

**Project Outline** for interview participants in order to clarify the series of questions posed. Each participant is asked specialized questions and interviewed in their own home, office or studio space with a portable video recording equipment.

Interviews in California, Mexico City and at MIT, January to March 2007

Introduction to Interview Questions for Participants:

En 1933 el artista mexicano Diego Rivera fue comisionado por Nelson Rockefeller para crear un mural en el lobby del edificio "Rockefeller Center" en la ciudad de Nueva York. Rockefeller sugirió que el mural fuera acerca de la filosofía del hombre en posesión de la tecnología que inspiraría un desarrollo mas ético del hombre. Rivera pintó a Vladimir Lenin en la pared y Nelson Rockefeller fue forzado a destruir el mural antes de que fuera terminado. Antes de la terminación del mural, un artículo en el "World Telegram" acusó a Diego de engañar a su patrocinador, Nelson Rockefeller, quien le pidió que reemplazara la cara de Lenin con la de un hombre desconocido. La controversia de este mural ha nublado la vision progresiva éste. Este proyecto busca traer este mural de vuelta al "Rockefeller Center" para descubrir este importante legado artístico del siglo XX.

In 1933 Mexican artist Diego Rivera was commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller to create a mural in the grand lobby of building 30 Rockefeller Center in New York City. Rockefeller suggested the mural would address , "a philosophy of man in the possession of technology that would encourage a more ethical development of humankind" (RCA Letter from NAR to Rivera, 1933). Having this philosophy in mind Rivera created the sketch of "Man at the crossroads looking with uncertainty but with hope and high vision to the choosing of a course leading to a new and better future", (Rivera Proposal, 1932) sharing a philosophy of man in the possession of modern technology that would encourage this ethical development. Rivera controversially painted Vladimir Lenin on the wall and Nelson Rockefeller was forced to destroy the mural before it was finished. Close to the conclusion of the mural, an article in the World telegram, accused Diego of hoaxing his Patron, Nelson Rockefeller, who requested him to substitute the face of Lenin with that of an unknown man. The controversy of this mural has clouded this progressive vision of this mural.

**Lucienne Allen** is the granddaughter of Lucienne Bloch, the assistant and photographer for Diego Rivera for his project at Rockefeller Center. I visited her on her farm in Northern California to take a look at the photographs from the project and to interview her about her grandparents work on the project and of the implications of the mural returning to Rockefeller Center today. The visit took place on the eve of the 98<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lucienne Bloch's birth.

**BMW: Your grandparents were illustrated as the young lovers watching Lenin as he clasped the hand of the African American and White Russian soldier. This mural was where they met and began their life together. Do you remember what they thought about being depicted in the mural?**

**LA:** He had painted the spermatozoa underneath them swimming and she said, quick, get my pisery, and it was during a time when you normally wouldn't necessarily be sleeping out of wedlock and they were having an affair, living together, and it was not the common thing of 1933 and they were ok with it and it was a joke and it was a funny thing about it. They were very proud to have been painted looking up as frank comradely lovers up to Lenin and they were comrades. She, my grandmother in particular really felt that fresco was a dead art, that was centuries old and when she found out it was being done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century she wanted to learn from him, from Diego. When my grandfather heard that this fantastic muralist was in town, in Detroit, when he was a young man, he went to, just to meet the man. He was more in awe of Diego Rivera, the muralist, the Mexican painter and all he wanted to do was meet him. He ended up working for him and learning and it was a fantastic thing for him to be able to learn a trade like that, at his young age. He knew he liked art and he appreciated the art that he was doing, but it was the trade that he was learning, it was the plastering technique and then when they decided that they could do this on their own after working with Rivera for a year or so, a couple of years, they tried. They worked on their very first mural together. They both painted in their very first mural together and it was after they did this first one that they realized after actually that their styles and techniques didn't really work that well and it was from then on that they decided my grandfather would be the technical assistant, my grandmother would be the artist and it formed their life, the time they spent with Diego and Frida, both of them. They were both such huge people, just because of who they were not because of what everybody else thought they were but of

their relationship that they had with them of the way they could speak, of the knowledge that they had, whether it was about art, or politics and they learned a lot, they were also very young at the time. Frida was a couple of years older than my grandmother but Diego was older. So here was a man in a position to teach them, an older man and he had so much to teach and so it was an exciting time and then of course just the times themselves were emotional and moving and the rallies and the demonstrations they would go to and the places they would talk and at one point my grandmother was translating for Rivera and the things she was saying she couldn't believe that she could stand up on the stage and yell things out to this crowd of people, that were so moving and so important to what was going on right then for all these people, these lives that were being effected by what she was saying through Diego it helped form who these people became. 65 years later they were still talking about Rivera, they were teaching fresco to students at different colleges throughout the United States and the stories they were telling were about the times they spent working for Rivera or painting on his mural.

**BMW: Can you tell me more about how your grandmother reacted to the covering of the mural?**

**LA:** Rivera came into where she and my grandfather were which I believe was in the shack. He came in and he said, Stop Work! And he was wearing plain cloths. Immediately when they saw him in plain cloths they were taken aback So then he says stop work and he says we've been told to stop work and then he explained to them, he says and she was, my grandmother was really upset. She just thought this was awful. And he put his arm around her shoulder and he says. He said, "Now the Battle Begins". She was mad. She took the muddy water that was in the bucket and she splashed it over on the floor and they turned around and they left, but the phone lines got cut, they couldn't make calls out. It was a little scary I think. I think they felt something was brewing but they didn't know quite what was going to happen and then they taped the mural, they put huge tarps over the entire front of the mural and then they whitewashed the windows and everybody scratched in the window some form of cuss word in their native language and my grandfather did something in Bulgarian, my grandmother did something in French and I think there was something in Spanish and I don't know what the other language was, if it was Japanese or Chinese. But that was an intense time. And of course she really didn't believe that anything would happen to the mural. It was

covered, that was bad enough but about a year later when she and my grandfather were, I think they were coming home from a movie, and they decided they would go by, jus to check out the old place, and they walked past these 55 gallon drums and they looked inside and there was the mural, in pieces, chopped up which had to have been sledge hammered, because your fresco, especially on the metal lathed wall, your plaster going to be a couple of inches thick. So it was shocking to them, shocking.

**BMW: Did your grandmother ever discuss the portrait of Lenin?**

**LA:** He was in the cartoon with a hat on so it was no big deal. It was when a lady came into take photographs for a newspaper article and she made a big deal about it, and he said well you're going to make a big deal about it, well let me just put him right front and center then, you think this little bit of Lenin with his hat on to the side is a big deal, I'll show you a big deal. So he changed the cartoon at that point and I still don't think it seemed that terrible, I just don't think my grandparents had the concept that people would not rent places in this gigantic building because of the picture of a soviet leader on a mural.