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Oral history interview with Manuel J. Tolegian, 1965 February 12

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Manuel Tolegian on February 12, 1965. The interview was conducted at Manuel Tolegian's home in Sherman Oaks, California by Betty Hoag for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on February 12, 1965, interviewing Manuel Tolegian in his home in Sherman Oaks. Mr. Tolegian, first I want to get this straight, the 'J,' does it stand for something, for the record?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, it's an old Armenian name.

BETTY HOAG: How do you spell it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: J E R I A R, which means 'strong blood' in Armenian. My father gave me that name.

BETTY HOAG: Wonderful. Thank you. Mr. Tolegian is a painter, illustrator, inventor, author, designer, teacher, traveler--in fact he's probably traveled the United States more than anyone I've ever talked to before—a friend of so many people who've been important in both literary and art fields, and does perfectly beautiful work in all mediums, I imagine; I've seen oils and watercolors and lithographs.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And all this will come out on the tape. I'm so happy to be interviewing you today. Before we get into the art, I want to ask you a little about your life. You were born in California in Fresno?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Fresno, California. 1911.

BETTY HOAG: I have two dates for you, I have October 18, 1911, and October 8, 1912, and I wondered which one you wanted.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That all changed when I went into the Army and they found out I was born October 18, 1911.

BETTY HOAG: I see. I had that happen to my birth date, too, for Social Security they found it was December 25th. Were you raised in the Fresno area?
MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, until I was about eleven years old. Then our whole family, believe it or not, we took a car, my father, camping equipment, and he drove, practically pioneers, drove across the country to Boston, in a car, it took us several weeks, in fact almost two months.

BETTY HOAG: Were there several children in the family?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. There were three brothers and a girl, a cousin of ours. But my father didn't like the East. He was also an architect and builder, by the way.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, he was.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: And so in about four months we came back. This time we came back to Los Angeles and I went to school here, grammar school and high school here, and then when I was about eighteen I graduated and a month or so later I went to New York to study painting—I decided to be an artist then.

BETTY HOAG: I see. Now I know that you studied with Vichkonkowsky. Was that at this time?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. That was at Manual Arts High School here in Los Angeles.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, really?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, he was head of the art department. I would say a man of tremendous influence over a great many artists. Eventually he [and others] went to New York also, Philip Guston and Jackson Pollock, and quite a number of people that went to Walt Disney and the pioneering work that they did.

BETTY HOAG: I've talked with several of them right downtown.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. I believe so. I believe so. There were quite a number, I can't remember the names now.

We're talking about thirty-five years ago.

BETTY HOAG: Yes. Were you there at the time Jackson Pollock was, because someone [Mr. Vogel] told me that you were a friend of his.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: [Yes] Actually I had a chicken coop studio not far from Manual Arts and of course being kids, you know, we were, we thought we'd try a little smoking, you know, and stuff like this. Well I was quite amazed that quite a few fellows were interested in this. One of them was Jackson Pollock and Philip Guston and a few others. They came to my chicken coop studio, see, we got all this back of our house here…And that's how—Pollock and I left for New York together.

BETTY HOAG: You did!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, we didn't live together, we shared studios together for come time, and then we began studying with Thomas Benton first,

BETTY HOAG: Was this in New York or…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: In New York. Art Students League in New York.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, I see.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: And then Benton left to paint murals in '33 in the state of Indiana for the World's Fair and when he did John Sloan took his classes at the Art Students League. So we studied with him for awhile, and then John Stuart Curry came there and George Grosz, for about four years we studied together, Pollock and all the rest of us.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Benton came back, yes. Then in '35 he went to Kansas City.

BETTY HOAG: From an art standpoint, since you and Pollock diverged about as completely as you can, what were you when you came away from Vichkonkowsky?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well it isn't as extreme as you many think. During our study with Vonkowsky, as for Vonkowsky himself, he encouraged us to free ourselves, you know, from academic ideas, concepts, pre-concepts, and all this, he was quite a liberal man. In fact he went quite extreme. Now I can say this, at that time I thought he was just versatile, he went in for Yogaism and Indian philosophy and all that, which, of course was very fascinating for us, we didn't get this in school, you know, so we were fascinated with this. He also brought us into his arc, you see, where he wanted this complete freedom. And this is when I did a lot of these experiments…Pollock and several others. But Pollock reverted back to all this, you see, I didn't.

BETTY HOAG: I see. Although there's something of it in you work that you showed me, the Armenian woman making bread, I thought she had a Chinese skillet.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Right.

BETTY HOAG: Something…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oriental. Well, of course, as I say, I'm of oriental descent…but I wasn't talking so much as I was about the nonobjective type of work he did. For instance, we just poured paint on a piece of paper you see, and we put watercolor with alcohol…and turpentine.

BETTY HOAG: Do you have any of those paintings?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: One or two, yes. I might show you a couple of them here. Then, as I say, after all this classic, very strong training that we had in New York, later on Pollock went back to that early type of experiments. I must say this: we was not too successful in classic art work. He didn't quite master it, he didn't quite understand. On the other hand he did have a great color sense, a great feeling for color, you know. And there's no doubt about it, he was a natural born artist, painter, you know. He didn't believe too much in studying, that's why…in fact he didn't graduate, he just abandoned school.

BETTY HOAG: Was that about the time Peggy Guggenheim discovered him?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, this was many, many years later. See I'm talking 1930 to 1940.

BETTY HOAG: I see.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I think this all happened later on his Expressionistic role and all that I suppose so, that was something they discovered and it was in the age, in the air, I suppose…whereas I went into what I feel is a much more important responsibility of the painter, and that is the social responsibility.

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Responsibility to the people. Instead of expressing myself I like to express what the people feel, what they aspire to. For they're all Americans, you know. So I get away from the so-called decorative arts and I get into the subject. I think it's more important.

BETTY HOAG: One of the reviewers of your work in 1938 I think has expressed it very well in Art Digest…I guess I didn't take down the name of the man who wrote the article. But anyway he talked about your exhibit at Ferargil Galleries.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Ferargil Galleries, yes.

BETTY HOAG: …doing "The Big Apple" in that show and said your subject matter was mostly social interlude and dramatic landscape and industrial scene, that it was an art of and for the people, a new kind of genre art unlike the Mid-West Benton, Curry and Wood, in that yours was happier and you expressed the feeling of the foreign born and concern for the grim faces of the farmers and workers at the same times. I thought that was an interesting differentiation.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: They made a very generous comparison, I must say, towards migration, but I don't know. I think of course Benton and the other names mentioned there, they followed more of less the idea that I pursue. In other words, I feel that the artist has much greater responsibility to where he lives among the people he lives with rather then to himself, in other words, expressing yourself is fine, you know…
BETTY HOAG: Community, everything…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: This is the thing that requires some maturity, some understanding. I'm not saying that I have it completely but I think I'm in the right direction.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well I feel, for instance, today that there's too much of this where the artist has just become a decorator, see, and he's playing around with the physical aspects of picture, the colors, textures, and so on. There are interesting, there are fine from a technical point of view, physical point of view,…slights our eyes, let us say, but if you can get any deeper into it there's nothing there.

BETTY HOAG: That application at the time you were doing easel painting many of the mural paintings, I just want to ask you if you ever did any murals.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I did, not in the sense that they were entirely my projects, I helped with some of the murals but I was on the Easel Project at that time.

BETTY HOAG: Yes. Just before we get completely away from the things, it would be very interesting if you would tell the tape what Jackson Pollock looked like…and…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well, Jackson Pollock and I were great companions…the tragic death he has. Of course I'm talking about many years ago when we were quite young, I'm talking about when we were 16, 17, 18…until the time we went to New York after high school here. He was kind of very quiet fellow, very reclusive man, had very few friends, he kind of…dressed eccentrically, and I can see why he didn't have too many friends among football players in high school, and he had long hair like this, you know he was a kind of ham actor…but on the other hand, though, he was a kind of rebellion against the order of the day, you know, in high school rebelled against the teachers, rebelled against classes until finally he was expelled form high school because he wouldn't attend any classes.

BETTY HOAG: He knew more than his teachers.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. The teachers were probably provoked…I went through all this routine and schedule and I abided by everything and I knew all the teachers. He has only two teachers that were on his side, one was Vonkowski and the other was an English teacher, I can't remember her name right now. But he should really… But, of course, rebellion for rebellion's sake is fine up to a point but if you have no cause behind it. And I don't think he did, I really think he did it just to rebel, just for the heck, the kick of it.

BETTY HOAG: So you think it was his age or his personality, or…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Both. I would say it was his age, and of course his home life was the same way. For

instance, I was quite surprised, I came from an extremely reserved Christian family, you know the Armenian are among the earliest Christian people...

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: ...their ethics are very high. But when I went a good many times to his home, his mother,--his father was a county road worker and he was most of the time away—she allowed drinking in the house, the young kids, my brothers occasionally they'd drop in, and smoking right there. So being a kid myself I thought evidently this is O.K. But what are you going to do, what are going to think? But underneath I thought this was all wrong. I really did myself. Of course you're a kid and you believe in doing mischief, you know. Well Pollock went along with all this, though. These restrictions they were all right, they were all right for certain people but not for him. And you ask his personality. He was quite a drinker, not an empty-headed fellow, but it was quite shallow, in the sense that he just didn't do any research, did very little reading in the sense—just between you and me he couldn't read too well, or write, for that matter. He just never had training.

BETTY HOAG: It sounds more like...discipline from childhood.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. And I think the fact that he was the son of a county road worker who traveled that he never really attended school in the proper way in the early days, you know, grammar school.

BETTY HOAG: Probably his parents didn't care much or encourage him.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Good point. Well I don't know it's not a matter of care much but it was just he was a neglected child that way. You know I tie this in with his later work, you see the same type of thing can be done in painting and you get some results without too much classical training if you have the basic instinct, and, man, he was relying on that gift entirely, if you know what I mean. This was his only saving grace so to speak.

BETTY HOG: He later married Lee Krasner. Was she an artist too?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I believe so. I never met her, I don't know anything about her. See I left New York in '40, '39 or '40 and later on we lost contact. However I used to correspond with him, used to get Christmas cards from him, I thought it was from him, as I say, his writing was just almost illegible, just little scribbles, you know, but knowing him as well as I did, I knew it was from him.

BETTY HOAG: Well this trip across the country in the middle of the depression, wasn't it in the '30's?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh yes. We made several trips together.

BETTY HOAG: Were these hobo trips, or...?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, one of them was definitely hobo. It's interesting how we left new York. I remember one trip, I think it was '32 or '33, we just couldn't get a ride, nobody would give us a ride out from the big city so I thought of the idea—when I was a little boy here in Los Angeles I worked in the markets. I thought we would go into a marker, and you can't go further East, these trucks have got to go West, so we looked at these license plates to see which one is going furthest West and we found one that was going to Pennsylvania, it was strawberries and he had a load on the trucks. So I just went up to him and I said, "If we unload these strawberries from the truck would you give us a ride to where you're going to?" He said, "Sure, go ahead."

BETTY HOAG: What a brilliant idea.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: And we did. And we slept in the truck all night while we were traveling.

BETTY HOAG: Were you painting as you went?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well not on that particular night. We eventually landed in Cleveland of all places, doing the same thing, going to the market, picking up trucks. But then we couldn't get any ride...maybe fortunately because then we began to draw. We practically walked through the state of Kansas, nobody would give us a ride through there at all.

BETTY HOAG: Was this during the dust bowl period, or...?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, I think it was. '33, '34. Finally we landed in Los Angeles about a month later with our knapsacks and our paints. We were really very idealistic, you know, we were doing this American scene.

BETTY HOAG: This was '34 and the project was just getting started here. Did either one of you work on it in Los Angeles?

MANUEL TOELGIAN: No, not in Los Angeles, no.

BETTY HOAG: I don't believe that Pollock ever did…no record of it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No. See we went back here every year. That is, I did. I made about twenty trips in ten years, every summer I came home to see my family, and then I went back after staying a couple of months. Many times I drove, you know. Around '35, '36 I started getting exhibitions of my pictures and made a few dollars so I bought a car and traveled that way.

BETTY HOAG: It was also in '35 that you met another Armenian who has always been very dear to us in California, that is William Saroyan.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh yes. Saroyan I met at a cocktail party in New York even though he was born right across the street from me in Fresno.

BETTY HOAG: How amazing!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: We played together as kids but we just didn't know…well he was a couple of years older and that means a lot when you're kids. But Fresno, see I left there when I was around ten years old, he stayed there for many years. But I was at this party—he knew about my pictures, you know, we immediately became friends. I don't think I told you, but in 1939 I played the music for his "Time of Your Life," a play.

BETTY HOAG: I read in a magazine you played the harmonica.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Played the harmonica backstage, yes.

BETTY HOAG: Was this fun to help him, or…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well no, it was quite a job for over a year in the evening. During the day I still painted but in the evening I worked at the job. And it was a Pulitzer Prize winning ply, you know, and Drama Critics Circle award, I think it was the first play to win these two awards at that time. Saroyan was a lover of my pictures, being of Armenian descent himself I think he felt this warmth and sincerity coming out of my work. Also he used subject matter quite often—he did, or still does, I guess… I think we were both mutually helpful to each other. I must say I owe a great debt to him for many things he did—he has a great gift for articulating, you know, he'd keep explaining things I didn't know these things that I did in my work, which he brought out in words, you see. It was very interesting.

BETTY HOAG: You know in 193 "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" came out with a beautiful gold strip across and it is still one of my favorite books. And my husband and I have never been able to understand what got him off with Time Magazine years ago thing happened and they have on him…they have made it so difficult for him and we feel so bad and it's a dreadful thing because no one can be needling…they want to.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I know, I know. Well, Time, of course has a special knack for that. I don't know why they should bother him. I don't think they needled, I don't think he felt that he was being needled in the sense.

BETTY HOAG: Well his admirers felt it was.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, I suppose so. But he himself outwardly at least he didn't show that he was affected by any of this, but I think probably inwardly he felt he was hurt.

BETTY HOAG: I think it hurts for any artist.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Right, right, right.

BETTY HOAG: An old friend of his…over at Malibu…old house…one year…down the road…when he was in Europe

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh yes, I remember that.

BETTY HOAG:…it had nothing to do with…no reason for putting…well this is what introduced you to the theatrical world of New York. Did you do any painting then?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well in that play, you know, quite a number of so-called stars today started in the play: like William Bendix, who just died, got started in it; Gene Kelly, in fact gene Kelly danced my music to that play; Celeste Holm got started in that; quite a number—Eddie Dowling, of course, had the lead in the play and now Edward Andrews was his sidekick in that play so quite a number of people were, you know—being a successful ply too they got their parts and they became established.

BETTY HOAG: Was he in the film…or do you remember

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No…all that…I made a picture of Kelly dancing in a Spanish costume…part here…here for that matter.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible…it was at MGM

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Inaudible…I believe so

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Is that so?...I can't remember [the name] a picture of it.

BETTY HOAG: I can't either…marvelous…Spanish coach

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That' right…dancing Kelly.

BETTY HOAG: You've done so many things…it wouldn't be possible…chronological [right now but I just can't]

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well, painting, as you know, is a pretty trying art, it's kind of a reclusive type of thing…you come in and you work, sometimes you think you're in a jail, you know, so you want diversions. You want other things to do. My hobbies are inventions like I was telling you…

BETTY HOAG: Oh, please do…on the tape. If you describe it it will be better.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well one of my inventions is this thing called a power easel, it's the world's first motorized or automatic easel. This may seem like gliding the lily but it isn't, it's the first basic improvement in easels since 18—something, when the first painters came back they had one easel made by somebody, I think it was…they had it in art stores way back in 1901 or something. This was the first basic improvement in an easel by anyone. So I said I'll go all out and I'll motorize it, I'll put ball bearings so there's no grinding, for instance, you can mount a picture in a few seconds. The most important thing is to have a slogan, the advertising people have a slogan for it, "It's the picture that moves, the artist stays put."

BETTY HOAG: What do you call it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Power easel. It's a patented product, it's on the market.

BETTY HOAG: How many pounds weight will it…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well you have pictures up to thirty pounds…it's very useful to several things. Walt Disney, for instance, has used this very, very profitable. In fact when they got this easel here a year and a half or so ago he said to me, "You know you just saved us $30,000." I said, "How do you mean?" Well he said, "Do you see that machine that's half-built?" I said, "yes." He said, "We're not building it, we're using your easel."

BETTY HOAG: Oh, isn't that interesting!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: He said, "You know engineers can go haywire sometimes, they made a huge—they jut didn't have the imagination like you have here for a very simple little tool."

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible…they didn't.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well yes, in a way, except that they use it for animation, they put a piece of plate glass in there, it holds things, and it saves them a lot of money, believe it or not, because they could move this object a little bit behind the glass the put in there. Meanwhile he is able to pull a switch, move it up or down or sideways, anyway… they have a special gadget.

BETTY HOAG: This one goes up and down with a foot pedal.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. Mine does.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. I put it in a light because you have electricity at the easel. There are other accessories that go with it. It is also the first easel that when you mount a canvas—I don't know if you notice those fir pins in there—that the upper edge and the lower edge there's air space in there so when you can get right on to the edge of your picture and finish it without getting print on the canvas, and also see your canvas, see your canvas totally. A lot of pictures are lost because of that little small but important detail…mural painters have this, Thomas Benton has one. And as I said we just sent some of them to Europe. My agents in London are the

Roundy Company; and in New York is Arthur Brown Brothers; Chicago I haven't any agent. I have a man, a plant in Hollywood with another fellow and they manufacture these for me.

BETTY HOAG: What is their name? In case…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Rakey Engineering.

BETTY HOAG: Would you kindly spell it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: R A K E Y.

BETTY HOAG: R A K E Y.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: R A K E Y. Rakey Engineering.

BETTY HOAG: What is the address? Do you remember offhand?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: 958 Wenker…right across the street from Miller.

BETTY HOAG: That's good to have because…if someone should want to order one might as well have…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: So as I say, I do these as a kind of hobby. And I have, oh, 5 or 6 other patents, one of them is an electrical heel that eliminates holes in the plug in the wall outlet, quite a few people have been injured, children, babies put things in there, well this device is nothing but a flat disk, that's all you see there and also in the plug past, the cap, so the wall outlet is always cold, you can touch is with your hand and nothing will happen to you.

BETTY HOAG: A wonderful gadget! What do you call it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: This we don't have a name for. We're just negotiating with a company to either sell or lease the patent. But when you bring the plug to the receptacle on the wall outlet then the juice begins to flow, the electricity is transferred…taken apart cold.

BETTY HOAG: Isn't that marvelous! Did you study engineering before?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, just on my own. Whatever the problem is I go to the books and look it up. I have many friends in this field they help me, you know. All these years, thirty-five years practically I have all kinds of patrons in different industries so if I have any problems I refer to them, they help me.
BETTY HOAG: Oh! Are there any other patents that you want to tell me about?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, I have another device wherein high fidelity sound where I eliminate the motor contact to the turntable in a record playing machine. In other words, the motor and the turntable have no visible contact, this is done magnetically, see, so that the motor can be far away from the turntable. One of the basic troubles in sound—I'll put it simply—is that the AC current ordinarily has a hum, you see, so this is transferred and amplified in the speakers. This is completely eliminated with my device because the motor and the turntable have no connection at all, no physical connection.

BETTY HOAG: This is amazing. Have you sold this to one of the companies…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I'm negotiating with them.

BETTY HOAG:…in the process. Sound like a wonderful…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Believe me, if I sell them, or if I don't sell them I've had my fun, just as I say.

BETTY HOAG: Well I think it's unfair because you also have your marvelous paintings all the time.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: oh, I'm trying to sell them, don't think I'm not, but it's pretty difficult, you know, the situation in our country the way it is, and big corporations and so on, it takes a long, lot of red tape to get to see the right man. But that's been a lot of fun. I have other patents, some that are pending, for instance, I have a lid on a teapot that won't fall off, it's very easy to take off.

BETTY HOAG: For me will you do one that eliminated the drip on the teapot?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: All right. That's a very interesting suggestion. We'll work on it.

BETTY HOAG: I saw a gadget one time in san Francisco which was nothing but a little piece of foam rubber and they have an ornamental felt flower, a rubber band that came from this little cylinder around the teapot to it

could adjust to fit the teapot, and when you poured I, the drip came down and went into the little…it was a great idea. I saw it in a gift shop and didn't but it…and for thirty years I've been watching for one.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: There you are. Well you can always invent one yourself.

BETTY HOAG: One of these days when my teapot bothers me too much I will. Well you also have written at least one book that I know about.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh, I've written a number of small articles, articles on painting. The most important thing I think I've done, I've done with Saroyan. He was here in 1950, '51 doing work in Hollywood here, not far from here, he was a neighbor of mine here so being an admirer of my work and also hearing my criticism, my almost constant criticism about what's going on in contemporary art today, he said, "Manuel, why don't we put all these ideas down in book form, in dialogue form, you know, just put a tape recorder down and we'll start to talk." Well we thought we could do this in, oh, about two or three weeks, and it was almost five months of work. Of course, he was amazing, this comes out natural with him, whereas I have to plod and think over what I'm saying and I have to review and change all that later on. But the theme of the book was basically that—in other words, not necessarily criticism, I wish it is, but also a constructive suggestion as to what the responsibilities of the painter really are. Is it merely decoration, colors, texture, tones?…See these are jut technical things and it's all right for a person to be equipped with these, with the physical matter of painting, but what then? What follows after? So this was our basic idea in the book.

BETTY OAG: Sounds fascinating. What's the name of the book?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: well we have several titles for it, oh, "The Language of Pint" was one, and "Saroyan Talks on Art" is another, we haven't—it's never been published, we're still looking for a publisher for it.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, no.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, it's never been published. See, here's the interesting thing about the—well, quite a number of publishers have said, "Oh, this is way out of line, we can't publish it now." One publisher said, "Oh, it almost borders on censorship, you're demanding that artists paint in certain ways." Nothing at all, I thought the editor was kind of acting as a censor by just saying that.

BETTY HOAG: Well I wonder about one of these grants, you know Ford grants that we have for doing…work…it's a wonderful thing.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well, of course, this is, as a say…

BETTY HOAG:…a wonderful thing for someone interested in…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: All right, maybe we'll consider that. But I think Saroyan has kind of lost interest in this, he's put the whole thing in my lap here to take care of it and I've been busy with so many other things that I haven't done anything, but that may be a good suggestion.

BETTY HOAG:…work…to look into.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, probably that's the best way to do it.

BETTY HOAG: What about "Perception in the Language of Painting"?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well this is another—that's my own book, I haven't published this at all.

BETTY HOAG: I tried to get it at the library but couldn't find it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, it hasn't been published. However, this covers my basic concepts of the painter and his responsibilities. I say, for instance, that painting is a language but it's a language of the arts, a visual language, and this is a type of language that's inimitable…nothing will take its place, like a lawyer says he needs an eye-witness. Well this is the basic idea. The artist is the eye-witness to something happens or something he feels, see, and if he puts this down, or is able to put it down, I think he's achieved something. Now the interesting thing is this that I mentioned a moment ago here about the responsibilities of the artist to his people.

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well now I think the artist becomes the greater artist when he also feels the same things other people feel, in other words, if he can put that down also.

BETTY HOAG: Thing that they can feel but can't put down.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right, yes, thing that they can feel or aspire to, or they get this great desire—this I think is part of the responsibilities, maybe the most important for all we know, of the artist—not decoration, not fooling around with little paints and tinting colors and all that sort of thing. This is a very minor part of art work, in my opinion.

BETTY HOAG: It's a very dangerous thing today…I talked to an artist a short time ago…who had…and she said maybe you won't like this, it's abstract art, I said I liked abstract art, so she showed t to me…incidentally I don't know where she got the idea…I didn't like it…rather strange…after she showed it to me…there is a figure here too…my teacher told me…well you know there's no thinking behind it. The same thing is happening in architecture, even the work of…[Le Carbusion]…but they don't know what…is thinking.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well that bring back a very interesting thing to me and I put this also in my book with Saroyan. Do you know you couldn't get away with this for one second in a patent office. This is one reason why I'm fascinated with patents, see, you cannot patent an idea, or a feeling or a thought, it has to have some substance to it, you must take an oath that what you're saying here actually works, functions. There's not bluff about it, see. Now imagine how we're getting away with this in painting for a girl was saying here I didn't know it was happening—well, how wishy-washy can you get? It's true that we have a certain style or we feel certain things that are going into our pictures that we are not entirely aware of at the moment, it may be instinctive, you might say, and this is an interesting psychological idea. But how far can you go with psychiatry? How much can you depend on accident to help you. Instincts are fine but where do they eventually get you? You may just become a wild animal, you know. If you follow this to logical conclusion you become an animal, in other words, just function…like…an animal…well is this the ultimate aim of mankind, you know? Or our goal in art? I don't think so. I think we have to start from the beginning of our own thinking ourselves, think with an original idea, a concept, an invention, see. I've always figured that painting—why do we have men like Da Vinci, for instance, a great painter but also great in merit. Few people know for instance that Samuel F. B. Morse was the president of the National Academy, established the National Academy, for twenty years almost, president of t and endeavored to fit himself really into the manner…he was a great painter. But look at the …that also and a great inventor, this has a lot in common. This is the thing that most artists have missed today, they don't see this relationship between the original concept, something new really, and that's a word you rarely use in a patent office, 'new'; novel is as close as you'll come, they'll use the word 'novel' because who has really an original idea but at least you can make some applications and put one next to another and create something that truly is functional and useful, must be useful.

BETTY HOAG: Wait a minute, must be useful—I wouldn't agree with you on that.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well I'm talking about inventions. It must be functional first. It must be original otherwise you can't get a patent. Now the reason it must be useful is that so many inventions have been made just for the money in it, they crowd the patent office just like we have today thousands and thousands of canvases flooding out galleries that are not really, when you really get down to it, useful in that sense, these are just simply—the man has eaten his dinner and left the bones there, you know what I mean. This is all very fine for you but how about the people that are subjected to this? Flooding the gallery with thousands of pictures like this. And this is my main criticism in the book with Saroyan that I have. And we followed this idea through, as well as in my book on "The Language of Paint." I'm trying to show that painting is a visual language and the artist is honest to that at least something is not right and it will show in his work.

BETTY HOAG: Oh…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Anyone who has done a little painting himself can immediately see if a fellow is a faker or not, you know, because something—you can tell immediately if they've been imitating Gauguin—this is something that now incidentally I have a number of people come in here with old masters they thing they've got. A woman called me the other say, he said this old hermit that just died in my building and left some Michelangelos…

BETTY HOAG: Oh my!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Now I'm on the receiving end of the telephone. My name is in the telephone book as a restorer and artist. As a restorer because I have restored some very valuable paintings. And I said, "Madam, there are only four or five authenticated Michelangelos in the world." You know she was right. I went and saw the pictures.

BETTY HOAG: Oh no!!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: The name was right. The man's name was Michael Angelo. That's right. I just bring that in as a joke because so many people think without knowing it they don't know too much about painting, you see.

BETTY HOAG: Well you can't expect them to.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right. As an artist, a person—I won't say critic, who is really a lover of art I don't believe you can fool his eye too easily. He know whether you're honest or not. I know I've taken a long time on that.

BETTY HOAG: Oh no. But it's fascinating, I'm glad you…really.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well I haven't made a great effort to do it but maybe someday after we die it'll probably be published.

BETTY HOAG: Mr. Vogel said something about having known you in New York. He talked about the Washington Square demonstrations and the riots in the park. So I wondered if you were part of that.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I was in the first Washington Square Open Art Show and of course as you know, that as the bottom of the depression when things were pretty rough. I sold paintings for $5 or $10. I'm not ashamed to say so because now my paintings are selling for almost $3,000, $4,000, in fact I arranged an exhibition of my work in San Francisco at the Winbled Galleries last September, and nothing was less than $3,500. I'm not getting too much but the reason I say I'm not ashamed that I got $5, $10, $15 for my pictures is because I think this is one of the great advantages of the painter; He can always lower his price in order to survive, see, in order to leave.

BETTY HOAG: Of course in those days that meant a lot more…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, it was worth a lot of money. So when a man came up to me, and I was very fortunate—I don't think I mentioned this—one of my paintings was reproduced in the Herald Tribune that week, and a man came in and said, "How much do you want for that painting that's reproduced in the Herald Tribune?" So I didn't know what to say, just the first figure that came into my mind, I said "$100." He said, "Sold!" He was a lawyer in Brooklyn, he was just looking at the show.

BETTY HOAG: Was that about 193-?...1935, '36 probably?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: The first Washington Square show I think was in about 1934, '35.

BETTY HOAG: You were on the Treasury Art Project easel before going on the Public Work of Art, I understand.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Now that is when you did paintings for the buildings. Were you sent out fro Washington to buildings around the country on this?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No. One of the most wonderful things about that project was that it, to me, symbolized out system of government. The main principle involved in the whole thing was a complete freedom for the artist, complete, and when I say complete I mean they said, "We're not going to give you any orders, we're not going to tell you what to paint, you've on your own, John, and if you've got it you'll bring the work in an we'll see what you have." Well you know this type of thing is so rare and so naturally all the artists…their heart and soul was in the work. Not excluding me, I was right there, I planned to do my best on the job. So whatever we got, and we got about $18 a week, I think.

BETTY HOAG: Were you limited to the American scene, particularly?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No.

BETTY HOAG: You would have been by your interest, but I mean…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well I painted American scenes, that is the American scene in the sense, the way I saw it. No, there were no restrictions at all. Now in the mural work in the libraries and post offices this was something else. I mean the theme was given and they more or less had to follow that; sometimes the artist himself suggested when he was asked what he could paint particularly well.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, the artist and the community sometimes…they had you know…they wanted historical.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, oh sure. Of course as you know there were a lot of controversies on that too.

BETTY HOAG: Really.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well it livened the thing up but then again it always came back to this where the artist had—there was a very distinct challenge I recall, this of course was not the government program, but Rockefeller decided after he built Rockefeller Center to have Diego Rivera come in and paint murals on the wall there in Rockefeller Center. He also had Jose Sert do some of the work. Rockefeller presented his general scheme and

designs and they had I guess to pass on them, they were very general. Do you remember the story?

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Karl Marx and Lenin, see, he painted them, so a great issue came up: Does the artist have the freedom, the right to whatever he…well there were two big schools of thought on it, a big division here. The man saying you know, "Who pays the piper if you hear the music?" Well Rockefeller said I'm paying for this, I should have what I want. And the other side said, well, no, this is a public building, public and so forth; you don't own this in that sense and the artist should do what he wants. And there were pickets and everything in New York…I don't know if you were in New York…

BETTY HOAG: No, I wasn't there, but I read about it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I was there at that time, oh, they marched around the block, Rockefeller Center…

BETTY HOAG: Oh! Really picketed the place?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh, for days, yes.

BETTY HOAG: Well there was this thing, wasn't it finally whitewashed of, or something?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, eventually, well they compromised, I think the picture is still there by they plastered over it. The picture is still there, can be peeled off some day.

BETTY HOAG: Well you were there. Did this influence your wok at all? You obviously went down and watched this going on. How much effect did that have on your…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: The side I took?

BETTY HOAG: I don't mean that…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I took the side of Rivera in the sense that, you see, he had done his cartoons, I don't know the exact contract was. Now that we're older we think of these things logically, in legal terms, the small print. I don't know what it was, as I understand it he was given quite a bit of leeway to do what he wanted to do. He was quite a famous painter, you know, and I don't know—sometimes I wonder, for instance, did the Pope say much to Michelangelo? When he painted the Sistine Chapel, or to Da Vinci. In some cases they did and in some cases they didn't, you see. It all depends upon the painter and the trust they had in the painter. Well, from that point of view…

BETTY HOAG: If Irving Stone's book has been well researched, it is true the Pope tried to influence…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I understand he did make some remarks.

BETTY HOAG: I don't know that…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: We don't know for sure. I think they had complete trust in Michelangelo. He was a great man, let's face it. And I felt Rivera is—I think the artist once he is accepted he should have the leadership to do what he thinks is proper. We have this problem in the movies, don't we, where we have censorship and so on…

BETTY HOAG: And in books.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Once we start this censorship that one man tells us, "Do it this way or else." Like, for instance, Madison Avenue they are saying is practically controlling TV today, you see, once we have billboards in our homes—we've got nothing but billboards in our home. I'm sure the medium has better future or better objectives than that. That's what actually happens…

BETTY HOAG: But where can you get it? What can the government do without having the same restrictions and I think this is illustrated in what happened…Johnson administration…give more help in the arts…can they do it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: If the government represents the people…

BETTY HOAG: Can they do it, and can they represent artists…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Good point, that's a good point. I think the Kennedys tried to make some attempt in that direction, unfortunately the assassination, but…

BETTY HOAG: Well as I understand it…could have, you know, helped the Kennedys…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: We have deeper amateur help and more profound problems to solve than art problems in America…such as…atomic bomb.

BETTY HOAG: The other aspect I want to ask you about the Rivera murals…and from painter's standpoint because after…particularly on the projects…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well no, not the project, probably some…restrictions today…

BETTY HOAG: Now today…Orozco…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh yes. Well I'm talking about a much later artist, I'm talking about Orozco…he was a very highly principled man and he has now there they let him—see they had complete…for instance the murals he did at Dartmouth, or the mural he did over here. Have they seen the mural at Grandmont College?

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: If you consider that here was a man that was extremely sincere in his work, in some ways of course I would say highly designed, but very forceful, very powerful, a much greater man than Rivera was. For instance, the job that Rivera did at the Detroit Museum…have you seen them?

BETTY HOAG: No, I haven't.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: This is more or less illustrative pictures of the Ford Factory and life and manufacturing, illustrative of that. But this is extremely crudely done compared to Orozco's work.

BETTY HOAG: Id he do the work himself or did he have helpers?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I think he has some helpers but he did quite a bit of the work himself. It's fresco. Don't let me in any way diminunize his importance, his importance, I mean he's a great painter.

BETTY HOAG: No, but it's interesting…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: it's a difference in point of view.

BETTY HOAG: While we're on the subject you said you helped with some on the with that section of the Federal Art where the Treasury…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: A very short time. That was the WPA it was a very short time. I was on the easel project. I was just on it to help a friend, and get experience.

BETTY HOAG: I see…important on the tape…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No. No. Most of that work was done on the easel project, and Public Works of Art Project. Then as I say in '36 and '37 I began having exhibitions of my own work at the Ferargil Galleries and later at the Association of American Artists Galleries. This was a result of all the trips I took across the country.

BETTY HOAG: Well you did a lot of exhibiting in 1936. You were in the Treasury art Project Show that was at the Whitney; the Fine Arts Show at the Museum of Modern Art; the Corcoran Gallery works of art, all this in that one year.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Me dealer did all that, see my dealer sent the pictures to Ferargil show and I was telling you at the Museum of Modern Art…President Roosevelt wanted to show the value of this type of work and he selected thirty painting for the White House, for the government buildings…he fortunately took one of mine… and this was a big boost you see to the program. You'd be amazed at the publicity this thing got.

BETTY HOAG: Was that Cheyenne?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Of course the Museum of Modern Art just opened, it was something new too.

BETTY HOAG: Was this Cheyenne or Laramie?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: It was Cheyenne looking at it miles away…it's in a hollow, you know…farms, mountains all around in a circle…

BETTY HOAG: It's a very fine picture. I wonder where those pictures are now.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: They're in various government offices…I don't know where they are, they head of our program said there are all being sent to Washington…

BETTY HOAG: Must be very exciting. Do you know Al King here?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I met him but I don't…

BETTY HOAG:…Albert King…and his wife…they were important in the California Project…Long Beach…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I know who they are but…out here those years, you see.

BETTY HOAG:…they discovered the lost Chinese art glazing colors…and i…at the same show…at which Roosevelt…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh is that so? Isn't that wonderful.

BETTY HOAG: It certainly is, it was a beautiful thing…at the same time…this Armenian picnic…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No that was after I think…

BETTY HOAG:…in 1938 Margaret Bruning in the "Magazine of Art" says, "It may be difficult to decide from the showing just where the American art is going…lean toward…"I thought that was quite interesting…particularly delighted with your work.

[End of Section 1]

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on February 12 continuing the interview with Manuel Tolegian. Mr. Tolegian, you were about to speak about being married in 1940 but if you don't mind before we get to that even I want to go back to a couple of other very interesting shows that you had. One in 1937 was in Colorado, was "Growth of Regionalism" show which showed "The White Road" and it seems to me that historically that must have been an exciting one because of the fact that it was western regionalism and there were some wonderful other painters representing California: Lucien LeBeau, for instance, who was on the Art Project, did some fine murals here; and they said from Wyoming there was Charles Pollock, is that a different Pollock?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, that's his older brother. That's Jackson's oldest brother.

BETTY HOAG: I didn't know there were other painters in the family.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. There were five brothers: Charles, Sandy, Marvin, and Frank. Frank Pollock is here in the nursery business in Ontario. Charles Pollock I believe is at the University of Michigan teaching there. He was one of the earliest artists here.

BETTY HOAG: And Boardman Robinson. I believe he was a California artist.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, he was a Colorado man but he came to teach at the Art Students League in '29 and '30 and he was, of course, painting murals, and oil painting. I think he went back to Colorado Springs and finally died there. He was instrumental I think in that show you talked about.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, he was represented with a portrait. And Dr. Curry had a corn field; and Thomas Hart Benton's mural sketches were on exhibit.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: And Grant Wood maybe?

BETTY HOAG: They didn't mention him, but it sounds like he would have been. And your was very lovely, California country side covered with sage brush and rock, a reproduction of that.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I remember that.

BETTY HOAG: Then the following year, 1938—well as a matter of fact, all of your paintings at this time have such fascinating names which jut the epitome of this period, I just love "The Big Apple"…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: "Turkey in the Straw"

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. "Turkey in the Straw" is in the Duncan Phillips Memorial Museum now in Washington. They own that.

BETTY HOAG: And, oh, "The White Barn", "The White Road", all of those things were typical of the country.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well, isn't it kind of tragic that all this—it seems to me that way, that most of this is all kind

of lost, that artists have…

BETTY HOAG: Turned away from it in subject, you mean?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, and have become introspective instead.
BETTY HOAG: Yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: They are concerned with their own selves, their own techniques, little cults of their own, their own little soirees, you might say, whereas this has never been in any period of any importance in art, this has never been the most important objective, it always has been concern with the people. For instance, a man like Hogarth, if we didn't have him we would know very little about the England of that time, or Daumier…

BETTY HOAG: Daumier in France at the same time…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: And Rolandson is another man that comes to mind and al the other great painters, you know, they always referred—it was not an introspective thing, it was partly that, yes, but it was mostly they were absorbed in the people.

BETTY HOAG: Well there were caricaturists, and I don't believe this myself but I think someone was saying to you possibly that we're doing it today in funny pictures and that's why this man with the strange name that hope to do his pop art.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Up to a point you're right, but they really weren't caricaturists in that sense, they were really great artists and hey had to learn the technique and the skill to bring out these wonderful feelings they had, these wonderful ideas they had, and the creative feeling they had. No one said to them, "Now look, today or this coming year we're going to do regionalistic pictures", or, "Let's make out schedule next week like they do in Hollywood." Se pictures, you know, this is not—this is just a commercial thing. That's why I say they weren't caricaturists, they were caricaturists, but they didn't paint caricatures of people, they really painted what they thought they saw in these people.

BETTY HOAG: Well don't you think that one of the reasons that during the Federal Art Project time there was this tremendous social protest, there was such a ferment about people's situation and that does not exist, we have time to be more introspective.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: We don't have social protest today?

BETTY HOAG: All right, we don't look at it today.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: The Negroes?

BETTY HOAG: Well I mean, look, how many people turn their back on the thing is part our problem, I think.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Turn their back?

BETTY HOAG: Well they're not doing anything about it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Very well said.

BETTY HOAG: How can you know it and not do anything about it? But people to left and right. I mean these murders in New York and…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's really a very, very good point. We are going through a very apathetic period, aren't we?

BETTY HOAG: Yes, it's a dreadful thing. I was speaking of it before we went on the tape. It reaches into all corners of people.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well I'll tell you, this may have an economic root. I take the Wall Street Journal, believe it or not, I read it, it's a good paper. I feel that—they agree that the American public has just gone hog-wild to be like the Joneses and their credit is the highest in history, everybody is over-extended in their credit to such a point where they just can't take any risks or they'll lost their home or their car or their family will be insecure. So the economic root probably may be the cause for all this apathy. In other words…

BETTY HOAG: It's a good point.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: You know what I mean, we feel that if we protest we may lose our job tomorrow. Then of course we went through that McCarthy Period where you were accused, if you had any ideas of any kind that

were out of the norm, you were a Communist, you know, or not a worthwhile person to talk to.

BETTY HOAG: That held even into the Truman Administration when the State Department…did you have any in those? There were recalled the other day…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, I didn't have…State Department? No, I didn't.

BETTY HOAG: We decided to exchange culture and they selected all these pictures and one man selected them and they were all one school of thought as it were, and one of the McCarthy-baiters in Congress learned that one of the men was a Communist so the whole thing was brought back. I think they found that two or three of them were out of eighty-seven painters.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well it falls in line with our general program, our general program throughout the world, for instance, I am not a nationalist but I do feel that America should come first in every aspect of our policy. It is doesn't, if we are not selfish that way, I don't see how we can be good to anybody else. For instance, if we went people to be democratic throughout the country, we should certainly set an example for it. This is why I brought up the Negro problem. And we are not doing that, we're trying, it's very difficult, it's complicated.

BETTY HOAG: We can't expect respect from other countries unless…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I agree, yes.

BETTY HOAG: One of the very interesting social protest paintings that you made was in 1939 called "Martial Law".

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And I have it here but will you tell the tape about it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well that picture was exhibited—well, first of all let me say how it started. I was doing the pictures of the life of the miners in Pennsylvania, a series of pictures—the pictures by the way you're talking about was exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. And I wrote a letter to John L. Lewis and told him just out of the blue, I said, "There's a painting at the Corcoran Gallery on exhibition that I'd like to have you take a look at. If you like it, if you think it'll fit into"--they were thinking of a new building at the Mine Workers—"I'll give it as a gift to the Mine Workers."

BETTY HOAG: How wonderful!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: So he went and saw it, he went and did that, he went and looked at it; and he liked it very much. He wrote me a wonderful letter that they would accept the gift, so it's hanging in the United Mineworkers to this day.

BETTY HOAG: Isn't that interesting. Where are their headquarters? In Pittsburgh?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: In Washington, D.C. And these were—the idea came from Youngstown—well they used to call it the massacre in those days, of course that's a pretty strong word, there were pickets at the steel mill in Youngstown, I remember people were killed, the National Guard was called. This idea came from that, see. I was almost going there to get my materials but since I had done all this work with the miners I just simply put the soldiers around the hills with machine guns, and they were allowing the scabs to go into the mill. I was very idealistic in those days, you see. I was for the working man. My ideas have changed drastically since then. In those days I was, I painted this, and I still feel it was the proper thing to do. I think I caught the spirit of the age, as you mentioned a while ago. That's a very good point you made.

BETTY HOAG: You caught the spirit of the dichotomy of the situation too in that very peaceful background, it's so lovely, and then the people, the agitation, it's a kind of fugue there, counterpoint thing.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's a very, very good point. You put it much better than I did.

BETTY HOAG: Well, let's see…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well that's a heck of a life, isn't t, a miner's.

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes, I'm from Butte, I know…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: It's very tragic, the families live in these company buildings and they've exploited them for years. If anybody should have a voice and say something about it it should be the artists, somebody who feels this tragedy.

BETTY HOAG: I never go to Butte that I'm shocked at the number of beggars, crippled, maimed people you pass on the streets. You can't realize it till you go to a mining town.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's another big mining town.

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I was almost going there myself to catch that.

BETTY HOAG: Did you never go?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I went to Montana but I didn't go…

BETTY HOAG: Well that's a shame because you should have…in 1940 under the Federal Art Project work there was a very interesting show at the New York Fair and this was under the direction of Joseph Danysh, which I didn't know until I read this article about you. And I believe he was out here in California.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I believe he was here. Well I showed at both of these Fairs, New York as well as California.

BETTY HOAG: And let's see, what one—oh, "Waterfront, New York" which they talked about the light dancing spiritedly through the mélange of forms, a kind of John Marin kind of thing, I don't know if it's a watercolor or not.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well this is my John Marin?

BETTY HOAG: No, but it has the same light…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Has it?

BETTY HOAG: Well in the reproduction it did.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well of course his basic source of creativity technically speaking were the Impressionists, see. He's a kind of compromise between the Impressionists and the classic painters. And I do the same. I have Impressionism in my still-life paintings, which you saw. Well now you'll see there are not just literal interpretations. Far from it. They are very carefully organized pictures using counterpoint you mentioned a while ago, of colors, tones, textures, and then forms. You'll have a large form, have a small form, you'll have a little seed of the peaches, big peaches and you'll have a little seed and those other smaller items. So you have contrast of tones, contrast of colors, contrast of forms, and contrast of textures all in this one picture. This is my general boon. Now of course I'm talking about technical things here. And this is far from the social protest type of picture that we've been talking about. But still this has much more meaning hat literal representation of peaches in this sense, there's a seed there, and there's a fruit there, you see. You know there's an old saying that when the fruit is ripe it falls from the tree, this is an old Armenian saying, and I'll never go back to the tree again. It can never go back. It's an absolute statement you can make that. Now this is the principle behind this picture. There are several pictures I have painted, for instance, of pomegranates, which is also a Middle Easter—very ancient idea of symbolizing…

BETTY HOAG: Fertility.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN:…and fecundity, abundance, so I have always opened up the pomegranate and the seeds falling. There's nothing original in that sense, but the way I've done it, see, the way I've put this fruit there, organized it, it has the human quality in it again.

BETTY HOAG: Well it's almost symbolism, but still it evokes symbolism, doesn't it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right. Sell, see, there are so many ways to do it, of course, I'm doing it with realistic—not realistic representational form, you can do it also I suppose with Expressionistic forms, but I think it's a little too vague for me, just a little bit too accidental. Somebody was asking me the other day, "How is it that you paint so smoothly?" This was the great jazz musician, by the way, Eddie Miller. Have you ever heard him? He's a sax player, he's a great, great musician there's no doubt about it, and he loves to paint, you know. He was here the other day, and he said…

BETTY HOAG: You mean to own a painting or he does paint also?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: He says he wanted to be an artist when he was a child so it's coming back to him now. He's exactly my age, by the way, fifty-three.

BETTY HOAG: How great that he's doing it!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: He says, “How do you get those—I see all the forms, shapes, the solidity, ad the sculptural quality of your paintings but I don’t see any bumpy pint. How do you do that?” Well I sad, I work it all in, I don’t leave anything to accident, see; every but of it is worked, it’s painstaking work.

BATTY HOAG: When you have a highlight you’ve made, you don’t count on lumpy paint to get it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That’s right.

BETTY HOAG: One of the other comment about your landscapes was that they are Ryderesque. I haven’t seen enough of them to know whether they are or not.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. I…Ryder. I think he was one of our great painters.

BETTY HOAG: Oh were you? Just as a matter of interest what about Blakelock too.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I’ve always connected the two so much…painter. Well they bother in my sense of the word—I don’t know how you interpret the word Expressionistic. They are both Expressionistic. Not in the sense of Pollock, see, he did it in a kind of vague manner, but these fellows knew what they were doing. It took a long time to create a Ryder painting. That man glazed, and worked, and re-worked, a hard-working man, you can see toil there, he worked hard.

BETTY HOAG: What a tragedy that both of those men used cheap paint.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, unfortunately…

BETTY HOAG: Isn’t it a horrible thing.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: But they had great skill though and they did know on secret, and that secret was to use white with their colors. So you have tones at least, the tones if not the colors, you see. Oh yes, white is the great secret of all painting. All these paintings we have today of Rembrandt and Rubens—some Rubens look as though they were painted yesterday. Right? This was after oil painting was discovered, put it that way. Fresco, if you go back before the 14th Century I’d say no, this is not as predominant then. Giotto used white. The idea of this is you—see, if you mix white with your colors you have already preserved your color. It’s the white that does the thing. If you ask the ordinary house painter he knows this. He primes his wall first, he uses a white background, he sometimes gives it two coats. He knows that. And he also knows that if you don’t mix white with blue it will fade in no time. Right? Chiefly because of the blue. This is a very ancient principle. This is why we have Ryder and Blakelock and William Merritt Chase and many of the other who knew this, Robert Henri—and their pictures, if they have lost some of their color because they used cheap color, they have not lost in their forms because you see it’s the white that secured the color, unfortunately the color has faded.

BETTY HOAG: A collector friend of mine in San Francisco picked up a Blakelock for $75 a few months ago. I was encouraged to know that there are some around. I mean he of course knew his work and was able to get it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Also a number of thing too, you know.

BETTY HOAG: I think not.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: There are clouds of Corot’s that are not, but again to the man who knows, to the wise eye, the secret again is what I just told you about mixing the white, now there’s quite a number of painters that will imitate Corot but they’ll never get away with it if you look closely into them, see them properly.

BETTY HOAG: A lot of our California 19th Century painters used green in most of the…that was a strange thing they went through. Keith did, Tavenier…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, Keith…

BETTY HOAG: Do you like his things?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I do, some of the better works. He also did a lot of brainstorming pictures too.

BETTY HOAG: I’m writing a book about Tavenier who was contemporary and at the time of Poland he was exactly an opposite personality.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Right…his work. Because Father Cornelius was a great friend of mine.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, he was!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, was a great lover of my paintings and bought one or to and I had my farm up north in California for five years…I had a little show over there, I say little…

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, no, in Chico, California, a small little town, outside of Chico I had an animal farm, a Shetland farm, and this exhibition I had there over five thousand people came to see that from seven different counties, more than any of my shows that I had in New York. They cleaned me out of everything that I painted. That was the time that Father Cornelius came and saw my work and picked out—as well as a couple of other Fathers that came, they picked out two or three paintings.

BETTY HOAG: Well you know I have this erratum to the book which is a whole volume in itself, and I can't find a copy of the book, I have been hunting and hunting.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I have both of them, he sent them to me with this…

BETTY HOAG: Well hang on to them…oh, those are real collector's items, you can't get them.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Is that so?

BETTY HOAG: Well I shouldn't say that. If you want to pay a lot of money you can get them at one of these crumby places…but I keep hoping I'll fin one. They have some Tavenier's there at ST. Mary's too and I can't get an answer from any of those fathers. If you know any of their names I'd appreciate having them.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: My next door neighbor will help you on that. He's an insurance man, he gives a lot of money to them. He knows all those Fathers. Two years go quite a number of them were killed in a Sierra automobile accident, five of them, including Father Cornelius.

BETTY HOAG: I didn't know he was killed on that…isn't that a shame.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, in the Sierras in the snow.

BETTY HOAG: Well, mentioning Chico we were up to 1940, '41…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, and I got married.

BETTY HOAG: And you came back from the Fair.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well now I intended to extend my ideas of visualistic painting, so I came back to my own state. I definitely intended to say here, which I have all these years now. At that time I thought well I'll go right down to the earth, you know, which I did, and I painted a lot of pictures through there. Of course in '42 the war interrupted all this and I became a war correspondent, an artist war correspondent.

BETTY HOAG: Oh! Please tell us about this on the tape.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well, that was through my agents in New York—Associated American Artists. They wanted to know if I would be interested and I said yes. I had volunteered just before that and had been turned down because of my ear, my ear has got a hole in it. So just then this news came so I said, well here's my opportunity to do something, so I did.

BETT HOAG: Well you said this was a combination Army and…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, this was a project developed by Abbott Laboratories and the Surgeon-General, he was given the full authority to do whatever he wanted to do with it and of course all the pictures reverted back to the government.

BETTY HOAG: What zones were you established in?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well the other artists were all sent overseas and I was just going to be sent overseas also when the war ended in 1945, but I covered the army nurses training and they various activities…people coming back, soldiers coming back, wounded soldiers coming back, how they treated them, what they did to them. And then the big project of malaria. Malaria was a big problem, see, in the Pacific theatre. So quite a number of the soldiers came back simply—the fever was killing them so that's when adurene was discovered, you remember, this crash program. The army nurses were involved in all that.

BETTY HOAG: You sort of specialized in nurses in one series that you're going to let us microfilm.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right. That's what the…

BETTY HOAG: And how were these used? For advertising purposes in magazines or…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: All theses pictures, all these paintings were to be used for war museum, was history museum.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, I didn't know we had such a thing.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That' right, in Washington, D.C. War History Museum. I had a very nice commendation from the Surgeon-General, General Kirk, a wonderful man. Then of course…we…had…the book "Men Without…", a record of all this.

BETTY HOAG: I want to be sure to get the names of those, of the publisher one the record before I go today.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN:…Press.

BETTY HOAG: Let's see. You had a couple of other pictures I wanted t ask you about, one sounded interesting and I wonder if I detected some Picasso influence, one done in 1944 "The Dove of Peace".

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh, the illustration, there are the illustrations…

BETTY HOAG: I don't know what this was from, I have just written It down.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: These were the illustrations for Richard Hagopian's book. It was a…

BERRY HOAG: Is this one of the Armenian books you showed me?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: No, this is in English. The Dove Brings Peace is the title of the book.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, is see, I didn't understand…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I didn't have too much else to go with it but illustrated that book.

BETTY HOAG: Pardon me, who's the author?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Richard Hagopian. He is now, I think, professor of speech at California, Berkeley.

BETTY HOAG: You'd have to be a speech expert to pronounce his name. Do you know how to spell it?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: H A G O P I A N. The 'ian' stands for 'son of', son of Jacob, yakob, Jacob. These are stories that are very similar to Saroyan's really, Saroyan's short stories. This is a Massachusetts boy, he did this book in the early days when I had my farm at Chico-Chico, So I said, "Fine, I'll do it". I also dealt through my agents, Farrar & Rinehart.

BETTY HOAG: And in the same year you did that beautiful painting—well, no, it isn't, it's different—you did "Dinner at Omar Khyams", you showed me a landscape taken at a ranch.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh yes, well I helped with writing that book, I did the illustrations for it, but that was used only for the Armenian edition. This was done by George Mardikian.

BETTY HOAG: I'll have to ask you to spell him too.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well this is the best-selling author of Song of America which he wrote about four of five years ago and truly a great American patriot this man, a great benefactor and a man who you may recall fed the UN delegates when they came to San Francisco—you see his restaurant was in San Francisco—group by group, you know.

BETTY HOAG:…I'm sorry. Is this the same Omar Kyham that you're speaking of?

MANUEL TOELGIAN: Yes, this is the Omar Kyham restaurant, and his name is George Mardikian, the owner.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, it isn't the same name…would you please spell Mardikian.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: M A R D I K I A N.

BETTY HOAG: Thank you.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: During the war he was called the “GI Food Chanteen”—GI Chow Chanteen.

BETTY HOAG: Tell the tape about his principle of raising himself.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: The what?

BETTY HOAG: The principle of raising his own fruit and vegetables.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh! He is a great believer—of course his book “Dinner at Omar Kayham’s” he goes into the great value of Armenian foods and he figured he felt that if he was going to make any kind of contribution to this great country of his—he’s an immigrant, you see, and he made millions, he’s worth now over fifteen million—it will be in food and it will be the great value of Armenian food. Well, of course, our food is—there are very few Armenians who have stomach trouble—and that’s because we eat yogurt—Moslem, in the old country they call is ‘moslem’. And also we preserve the vitamins in the food. See, I helped put this book a little bit, he couldn’t speak English too well, and my wife, being a school teach, and we were old friends and we helped him revising it, he gave the material, and all that, the menus smaller, the recipes. The stews, for instances, are very, very nourishing and full of vitamins because it is all cooked in one pot, the vegetables and the meat, the flavors are intermixed you see, we call those yahtis, or stews around here. And then of course the Moslem is always a sauce on some of these, and this is a good mixture, you see, the enzymes there, the bacteria, I hadn’t thought too much of it but he had. Then he also believes that vegetables and the meat must all be fresh, in other words, the vegetables themselves must be frown on virgin soil and he has this on his farm, melons and things are out of this world, the flavor, the perfume of these melons is unbelievable.

BETTY HOAG: How far is his farm from San Francisco?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Seventy miles north of San Francisco.

BETTY HOAG: Up near Santa Rosa?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: The Napa Valley, jus the other valley over. And he also raises his cattle and his sheep. Sell Armenian eat a lot of lamb, and he has his little modest ranch house there, he lives there. This man has over seventy of my paintings, he’s been buying them over the past twenty-five years now.

BETTY HOAG: Does he show them in the restaurant or in his home?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Do you know what he does? He is so fond of my work, and probably of me,--we’re old friends—that he gives there pictures away. He pays pretty substantial prices for them. For instance, he gave one to Nasser recently; before that, to the Reader’s Digest Leland Wallace, and, oh, all number of museums and individuals because he wants to…this man is just great, you know.

BETTY HOAG: Isn’t that wonderful! He’s almost a Medici.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, he’s my booster. He’s coming here tomorrow, by the way.

BETTY HOAG: Your things are just beautiful, lovely…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Thank you. Too bad you’re going to miss this man, he’s coming tomorrow to see us, he comes to see us, he and his wife, he’s a wonderful, great man. Of course, he wrote this wonderful book “Song of America” which was a fantastic best-seller here. And he goes around the country, unfortunately, he can’t do it now, he’s had a mild heart attack, it wasn’t serious, a mild one. But he does around the country giving this book away if you don’t buy it. The State Department took 100,000 to distribute around the world.

BETTY HOAG: I’ll have to get one and read it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I’ll give you one before you go.

BETTY HOAG: Good. I’d love to have it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: But he talks, you see, lectures on it, till finally—he did this for three years till he was exhausted and had this small heart attack, so he quit this lately.

BETTY HOAG: He sounds like a great heart.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Bragging about our country, what a wonderful country we have. We don’t appreciate this, you know. And how true it is, you see, we take everything for granted. All we have to do it go overseas and see how other people live.

BETTY HOAG: What was the picture show that came out last year that we saw about a little boy? Wasn't that Armenian…?

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Oh, you're thinking about Elia Kazan's book America, America.

BETTY HOAG: yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: You know I missed that, I haven't seen it, but I understand it's…

BETTY HOAG: Oh, you're going to enjoy it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN:…patterned very similar to this book.

BETTY HOAG: I though as far as the directing of the picture went, it left something to be desired, by the message was the same.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well now Kazan is a friend of mine, I've known him and it's true he has the same feeling about this country. He was born in the Middle East also and he has exactly the same feeling about our country. He's made pretty well here, the opportunities are here.

BETTY HOAG: He wants to show people that they are.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right. You see this is something—again I don't want to sound like a broken record—but we as artists I feel have a responsibility in showing this message to the rest of the world, either it's our writers or somebody. And what do we do? We send thousands of abstract pictures all over the world, they can't understand these pictures. Why do we do this nonsensical thing? We send for instance…

BETTY HOAG: That's a good point.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN:…to people in South America or people in Soviet countries where we're trying to be friends, you know, with the atom bomb over our heads we're trying to get these people to understand out country. And we send them miles upon miles of these abstract canvases where we're mad at them. And I wrote our State Department and our President about it, and no reply at all, no concern. Well now this is very, very important, extremely important.

BETTY HOAG: Accepting the Soviet Embassy's invitation to meet them in a boxing competition would do more good than some of the paintings.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well…and the wonderful things about it is that the Soviet people—I'm not talking about the government now, I have no se for their government at all—but the Soviet people are great friends with us. They like the way we live and very unfortunately they love art, they're crazy about painting in particular, you know, and we send them these miles—we flood them with these canvases that have no meaning whatsoever to these people. And they try their best to say, "Well we don't understand them but I guess they're interesting," which I guess after all is the best thing you can say.

BETTY HOAG: I've always felt that when we first started doing this, sending things to France was a sort of me-too attitude, or, "We can do it here…"

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Good.

BETTY HOAG: And maybe that had its…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's pretty good, because that was more or less Pollock's concept. It has a very good point there.

BETTY HOAG: Your point is great but it doesn't mean anything any place else that they're not speaking that language either.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right absolutely. And yet we're trying to win over the people of the world, aren't we? I think we have failed miserably. I really mean that, we have failed miserably as artists. It's too darn bad, I think one of these days we're just going to have to face up to it and come back to…I don't mean to be unreasonable or Armenian…but we've got to come back to the artist's basic responsibility.

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Saying here the psychological aspects of what the physical matter of painting, what it does, you see, this is all very interesting, but it's too subjective, it's too much adulation of what paints do accidentally,

not enough attention to the intellect and creative ideas, to the inventive part of the mind, intellect, where the basic concern here seems to be with the physical aspects. I know I'm repeating myself but, you see, this ties in with what I'm saying…

BETTY HOAG: Maybe it's the effect of our culture, material culture.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well I'm sure it's reflecting something, but it's also reflecting a kind of—have you seen some of these teenagers, their pan-faced, apathetic, devil-may-care attitude, it's also a reflection of that. A little bit of this Sartre business, you know, I don't know how to pronounce it…

BETTY HOAG: Existentialism.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, all right. How it's taken root or why it's being adored today—whatever you want to call it, I'm not using the right word—why it's being followed is beyond me, I can't figure it out. I think maybe something has to happen, that's going to shock us into really understanding what a wonderful thing we have here in our country. And it's worth fighting for, it's worth defending, it's worth bragging about, it's worth telling the world what a wonderful government we have. Now this can become flag-waving and over-patriotic, I can understand all that sort of thing, I don't mean that, these are crackpots that go that far, patriotism is a wonderful thing and I'm proud to wave the flag in the sense of that—but it has to be done in a very beautiful and powerful way, it can't be done just mouthing a lot of words.

BETTY HOAG: You have to back it up.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: You have to feel it. That's why I object to all these pan-faced kids that are walking around not concerned with their studies, they don't give a damn, you know, they have no respect for their parents, and they're fooling around with sports cars, this is all very interesting and I don't say that they shouldn't have a little mischief in them. But artists, no, I draw the line. If you're a painter, if you're a pro you can't be playing around with the kids any more. You'll be playing around with something that has tremendous, valuable history and a great tradition behind it, and we are going to throw this off to one side, just say this doesn't have any value, well I don't know about that.

BETTY HOAG: You made one of the big points in a letter you wrote to the editor of Art Digest a few years ago…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: You've done a lot of research on my…

BETTY HOAG: Well I had to understand you a little bit before I came in here. But in that you say: "a good painter does his work for the love of it!" Now there's the technical side if you want it, but you also added, "and out of compassion for people painting is an art of vision". And I think that in that you really epitomize just exactly what you're saying now and what you're doing in your painting.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: You know, sometimes a business man who's never had any experiences with art comes into my studio and says, "You've got ten dollars worth of paint there and show me why is that worth two thousand dollars or a thousand dollars?" Well, this may seem like a stone wall, you don't know how to answer that. Well the first answer I give is that if you use your eyes properly, if you have any feeling at all, you'll see that, you'll see something beyond the paint, beyond the decorative value, beyond the frame, see. This is the only answer.

BETTY HOAG: Well also to get him to take it home and look at it. I think a lot of times when these people feel this way and what they begin to live with something it seeps into them, but it isn't always east.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well if they're exposed to it they'll eventually get it, you're right.

BETTY HOAG: One thing we want to get through before we're through with our tape, and I know you have someone waiting, is sort of your overall picture of the contribution that you feel the Federal Art Project made, or anything pro or con that you care to say about it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well it's all pro. I think it's the most wonderful thing this government did and the time it did it, of course. It did one thing. First of all it got all the painters together. You know painters are kind of reclusive people, they don't get together too often. In this case they did, they got together and they talked about their problems and so forth…

BETTY HOAG: Against a common enemy, as it were.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well, that's pretty tall. What I meat was the technical side, for instance, there was a lot of give and take, a lot of artists wouldn't care for another man's work, well they got familiar with him, they talked to him personally, and they began to find out, a change of ideas here, well maybe this fellow has a go here, he's trying to do something, there was more tolerance if you want to call it that, being charitable is all right, there was a feeling or solidity for each other. That was one thing we did. The second thing, even though it was $18,

$20 a week it was something, that was a lot of money in those days, and it gave the artists a little dignity, see, made them feel that somebody appreciated their work.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, and that was the first time this had ever happened in this country, really.
MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I believe so,

BETTY HOAG: Yes, I'm quite sure. Before they never felt they were needed, it was the ivory tower aspect.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well of course part of that was the artist's fault, they had that ivory tower, you know, devil-may-care, to heck with the public, and all that. They're talking that way now, by the way again, you know. I don't know if you heard a discussion on TV with some of the top people, people in the highest echelon of American art were on TV about a year ago and I was surprised to hear the editor of one of our art magazine say that artists do not paint for the public, to heck with the public, they're nothing, that's just what he said.

BETTY HOAG: Oh no!

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well now we're getting back to this idea again, you see…ivory tower.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Good point, yes. That's what it is.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: How many artists, really creative artists has any age produced you know really serious painters. There are a number of flashes in the pan, yes, but they're also some of them who the people just loved and they did everything they could to preserve this fellow, do whatever they could for him. Go back as early as Giotto's time where they paraded his work all through the street…

BETTY HOAG: Church processions…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: This was the type of thing—I don't say that we should worship the artist, no, but we should have a feeling that he's a man we should…

BETTY HOAG: Again you come to this thing of…he was doing it for the Church…today it would have to be for our country.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well something.

BETTY HOAG: Well something, an ideal, yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN:…sense of responsibility…till he does he has no excuse to be crying about making a living or anything, no one appreciating his work, no artist ever worked that way…say "I'll paint a thousand pictures and I want someone to appreciate them." It doesn't work—in other words, it's just the other way around. If you paint pictures that are contribution then you'll have people coming in droves to buy them…

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Right. Right. They've got to be honest pictures though. The example I gave of Chico was I think a good example…

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: You know there's an old saying: if you gamble, gamble yourself. When I left New York I had fifty dollars when I got married, I said I know that my principle is right I'm going to go and rent this farm, a little place, I think we were paying twenty dollars a month and I started painting pictures and I worked two years. Fortunately my wife was a school teacher and so she brought a little income, it was pretty good, it was enough, we had our first dinner on orange boxes, I remember that. And I painted these pictures. As I say five thousand people came to see them, they cleaned me out of every picture that I painted, even my little sketches, my little drawings. This is what I mean by contributing. Now I'm not saying that every artist should do what I did, but they contribute in their own way but they have to be sincere, they've got to love our country, they must have faith in themselves…the business of being wishy-washy…doing accidental things. You know I have never had this great adulation for Pollock that people have given him. Why he was given this is of course another matter, a long subject, probably for commercial reasons. But Pollock himself would be the first to admit he didn't know exactly what he was doing…[which is the truth]…he was very sincere that way, you have to admire a man for that.

BETTY HOAG: I'd like to tell you a funny story. Our older son is a Marine. He was stationed in Geneva,

Switzerland a couple of years ago this was when we went to Europe, he met our plane and we drove through Italy and a friend of ours is also a friend of Peggy Guggenheim, and gave us an introduction to her. The three of us went and met her, and she was very nice and it was wintertime, her home is open in the summer…winter so it was wonderful…I had occasion to tell Peter that she discovered Jackson Pollock…so we looked at all his paintings, she has a room where she had nothing but his paintings, I knew this was the greatest thing in the tour, she said, "How do you like them?" And out son Peter went around and looked at all the pictures and he said, "I think they're absolutely terrible." She said, "Why?" So he told her why. And she was very charming about an hour with Peter talking what was wrong with Jackson Pollock…Letting him tell…ruined our reputation with her…and she writes to her friend all the time and every time she writes she says, "and how is that delightful Marine?"…isn't that funny. He was probably the first person in years that said just what he though about them.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: You see…that's one of the things that…Harvard legal mind, he's a Harvard graduate…back up everything I say…well our main subject was Rackets in the Arts, this was our main theme. I had told him about this woman who had painted—well, I'm ahead of my story. The Treasury Department had looked into her tax report, they had found out that she had taken $37,000 or $47,000 off her taxes by giving gifts of paintings to different institutions, the first one of which was one of her alma maters she had. He had agreed to take it over, she had given seventeen different paintings to seventeen different alma maters…had taken off, as I say, $47,000 for taxes. They found out that she had painted all of them herself. She was just throwing paint around, abstract expressionistic stuff. So he disallowed the thing. Now the same type of thing is going on, don't think it isn't, in the field. And what better type of art could they pull off track this racket than pictures nobody can understand.

BETTY HOAG: With academic paintings you couldn't do it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right. There are certain standards, well not standards, but there are certain things you can expect. Well here the fellow says, "Don't you understand it, if you don't understand it, that's your fault, not mine." So these pictures are given, you know, huge amounts are taken off every year. Supposedly Pollock's are worth $100,000, well it sounds right…who put these prices on? Where do these things come from? If there was a great demand for his work? I don't want to go into details, we can't get involved in legal matters here. I don't know if you know I have a sit with Mrs. Pollock—a million, three hundred thousand dollar suit right now.

BETTY HOAG: I wouldn't tell a story like that on tape.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well you can take it off if you want…But I tried to show that a great number of our museums have these fake paintings in them, not necessarily abstract painting either, I'm talking about real fakes. Fake old masters.

BETTY HOAG: Of course some museums don't realize, if they don't have good museum directors they don't know what they have.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Do they or don't they? It's hard to say, it's something you can put your finger on. But I am open and frank enough to say, I think they know what it is all about too. A few kickback perhaps involved and no one can prove any of these things, and all very confidential matters, but $30,000 or $40,000 can be taken off someone's takes by having…I can mention a couple of institutions right around that have…but I don't do it, say 90% of what the university have estates in them right now, now it's very difficult to prove this, you know, my word against somebody else, but I'm a student of my work and I think I know what I'm talking about.

BETTY HOAG: Well even when you do know all about it…you know Berenson establishing what was it—17th Century Italian man out of his imagination and then smashing the whole thing afterwards. So he was supposed to be the top critic in the world at the time, having training and experience. So we're all human.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes, except some of this is being done very deliberately…I won't mention names but there was a man who brought a fake Van Gogh to the exhibit of the Van Gogh show here and said, "This is a fake." "How do you know?" "I've got the original". How clear can you get. He lost his reputation for doing that…there are two schools of thought.

BETTY HOAG: He should have…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: But this goes one. But coming back to the Abstract, look what a beautiful setup it is.

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes, it's a natural for it.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: It's a natural for this tax evasion, or tax whatever you want to call it.

BETTY HOAG: We'd better get back to the project. You had another good point about the different modes of art

that originated under the project too.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Yes. Now you see today we may not think in terms of landscape or still life or mural, unfortunately; I say unfortunately because here we have a definite reason for all these different modes of painting, just as there is in music, there's symphony, there's the quartet, chamber music and so on. The still life, for instance, to give you one example is the only way that objects can be brought in close view…(telephone interruption) We'll finish this up because I've got to get going…they want to talk to me. Now mode is very important for this reason: it brings objects to a close-up view, it's the only mode that can do this and that; in landscape things look a great distance, in other modes, genres. Now there's more to it than just that. You don't just simply bring a lot of objects to close view. Why do you bring them to close view? How do you select these objects? Why have you selected them? And what do you intend to do to compose it, give it the power or the strength you want to develop, see? So there's a reason for the still life mode it's not just putting a few objects together and start painting them. Now portraiture comes a little closer to this because their great animation of face that you want to bring out you paint in, you paint out this is another very important role, after you have painted a dozen faces you're destroyed the whole effect, first of all you have to go to a white canvas…genre is the next best where you have the combination of landscape and things. In landscape the importance is not to show too many details, it's the opposite of still life, on the other hand only show mood or show other things; and mural of course is another one. So one the WPA project some wise person or committee or whatever it was thought of this, they knew the value or this, see, as it turned out I think the number of artists were limited to these various…anyhow so they divided they project into these various groups. Mural painting I think was the fewest. Easel painting was the most. I think portrait painting came third or fourth. Not too many genre painters. I painted genre in the moving pictures in some still lifes, in some landscapes too. So…it's the most important part, it's the beginning by the way of any important art…which we must come back to if we're going to have any sensible art again, we have to come back to these modes. It's been completely dissolved, dissipated, completely done away with…today in the Abstract Movement they have no respect for it, in fact they're against it…again this pan-faced, deadpan-faced attitude toward things…

BETTY HOAG: But it's a marvelous thing those were done at the time they were and that there is a return to it, an appreciation for it some place, some time they're going to being to get some together…how all those pictures were dissipated you know they were given out to governmental institutions…and a lot of them are in basements and cellars…someday someone is going to get them out…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: I know. They will. Well now let's pick up on a happier note. I feel that our government policy is to win the people of the world over to our way of thinking, that does not mean to our government but to understand that we are a peace-loving people, we went to trade with the word, and in order to do this, we have to—the artists, the writers, our movies, they must all come together, and this is bound to happen, I predict that this will happen within the next ten years, have to happen, because we're losing the world, we've lost China, for instance, and there are huge acres of people that are involved…

BETTY HOAG: Millions of people.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Millions of people, yes. And they have the atom bomb too, you know. We've got overkill now, you know.

BETTY HOAG: Well better if we can do it through love and not through fear.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: That's right. And I think some day the new people in our government—the Kennedys made a start—but I think they have to go much further than that. They have to have a ministry of art. We must have this, we must have some type of general representation of our various artistic feelings and directions, and approach all of them, not just one group as you were saying a little while ago. In that way let the world see our country, let the world see what we really do. If they don't do it in a powerful artistic way it can't be done any other way. We can't do it with a gun and we can't go it through bribery, we tried that, it has to be done through a meeting of the minds and hearts, don't you think so?

BETTY HOAG: Right. And I think the Peace Corps people are trying to do it as individuals by we can't get enough over…

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: Well that's not being done in the sense that I mean either, see you don't really win people over, you do to a certain group but not like a work of art which…

BETTY HOAG: Right. You're absolutely right. I hope it will happen.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: What do we show in out movies? Gangsters—what is this—Indians?…it's too bad. But this will happen, I know darn well it will. You know we're a young country, and I come from an ancient race, I feel this in—it's in our bones, it will come out.

BETTY HOAG: I hope so.

MANUEL TOLEGIAN: It was a real pleasure talking to you.

BETTY HOAG: I thanks you so much for the lovely tape.

[End of interview]

BETTY HOAG: I regret the roar that appears on the tape. Apparently one along interview, as this was with Mr. Tolegian, my little recording machine gets too warm and sets up this background humming. I hope the girls will be able to transcribe past it. The section in which I'm telling about our family meeting with Peggy Guggenheim I have already told on a previous tape so it isn't very important to get it recorded. As a matter of fact, it roars through and I doubt if you can get it, but it's hardly worth picking up. However, Mr. Tolegian's remarks at the end of it are important and I hope that they can be transcribed.

[End]

Addenda to tape #25 (Manuel Tolegian)
By Betty Hoag
February 16, 1965

This is Betty Locrhie Hoag on February 16, 1965 with addenda to add to Tape #25 and Tape #18. Since I have some room left on this tape it seems like a good time to get it in. Tapes #24 and #25 are with Manuel Tolegian and when I went back to Mr. Tolegian's house yesterday to get material from him to be microfilmed, I had hoped to get some rather rare books that he has which contain some illustrations by him. However he would not trust us to borrow them for even one day to take down to the microfilm company because they are very, very rare. And I did want to get them in the record. One is a book printed in French called Armenian Painting and Sculpture, that's Peintre et Sculptuer Armenian, the author is [spelled] Onnig Avedissian, it's published by the Friends of Armenian Culture, Amis de la Culture Armenienne, in Cairo, Egypt, that's Le Caire, en 1959. The second one includes several very beautiful color plates including Mr. Tolegian's painting of Armenian Women Making Bread, and it is in the Armenian Illustrated Review, which is published by the Makhitarist Fathers f the Venetian Abbor, published in Venice at the Armenian Monastery of San Lazzaro in 1950. The article is all about Armenian painting form 1749 to 1949. Mr. Tolegian's paintings occur again in a book in English called New Horizons in American Art, published b the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1936, with an introduction by Holger Cahill. His plate is #110. I'm sure the Archives own this book. A fourth one is called Men Without Guns written by DeWit Mackenzie, published in Philadelphia and Toronto by the Balkinston Company, published in 1945. When I went to get microfilm material from Mr. Tolegian it was obvious that there was much more material that had to do with Project Artist in New York which he did not tell me the other day so we are going to have another tape with him.

[End of Addenda to Tape #25]

END OF INTERVIEW

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