This is an interview with Professor Emeritus Everett Gee Jackson, SDSU Professor of Art from 1930 to 1969. This interview is being conducted on August 27, 1992 at his home in San Diego. The interviewer is Michael Milligan, for the John and Jane Adams Minigrant.

Within the house you can still see that he is painting. The home overlooks Mission Valley and, in itself, is an art museum.

(MThis transcription has been briefly edited; factual information in brackets has not been confirmed. 7-22-94.)

MM: Most of my questions are going to deal with San Diego State because that's what we're interested in. Why did you transfer from Texas A&M to San Diego State?

EJ: Well, I didn't do that. Actually, when I left Texas A&M I went to the Art Institute in Chicago. After I left the Art Institute in Chicago I came out to San Diego because I had a case of strep throat, and in those days they didn't have antibiotics. It was pretty bad. So, I picked up a little art magazine one day, opened it, and it said, "Come to sunny San Diego, where the sun shines every day." I said to myself, "Maybe that's where I ought to go." So, I left Chicago and came out to San Diego. There was a little art school here, and that's how I happened to come to San Diego. When I left San Diego (I didn't stay long) I went to
Mexico. I got in touch with a friend of mine whom I had known in the Art Institute, and I suggested to him that we go to Mexico to try and see if we could learn to paint. He said, "Fine." I said, "All right. Meet me in my home town in Texas" which he did.

When I left San Diego I went back to my home town where he met me. He and I went up into the Burro Mountains in Northern Mexico, and camped out near a Kickapoo Indian village trying to paint up there. We decided while we were there that we'd better go down and see the interior of Mexico, so he and I went back to east Texas where my family had an old plantation home. We spent a few months there until we could save up some money, and then we went to Guadalajara. From Guadalajara we went down to Lake Chapala. We stayed two or three years.

Eventually I came to San Diego. I might as well tell you this, and not skip too much. When I was out in San Diego the first time I met the girl who later became my wife. All the time I was in Mexico, my friend was writing to his folks, I guess, and I was writing to her. Finally, I would go up to the University of Arizona to see her. She was in the University of Arizona. Finally, I persuaded her to join me, and go back to Mexico with me which she did. So, we went back and stayed another year down there. Then, we came back to my home town in Texas, and from there we came out to San Diego -- the two of us, married. And I figured, "Well, I better figure out some way to make a living."

So, I found that I needed a few units before I could have a degree. I went out to State and got the degree. They gave me
credit from what I had at Texas A&M and also from the Art Institute of Chicago, and it didn't take me long to get a degree. While I was there I had an offer of a job in a college in Texas - Alpine, Texas. That was the State Teacher's College. I went there one summer and taught. Later, from there, we came back to San Diego and I got a job teaching at San Diego State. While I was there, there was a wonderful place in West Texas up in the Davis Mountains, and I kind of wanted to live there, but my wife was from here. After I got a job at San Diego State I got a letter from that college in Texas offering me a job there. So, I said, "I'm going to see Dr. Hardy about this." And, Dr. Hardy said, "How much did they offer you?" I told him an outrageous salary, so I decided to stay in San Diego.

MM: That's great. One of the questions I have pertains to Dr. Hardy in that...

EJ: Dr. Hardy was a professor and the president when I started teaching there in 1930.

MM: You taught through three presidents' administrations -- Hardy, Hepner, and Love. Do you have any comment on the differences in their administrations?

EJ: Dr. Hardy was certainly a wonderful professor and president. All of them were good. But, Dr. Hardy and Dr. Love were very popular with the students and the faculty. I don't want to say anything against Hepner -- he was all right too -- but, they were really very, very popular. Dr. Hardy was very popular with his faculty and they just loved him. The same is true of Dr. Love. I
think Dr. Hepner was... I don't think the students knew him as well as they knew Dr. Hardy. Anyway, they were three wonderful presidents.

MM: Why do you think the comradery between the faculty died out?
EJ: Don't you think it might be because we were smaller back then? When you're in a big institution with lots of students, you might not be able to know all of them. But, in those early days, there weren't so many members of the faculty nor students and everybody knew everybody else. So, I recommend that we have smaller colleges.

MM: What was it like to teach one of the first pre-Columbian art classes in the United States?
EJ: The reason I taught that class -- one day the Dean came over to see me -- Dean Peterson -- and asked me if I would give a course in pre-Columbian art, in Mexican art. I told him I would be glad to do it, but I would like to put it off about a year until I could prepare for it. He said that was fine, so I began to study the thought of teaching such a course, and also made trips into all the major ruins in Mexico with that course in mind. That's why I taught it, although while I lived down in Mexico I became very interested in the pre-Columbian cultures. In fact, my wife, when I took her down there, one of the things she did was go out and dig up artifacts. As a matter of fact, she had a whole suitcase full of artifacts -- pre-Columbian figurines and so forth -- when we went to live in Mexico City. I remember once she had all my shirts hanging on the line in the backyard of our
house in Coyoacan. A burglar came in and not only took my shirts, but took her suitcase full of pre-Columbian figurines.

MM: Oh, no!

EJ: I thought that was too bad to lose all her figurines. A few days later, in the night, the burglar brought the suitcase back. He opened it, saw it was nothing he wanted, and brought it back.

MM: Good for him! He didn't know what he had.

EJ: I guess I did start one of the first courses of that sort in the country.

MM: What was the main goal of the course -- the main theme? You were breaking new ground, I'll tell you that.

EJ: My main idea was to acquaint the students with what had happened down there in that part of the world -- especially in art, sculpture and architecture. I continued my interest in that, and continued to study, especially the sculpture. My last book was mostly about pre-Columbian sculpture -- Maya sculpture.

EJ: Have you interviewed Spencer Rogers?

MM: Yes, he was interviewed in 1986.

EJ: Well speaking of Dr. Rogers -- about two weeks ago I answered the phone, and somebody on the phone said, "Dr. Rogers is gone." I said, "What do you mean? Who is this speaking?" The guy hung up. Well, I called up John Dirks and told him about it, and we called up Dr. Rogers and found out that he hadn't gone at all. I was shocked.

MM: That Mark Twain quote, you know, "Nelson, my death is greatly exaggerated."
EJ: Yes. That was true. Anyway, it certainly frightened us. But, do you know what I think happened? Dr. Rogers doesn't hear very well. In fact, he's like me, only worse, I think. He decided to call me on the phone and he said, "Dr. Rogers is on." I thought he said he was "gone." When I answered so excited and worried, he couldn't hear, so he hung up. So, I told his wife, a short time ago, that she could get a machine to fit onto the phone. I'm hoping she got that for him.

MM: Do you remember the debate about the three different locations when moving from the Normal school. There was a debate about going to the city beach, La Mesa, or Balboa Park for the State College. Do you remember that?

EJ: I certainly remember when we moved.

MM: What was that like?

EJ: I was teaching up here [indicating on photograph, the Old Art Building]. The building on the north side of campus, it's still there -- that was the art building. That's where I started teaching, as a matter of fact. I remember the faculty there. Dr. Adams was there then. I do remember the fact that they did debate on where to go. A lot of people thought that this was the wrong place to go. I suppose it turned out all right, hasn't it?

MM: Well, Pacific Beach wouldn't have been a bad place for a university. It was supposed to be out here where I guess there was a military school. I guess there was some property that was being donated.

So what was the move like?
EJ: It was pretty smooth. It really was. This campus was really torn up. I painted a mural showing the student and the torn up campus. It's on a stairway that goes down from the old library, down into the basement where the Art Department was then. That mural is a fresco. It may be there yet. In fact, I told one of my faculty, Lowell Houser, that he could paint his picture on top of it. I think maybe he did. He put maybe a board over it and then painted a mural on top of that. That's probably there. Underneath that board that holds the mural that Houser did you'll find my mural showing the campus when we first moved to it.

MM: Was there a lot of wild life still out there on the campus?

EJ: Well, there were some rattle snakes. I could hear rattle snakes right behind our building.

MM: Egad. Did you guys do a lot of field trips?

EJ: Yes, going out painting.

MM: Where'd you go?

EJ: Down the hill up to the -- now it's a highway, but it wasn't a highway then. It was just a dirt road there. You go down the hill a little further and you come to beautiful, big boulders, and a creek.

MM: Adobe Falls?

EJ: Adobe Falls, that's right. We used to go down there to paint.

MM: How did you get there? There were no roads out there yet, were there?

EJ: Well, you know, you'd go through east San Diego to get
there, out El Cajon Blvd. El Cajon Blvd. was there.

MM: Was it a paved road?
EJ: Sure.

MM: When you come out El Cajon, you've got about three blocks before you get to the University. Then there's College Avenue.
EJ: Yes, that's the way we went out there. We didn't go through the valley to get there. I used to go out there for a long time, I'd go out there to El Cajon Blvd. I remember I was going out there one morning, early -- I always liked 8 o'clock classes. There was a big sign along the side of the road that said, "You not only live, but you live longer in east San Diego." I was interested in that. A short time afterwards I went through there, and some state college students had written across the bottom of it, "It just seems longer."

MM: What did you enjoy most about teaching?
EJ: Well, I think the students. If there were no students, I wouldn't have liked to teach.

MM: This is true. Are there any students that come to your mind, that really stand out?
EJ: Sure, lots of them. As a matter of fact, the other day I was invited to a luncheon at the Rotary Club, and there was a whole table there full of my former students -- some of them from way back. I had Japanese students. Some of my favorites were Japanese.

MM: During the war, too?
EJ: Before the war. During the war they were taken away. I had
some Japanese students before the war. I had one that turned out to be a Japanese spy.

MM: Do you remember his or her name?

EJ: [Shimata]. What he was doing all that time was making pictures of all of our dams. He came by here one day, before the war, to tell me goodbye. I told him we were having trouble because at that time there was no war yet. I told him that if he went back to Japan and we went to war to remember where this house was and not to bomb me. He said that he wouldn't. It turned out he really was an officer in the Japanese navy.

MM: My goodness. He had this planned for a long time. Do any of them strike out that became artists?

EJ: Yes, a number of my students have become successful artists. One of them is a Japanese girl. She became quite a famous costume illustrator in New York.

MM: Do you remember her name?

EJ: Her name was [Toshiko Kojima]. She became quite famous. Of course, another student of mine, that is still a wonderful artist and well recognized in the art world is Martha [Alves]. She still exhibits widely.

MM: The Art Department itself, you built up. San Diego State, during the 60's and the 70's, because of the foundation you set down, became one of the best art schools in the west coast.

EJ: I think so.

MM: Largely because of who you brought in.

EJ: Yes. I brought in some very fine teachers.
MM: How did you find these people?

EJ: Well, I didn't find them the way I was supposed to. That is to say, instead of looking over a lot of papers and approaching them from that point of view, I went to friends of mine and asked if they knew some good teacher. For instance, I was dancing with a woman at the Coronado Hotel one night, and she was a faculty member of UCLA. I had great confidence in her. I said that I was looking for a wonderful print maker. She said that she knew just the fellow for me. That's the way I got my people. When I wanted someone to teach something, I would go to somebody that was very well known in that field. I happened to have friends who were. They would tell me if they thought that this was the man we ought to have. So, that's the way I chose them, instead of reading about them. I chose John Dirks. He was one of my students. He was in my night class. I used to go around and look at what he was drawing. I'd have a beautiful nude model on the stand. I'd go around and look at John Dirks' drawing and it looked as though he'd drawn a chair. [laughter] I later needed a furniture designer and figured he'd be just the man for that. It turned out that he taught a course in furniture design.

We had a wonderful department -- I suppose as wonderful as you could get.

MM: I think it is.

EJ: My last book I gave to the Art Department -- the proceeds from it. Every time I sell a book it goes to the Art Department.

MM: Well, they can use it right now.
EJ: When I read in the papers that people were being let go who had tenure, it certainly was a shock. I thought tenure meant that you couldn't fire a person. I don't really know enough about it, except that I do have my idea of what the fundamentals of a university should be. If I had been asked to cut down on the faculty -- because I'm very prejudice -- I would have immediately gotten rid of the football team and the basketball team right off the bat. They would be the first thing. That sort of thing is not as important as the academic courses.

MM: The next question I have is what do you think the goal of the university should be?

EJ: The goal of a university is to teach and pursue knowledge about man and about the world.

MM: It's kind of hard when they eliminate anthropology and religious studies. [Ed. note: anthropology was not eliminated; religious studies was, in 1992.]

EJ: I think it's sad to get rid of a course in the study of man which anthropology is. That's a very basic thing. It has a very distinguished history, and I can't understand how they could ever get rid of a course in anthropology.

MM: Well, you have the study of man, and then you take away religious studies which is the study of man's philosophy and his relationship with God, then you take away natural sciences.

EJ: I certainly wouldn't take out the natural sciences.

MM: No. And then half the chemistry department is gone.

EJ: That's shocking. That's why I would get rid of football
first -- no, I would get rid of basketball first, then football.

MM: There you go. I agree with you.

EJ: I don't care what the wishes of the masses might be. I would certainly not get rid of such things as the natural sciences, and the social sciences, and so forth. People have to go to college before they know what you should get rid of.

MM: I was reading a poll that Life magazine had done, and they listed in order five problems that should be addressed. The first one was education. Most people feel that without education, we can't solve the second problem which is the economy.

EJ: I see that some organizations out there are voting today on whether to ask for Day's removal. I don't know about that. I suppose Dr. Day has done the best he could.

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