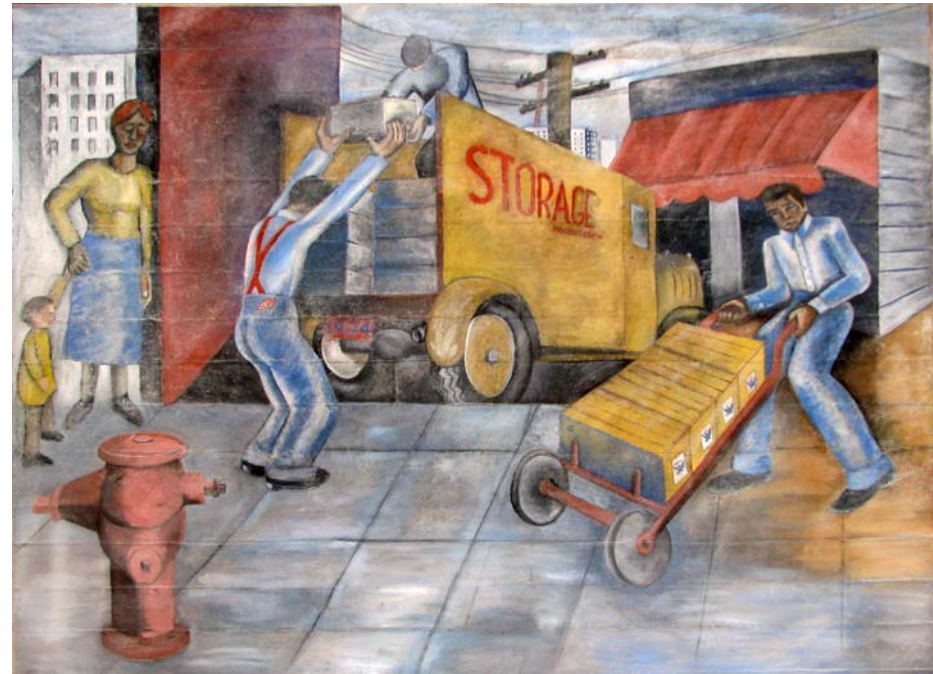# WPA Murals in California: a small digitization project

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Origins of the project

- Several murals were uncovered on the San Diego State University (SDSU) campus, dating from the 1930's.

- The murals are being restored and relocated in the library.

"NRA Packages" by Genevieve Burgeson Bredo

Implications

- Inspired by the discoveries on campus, Laurel Bliss and Lisa Lamont received a $10,000 faculty grant from SDSU's Research Foundation to research and document Works Progress Administration (WPA) murals in California.

Goals of the grant

- Create authoritative list of WPA murals
- Photograph existing murals around the state
- Link digital images to metadata
- Launch a publicly accessible online database
- Put SDSU murals in historical context
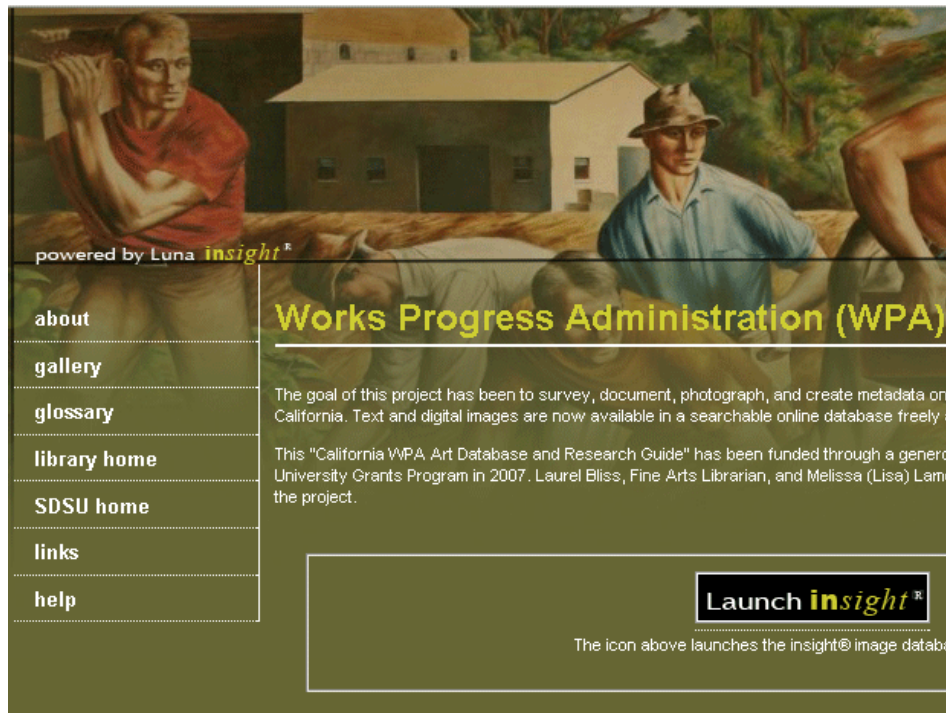
Immediate challenges

- No digital asset management system
- Existing fields in VRA core didn't quite match our needs
- No comprehensive list of WPA murals
- SDSU murals are WPA-era, not WPA
- Grant money was due to expire in eight months

Coping with challenges

Lisa took on the technical issues: buying Luna Insight, training staff, creating metadata fields, making site visits to photograph murals.

VRA Core Element	XML element	XML attribut
WORK	work	
		id
		refid
		source
COLLECTION	collection	
		id
		refid
		source
IMAGE	image	
		id
		refid
		source

Coping with challenges

Splash page for WPA project

Laurel took on the content issues: research, contacting mural sites, creating website to support the image database, getting an extension on the grant through June 2008.

Where to go for information?

- Books on WPA and/or specific artists
- Dissertations
- WPA websites
- National Archives and Record Administration's records
- Full text interviews with artists on Archives of American Art website

Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
DONAL HORD
AT HIS HOME IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
JUNE 25, 1964
INTERVIEWER: BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG

BH: BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG
DH: DONAL HORD

BH: Mr. Hord did the beautiful sculptures in San Diego, among them the *Aztec*, which is at San Diego State College, Center in San Diego. The creation of that Civic Center fountain was the subject of one of the documentary films done to use it are owned by the University of Southern California. Mr. Hord is so well known that it seems pointless to go in time today. He is going to tell us on the tape something about his work with the Project. Shall we begin?

DH: [Reading an old newspaper] I find here that I was Technical Advisor for the Project, as of September 18, 1937.

BH: Oh, you had already finished quite a lot of work by that time! Was the *Aztec* the first thing that you did on it?

DH: Yes, the . . . . No, the first projects I did was the figure in front of the Los Angeles County Museum and some va *Man With a Wheel* monument and it sat in front of the old rotunda. Do you remember that?

BH: Oh, I don't remember that.

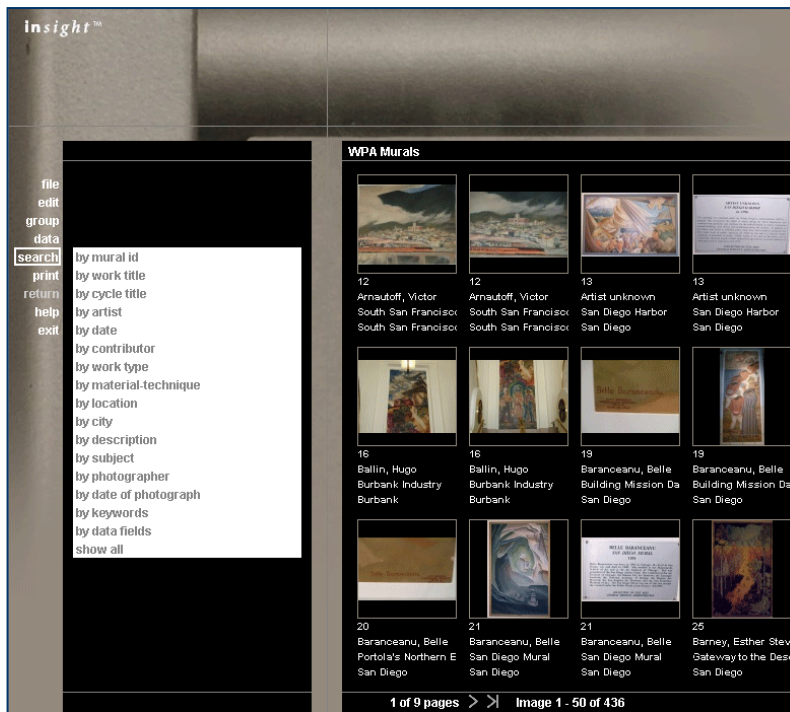http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/hord64.htm

Conclusions

- 347 WPA murals in California.
- Each requires extensive research, possible site visits, metadata creation, and image "massaging."
- How many hours of work per mural?
- Not scalable in current format.

Conclusions

- People were amazingly helpful: post office workers, local historians, school principals, WPA enthusiasts.

- WPA project may serve as a "dry run" for other digital projects at SDSU.

- Digitization projects are much easier when you own the items.

Still left to do….

WPA database in Luna Insight

- Resolve firewall issues – database only available in a test version on campus.

- More photographing.

- More metadata creation.

- Beef up narratives and information on the project's website.

- Possible GPS mapping of sites.

Questions?

Contact Laurel Bliss

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