fertilization. Hofmann and I discussed the Pacific Ocean as a new Mediterranean. He quite seriously accepted this idea that the cultures of the Orient and the South Seas would eventually fertilize those of the western United States seaboard; that we

Wessels: would have a new civilization built up around the Pacific Ocean. This idea was latent and expressed in the Treasure Island World's Fair where they had a building which was dedicated to the Pacific Ocean in which the art of all these areas was brought together. This idea was very strong in those of us that liked to look into the future of history as well as the past.

Riess: But as far as whether he came out with a connection to the University of California or to the Art Institute or something like that?

Wessels: Well, one was realistic. Worth Ryder had laid the grounds and this was a very comfortable place for Hofmann to land. Two years before this Vyclav Vytacil had played John the Baptist to Hofmann, had talked Hofmann and taught Hofmann, and had attracted all the ladies, because he was a very handsome guy and he really bowled the local art world over with his almost emotional harangues about modern art values. And so you might say, here was a kind of soft spot ready to land in so we put Hofmann in a nest already feathered and he was able to go on from there.

And it was the best place for him to make a landing in the United States. He would have been among

Wessels: aliens anywhere else. We felt on the one hand that this University was an important place, and it was going to be more important. And we felt that it was the best place, practically speaking, to launch Hofmann because we had control of the launching pad. [Laughter]

Before we leave Hofmann I want to say that there never has been, amongst those of us that worked with Hofmann, there never has been any pulling or hogging at all, any jealousy whatsoever, we have always worked together. But there has been jealousy on the part of others who wanted to horn in, some feeling that we were dogs in the manger and this sort of thing. Actually we have always been just like a little group of acolytes, ~~all~~ each of us treasuring what bit we got from the man.

Riess: It sounds like Hofmann was above that too, any kind of petty...

Wessels: He was always trying to make peace where he sensed dissension. He hated, well, he taught me something that saved my neck in later teaching years. He said, "There is no rivalry between intelligences. You can't have too much or too many kinds of intelligence and there is no rivalry between intelligences." He said,

Wessels: "You are in a vacuum of ignorance, and there is room for all of you. There is plenty of room for anyone with intelligence, so why should you war with each other?" This stood me in good stead. I thought of this many times. In fact, Hofmann, I think, quite unconsciously was given to making apothegms that stuck with you, little pieces of distilled wisdom that did not sound so important when he said them, but then when you found yourself in some situation in which they applied, they seemed very important, indeed.

For instance, when I went back to teaching at Arts and Crafts after the summer session with Hofmann, I went there in this very strained atmosphere. A good many of the people on the staff were my own old teachers, who had a vested interest in some particularly dogmatic approach to art which they had developed, and they did not like to see things changed. As I have said before, very often the radicals of one generation become the conservatives of the next. They not only attacked me, but they actually called names. I would tell students one thing, and they would say that it was wrong and that I was foolish. "He does not know anything. He is just a young man, and you

Wessels: listen to me, and so forth."

I went through five years of that, and the only way that I won out was to decide that "there can be no competition between intelligences." I simply would not engage battle. I talked about principles, and I never mentioned names. I said, "Try it out for yourself. If you are intelligent, you will make a decision, and if you don't want to do it the way I think you should do it, that is up to you, but in my classroom this is the way I think it should be." But I never mentioned anyone's name.

They would come to me with gossip--"Mr. So-and-so says so-and-so about you," and I sould say, "Yes, but what did he teach you?"

"He taught me so-and-so."

"Well, you see, in his classroom that might be so, but in this classroom I don't find that so. Here I believe so-and-so. Now you go home and try these two ways out, and see which one works for you." This was my method, and eventually the tomatoes stopped flying from the other side.

Riess: It really is amazing when you hear about something like that.

Wessels: I'll tell you, Worth Ryder and myself, and then after

Wessels: he came, John Haley, were very much in the minority. We were voices shouting in the wilderness, quite literally. We were so alone and so misunderstood, we only understood each other.

Worth Ryder and I were maybe the only two people around here who knew very much about Picasso, for instance, who knew anything about Cubism. Everything that we did was lampooned in the newspapers and made fun of. When Hofmann was introduced to the San Francisco Art Association at that time, he was a figure of fun. Walters, the sculptor, got up and mimicked him in public.

Riess: Why do people care that much?

Wessels: The vested interests. An artistic style is a kind of an investment, to which you become committed.

Riess: But newspapers and the general public? Well, I guess the general public does invest in a style of art too.

Wessels: Yes, what is accepted is good. There should be no change. So Hofmann's first appearance here affected a select group of people, but on the whole it was overlooked and rejected, particularly since the wave of Mexican Revolutionary art was hitting San Francisco at that time. Ralph Stackpole was the artist who succeeded in attracting most of these people to the

Wessels: Rivera thing. So Hofmann was more or less overlooked in that development. But by hook or crook Worth Ryder and I slowly won. We fought side by side more or less as friends for years--I at Arts and Crafts and he here. I would say that to some degree our efforts have been successful, to the point now where we are considered the rear guard and not the advance guard. And to the point where now we distrust some of the new developments and perhaps are turning into conservatives ourselves! I don't know, but I wonder.

ARTISTS, PATRONS, MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES IN SAN FRANCISCO

Riess: Would you comment on a few patrons of art in San Francisco? Grace Morley said that in 1936 when she was exploring modern art in San Francisco that she was pretty much alone except for people like Sara and Michael Stein.* Did you know them?

Wessels: I didn't know them. In fact, I knew hardly anyone in the art world at that time. I was a very insignificant figure. I was writing this column on the Argonaut and I even went to some pains not to know some of the artists for fear that I might be accused of playing favorites.

Incidentally, I strongly supported all of Dr. Morley's activities. I don't think I ever wrote a bad word about her, and I very much welcomed what she tried to do in the museum and she ended up by being a close friend. In fact, the last evening she spent in America, I think she was in our house, with Herschel Chipp, or one of the last.

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*Grace L. McCann Morley, Art, Artists, Museums, and the San Francisco Museum of Art (Regional Cultural History Project, Berkeley, 1960).

Riess: Mrs. Charlotte Mack and Mrs. Ansley Salz...

Wessels: Mrs. Salz I don't know well at all. I met her one evening at our house when she came with a group. She has been a consistent patron of art and a painter herself, sympathetic to artists and a grand person, from what I understand. Richard O'Hanlan could tell you about her; she has bought his work. In fact, that piece of sculpture over there in Faculty Glade was given by Mrs. Salz to the University.

Riess: And did you know Albert Bender?

Wessels: Albert Bender...everybody knew Albert. My wife was playing for a dance group which was more or less under the aegis of Martha Graham in San Francisco, run by the former wife of Martha Graham's choreographer and accompanist, Lewis Horst. And Lewis Horst and Martha would often come out and use this dance studio as the base of operation in San Francisco. I got to know them fairly well through my wife's playing there and accompanying them there.

Albert Bender had his quarters just upstairs above this studio, and Albert just loved to be among artists of any sort. He had made his money pretty largely because his was one of the few insurance companies in San Francisco that paid off after the

Wessels: earthquake and fire. This brought so much insurance business to Albert that he became rich. He had a cousin whom he loved very much named Anne Bremer and she influenced his taste in art, and he came to associate with artists and to spend his money on them at a time when grants and things of this sort were mighty rare.

It was not very long after I met Albert that I received a $100 check. He said, "Send me anything you like." I sent him a painting, a very bad painting, as I remember now, which he gave to the San Francisco Museum, which now lies in the basement down there some place. But anyway, $100 made quite a bit of difference at that particular time. Now this is the way he was. He was simply generous to people in whom he had faith. It was not so much the art that they were producing then, but what he thought they would do. Richard O'Hanlan could tell you all about that too. Albert financed his Sausalito studio. Albert was always finding artists that he thought had promise, and then giving them various sums of money in return for works and then giving these works to the museums. He was the kind of art patron that the artists loved.

Albert would very often come downstairs to Betty's

Wessels: dance studio when they would have a party and to various goings on. And I got to know a lot of interesting people there. One of them was Ansel Adams, who has been a friend ever since. The first time I ever saw Ansel he was sitting at a piano demonstrating his ability by improvising to the rolling of an orange on the bass. He rolled the orange up and down the keys on the bass side and did the melody with his right hand. But Ansel was a very good friend, and I see him quite often. He is now, by the way, doing a centennial thing; he has been working two years on a photographic project on the whole University. Ansel started out as a concert pianist and became fascinated by the possibilities of photography through his observations of Edward Weston, he knew Edward Weston very well and so forth, and I guess sort of carried on in the Weston tradition in his own work.

Other big names around San Francisco at that time were Gottardo Piazzoni whom I think also taught at the Art Institute at least part of the time. And Gertrude Partington Albright was a leading figure in San Francisco art. Of course, Maynard Dixon was the big illustrator.

Wessels: Stackpole was in Paris then. I did not know much about him until he came back from Paris and brought a degree of Fauvism in painting with him, and then he went over to a sort of modified French classic sculpture which you see on the San Francisco Stock Exchange. He also sponsored Diego Rivera's coming to paint murals, and did everything possible to direct San Francisco artists to what the Mexicans were doing.

Richard O'Hanlon was an assistant of his on those things and could undoubtedly tell you more about Stackpole than most anyone else could here. I knew Stackpole only slightly; he is at present retired to a little town not far from the Perigord region in France, and he exhibits occasionally in Paris. He married a French wife.

Riess: Keith...

Wessels: William Keith had died before I came along, but his canvases were all over the place, and you have heard a lot about him. He was a phenomenally successful painter for his day. It was the day when painters were not usually successful. Keith really in his later days ran kind of a factory. In fact Frederick Meyer told me that he saw Keith do an early form of

Wessels: accidental painting. He painted a canvas very heavily with impasto and then pressed it against another canvas the same size and then did two pictures, one the reverse of the other with minor changes on the same basis. Which to Meyer seemed something a little less than honest perhaps, but anyway since Keith was a good artist and created the canvas out of whole cloth,as it were, why it was all right.

There is still a Keith Society in Oakland which was headed by the former Knowland of the Tribune and they hold meetings and hold celebrations about Keith still. You could probably get any data you wanted about Keith from them. There is a book on Keith written by Father Cornelius of St. Mary's. I have a copy, and you can have it, which in complete adoration details everything possible that you could gather about Keith. I believe there is a collection of Keith's pictures in the Oakland Museum.

Riess: Would you comment on what generated the style of Grant Wood and Curry and Benton, in contrast to what was developing on this coast?

Wessels: That particular school was very much backed up by the chauvinistic bent of Thomas Benton. The coasts of America were open to the world but in the so-called

Wessels: heartlands, those people were all isolationists. They felt that anything that happened outside of the borders of America was not to be trusted, probably immoral if it came from France! This was really curious--and my wife comes from the Middle West, so I can't say anything very violent--but there was sort of a Middle West American self-consciousness. This found expression in the work of John Steuart Curry, Thomas Benton and Grant Wood. They tried to make a virtue out of this attitude toward art, and I think some of the things that they did were valid. However, they tried to theorize that this was the only art in America, but it was not.

Art has always been international; art has always moved along the trade routes. The Gothic architecture itself includes influences from the Far East, that came along the trade routes across the Mediterranean. All art has grown through interchange and cross-fertilization. These men isolated themselves.

Actually we find that the art develops faster the more cross-fertilization and the more international it is. I would say that there is no such thing as regional art today except to a minor degree. It is rather too bad that artists think that they have to conform to the

Wessels: international standards as much as they do. I, for instance, feel that the West Coast contributed to the art stream a rather unique use of space. This is perhaps due to the fact that we live in a bigger outdoors here than they do in the crowded city.

Riess: You don't think that this can be seen in the work?

Wessels: Yes, I think it can in the work of men like Diebenkorn and others. The influence of our more outdoor type of life and our more wide open spaces here has influenced American painting. Actually you find men who come here from New York really have painted only in an interior and still life way. Landscape is quite foreign to them. This is not true of Western painters.

Now this is an illustration of what a regional art might be. The conditions of life affect the way of seeing, and so forth. But there is quick interchange. As soon as a man gets to be very well known as a painter here, he goes to New York and gets a New York dealer and so he becomes a New York artist. He may be called a Californian but he may not have been home for 20 years.

Riess: San Francisco is not really one of the capitols yet?

Wessels: Of art? I would say in America you have New York and you have San Francisco, with Chicago fluctuating, some-

Wessels: times it is up and sometimes it is down. There are small art activities, there was one in the Northwest that produced only two men--Morris Graves and Mark Tobey and Mark Tobey was not really indigenous to the Northwest. He had come from England so that is international. So you have only Morris Graves who started painting sick sea gulls and so forth, and initiated a kind of a style there. But the San Francisco area has consistently been a creative area. It has been consistently an area where young artists started and experimented, did not receive very much financial support and then went to other places.

Riess: Let's talk about museums in the area. The DeYoung, what did it represent in the way of new things to see?

Wessels: The museums in the area were a bit on the stodgy side in 1930. There was a Lloyd Rollins who was the director of the Palace of the Legion of Honor. One of those kind of silly things happened. Myself and three others organized a magazine called the Fortnightly in San Francisco. In it I ran one of San Francisco's first art columns. In it I heard about the San Francisco Annual. I looked over the names

Wessels: on the jury and they were the same jury that functioned in different guises through the years. So I was able to predict who would get the prizes and I did and I hit them all on the nose. Immediately the newspapers got onto it and came around to find out how I knew? who had leaked on the jury? why they had not gotten the story first? and so forth. I said, "There was no leak; I just predicted." [Laughter] "And I could do it again, if I knew the members of the jury." I could tell you who would get the prizes because I knew what was getting prizes that year. And this led to a minor upheaval. A lot of painters had submitted to this San Francisco Art Institute Annual and had been thrown out by the jury, enough painters of talent and ability that they made quite a gang. They banded together, and partly because I had called shots on the jury, they felt they had a cause to fight. So they were highly indignant and gave interviews to the papers and so on--favoritism and this and that and the other thing.

Then Joe Danysh, who was just looking for a cause to jump on, came into the picture. He was just arrived from New York and he persuaded the City of Paris to have a Salon des Refusés. He went around

Wessels: and gathered the work of all these somewhat indignant painters and got them together. Of course, Benny Bufano was always ready to leap on any bandwagon so he leaped in too and contributed a huge figure of St. Francis menacing San Francisco. There were all sorts of things, a kind of rabble-scrabble of art, a good many things. I remember I had a portrait of Carolyn Anspacher which was considered a little wild in that day. There was also a painting of the bread lines down on the wharf. Anyway, this was such a success at the City of Paris that it was offered to Lloyd Rollins at the Legion of Honor. He attempted to turn it down, but the public pressure was such that he couldn't. This finally led to his resignation and replacement.

This, as I see it now, is one of these almost senseless waves which nevertheless did show the tenor of the times; the establishment had to change, that was all there was to it. [Laughter] The establishment did change, and shortly after that we find Worth Ryder becoming the dominant figure in San Francisco Art Association politics, and the nature of the art school and the Art Association itself changing, with many more modern-minded people teaching. This was one of

Wessels: these transition periods.

Riess: I thought of the Art Association being tied in closely with the San Francisco Museum rather than the...

Wessels: Oh no. The Art Association started the San Francisco Museum. The old San Francisco Art Association is, or was--it no longer exists in the same form--was the oldest association of its kind, absolutely unique in America. It was not a school, it generated the school.

Riess: It generated the California School of Fine Arts?

Wessels: Yes, it set up the school in the basement of the old Mark Hopkins mansion, and ran a school of fine arts there. But the big thing was the association of artists who ran the San Francisco Art Institute Annual once a year, which was the big show around here.

Then Mortimer Fleishhacker and others helped pull the museum away from the Art Association. But it began as a project of the Art Association. Mortimer Fleishhacker felt it would do better if it was independent; I don't know just why, but at any rate, he did. It was pulled out of the purview of the Art Association and became an independent entity, but

Wessels: there was supposedly an agreement that the San Francisco Art Institute Annual would always be held there. There was a relationship between them.

Riess: And their boards overlapped.

Wessels: Yes, their boards frequently overlapped. It was a political thing that went on there, I think, maybe a slight power grab on the part of Fleishhacker, I am not just sure. He wanted the museum for his own purposes and he did not quite trust the artists. Very often, I think, collectors--I say this advisedly--try to dominate the art and try to impose their choices on the art world and they do this very often by setting up museums which expose the works they approve of. It was a little of this, I think, that was going on there.

As it happened, however, Grace Morley did a magnificent job. It was the most lively museum in San Francisco. It set the pace for the others which were able to follow only haltingly because of the prejudices of their patrons and their boards. We find Mrs. "Sugar" (Spreckels) at the Legion of Honor successfully kept that museum back until she was too far along to bother. Walter Heil had untold trouble at the DeYoung Museum, and Mrs. Spreckels tried to get

Wessels: him thrown out.

One of the reasons that I resigned from the Argonaut was that I refused to write editorials against him, and this brought about a strange friendship. Heil and I have always been fast friends ever since then, though we have very little in common. In fact I always thought this was grand of Dr. Heil, he was a very big personage and I was a very small one. But when he found out that I had resigned a job that I very much needed rather than write an editorial against him, he came around to see me and in a romantic German manner declared a life-long friendship. And he and Ninfa Valvo gave me my first show in San Francisco which was a tremendous success.

I think probably the fact that I did this had some positive effect in making Worth Ryder interested in me as possibly a person to come here. I don't know that it began then, but I think my friendship with Worth Ryder at that time began to get closer. Everyone here including Dr. Horn, who had just come here then, thought this was just an unexpectedly--shall we say--a noble thing to do. It did not seem to me to be particularly noble. I just could not support something I thought was so sticky as what was going on. Even

Wessels: though I needed the $40 a month, I figured that I could get it easier somewhere else.

But at any rate, the museums were hampered by their sponsors and they are still. San Francisco art sponsors are notably conservative, they are addicted to admiring their own collections which come mostly from the past. They patronize the current artist very little. I don't know why there is so much creative ability around San Francisco, why so many artists come here to work and live, because they don't certainly get much support from museums and patrons here.

One woman, Ninfa Valvo, who was one of the curators at the DeYoung Museum, succeeded in going against the wishes of her sponsors as often as not and putting on a series of shows of contemporary San Francisco artists at the museum, all of which were great successes. But she suffered for it. My first show of any size was the one that she put on for me there, and it was very successful. It was my first real, you might say, debut as a painter. I was known as a person who talked a lot. Al Frankenstein wrote in the Chronicle, "For once Wessels does not have to talk!" I had become known mostly as a lecturer and

Wessels: a talker. I had been delivering all kinds of orations and lectures, and I was hoarse from talking about modern art values and contemporary art, trying to bring people to understand what it was all about, so much so that I had done very little painting after coming back from Europe. This was the first time I had a chance to do a whole show. Yet, the enthusiastic critic in the Chronicle said, "For once Wessels does not have to explain."

Riess: But don't you think that the San Francisco Museum of Art keeps up with things?

Wessels: Well, the San Francisco Museum of Art has been more or less in the doldrums. George D. Culler left there because he was only getting a half-time salary for a full-time job. Grace Morley never got a full-time salary, and when she took a part-time job as a UNESCO advisor, they finally got her for it because she was said to be neglecting the San Francisco Museum.

Riess: That is really amazing to me. They have an enormous membership and all kinds of backing...

Wessels: They would rather spend their money on something else. I know some of them; they are just people who are very self-satisfied and sure they are right. Now they have

Wessels: a new director, and we hope that things are going to move better.

Riess: How about commenting on the present San Francisco Art Association situation?

Wessels: Well, that has changed form several times. Now it is the San Francisco Art Institute. I haven't followed the latest developments. I was on the artist's council for two or three different periods. I think that I was on during David Parks' chairmanship, and then again I was reelected. Then there was a hiatus, and then I was on again when Fred Martin was there, and so through the years I had quite a lot to do with it. I was also on the board of directors by virtue of being sent there as a representative of the artist's council. And I have also been on the various advisory committees and so forth for art affairs in San Francisco. The Society for the Contemporary Arts,which is a collectors society, I was on their advisory board for awhile, and I conducted a tour to New York explaining contemporary painting to them and a lot of stuff like that.

But the Art Association has changed its role in the community. At one time it was the oldest and is still, I think, a unique art organization. There is

Wessels: nothing like it in the United States. I think that the reason that it has changed form and lost its function largely is that the newer artists who came in from the East just did not know what to do with a thing like that. The older artists did and used it. And the San Francisco Art Association Annual was the definitive show of the year in the earlier days. Later artists came to town with reputations and felt that they did not want to affiliate themselves with any organization at all. Artists became increasingly anti-organization and so slowly weaker artists dominated this organization and used it and made demands on it pretty largely that it exhibit their work. It was purely a egoistic thing; they were not thinking of the community effort at all. They were thinking of the chance to get their work in a show. And as this attitude increased, the Art Association became less attractive to worthwhile artists until it recently had to undergo an overhauling. I don't know if it was for the good or not, but at least I know that is what happened.

Riess: How about galleries in the area? Were there any that were particularly adventurous?

Wessels: There were a few. Vickery, Torrey, and Atkins dealt

Wessels: in etching pretty largely. Galleries in San Francisco were few and far between and short-lived and had a rather bad time of it.

Riess: They weren't pioneering?

Wessels: Oh, they were, they tried to be, but nobody would go--I mean no one that had any money.

Riess: One that I heard of was the Gallery de Beaux Arts...

Wessels: Well, that was one that was comparatively more successful than any others. That was run by Beatrice Judd Ryan who later moved to the Rotunda in the City of Paris under the auspices of Verdier. Beatrice Judd Ryan, I think, was a cousin of Lee Randolph and so she had rather an "in" with the establishment, and she was very friendly with such painters as Rinaldo Cuneo, a good landscape painter. He often exhibited there. She showed perhaps more modern,or things that tended to the modern,than anyone else. Let's see, it was called the Golden something or other, gallery. It was on Maiden Lane and this became sort of a center for the avant garde people to go and look at things by such painters as Otis Oldfield who had recently been in Paris. I would say that the general style of the things that were seen there was between Impressionism and Fauvism.

Wessels: Stafford Duncan was a commercial artist of considerable note who also did some pretty good painting. I saw a show of his there. Everything that was avant garde in San Francisco painting seemed to show up there occasionally.

Beatrice Judd Ryan is still alive and still very active, although quite old, and is sort of a fantastic person because she still has delightfully brilliant red hair and wears the most joyously gaudy costumes you ever saw. You could interview her with profit too. She is writing a book--or is said to be--on San Francisco art. We are very good friends.

French Modernism, as I say, didn't really catch on excepting with a few people in San Francisco. One of the chief exponents was Lucien Labaudt who was a dress designer who came from Paris and set up in San Francisco. And his lady still runs the Labaudt Gallery, Marcelle Pigue, she could tell you an awful lot about these things, by the way. She is a large, genial lady who has been secretary of San Francisco Women Artists for donkey's years and runs the Lucien Labaudt Gallery in the memory of Lucien (who died as a war correspondent artist, by the way). She might be a source of some valuable material. She is an

Wessels: awfully nice person.

Riess: Well, in summing things up then in San Francisco, it sounds like there were not too many reasons to come here if you were an artist, would you say?

Wessels: Excepting that it is a good place to live.

Riess: Yes, is it just the physical qualities?

Wessels: I wonder, I don't really know why. Old Telegraph Hill where we all lived, myself amongst others, in the later days has become a very expensive apartment house district, and the artists have now found cheap quarters elsewhere. Wherever you find gracious living, not too expensive, you will find that artists very often move in. Then when the artist discovers it, the real estate people discover it shortly afterwards, and you have what happened with Carmel. It becomes a fashionable place to live, and then the artist moves somewhere else where it is gracious and cheap. Right now that is Potrero Hill. And right now it is Mendocino City and Mendocino City outranks even Carmel.

Riess: And have you seen Port Costa?

Wessels: Certainly, I know the people who developed it. Port Costa is, I don't know what its future may be, but it could very well become another art colony. Mendocino has started becoming one already. Even Florence Allen

Wessels: is going up there to pose this summer, and where she goes you can just tell that is where the artists are going to be! [Laughter]

Riess: How about the Oriental influence in the San Francisco area? Do you think that has interested people?

Wessels: I think that the Oriental influence is overplayed a little bit because such collectors as Albert Bender have always been interested in Oriental sources of art influence. But you must remember that this is an exotic culture. Now I am an internationalist in art and I believe that we can understand and get from art in a sort of a way the emotional attitudes of different cultures, but I think that what we respond to is chiefly the harmonic and structural elements rather than the emotionally expressive ones. We don't understand their symbolism; we don't read their language unless we are scholars.

I think that Western art has its roots in Greek philosophy and not in Oriental philosophy and although there are influences, and certainly there have been influences on the West Coast, as long as Western European culture dominates, I don't think that we are

Wessels: going to be very easily dominated by Oriental art, no matter how good. We will admire it, but there will always be a little bit of a screen between us. I make a difference between emotional understanding and intellectual understanding. I think that we intellectually accept Oriental art; we find it beautifully structured and harmonic, good for the eye, decorative in the good sense, but we don't immediately respond to it, like we do to--what shall I say--the Charioteer at Delphi?

I can add to that. I went to Greece for the first time two years ago, and I really did not want to go because I thought I knew all about it from the books, and what I knew was dusty and dry and not alive and had nothing to do with me. I had been trained in Gayley's Classic Myths and all this sort of thing, and I went to Greece more or less under protest. Some friends were there. I can only say that I was amazed to feel like I'd come home! It was as if every stone was alive. It was a complete emotional union as far as I am concerned, and I am not Greek. This is true; Greece is the most moving country that I have gone to. And I feel that there is something that I cannot put my finger on, some

Wessels: way of seeing and dealing with forms that is symbolic of the intellectual roots of the people, and you respond to the meanings of these, it is not a foreign language to you. I admire Indian art. Yet Anglo-Saxons could no more base our art on Indian art and Indian blankets than we could fly to the moon on wings.

It is an emotional thing. You have to understand what their psychological motivations are. They have a millennium of life behind them that we do not share, whereas we have our own roots and our own roots are in Western Europe.

Riess: And 2000 years of our own symbolism.

Wessels: Exactly, we understand it immediately, we do not have to go to the books first to see what it is. This may seem to be anti-international art. The day may come when we all understand each other, but we speak different emotional languages still.

Riess: Some artists have adopted so much of the Japanese style at times.

Wessels: The Japanese have undoubtedly influenced modern art in Paris; Van Gogh was influenced by a Japanese print show, so was Whistler, a print show that was for the first time shown in Paris. The bold pattern, strong,

Wessels: definite structure, and so forth that was characteristic of the Japanese work, influenced the painters of that time. But when you look at Van Gogh, you don't think of Japan.

Riess: How about the African influence, do you think that was a different kind of influence?

Wessels: The African influence was similarly absorbed and only, as it were, pointed the way for a structural revolution that Picasso evolved for himself. He went to the old Trocadero Museum in Paris (which is now destroyed) and saw these moldering old collections of African objects there. It was a very unfashionable place at that time. Picasso used to meander around this museum and look at these strange objects, and they had their effect on him, and on his way of seeing, which was at that time searching for a kind of logical geometry; and he saw it there undoubtedly. Years later I was brought to Picasso's studio by Hans Hofmann, and a lady journalist from the Washington Star crashed the gate with us. When we walked in, she sneaked in too. We were invited to come, and Picasso was very gracious, in fact, obviously a patsy for people who wanted to bother him, and so he could not entirely leave her out of the conversation even

Wessels: though she had not been invited, and so she horned in at one time and quite inopportunely said, "Mr. Picasso, you were strongly influenced by African art, weren't you?" Picasso was a great practical joker; he looked at her with an expression of perfect amazement and blankness on his face and said, "What is African art?"

This so dumbfounded her that she subsided into a corner.

But surely the artist who is looking for something and looks at the art of an exotic civilization and sees what it exemplifies... What he is looking for is inside of him, and he develops it in his own way. He does not go trailing off after the African natives or something or other. He does not do it by copying. This was one of the silly things about the temporary Mexican influence on San Francisco. You'd have thought that overnight all the San Francisco artists' models had all developed big feet, and that the San Francisco artists all had overnight become Mexican peasants. It was just as phony as a costume party!

Riess: What do you think about art conferences in general? There was the recent one, "The Current Moment in Art,"

Riess: that you went to.

Wessels: Well, I paid my $50, but I did it mainly because I was a good citizen. I did not expect much, and I was not disappointed. [Laughter]

Riess: I wondered in general, does talking about a movement help?

Wessels: It is one of the inevitable consequences of the ferment, that people want to get together in some official way and expound about it. Personally, I think that these "bull sessions" are good if they are held under that unassuming name, but when they are called a symposium or a panel it becomes something else again. You usually get people who are poseurs to do it. Secondly, you usually confuse them by giving them a moderator who does not know what they are thinking about; and thirdly, you usually get an audience who comes because it is the thing to do and they don't really know much about what is going on. Fourthly, the people who are talking about art are usually not the ones who do it. The result is that a panel maybe one in ten times strikes fire and does somebody some good, but I have been on any number of them and I have sworn off them entirely. I will only go to them if it seems to be the thing to

Wessels: do and being part of the art community I have to support them.

Riess: Yes, it seems so anti-everything that...

Wessels: Nothing very important was said over there. There was what they called a "confrontation," which is nothing more than two people standing up and looking at each other. [Laughter] Mrs. Haas anxiously sat down next to me in a restaurant shortly after we had come out of that conference and said, "Mr. Wessels, do you think that it did any good?" I said, "Mrs. Haas, it seems to me that it depends on what you think you are doing good to."

She said, "Well, do you think it is good for San Francisco?"

I said, "For the image of San Francisco I think so, yes. As far as San Francisco art is concerned I don't think it affected it a bit."

Now look, those guys got on a plane; they came out here with that "shot out of the gun feeling"; the first panel they had been off the plane for about two hours; they had martinis poured in them; they sat in front of television cameras with a lot of bright lights on them, and they were expected to exude the wisdom of the ages. And they couldn't, and who could under those

Wessels: circumstances? There was a frightening audience in front of them, and most of those people were so scared of the audience that they were looking at their thumbs most of the time. A few of them took refuge in clowning. These guys are garret dwellers and alley livers in New York who occasionally produce a great painting, and they are not used to this kind of stuff. They can't speak anyway, most of them. One fellow, I was particularly sympathetic with and I liked, Larry Poons. I think he is a very honest man and trying like anything to be sincere and all he succeeded in being was vague and mystical. "You just can't explain this," was about all he had to say.

Another way of viewing art in the San Francisco area might be through my model, Florence Allen. Flo has been around--I'm being discreet now, I won't tell you how old she is because I know she does not like to tell people, but she did tell me. I think that I have known her for 30 years or thereabouts as an active member of the art community. She has posed for, and worked with, and I may say very intelligently too, two generations of painters around here, and she is still the best model I know.

More often than not, it has been my custom to let

"The Legendary Flo Allen", S.F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle 3/19/67

By CAROLINE DREWES
Examiner Staff Writer

Florence Wysinger Allen, who has been described as "not only a woman, but a force of nature," threw back her head and laughed . . . A laugh rich with the joy of living, unmistakably Florence. Big and beautiful and hearty, like Flo herself.

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San Francisco's most famous artists' model relaxed this week in the living room of her Victorian flat above an art gallery on Union Street, and laughed again . . . "Retire? How the heck can I retire?," she asked in her throaty, vibrant voice.

It was her birthday. She doesn't divulge her age, but her warm, cafe au lait skin is smooth as satin and her carriage splendid as a queen's.

Florence has been painted and sketched and sculpted by every well known artist in the area, by artists from the east and from Europe. She has modeled at the S.F. Art Institute, at Mills College, at UC, at Stanford, at Holy Names, at the California College of Arts and Crafts . . . Two years ago, the Florence Allen show at UC Medical Center Millberry Union in essence was a history of local art in her time.

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That was the year Florence observed her 30th year as a model. An ad hoc committee of "Friends for Flo" was formed, and they gave her a surprise party. Only artists were invited . . . more than a hundred came. That was the year it was rumored Flo might retire.

She hasn't been allowed to do so. If indeed she ever intended to. Today she only works requests, but she's booked solidly through next month. The day before her birthday, she posed from 8 a.m. to 4:45 at Mills College, then reported for work at the Old Spaghetti Factory, where she is hostess. Next week she starts on her off evenings as part-time manager of the House of Nile Dress Shop on Grant Avenue.

—Examiner photo by Matt Southard

YOU'VE SEEN HER IN A HUNDRED WAYS
S.F.'s noted model . . . Florence Wysinger Allen

Flo loves clothes. John Silva, one time art student, now a designer, not only designs her dresses, but makes them as well. . . . The eternal female, she has always worn the same scent —Weil's "Secret of Venus."

So, on her birthday . . . surrounded by flowers and candy and gifts from a multitude of friends, Florence talked of many things.

There's a small sign at the head of the long stairs in the flat she shares with three amiable cats. "Florence Allen lives here. Genuflect when entering." It was tacked there by an artist friend. The walls are hung with the work of well known painters, gifts to Flo, many nude studies of Flo herself. "Everything in this place means so much to me," she said. People are forever giving her things.

Divorced twice, she still feels marriage is "a good institution." Childless, she has mothered all sorts of people. She is enormously proud of her family. Four nephews have served with the Air Force. There are three now, one on his second tour of duty in Vietnam. One died while in the service.

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"My grandfather, Edmond Wyssinger, brought his wife from South Carolina in 1840 on the Overland trail in a covered wagon. Grandmother, who had a brood of seven, was not averse to smoking a corncob pipe nor imbibing a nip of corn liquor now and then. She lived to be 110."

Her father and his brothers were "guinea pigs" in an 1892 State Supreme Court test case — Wysinger vs. Crookshank — establishing the Negro boys' right to attend school in California.

Bright and brainy, she wrote for a local Negro paper for 19 years. She's already completed a number of chapters for her autobiography, originally to be titled, "Who's Nude."

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"This race business," she pondered, "What a drag. When it really comes down to it, who belongs to what and to whom? Personally, though I may be mixed in my mathematics, I'll wager I'm at least one-eighth Portuguese and one-sixteenth American Indian. Let's face it, there are few pure Africans in America. This Duke's Mixture or mulligan has made no difference to me or to my real friends."

Born in Oakland, Florence has worked with the Council for Civic Unity, the Urban League, the NAACP, and with numbers of other civic organizations. In 1945 she founded the Models Guild.

Anent her profession . . . She waved a strong, well-manicured hand. "Many models are natural exhibitionists with highly developed egos plus frustrations. My own reason was mainly economic. Eating, that is.

Wessels: the model stand and rest while I talk to the class about the problem that I am about to give them. Often as I have been describing the problem, I have found that Flo had already taken the pose that perfectly exemplified what I was talking about. It is almost a by-word amongst hard working teachers that if you have Flo, you don't have to teach the class, she does it. She is really very intelligent about the values of painting, particularly as they pertain to life class.

She also has a kind of dramatic flaire about her that simply fascinates the students and they work in spite of themselves. I think you should interview her. It would be a curious mixture of hip gobble-dy-gook and wisdom. She is not a very coherent person in speech; she speaks in terms of idioms and slang, and you have to know her language to get it. She has, by the way, been threatening to write a book for donkey's years. I've suggested the title, "The Model Stares Back." She has never written the book, but many people have undertaken to gather her notes together, and she has kept notes on all these years. Some day it might come out, you never know. Yes, she is definitely somebody who would have a lot to tell.

FEDERAL ARTS PROJECT

Hard and Busy Times

Wessels: My teaching was increasingly successful. I had huge classes, much too big. I influenced many people in all sorts of curious ways. I forgot to paint for myself because I was so busy teaching. This had a very bad effect on me.

Then the Depression hit; banks closed, and the students began staying home in droves and not coming to the art schools. Most of the private institutions were faced with an immediate reduction in the number of student fees. Very often they had to cut down the numbers of classes which they taught. This immediately cut teachers' salaries and so on. So I found my stipend retreating rapidly from something in the neighborhood of $400 a month, which was pretty good in those days. In three months it went down to less than $100. At that time I had to do some quick adapting.

I opened my own studio on Telegraph Hill and immediately attracted some thirty-odd students there because they were curious and interested in what I

Wessels: had to say about modern developments in painting; and the art situation at that time here had been more or less dominated by the older men who had come from Romantic and Impressionist periods in Paris, and only Worth Ryder in this institution and I were speaking out for the new values.

But I have omitted any mention heretofore of getting married, which was pretty important too. In 1932 when I was back from Europe and teaching very actively at Arts and Crafts my old friends of two or three years back had all drifted off in different directions. I had only one real contact here in Berkeley who could be said to be friend or playmate, and that was Warren Cheney, who was the nephew of Sheldon Cheney, who has written a good many books on art. Warren and I had met in Europe when he had come and joined the Hofmann school in St. Tropez. He was married and had a very comfortable home, and I was often a guest at their house.

One evening when I came in Warren said, "We are going dancing at the Hotel Claremont. Why don't you get a girl and come along?"

I said, "I don't know any girls any more."

He said, "Well, how about that Foster girl that

Wessels: I saw you talking to the other night?"

"Oh, good heavens, we don't get along at all! All she does is bug me with important questions when I want to sit quietly in a corner and rest from a hard day of teaching."

"Well, I bet she would go if you ask her."

I said, "Okay, I'll call her." So I called up and said, "Is Kathryn Foster there?" When I asked her to go out she hesitated and said, "Well, you know it is my brother's birthday party, and I hate to leave, but I think I will."

So to make a long story short, we had a pleasant evening dancing together at the Claremont, and six weeks later we were married. The dialogue has gone on very happily ever since.

Riess: She has been asking you important questions...

Wessels: Yes, she was a musician and was at that time playing for a modern dance group in San Francisco and also demonstrating for Henry Cowell who was, what shall I say, in a certain sense pioneering modern music hereabouts through the New Music Society and so forth. So I was immediately dragged into a circle that I had not known before, and found myself designing dance settings and costumes, and sitting in on these very strange

Hans Hofmann and Kathryn Wessels at San Francisco Airport
Before Hofmann's departure
After receiving an honorary degree at U.C. Charter Day

Hans Hofmann and Glenn Wessels at San Francisco Airport
Before Hofmann's departure
After receiving an honorary degree at U.C. Charter Day

Wessels: affairs where broken milk bottles and wash-boards and everything else were dragged in for musical instruments. I became an expert on milk bottles and wash-boards so I began to get the idea of a new dimension that was abroad in music as well as painting.

When my wife and I set up our studio on Telegraph Hill, I fixed the basement up as a painting studio and she had her piano upstairs and was practicing crash chords and all this sort of thing, I used to sit there in the studio downstairs and wonder what in the world she was doing with that piano. I discovered a couple of months later that she was equally puzzled about what I was doing with that canvas. [Laughter] So it took us not months but years really to get together. I think she probably now understands and knows as much about painting as I do, although I am not sure that I know as much about music as she does. On both sides it was an enriching experience.

Things went from bad to worse during the Depression as far as the Arts and Crafts School is concerned. Frederick Meyer, whom I honor very much and owe a great deal--all I can say is that in these days the burden of

Wessels: running the school became so much, so heavy, that his health broke. Sooner or later the management of the school slipped out of his hands and into the hands of a board of trustees, of which I am now a member. But this school was really suffering from the Depression, and a great deal of what Mr. Meyer planned and had hoped to do became impossible to do.

More and more I led an independent life as a free lance teacher and only occasionally taught at the school when my services were required. I had little private classes all the way from Inverness to San Mateo. I was on the road most of the time running from one place to another, lecturing in the evenings and so on. It was very exhausting. Nevertheless, it was a living.

And classes were going well enough on Telegraph Hill that finally the Academy of Advertising Art, which wanted some of their students to get in on what I was teaching, asked me if I would not transfer some of my classes down there and let the day classes be amplified by their students and this would amount to a broader basis of work. So we did that.

Just about this time a friend of mine named Joseph

Wessels: Danysh showed up very broke from New York and married to an old friend of mine, a very close friend too, Eleanor Kunitz now. (She later married a Guggenheim poet, Stanley Kunitz.) So nothing would be more suitable than that they would move in next door and we would share the rigors of the Depression together. Joe was a wonderful cook and a very ingenious fellow and very jolly company. I think I was the main bread winner at that particular time, although my wife brought in money from accompanying. Pretty soon my bread winning started to go down and continued to fall off from the School of Arts and Crafts until she was earning more than I was, but together we made it. Then I began increasing my private teaching activities and what with the Academy of Advertising Art my stipend went up again. But these were very chancey times; you never really knew where the next month's expenses were coming from.

The difficulty with free lance teaching is that you never know what students you are going to have from one time to another. You have no hold over the students. It is not the same thing as teaching in an institution where they have to listen to you whether they want to or not. You have to teach as it were with a hook in it

Wessels: to assure that they will come back the next time. Unethical as it may seem, you have to do a series of cliff-hangers to keep the suspense going--otherwise you lose students. They are always apt to get the ultimate secret the next time they come, not this time! I sometimes wish university professors had the same art that I had to learn the hard way. You build up to something that sounds very important to talk about, but you put it off until the next time. We have done that here. [Laughter]

Riess: What was the Academy of Advertising Art?

Wessels: It was a vocational institution in San Francisco where students learned the trade of commercial art. They actually place their students while they are still students, in paying jobs and so on. It is an intentionally practical vocational institution.

Riess: Did interesting people come out of that?

Wessels: Oh, they were people who did fashion designs, people who could draw shoes for a department store.

Riess: When they came to you, did they discover something that opened them up?

Wessels: Not so much job wise, but commercial art or illustration has a kind of bread and butter dependence on what you might call the garret artist. All the new ideas of art,

Wessels: the research ideas, the ideas that people dig out about new ways of seeing things, fresh ways of seeing things, all come from a man who is painting in an attic someplace. The commercial men do not have time to dig those up. So the commercial men really feed on and adapt what they find usable from material that the fine artists are showing. They are very clever technicians, and they are borrowers of ideas. They don't often have time to originate them. Actually you will find that the Cubism that was being taught in the art schools--shall we say in the thirties--became the commercial art of the forties. There is usually a 15 or 20 year lag.

This way of seeing...well, take Spearmint Gum, for instance, one of my students was a boy named Hubert Nelson, who recently died. He went to work for Otis Shepherd on the Wrigley account, and all those cute little arrows with little block men figures riding on them are Cubist in style although they are very diluted, of course, and they are not to be thought of in the same area as Picasso, but the style is nevertheless a Cubist style, in other words the surface appearance of things is seen in a fresh way. Now

Wessels: chewing gum is nasty stuff that oozes out of trees, and it is up to the commercial designer to give it appetite appeal in one way or another. One of the ways to do this is to present it under the guise of modern art, or modern art but not too modern to be acceptable to the average person. It has a flair of newness about it but yet is not too strange; this is what the commercial artist has to do. What he has to do is get the message, understand it himself, and then vulgarize it to the point that almost anyone can understand it. It now has a little flavor of newness about it and this is what commercial art is. It is usually anywhere from 20 to 30 years behind some important art movement, and it borrows the superficial aspects of that movement.

Riess: Except it is running parallel with "pop" art.

Wessels: Yes, now there is a feed-back here that is rather interesting; this is the first time it has ever happened. Pop art has moved the other way. But this is the first time that I have seen it happen.

To get back to our story, suffice it to say that this gave what I had to say enough appeal to the commercial people so that not only did I teach classes for advertising art, but a rather powerful group of

Wessels: designers known as the Art Directors Club of San Francisco organized classes for me to teach. I believe one of their officials was Ray Bethers. I had as many as 50 of these men in my classes at one time. I taught them about the basic principles of Cubism and Expressionism, assigned problems and so on. To a certain extent the appearance of commercial design in San Francisco changed in the direction of modern art.

All these things took, I hate to think how much, energy. I would be so tired when I would go home at night after a day of this sort of thing, giving out and giving out, that I usually just fell flat on my back immediately after supper and slept until I had to get up and run the next day.

Riess: And how did you do your own painting?

Wessels: I didn't--and that is the point. That is the sorrowful thing about it; I really could not be a painter. I did not have the energy for it, I was very unhappy and frustrated, but I could just not stop running. I had a bear by the tail.

Then my friend Joseph Danysh got a job as an art critic for the old San Francisco Argonaut and when he quit that--some friend of his in Washington asked him

Wessels: to become the director of the Western Division of the WPA, of the Federal Art Project, and he dropped out of my ken for awhile, I took over his job on the Argonaut, and I wrote art criticism for the San Francisco Argonaut for seven years. I would get up at 5 o'clock every Monday morning, and write 2500 words and then the rest of the time I would be teaching at all these various places.

Riess: Why did you take his job?

Wessels: Well, it was another job, and you never could tell, I mean everything was from hand to mouth...

Riess: I shouldn't think that art criticism would pay so little.

Wessels: Forty dollars a month. That's what our salaries were in those days. [Laughter] None of these things paid enough so that I could afford to stop any of them. But I was always glad of that. I would tear around the town looking at pictures and then try to condense my ideas. I learned how to organize my ideas from this pressure.

The Project Comes to San Francisco

Wessels: I had been writing the Argonaut column about a year and teaching in these various places, and then even my students began to drop off. Money became increasingly tight, and no one had any money to spend.

Wessels: All the artists were on relief in one way or another, excepting me, I was making too much, I could not go on relief!

Then something happened. Dr. Heil in the museum at Golden Gate Park sent out a mimeographed letter inviting all the artists in San Francisco to come to his offices. He had an important announcement to make. So myself and William Gaskin went along at the same time; we did not know what it was all about. Heil came out, got up on a chair, and said that the government had authorized him to employ artists to decorate public buildings and each one of us should take off in whichever direction occurred to us and find a suitable place to paint a mural on a public building and then come back with the plans and the government would pay our salaries and the municipality or state, whatever it was, would pay for the materials. This was not relief, but a government contract thing.

Riess: Was this meeting for everybody? How did he get a list of the artists?

Wessels: Through museums, people who exhibited through the museum. He had their addresses. There must have been 250 people milling around in that office when we arrived.

Wessels: Bill and I took off in the direction of Coit Tower where some of the beginners, people who had gotten in on the ground floor of this thing, were already starting some frescos. We decided that we didn't want any part of that. So we prowled around and finally discovered Laguna Honda Home, where there were five big arch panels. You know a great many of the American buildings are copies after classic buildings of one sort or another and usually in a classic building there are niches for sculpture and panels for painting and so on, provided by the architect, usually with some particular artist in mind. But in the American copy these have almost always been left blank, and there are a lot of traditional buildings with places for decorations, but no decorations. These are the sorts of things that we ferreted out. I found five panels that obviously had been intended for some kind of decoration at Laguna Honda and Bill and I went and looked at them.

We submitted sketches for the first two to Dr. Heil and he said, "These are so good, I don't want you both working in one place. Wessels, you take Laguna Honda, and Gaskin, you go find another place." So Gaskin went someplace else, I don't know where now,

Wessels: but he painted a mural someplace.

I did eventually all five of those at Laguna Honda which are now mercifully covered up, because I discovered rather early in the game that the only accepted art style was not what I thought mural painting was, but was à la Diego Rivera. Orozco and Rivera were the kings of the art world in the West, and either you painted in the Mexican manner or you did not paint. In the San Francisco Art Association Annuals, if you did not have a lady with big feet, why you just were not in. This, of course, was quite antipathetic to what I have learned about modern art in Europe. I had to adapt myself to it because otherwise my designs were not acceptable, so I never liked those things I did for Laguna Honda.

Riess: The design you submitted was adapted to the Rivera style?

Wessels: It was, purely a commercial job. I learned bitterly then something I believe I have held to ever since regarding public decorations, that it is an elevated form of commercial art. You are working for a community, and you have to paint to an average taste of some sort that will be received. You can't introduce too many novelties, too much mysterious stuff, too

Wessels: much individual technique because it simply will not be accepted. There are vogues and styles, and if you are out of style when you are doing community art, then you are out of luck. Very often this prevents any building presenting real masterpieces because the artist nearly always is bullied a little bit by what the popular taste of the day might be.

Riess: Of course, there is the other thing, people don't appear to notice the murals anyway.

Wessels: Well, they do if they are different. As long as the work of art on the wall does not disturb someone, okay. But as soon as it draws attention to itself because it is different, it will draw enemies. I learned then that a public work of art is partly compounded by the taste of the artist who does it and partly from the taste of the people who pay for it. In a sense it is hardly any better than the relationship between an illustrator and his client because the client dictates in the end what he wants to pay for.

To a certain extent the more you average tastes, the lower you get. In a democracy, the average is the mean common denominator of everybody. The bigger the area you work for, the less chance you have for real research, real innovation. It is too bad, but that is

Wessels: the way it is. This is why I think that the individualistic, capitalistic system whereby it is possible to work for one man, let's say, or one patron or a very small group of patrons is really the hope of creative art. That is why I think that the art in the Soviet Union has not amounted to a hill of beans for a great number of years because it has to follow the Party line. The Party line is for everybody.

Riess: Now when the Mexicans came to do their work in the United States, wasn't it considered to be odd and strange?

Wessels: Oh, but it was very acceptable because it was revolutionary, and in those days everybody was hungry, and anything revolutionary was good, even Communism was a respectable word around here, you know. I wonder how many people that have been rabid anti-Communists in recent years realize they used to march in parades along with Theodore Dreiser and other people like that, advocating those earlier principles of Communism. We were told then that the twelve disciples were Communists and so forth.

I never swallowed all this myself, I have never been very active politically. I am kind of a sceptic and any extreme in politics leaves me a little fright-

Wessels: ened. It seems to me that I like the middle of the road. It seems to me that I like the freedoms of democracy and it seems to me that I like the privileges of capitalism too. It seems to me that art would fare very badly if it were run communally. Yet, people would not eat very well unless we had a welfare society and so I am somewhere in between the two.

Supervisor of the Oakland Office

Wessels: I had hardly finished these murals, and I think I got $90 a month, something like that anyway, when somebody, some school superintendent whose name I have forgotten who was quite a well known man for his time, head of all the San Francisco schools, had seen these Laguna Honda murals and asked whether under the newly organized WPA Federal Art Project, he could not have me do murals for him for his school. I went to see Joe whom I had not seen for some time, who was in the hospital with the mumps at the time. I said, "Joe, you called me, and superintendent so-and-so of the public schools of San Francisco offered me this job. I don't know anything about your project, will it work? Apparently I am to go on relief and I am still making too much money to go on relief, how can this be worked?"

Joe said, "Look, I don't want you for a relief job at all. I want you to supervise the Oakland office of the WPA Federal Art Project. Don't do that job; you are too useful in other ways. We badly need someone who knows all the techniques and can supervise artists in work, the techniques of which--very often these

Wessels: people have only handled oil paint and they have never done fresco. We want to do a lot of mosaics. You are one of the few men around here who knows these techniques. So what I want you to do is to join the Federal Art Project as a supervisor and not go on relief, but take a salary as a supervisor."

The WPA Federal Art Project was set up with the idea that one supervisor could be hired, not on relief, who would occupy the services of at least ten relief workers. In other words, he might be a designer, planner or something or other, and he would put to work all these other hands.

Riess: Would he choose the other hands?

Wessels: Well, in so far as you could go to a relief agency and pick them off the relief rolls, you could choose them. If they were already on relief, you could pick them. Very often they came to you and applied and showed you what they could do, and you would have to decide how in the world you could put them to work, and so on.

They had set up a print making project in the old Potrero Hospital, on the Potrero where the headquarters were in San Francisco, and I did a little preliminary work there doing lithographs.

Wessels: William Gaskin had been made the San Francisco supervisor and I had been made the Oakland supervisor, and Joe Danysh was the supervisor of the whole Western Region and then there was Inverarity in Washington State and somebody whose name I have forgotten in Oregon but anyway, there were maybe ten or twelve young, anxious, ambitious people rather suddenly given this tremendous responsibility of putting all the artists in the area to work, all the ones who were on relief at least, and by that time that was almost everybody in the local art world. I was given the Oakland area to handle and I also acted as technical advisor for everything down as far as the Techachapi and as far north as Oregon. So I had to travel a good deal as well as running the Oakland office.

The Oakland office was in the old Hall of Records which has now been pulled down because of the Freeway going through there. In order to get this from the city of Oakland, from the County of Alameda rather, we had to quick-like dream up something to do for the County of Alameda so they would sponsor a project and as part of their sponsorship would give us a workshop.

Bill Gaskin and I went to look at the Alameda County Courthouse to see what could be done there in the

Wessels: way of enrichment and decoration. We saw that they were putting in slabs of very shiny onyx. I said to Bill, "Frescos would look chalky in here; they won't go at all. We are going to have to do something else. I don't think mosaic is it either."

Bill said, "How about inlaid stone? Cut stone? You have seen that in Palermo, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have. Do you suppose we could recreate that technique?" I immediately hit the books, and we really kind of recreated the art of cut stone.

Now, I want to follow this particular project up fairly closely because it is typical of the way that a good many of these things were done.

Riess: First would you explain how the group worked, who you had at your disposal?

Wessels: I had thirty men in the shop, but some of them were old ladies whose only claim to art was that they had decorated silk cushions with pansies and they could match colors very well. I had them matching mosaic stones. "Here is a sample, out of that pile of tiles, find all that color, cut them up into mosaic ~~patches~~ tesserae and then put them in the right tin cans so that the mosaicist has the palette to work with." Maybe I had three old ladies doing that.

Wessels: Then I had a man who was an expert in the uses of mortar and bricks and so forth. The upshot of the matter is that the two mosaics on the University power-house -now Art Museum- down here were done out of the tile scrap-pile by this workshop in that way.

Riess: I had not realized that it was a sort of a 9-5 thing for these people.

Wessels: Oh yes, it was daily work. Helen Bruton, who was one of the designers of the art in the fair at Treasure Island, a very competent mosaicist, did one of those powerhouse panels down there, with Florence Swift, who was an also exceedingly competent designer and artist doing the other. However, none of these people were on relief; they were hired as minor supervisors. They were independently wealthy, but we needed their talents and abilities as designers in order to put all these other people to work. So with this whole shop acting kind of like an orchestra and these people as conductors, we were able to use many hands to produce these kinds of things.

Riess: I had no idea that the Federal Arts Project drew in this kind of people too.

Wessels: Oh, yes. We had at one time all of the better artists in this whole community working with us. John Haley

Wessels: did a fresco for us.

Riess: Oh, that is what I expected, but I did not realize that so many old ladies...

Wessels: But these things can not be done without many hands. It is really communal art. The leading individual is only the planner, designer, and the superintendent; you have to have all these specialists and technicians to help out. That is the way that the most important monumental decoration can be done. We on the West Coast, I may say, were unique in the amount of architectural art that we did. We went into mosaic, inlaid stone, frescos, and so on to a much greater extent than they did in the East where they stuck pretty much to easel paintings and things of that sort. I can't help but feel, without being critical, that our way employed more hands. We had many painters, too, who did not work in the shop, but in their own studios, but there were about 30 in the shop in the old Oakland Hall of Records. They did the hand work on architectural decorations, etc.

Some of these things are of a permanent nature and are enduring even today, even despite a great amount of vandalism...You would be amazed at how the people who disagreed with Roosevelt would pick mosaic stones out of the mosaic just because it was done by the Federal

Wessels: Art Project. We had to repair and repair and repair. I am talking here about my share in an enterprise in which many others played important parts. I only shared in the responsibility. There were others--particularly Bill Gaskin, with whom I worked closely. He was the S. F. Supervisor, and initiated most of the architectural projects around here. Now these things that I am describing happened under my supervision, and so I happen~~ed~~ to know about them. On a much larger scale the same thing was happening throughout the West. In Los Angeles, for instance; and the Long Beach Pavilion was decorated under McDonald Wright's supervision. Timberline Lodge in Oregon was all designed by Federal Art Project people under Bruce Inverarity and so forth. All up and down the coast were these huge architectural things. All of Aquatic Park, that whole pavilion, the building included, was designed for the city of San Francisco by the Federal Art Project, decorated by sculptors from the Federal Art Project, and painted by Hilaire Hiler, who was the muralist, with sculpture by Sargent Johnson. Those are encaustic frescos in there. Those fish were all done under the Federal Art Project.

Now all of these things took a lot of shop work;

Wessels: maybe there would be 15 or 20 people employed in doing the various things that would need to be done for that decoration. In my shop in Oakland I had about 30 people. They would be grinding color in one place; they would be cutting mosaic stones in another; they would be doing all these various specialties.

Riess: Was this a static group or did they keep changing?

Wessels: There was some turn-over. As soon as a man could get a job, he no longer was eligible for relief, and as soon as we trained him, he could get a job. The Project really folded when the Treasure Island World's Fair called for people who could do these things. I lost almost my whole shop. They all went and did those decorations.

Riess: You say "As soon as you could train them" but I thought the reason they came to you was because they were trained in some skill.

Wessels: No, they were trainable, put it that way. Most of them when they came to us had some kind of art training, but we had to find out what their capabilities were and train them if possible.

Now to show you how it worked, coming back to the Alameda County Courthouse, I found the wife of a pro-

Wessels: fessor in the Spanish department here, who was a friend, who wanted to do a fresco. She was very hipped on everything Mexican because she and her husband, Lesley B. Simpson, had traveled to Mexico. She wanted to do a fresco. I could just see another Mexican fresco! But she was a good designer, so I said, "Marion, come and look at these spaces down at the Alameda County Courthouse." Oh, she could do marvelous frescos there.

I said, "Look, Marion, you see that very rich onyx marble. Don't you think a fresco would look rather dry?"

Oh, but she wanted to do a fresco; everyone else was doing frescos. She wanted to do a fresco so Bill and I had to persuade her that although she wanted to do a fresco that this was not the place for it. And what she had better do was revise her ideas to the technique of cut stone, which she had never heard of. Then we showed her some of the beautiful pieces of marble and she began getting ideas. And to make a long story short, we sold her on the idea of designing for inlaid stone, so she revised her ideas and her designs to suit inlaid stone. For some reason she blamed Bill for forcing her to change and

Wessels: not me! Later she was happy about it and forgot that we had to persuade her. Then we found on the relief rolls an Italian stone cutter, Gaetano Duccini, who made tombstones and did intarsia work. He had skill to his fingertips. And also we found that they were wrecking old Victorian mansions in San Francisco and in the basements of these mansions would be all kinds of very fancy statues, very bad art nouveau, bad Victorian art, Venuses with clocks in their tummies, alabaster balustrades and all this junk, kicking around in the dust--and this intrinsically beautiful material provided us our palette. We sawed it up into pieces 3/4 inch thick and then mounted these on slabs and these slabs then were keyed by a pronged hook into the steel structure of the building and we fitted these together. If you will go there today, you will find in what once was the lobby there of the Alameda County Courthouse, two panels seven feet by fifteen feet, one symbolizing the forty-niners' coming and the other symbolizing the life of the Spanish people before the forty-niners came. This is the only place in the Western world where you can find inlaid stone, to my knowledge; it has never been done anywhere else in America. I think even now as you look at it you

Wessels: will realize the fitness of this medium to the finish of that lobby. Frescos would have looked chalky in that shiny interior and this was a good choice of medium.

Riess: Please describe more of the process of doing this.

Wessels: First Marion made a big paper cartoon and expressed her design in terms of shapes of the stone. Each stone was numbered so that we would know which stone it was and so on. Then Gaetano Duccini took these stones and made microscopically accurate curves, grinding them on the grindstone and so on, so that they would all fit together like a jigsaw puzzle, and using the right texture and the right color to carry out the design. This went on for about a year, these two people, he furnishing the stone technique, she furnishing the design, and finally with the aid of a plasterer and metal man and a number of other workers, the things went up.

But then there was the problem of a certain area which was supposed to be gold leafed (and again I am using this as a symbol of the things that happened almost daily). There was no one on the project who knew how to lay gold leaf on stone and I could not find anyone who did know how. I tried it myself. I

Wessels: have laid gold leaf on a manuscript but not on stone and it did not seem to work the same way. We tried and tried in the shop to get the gold leaf onto stone but it did not work. And so we were stuck. Here were these blank white areas in the marble that needed gold leaf and the designs were not done. The Alameda County Board of Supervisors were beginning to get impatient. This thing had dragged on for a long time and they wanted to have their lobby finished.

So one day I was sitting in the office biting my nails, wondering what I was going to do about this. The secretary said, "There is a Greek maker of ceremonial images who wants to know if there is anything for him to do on the project. He is on relief and would like to work on the project."

I said, "Well, I am not doing any good sitting here fretting; let me talk to him."

In walks this old grey-haired guy who had some little icons and things. I said, "I am sorry; we don't really make religious images on the project." And suddenly I said, "Is that stone?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Is that gold leaf?"

He said, "Yes."

Wessels: I said, "You're in. Come with me and tell me what you can do here. We have a job and we need somebody who can lay gold leaf on stone."

I drove him over to the headquarters and showed him the blank spaces. I said, "Can you cover those with gold leaf?"

"Yes, but where can I get the right kind of gold leaf?"

"What do you mean?"

He said,"Well, the commercial gold leaf is too thin. The stone is granular and when you lay a sheet of thin commercial gold leaf on it, it cracks and breaks. It won't take it; you have to have specially beat gold leaf. It has to be four times as thick."

I said, "Where can I find that? Can you beat gold leaf?"

"No, that is a specialty."

"Well, where can I get it?"

"Maybe you will have to send to the old country."

"We can't spend United States funds outside the United States during the Depression."

So I told everybody on the project that we were stuck for a gold beater and did anyone know a gold beater? I called them all together, all thirty people.

Wessels: That night I got a telephone call saying there is a guy who runs an apartment house out in East Oakland who used to be a gold beater. He had all his tools still but he had not done it for years.

So I got on the phone to him that night and the next morning early I was out there and here was this guy with a huge overdeveloped right shoulder. He practically looked like a cripple. I said, "You are the gold beater?"

"Yes, but I don't do it any more. I run this little apartment house, I am retired."

I said, "Well, they told me that you still have your shop."

He took me out back, and his tools were rusty and so forth, but he still had his shop.

I said, "Now here is what I need,"and I outlined the thing to him. "Could you reactivate yourself and your shop enough to do this for me?"

"Well sure," he said, "it would be fun."

I learned an awful lot. He had to get the intestines of calves, because you put the little hunks of gold between calf intestine films and then you beat the whole stack at a time. How many strokes you beat it determines the thickness of the leaf and all that.

Wessels: Anyway, I learned all this technical stuff, and to make a long story short, we produced the gold leaf, my Greek image maker put it up, and it is still there today.

But there was one other shock involved--you can see why I went to the hospital after seven years of this. I came in just about when the job was done. In order to keep the wind from blowing the gold leaf, we had to hang a curtain around the gold leaf work, otherwise we could not handle the gold leaf. The way you handle gold leaf is by running a **gilder's point** through the hair like this and then the static electricity generated causes the leaves to lay onto the hair OF THE GILDER'S TIP. Then you waft it to the place where the size is on the stone and then it just lays in place. It is a very skillful thing, and a little wind can disturb the process.

Well, a certain amount of gold leaf blows around in spite of everything you can do. One day I came into the lobby down there and the whole place glittered with waste gold leaf. It was all over the place. I thought--oooh, the **Treasury Department** is going to get me! I am responsible for everything that these people use, every bit of material. If there is any waste, why the

Wessels: Republicans will bring pressure to bear on the Roosevelt Administration and Harry Hopkins will be right down my throat. So I said to this man, "Now there seems to be an undue amount of gold waste here."

"That's nothing," he said, "there is no gold there at all."

I said, "Look, I insist on you sweeping it all up and saving what you can."

He said, "Okay, I will sweep it up, but you'll see. There isn't anything there."

So I stood there and watched while he and two other fellows swept that whole lobby. As they swept the gold toward me it disappeared, and disappeared, and disappeared until finally in the end there was a little black crumbly residue left. I don't suppose you could have put what there was of this powder on one fingernail.

"Where did it go to?" I asked.

"You must realize," he said, "that this gold leaf is beaten so thin that one five dollar gold piece covers a city block."

That is how thin the gold leaf was! Naturally it disappeared as you swept it so there was not really

Wessels: much waste so there was not any problem, but I learned things like this every day.

But now what I have described here at some great length went on in many cities in connection with many federal art projects. There were many disappointments; we made some mistakes, but on the whole I think that the government got, no matter how you measure it, value received out of this project that I had something to do with. I can not speak for the whole country but I can for this one.

I went to a professional firm of decorators after these two panels were done down at the Alameda County Courthouse and said, "How much would it cost to do those on a commercial basis?"

They said, "$25,000 apiece."

It cost the County of Alameda $5,000 apiece and it cost the government only the relief salaries of the workers employed, that was all. The whole thing as nearly as I can make it out, came to somewhere around $8,000 a piece. So to that extent we created value. I would say among the fifty-odd artists whose affairs I administered there was not any significant waste, and there was not any significant boon-doggling. Now for others I can't say.

Riess: This was the big accusation?

Wessels: Politicians were roaring around about this all the time, about how much was wasted. Actually it was not. Now it is rather hard to put a price on a poem. It is rather hard to put a price on a work of art aside from commercial demand for it. When there is no commercial demand, there is no value perhaps and yet I am not too sure. I think that those mosaics down here which were made of waste tile and made by waste people, people that society had found no use for, it seems to me that there is value there. And it seems to me that there is value in the Alameda County Courthouse too, far above what it may be worth in dollars and cents. We made something out of a very little, we made more out of less, and we raised the morale of frightened and depressed artists. We gave them hope and a feeling of accomplishment--of being part of the community. It seems to me that in any complete casting up of accounts, in an economy or a culture for that matter, what you did with what you had at the time is the important thing. I am proud of my share of what the Federal Art Project did in this part of California. Along with what you hear of waste and confusions and so on, I would throw this into

Wessels: balance for the other side and say that if I had to do it over again, I would be glad to make the same mistakes.

Collapse

Riess: Were you working there then full time? I mean you could not have been doing the other teaching? Could you?

Wessels: I was teaching at the same time; I was writing my art column at the same time. I worked at the Federal Art Project eight hours a day and did the rest evenings and so on. There were no vacations, there was no security, no assurance the Project would continue.

It ended for me when I was on a lecture tour. We were looking for new city halls, new post offices to decorate, after about six years of this. Someone had to go and visit the local school superintendent or the board of aldermen and so forth and say, "You have a city hall here that is copied after the Granada in Spain and you haven't any of the decorations that go with it! The Federal Art Project is ready to step in. If you will pay for the materials, they will furnish the skills and the labor, and will execute the decoration for you in your building which will be suitable to your place, your wealth. What have you to celebrate

Wessels: in art? What is it about your town that is great?"

Well, usually the mayor thought a portrait of himself would be suitable and then I would say, "I am sorry; we are going to do this in stone and that is not good for making portraits so perhaps there ought to be something else."

"Well, we dry a lot of prunes here." Or, "We do this or that or the other thing."

Then I would have to go back to an artist and say, "Have you any prunes in your system? Can you make a design which would celebrate the drying of prunes?"

The artist would probably say, "No." Or maybe I would find one that would say, "Yes." Then I would bring the artist and some committee or other together and then I would try to stand as the grain of sand between the upper and the nether millstone; I would try to bring this artist who had no conception of local politics and these local politicians together on some kind of agreement, and maybe one time out of three I would succeed. So you find work from the Oakland workshop designed by an artist in California in a little high school in Lockford; in a high school in Tulare; scattered all through the state are mosaics and murals

Wessels: done by artists who worked out of the shop here and whose hand work came from this crew that we trained here. This is the way it was going.

I was on such a tour, an invasion of the northern part of the state. It was Marysville and I was supposed to speak. I had begun to have trouble sleeping. I had gotten to the place where I was on the jump day and night and I had no regular sleeping hours and I could not sleep. A doctor had said that I needed some kind of a nerve tonic or something. I did not have very much time to pay much attention to this either. He gave me a bottle of something or other and said, "If you feel low, take a teaspoonful of this, when you feel jittery."

It turned out that I got an overload of--well, what it really amounted to was hashish, some kind of a medicine that had hyacimine and hyacine in it, which are the active principles in hemp. It was a nerve sedative all right! It put me into the hospital unconscious for six weeks with what they called a combination of hemp poisoning and nervous breakdown. It was thought that I was going to die. Friends even wrote farewell obituary-type letters to my wife. But after the most tremendous dream in which all the events

Wessels: of my past life, a kind of apocalyptic adventure in which all of my enemies were personified and in which all the villainies of the world were personified and so on--I went through a regular Dante's Inferno in those six weeks--I came out of it. Then I went to see a psychiatrist to see if something had gone wrong with my mental processes. He just said, "Overwork. It is just plain overwork; there is nothing wrong with you at all. See to it that you don't take on so many things again in your whole life. Learn to relax and when you feel tired, sit down. Don't force yourself and you will be all right."

So I came through that. But it took all our financial resources.

Riess: Did you just collapse in a heap?

Wessels: What happened was that I was speaking to an audience of people about the possibility of a mural in their school building. I became terribly weary and asked if I could sit down. I sat down and finished the speech almost as if I were in a dream. Then I walked out to the car. My wife was driving. I sat down and said, "I feel terribly sleepy." I fell asleep and did not wake up until six weeks later. So she drove me all the way down the state, poor dear, and was scared

Wessels: to death. Apparently I could move. I could get up and do things if I was told to. But I was walking in my sleep.

Assessment

Riess: Why was the Coit Tower work so bad? It seems like the artists who were there did not understand perspective, they did not understand...

Wessels: They did not understand frescos; they did not understand a lot of things; a lot of them were not qualified to do it, though some were. They had painted all their lives on a canvas which is just not more than 4 or 5 feet long. Suddenly they were confronted with a fifty foot wall. What do you expect?

Riess: Were they adequate painters in the first place?

Wessels: Maybe on small canvases, but that is a very different thing. The idea of painting large canvases as big as these things here, 5'x5' or so, for instance, is comparatively new. You see artists in those days hardly ever painted on anything bigger than a piece of charcoal paper--maybe 2'x3'. Here they are suddenly confronted with acres. This is a job that we as supervisors had to do. We had to retrain them, to make them think in these new terms. We had seen the monuments of Europe; we knew how these things could be done. Many of these artists had never seen

Wessels: them. There was nothing like that around here. Two mosaics as big as those down in the University Art Gallery were unheard of before the Federal Art Project in this country.

Riess: Were there other ways that artists were supported at the time?

Wessels: You went on relief if you did not have enough to eat. Then the Art Project supervisor's job was to go to the relief rolls and go through them and find somebody he could use, that he had a job for, where they could be doing something productive and constructive. Every so often I would go to the relief office and say, "Have you anyone with any art training? Let me look at it and let me review them." That way I found some people who had some special skills I could use or develop. Some of our best painters today developed on the Federal Art Project. Famous ones.

The supervisor really had to get the job for the artist; he had to train the artist; and he had to run the shop that made these things possible. You really were a kind of a jack-of-all-trades. As luck would have it, I had a very good all round experience and training.

Riess: Why can you always recognize a Federal Arts Project

Riess: work? Very often you come to a town and you spot such a work right away.

Wessels: Actually there is some confusion there. There were two projects--one that went on concurrently with the Federal Arts Project but it was right out of the Treasury Department. And all those designs, which were mostly in Post Offices, were passed on by a group of three men and they all chose similar things and established a kind of government style. Actually the WPA work was different, very different in styles. We left it up to the particular artist and his particular client what happened. We never censored; excepting when we thought it was impossibly bad, we never censored. They did. Any unanimity in style you usually find on the Treasury projects, not in the WPA projects. The WPA projects had a much wider variation of value to them. I mean some of them are very bad and some of them are very good and so forth. The Treasury Project would not gamble on their artist's ability to produce good, unusual work. We did. Some we won, others we lost.

Riess: How can you rate the success of the Federal Art Project and the public's feeling about it?

Wessels: Well, that is a pretty large order because the Federal Art Project had so many manifestations.

Riess: Well, let's stay in your area.

Wessels: My area is pretty large too because out at my Oakland project--and I would say that this was typical of what was going on throughout the country--we had various things going. Some of them appealed to the public or certain elements of the public very much.

For instance, there was enterprise undertaken which was called the "Index of American Design." Some of the artists working out of the Oakland Art Project worked on this. Their job was to record, by any media possible, old ships' figureheads, old furniture, Indian petraglyphs, paintings on rocks, anything that might be considered the heritage of American art. Folk art of all sorts, gingerbread on houses, all of that kind of thing that might be considered to have folk art value. This was a huge record made up of material coming from all the various art projects throughout the country. It was finally sent to the Library of Congress in Washington. A book called

Wessels: The Index of American Design which had just a little bit in it, a very small amount of it, was put out, which is considered to be an important book and a contribution to American history.

Riess: How was it directed?

Wessels: In every community that had an art project, certain artists whose abilities were of this nature were set to do this work. I had two or three at the Oakland project who did this sort of thing. Their work when they were done was in the form of carefully executed water colors, perhaps some photographs. In some cases where there were demands for many copies of these things we lithographed them--the University of California had a lot of them. That was one of the things that the educators, at least, accepted.

I think that people usually think of the Federal Arts Project as producing unwanted easel paintings which hang in obscure offices somewhere or another because the poor recipient, the poor office man, works for the state or the municipality and can not defend himself. There are a certain number of such things. But various institutions still use slides, photos and reproductions which we prepared.

Somewhat perhaps better liked were the projects

Wessels: such as the mosaic on the University Art Gallery which was done, as it were, for the public, as a public work of art for the decoration of a state-owned building. We did a good many of those and those were rather well received in most cases, although in some cases they were not liked.

The easel painting appealed to a smaller public. We had a certain number of painters who just did paintings. These paintings were given by a curious device known as "permanent loan" to some state or municipal or federal office. They were used as office decorations. These might be oil paintings, water colors, or something.

Riess: Are there any really kind of great things hidden away that were done by that means?

Wessels: Well, Dong Kingman, for instance, now has great public acceptance as a water colorist. He did his first water colors for us; he was on our project. He did a lot of water colors of the waterfront and so on. Things that he was later paid thousands of dollars to do again he did for us for $90 a month. The University has some of those, some place. As office decorations and so forth, they would ask for the work of a certain artist. Some of it was liked and some of it was not. There was some

Wessels: waste in this project but not much.

Riess: How were the new things presented to the public? I mean when an easel painting or something was done was there any kind of fanfare?

Wessels: Usually there was no fanfare for the smaller things. Usually there was some kind of a dedication ceremony for the larger things. I can remember the good chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Alameda County had a banquet for Project people and Marion Simpson and Duccini who made Alameda County's cut stone murals of which I have spoken. They had a formal dedication ceremony afterwards and the supervisors officially received the work. The Board of Supervisor's chairman got up and said how glad they were to have these wonderful "muriels." [Laughter] They were often recognized by the public, the larger things, but the smaller things went unnoticed. Usually a letter of thanks was about all we got.

Riess: On the whole it sounds to me like the benefits were all on the part of the government. There seemed to be little benefit to the artists themselves.

Wessels: I would say that there would have been no American outburst such as produced Abstract Expressionism if it had not been for that preparatory work. Many painters now

Wessels: famous put in their apprenticeship on the W.P.A. F.A.P.

Zero Mostel began his public life as a Federal Arts Project painter. He later went into stage work but that is where he began. Such men as de Kooning painted sets for the WPA Federal Arts Theater. Oh, you can go right down the line. Practically all the men who achieved great fame in painting in the last twenty years were at one time or another Federal Arts Projects men.

Riess: I guess when we talked last week it sounded like so much of the work was just busy work that could be done by little old ladies--the matching of the mosaics...

Wessels: No, I was talking there only of the projects which were of the nature that they took a lot of hand work and only one designer. We tried to get good designers, people whose talents as designers were excellent, so that we could employ these smaller art talents--people not capable of initiating and carrying out work of their own, but able to match colors, plaster, mix paints, and so forth. But when you took one man like Michaelangelo, shall we say--we had no Michaelangelo--but we had some very good fresco painters--and put him in charge of a crew, he could work that much faster and

Wessels: his own talents and energies are saved for that part of the work that only he can do. So that is the way that we tried to use our workshop--as assistants, as people who made it possible for the skilled artist to do his work without interruption. Now, for instance, Diego Rivera did a huge fresco at the Treasure Island World's Fair, a tremendous one. The only reason that he could do it was that he had a crew of ten people to help him. Some of them were Federal Arts Project trained people. One of them, Mine Okubo, an artist now in New York (and who has written several books) was his chief assistant. But you will find that any large architectural work of art, anything that covers say fifty by a hundred square feet, something like that, is the result of many hands working under one competent designer. It is not painted entirely by the painter himself.

Riess: Did people have any real idea of a style for mural painting until Rivera arrived?

Wessels: We had to train them. A style did evolve. There were several styles of mural painting that did evolve. There were very few American painters who had the opportunity to work on large surfaces and it came as rather a shock to them. The reason, as I said, that

Wessels: you find Coit Tower so disturbing is that this is the first time that most of those people had a whole wall to deal with, the very first time in their whole art lives. Up to that time they had never painted canvas any bigger than, shall we say, a piece of charcoal paper, maybe a couple of feet by three feet. Then suddenly they are confronted by a wall maybe fifty or a hundred feet. And in the difficult fresco medium. You simply have to have some experience to do it well. We tried to use people who had some previous experience to boss these jobs and assist as far as possible the lesser trained people. The lesser trained people learned as apprentices. In other words we went back to the old Renaissance Botteghe system where the artist learned by being an apprentice, then later rose to the position of being a journeyman himself and then later on became the head man. Every one of the Renaissance studios consisted of the master with assistants--Rubens had 14 of them and most of Rubens' paintings were painted by his 14 assistants with occasional licks from the master and with actual drawings done by Rubens maybe--the sketches, the first plans made by Rubens. Then Jan Snyders would be the expert in still life painting. He would paint the

Wessels: meat and the food on the banquet table. And Van Dyck was very skillful at hands and faces. Somebody else was good at cloth and so on. They would put the whole painting together and Rubens would come and look at it and finally put it all together with a few strokes. Now in all honesty, this was never signed by Rubens. He never signed these things with his own name; they were the products of his workshop, so he didn't sign his own name to them.

You see, large scale art is a workshop affair. And we went back to that during the Federal Arts Project as the only way of handling the less experienced people and bringing them up. As they advanced in skill, they got more and more individual work to do.

The Federal Art Project had these architectural commissions--which were really public works of art--where you had to deal with some political body and where the artist was more or less a servant of public opinion and so on. We just furnished the technical skills that he needed in order to carry the work out, plasterers, mosaicists, stone cutters, and so on. Those were one department. Then we had a group of people who just painted easel paintings, water colors

Wessels: and oil paintings, which were borrowed on a permanent loan basis by government institutions; then we had the Index of American Design which recorded folk art and was sent to the Library of Congress. But then, I've spoken of those. Then we had, in one project in San Francisco, a whole set of people who were engravers and lithographers and etchers. They worked much as the easel painters did in making prints. We had photographers photographing old San Francisco. They were also contributing to the Index of American Design;all the gingerbread that has been taken down in the Western Addition, and so on, has been recorded by some very excellent photographers.

Then we cooperated with the American Guide series. The writer's project was writing the equivalent of Baedekers for every state in America. You find these still, Federal Writers Project, California, Berkeley, so forth. They still are valuable as reference books in which an outline story on every community of any importance is included, with maps. A regular guide book to America. These often required illustrations and so forth and so art project people would cooperate with those. We had two girls who were doing page endings and so forth, illustrations for these books. And

Wessels: so we cooperated with all the other Federal Art Projects, and we loaned people to the theater project to paint scenery.

We loaned photographers to the University of California to improve their slide collection. We had one man who had a good knowledge of art history and was also a good photographer who worked out here all the time. He later became a professor of art history, I believe. A good part of the slides now used by the art historians here were taken by this man from books and traveling shows that came through. He recorded everything of any importance. This was done under the Federal Art Project.

Riess: This sounds administratively very tricky, but apparently it was loose enough so that people could move from one thing to another without great...

Wessels: Well, the supervisor was the man who furnished the trickery. He had to make it work somehow. Up above him he had a rather inflexible federal government that was dishing out funds under rather awkward bookkeeping conditions. For instance, to show you the sort of a daily problem the supervisor had to meet: I had some people doing tempera paintings, I won't go into the reason why they were doing tempera paintings, but for

Wessels: a tempera painting you need egg yolk as an ingredient. So I went to the procurement office of the Treasury and said, "We need one egg a day for our tempera painters."

The man looked at me ferociously and said, "I could give you a crate of eggs or I could give you a hen, but I can't give you one egg a day."

I said, "Let's see, we've got to have this egg. So I'll bring the egg. An egg is worth five cents so I will take five cents' worth of dry pigment in exchange for the egg." Now this was quite illegal but it was fair to the government because it was getting value received. But I suppose I could still go to jail for it. This is the way many things were done. The government machinery was simply too far removed from the daily work of the artist, so the supervisor had to work out all sorts of compromises in between.

Riess: I think this could make the difference between a really good creative project and one that got all bogged down.

Wessels: Everything depended on the ingenuity and imagination of the supervisor. The ones that had supervisors who could furnish the required amount of ingenuity and imagination got along very well. The ones who didn't, didn't, that is about it.

Project Artists

Riess: In the 1930's when the Project was going on, what about people like Stackpole and Piazzoni? What were they doing?

Wessels: Piazzoni did the library murals at that time, I think under a Public Works of Art Project, but I am not sure. Stackpole did the Stock Exchange statuary. I am not sure, I don't think that was on the project, but Benny Bufano, of course, was, and many of the younger sculptors worked in his workshops. Our own Richard O'Hanlon here can tell you about that; he was on the Bufano project.

Riess: Who else was going on on their own?

Wessels: Well, there were a few of us who were making enough money one way or another, I through teaching, and I think Stack, through commissions on sculpture, so we never had to go on relief. And those of us who were employed by the Project were brought in as supervisors because we furnished the required ingenuity and knowledge, you see.

Riess: What has happened to the artists whose names were associated with the work on Coit Tower?

Wessels: Well, Victor Armantoff was down at Stanford for awhile. He is a good muralist. He did a George Washington High School mural under the Federal Art Project, I think.

Wessels: Jane Berlandina is in England now and has become a well known painter. Ray Boynton died, of course, after retiring from U.C. art department. Ralph Chesse is still running puppet theaters and his son, I think, is a theater manager in San Francisco now. Ben Cunningham is an artist in New York, quite successful. Edith Hamlin was the wife of Maynard Dixon and is now retired in the Northwest. George Harris got a Guggenheim Award, William Hesthal is someplace in Los Angeles teaching, I think. John Langley Howard is a successful painter. Lucian Labaudt died as a war correspondent artist somewhere in Southeast Asia. He was a fashion designer originally, but he died as a war correspondent artist. He was being sent by plane to draw some of the war activities over India, I think, or maybe Cambodia or some place and the plane went down.

Langden, I don't remember. Aletti, I don't remember. Olmsted, Parker, Susanne Scheuer is now an art teacher. Edward Turada is now in Japan. Zackheim did the murals that again are uncovered in the Medical School in San Francisco. They thought they were rather horrible when he did them and they painted them over and now the new administration thinks they are quite

Wessels: fine works of art so they have uncovered them again. José Moya DelPino is retired in Marin County. These men are all along in years now, I am 71 myself and most of these are older.

Riess: But these were all quite good people when they came onto the Project or did they learn on the Project?

Wessels: No, those people all had reputations. Helen Forbes had a reputation and you can still see this huge tempera painting that Helen Forbes and Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli (now Cravath I think it is) painted out at the Fleishhacker Mother's House in the Zoo out there. It is the whole story of Noah's Ark all around the room. These Bruton sisters, the three of them, worked on a great number of mosaics for us. They later also did all the biggest Treasure Island World's Fair decorations.

Now these people all were leading supervisors, position people. Many came up from the Project and expressed themselves later, not on the Project, but that was their training ground. David Park, I would say, developed on the Project and he has become quite famous. Anton Refregier is very well known as a mural painter. John Gerrity is retired. Maxine Albro, I don't know where she is now. Ruben Kadish, the last I knew,

Wessels: was painting in New York. But I don't know where he has gone to. Zackheim, as I said, his frescos are now becoming famous again. John Garth...

Riess: He was the critic who was so anti-...

Wessels: Yes, he was the Sanity in Art man, more or less because of his patroness. I wrote the Argonaut art criticism column all through these years and finally the Sanity in Art people objected to my slant. I left to go teach at Washington State University, and John Garth took my place. John, I think, was governed more or less by the taste of this one patroness who was the lady who gave the Legion of Honor, what is her name?

Riess: Spreckels.

Wessels: Spreckels, yes. And she was a convinced "Sanity-in-Art-er", anti anything modern.

Maurice del Mue died. These people are all gone now. These were the leaders of that day. And the people that they trained and helped develop as their assistants are the artists all over now--practically everybody that ever was on the Project.

Of the staff here, John Haley did murals for Government Island frescos down in the estuary. Then there were several others that worked down there too. This is a very skimpy list. There were many others.

Wessels: In the south, one of the supervisors there who trained many people was Stanton McDonald Wright, who was known more or less as a Synchronist, that's with the movement that originated in Los Angeles. But here you are talking about people who are 70 or more years old. I feel like a lone blade of grass after the winter wind has blown most of the others away.

Riess: When you were working on the Alameda County Courthouse, weren't you tempted to do these designs yourself?

Wessels: Oh, I tried to design them sometimes, but I did not have time. Anyway, that was not my job. My job was organizing, and advising. I had to help others do it. I had no time for myself.

Riess: It just sounds so irresistible.

Wessels: It was. I was eager to. I have always been eager to; that's the whole point. I came back to this country from Europe as a painter. I did not even know how to talk about these things. Yet, people wanted to know, and I found myself writing and talking and teaching and not painting. As it turned out, I did not take up painting again seriously until after I came down here to teach in U.C. in 1947. While I have continuously painted some, my actual first appearance as a serious painter here occurred, well, I was painting at home

Wessels: when Karl Kasten came up to see me one day and I was working on some seascapes. He said, "Good painting. Put that in the San Francisco Annual."

I said, "Good heavens! I would not bother about any of these things. This stuff is all right for me, and I love to work at it, but I am not a noted painter."

He said, "Put that in the Annual."

I said, "Okay, if you feel that way about it, you take it over to San Francisco and stick it in, but nothing will come of it." So he put it in the 75th San Francisco Art Association Annual, and they gave me first prize for that year. This really jolted me. I thought, "Well, if people think I am a pretty good painter, perhaps I should paint more."

So since that time I have been painting and exhibiting regularly. That was only about ten years ago.

UNEASY KINSHIP: ARTISTS AND PUBLIC

Riess: Another effort of the Federal Arts Project was the art centers.

Wessels: The art centers started rather late and there was an effort to get the general public into the activity for the purposes that I have previously hinted at--that it was felt that a great number of people needed art as an outlet, perhaps as therapy, but anyway, as a constructive activity. It has been discovered and proved in mental institutions and places of this sort that the exercise of one's abilities in making a work of art is in itself an integrating and constructive activity. It can cure mental ailments.

Now those of us who are professionals don't like to think it is only that. We know that it is a very healthy kind of exercise. Did I quote Johann Sebastian Bach before and say that, "It is a glory to God and a pleasant amusement"? That is what he considered making music. Well, it is more than that. It is really kind of a game which makes you stronger, spiritually and mentally. I hate that word "spiritually", what shall I say instead? Sounds kind of spooky, but I don't mean it that way at all. But whatever we have nowadays

Wessels: instead of a soul gets stronger on account of this activity. There is no question. It happens with good painters and it happens with very bad painters who try.

It happens to insane people who try. It is a fact that engagement in painting as an activity and, I suppose making music too, is a personality-integrating activity. I was judging the California Medical Facility Art Show the other day, and I discovered that they recognize the fact there that they can pull people out of the morass of mental confusion by giving them a specific task in sculpture or painting to do. It very often has worked where nothing else will.

But here is where confusion is apt to arise. One is apt to think of that kind of work as having the intrinsic worth that the work of a professional artist has. It very seldom does. Sometimes it does. The difference is this. I have, as I conceive it, a job to do, things to accomplish in this world. I use my ability to walk in order to get those things done, and I walk a good deal. My wife says, "Why don't you exercise?" And to that I say, "Well, I walk up and down four flights of stairs all day in the process of teaching. I don't think I need to go out and take bending exercises after that."

Wessels: I make this differentiation: therapeutic art is walking because the doctor says you must. Being an artist, your walking is simply part of the work, that is all. You simply do not think about it. You think of it as a way of getting someplace, not because it is good for you. You don't paint because it is good for you; you paint because you want to make an excellent painting. And you don't eat because it is good for you--at least you won't digest the food so well--you eat because it tastes good and that is the best way in the world to enjoy food. If you eat a fried egg because the doctor says that you must eat a fried egg, you won't enjoy the fried egg and it won't do you as much good. But if you are hungry for a fried egg, then it does you some good. I try to make a distinction here between the professional attitude of the painter and the therapeutic or Sunday painter who paints because the doctor says you should do it. I don't think that it does very much good that way. I think that it has to come from an internal urge and compulsion--I <u>want</u> to paint.

Riess: About ten years ago Abstract Expressionism was being explained as a kind of integrating thing on the part of the artist.

Wessels: Yes, it was, but it depends on who is doing the walking, you know. Depends on who is doing the walking, how well it is done. I think that looking at art,

Wessels: intelligent looking at art is also an integrating experience. You can vicariously go through the same victory that the artist has won by understanding his painting. You can go into a painting, look at it, and move around inside it and vicariously, perhaps to the same degree at least that a spectator at a football game can, you can engage in the activity. If you have ever gone to a football game, sometimes you may come home real tired--you have made a few goals yourself, yet you are not a professional ball player. And this is the way I feel, at least when I come back from a good exhibit, that I have painted a lot of paintings. This is what the spectator gets out of it. I think we need spectators of each others work as well as creative painters in America, we need this other kind of joining in.

I go to a lot of concerts. You may say that I experience music vicariously. I don't compose it; I am not very good on any instrument. Yet, I go to concerts a lot, and my satisfaction is very rich in music, but it is all vicarious. I used to play in a brass band. Once I played the "Ode to an Evening Star" by Tannhauser in the Greek Theater on the baritone horn.

Wessels: (This was one high point in my childhood career!) But nevertheless I didn't intend to be a musician. I do join in music, enthusiastically, and with a great deal of satisfaction as a spectator. It seems to me that this is the way that people can enjoy painting too. There, I am on the producing end, but when I go to somebody else's show, I am on the receiving end. I experience his failures and his victories vicariously by looking at the painting. Sometimes, the work of the professional painter is so demanding that it consumes him--take Vincent Van Gogh--or Kokoschka, for instance.

Riess: Needless to say, the general public is having more trouble experiencing by looking these days.

Wessels: The gap between the consuming public, you might say, and the creative artist has been considerably aggravated by certain social conditions that have isolated the artist from the public. This is one of the things that the Federal Arts Project tried to cure through the art centers.

What they did was say, "Come and join us and let's all work together on something that is worthwhile to the community." Maybe instead of paying little old ladies relief for matching stones maybe they would do

Wessels: it just for busy work, and they would have a sense of sharing and partaking in the creation of a large design.

Then again we had classes in drawing. I can remember that I taught in an art center in Sacramento which was organized up there. That was one of the art centers in California. We had drawing classes; we had painting classes; we had a director; we had a museum going with traveling exhibits from various parts of the country; people from the community could come in and learn to draw and paint in an introductory way. They even set up special classes on request for certain phases of art. For instance, the government employees in Sacramento, which turned out to be quite a body, they had to turn out terribly boresome reports. They wanted to know if we could not tell them how to make the reports more interesting so that people would read them. So one assignment I had was lecturing to these people telling them how to make their reports visually more acceptable.

Art centers have to serve the community interest. It isn't on the level of professional art, but it does bring art values into common affairs. It does increase the capacity of the people who share in these activities for the appreciation of the work of the professional

Wessels: artist. That is what art centers did. I think one of the functions of the art center that we are building across the street here at the University will be to bring more of the University public in closer to the artist. I think that the future of American art depends on the artist coming out of the ivory tower a little bit, and depends on the public climbing the ivory tower a little bit, getting together for mutual benefit.

I can remember one time during the Federal Arts Project after a particularly difficult time, when most of us supervisors, who had been working without vacations for seven years on the difficult business of bringing the public and the artist together, met at a banquet in San Francisco with Holger Cahill, who was head of the whole thing, speaking. We went out of that banquet arm and arm singing, "Back to the Ivory Tower". [Laughter] Most of us had had our fill of trying to bring John Q. Public to where we were. But actually we continued to try to do it and we always have.

Riess: In these days there is such a big selling job for a contemporary movement...magazines and so on.

Wessels: Yeah, it pays the dealers to promote their artists.

Wessels: They try to sell their artists and they very often succeed. There is now a great vogue of buying and they start a new fad in art overnight--which drops out of sight as fast as "pop" art has. (It is already "out".)

When you back a bad horse, the interest soon dies. I think the valid art movement of tomorrow is not here yet. I think we are in a transition period and each one of us has to dig into ourselves for values that we think are important. Then sooner or later when we come up with the valid ones, why then we will start a new movement.

Riess: Aren't people who are buying art today buying on purely speculative grounds?

Wessels: A good many of them are. You find advice on how to buy art in Fortune magazine these days. This is something that you would not have seen ten years ago. It is a whole lot safer to know about a product before you buy.

The safest thing of all is an educated taste and that is something you can provide yourself with by plain hard work. Just to look at a lot of art and to make a lot of decisions about it for yourself, say to yourself, this kind of thing I like, and this kind of

Wessels: thing I don't like, and this I might come to like if I study it long enough. You will slowly progress in your taste. You will find that the first things that you buy will not last very long. You won't like them later and you will trade them off for other things. After you get more educatinn in buying, you will learn to get beyond the immediate impact of something and appreciate the long term involvement of the work and you will buy works that will last longer for you. Slowly your taste improves. As your taste improves, you yourself as a person become richer, you enjoy living more on personal levels.

Riess: That is an interesting value of the Morrison Library print lending arrangement. By the end of a semester you know how you feel about that print you have had on your wall.

Wessels: Exactly, I think that is an exceedingly important activity in the University. I personally have tried to help it out any way I can. I have given them one lithograph, and when I get another good one I intend to give them another, and so forth, because I think that this is important to education. I believe in all the lending galleries too. People can go and say, "I think I am going to like that painting. I don't want

Wessels: to buy it yet, but I would like to have it in my house for awhile." So they are able to rent it for a nominal fee. Then if they really find after three months that it still produces value for them, then they are able to apply the rental cost to the cost of the painting. I think that this is really the right way to sell paintings rather than to sell them by hotshot merchandising, to foist something off on somebody who may or may not be able to live with it.

Riess: What is the place of message--overt, political, etc.--in art? We have been speaking of such a "message" period, the Thirties.

Wessels: I think that the artist best conveys the ideas that he feels when he does not illustrate them too directly; including an American flag in a painting does not necessarily make it patriotic. I think the more obvious symbols may or may not be important in a painting. It is more the kind of world which the painter projects which is important, a fantastic world, a dream world, a down-to-earth realistic kind of world, it all depends on how life is seen by the painter. This is what he projects, not, I think, "message" cartoons. I think that the place for political cartoons is in the daily paper because they are temporal things; they go very

Wessels: quickly. I don't think that political cartoon ideas ought to be celebrated in the form of mural paintings that last a hundred years because they soon become out-of-date. I think that the artist has to deal with values which last longer; otherwise it is fruitless for him to put them in permanent form.

Riess: So you think that the Rivera things are dated then?

Wessels: I think so, very definitely. Orozco, too, though in my own estimation Orozco more often hits universal things than Rivera did. Rivera actually was an active political force and was important for a short time. It seems to me that a painting such as Orozco's--shall we say in Occidental College, the Prometheus painting of the Greek gift of fire and all that sort of thing--this is a universal theme that will never go out of date. It will always be understood, and that, I think, is the proper subject for architectural mural painting if it is to last. Well, modern buildings only last about 75 years, but it will last at least that long and perhaps a lot longer.

Riess: It seemed to be suggested in this thesis that unless you were fired by real revolutionary conviction that you were not going to make much in the way of a painting.

Wessels: I believe that anything that produces deep conviction can serve the talented painter as a starting point, as a springboard, anything that he believes in very deeply.

For me, I guess I am a pantheist, I love nature that way. I mean for me just walking out into the hills and looking at the water is enough. And this to me is universal. Now other people would have to look other places. But this is the motivating force as far as I am concerned, and I understand other people having other motivating forces, but this is mine. I see the energy in all things expressed in a myriad of ways and I try to celebrate this, it is a kind of worship, if you like, by putting it down in paint. This is my own feeling about my own work. It seems to me, and this is belief and perhaps founded on what I know about science, that the ultimate reality, the final ingredient from which everything is made when you come right down to it, is energy. This is the final reality of our times. This is what I try to paint in any one of a number of manifestations whenever I paint. I might see it in mountains and I might see it in trees; I might see it in water; I might see it in rocks and so on. Or I might even see it in human beings. I've

Wessels: worked a lot with water as an energy symbol.

Someone said the other day when they saw me painting a mountain, "See, you got up on the shore at last!" [Laughter]

Riess: Is your show still at Mills?

Wessels: Oh, no. That came down. I am now between shows. I am aiming for Norway this summer (1966), and if it happens as it did before, I will come back with sketches.

The last paintings were founded on living in the Alps for two months and in Sicily for three. The Mills show was made up of those and of canvasses borrowed from collectors, ten canvasses which I thought were high points in the previous ten years. For myself I called it "Fifty-six to Sixty-six". It was ten years of painting, but the larger part of the show was made up of things I did on the Creative Art Institute Grant in Europe during the last eight months. Those paintings were all bought by collectors. I have one or two or three of them left so now I am starting over again on another show, perhaps two years from now.

Riess: Is the fact that an artist is unacclaimed an aid to his development in that he is free from influence and demand?

ANDERMATT

1964

Oil and acrylic, 36 3/4 by 49 5/8 inches

glenn wessels

Wessels: Well, now here is a kind of a paradox. If you get support, then you get a demand for a certain kind of thing. And the artist goes to work for a stable and the New York dealer--let us say he is painting red paintings and the dealer is selling red paintings. Then maybe he decides to have a blue period and the dealer says, "Oh, no. You mustn't because I can not sell those. My clients all want red." The tendency for the artist is to say: "Well, I had better continue painting what they want me for." So he becomes typed and becomes a specialist and starts repeating the formula till he dies as a creative painter. This is the evil of too close association with dealers.

On the other hand if he does not have enough to eat and can't buy paint he can't work so there must be some kind of a compromise between those two situations. Usually it is teaching or something like that. Perhaps marrying a rich wife. [Laughter]

Riess: Or some kind of government support maybe.

Wessels: Yes. I don't think it ever will be solved. I think every artist has to solve it in his own way. One of the cleverest ways that I know of--one of my students got a milk route because that left him his time all day and the good light free for painting. He did his

Wessels: work in the early morning and the late evening. But all artists have to look for some way of assuring their bread and butter and being able to buy paint and materials. Under our hit or miss system, the artist who gets a dealer sometimes gets a sympathetic dealer. Sometimes there are good ones. The artist who gets a dealer is relatively financially secure, whereas the artist who does not get a dealer is not financially secure, but is independent. He is more apt to initiate things and find new things and start new trends whereas the other man is apt to have more financial support and to be more limited in his range.

Riess: Without real support,someone buying and so forth, is there some kind of wasting away, or what?

Wessels: No, the compulsion to paint whether other people look at it or not is pretty strong if you are a painter. Most people have a kind of conviction that this is what they <u>have</u> to do regardless. Even a tired teacher such as myself, for forty years I have gone home and ground away at painting in the evening although I have taught all day. David Park and I together used to haul studios full of paintings down to the Bay and throw them away, we simply had no further room for them and no one wanted them, but we kept painting. Finally...

Riess: But when you say "Grind away" you were loving it, weren't you? Or was it really a compulsion?

Wessels: Well, yes, grind away, and I mean grind away from some kind of internal compulsion. You were tired; you came home tired from teaching and you worked far into the night.

Riess: There are at least two points of view on record in our office: when Grace Morley talked about artists, she really talked about them as sensitive prophetic kinds of people. I mean she had a tremendous amount of respect for any kind of artistic effort. The other view is that artists are essentially simple people without profound things to say.*

Wessels: I don't think that either one of these views is exclusively right. Grace Morley has been kind to the sensitive type of artist and others have taken the other point of view. I think that the right view includes both. Artists are all kinds of people. There are literally all kinds of people who paint. You can not categorize them as personality types. Some of them are as crude and obtuse and as vicious as any

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*Grace L. McCann Morley, Art, Artists, Museums, and the San Francisco Museum of Art (Regional Cultural History Project, Berkeley, 1960).

Louis Bassi Siegriest, Reminiscences (Regional Cultural History Project, Berkeley, 1954).

Wessels: animal and they still paint. There are others that are so nebulous and so mystical and so sensitive that they don't belong here at all. Then there are others like myself who have always eaten regularly, who have done a day's work, and glory in the fact that they are rather normal. [Laughter] And so it takes all kinds. The art world is very big.

I have always felt that the world did not owe me a living. That whatever the world demanded of me, I would try to do as well as I could. The reason that I am a teacher is not because I set out to be, but because people asked me to talk about what I did. When I came back from Europe as a student and put paintings into shows, people said, "What in the world did you do that for?" In explaining, I became a teacher perforce.

Riess: A lot of people would just turn on their heel and not explain.

Wessels: I always felt that it was kind of a game between me and the world. The world asked certain things of me and in so far as they asked and I saw that it was reasonable, I tried to fulfill it. And the world forced me into the role of a teacher. I think that the present world probably would not have done that; I

Wessels: think that the present world would probably have been able to read what I was trying to say in my paintings, at least the evidence is now that they are seeing it. Now they are asking me to stop teaching and continue painting which is coming a little late but nevertheless I am happy that it is coming.

Riess: There is another theory of the artist as prophet, really reading the public mind and a little bit ahead of the time.

Wessels: I don't think that the artist is consciously that. I think that he is like the sensitive instrument that reflects or gathers or vocalizes feelings. I don't think that he is always aware himself that he is doing this. He does not work in a vacuum and yet at the same time he works very much alone. He comes in from his daily life with his unconscious filled with all sorts of forces that have played on him and he starts to paint. These things become symbolized in the paint in one way or another and sometimes he doesn't even realize he is doing it. He is what you might think of as a receiving instrument. He himself is not very conscious of it sometimes. I would not put him in the status of prophet.

I don't set out consciously to tell the world. I

Wessels: just start painting and this occurs to me that this would be the thing to do; that is the way it is.

I think that some artists on the other hand are quite consciously social critics and they are having a wonderful time giving the public back some of its own, particularly the more successful publicists who became painters. Whistler was that type, he was able to tell the public where to head in, and he rather enjoyed doing it. Another one was Courbet, who led a very argumentative public life, but not all of us do that.

Riess: How about the more modern people?

Wessels: Hofmann as a teacher could make a philosophical case for himself every time. On the other hand, you cannot get a peep out of de Kooning. Some of them are garrulous and give all sorts of false reasons. I once tried to pin Esteban Vicente down, "Do you paint all by yourself?" Do you just paint your own soul state?"

"Oh, but I don't live in a vacuum. I don't know what I paint. I paint because I want to paint. I don't know where it all comes from." But it comes from some place.

Riess: It's interesting. The non-artist must have this same thing to a certain extent. What do we go home and do?

Riess: We go home and forget it, I guess.

Wessels: You have hit on something that seems terribly important; at least it seems so to me. One thing our civilization is doing if we continue the way we are going is manufacturing more and more leisure time for everybody. We have really got to find new avenues for expression--other than getting out on the highway and driving a hundred miles an hour and going to baseball games--for everybody. In other words it seems to me that one of the only open frontiers, one of the only places left for the enterprising mind to expand is in the world of new creations, inventions, art--there is no longer any wilderness. Pretty soon we may be on the moon or even further--there are only two frontiers left: outer space and man's own imagination.

It seems to me that we have got to train people to use their imaginations in order that they continue to have the sense of discovering that we have had up to now. There is no place else to go. It seems to me that art training and cultural training of all sorts becomes terrifically important right now in our society where more and more of the drudge work is being taken out of our hands by machines.

I am not a sociologist, but I have this feeling that when I teach someone how to paint, I am perhaps

Wessels: saving one more man from frustrations and the analyst's couch!

Riess: I think that is true and when I read the thinking of Stephen Pepper when the department here at the University of California at Berkeley was getting started, I have that feeling that it was for everybody to come and get something. Yet, it seems now to have turned into a professional thing.

Wessels: Well, everybody can come but nothing is any good unless the standards are high. I think that everybody should play golf if they want to play golf; I think that everybody should paint; everybody should fish. Out of all this tremendous activity, there will have been a few who point the way, who will have gone further than anyone else, who will be superior. You only get the best painters during a time when there are a lot of people painting. So I think that everyone should who wants to, but not everyone should expect to excel everyone else. All of us can speak English after a fashion, but not all of us are poets. I think that there is a natural ability and perhaps a certain degree of accident has its part. Certain people will simply develop superior talent, that is all there is to it, although the opportunity should be open to everybody, you can't tell where

Wessels: this lightning is going to stike.

Riess: So then the teacher is the one who decides, I mean by your praise or lack of it...

Wessels: Even here I distrust one teacher and one reason that I think this department is good is that it has eight or ten of them and we sometimes differ as to whose talents are the best.

Riess: Yes, but you would not come into the contact with the eight or ten of them unless art was your major.

Wessels: We have a law that a major student has to work with at least three for just that reason. The student has to search around for the person who can help him, the same way as you go to a butcher or doctor.

Riess: I think what I am asking is how much encouragement there is for coming and taking just one course?

Wessels: They are absolutely open.

Riess: But do you think that that many come now?

Wessels: Consider for example: This course on art materials which is the last lower division course the students take here, in order to get in there the person must have gotten past at least two other courses with passing grades. All right, there is that in the selection. But I have art historians in there who are never going to paint. They want to know what art materials do so they

Wessels: can understand painting better. I have some people who never intend to go any further, who just love it. Then again I have a small number of people who intend to be art majors. I would say, 30 per cent of these students intend to become artists, the rest are simply there for avocational purposes.

TEACHING AT PULLMAN

Wessels: As I mentioned, in about 1940, after seven years of day and night work, no vacations, I landed in the hospital. When I came out of this, it seemed that my world had collapsed completely. All the money we had saved went for hospital fees and so on. However, the School of Arts and Crafts was beginning to recover a little bit from the Depression so Frederick Meyer--even before I was able to stand, I was able to talk, though my voice was so quavery that I could hardly lecture--employed me as a lecturer and I taught classes in painting materials. During that time I originated the very thing that I am teaching here at the University of California this morning, a course in the use of the various art materials. This was taught at Arts and Crafts under the name of "Painters Craft" first. This was the first time such a course was taught, as far as I know, outside of Paris. I was doing this, and we were living sort of hand to mouth, and my parents who were naturally very concerned, offered help too.

As luck would have it, we did not really need it, because Worth Ryder, who was the great name in the

Wessels: University of California art department, got me an invitation to teach in Washington at the Washington State University summer session. He received a request from Worth Griffin who was the chairman of the art department at Pullman for someone to come up and teach the summer session. Worth immediately turned that over to me.

We went up there and I taught on the Nespelem Indian Reservation--landscape painting--to a small group. They liked what I did so well that they asked me to come back next year on their permanent staff. I told them that I could not come that way, that I had obligations to Arts and Crafts.

I really deeply felt that Meyer had been so good to me and helped me so much through the years that I could not leave him flat, even though I knew that his school was in a very shaky condition and he was losing control due to just tiredness, old age and the Depression. So I told him (Meyer) that I would have to be assured of a living salary. "I'll do anything you want me to here--I have been writing your speeches; I have been your assistant; I have been teaching any courses when you could not find another teacher. Surely you can put me on a regular secure salary basis even though

Wessels: it is small." I said, "I will give you six months to think it over, but if nothing is done before six months, then I will have to accept this offer in the north because I can not live on my salary."

Well, nothing was done in six months so I left and I went up there and was there for five years.

The dean at Pullman said that he had never heard of a man being so reluctant to leave a bad job. [Laughter] He said, "Anyway this seems to promise that if we treat you well here, why you will treat us fairly if you ever go away." So I did, because as a matter of fact, when Stephen Pepper asked me to come back down here, I gave the dean up there a whole year's notice. Not only that, but I arranged for a very good man to take my place and this was James McCray. James McCray went up there for a year and then he was invited back down here. Ever since then the art department at Pullman has had a strong representation from Berkeley. Its present chairman is Keith Monahan who was Worth Ryder's assistant for years. And one of its shining lights is Bob Sterling who is a graduate from here.

Riess: What were things like in Pullman when you got there?

Wessels: It was my first university teaching experience and Worth Griffin was an odd character. He was a Wayman

Wessels: Adams portrait painter when he came in. He was brought out there to paint the Indians. Everybody there was crazy about Indian lore. But he got hold of Sheldon Cheney's Primer of Modern Art and got bitten by the expressionist bug and began to paint expressionistically. And the young man in his department whom he helped, a very minor teacher in this department, was one Clyfford Still. Now Clyfford Still and Griffin, both of whom are very opinionated people, developed divided opinions about modern painting. This led to rows between them and without going into unnecessary detail I was brought up there to take Clyff Still's place when he left because he had become such a persona non grata that he had to get out.

I knew Clyff quite well before he began painting in the way that later made him famous. He was a very brilliant and opinionated person with a dramatic flair for adopting strange and attractive ideas and presenting them in a very dramatic way to his students. He always had a strong following.

Riess: What kind of art department was it? Were there history classes? Or all studio?

Wessels: I taught the history and introduced esthetics. There were classes in drawing and painting and even a small

Wessels: class in mural painting. The art department also had to teach some courses for education, art education. They had ceramics as the only craft and that was about it. It was organized as a fine arts department, not under anything like Letters and Science, not under Arts and Sciences.

While I was at Pullman...Pullman was sort of an assemblage of unrelated institutes when I got there. While I was there, the leadership changed from President Holland to President Wilson Compton, the lumber, wood-products man, brother of the famous physicist. He immediately asked for an overhaul of the whole curriculum.

I was one of what they called the Committee of Forty. And the Committee of Forty overhauled the catalog. We found therein, for instance, a theology major under agriculture, and we learned how a state institution developed. This one, being a land grant college, started with first a cow. And the cow had to eat so they brought a man who knew how to grow grain--an agronomist. The cow got sick so they got a veterinarian college and the veterinarian college had to have a bacteriologist so they got a bacteriologist. The bacteriologist had to have a chemist so they got a

Wessels: chemist. In the meantime the farmer began getting rich and his daughter wanted some culture and so they set up a singing school and so they had a music department. And it is in this way that everything grew backwards from the cow. Now you got this very strange structure with the cow at the top. We were set to rectify matters and Wilson Compton's Committee of Forty were men chosen from all disciplines who were to rewrite the basic structure of the whole institution and set up the Arts and Sciences College, which is comparable to our Letters and Science, to relate these various vocational institutes to it with Arts and Sciences as a core. In other words, to up-end the whole structure and reconstitute it. I sat for nine hours a week for three years on the committees which did that, and wrote a good section of the new parts having to do with humanities. I was later considered as dean of the humanities department up there, but I preferred to stay here. I don't like all administrative work.

Riess: You said that you taught art history. When had you acquired a teaching knowledge of art history?

Wessels: I never had an art history course; I was self trained. I found as a painter that I had to...I did have a history of architecture course one time and I did have a history

Wessels: of music course one time, but I never had a course in the history of painting but I have read and travelled extensively and when the need arose, I was able to teach the course.

Riess: How did you and your wife like Pullman?

Wessels: We decided that the town and the university were the smallest part of it; living in the magnificent Northwest was the biggest part of it and so we got a house that looked out the other way, away from town, and we had a grand time. We went fishing and hunting and skiing and camping and all those things. The little internecine warfare between the townsmen and the university and so forth didn't concern us a bit, so we got along fine.

Other people who went up there and turned their faces inward found the place then rather small potatoes, though it has grown very much since.

Riess: But you had the feeling that you were there for good?

Wessels: I thought I was there from then on. I had no idea that they intended to bring me back here, which apparently was in the cards all the time.

Riess: Who were you in touch with at Berkeley most of the time?

Wessels: Well, we would come down every summer. I felt that I was isolated there and I felt it was very important, although Pullman was all right, to retain contact with

Wessels: places where the mainstream of painting and art could be experienced. San Francisco was better than Seattle. It was pretty backward up there in that way then although there were some things of interest there. San Francisco was the most important art center available to us so even during wartime, when travel was difficult and we burned cleaning fluid in the car, we got here for the summer.

Riess: Burned cleaning fluid?

Wessels: We didn't have gasoline, you see, so we would mix gasoline with laundry cleaning fluid and puffing and huffing smoke we would make it all the way.

Riess: I always have the feeling that it is kind of downhill anyway from Washington. It looks like it on the map. [Laughter]

Wessels: On the map, yes, but it is a good deal uphill. But we had a little car that burned very little gasoline and by squeezing our A tickets hard, we were able to make it. We made it every summer down here and refreshed ourselves.

I taught one summer session for Arts and Crafts and then I was brought down here to the University of California for a summer session. During that time I was asked to stay.

Riess: If you had had an extraordinarily good student up at Pullman, would you have tended to send him elsewhere?

Wessels: Yes, I did. I had one such student whose name was William Dole and he later became the chairman of the art department at Santa Barbara. I ran up against him in the extension classes up there and he wanted to know where he should go to study painting. And I said, "Berkeley, of course." I had no idea at that time that I would be here myself and would supervise his graduate work.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, ART DEPARTMENT

Wessels: Now I should like to make clear my connection with this University. I came in 1930 as Hofmann's official assistant and the University hired me as an assistant for his first summer session while I was here. At that time the College of Arts and Crafts was in difficulties and they were trying to get me back to their faculty where I had been. There was a question for awhile as to whether I should remain in the University as an assistant to Worth. But Worth really did not know me very well. He had mainly come to know me through correspondence with Munich. He used me really because I was the only one there, and when I expressed enthusiasm for his idea and brought Hofmann here, I had fulfilled my mission. I had delivered Hofmann here and helped him through his first summer session. So the question about what I should do was solved by an offer from Arts and Crafts.

At that time, I understand, there was a discussion as to whether I should remain here as an assistant for Worth. But Worth had a preference for John Haley whom he had known for a long time in Munich as another Hofmann student. And so John came here; the first one after

Wessels: Worth. John Haley came here from Minneapolis where he had been an assistant to Cameron Booth, and a good many people tried to make a rivalry between us, which was kind of curious at the time. The trouble was that we were fast friends and had been ever since we had met in Minneapolis and so nothing ever came of it. The fact that I didn't come onto the University staff until five or six years later has more to do with the fact that the Japanese war intervened than anything else. I did not know it, but when I left Berkeley to go to teach in Pullman, Washington...Stephen Pepper, who was then the chairman of the department, came to me and said very seriously, "Glenn, don't sell your house."

I said, "But I don't believe in absentee landlordism. If I am going to live up there, I am going to live up there."

He said, "But don't sell your house. I can't say anything more."

And so, two years later, I gaily sold the house, and two years after that, I was invited back here. I would have been invited back here probably within a year after Dr. Pepper spoke if it had not been for the war conditions. I spent the wartime up there.

So after Worth had John to assist him, then I think

Wessels: Worth and Stephen Pepper both decided that I should be the next one. But actually the next one to come was Erle Loran, who also came from Minneapolis and also was a Cameron Booth student and who partook of the Hofmann doctrine, you might say, second hand because he had never been a student of Hofmann, only he had been a very good painter, a prize-winning painter. In later years, through an introduction of mine, Hofmann and Erle became close friends. Erle was the one who carried out the negotiations which brought the Hofmann works here.

I was saying that Worth consulted Hofmann on the development of this department. When there were plans to enlarge the art department from the old building where we were over on Hearst and to move to Spreckels (which is now torn down and the music building has taken its place), Hofmann was consulted as to how the studio should be arranged and a good deal about curriculum was discussed with him and so forth. And at that time (I was in on those discussions), the idea, at least implicitly or tentatively, was there that I might be asked to stay to help carry out these ideas. But John Haley was brought instead.

In any event, I was very surprised when shortly

Wessels: after the Japanese war I was invited back. And in spite of the fact that I had advanced in that institution and was really quite happy there, the attachments to Berkeley were still pretty strong and the invitation was accepted with enthusiasm. I began in the summer session and then went right on to teach during the regular semester.

I have a curious thing to relate about that. The first course that I was asked to give that summer was the present Art 1B survey which is required of all painting students and sculpture students in the department. It used to be given by Worth Ryder and it is now given by Chipp and others. But at any rate I was asked to lecture. 1B was a course that I had given at two other schools but never here. I never thought anything about it, but I went to 11 Wheeler and got up on the rostrum, and looked at my notes; suddenly it dawned on me, or rather I was immediately reminded and got terribly upset,because I had flunked an examination in philosophy in that very room, I don't know how many years before, and the feeling of doom hit me so hard that I could hardly lecture. I was so ill that night that I could hardly teach the next day. I had to fight this to give the lecture in spite of the fact that I felt that here I

Wessels: was pretending to know something in the room where I had proven that I had not known anything. [Laughter] But this shows you what footloose psychology will do for you.

Riess: Did you have any hesitation about coming back?

Wessels: No, not in the least; I came back enthusiastically. I have always regarded this as home, and the people in the department as some of my closest friends, so that is the way it was.

Riess: Was it Professor Pepper himself who asked you back?

Wessels: Professor Pepper was chairman. He was the official one, but naturally it would have to be by department vote. And so I came in with the full support of everybody, I'm sure.

Riess: How was the department functioning when you got back here? Was it moving smoothly?

Wessels: Dr. Pepper was having to iron out difficulties inherited from previous administrations. He apparently welcomed my help in this because he knew I knew all the individuals involved and so on. So I found myself very much not only organizing my teaching, but very much employed in discussing department affairs with him.

For one thing, the curriculum set-up was a series of required courses, so that the student had to take one

Wessels: course before he could take another course and so on; and different professors taught differently and held different ideas and these courses did not necessarily connect. This was particularly true of the upper division. So it was decided that we would not try to agree on so many things but that we would try to agree on a fundamental course which we called 2-A which would be an orientation course in drawing and composition required of all people entering the department. That course would be the course taught by common consent and common agreement. It should contain material which was approved of by everybody; although the teachers might give different emphasis to these things, nevertheless these things would be mentioned in that course by common agreement.

On that basis the next course which was organized was the introduction to color which was also a course given by common consent; then a course in introduction to figure drawing. Later, not then, but later another course was put in instead of a second course in just introduction to color and painting, and the course I had initiated at Arts and Crafts in art technique was put in. First it was put into the department as a beginning course in the upper division which all students

Wessels: were required to take; later it was moved to its present position as the last course that the sophomore student takes before he qualifies for a major. It is now sort of a filter course, still there. Mr. Allen and Mr. Kasten taught it and I taught it my last semester. It is a course which even historians are finding useful because they find out, for instance, how wax painting is done, how egg tempera and gold leafing are done. All the business about permanent paintings, everything about stretching canvasses, preparing surfaces, preparing walls, all the cookbook matters that artists are apt to overlook in these days of metaphysical expression.

But the need for the course, it seemed to me, and one of the reasons why we have insisted on its importance, is because the present day avant garde paintings simply fall apart a few years after they are made. The painters have lost touch with the craftsman and this then is a return to the idea of honest craft in producing a work of art. There are ways of doing things which are permanent, which give exactly the same artistic effect as impermanent ways of doing things. You can't tell when you get the painting whether it has been permanently done or not. The artist has to be honest

Wessels: and know his materials in the first place, otherwise very often...well, the director of the painting restoration laboratory in the National Gallery of London, which is one of the best in the world, told me on a recent sabbatical tour, about six years ago, that 90 per cent of contemporary painting would not be with us 25 years from now. He said that he did not say that because he did not appreciate contemporary, he deplored its loss. He said even at the present time they were fighting for the life of the Van Goghs that they owned in the museum because of his negligence in terms of the materials.

Riess: I thought oil was oil and canvas was canvas...

Wessels: Oh, my, no! It is a very complicated business. You have to know a little physics, a little chemistry, and a lot about the history of art in order to do things in a way that is permanent. In recent years, the tendency of the artist has been...I think often contemporary artists, a good many of them, show evidence of a kind of a death wish; they do not care if things are permanent, permanence is not part of the scheme of our culture. Obsolescence seems to be rather almost a goal. Some of them paint that way.

You find, for instance, a very good friend of mine,

Wessels: deKooning, being completely indifferent to the fact that a piece of newspaper stuck to one of his paintings. Now anyone who has left his newspaper on the front lawn knows what happens to it; in a week it turns brown, in two weeks it is brittle, in three weeks it looks like it has been in a fire. It isn't any better than that when you stick it to oil paint. Nevertheless, deKooning left a piece of the New York Times sticking into one of these abstractions and he called it, whimsically enough, "Times Square". Well, he also did a lot of his best paintings--I photographed these sketches in his studio as he was doing them--on what we call railroad board, which is a cheap cardboard which turns brown, what is ordinarily used for window signs and so on. He said that he liked the feel of the brush on the surface. I said, "Okay, so why don't you use illustration board instead?"

"Oh, well...it's expensive."

I saw one of these cardboard paintings the other day. I have photographs of them in their original state and the board was white. Now the background of those paintings is dark brown. When I asked deKooning how he felt about that, he said he thought, well, maybe the color had improved.

Wessels: This shows you the laissez-faire attitude of the present day avant garde painter. He is interested in the act of creation, and for what happens to the painting after he has done it, he does not seem to give a hoot. We try to show that at other ages and at other times a different attitude pertained and, in this course, in Art 4 we teach our students that there are times when they may want to work permanently and if so, this is the way to do it.

Riess: Why were the materials so permanent way back when?

Wessels: Whistler, when asked what it was that he mixed with his colors to make them so brilliant, he said, "Well, it is a great secret and it is a rare commodity." The man who was after it persisted. Whistler said, "Well, I don't think you would come by any of this material." The man nevertheless persisted, and Whistler said, "I will tell you what it is if you won't tell anybody. I mix my colors with brains." [Laughter] And this is just exactly the case with the old masters. There aren't any real secrets; there is just a lot of patience and a lot of knowledge.

Riess: Now what did you mean by it being a filter course?

Wessels: A filter course is a slang term the University uses to refer to a course where you decide whether people can

Wessels: go on from there or not or whether they aren't worth keeping in the major.

Riess: Yes, this would work for the painting majors.

Wessels: The history majors don't have to take that although some of them do because they feel they want to know. They are only required to take here, I believe, two lower division painting courses so that they can at least know which end of the brush the hair is on. [Laughter]

Riess: As far as teaching the 2-A type course, everybody teaches it; I mean nobody can get out of it?

Wessels: Well, the more serious and far-sighted instructors welcome the chance to deal with freshman students; the more intelligent instructors, the far-seeing ones welcome the chance to work with the younger students and to help lay the foundation for their future work. Our general attitude has been that all of the instructors in the department should rotate in these courses, if it is possible. A normal load would be for a person to teach a freshman or a sophomore course, one or the other of the lower division courses and perhaps two upper division courses, or perhaps a graduate seminar and an upper division course and a freshman or sophomore course. This would be the normal distribution

Wessels: when we can do it. Visitors are never given 2-A because they don't know the traditions of the department, and 2-A is supposedly the tradition of the department.

Riess: Mr. Pepper says that you were trying to build up also the theory and criticism side.

Wessels: Yes, he had for years given a noble course called Philosophy 136 which had been required of all art students. It was a course in esthetics but esthetics with a very definite laboratory or studio slant related to it. I took this course, I remember I got an E in my first quiz. I got better grades later. But that is the way I started out. I felt coming from teaching at an art school that although there was a good deal of what artists call "philosophic twaddle" that nevertheless these were things that any serious artist must deal with and the philosophic questions raised there were questions that an artist had to answer for himself whether he agreed with the philosophy or not. He had to meet these questions and answer them squarely, otherwise he could not be said to have any integrity. So I took this all very seriously and began reading all the art philosophy that I could lay hands on, trying to build bridges between what the philosophers thought beauty was and what the painters

Wessels: thought it was and trying to find out how in laboratory practice one could relate the actual practice of painting to the theories about beauty.

Out of this effort came my course which I taught for the last time last semester, Art 132, which was set up to be kind of a bridge course between Dr. Pepper's more philosophic esthetics and the actual laboratory practice.

When Dr. Pepper retired the philosophy department saw fit to give that course a more metaphysical slant and to remove it from the actual practice of painters and musicians and so forth--because Dr. Pepper's course covered all of the art expressions, but my course was aimed particularly at painters. When that happened, with the general shortening of the curriculum, more and more pressure was on for breadth requirements and the time that the artists had to give to their major subject was limited and so only two units was allowed for this area. I tried to do in two units what I thought was essential out of Dr. Pepper's course, plus the bridges and the relationships to studio practice. This has been what my Art 132 course has been. They called it "picture-analysis" because it is not strictly philosophy and it

Wessels: is not strictly painting, but it is thinking about pictures: their construction, and their constitution and how these things relate to the philosophic notions of beauty.

Riess: Do you enjoy teaching that?

Wessels: It's always been hard work because I have had to rewrite it every semester. I taught it for years and I have never taught it the same way. I am very relieved not to have to teach it anymore but now I find that I may have to teach it at San Francisco State!

Riess: Why do you have to keep rewriting it?

Wessels: Because new concepts come in; just about the time you make a nice neat rule, why some genius comes along and shows you that it is not an all-encompassing principle that you are dealing with so you have to scratch the rule--you have to broaden your definitions! In other words, I am a painter and I grow along with painting and as new ideas come into painting, I see that some of the old definitions do not fit and so I have to rewrite the definitions. [Laughter] But a few of them stay fast. I still think that I could say honestly that any work of art that is not rhythmic--now it may be a very complicated rhythm and not appreciable by everybody, but I think I could say as one of the universals

Wessels: that seems to stick is that only rhythmic expression is successful expression; only rhythmic expression is efficient expression, and unless a thing is stated with a degree of order and rhythm, it will not last. It may be novel; it may be smart; it may be witty; but it will end up in the attic if it has not got this intrinsic quality of rhythmic structure at its core.

Riess: Does this course provoke a lot of discussion among the students?

Wessels: Yes, this is one of the good things about it. What it does is give them a lot of stuff to object to and to try out, and to redefine and so forth. I tell them when I begin lecturing the course that my concept of teaching art is that art like life always changes and my concept of teaching it is simply to raise the questions which they must answer for themselves and to give them the answers that I have worked out. If they find that they must have different answers, then they will have to find them. Teaching to me is the presentation of the discipline that one man has worked out and found necessary for his life in art. The student then is not bound to copy that and try to put on the suit of clothes to fit himself, but he must construct

Wessels: for himself something like that, something that will serve the same purposes. This is what I think is about all that an art teacher can do. He can present what he had to do to be an artist and then the student gets some idea of what decisions he will have to make and what positions he will have to adopt.

I guess I can sum up my feelings about this by saying that one of my better students of former years met me not too long ago and he looked a little sheepish and said, "Mr. Wessels, you know, I have rejected everything you have ever taught me." Of course, this could not be entirely so, but it could be in part. I think that he expected me to react violently and actually what I did was to smile and say, "Well, you know who you are now." So you see, it is simply a matter of self discovery; to force the student to answer questions which are basic questions is what I think the study of art philosophy does.

Riess: Was there anything else done to build up the theory and criticism side?

Wessels: I tried hard at one time to...well, I observed at one time after studying the careers and training of eight of the most influential, journalistic critical writers in America that these people who write the newspaper

Wessels: art criticism have an undue amount of influence on the art world. I say "undue", I would only use that word after looking into their own knowledge and their own preparation for their work. I found out that of eight who were writing at that time that only one had ever had a brush in his hand and only one had ever had any part of any formal art training.

So I felt that it might be within the province of the University, either in the art department or in the journalism department, to work in this area and to arrange at least a specialist discipline in art criticism which would serve the person who was going to write in the daily papers and so forth. I made some efforts in that direction which were not followed up at all. They were misunderstood. On the part of the artists, they said, "Who reads that stuff anyway?"

On the part of the literary people, they have a kind of wonderful nebulous idea, like the education department has about teachers, you get a M. A. in education and you are allowed to teach anything whether you know it or not. Just so with critics, if you can make nice-sounding words, why you are allowed to criticize anything whether you know it or not. It has been my contention that the critic must understand the content

Wessels: of what he is criticizing and I don't see how he can do that unless he has some degree of actual physical contact with art materials and art processes, some knowledge of the laboratory work.

Now this same attitude has been accepted in this University for the training of art historians: all the art historians must, at least in the lower division, have had some experience in trying to paint. This is not true in other institutions, the larger number of art historians who talk authoritatively about painting don't know what paint is. That is to say physically. They are scholars, they are really archeologists with a specialist attitude. So they sometimes arrive at very false conclusions. Some of the critics have arrived at very false conclusions too because they haven't understood the discipline of paint, which is a language in itself. You can say things that sound fine in words but when you try to paint them, it is impossible. And you can paint things that are not describable in words; they are two different languages! Two different means of communication and one must know both before one can translate.

Riess: I think colleges produce people who know how to criticize. You are taught to have a kind of critical point of view.

Wessels: This to me without the content is like taking courses in pedagogy and then trying to teach plumbing when you have never had a wrench in your hand.

Riess: So then, but no solutions?

Wessels: No, nothing came of that. Strangely enough something else did come of it in an odd way. At the time I thought, "Let's see, what critic can I respect who is a successful journalistic critic and at the same time would be of University stature?" So I encouraged Alfred Frankenstein to come over and give the lecture in that class, in Art 132, and what that resulted in was his coming and teaching History of American Art (I guess over the protest of some historians, who thought that he was not a scholar),but he did not teach criticism, which is what I wanted him for. He does, I think, as respectable a job as anybody in America does in that area. I don't always agree with him, but that is beside the point. I think he does a most respectable job, and I think he has more training, although he is self-taught, than most of the people who write about art. Yet, he is not imparting that knowledge to the people in the University; what he is doing is teaching a perfectly ordinary scholar's course in American painting.

Riess: When it gets up to contemporary painting doesn't it...

Wessels: All the historians embark on a little criticism here and there, to that degree, yes.

I am a crank in this; I will admit it frankly. It seems to me that the historical attitude is not the only attitude. The philosophic attitude has to be brought in too. The historians' criticism of the critical, theoretical approach is that it generalizes, it deals with abstractions that are not real, and so forth. They prefer to heap up an immense amount of detail to prove something. In answer to that, I have quoted Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who said, "No generalization is worth a damn, especially this one." [Laughter]

I think that this thing must be approached from both sides. I think that the fact-keeping, archeological-minded, date-minded historian is necessary, but I think also the man who is able to stand on a mountain top and look over the whole scene and pick out the salient features and the universal principles is also necessary. Neither one is always right.

Riess: Your description of the critic makes it a pretty impossible thing for anybody to be. How could anyone be that able?

Wessels: I think that some people have been that able. It is mostly an attitude of mind. A critic must have a good foundation in history and he must have a good foundation in practice and he must be able to express himself decently in words. And I think that is possible. It has to be a pretty big person, that is true. He can not be a mere archeologist on the one hand and he can't be a mere emotional painter on the other. He has to be a painter who thinks and a painter who knows history. Or he has to be an historian who is not satisfied with details; he wants general principles. Either one of these two can be critics. At the present time, I think that some of the historians do a pretty good job in the criticism area. But they do it as a kind of a by-product not as a central subject. I had hoped to set it up as a central subject and I did not succeed.

The present situation is that David Simpson,who is a painter with a decided intellectual turn of mind and a great interest in philosophic matters, and widely read, and certainly one of the most avant garde of the avant garde painters, has expressed great eagerness to take over my materials to study them and to try to institute a course along these lines. I insisted for my part

Wessels: that he not repeat my material but that he build on it and use it, expand it, change it as he needs to. But I am giving him my slides, my notes, and everything that I have, so that he may make out of it what he can. There is a chance that he will continue this idea.

Now there is another thing: in the present culture, artists don't talk or use words very well. It is kind of a part of the isolation of the artist, the ivory tower attitude, a hangover from Romanticism. The artist is somehow or another a special sort of person removed from the rest of the world. He doesn't communicate in ordinary terms at all. He invents big words to conceal his emptiness of ideas and so on. I think one of the most recent examples of this is the recent "Creative Art of the Moment" Symposium in San Francisco where people paid $50 or $60 to listen to six imported New Yorkers who said nothing that hasn't gone on in our own seminars for years here too and a good deal more too. Most of these men could not express themselves, some of them could, what little they said was very biased, not very well informed. It showed that these were really ignorant men, very sincere perhaps, but lost in the fog of their own ideas, with no ability to

Wessels: compare themselves to others. Although I think it was an important event, if it only showed this: it shows that the present day artist is not a complete man; he needs more of the kind of education that we give here, if you don't mind my saying so.

The artist rather prides himself on not being able to speak. Some of our own colleagues here, even though they teach in universities, decry the reading of books! They think that these things get in the way of being an artist somehow. I have always fought that idea. It seems to me that because you know one language, it is no sign that you shouldn't know another. In fact, if you know the other language, you even know your own better. I have learned this because I know that when I understand German and French, I know that I understand English better. So if I know something about painting as a means of communication, and I know something about speech as a means of communication, then I understand both better.

Riess: This anti-reading attitude rubbing off on the students sounds really kind of dangerous.

Wessels: This is one of the things that is producing these odd-balls. When I say odd-balls, I mean these unfortunate people who can not relate themselves to the world, the

Wessels: creation of this atmosphere of particularism, that an artist is somehow mystically different than anybody else and does not have to subscribe to the same standards at all. This is perhaps necessary for certain genius types and I admit that there are people who are exceptions. But this invites the art department as a refuge for people who can not relate to anything. So we get a surprising number of people who can't meet University standards because they think somehow or other that in art there is a refuge for non-regimentation, as they call it. Refuge from thinking. I think that we have less such people than you might expect to have because generally University standards are rather difficult. But art has become a catch-all for misfits everywhere. The whole profession of art has become down-graded because of it. This is why we need standards; and we need criticism; and we need it badly. This whole thing meshes.

Riess: You were saying that these New Yorkers who were out here for the symposium exhibited kinds of things that don't happen if you have a good university background, and yet it is still happening within this University. I want to ask you to compare this with the professional school teaching that you did for so many years.

Wessels: The professional school has been moving closer to the liberal arts curriculum and the university has been moving closer to the professional school so they are nearer now than they ever were before. There was a time when the art schools were one thing and the universities were another. They still are in Europe. This is reflected in the curriculum and this is one of the things that causes the greatest pain in the transference of units. When I moved to this University--I had been at the University for two years, then I went to art school, then when I attempted to convert my art school units to the University units, I shed units right and left! I think I came out with one third of the units that I had actually earned in art school. What it really amounts to, I went to art classes and studied in top grade art classes for seven years. Now that normally, in art school terms, doesn't lead to a degree. It happened that in five years a B.F.A. was given and then besides that, over and above that, I had been in collegiate schools altogether another seven years! So what did I come out with, after fourteen years' work? Only an M.A., because these two fields are thought not to relate. And yet in my life, one is not possible without the other. I went to art school and to what

Wessels: the art teacher said, I said, "How can we prove this? Who says so? Where is the historical background for this? Where is the philosophy for it? Where is the psychological proof of these things?" I came to the University to find out.

Riess: If you were going to be around here much longer, would you be participating in some of the innovations in education going on around here?

Wessels: I don't know. I am in the position now of probably being considered old hat in some quarters and too old for effective action in others. So it would depend on whether I was invited. I will say these things, and I won't be listened to because they are not popular things. But nevertheless I don't know how widely spread they will be.

Now there is too much--I am speaking now as a very old teacher, passing forty years of full time teaching--there is too much beginning at the top and not enough preparation in university art courses and elsewhere. The students always want to do what they see in the latest art magazines instead of working on the fundamentals which make good things possible. It is not possible to be original by copying originality. One must build some foundations, and the impatience of youth,

Wessels: it seems to me, has forced the hand of art instructors everywhere and they are allowing students to experiment before they know what they are experimenting with. Now this may make me sound terribly old hat, but it's true.

Riess: Do you think that is the nature of the instruction here?

Wessels: No, that is not unique here, but it is true here to some extent. It is true of almost every art school; they begin to experiment before they know what the tools are.

Riess: You do probably more public lecturing than anyone in this department, don't you?

Wessels: Yes. I have probably been more active as a juror of art shows and as a visiting lecturer throughout the state, and over in Nevada, and up through Washington, than any other single member of the department, although some others have done these things too. We've talked about how I was more or less forced to teach, to explain, when I returned from Europe and my study with Hofmann.

The lectures are hard work. It isn't just a gift of gab; it means that one must really prepare for these things. One of the beefs I have about painters is that they have so little respect for their audiences. When they get up to talk, they never prepare anything and so

Wessels: they never say anything. I work two or three hours for every hour that I appear in public.

Every experience that I have had with artists appearing in public has been unfortunate. Most of them seem to act like clowns and think that it is up to them to mug and make fun and that it is not a serious occasion anyway and that words are not important anyway and so it is just a kind of "happening". Against this I pose the idea that a lecturer has something to say and he has to say it well, and he has to prepare for it.

Riess: Dr. Pepper said that you were being groomed to be chairman of the department, at least that is what he had in mind.

Wessels: I suppose that is so, although I had had my fill and more of administrative work and I never had any such ambitions. At the time that I might have become chairman, I became very ill. It was really, I think, partly frustration that brought it about; I found out that the high ideas that I had for the department were probably impossible to carry out and that there were more differences between myself and some influential members of the department than I had suspected. I went through a very difficult time.

Hofmann's departure after receiving an honorary degree at U.C. Charter Day ceremonies
San Francisco Airport. Taken by Glenn Wessels 5 April 1964
Right to left: Mrs. Wessels, H.Hofmann. Erle Loran, Clyta Loran, Monica Haley

Wessels: Then at that time, there was an effort on the part of the University administration, I think, to bring the then decorative arts department into some kind of better relationship with the art department. It was felt that two separate art departments did not make sense. Dr. Pepper really sponsored this effort. The decorative arts people objected; they did not want to be related to the art department. They are now being forced to relate to the new School of Environmental Design. But I don't think they like that any better. What they wanted was to remain independent, and they fought hard for it. It was a rather thin major. As one member of the dean's advisory committee put it, it concerned itself with wallpaper and tapestries--a thin major! There is no doubt at all that it needed integrating somewhere. We made this effort and tried very hard to make them see that they would be happier within the art department than anywhere else. But they did not see it that way.

On the other hand, the sculptors, who were then with architecture, did think that they would be better off with the art department and they are doing very well there now. They are very happily a part.

All these things occurred under Dr. Pepper's

Wessels: administration and in some minor degree I carried the ball on some of them. When Dr. Pepper was called away for a year at Harvard, I did act as chairman. I think this service, which lasted one year, sort of helped me to escape any further service as chairman. [Laughter]

Riess: What were the factions then in the department?

Wessels: There were those who opposed the enlargement of the department at all. They still oppose it, although they can't help it. There were those who felt that the department should limit itself only to studio teaching. I and others were condemmed for using the lecture method, for lecturing at all. It was all part of this idea that the artist should not talk, that there should be only studio classes and only small ones at that. There should be no attempt to serve the University as a whole. It should be a little quiet niche where certain men could follow their own whims and not be disturbed. I was against that and I worked very hard to bring in people who were against it too. I succeeded in many cases. So the young men who are now in the department by and large, I think, will carry forward the general idea of the art department which I had. In other words the enemy is now in the minority. There is more than one way to kill a cat and if you can't win over people, why then you can

Wessels: surround them.

Riess: It is interesting how at a certain point in history a certain man is brought in and things change. Like Worth Ryder's arrival here seems to be so critical in the development of the art department.

Wessels: I suppose you could sum up my efforts as a continual effort to relate the art department to the rest of the University without losing the significant content of art. Because I was not in complete agreement with the ivory-tower artists on the one hand, and wasn't in complete agreement with the University scholars on the other, I have been kind of a lone wolf and played both sides against the middle most of the time. It seems to me that I saw another thing. I saw a person, what you might call a "university artist", a person who had a liberal arts background and whose specialty was painting or sculpturing. This I think is what the department stands for.

Riess: From the way that art is defined in the world today, that is not what anybody expected.

Wessels: If the relationship of art to society has any meaning at all, then the most significant person is the one who has the wide view as well as the narrow specialist one.

As I say, these things are not quickly come by.

Wessels: There has been lots of blood shed in the process of evolution. Some of it was mine.

I would like to say though, that I have great faith in the future of the art department of the University. I think that the young men who are in here now see their way and will carry the ball in the direction that it was intended to go in the first place. I think that most of the difficulties are over, but there, of course, will be new ones.

PARTIAL INDEX

Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Graduated from Goucher College with a B.A. in English in 1957. Post-graduate work at the University of London and the University of California, Berkeley, in English and art history.

Feature writing and assistant woman's page editor, Bethlehem, Pa., Globe-Times. Free-lance writing and editing in Berkeley and volunteer work on starting a new Berkeley newspaper.

Editor in Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art, cultural history, environmental design, photography, and University history.

GLENN WESSELS

Dear Wessels:

In writing this foreword for your first one-man show (of large paintings), I feel as if I were giving the bride away! You had to travel a pretty difficult path to find your real self as a productive painter—the way so many artists must who must split their lives amongst a multiplicity of contrary aims and duties. An artist who is compelled to teach over a long period of his life can do this only on a creative basis, engaging his whole personality, as in the process of creating a work of art. A creative teacher is steadily confronted with psychological raw material which is offered him in the talent of his students. Talent is common, as are the means for creation, but . . . only instinct and inner vision can awaken these into creative utterance. An awareness of this is basic both to creative teaching and to the unfolding of the creative urge toward the greatness of positive, substantial, imaginative creation. This awareness has opened new vistas to you now and will unfold even more excitingly in the future. Of this your show gives plenty of promise.

HANS HOFMANN

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS . . . JUNE 1 - 28, 1959

1. Sea 1957
2. Moonlit Cove
3. Shore Wind 1958
4. Riptide
5. Evening Wind
6. Sycamores
7. Foothill Autumn
8. Spring Snow
9. Breaker
10. Over the Mountain
11. Dark Sea *(Illustrated)*
12. Night Surf II
13. Precipice
14. Delta Water
15. The Mountain
16. Ashes 1959
17. Sea and Rock
18. Flight of Leaves
19. Coming Rain
20. Stump
    Lent by Mrs. Pauline Alvarez
21. Wild Oats
22. Afternoon Wind
23. Night Breakers
24. Wave and Cliff
25. High Winter

M. H. DE YOUNG MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Golden Gate Park • San Francisco

U.C. Shows Wessels' Landscapes

By MIRIAM DUNCAN CROSS
Tribune Art Critic

The new, wondrous sea and landscapes painted in Italy and Greece the past year by Glenn Wessels, recently retired as professor of art at the University of California, Berkeley, are appropriately on exhibit at the Art Department's Worth Ryder Gallery on Kroeber [illegible] through Nov. [illegible]

Over 30 years ago the late Worth Ryder persuaded Wessels, his colleague in the University's Art Department, to come to Wet. [illegible] Hofmann [illegible] Hofmann, [illegible] the "[illegible] region [illegible] at Berkeley. He went [illegible] establish schools in New York and Provincetown and a world reputation as teacher and [illegible] in gratitude for which [illegible] from [illegible] and [illegible] the University's large collection of his paintings and [illegible] the proposed [illegible] Art Museum.

HIS OWN WORDS

[illegible] Wessels paint [illegible] best discussed in his own words. "Energy for me is the ultimate reality of our time—[illegible] and concurrence, ebb and flow, rise and fall, advance and retreat, welling and thinking, volume and energy, [illegible] and expansion.

Wessels went to Europe on an appointment to the University Institute for Creative Arts which gave him time and funds to paint this extraordinarily inspired body of work. At 63 he appears at the peak of his career and doubtless like Hofmann will continue to create with ever-increasing vitality and vision.

GLENN WESSELS

WINE DARK SEA

His paintings make a magnetic field of the gallery so the viewer must deliberately [illegible] work to experience the individual [illegible] pull. His former close-up analysis of the dynamics of water in motion is climaxed in the lushly painted "Wine Dark Sea," a radiant spray danced up from the richly colored confidance by a brisk wind that sang along the wine dark sea. There is news in his expanded vision — vast views looking down to green valleys [illegible] to [illegible] wind were [illegible] painting with [illegible]

INCESSANT ENERGY

[illegible] is summed up [illegible] called [illegible] Like Van Gogh, Wessels charges the landscape with energy. Greater, [illegible] suggesting lessening [illegible] increased vision is [illegible] of [illegible] lightness [illegible] color. Colors [illegible] across the gallery.

[illegible] Dogs and Lady's assemblies, the [illegible] pass and sheer beauty [illegible] these dynamic personal [illegible] These many other [illegible] to have [illegible]

AN OUTSTANDING SHOW AT MILLS COLLEGE

By MIRIAM DUNGAN CROSS
Tribune Art Critic

Most comprehensive show in the long career of U.C. Professor Emeritus Glenn Wessels, now animating the Mills College Art Gallery, is proof that at 69 his powers are in full flood.

The exhibit includes not only the recent, wondrous landscapes of Sicily and the Alps and the Homeric seascapes, which all but sold out at the showing in the Worth Ryder Gallery, but the earlier atmosphere and erupting seas paintings dating back to the early '30s, and a work just finished.

It was a joy to see the European paintings again (done under appointment to the U.C. Institute for Creative Arts) in the larger space and daylight of the Mills Gallery and in the light of the earlier works and to discover that light itself, an inner illumination, distinguishes these still dynamic and even more sympathetic recent works.

Paint has thinned. Color is broken into components for richer, impressionist harmonies.

While energy for Wessels continues to be "the ultimate reality of our time," he contrasts his dynamic works with quiet ones. Professor Herschel Chipp of the U.C. art department beautifully expresses these opposites: "The pounding of the surf at Mendocino and the gentle stirrings of the sea at Messina, the expressionist excitement of a summer snow storm in the Slazkammergut and the gradual aging process of sun and weather on a Sicilian hill town."

With considerable trouble Wessels assembled the earlier works which he considered high points in his painting from owners all over Central California. Some, acquired straight from his studio, have not been shown before.

The paintings range from the sere, prickly weeds through the atmosphere suffusions of color to the exploding, undulating wind-lashed seas, emotional expressions emotionally painted. Of the 49 works in the show 44 are in private and public collections. Tie that! (Mills noted artist-teacher Ralph DuCasse has one; S.F. Arts Commission another.

Surprisingly, the two works we consider the ultimate refinement of Wessels' vision, are still for sale. They are "Calabria," a painting of sunlight shimmering on still water that would have made Monet weep, and "Scilla," a poetic concept of boiling seas in rich harmonies of color scattering light-catching circles of spray both Homer and Vergil would admire and a most skillfully organized and executed painting besides.

American Drawing

Second important exhibit at Mills, "150 Years of American Drawing," comes from the noted collection of John Davis Hatch of Lenox, Mass., pioneer collector in this field. The 46 drawings, covering a period from 1780 to 1930, Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley to Raphael Sawyer (only artist in the group still alive) comprise one-fifth of Hatch's main collection.

Hatch describes the joys and pains of "Collectomania" in the exhibit catalogue. A serious collector since 1933, Hatch found "major pruning" necessary after seeing the Japanese print collection of Louis Ledoux, who limited it to 250.

Hatch keeps his main collection at 250 with occasional "painful" removals to make way for better works. Early pruning resulted in a "study group" which he gave away over 20 years to museums and colleges. Symtomatic of "Collectomania," another study group is forming.

Selections for the exhibit were made by Dr. Jakob Roseberg of Harvard, authority on Dutch and Flemish painters. He has chosen a fascinating variety of drawings done for different purposes by famous and lesser known artists. As Dr. Alfred Neumeyer of Mills once said, "Looking at fine drawings is like peeking over the master's shoulder."

Brief, informative documentation accompanying each work increases the show's interest. For instance, Copley, "perhaps the first great American draftsman," made the sketch "Death of the Earl of Chatham" (in the House of Commons) for the famous painting now in the Tate Gallery, London, and the second sketch of the folds of a garment "probably" for this painting. Rather than a preliminary sketch, Winslow Homer's "A Fair Wind Blowing Up" was made as a guide for a woodblock cutter after the famous painting (now in National Gallery) was completed.

There is no documentation on the notorious trial, but would architect Stanford White's pencil study of Broadway, N.Y., as sensitive as it is, been included if his principal claim to fame had not been his death at the hands of irate husband Thaw?

Charles Dana Gibson's famous "Gibson Girl," turn - of - the - century pin-up girl, appears in possibly a unique rear view of a pen and ink park scene, and Walt Kuhn, well known painter of clowns, is represented by an unexplained early cartoon.

Among portrait drawings are the charming, brief sketch "Head of Jean" by George Bellows for the central figure of his painting "Elinor, Jean and Anne" in the Albert - Knox Gallery, Buffalo; Marsden Hartley's expressionist self-portrait, and, of special significance to Mills, a pencil line drawing of its one-time teacher Kuniyoshi by Emil Ganso who, according to the documentation, did it in a style more typical of the Japanese American than his own.

Participating with Mills in "150 Years of American Drawing" are Williams College and the University of North Carolina. Stanford Art Gallery recently presented "150 Years of American Figure Drawing" which also began with West and Copley. One of Hatch's prunings?

The exhibits are on display Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, 1 to 4 p.m., through Feb. 13.

Exuberant Wessels Exhibit

By Alfred Frankenstein

Glenn Wessels reports on a year in Europe in a marvelous series of paintings now to be seen at the Worth Ryder Gallery in Kroeber Hall on the campus of the University of California.

Wessels spent most of this time in Italy and Greece, where there is plenty of sunlight to be translated into vigorous movement on the surface of a canvas.

One of the pictures in the current show is called "Dull Day Reflections," but it is one of the least dull pictures you will ever see; not since John Marin has there been so exuberant, vigorous, and effervescent an explosion over landscape as the one Glenn Wessels provides.

All the pictures are tremendously vigorous, but there is plenty of variety among them. Wessels knows precisely what color-key to invoke for a given mood, and the moods he reflects run a considerable spectrum. He also knows precisely what effect of stroke, streak, dot, dab, drip, or swirl to invoke at a given moment. The result is a most extraordinary effect of controlled spontaneity, and a magnificently wide range of pictorial achievement.

"Messina Beach" is an abstraction of energy in the freest terms. "Canavese II" reminds one of Gertrude Stein's observations that cubism is Spanish architecture; it can also be Italian architecture, and the whole thing is carried out in cubist terms. The shimmer and vibrancy of impressionism are often recalled, but Wessel's painting is much stronger than the term "impressionism" would imply.

He works wonders, pictorially speaking, with dry old Italian towns perched on the edges of precipitate cliffs, with the fountain-like burst of surf on the rocks in Greece, with the overwhelming dazzle of light on Alpine glaciers, and with vast mountain spaces. This last subject, distinctively, calls for much thinner paint and far less excitement of surface than the others.

These paintings were all done last year and this on an appointment from the University's Institute of Creative Arts. The Institute will have to go a long way before one of its grantees comes up with any more solidly accomplished and more brilliantly worth while.

Hofmann Collection

An art gallery and some 45 paintings will be donated to the University for the Berkeley campus by the artist Hans Hofmann, President Clark Kerr disclosed at a Charter Week reception and art exhibition this month honoring the 84-year-old leader of abstract expressionism.

Hofmann is regarded as one of the most influential teachers and painters in contemporary American art. He explained he is making these gifts to the University in gratitude for the role which it played in opening a new life to him in this country when his homeland was taken over by Hitler's Nazis.

The painting will be the largest Hofmann collection in the world and will be the core of a permanent art collection to be acquired by the University. The Hofmann gallery will be part of the projected University Arts Center.

"The University is deeply indebted to Hans Hofmann for these magnificent gifts," Kerr commented. "They are truly priceless, not only as an aid in art teaching, but also for the cultural life of the Berkeley campus and community at large."

Hofmann came to Berkeley this month for the first time since 1931—to receive an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree in Charter Day exercises at the campus. At the reception the next day in the campus' Worth Ryder Art Gallery, he was surrounded by an exhibition of 14 of his paintings. These include the nucleus of the permanent collection.

The late Worth Ryder, who was on the art faculty, arranged for Hofmann to come from his native Germany to teach at Berkeley during the summer sessions of 1930 and 1931. This enabled Hofmann to find refuge in this country during the period of ascendant Nazism in Germany. His first exhibition in the United States was at the Berkeley campus.

He moved to New York, and established schools there and in Provincetown, Massachusetts. His ties with the Berkeley campus remained strong, however, with several of his pupils joining the Department of Art at Berkeley. Those now on the art faculty are Glenn Wessels, who was Hofmann's first English teacher; Erle Loran, John Haley, Karl Kasten and Wilfrid Zogbaum.

President Kerr himself took an active role in negotiating for the gifts. He heard of the possibility of them through Judge Samuel I. Rosenman, former Justice of the New York Supreme Court, while both were serving on a national Railway Labor Board conference last June. Later negotiations also involved, among others, Regent Norton Simon and Professor Loran.

An agreement signed Dec. 27, 1963, names the first 10 of the ultimate collection of 45 paintings. The Hofmann gallery will be financed with $250,000 raised from sale of more Hofmann paintings, other than the 45 to be displayed there. Any excess money from these sales will comprise a trust fund, with proceeds to purchase avant garde art for the Berkeley campus and to finance scholarships.

This will be a permanent memorial to Hofmann and his late wife, Maria, and will be primarily to exhibit the Hofmann collection.

The Hofmann gallery will be part of the projected $3,750,000 Arts Center, which will be built just south of the campus. It will be financed with nontax funds, and will contain a larger art museum, art library, a small workshop theater, a conference suite, and other art and music facilities. The Regents have called an architectural competition to design the building.

Kerr noted that the forethought of providing for such a definitive permanent collection of one artist is only occasionally seen in the art world. Other examples are the Picasso museum at Antibes, Kandinsky's collection at the Munich Municipal Gallery, and the Cezanne and Renoir collections at the Barnes Museum, near Philadelphia.

A second and larger Hofmann exhibition will be shown on the Berkeley campus from May 11 through June 7. This will be the only West Coast appearance of the traveling show, which was organized last fall by the New York Museum of Modern Art.

The University owns 16 Hofmann paintings to date, including some from both the current and future Berkeley exhibitions. They are:

Summer Bliss, . . . in the vastness of sorrowful thoughts . . . , Polyhymnia, Gloriamundi, Fantasia, Nocturnal Splendor, Ecstasy, The Garden, The Prey, Agrigento, Tormented Bull, Magnum Opus, Idolatress #1, . . . and thunder clouds pass . . . , Combinable Wall and *Bald Eagle.*

Katheryn Wessels Is Dead at 65

Katheryn Foster Wessels, an accomplished concert pianist and well-known member of the campus community at the University ofCalifornia at Berkeley, died yesterday (Sunday) at Kaiser Hospital in Oakland after a long illness. She was 65.

Mrs. Wessels was the wife of Glenn A. Wessels, painter and professor emeritus of art at the University.

Born in Chicago on April 17, 1902, she spent her early years in Illinois and was graduated from the Chicago Conservatory of Music.

During the 1920s she toured the country as a concert pianist and accompanist. Her professional performances decreased in number after she married Wessels in 1932.

Until quite recently Mrs. Wessels taught English to foreign students at the University.

In addition to her husband, who lives at the family home at 1601 La Vereda road in Berkeley, she is survived by two brothers, Willis Foster of Berkeley and E. S. Foster of Washington, D.C., and a sister, Mrs. Clifton Rather of Oakland.

San Francisco Chronicle
September 4, 1967

Glenn Wessels To Be Honored

Glenn A. Wessels, noted artist, alumnus and faculty member, will be honored at the annual California College of Arts and Crafts Founders' Day dinner at 8 o'clock tonight at the Edgewater West Inn, 10 Hegenberger road in Oakland.

On Saturday, the alumni general meeting will be held in the residence hall lounge on the CCAC campus. Students will present a preholiday art and craft sale, and campus tours will highlight new construction of two major buildings, a $1 million project scheduled for completion in 1968.