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Oral history interview with Harold Tovish, 1974 February 7-1977 March 17

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Harold Tovish on June 24, 1974 and March 17, 1977. The interview took place in Boston, MA, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

HAROLD TOVISH: Okay, let's have a—let's hear how that sounds.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

HAROLD TOVISH: Okay, let's hear how that sounds. [Audio break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Second interview of June 24, 1974. Now, you have been talking last about teaching, and, you know, we could begin today asking you about your teaching. When did you begin teaching? Right after you, uh, had been to Paris?

HAROLD TOVISH: No. I—I, uh, actually started teaching before I went to Paris, and I got into it in a very peculiar way. Um, after the war, I got back to New York, and I went very briefly back to Columbia under the GI Bill, and studied with Maldarelli for about, uh, one semester. During which time, I also got married to Marianna Pineda who's also a sculptor, and I, uh, found that I could no longer be a student. So, Marianna and I decided we'd get our own studio and launch into our professional careers, you see? And they had a wonderful scholarship so to speak for—for veterans in those days. If you weren't on the GI Bill, that is if you weren't going to a school, you could have a business. And for, uh, 52 weeks, they'd give $20 a week to help you get into your business until you could get on your own feet. And they called it—amusingly they called it the 52-20 club. [They laugh.] And I remember, I used to go down to the, uh—whichever agency took care of that, and I had to show them my ledgers, my books to show income and outcome. It was really amusing, you know, this lineup of bums like myself —

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: —we're all running all kinds of phony business. And my—my business was, uh, making sculpture, and I was quite honest. My reports were quite honest. There was only outcome, no income at all.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] When was this, in the late '40s?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, yeah. It was, uh, it was 19—it would have been 1946, and '47. I got out in '45, late '45, and, uh, I had about a year of this. Well, I—I, finally, uh, produced some sculpture, and my book showed that I still wasn't making any money. I had no place to show it.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you happy with the work you were doing?

HAROLD TOVISH: Uh, I was dipping my feet into it again. I really was just sort of doing it. I did wood carving and I did direct plaster. I did clay, clay modeling. I even for—at one point, when we were gonna have a kid, I did mannequins and—for a short period of time. And so, you know, wherever I can pick up some dough doing certain things like doing mannequins or something like that, I—I tried my best. But my 52-20 club membership ran out or was about to run out, and, uh, we had a little baby. And I was really getting very, uh, panicky because this—finally, everything I had been warned about appeared to be coming to pass, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You mean there'll be nothing once you were out?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, although I—I mean I was out, I had no prospects. Uh, I made one very abortive attempt to get a gallery. Uh, the humiliating business of trotting around with your photographs and getting kind or indifferent comments. And I remember that the notion of teaching one evening occurred to me, and interestingly enough, uh, teaching was one thing I never thought about. Uh, at that time, there were so few jobs for artists. Nowadays, people don't realize that when I started in school, for example, if I wanted to get a master's degree in, uh, in art, as far as I know, there were only two places in the whole country that you could get those. One was at the University of Iowa, and I believe the other one was at Ohio, but I'm not sure about that, uh, and then there were the art schools. So that really the—you know, if you were—if you had a job in an art school, you were

probably a fairly prominent artist to begin with. There simply weren't jobs, and, uh, I didn't have any notion of what had happened during the three years that I'd been away, but, obviously, what happened was that many other schools began to institute art departments and—and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: You didn't keep up with anything when you were in the service?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, no, no, I kept up with nothing. Just—I kept up with the events. [They laugh.] Or rather I was swept up in events, but at—in any case, what did happen was that I remember that William Zorach had been particularly, uh, kind and interested, and I think genuinely so, in what I'd been doing at Columbia. He used to come up there as a visiting critic occasionally, and he patted me on ahead as one of the promising young sculptors. So, I decided that what I would do would be to write him a letter and send him photographs of my work. And ask him if he would be willing, on the basis of his reaction, to write a letter of recommendation for me in the event that I heard of some opportunity, and I—I did that. I sent him the photographs and stuff. Well, I never—I—I didn't hear from him, so I figured well, nothing comes of that, and I would just hope he'd send the photographs for me.

ROBERT BROWN: Really—[Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I was very intimidated, he was a very big artist at that time. And then finally, my 52-20 club dues or rather the—my membership ran out as I put it. It—it ran out and I remember that after receiving my last payment, you remember the $20 a week, huh—

ROBERT BROWN: You had a family now.

HAROLD TOVISH: Right, I had a family now. Uh, one day, I went down to a certain shop in town, which specialized in waiters and waitresses' outfits, and I had supported myself when I was a student by being a busboy and a waiter. And now, I was going to go down there, and get myself my little outfit again, and go to the agency as I had done before, and get back into that rat race. And you can imagine, I was quite depressed. I was now about 25, 26 and, uh, as, you know, I had a wife and child. And I realized that in order to make any kind of money at all, I would have to put in long hours and so on. And, uh, man, I was really depressed, but I was determined that I would have to do it. And I would do it with as much grace as I could since this was part of the mythology of being an artist that you had to do work like this in order to survive. Uh, why shouldn't I do it like anybody else?

ROBERT BROWN: And you were still primarily thinking of it as surviving only as an artist then?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Not as a teacher? [Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, I was hoping—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

HAROLD TOVISH: —that I could do that. I don't know on what basis because I didn't know anybody who had done it. I really didn't. Everybody I know was teaching also.

ROBERT BROWN: So, you thought it must be that way or should be?

HAROLD TOVISH: But, I felt that if I, uh, were able to break into the field some way, if I were to get some kind of recognition, other things would follow, which was not unintelligent, but it was, you know, breaking the ice. That was a tough thing. But in any case, I bought my little outfit and came back home very depressed. And Marianna who's a wonderfully optimistic and a supportive human being—I was extraordinarily lucky to run into a—a woman like that—uh, you know, cheered me up considerably about it. That if worse came to worst, her parents would help. Her parents were fairly well-to-do people. In fact, uh, they were giving her a small amount of money every month so that between the two of us, we were able to keep our heads above water. But, uh, the next day, I went back to the studio. I was going to stay in the studio, uh, to the last possible minute, and I—the telephone rings. I pick up the telephone and this guy tells me, "This is Mr. Harder at Alfred University and the New York State College of Ceramics. And I have a letter here from William Zorach recommending you as a possible teacher and sculptor. Would you come up for an interview tomorrow?"

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I was absolutely stunned by this. So, you know, to this day, I—I have the most warm, warm feeling towards that man, Bill Zorach. He—he—he used to come on as a big, bluff, almost brutish man, but the truth of the matter, he was extraordinarily gentle and a generous soul because I heard that he helped many, many artists. And I think he probably condemned himself for being so soft because people are so ungrateful.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, and he'd done moral of a favor than if he had sent you a letter that you'd pass around.

HAROLD TOVISH: Right, right. He had actually gone out of his way to help me rather than the way I had predicted. I certainly didn't anticipate anything like this, but the point about it is that he went ahead and did that marvelous, generous thing, and, uh, I went up by bus, and I was so keyed up and excited. It was a very long trip. Alfred is about, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Two hundred miles or so?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, no, Alfred's, uh, between Buffalo and Rochester, somewhere in between, about halfway in between those two places. So, it was an all-night trip, and I didn't—I didn't get to sleep at all. Well, as I said, I didn't—I wasn't able to sleep on the bus. I've never been able to sleep on vehicles. I always envied people who can. I arrived there in an absolutely sweltering day during a summer school session, and, uh, Mr. Harder was the head of the school. He was teaching a class, and I was told to go into the class, and sit there, and wait for him to finish his lecture. Of course, I fell asleep. I was sitting in the front row, and I fell asleep. [They laugh.] It was just when he was looking for a really lively character, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: And then when it got particularly silent, I snapped awake, and, uh, he was leaning over me and says, You must be Torvish. He said, "Why don't you come down the office?" Anyway, to make a long story short, uh, we chatted and he said, he'd let me know and I went back to—

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] You got—

HAROLD TOVISH: —to New York—

ROBERT BROWN: —[inaudible] at that point.

HAROLD TOVISH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

ROBERT BROWN: —what he might have thought of you as a teacher. [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: Right. Well, he grilled me a lot. You know, he grilled me a lot, tried to see, uh—I don't know what the heck he was after. I have no memory of the thing. But in any case, a few days later, I got a letter from him saying that I was appointed to—as—as an assistant professor, and I think my salary was $2,600, which was more money than I ever earned in my life. I mean that was like a stunning event.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: So, we went up there, and I taught there for two years, and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: What was it—life like at Alfred?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, uh, it was a superb ceramic school, there's no question about that. I suppose probably the best in the country. I think better than Cranbrook. It was, uh, excellent as far as its technology. Why, the people who went there really learned their trade. My colleague was a fellow named Daniel Rhodes. He's one of the very big names now in, uh, the whole business of ceramics. He's written some exceedingly important books, and I think now almost every ceramist has his books on the shelf. And Dan and I, and, uh, Lillyan his wife, and Marianna, we became quite good friends. In fact, Marianna is out in California. She's gonna see them, and they asked me to come out and spend some time with them. He's retired now. Anyway, we, uh, we got on splendidly. Of course, I went through all of the agonies of a beginning teacher. I was absolutely convinced that every student knew I was a complete fraud. I was really a very young fellow myself. Many of the students were GIs, which meant that they were either my age or a couple of years younger. And, uh, my only claim to authority was —would have to be based on the fact that they actually had hired me and said, This is your teacher, because I didn't feel any of it. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What were you supposed to teach in the ceramics school?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, uh, what they felt was that drawing and sculpture were to be a kind of, uh—it's curious because it's the other way around now in many schools where ceramics is the minor concern. But here, it was a major concern, and I was like a service department. And my idea was simply to give them work that had to do with, uh, form, three-dimensional form and to let them explore possibilities. And in some mysterious way, this was going make them produce better parts. Well, I suppose there's some kind of sense in it because, uh, you could make a pretty good case for a—for a beautiful ceramic being a kind of sculpture, with the added advantage of having a function in many cases. Well, anyway.

ROBERT BROWN: But did you ask them—did you, uh, develop pretty close relations with students, or how did you approach them—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I—in spite of the fact that so many of the students were close to me, I, uh, I never developed very, very close relations with the students. I know that there are some teachers who seem to function at their best when there's a kind of an intimacy between themselves and the students. I, on the other hand, functioned better when I was at a certain remove, distanced. I think, obviously, it has to do with some personality, uh, characteristic of mine, which either is a defect or is an advantage, I don't know which. But that's not to say I haven't gotten—so I know—you know, I got to know the students pretty well, but I—I—just didn't go into that palsy-walsy [ph] stuff. I didn't like it. I felt, I suppose, at that time especially that I needed all of the authority I could possibly exert, and part of that was a kind of a non—fraternization program. I didn't think of this deliberately naturally, but in the end, uh, since I've been teaching on and off for some years and my general relations have been pretty much the same, it's obvious that there's a kind of a—a characteristic phenomenon working there.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work close—did you set them problems and then worked—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah, I—

ROBERT BROWN: —or watched them very closely?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah. I would—I would give them, uh, certain problems. I can't remember particularly what. They tended to be abstract, uh, formalistic, very formalistic, and in relation to the fact that they were doing abstract forms really. These kinds of exercises, which is what I thought of them as exercises, would presumably have some kind of overlap in their work. And I think it did because I did notice that, uh, some of the students employed certain devices, textural devices and formal devices in making odd-looking pots that were not particularly conventional. At least at that time, they weren't.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your aim, would you say, in terms of—with the students? You said earlier that—

HAROLD TOVISH: My aim was, personally, was to first survive. To keep my head above water, to remain unexposed for the ignoramus I was.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were ignoramus at method, but that's about it.

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I was just ignorant of, uh—I knew I had limitations as an artist, I had limitations of knowledge, uh, about sculpture. I was after all, a young man. I had lost three years in the army. Uh, I knew how profound and complex the art of sculpture was. I, at least, had that consciousness, and I knew I didn't know very much. I mean it's as simple as that. Like most young fellows, I had been riding on my talent, that is a certain ability to look at something and, uh, extract something from it, and turn it to use. Not purely imitative but, obviously, uh, strongly influenced by this and that force, and—which is, after all, what that meant was I was a student, and I was teaching students. And I thought of myself as a student; although, I was now a—I had been—I was out of school, I was now teaching school. There's a big difference. But, of course, the truth of the matter was, uh—which I—I learned soon enough—was that the students were simply miles behind me. They knew infinitely less than I did. [Laughs.] So I really never had to worry about that. It was just that my own sense, you know my own cert—uncertainties, so—

ROBERT BROWN: Well did you grow out of that uncertainty a bit while you were there?

HAROLD TOVISH: Uh, no, I never did. I never really grew out of it. Uh, even to this day, I—I, uh, often feel a fraud teaching sculpture. But let's say I've—like an old sinner, I've developed scars of the thing and I—I mean it doesn't torment me the way it did there. I also knew that I was not gonna remain a teacher. See, uh, this was not gonna be my life. I just—you know without ever actually coming to that and, you know, saying it. I just knew that I wasn't going to stay there, just that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: Teaching was not a—a fundamental expression?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, it wasn't. Although from all reports, I was a good teacher, and I have a reputation as being a good teacher. And I suppose it's because I'm able to speak with some degree of—of, uh, clarity, and occasionally rising to incredible heights of eloquence. [Laughs.] And also, obviously, loving the, uh, the whole business of—of sculpture, and drawing, and art in general. And I—and I imagine that a combination of all these things would make a person a reasonably good teacher.

ROBERT BROWN: And what about, uh, love or at least an interest in the students, and in this development?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, of course, what I—what every teacher looks to, hopes for is to have an extraordinarily

gifted student. You know, in all the years I've been teaching, I've been, uh, I was fortunate of having about a half dozen of such. A couple I think really were quite superb, superbly gifted people. But, uh, my—I would be less than frank if I claimed that I had a deep and abiding passion for teaching of, uh,—or the kind of interest in students in general that I can—I can think of several artists I know who teach, who make me feel almost ashamed by—when I compare my attitude toward students to theirs. I mean these people are really concerned about their students and will go out of their way to, uh, discuss even personal problems with their students. You know, the students come to them with all kinds of horror stories. My students don't do that. They don't come to me in that way because I think I've—I've gotten across somehow that, although I'm not a cruel person or an indifferent person, that I don't feel that that's my, uh, my particular concern. Sometimes, it's forced on you whether you like it or not and then you do your best, but I don't believe in amateur psychiatry. And—and I think there are other ways to help people beside, uh, getting involved in their personal lives. That's what I mean by not getting too chummy. I may be protecting myself, you understand. It's possible I feel that I might go—get too involved and then I'd take their burden on and I have enough of my own, but in any case, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, were you able to, uh, take on your work during those two years?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yes. Yes, I had—

ROBERT BROWN: [Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I was young. I had a great deal of energy. I was ferociously ambitious. At the ceramic school, I worked exclusively in ceramic materials. I did my first serious piece of sculpture there. I even have a slide of it.

ROBERT BROWN: What was that?

HAROLD TOVISH: It was a, uh, a piece of sculpture called *Helmet*, which is—which was simply a head, a soldier idea you see, in which I used different color clays, not glazes but clays and actual clays, and—and it was quite a good piece, you know. Uh, while I was up there, I was elected to the Sculptors Guild, and I exhibited that piece at the Sculptors Guild. In any case, that was my first—what I think of as, uh, a real—I don't know, I hate the word "breakthrough" because I've done other things before that were obviously leading up to this. But it was the first piece I felt that wasn't really burdened, terribly burdened by my obeisance to other artists. And when I look at that piece, which I did in 1947, it—it still, uh, holds its own. It's, uh, quite a respectable piece of sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you—what do you think would account for this plateau or this level you'd reached? What were you putting into it that you hadn't before?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: You were shedding the skin finally of looking at—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: —other people's work?

HAROLD TOVISH: I—I—you know I can never speak. I've always been fascinated by the development of the artists. I've always been terribly interested, especially in their early work because when you look at an artist's early work, you—you—you really get a much better sense of the kind of mind that they have. Their—uh, not only the mind but their whole emotional tonality can be seen in their very early work. Uh, Buisman [ph] remarked on that at one time. We went to see Buisman, and he said, "Do you have pictures of your early work?" And I remember thinking at the time, even though I was, uh, quite a young fellow, I understood why he asked that because I, too, had always wanted to see what the first thing Michelangelo did, what was the first thing Rodin did. The—these things fascinated me and in looking through artists careers, you—you'll find that they go through an imitative period generally. And then slowly, they're—you begin to note that some particular thing that's even in the earliest work begins to take ascendency, and—and van Gogh was the perfect example of that. First very awkward, clumsy, trying to do this somebody—you know, the way that, uh, Mauve did it or somebody like that. And, uh, not making it because he had this peculiar thing in his head that twisted things and pushed things a certain way. Until finally, he becomes really an extraordinarily elegant artist, especially in some of those drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: But in the early work even, uh, there's a choice of what to imitate?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You know, already certain traits—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, that's what I mean.

ROBERT BROWN: That's what so apparent, isn't it?

HAROLD TOVISH: Right. The predilections begin to show up. Why do you change Ang [ph] over Delacroix? Why do you decide that Rodin is gonna be your hero rather than, uh, Picasso? Uh, very critical issues are involved. And, uh, it's true that you may grow from Rodin to Picasso in—in a relatively short time, but it's extraordinarily important, I think, in terms of what happens to an artist, uh, the fact that he did choose Rodin immediately as one to emulate. Uh, but my—what I—you know, to speak—the distance between that time and now is great enough, so I could talk about it, I think, with some objectivity. Uh, the one thing I did have as a kid was a very powerful sense of self. Uh, and it had a bit—a kind of a—it's a very, very difficult thing to do, to convey this thing, but let me—let me try to put it this way. That it would be as if I were in some kind of an extremely familiar place and then I'd be looking out at the—out the window and seeing very interesting things out there. But that I was well aware that this was where I was. You see, I had a—an extraordinary sense of location so that even when I was influenced by this or that artist, I was never self-conscious about it. I knew exactly. I never kidded myself about that. Uh, something came out in the work, which made me feel that I simply wasn't being some kind of a sycophant, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HAROLD TOVISH: I wasn't humble in the sense that I was going to apprentice to this or that artist in absentia you might say. I—I really had a sense of a personal power, and I had something that was quite extraordinarily. And, you know, I look back on that young fellow and I—and I admire him for his, uh, almost charming confidence.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Would you say it was audacity?

HAROLD TOVISH: And a certain audacity but, of course, audacity based on, uh, on ignorance, there's something quite pitiful about it in a way, especially, you know, you end up in, uh, crushed, you know, because it could be based on nothing, pure self-delusion. I know it wasn't based solely on self-delusion because I was a talented kid, and I—you know, you couldn't—you tend to see your own talent—well, let's say, the—the measure of your own talent reflected in other people's reactions. And I always had the most, uh, marvelous kind of reception from people who were all for me, who were all, uh, predicting great things for me. I suppose, they'd be somewhat disappointed but nevertheless, that's—that's what I had a perception of people's reaction to what I was doing. And also, a very clear sense of myself as an artist and what I might be able to do. And yet at the same time, there's a curious contradiction: I was always very, very suspicious of other people's opinion of me. I never felt that the praise that I got from others for something I had done was really warranted because, my—as I say, my ambition was very, very high. And I felt that, uh, there was a certain patronization in comments that were made to me. And I don't think it was in fact patronization, but I took it as patronization because I couldn't take it seriously. Because I knew that the ideas that I had, that I would like to do, were beyond my strength to do. I could not do them. I wasn't masterful enough, and, uh, that tormented me—

ROBERT BROWN: You're very anxious.

HAROLD TOVISH: I was an extremely—

ROBERT BROWN: You were—

HAROLD TOVISH: —anxious artist, extremely anxious. I wanted to do marvelous things. And let's say that my vision, my, uh—the level of maturity of my vision was very much further along than my maturity as far as skill and knowledge of how to make a form was. So I—I lived in a constant state of frustration, and—and that was going on while I was teaching. It was very trying, a very trying time. I had the trauma of trying to convey things to people and to myself at the same time and to keep all of this thing juggling back and forth in a way that I could handle. It was very difficult.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your—your—was Marianna very supportive during this time?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, Marianna was not only supportive—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, she supported you—

HAROLD TOVISH: —but she was—

ROBERT BROWN: —too?

HAROLD TOVISH: —uh, she had given up doing her own work for almost two years because of the child. And in my male chauvinist way, I never even recognized that she was suffering for one. But finally, uh, she determined that she was gonna get back into it. And she went back into it and then it was very good to have her working also because I could talk to her about my problems, and I had great respect for her opinion and she was a very,

very gifted woman, and her personality is very different from my own, and her manner of, uh, dealing with her problems was very helpful to me because I—I—well, she exerted a kind of calming influence, let's put it that way. So my despair wasn't constant, let's put it that, you know, it wasn't constant.

ROBERT BROWN: And Alfred, as far as the general milieu goes was fairly neutral for you? I mean because it had a—

HAROLD TOVISH: It was neutral in the sense that—

ROBERT BROWN: —new place for you?

HAROLD TOVISH: —I was literally the only sculptor working in the school there.

ROBERT BROWN: So, you could, uh, exert your torment and your anxieties on your own? I mean there were no other external—

HAROLD TOVISH: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: —pressures aside from—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, there were no real external—

ROBERT BROWN: —teaching responsibilities.

HAROLD TOVISH: —external pressures at all. I—I—it was a valuable time because I was thinking. I was working, I was trying out things, I was, uh, I was very busy.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you exhibiting? You mentioned today the *Helmet*—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I exhibited—I exhibited, uh, at the arts—oh, I'm sorry at the Sculptors Guild, and I—I did what everybody did. I entered various competitions to exhibit and, uh, I'd submit it to a jury, and pay an entry fee, and, uh, and then they'd accept you and, I mean, that whole damn routine and—

ROBERT BROWN: You'd sound as though that really you didn't—even then perhaps would rather not have gone through with it?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I—I—I—uh, we're wandering around a little bit. I'll tell you an interesting thing that happened. There was a big show of, uh, sculpture down in Wichita, Kansas. Is that right? Yeah, I guess so.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time, yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: Wichita something art association, that's it. They used to have a big, uh—I think if I'm not mistaken, I'm not sure whether it was a ceramic thing or whether it was a, uh, sculpture exhibition. But anyway, I had done a—a large head about three feet high in coil-built ceramic clay. And I sent—I sent a piece down there; they wouldn't take photographs. It cost me $27, and $27 was a hell of a lot of money. If they accepted it, they would pay for its return. If they did not accept it, you had to pay for it. What was that gonna be? Uh, $54? And once I had sent that thing and was waiting for the word as to whether it had been accepted or not, I started to brood about that. Goddammit, goddammit, says I. If those bastards don't take it, it's gonna cost me $54! I'd found it such a humiliating thing for an artist to have to do, that I vowed I'd never do it again, and I never did. They accepted it, uh, but—but—but it shattered me the idea that I was—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

HAROLD TOVISH: —to think that my ego required that I would have to—I mean was it just a matter of ego that I wanted so desperately for the world to see this thing that I was gonna pay? Well, anyway, I was very upset and that's why, you know, one of the union things that I've been fighting for was, you know, everything. Still going on.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think they're demeaning art?

HAROLD TOVISH: They're not just demeaning. In many cases, they are a racket. Uh, we could talk about that another time.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, did you then get feedback from these—these exhibits?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, yes, I did get a little feedback. From Kansas City, I guess, I got nothing because, uh, why would I get any feedback? I didn't even think to—to write and ask for reviews or anything like that. But I did get

a little feedback from showing at the Sculptors Guild. Uh, when I went down to New York one time, I met some of them, and I think—and that was a nice thing you had in the show, all that, you know that's all. Uh—

ROBERT BROWN: You respected that group, the Sculptors Guild?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, it was—at that time, it was the radical group. Of course, now, it's become quite acceptable and cons—they have like a melange of, uh, more of avant-garde artists and quite conservative artists, and Marianna is there by the way. I—I—I left it some years ago. But at the end of two years, my feelings about teaching and the sense that trying to carry on both activities at the same time was really wearing me down. I began to get restless. At the same time, the head of the school wanted me to—complained bitterly that I had too few skills available. He wanted somebody to teach lettering, and now lettering was one thing I would not only not teach, I had no interest or capacity—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, but—

HAROLD TOVISH: —or anything for that. So by mutual consent, it was agreed that I would leave. Marianna and I had already discussed what we might do, and we both said, "To hell, let's go to Europe." And we'd saved up some money, in spite of the fact that the salary was really very modest. We saved us some money and then, uh, one of Marianna's relatives, an aunt, very generously offered to pay our rent, whatever it might be over there while we're there. So, there was nothing to hold us back. So, I resigned and we went to Paris and spent 18 months in Paris. And Paris was where we—I really think both of us became artists there because from that point on, uh, there was a sense of independence, a sense that one was now doing something that could be taken seriously. At least—

ROBERT BROWN: Were you—

HAROLD TOVISH: —that was the feeling, whether or not that was a fact was a non-matter, but we both felt that.

ROBERT BROWN: You were on—you were not only on your own, you were isolated? You had your own apartment studio?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah, we were infinitely more fortunate than, uh, most of the GIs there. I think an unmarried GI got $90 a month. A married GI got $120 a month, plus your tuition wherever you went, plus a—a sum for materials, I can't remember how much. But Paris in 1949 was after all—what—four years, five years at most, four years removed from the war. And the American dollar was—went a long, long way. We were—we were, uh, really quite well off by comparison to most people. The fellows who were getting $90 a month, uh, could make it. It wasn't easy, but you know, if you're careful with your money, you could manage fairly well. And if you ran to the black market and got more francs for your dollar, you—you could get by. Although some of the guys really did have a hard time, it was not that easy. But—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you see a lot of people you knew?

HAROLD TOVISH: Didn't know anybody.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you go to Paris?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I—I had gone on leave when I was a soldier. I had spent, uh, four days in Paris, and I said, I'm coming back here someday. I mean why did you go to Paris? Rodin, you know, to see the Rodin Museum, to see all the great sculpture, my God, and, uh, since it was cheaper to live there. I couldn't have done that at home on that kind of money. And Marianna was getting this help from her aunt, and it would have been stupid to do anything else.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: So we went there, we rented a house for some particular sum of money right on Boulevard Saint-Jacques about two miles away from Zadkine School, whi—which is what I enrolled into. And, uh, we were able to—I think, for something like $20 a month, we had a—a young Alsatian girl who took care of the baby. By now, two children, the second child was born in Alfred. And, uh, we—we got a studio across the street for another ridiculous sum, I can't remember what, and that was the second year we got there. For the latter part of our stay, we got the studio, but for the first year, we both went to Zadkine. And, uh, the place was filled with—with guys my own age, a few younger people, several women. Uh, some of the people who were there, you might interested to know, were Hugh Townley; although, we weren't in the same group. Hugh, I think, either came a little after I or before, I don't remember. But Shinkichi Tajiri, I don't know if you know him, but he—he's become a European artist. He—he was there. What's the guy's name who later on became—Cohn [ph] his name, Cohn, Cohn. He does these wood—wood sculptures that really became quite well known and his manager was staying there. I can't remember his name by this—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, was the school focused around Zadkine at all or—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, were if you were inserted in sculpture, there weren't very many places you could go to. Zadkine was the obvious guy to go to. Most of the artists went either to Zadkine, Léger, or André Lhote. Those were the three figures that were—around which the GIs congregated. If you didn't want to study with any of those in particular but wanted to do a kind of freelance sort of schooling, you went to the Grande Chaumière, In the Grande Chaumière, you might—you might have Zadkine also. He—he also taught there and something called the Colarossi, which I think was a—an adjunct of that, I don't know, anyway, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, was it anything like the—the way you'd been taught before?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, first of all, I had a hell of a situation. Uh, I really didn't wanna be taught anything.

ROBERT BROWN: No, you said you didn't wanna be a student.

HAROLD TOVISH: I was not interested in being a student, but I had—in order to get that GI, I had to be enrolled in a school.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you could still qualify for your GI when you went over there?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, that's it. I had to—I'd been in service long enough to have, oh, at least four years of GI at my disposal. So, I, uh, I registered and Marianna registered independently. And we—he had clay, he had homages [ph], he had materials, and we didn't have the studio or anything, and it was a convenience. And I felt that somehow, I would be able to work on my own in the studio, and that he would recognize immediately by just looking at me that I was a very experienced artist, and he'd leave me alone, let my genius flower without any interference, little did I reck'. [They laugh.] Zadkine was nobody to—to push aside, I'll tell you.

ROBERT BROWN: He was a very dominating—

HAROLD TOVISH: He was a—well I—really now, looking back, I mean he was an absolutely marvelous fellow. He was a pain in the ass, and I'm sure I was a pain in the ass to him, but he was a superb teacher, an absolutely superb teacher. Terrible for anybody who had an idea, marvelous for somebody who really wanted to learn something. And if I'd had him as a teacher early, I think he would have been very important. But as it was, his importance to me was as a friction. He was a ferocious—

ROBERT BROWN: Give an example?

HAROLD TOVISH: He was a ferocious critic, absolutely ferocious. And he—uh, well, I'll give you some examples of his ferocity. Uh, he was very tough on me, and my technique of dealing with Zadkine was to go silent. I would listen respectfully. I was not, uh, snotty. And I—you know, I respected him too much as an artist to have tried to bandy words with him. I wouldn't have done that. But as I, you know, indicated earlier, I really was desperately wanting to do my own work. And in order to listen to him, I would have to have disrespected my own ideas and I didn't. He wanted me to do Zadkine sculptures. I mean it was as—as frank as that. The one student in the class he adored was a fellow who did Zadkine sculptures and very well by the way. He could have easily done forgeries. Maybe he's done some for all I know. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: The—Zadkine didn't see this as a shortcoming?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, Zadkine's idea of being a teacher was to be the L'Ecole de Zadkine, you know, you followed him. You learned by imitating and learning his secrets, whatever they were.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of things was he—did he brutally criticize you for?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I mean I can give you some examples. Uh, at the time, I had been, you know as a—I had been in the war, and I'd been really in it, and I'd seen some really quite ghastly things, you know? What had happened in concentration camps and so on. And this stuff had been stewing in me, and I had done a figure of a woman who was dead, you know, and all sort of crouched together in a kind of fetal position. And actually, I did that a little after I left him, but I brought it back for him to see. And, uh, he was very witty in his criticism, too. A sharp fellow, and he says—he'd invent words, he accused me of being interested in "clinicism." [Laughs.] You see, he found my work too clinical. It was one example, but I witnessed him, I witnessed him, uh, criticize some other students and, boy, I'm telling you, he could just, just absolutely wreck a person. There was one guy there who was the type, unfortunately, who—whose ego was—outstripped his ability by a mile. And, uh, he did a large wood carving, which was a rather shabby imitation of Zadkine. Not the same fellow by the way—the other guy was much more modest, so. And by some fluke, he was accepted in the Salon de Mai. The Salon de Mai was the most prestigious exhibition for young artists. It was, uh, I think—I can't remember exactly where the show was held, but it was held in either near the Louvre or the Tuileries, I can't remember where. But that was the thing to

get into if you could, you see. He got in. So he came back all puffed up. Uh, most of us haven't even tried to get in, you know, but he did and he got in. We were stunned. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Did you let him know or no? No.

HAROLD TOVISH: No, I mean—

ROBERT BROWN: Zadkine.

HAROLD TOVISH: —we didn't wanna be malicious. So, uh, he came in, and we to—we had already told, "Do you hear so and so got in?" Zadkine said, "Very good, very good." So, let me see if I can reconstruct what—what he said. Oh, God, I was so shattered by that. There was a little auxiliary room where we did wood carving and stone carving and then there was another—his main studio where we did, uh, clay modeling, okay? So, he comes sauntering into the little workshop, the—the carving workshop, and this fellow was there and he—he says, "Oh, I hear you were accepted in the Salon de Mai?" And already a review had come out, and his piece was mentioned, which shows how dumb most arguments are. So he says—he says, uh, "You'll become famous," he says. And he says—I'm trying to reconstruct the exact word because if I—if I mess it up, you'll miss the point because everybody just flinched when he said this. He says, "You will become famous doing—only if you do Zadkine sculptures," something to the effect. [Laughs.] "Because if you do anything on your own, it'll be dreadful," something like that. [They laugh.] He's quite—this guy has been quite right. But to give you another example of his—his, uh, incredible invective, he had a real gift for it. Uh, I saw my first Giacometti in a gallery on the Left Bank somewhere, and I was absolutely knocked down by them. By an interesting coincidence, I had done part of a series of these desiccated-looking people. I had done a se—a pair of lovers who were obviously these emaciated people. And then I went down and I saw these—this is 1949, right? And I saw these Giacomettis, just a few, and I said, "My God, fantastic." So, I came back full up with Giacometti and I started talking about, uh, Giacometti to Zadkine. I said, "What a marvelous artist he is, what feeling in his work," this, that. And Giacometti —I mean, uh, Zadkine just sat there nodding his head, his great, shaggy, white head, "Giacometti, ha, snot on a string."

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I—I mean I was just stunned by—by the viciousness of—of his comment. He said, "Giacometti is not a real sculptor." He says, "He can't—doesn't know how to make forms." He can't do this, he can't do that, and of course, what stuck in my mind was that "snot on a string." And you know later on, uh, when I got away from Zadkine, what was interesting about the man was that no matter how he put it, how—how exaggeratedly he might make a statement, there was always a kernel of truth in what he said. It wasn't pure, you know, gratuitous nastiness. And he was an extraordinary intelligent man. He had a—an artistic intelligence, possibly the most brilliant man I've ever run into.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that, uh—you think he was defensive, himself?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, undoubtedly. Zadkine's heyday had been in the late '20s and '30s. And, uh, he had come to America during the war and simply could not make it in America. All the others were treated with enormous respect, you know, Masson and Mondrian, and all the rest of them. People flocked around them. Uh, Zadkine had never been part of the Surrealist movement. And he was of the generation that developed Cubism. Uh, and his personality was so abrasive, and he simply couldn't make it in America. He was no Duchamp, Villon [ph] who could charm the pants off you, you know? Uh, and he had a rather disappointing time in America. He simply was not given the kind of recognition and attention that he deserved. Uh, Lipchitz, of course, got that but not Zadkine.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: But Zadkine was very much what he was. You know, he—he did not cotton up to anybody.

ROBERT BROWN: But you say he's a good teacher, though. But sure enough—

HAROLD TOVISH: Brilliant teacher, brilliant teacher.

ROBERT BROWN: —was the invective part of the method here?

HAROLD TOVISH: No. The reason he was such a good teacher was that for beginners, he had a way to talking about the model, which was so vivid. It—it was done in analogies. He would talk in analogies. And he would—we had, for example, a—a model who had posed for Rodin, Kakaweti [ph] he was called, and in fact, he'd posed for the Balzac. I mean, you know, I mean that really gets you a sense of history there—

ROBERT BROWN: Okay. I'll be looking for him, huh?

HAROLD TOVISH: He was now an elderly man, but you could see that body. That chunky, powerful body, but now everything you need to hang. And he described this guy as a chest, a bureau, a chest of drawers with the drawers open, and things hanging out of the drawers, and things like that, all kinds of—and then he says look at strings, uh, dirty clothes. He gave, you know, a vivid imagery that he made out of the model. And you would—you know, I worked from the model also, I did a lot of that while I was there. In the mornings we worked from the model, in the afternoon we worked on our own, and you could draw or model. So, I listened to him, I learned a great deal from him. I could never imitate his style of teaching. You know, it was based on so much acid, you know, a terrific amount of acid. He could be very amusing also, a very funny man. He, uh, had this really quite rare quality of an unrelenting insistence on certain ideas, certain things. And, uh, without ever saying it you see? What—what emerged from this was a—a feeling that this was the most important activity in the world and that we were doing something which was, you know, a function of such profound importance that anything, any sacrifice, anything that we could do to make it better, to make—to find out more about it, was worth the effort. If it meant that I have to stick a hot iron into somebody, he would do it, right? I mean I don't wanna convey a—a total picture of a mean man. He wasn't really mean.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

HAROLD TOVISH: Uh, he also was quite impersonal. I rather liked him for that. I don't mean impersonal in the sense that he wouldn't make personal cracks. But I mean in the sense that, uh, you knew he was the boss. There was no, no nonsense about that. And, oh, while I'm reminiscing, there's another charming thing here, he can have a monstrous ego too naturally. And, uh, we would finish about 4:30 and then the custom was to run over to Café Select and have a beer, or a glass of wine, or something, and occasionally Zadkine would come in too. He'd go back to his own studio, which was around the corner, and change his clothes and then come back. And we had seen him a half hour earlier, right, and most of the café was filled with—with students. And Zadkine would enter the café like an emperor and he'd march down the aisle. He would never sit with any of us but always in the corner by himself, and as he passed us, he would—he would wave his hand with the knuckles outward like royalty.

ROBERT BROWN: Royalty. [They laugh.]

HAROLD TOVISH: Smiling as if he hadn't seen us before. [They laugh.] I was just—I was just smacked out by that man.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: He was terrific.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, what did he stress as important in, uh, in sculpture?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, the—the key to his, uh, his teaching was Cubism. You know that—that I think informed everything he taught. He also had one thing that many Cubists did not have, and that was the very lyrical spirit, which came out in his best work, the kind of lyricism that for example I find lacking in Lipchitz. Although Lipchitz has done work which aspires to lyricism. It—it's not as clear. There's a certain heaviness and clumsiness about some of the things that, uh, Lipchitz had—and I was, by the way, I respect very much. But it just appeared to me that lyricism was not the most powerful force in, uh, Lipchitz's nature but it was in Zadkine's. So that even the style of teaching, his way of describing models, or the way a form might turn, uh, had this undertone of lyrical quality to it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, the analyzing of a model is, uh, a marked characteristic of his, isn't it?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, exactly. He would describe the model and by the way, I do that too now.

ROBERT BROWN: This was before you got into the work with the model, before you got into your model?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, no, the model would be right there, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah?

HAROLD TOVISH: And talk about the model, describe the, uh, you know, he would bring in all of nature. He would talk about mountains, and cataclysms, and—and, uh, oceans heaving, and—you know, it was full of that kind of thing. And he—he conveyed a sense of complexity also, which I think, uh, stemmed from the possibilities of Cubism where there was not only the complexity of what was given but what you could invent. And between—you know, he—he knew, he had a profound understanding of a figure. He'd done quite academic—you know he'd gone through the routine. But his work always—in fact, one of its problems was its complexity. He very often went crazy with complexity to the point where this lyrical quality I talked about simply got drowned.

ROBERT BROWN: True.

HAROLD TOVISH: But I could think of a half dozen Zadkine sculptures, which I would put against anything that's been done. Although, he doesn't have the reputation that Lipchitz does. I think it's very personally unfair. I think, uh, he fell on his face perhaps more often than Lipchitz did.

ROBERT BROWN: You know as you were saying, while you were there then with him, you were picking up his—through his ability to give analogies and all, things that you had not seen in the form as you have done it, the given? Or were you thinking—

[Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, no. You must—you must understand that I was a resister. I was not to be seduced. I understood what he was talking about, I—

ROBERT BROWN: You didn't need his—him to trigger off this—

HAROLD TOVISH: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: —in yourself?

HAROLD TOVISH: I knew what he was talking about, but I was not interested in Cubism per se. I might have been influenced it—by it the way any artist alive today would be influenced by, but it would be a case of more or less, in my case less. There were artists who came out of that experience who were much more influenced by it. I think, for example, Hugh Townley was much more influenced by Cubism than I and learned a great deal more from it than I did. Uh, and I could name others, but—

ROBERT BROWN: Yours was a relationship then [inaudible]?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think you could—you developed as much as you might have had you had been—

HAROLD TOVISH: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —led along with him.

HAROLD TOVISH: Zadkine, you see, would force me to clarify my ideas. Uh, well, I used the word earlier "friction," he provided a kind of friction, which was uncomfortable, it was hot. He wouldn't leave me alone. He would come in and say something to me, which indicated that he thought I was very gifted but I was all wrong. He says, "You will never do anything serious!" He said stuff like that. Because, he says, "You do not understand what the key is," or something to that effect. See, he felt I was moving in a direction, which would preclude the possibility of—of going beyond a certain point. And he told me this straight up and down. You know he is—as I say, he wasn't gentle.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get—did he get across what that key was, do you suppose?

HAROLD TOVISH: The key, obviously, was that the—in the 20th century, Cubism was the key to sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: And you weren't going through that process?

HAROLD TOVISH: I was not going to become—

ROBERT BROWN: Analysis.

HAROLD TOVISH: —a Cubistic sculptor. I was not going to move in the direction of abstraction, which is what I felt Cubism meant by logical consequence. That once you were to take the human form and impose upon it a totally different order, that the order became paramount, and therefore, there was no reason why you must retain the image. You see my idea of image is always associated with something seen. Other artists' idea of images, it can be something quite else, whatever it is they make, that's image. Of course, it is. In the material world anything, you make is sort of an image, but image to me has something to do with the history of all art, going back as far as you like. It's a limitation, which I had accepted, you know, because this meant something to me. Well, in any case, you could see, there was a fundamental friction between us. And yet, I don't think that Zadkine, uh, gave me up for lost. And he was too much of an artist himself to—to feel that unless I did finally succumb to this vision that he had, there was—I was hopeless. Because after that we corresponded and he recommended me for things and, you know, things like that. He—he thought I was worth his time, and he also was very good for Marianna. He—he worked very hard with her, and he taught her something about carving.

Although she too, resisted him but in a much more polite manner than I did. [They laugh.] I was not exactly nasty, but there was an expression on my face, which must have said, "Sullen resistance." I wasn't as able to hide behind good manners as Marianna.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you productive then?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, I was quite productive.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have the free time in the afternoon—

HAROLD TOVISH: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: —or was he around—

HAROLD TOVISH: I—I also had—I had a lot of facility. I was very good with my hands. I worked rapidly, and I turned out quite a bit of work. Uh, I cast my first bronze at Zadkine's, modest little pieces, oh, bigger than that, five, six, eight inches and—

ROBERT BROWN: On your own or did they have an assistant?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, no, no. I took it out to the foundry, and it was done in a foundry. Marianna did the same, and at the end of that year, we both realized that we—we really couldn't continue with Zadkine. It was just getting to be too much, and, uh, we decided—we'd already had our own studio as I told you, and we decided we would try to find a studio. By great, good fortune, it was a studio complex across the street from where we lived, and we went in there and just by happenstance, uh, a poor Spanish refugee aristocrat had two studios. The rent was very cheap. It was all controlled rent, you see, and he was paying probably about four dollars or six dollars a month for these, uh, extra studios. But he needed money desperately, and I think he rented it to us for something like 18, 19, I don't remember. So that was bread for him. We got our studio and then we were on our own, and it was while we were on our own that, uh, we began to meet other artists in the community. You know, the ones we met at Zadkine's, uh, we more or less lost contact with. But then we started to meet painters, people like Herb Katzman, Jonah Kinigstein, and Reginald Pollack, and Jules Olitski. And in fact, Jules Olitski had come for about a week to, uh, Zadkine's because he was he was also a GI and had to go somewhere, and he left Zadkine, I think, after a week. He couldn't stand it. Uh, he was totally inept as I recall. He couldn't—he couldn't do anything with his hands. [They laugh.] That's what I remember about Olitski. But Olitski was doing astonishing paintings at that time, which I think either he has destroyed or I have never seen even photographs of them. Uh, very Expressionist paintings with the writing, and words all over them, and all kinds of weird things. We all thought he was a very interesting artist. But I was stunned later on when I saw what he had become, this elegant man. My God, what had he had done to himself to become so elegant? [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you developed then a—this was mainly a social life was it, you had with these people or is it—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, no, a very artistic life. We saw each other. We—we talked about work to each other, we—and of course, we socialized somewhat. Actually, Marianna and I lived very isolated lives in Paris. In fact, it was really only towards the end of our stay that we began to meet other artists, and get to know them, and spend a little time with them. We really worked very hard. It was a marvelous place to work, absolutely marvelous. The weather was vile.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

HAROLD TOVISH: Paris, I mean everyone who's talked about Paris, uh, they never really mentioned how awful it is there. The—the gray, purple light of Paris is I what I remember. And it was chilly all the time during the winter and, uh, you—you just worked. That was all there was to do. And we got to know Germaine Richier who, uh, would be, I would say at that time, was the major influence in my work. Uh, I—I found her stuff at the Musée—um, the Museum of Modern Art there—tremendously exciting. And, uh, on the base of this, I said to Marianna, "Gee, we've got to meet this person." I'd never heard of her. And we did went—we actually went to see her, and I'd shown her photographs of my work and Marianna did too, and she was extraordinarily kind. And when I'd finish a piece of sculpture—she was out where my foundry was in the same area—so I'd bring it to her to look at it. She was awfully nice. She, uh—one of the great mistakes we made, it was really too bad, was that Marianna proposed that Richier do a portrait of me. By the way, I think Richier is the great portrait artist of the latter part of the 20th century or rather let's say after Rodin, she outstrips anybody including, uh, Marini. Nobody does portraits the way that woman did and she's not known. It infuriates me—well, anyway. Marianna said, "Gee, wouldn't it be great if we were to commission her to do a portrait of you? To watch her do it!" And I said, "Oh, no, we couldn't do that. First of all, where are we gonna get the money to do it?" She says, "I'll bet you if I wrote to my parents, they would pay for it." And they would have, but it never came to pass. I've really regretted it with part modesty and also part the feeling that the time would have been more than I wanted to give. But I—I

felt it was, uh, that kind of personal ego thing, which I was foolish enough to feel was important. And I—I wish I had had a little more ego so that the idea would have delighted me.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: Because it would have been a great experience to watch this woman go about her business.

ROBERT BROWN: Because you were staying there where you could have gone to develop on your own?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, I did but nevertheless—

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I have such great respect for what she was doing that, uh, to have watched her go about how she constructed a head would have been—it could not have been anything but a profoundly important experience, and I really regret that. I feel, in fact, certain problems I have with doing the heads might—might have been avoided if I had. But maybe I'm wrong, I don't know. And so, she was important as part of that Paris experience and so was Zadkine, so were a few of the artists we met there.

ROBERT BROWN: Were the elders—the other French painters and all, were they fairly approachable or not?

HAROLD TOVISH: We made no effort to meet anybody except Richier.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the galleries at that time? Were they—

HAROLD TOVISH: Made no effort—

ROBERT BROWN: —[inaudible].

HAROLD TOVISH: —to have anything to do with galleries. Uh, we would go around and see shows. We saw the first Bernard Buffet show, and he was considered hot stuff in Paris at that time. I—I didn't quite get it, but—but a lot of people thought he was pretty good. Uh, there were very gifted people around. That was—it's always good to have many gifted people around, and we all kind of pushed each other. It was really kind of a domino theory of art. [They laugh.] Except it was in reverse. Everybody was pushing everyone presumably upward. Competition was fierce amongst the artists, but Marianna and I enjoyed a peculiar place in that whole scene. Uh, we lived much better than most of the artists did. We had a house, we even had a servant, we had two children. I would say 95 percent of the artists there were single people, or if they were married, they didn't have kids. Uh, I had already been teaching so I had a—an amount of experience under my belt, which a good many of those people had not had. Furthermore, I wouldn't claim that I was a better artist than many of them were. In fact, some of them, I think, were really very, very good artists already. Herb Katzman was an extraordinarily gifted artist and so was Kinigstein. And Tajiri and, uh, Pollack are highly sophisticated artists. Uh, who else was there? There were quite a few people who were coming up at the—Townley, Olitski. And this guy named Cohn whose name I'll get before the end of the—our session.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did you know you would, uh, stay only a short as you would—as you did?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, what—what came up was this. One of the people who had been teaching at, uh, Alfred had left and gotten at job at the University of Minnesota. And it happened that they needed a sculptor there and he recommended me for the job. A letter comes in the mail suggesting that so and so is gonna turn up one of these days to talk to you. We need a sculptor. And the guy who turned up was a fellow—oh God, I'm not gonna—Malcolm Myers [ph], a graphic artist from the Midwest who came to look me over, you see. He and his wife, amusing people. We—we, uh, had a good time with them, and I guess the report that went back was very good. Anyway, I got a letter asking if I'd take this job. Well, all right, our young daughter was getting to be about four years old and our other—our son was about getting onto two, and we were not, in any sense, the expatriate types. It was quite clear to both of us that our life was gonna be back here. We knew artists and know artists who still are in Paris. A—a guy named Chelimsky, for example, was one of the artists we knew there who simply became a French artist, he's there. I don't even know if he comes back to renew his passport every five years or whatever it is. But he's at the School of Paris, he's there, that's it. Uh, Reginald Pollack stayed in Paris for, I don't know how long, 15 years, anyway. And there were some who settled in, learned the language fluently, in some cases married French women, and their lives, uh, were quite well determined. But we had these kids who were growing up and we wanted them to go to American schools and all the rest of it. And when this offer came, we talked about it. The amount of money involved was more than I've ever earned, and, uh, our feeling was that perhaps it would be best to go back and so that's what we did.

ROBERT BROWN: You weren't certain but you thought probably?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, at the time, I felt that we couldn't keep this up for much longer. The fact of the matter

was that we had to, uh, begin our career in a professional sense in America. I had exhibited in Paris at a gallery, which was run by an American and which showed Americans in Paris, and I've been given some rather nice notice, minor but nice notice in the newspapers. Probably the same dumb critic who said this other guy was good, so you'd see what that amounted to.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: But the—and also I had sold my first sculptures. Oh, I didn't tell you about that.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, in Paris?

HAROLD TOVISH: To Mr. and Mrs. Child. That's right. The Childs bought—Paul and Julia bought two pieces of my sculpture from that exhibition in this little gallery. And we went to have supper and she fed us a gourmet supper.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, she could cook even—

HAROLD TOVISH: And we still—yes, that's what she was studying at the Cordon Bleu at the time, and that's where we got to know them, and we still know them. We—we don't see them very much, but, uh, when we do, we recall the good old days, you know? In any case, they were my first patrons. [They laugh.] Uh, but it was interesting, neither of us really resisted the idea. Marianna, I think, more so than I because Marianna was working well, and she had an ideal setup. Somebody to look after the children and so on, and going back to America would bring back certain problems for her. How was she gonna continue to work and so on? But it was at that time that women—well Marianna's generation, was still, uh, you know, "whither though goest, so will I."

ROBERT BROWN: Got it.

HAROLD TOVISH: I'm gonna say very convenient for the male.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: Not so hot for the woman. But she was just great. She—she said, "Well, okay, if you feel that's what we should do, we'll go." So, off we went to Minneapolis, and I taught at Minneapolis for three and a half years.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it anything like Alfred? A much bigger place?

HAROLD TOVISH: Much bigger place. Uh, there, the sculpture was one of the major mediums and it was not a service course. [Laughs.] And I got some very good students, and, uh, I was much more confident in my teaching. And I did some more experimental work there because I came back—we got back here in 1951. We got back in—oh, by the way, the last, uh, six weeks of our stay in Paris, we studied etching with Ada [ph], and that was interesting because later on I—you know recently, I've done some—

ROBERT BROWN: Etching.

HAROLD TOVISH: —graphic work. But, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Did Peter have a lot of [inaudible] or this thing, a fairly large setup there, or—?

HAROLD TOVISH: Who?

ROBERT BROWN: Peter.

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, he rented a—a whole floor of a place with presses and all but, yeah, we—we both worked there for six weeks. Uh, that's another story, but we wanna get on to Minnesota. At Minnesota, both of us continued. In spite of the inconvenience, Marianna made a little studio down in the cellar and managed to get in several hours of, uh, of work a day. The kids went to a nursery, and it worked out pretty well. It wasn't as nice as Paris, no doubt. And I had a converted men's room, which I shared with another sculptor named Paul Frazier.

ROBERT BROWN: But that's back to your beginnings, right, in the orphanage? Yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: Sort of, yeah. And I started to do more experimental work. I suppose I would have to describe it that way because when I got back, the Abstract Expressionists were beginning to be felt as a very visible and powerful force. Uh, in 1951, already the names of Pollock, and de Kooning, and, uh, and so on and so forth, were—had emerged from obscurity, and now, were beginning to command the whole art scene. And the sculptors whose work I was thoroughly familiar with, people like Seymour Lipton and Herbert Ferber, David Smith, from that period before I left—after all, it was not quite two years, you see. I began to see work by Seymour Lipton and Herbert Ferber that had absolutely no relation to what they had done before. Both were doing sort of heavy

figures, still a hangover from WPA days, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: Rather leaning a bit to the grotesque. Uh, Lipton being much more interesting than Ferber. Ferber, I never thought of as a very good sculptor, although others do. Well, what can you do? Uh, but in any case, they began to—they were doing this stuff. "What the hell is going on around here," says I.

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of a flip-flop which is—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah, a complete flip-flop. Uh, I'm not questioning their—their, uh, integrity at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. But—

HAROLD TOVISH: But whatever it was—

ROBERT BROWN: —still [cross talk]—

HAROLD TOVISH: —it was an extraordinary reversal. Roszak who had been doing, uh, Constructivist sculpture was suddenly becoming an Expressionist sculptor, a very curious thing going on. Uh, David Smith who had been doing Surrealist work much more consistently went into, uh—again he went into a kind of lyrical sculpture where this Surrealist imagery began to be more subdued and something else came out. But, of course, he's a—he's really a different case. But everybody, people who were—my fellow teachers, you know, were extraordinarily interested in what was going on, and every magazine you opened, you know, there would be this, there would be that by Pollock and a lot of peripheral characters too, artists who since have somewhat faded, but they—they apparently swept the field.

ROBERT BROWN: This—was this, uh, puzzling to you? Did they—did anybody who sweep the field? Because when you—before it was—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, it was puzzling to me in this respect. I was puzzled by it because, I suppose, the kind of artist that I—I was then, really still am. That is, I assumed that art emerged from some kind of deep, personal resource. In that the outside, that thing outside could only serve to help you get this, uh, this deep thing, whatever it was that was special about you, out. That thing out there might have helped you and that was its only value. I could never and still find it difficult to conceive of an idea, which was based on some perception that appeared to have some universal application. Overwhelming this thing, and me submitting to that. This is why I couldn't adopt a Cubist attitude or a Cubist means.

ROBERT BROWN: You've always had the strong sense of self, right? And then that's—

HAROLD TOVISH: Exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: —[inaudible]—

HAROLD TOVISH: I mean I could not see how an artist who had been doing A would decide that A was totally pointless and that only B made any sense. It was the notion that some intellectual idea of art could supersede your own vision. Now, I could be doing these guys a great injustice. It could be some kind of confluence of inner and outer forces, which pushed them in that direction which was to their—to their benefit. I—I am simply saying that I never went through that, that process—

ROBERT BROWN: But still—

HAROLD TOVISH: —whatever it was, I never went through it. But nevertheless, in looking at what this stuff was doing and was happening, the complete abandonment of subject matter, the adoption of formal systems, which appear to depend a great deal on intuition. Uh, whereas intuition in the formal sense rather in a subjective sense, where you let things happen, where all of these things occur there. So that all of the hangover from an earlier period, those things that were rather left up in the air with the randomness, uh, you know, automatic writing and all of these things from the Surrealist and Dada periods began now to be adopted in a kind of systematic way, which is almost a contradiction of what it was really all about. So that you would go into the studio determined to be totally irrational if you could and just let things happen. Right? Of course, the guys let it happen the same way many times.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

[Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: You—you would detect who did what so that the unconscious was apparently a very

consistent creature after all, but whatever the case. I—I began to look at this stuff and in some cases, the work rather interested me. I mean I found certain things that Lipton did were quite interesting, uh, in a formal sense on one level. In another sense in that, there was a kind of a threatening quality about his work and certain Roszak pieces, which I found, uh, I—I could respond to. Although, I—I could not see myself going in the studio and then starting to make something, using whatever this imp—the idea of impulse, or making some little thing and then building from that, or whatever. I mean I really don't even know the way they went about it. I just didn't do that.

ROBERT BROWN: You just couldn't.

HAROLD TOVISH: So, uh—but nevertheless, it must have had some kind of bearing in some of the things I began to do at that time because I began to explore other things. For example, in 1952, we went down to Colorado Springs, and I saw for the first time the cave dwellings, the cliff dwellings, and I was profoundly affected by that. I mean it's a very mysterious place. And you still feel a certain presence there. A curious, uh, ghostly, mystical thing about those places. And I did a piece of sculpture, which, uh, reflected that, a thing called *The Ancient Place*, a rather direct response to it, in which I made sort of a configuration of what appeared to be cliff dwelling. Uh, and then in it, I put little machines that I contrived to make with the spare parts from Honeywell, you know, little gears and beautiful little gadgets, which I put together and put in these caves. And it was, uh, symbolic of the idea that instead of shards, we'll find machines, that sort of thing. Because I was also politically, uh, very alert, and well, the atom scare was going on at that time, so, it was a response to that. But the formal character of this thing would indicate that some of that interest in experimental form, uh, had entered the work. And what was fascinating was that the following year I had an exhibition, which I showed all the work that I did in Paris, and what I had done since I returned from Paris, and that included portraits. It included a piece called *The City* in which I did—in fact, what's interesting was that the first thing I did when I got back was a piece called *The City*, in which I worked in reverse, in clay then, a technique which was, uh, used later by other artists. But this too was—was, in a sense, more abstract than anything I had done before. But this was almost the first thing I did when I got back. But I—what I'm really getting at is that—geez, I've been yakking a long time, you know, haven't I?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, so this—

HAROLD TOVISH: Uh, uh, my voice is gonna be—

ROBERT BROWN: You had an experiment even before you knew you were experimenting yourself?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, the point was that I had an idea, and there was there no other way to do it, but way—

ROBERT BROWN: And it somehow—

HAROLD TOVISH: —I did it.

ROBERT BROWN: —coincided with this Abstractionist Expression?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, uh, what I'm saying is if you were to look at the things that I had done at that period, they would not seem totally foreign to the milieu of sculpture at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time, right.

HAROLD TOVISH: On the other hand, neither would they fit very comfortably.

ROBERT BROWN: Third, they would not seem foreign to your milieu, would they?

HAROLD TOVISH: No.

ROBERT BROWN: You could see—

HAROLD TOVISH: There would be a very specific intent in the piece. I was simply not trying to make an interesting piece of sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

HAROLD TOVISH: See, I never went in that direction.

ROBERT BROWN: Never.

HAROLD TOVISH: Never.

ROBERT BROWN: Formalism for its own sake.

HAROLD TOVISH: I never went into the, uh, into the notion of that—that pure form, that is, simply making form could be suggestive of all of human experience if it were done beautifully and deeply enough. I always felt there had to be a connection to what I considered real experience, always.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, whereas Zadkine resisted that.

HAROLD TOVISH: Exactly. Although Zadkine didn't abandon it either, you see? Actually, he didn't.

ROBERT BROWN: No, he didn't.

HAROLD TOVISH: He retained.

ROBERT BROWN: He talked in that way—

HAROLD TOVISH: He retained his connection, but, uh, the artist who brought it to its logical development, uh, abandoned it. And that's always been my—you know that's really, uh—in the end that's essentially my position.

[END OF TRACK.]

HAROLD TOVISH: This is reel 1 of 2, Side B. This year with—well, we're wandering far afield again. I think maybe the Minnesota thing, which lasted three and a half years, was, uh, a kind of an interim period for me in the sense that at Minnesota, some of the things that I had done in Paris no longer were the focus of my interest. And I—I did these things I described, which were perhaps a little more experimental in character. I had my first one-man show—

ROBERT BROWN: In Minnesota.

HAROLD TOVISH: In Minnesota, at the, uh, Walker Art Center, and that was in 1953. And much to my astonishment, I—I, uh, sold about two-thirds of it, almost everything.

ROBERT BROWN: What kind of things did you have there in the show?

HAROLD TOVISH: All the work I'd done in Paris, uh, in addition to about half a dozen pieces I had done in Minnesota. And since I had never in my life expected to earn any money as a teacher—or, I'm sorry, as a, uh, sculptor, I—I was absolutely floored by the fact that people would pay quite a bit of money for some of these things and—

ROBERT BROWN: Was there—were there many people from the area, were there people from many places—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, people from the area. Well, and Minneapolis is a very alive, lively community. It's, uh, we in the east look at those places as if they're in Siberia somewhere. The fact of the matter is that they're, uh, very sophisticated people out there. It's a great university, you know, somewhere between 30,[000] or 40,000 students going there.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your feeling about, losing now to—so, did you think of it as losing pieces of your past or—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: —was it good riddance at this point or—

HAROLD TOVISH: You know it was—it was a curious thing. No, I never—I never felt "good riddance" in any sense of the word. I mean I never thought that way, never. It was as if I had done something. I had carried something as far as I could go with it, and there was no more I could do with it except repeat. Uh, that's another thing, which I think is probably is one of the forces that keeps me a sort of peripheral type. That is, that I never can think in terms of an oeuvre. Uh, if I operated on the basis of having some formal system, which had overriding priority, I could see where one might simply be so fascinated by that, that what you do is accumulate, uh, objects which are a reflection of that formal system. And presumably, you would carry it to some immense height, and it would constitute important work, okay? Uh, I haven't got that capacity. I have never been able to develop a formal system, or as some—another artist would put it, a vision of form, which is all-encompassing. Something I think that Henry Moore has. Uh, something that—that might surprise you that I don't think Giacometti had. Because Giacometti's formal system is—is so tenuous, so uncertain, so full of problems. That in the end, uh, Zadkine's criticism, you know, a snot on a string, as brutal as—as that criticism is, there is an element of truth in it that Zadkine—uh, or rather Giacometti's work depends on a kind of an emotional tension. And the anxiety that is present in his work, it becomes almost something you can touch. Uh, it's—it's an art of

silhouette. It's an art of a, of a kind of an emotional—Let's say, that whatever form one can detect in Giacometti, the—the best part of his formal character is in its use of a kind of an exaggerated, uh—how the hell can I put it so that it makes any sort of sense at all? The way he'll do a head, you know, that compression, the—the slamming the head so that it becomes, you know, flounder-like from one view, uh, where the features become overwhelmingly important, uh, that was the only way he apparently could cope with it. Because he found the—the whole business of how do you get from one point to the next, uh, is just infinitely complex. And something I shared his anxiety on this question, it's a dreadful question.

ROBERT BROWN: So that he concentrated in by—

HAROLD TOVISH: Right. By compression—

ROBERT BROWN: —[inaudible]

HAROLD TOVISH: It's an artof compression, and his heads are far more successful formally than the figures, which really do exist as—as a kind of a—a silhouette. The whole thing is important. The parts simply decay in front of the eyes. There's a—a, you know, a detail from Giacometti that was simply [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: It's a very exciting case; however, you couldn't program it out.

HAROLD TOVISH: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: These things came—

HAROLD TOVISH: —right. But I much prefer Giacometti to Henry Moore, I mean as in the end, and you could see why I would have to. Because the formal system would appear to me to involve a limitation, which I am not a—or rather I am incapable of accepting. I just can't accept it. And yet, everything that I do has to cope with form, uh, has to exist in some formal kind of a cloak. Uh, but the difference is that the—the idea, whatever it happens to be, tells me what the form has to be also, and I don't give a damn where it comes from. I mean I do it that way because I don't know any other way to do it. So that whatever disparity one finds in my work, in terms of, uh, its stylistic, uh, appearance would have to be attributed to this.

ROBERT BROWN: You brought that up before that—and you think also teaching on the periphery.

HAROLD TOVISH: I do—

ROBERT BROWN: But those who have a system?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, a s—a system makes it sound rather, uh, cold and deliberate. But those who—who, uh, who use the word "sculpture" when they say, "I am sculptor," or "I do sculpture," sculpture to them means you do something with form in which the formal character of the thing is the whole problem. How do you make a piece of sculpture?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, or you—[inaudible].

HAROLD TOVISH: Or you talk about sculpture, you see? You know, I—I'd rather be—I make images. Uh, I don't know if I'm, uh—by that definition, I would doubt very much that I could be called a sculptor because I'm—I'm doing things which are very personal. They have definite, uh, autobiographical meaning to me. And—and, uh, I don't mean incidents from my life and times, but in the sense of my feeling about being alive. And I intend for these things to have something to do with real experience, human experience of art—in work of art. Some metaphysical or philosophical, uh, sense of what it is to be alive for me. That makes it sound almost precious. Yeah, the—this attitude might come off to some people as being quite, uh, precious and so personal that it's a form of indulgence, a—and perhaps even lacking in certain kind of modesty. In the sense that how do I imagine that I can pull off these things, that they would be of any importance, if they don't have this universal aspect of sculpture?

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

HAROLD TOVISH: Now, it's entirely possible that they do have that. But it certainly had not been my fundamental concern ever, ever and I'm—I make no bones about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Because you, uh, were perhaps for that reason, uh, flabbergasted then when so many people seemed interested in your work?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: That you should—even you were aware of your—

HAROLD TOVISH: I was—I—first of all—

ROBERT BROWN: First—

HAROLD TOVISH: —a good deal of my work is not particularly pleasant. It's virtually never decorative. And I couldn't understand why anybody would want, uh, these particular symbols that I was making around.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you develop—develop friends among some of those collectors? Were there any collectors?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, no, I've always rather kept aloof from personal association with, uh, collectors. So some of them are—are more friends than they are collectors in the sense that they might have bought one thing or something like that. But, you know the serious collectors scared the hell out of me in a way. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Why?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, you know, it is—it's a weird thing to do, isn't it really?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: [Laughs.] I mean, you know, the pack rat mentality, but for the highest purposes always has—or scared me a little bit. Why does anybody want 1000 pieces of sculpture [laughs] for God's sakes? Six thousand paintings? What the hell are they gonna do?

ROBERT BROWN: Are you thinking of the possibility you're scared also because of the—uh, they'll have that much of you, each time they get another one, there's gonna be something else out there?

[Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I did. Didn't I mention that earlier? You know, uh, it's been so long since we did the first part of this taping but—but one of my fantasies when Hirschhorn bought quite a few of my sculptures, and one of my fantasies was that someday I'd irritate him, and he'd decide to destroy three-quarters of my life work. [They laugh.] He wouldn't do that, he paid for it, I doubt he would destroy it.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: But anyway, uh, no, I—I always feel that there should be some kind of distance between the artist and the collector, and the artist and the museum person, the artist and the critic. Uh, I—I just think the world is too—too full of pitfalls. It is very, very hard to keep yourself together in this business. It's terribly hard. An—and I'm not sullen about it. I mean I—I don't think of these people as evil, right, or anything like that. Although, I'm sure some of them are just like artists, some artists, can most certainly be evil types. But it—it's such a seductive business. You know people who pay $10,000 for something that you've done, and then sort of wrap their arm around you, and, uh, they represent certain possibilities, you know? Or, uh, you get to know a critic, and the critic likes you personally. He may like your work too, possibly, and that, uh, these personal contacts will somehow help you. Now, in terms of career, that might be very cozy, but I've always felt that there's a danger, especially if you feel that you're a weak person, which I've always felt that I really don't have much character. That I could be very easily seduced if I gave way at all. Uh, and that a certain kind of praise, a certain kind of notoriety, and all these things, in a way, leech away your substance. I—I really feel that, and—and I'm sure my, uh, insistence on, you know, staying out of it has something to do with this fear of my own weaknesses, you know?. Whereas other artists would revel in this, unselfconsciously. I, in a way, envy them, their ability to go ahead and, uh, play that art game, you know, enjoy the fruits of their ability as artists and as—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. [They laugh.] Well, you already—or like when you arrived at this, oh, and had this success, were you tempted at that point or were you pretty much—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, I wasn't.

[Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: First of all, the—the exhibition had a terrible effect on me. I went into a terrible funk. I didn't understand why anybody liked it. What was wrong with the work? You know I had that idea that if people respond to the work, there's probably something wrong with it. It was part of the mythology, you know, 20th-century art that everybody is supposed to be horrified at first and then, later on, they realize how great it is. But I don't think that was it all together. I also feel that I was doing stuff, which, uh, which I really considered a response to the world, which was a rather dark vision of human fate, of human experience. And I couldn't understand why anybody would want this around the house, to become a mere thing in the—on their shelf. And I took that to mean that I had not made the thing forceful enough. Now, of course, my program has never been to go out there and—and, uh, have people rush out of the gallery shrieking or anything like that. But I would meet

some of the people who'd bought things, I would, uh, listen to them talk and—and I really was mystified, why did they want the thing? They claimed that they liked it because they thought it was good art. Now, I can't quarrel with that, can I?

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. A bunch of formal stuff. Totally—

HAROLD TOVISH: They, apparently, found qualities in it, which gave them some satisfaction, you know? And I'm not going to, oh, belittle their needs as opposed to mine. One thing that you learn in this business is that whatever it is that you put into a work, um, may not be what others get from it. There's no control. It's rather irritating but such is the case. What you think was, uh, meant to imply some—some rather grim notion, they find amusing. And there's nothing you can do about it. Either they were totally blind, uh, or else they see something in it that—that you simply can't see. You just can't see.

ROBERT BROWN: But this did not upset you that much because you'd already created this. You were done with that particular piece, if I say, it was your—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, yes, I'm done with it. As I told you, I—I'm really not very interested in the thing once it's finished.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time, did you have any colleagues or I mean people who—to whom you were particular close as—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well mostly in the [cross talk]. You know, up in Minneapolis, uh, it was not the style to talk much about art. In fact, in America in general, uh, it's always disturbed me that there's very little intellectual exchange among artists. It's mostly—mostly has to do with, uh, "did you see so and so's show? What did you think of it? It's great, gee, he sold everything," or, "She didn't sell anything," or—or, do you—"I hate my dealer," or "I love my dealer." I mean that's the—that's what it amounts to, uh, backed by the unusual stuff which is sort of fun. But—but artists, in this country, appear to me to be very self-conscious about talking about ideas. Uh, it's an embarrassing subject. Pollock, you know, represents a sort of the prototypical, tough, terrific artist, but no bullshit that kind of thing. He just—he does it and then—and you know, "up yours," that sort of thing. But that, uh—in many ways, I think, has become part of a mythology at the American artist in particular. I mean the European artist is much less prone to this kind of, uh, almost adolescent attitude about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Strong and silent type?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah, being qui—shut up and do it, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: And let the other fools talk about it. Whereas, you know, I think it's so, uh, marvelous the whole subject whether you're talking about it and making it whatever. There are real things to talk about. There, you know, ideas in this thing which aren't worth talking about, but, uh, that's, another matter, anyway.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In teaching, were you changing and all that, or do you [inaudible]?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well I was—I was being a very good teacher. I just thought I—as I say, I had somewhat more confidence. I, uh, had an idea of how to go about teaching, you know, studio work. I had a couple of good students and, uh, I got to be quite a well-known artist in Minneapolis, which helped, too. Uh, wherever Marianna and I have gone, we become the outstanding sculptors about six months after we arrive. That shows you the state of sculpture in America. But, uh, well, we stayed there for three and a half years, and after my show, and I had several thousand dollars, unexpected thousands of dollars, I said to Marianna, "Hey, let's get out of here." And this time, we went to Italy and we stayed there for three years, marvelous you know? Marianna meanwhile had gotten into a gallery in Boston, Swetzoff Gallery. And, uh, Swetzoff had come through Minneapolis when Marianna was having a show in—in the Walker Art Center, and he took her own. And in Italy, uh, I began to do what I really began to feel I was rising into a rather good peak of achievement. I did some really quite good things in that way.

ROBERT BROWN: Hold on. [Tape stops, restarts.]

HAROLD TOVISH: A real serious phenomenon in American culture, there's no doubt about it. Uh, I mean I tried to get them to be a little more sympathetic because they had no concept what it was like for the person, uh, let's say the man of the family to be totally unmanned, so to speak, when he lost a job or couldn't get a job. Uh, people blamed themselves. They found some sort of deficiency in their own characters to explain their fate, when, of course, it was the whole goddamn system that had—had crumbled.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do—your mother as a woman is—

HAROLD TOVISH: My mother—my mother was an extraordinary woman, she still is. Uh, she's alive and kicking but, uh, at that time, she was working for something like $12 a week. Uh, she got remarried, unsuccessfully. Her husband wasn't able to support her, oh, it's a common story. You know, millions of people went through this kind of thing. But she kept her own body and soul together, and she tried as best she could to maintain, a familial relationship with all of her children. And we did keep it up, you know? We, uh, my sisters and I are fairly close, and I'm very fond of my mother. And, uh, we—we managed to keep some semblance of a family even though we were all scattered, but it was this curious sense that the future was a threat. It's not something you look forward to. To grow up at that time, did not seem to be a desirable—altogether desirable. Of course, uh, every young child wants to grow up so that nobody would be bossing him around, oh, but—so after that in the opposite, you know, we were constantly being warned about the outside world, as it was referred to. And told that if we didn't do this, and didn't do that, we would, uh, starve and then everybody, yeah, I don't have to spell it out. You can imagine. Of course, they had dreadful responsibilities. They had to finally—when a kid reached 18, they had to kick him out. And most of the young fellows I knew ended up in, uh, pushing those carts from around downtown with the clothing racks through the streets. And I actually did some of that myself later on, but I had a very curious reaction to all of this. I became so infuriated by my own fears, [laughs] by this constant harping on the uncertainty of the future, that it affected—I said, Goddammit the hell with all that. I mean I really remember. I mean I was really resentful, and I said, I'm gonna be an artist. I don't give a shit, that's it. Well, that was a bravado. A good deal of it was pure bravado, but it did, uh, make me keep my mind on what it was I really wanted to do. And I was quite prepared to make whatever sacrifices were necessary, but I also—I have been a very lucky fellow. I really have been extraordinarily lucky man. First to have been in an institution where such things were available, that was one thing. Second of all, to have been in an institution, which did have a, uh, a foundation which gave scholarships to its bright, young people, usually to go to college. And as I tell you, I did wretchedly at high school. I think I barely got out with, uh—I think 65 was the minimum, I got 67 average. Well, anyway, uh, we used to—I mean I'm sort of skipping around here. You have to be patient. All those who wants to go to college would appear before a board of trustees on Wall Street. What an awesome occasion. You go up in the elevator and there was this, uh, walnut-paneled office. This really is right out of a Warner Brothers' film at the time. Uh, I was the first artist to ever ask for a scholarship because I simply couldn't go to college. I didn't have the, uh, scholastic background for it, or rather that—the scholastic record for it. Uh, the kids who did go were really very bright kids. So, I remember going up to this office. It was really hilarious. Going up to this office and these very impressive gentleman sitting around this great, big table and started cross-examining me. Why do you wanna be an artist? I don't remember what I answered. How are you gonna earn a living? Uh, I just fumbled around on that one. I said, Well, uh—by the way, this was 1939 already and the World's Fair was on, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HAROLD TOVISH: And I whipped up some story about that the World's Fair was going to make doing sculpture for architecture a very big deal. Uh, I was pretty shrewd, quick on my feet. And I handed him a line of baloney, and I imagine they probably knew it. But I—I did have, uh, some pretty good backing from people who thought I was gifted and perhaps the idea of giving, uh, giving, uh—recognizing that perhaps art might be taken seriously and someday people might do—

ROBERT BROWN: These were trustees who gave you—

HAROLD TOVISH: These were the trustees.

ROBERT BROWN: —backing?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, I didn't know about this, but what—what I mean was that I, uh, I, undoubtedly had recommendations from various sources, my teachers and that kind of thing. Uh, I even brought a couple of examples of the work I've done up there. And of course, they were in a funny position because their job was to see that, uh, that they could do whatever—what was possible for these young kids without any resources at all. To send them to college to study some subject which might bring them a living later on, very important. But here, they had somebody who was gonna be an artist, who has said so, and should they really encourage them to do it? It was, you know, a serious question. But one question was, "What if you don't make it?" Somebody popped that at me, right. I said, "Well, of course, I'm going to make it." [Laughs.] I said, "I never even gave that any thought." They loved that. I can see that went over very big because you know, it's the great American, you know the American, way, or the dream, yeah, the American dream. I fit in a certain pattern and I guess they liked it.

ROBERT BROWN: These were all very successful businessmen?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yes, these were all very wealthy men who had made it with knobs on [ph]. Well, in—in any case, uh, I did get the scholarship. It's not a generous one, but it's probably as much as they could give. I got seven dollars a week and my tuition was paid, and then that's—I actually lived on that for two years. Uh, I—I

had gone to an exhibition earlier that year of the Sculptors Guild in New York. This was their first exhibition. And I saw the work of, uh, a sculptor named Oronzio Maldarelli. I admired it very much. And when I was thinking of where I might go, there were two places I had in mind. One was the Black Mountain College, about which I had heard very interesting things. And the other was Columbia University, which had an art department, and Maldarelli was teaching on it. I often wondered what would have happened if I had gone to Black Mountain College because David Smith was teaching there.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How had you heard about Black Mountain?

HAROLD TOVISH: I don't remember.

ROBERT BROWN: Through Berger?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, no. No, no, no. Berger wouldn't have known. It was one of these women teachers. I wish I could remember their names. They really were very—very influential in my life. I just can't remember who it was—uh, one of them introduced me to Arshile Gorky. If you wanna hear that story—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

HAROLD TOVISH: —it's interesting. Um—

ROBERT BROWN: This is while you were still in school?

HAROLD TOVISH: This is while I was still a student, uh, in there. Uh, one of the women invited me to supper at her house. She had, uh, just given birth to a baby who was damaged at birth. I don't know. I—it has nothing to do with anything. It's just—it sticks in my mind, and this was a child who's gonna be crippled for life. But, uh, she invited me out. She was very kind and I—I hardly got such invitations as a matter of course. [Laughs.] And, uh, I went out to Brooklyn where she and her husband lived and we sat at a table and had a little alcohol. And at the end of the table behind her husband, her husband's chair, was a large painting, a long narrow painting. I remember it, and I, uh, we—looked at it. I was looking at my first real, true-to-life Arshile Gorky. I think if I can remember the configuration, that it must have been the period where he was, uh, strongly influenced by Miró, Picasso and Miró. But I wouldn't have known at it the time. I found it very strange, and unfamiliar to me; although, I had seen some abstractions. Uh, and I asked who did it, and they said, Oh, he'll be here later this evening. Apparently, they were good friends, and sure enough, this guy turned out, and it was a fellow with a big mustache, a very impressive man. He didn't stay long, but that's my contact with Arshile Gorky. Where the hell was I? I can't remember.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were talking about why—I was talking about Black Mountain, how you might have heard of that?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yeah. I think one of these women, you know, and then I—uh, which made me think of Gorky because they would have been in that avant-garde crowd. And, of course, they would have known all about Black Mountain, which was, uh, a really, an enclave of—of avant-gardism at the time. Well, what—what, uh, made me drop that was simply going all the way down. Where was it? Do you remember?

ROBERT BROWN: North Carolina.

HAROLD TOVISH: North Carolina. Yeah. Going all the way down there just didn't seem to be a good idea, and, uh, I was just a kid with very little experience in life. And Columbia was not far from where I—I mean I knew that area very well. I had grown up there. Uh, and, of course, Maldarelli was teaching there, an artist I admired. And I went there for three and a half years, learned a great deal from Maldarelli. He was an excellent teacher, very little given to, uh, philosophical musing. A hardnosed, practical man, uh, who was very encouraging.

ROBERT BROWN: Where were you when you got there as far as your own work?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, yeah, that's a good one. I—I should have touched on that. Well, all right, try to imagine, uh, really a totally innocent, young fellow with a lot of native talent, doing really quite primitive sort of work, but with certain amount of quality to it. Started going to museums, you begin to get a sense of what really good art is about. Your taste, at first, ran to rather obvious kinds of things. The—the—the usual, uh, almost traditional route that an artist takes. Uh, you become the victim of your enthusiasm. You rush back to your little toilet studio and, uh, whatever happened that—that excited you, you tried to imitate it. I mean I—I learned a tremendous amount by pure imitation. Well, a rather impure imitation, I wasn't skillful enough to really imitate something, uh, very well done. But I went through Zorach at one point, I remember, uh, and then I would hop over to Rodin, and then I would go off to somebody else. I simply was—as I said, I was insatiable, voracious. Uh, but, of course, what was happening mostly was that I was simply absorbing through my eyes, uh, a tremendous amount of information from the past. Well, I used to go literally every single Saturday to the Met. It was like a,

uh—it was my synagogue, [laughs] if you wanna know the truth. Uh, and as I got older, I started to—I would take up The Met in the morning and in the afternoon, I would run down 57th Street where all the galleries were at 57th. I would say 95 percent of galleries in New York were lined up on 57th Street between, let's say, uh, Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue—or Lexington Avenue. Imagine, think of the change since then. And you could literally go to every gallery on a—on a Saturday afternoon. Uh—

ROBERT BROWN: What did you pick from them?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, that's interesting because at that time, uh, Curt Valentin was running the, uh, Buchholz Gallery it was called and later it was changed to Valentin Gallery. And there, I got my first views of people like Moore, uh, Brâncuși, Lipchitz. Well, you know, you name them and, uh, Valentin had them, of course all of the German Expressionists and so on. Uh, and so being a pretty bright kid, with a certain amount of good instinct, I, uh, was educating myself. I didn't think of it that way as exactly what I was doing. I wish kids would do that a little more today. I don't think they do it enough but that's an aside. Uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you talk to people at these places, the museum or—

HAROLD TOVISH: I was very shy. I was very shy. You know, I was in there—this was the outside world and I—I was very shy. I didn't, uh, speak to anybody. But I got into Columbia, and now, I'm 18 years old, 18, a little older in fact because I had to go back to high school for half a year 'cause I flunked something. I flunked gym, that was it. [They laugh.] I never went to gym, which was the last class of the day, so I get to run straight back to the studio. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: Of course.

HAROLD TOVISH: So, they forced me to come back to do—I used to sit in the gym for hours on end, day after day in order to get my degree. Well, the hell with all that. Uh, uh, the point is I did get the—the scholarship. I did go to Columbia, and there I learned at least the beginnings of my trade. I—I learned to carve, I learned to cast very well. Uh, I'm completely on my own. I did a life-size anatomical figure. Uh, interestingly enough, all of that kind of training, which Maldarelli had had up to his neck, uh, he lost interest in all of that, and they were trying to be modern—you know in general, they rejected somebody like Rodin, you see, and that's interesting. Rodin was, uh, represented to them, a stifling influence probably because he was such a genius. Yeah, he was the Picasso of his time. I mean he absolutely engulfed the scene, I'd say.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what did they try to do?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, that was the, uh, time when we were called the "roll the sculpture down the hill school. Everybody was doing stone carvings of chunky figures, uh, inside a block of stone and in general, that was the—as I recall, that was the flavor of the kind of work that held the interest of artists at that time, sculptors. Although, of course, that's, you know, an oversimplified picture because, uh, David Smith was operating too and Louise Nevelzon was operating then. I saw shows of hers back—as far back as 1938, '39, '40.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they getting much attention there or it was mainly—

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, well, no, no, no.

ROBERT BROWN: —carved stone—

HAROLD TOVISH: Louise Nevelzon didn't—did not do that kind of thing. She was doing funny wood constructions of figures that looked like, uh, very crude, but interesting puppets. Strange puppet-like figures. A very interesting artist always; although, she had very little status in that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you—did you admire particular ones? You—you say you liked Maldarelli's teaching?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah. Oh, I admired Maldarelli because he was so damn sophisticated and elegant. He was an elegant modeler, a marvelous carver. He was not a first-rate artist, uh; although, he was a—a very good artist. Zorach, I think, uh, ultimately was better than him, stronger than him. Although he couldn't—I don't think he could ever touch Maldarelli for the sheer mastery of touch. He was a Mediterranean for God's sakes, I mean, you know, and he really knew how to do things.

ROBERT BROWN: So I thought you greatly—you say you mastered things there. You mastered—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I mastered. I mastered the—well perhaps, I shouldn't use the word master, that's a pretty, uh, big word. Let's say that I began to get my first inklings of, uh, what it would be to do a figure, what it means to do a—a figure that comes across more than some, you know a stuffed corpse. Uh, I understood a little bit about what constituted a good carving, a stone carving. I began to exercise a certain amount of taste, too. I suppose this was the beginning of, uh, acquiring a certain amount of sophistication. The word sofisticado, always

amuses me. It's spoiled. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel—

HAROLD TOVISH: My innocence was being spoiled.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you sense that, your, uh,—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, I didn't sense that at all.

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I had no—I had no sensation that I was losing something valuable. Uh, that is that kind of innocence that, uh, sort of mindless enthusiasm, you know, for anything. And now, I was becoming discriminating. I was trying to, uh, achieve technical mastery. And in the process, of course, I was losing to some extent that—that, uh, fine innocence.

ROBERT BROWN: But your teachers didn't insist on trying one thing and then another? Or were they?

HAROLD TOVISH: What do you mean?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did they, uh, ride herd on you much? Or were you—you say you tried to—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, no that's—

ROBERT BROWN: —suppress that.

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah. I see where you're getting at. That—that's interesting because first of all, there was no degree program then. That thing wasn't—there was no—nobody was riding on that idea that you're gonna get a degree, and that, uh, you're gonna teach or anything like that. I never dreamed I'd be a teacher. Uh, our program was so simple. As to be almost simpleminded now when you think of what art school is like. In the mornings, you draw and in the afternoon sculpture, and that was it. And for all the years I was there, that was all I did. Of course, it had the merit of extreme concentration. You really spent a lot of time. You used to come in on Saturdays, you know? And at work very often, when I went to—I'd go to—if it was a bad day, I didn't wanna go to galleries, that's where I'd go, and, uh, so on. It was very concentrated. I—

ROBERT BROWN: And was the teacher with you most of the time?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, Maldarelli was there every day. He had a studio there, and he used to wander in and out and looking at what we were doing. We worked from the model. Uh, in the afternoon, three days a week, you worked with a model, two days you carved on your own project. And if that now seems like a very simple program, uh, I think it's to be envied by kids now who are simply harried by that whole academic schmear. And are very often frustrated because they can't give it the kind of—uh, that kind of concentration. But you had to take care of the other part of your education yourself. And if you—I mean I've never felt that I missed out on any great deal by not going through the college route because I used to love to read. You know, I am still a voracious reader, and when I wasn't working on a sculpture, I was probably reading or going to the movies while I was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the teacher count for a lot, do you think?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: In that—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —very simple regime?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes. The teacher counted for a great deal. And he represented, uh, unquestioned authority. I didn't feel any obligation to defy Maldarelli, which is very often the case with students now. Uh, I simply assumed that the man knew infinitely more than I did. And that what he could, uh, teach me was not to be belittled in any way. However, I recognized that he was not an intellectual, oh, which is not to say he was ignorant by any means. Uh, he was not a man who went in for deep thought, and we—you know, he didn't go in for long discussions. We didn't have debates about art. Uh, if a certain kind of art came up during our coffee hour about four o'clock in the afternoon, he would make a quick remark and that was it. You know, he dismissed the—let's say all of abstract art [laughs] with some sharp comment. He had gone to Paris and had done, uh, Cubistic sculpture at a young age and then rejected it completely. Uh, so there, he had relatively sympathy.

Well, he used to refer to it as designs. He was actually not a—you know, I feel, that that was not an altogether incorrect observation but that's the way he is.

ROBERT BROWN: Didn't many conservative writers and artists at that time refer to abstractionist tactics?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: [Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: Or rather pretty much but at least—

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think that way?

HAROLD TOVISH: At least he—he had the—the, uh, authority of actually having done, you see. In the early '20s, he had been in Paris and he had done—I saw them. You know I saw examples of it.

ROBERT BROWN: You seem to relate to the form, right, the—the observed form?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah. Well, as I say, I was not discriminating in what I was being taught. I was not saying to myself is this worth learning? I simply took it all in. Uh, all of the teachers there, the—there was Frank Boucher [ph], uh, Harry Carnohan [ph], uh, Peppino Mangravite, uh, George Grosz was there for a short time and very interesting. A guy named Hank Malloy [ph] who was a superb draftsman. Uh, those were my teachers, and they were all doing figurative work, which had been influenced to some extent by, you know, the discoveries of Picasso and all that. But they were pretty much figurative. In fact, they were definitely figurative, and there was no bones about it. And that was pretty much the kind of training we had—it was rigorous in the sense that, uh, they didn't hesitate to come around and tell you that that leg was drawn incorrectly, you know, that kind of thing. It was the carpentry of art.

ROBERT BROWN: What did Grosz do as a teacher, you know?

HAROLD TOVISH: Grosz had just arrived in America, or he'd been a very short time. He came there, uh, I imagine because somebody there—possibly Mangravite who was the house intellectual, I suspect, uh, admired him and knew he needed money. He could barely speak English. His English was really eccentric, but he was a fascinating man, absolutely fascinating man. I took some drawing classes. His classes really ended up being more of a kind of monologues, very strange monologues about when he was a boy looking at windows and seeing naked women and, uh, all with a kind of weird, bemused smile on his face as he spoke. He had a funny way of hitching his hand up into his sleeve. And, you know, I remember that little curious eccentricity of behavior. As he talked his hand would slowly disappear up into his sleeve. [They laugh.] And I used to watch him. But he was very fascinating because we, uh, all knew that this was a first-rate, uh, artist and mind. And, uh, in spite of his bad English, he—he somehow conveyed an extremely complex person to you. You knew that this was a man who, uh, was a unique character. You were not gonna run into anybody like him.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you think this was a [inaudible] uh, putting the—did it appeal to you at all this kind of thing or did it puzzle you?

HAROLD TOVISH: Uh, what do you mean this kind of thing appealed to me?

ROBERT BROWN: Behaviors, eccentricities.

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, it's very appealing. He gave a sense of, I suppose, the more, uh, corny sense of what an artist might be like. But, uh, I—I think by that time, I was a little more, let's say sophisticated enough to recognize that it was simply a very interesting human being regardless of the other thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you self-conscious about—of yourself as an artist? I mean—

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, sure I was, sure I was. By that time, I felt like one of them, you know nature's elect. I had joined the grand aristocracy of artists going down through the ages. Oh, no, I was very, very, very conscious that I was involved in, uh, an activity, which was one of the greatest things that humanity had ever produced. I was extremely conscious of it. And I approached the whole business with, uh, almost childlike reverence, which by the way, I retain to this day. Uh, and I'm very resentful of treating art as—as some kind of, uh, you know, a trade or some sort of activity. Maybe, you know, it may be too much almost.

ROBERT BROWN: There was nothing outside of the art school to knock you down?

HAROLD TOVISH: Absolutely nothing. The only other thing was another art: literature, or a good film, or a great music. But all of it combined always struck me—and I've never wavered—as the great human achievement, art. Science, a second but never first. [Laughs.] The industrial revolution never overwhelmed me, you know, the

achievements of science. Oh, by the way, I was interested in science, always was. In fact, I wanted to be one when I was a kid until art, you know, became the thing. But, uh, I had such a feeling about this that it really began to take on a—a kind of almost the ritual of religion because I would judge my work on the basis of whether or not it was in a state of grace or whether I had sinned. I mean I can express this now because I look back on that young fellow, and I—I'd really see that's what I was doing. Uh, I had models in my mind. See, I had models of what it meant to do something good. I knew who they were by then, and I would do something, and I could not help but, uh, matching it up against the saints, you know? And if it were too far away, if it was wanting. If I thought there was any fake in it or whatever, you know that kind of thing, I would destroy it. And needless to say, I could tell you I destroyed an awful lot of my work, and in fact, that became really almost a neurosis with me, and it's carried to this day. I destroy much more than I produce. But, uh, those early intimations one has—well, anyway, as I—I—as I was suggesting there, that sense of reverence that I had for the business of making art, uh, was simply so powerful that to this day, as a—as I've already suggested, it has, in some way, hindered me, you see. It has made me perhaps too self-critical. It's per—perhaps, uh, to some extent made me almost too thoughtful about what it is that I'm doing. And a certain kind of spontaneity, a kind of ability to express, uh, a certain joyousness in the process was somewhat dampened or sobered by this feeling that one was involved in a process, which had been explored by men who achieved simply miraculous, uh, art. And that is quite a burden for a young person.

ROBERT BROWN: If you—if you have anything that was partly good, that wasn't—

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, well, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: That was something to be destroyed because it's partly flawed?

HAROLD TOVISH: Uh, occasionally, I would do something where I recognized a that a very significant thing had happened in that work. Oh, you know, there's so much mystery attached to the process of art, I wish there was some way we could really de—demystify it. Uh, because the actual business of what—what thing is it that finally clicks, and you do something, and you recognize, Jesus Christ, I hit it, you've made it. Uh, if you could know exactly what it was, that, is the difference. Uh, I don't know that if—it wouldn't make it any easier but it'd be damn interesting. You know, I think probably that won't submit to analysis, I don't think that could be rationally ever explained.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you try to intellectualize this as a sort of young—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, no. Uh, because fortunately uh—well maybe fortunately, I had a very great trust in my own gift. I also had a lot of trust in my, uh, my instincts. I had the arrogance and the confidence that lots of young people have, sometimes well-founded, sometimes ill-founded. That I was destined to do something good. And, of course, that's what sustains a—a young person because, uh, after all if they've got any intelligence at all or any critical faculty, uh, they're bound to. You know there are other artists who've done a hell of a lot better, I mean, even the—you know of your own age, and yet, the—the sense of one's own powers would have to be a very important part of your equipment, and I did have that. I knew when I was doing something, which was, uh, very derivative. I mean I've never kidded myself that way. I—I think—I think that I—throughout my career with some faltering, I—I've been pretty straightforward and very, very honest in what I have done. Because it ties in with that whole idea there of the reverence. You don't lie in church, you see? And, uh, I have even written some aphorisms to amuse myself. I mean, at one time, I wrote down, "Lie to your mother, your sister, your brothers, your wife, your uncles, cousin, best friends, but never lie in your work." You know, this is something I believed and, uh, I don't see how any artist could really function otherwise. Because nobody gives a damn except you, really, ultimately. It's the artist who has to, uh, put forward what is authentic. Nobody is telling you to do it. Nobody is telling you anything. And—and, my God, if you're gonna fake it, that means the end. You know, it's just the death of the artist.

ROBERT BROWN: But sometimes, you felt you had lied in your work so you destroyed it?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, uh, lying, let me tell you how subtle that could get. This might be a lie in art. One gets an idea in a flash, *snap,* you know an image, and it has a particular flavor and smell to it. Yeah. See, we—now, we're getting into this mystery and so I've gotta be very vague. Uh, you might make a little sketch and that little sketch, as crude as it is, would, uh—as crude as it was, would—would be like a shorthand note of what you felt when that thing first hit you. It's like the power of—of an odor, which I think they say is the strongest one to trigger memory. But that little sketch, I think this is what sketch serves an artist in many respects, it tells them, oh, yes, that thing you see, in all of its—it's detail as much as you've been able to imagine. Now, in the process of making that a real thing in the real world, you cannot retain with exactitude that original thing. And so, it's always—that's what the frustration of the artist is, that there's always that—that final verity which you feel eludes you. Now, maybe a genius like Picasso never had that problem, I don't know. I would find it hard to believe. It's just a different world the, uh, imagination thing. But when you start putting it into the real world, there you see everything is sitting there in a room with things behind, and in your mind there was nothing

behind. It was just there. You know what I mean? It's really different. So in a way, you can never attain that thing because this thing now exists in the real world. Now, depending on how close the thing I made got to that sort of orgasmic vision, a sense that's something is gonna happen, that's how I would measure its truth, the veracity. If it did not get close to it, if I did not, when I look at that, begin to resurrect or again feel something of what I felt originally, I would destroy it, see? Now, interestingly enough, other people seeing what I had done or what I was doing would say, "Gee, that's great. Oh, God, you—you've gotta cast that," or something like that. Then, of course, I couldn't do it. I could not do it. In the process, I destroyed a lot of very, uh, acceptable stuff. In some cases, more than acceptable. My wife has said that I destroy a lot of good stuff. Now, she may be right objectively looking at what I was doing, but subjectively doing what I was doing, I knew that that thing was not an authentic reflection of what I intended, so I would destroy it. That's the kind of artist I am. I—I don't see this as virtue because I think that what may have happened on occasion when I was doing, uh—you—you'll see in some of the photographs there I've—I think there are photographs in there of things I destroyed, which are really not bad things at all. In fact, you might—some people have thought they were better than other things I cast, but they didn't have this—a resonance. And to me, that was so unacceptable that I simply became very disturbed. And I failed to appreciate the idea that certain things could happen in a work that had their own life, which was apart from my narrow concern. And I think, uh, this is one of the reasons why I'm not—I've not been prolific. Although, I am very facile. I—I have a reputation of being able to do things very easily and quickly but that's not good enough, you see. I mean it hasn't been for me. Well, in any case, uh, as a result, my career has had a very peculiar quality to it. That is, here's an artist who has earned some kind of reputation but who when you go down the list of what has been done, it's a remarkably small production. And I've always felt almost sheepish that I should have a reputation, however limited it is, uh, which seems to be incommensurate with the actual production of things that—you know actual things that exist.

ROBERT BROWN: This resonance, so I'm assuming like a feedback that you have to have?

HAROLD TOVISH: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: If you don't get it?

HAROLD TOVISH: If I don't get it, I—I cannot continue with it.

ROBERT BROWN: Have you ever, at other times, looking back on things you've destroyed?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yeah, I can look back—

ROBERT BROWN: Thought that—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah, now, I can look back on some of the things I destroyed and realized that whatever my preoccupation or obsessive need was when I was doing it, something had happened in that work, which—which deserved at least a short lifetime, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: Of course, looking back at these things, I—I really do realize that I was blinded by the limitation of my obsession at the time. I really was. That certain things happened in the work, which possibly were even superior to what I was trying to get at. But, uh, one behaves the way one behaves and that's the end of it.

ROBERT BROWN: And this has recurred? I mean—

HAROLD TOVISH: Always. It still goes on. I—I suppose that now at the age of 52, I do have perhaps some greater humility about what it is to try to do a work of art. I know what—how difficult it is. And I know something about its process, and I also recognize that my own limitations have been my strength and my weakness always. I suppose that's, uh, really kind of cliché. I'm much more humble now about what I could do; although, I still wanna do good stuff. Uh, I no longer have that sense of limitless possibilities that I had as a young fellow where I felt I could do anything, which was not true, but at least I felt that way. Uh, it's simply the sobering process of experience. Uh, I no longer have the same, uh, fierce ambitions about career that I had at that time. That I wanted to be nothing less than an immortal artist who could stand, uh, comfortably next to Michelangelo, or let's say between Michelangelo and Donatello, [laughs] with Rodin down the aisle. Oop. Those, of course, a young artist really, uh, needs to have that kind of infantile confidence.

ROBERT BROWN: But you still do get some of this resonance, as you called it or feedback?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yeah sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Or you don't—you couldn't—

HAROLD TOVISH: Right, I couldn't function. Well, you know, I have my troubles. I mean I—I—I haven't done any sculpture of any consequence since 1968. I have been, uh, drawing, doing a great deal of drawing, making friends and stewing a great deal. And now, I'm about to start going up, and to see my way clear as to what I want—might wanna do. And, my whole, uh, psychic direction in art has undergone a transformation from those early days, which was based more on—where my work was based more on, uh, vision, a visionary revelation, you know, something comes and I do it. Whereas now, I, with all of that behind me, you see, my ideas have—I think a much more contemplative quality, a more metaphysical, possibly with a certain mystical quality, you know, which amuses me because I don't think of myself as a mystic at all. I don't have any of those pretensions, but other people see that in the work, and I'm prepared to accept some of the—some of what they do. Well, my work is much cooler now, much—there's a remoteness about it, a curious remoteness. I don't know if you know my, uh, recent work?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HAROLD TOVISH: When you compare it to my earlier things, which had a much more direct response to experience. Now, there's a great deal more reflection of, you know everything, the whole world, uh, the universe, everything. And as—you know, as pretentious as that sounds, it would be, uh, false to deny that, or to make believe that the kind of things I've been doing, let's say since 1965, are spontaneous in the sense that they were earlier . The ideas still come in the original way, but it's obvious that it is—the odor of it is much different. Or there are traces of it earlier. You see I—there is a connection but it's not, uh, a connection that is a one, two, three, four, five connection. It's more like one, two, five, seven, 10, 12, you know that kind of thing, jerking sort of, you know? But you see, through all these periods, uh, where I had been fallow, suffering from lack of a vision or let's say from an unclear vision, during those periods I really was doing a tremendous amount of creative work without having anything to show for it. See, uh, they really talk about that part of an artist's career. You know, it always comforted me to know that for 14 years Beethoven wrote virtually nothing. That there had been these, uh, very important artists, these hiatuses, you know, and they just, uh, well, "lying fallow" is about a good way to put as anything.

ROBERT BROWN: There's creative periods, but they were creative periods for you?

HAROLD TOVISH: Very creative periods; although, I suffered horribly. You know, that Jewish puritan ethic, you've gotta—you know you've gotta work, you've gotta do this and then—but during those times, I was obviously thinking that the suffering was a form of thinking. And then when I next came out with something, it constituted, uh, well a real, I wouldn't call it a breakthrough, I hate that term. But it would be as if there was something in between that happened, only there was no evidence of it. And that's something, the next thing appeared to be, uh, quite a step beyond. I don't say forward, I just say beyond.

ROBERT BROWN: But you can't work in these times. Of course, it sounds like intense suffering, it's a fallow time.

HAROLD TOVISH: It's not that I—it's not that I can't work. I can work. The difference is that the work that I do lacks this quality of I was telling you about. The—the urgency to do it is not there. For example, I—I'm a very competent portrait artist. I suppose if I made a thing of it, I could have made a living. But I was never interested in a portrait per se, or doing heads to do heads, or to simply be a competent portrait artist. I mean I have much, much greater ambitions than that. Uh, I'm—I could have gone on doing portraits, and people would have been quite satisfied with—with the quality of that, and so on and so forth but—

ROBERT BROWN: There would have been nothing in them for you though?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You have got—

HAROLD TOVISH: I mean I would have simply been practicing a trade, and I—I really sometimes wish I were able to do that. There's nothing disgraceful about that. You know, there's a—when you think about it, we had the—I mean this is an over-weaning kind of, uh, burden or a concern for being so arty or, you know, being "the artist" all the time. To the point where I couldn't simply practice my—my craft as an honest workman and simply do a good job as best I could. But I simply could not maintain interest to do a portrait. Although, occasionally, I'd see a head that I wanted very much to do and that's another matter. So I really have done virtually no commissions, maybe two or three in my whole life. And, uh, I've got somebody now who wants me to do, uh, a whole series of portraits of their son as he gets older. It's an interesting—it's an interesting project, but I can't bring myself to say, Yes, I'll do it because I don't know if I can, you know? And yet, it would be nice to earn some money, and I would do an appropriate job, you see. It's just that I've got certain kinds of habits, and it's very hard to break a habit. I wish I had a cigarette in fact because that's one of my habits, and I don't have any. What?

ROBERT BROWN: Do you wanna get one?

HAROLD TOVISH: I don't have any. [Laughs.] I don't have any in the whole damn house. Well, let it go. Uh, so, you know, the—there's been that—that hindrance. I—I envy people who—who have that honest workman attitude towards their profession. And I—and I—and I often, um, satirize my own zealousness, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: How? Have you—

HAROLD TOVISH: I'm a zealot.

ROBERT BROWN: Have you ever had times when you were—felt you were an honest workman? How do you feel then? Was there a time—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I'm slightly—

ROBERT BROWN: —that exactly—

HAROLD TOVISH: —bored. I'm slightly bored. Because, uh, what I do then, you see is simply fall back on—on my experience and, you know, and—and my facility. And that seems—begins a smack of the sin because I—you know, you are trying to do art and art always in my mind is equated with this very, very great almost religious function, very hard.

ROBERT BROWN: You can't see because that—with prospective commission to do this art, that you could get some relation either with him or with his—what the ups might—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah. Well, you know, I've—

ROBERT BROWN: So [inaudible]—

HAROLD TOVISH: —already done about four or five heads of this fellow and I hate them all. I mean I—there again, I mean even—to even like that, it's gotta come up to a certain standard.

ROBERT BROWN: And it's gotta come out of you, out of your—

HAROLD TOVISH: Right. It's gotta come out as a—

ROBERT BROWN: —work—

HAROLD TOVISH: —real response, I'm simply not gonna sit there and do a resemblance. Because, see, you know, I just know that you can do portraits which are very good art. God knows there are enough examples around. And why should I add to the clutter, if it isn't gonna be, uh, worth looking at? And the guy who asked me to do this is a very serious collector, and a man of, uh, really quite deep knowledge of art. Uh, you know, I just won't give him these—the—these things that I've done of his son because they are not good enough, and he may never get them, but that's the story of my life.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Well, when you were at Columbia for three and a half years—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah. I—I—I went in the Army—

ROBERT BROWN: —when you came out of that, where were you at?

HAROLD TOVISH: I went into the Army, the Second World War, that was over—

ROBERT BROWN: You know what you were getting into there?

HAROLD TOVISH: No. No, I had no idea, thank God. But I was in there for two and a half, three years, and I got back, and I went to Columbia for a short time, and I couldn't stand being a student anymore. I met my wife at Columbia, uh, Marianna Pineda who's a very good artist. We, uh, got married and the rest of it doesn't matter. Uh, career, you know, all that, nothing special. No dramatic breakthroughs in career business. My career has been, uh, really a very diffident sort of career. It's been slow, steady, and I'm really quite satisfied with my position, you know, in the world. I have a peripheral reputation, a peripheral position in the art scene. I do a peripheral kind of art, and I find it a very nice place to be. I—I used to, like I suggested earlier have, uh—you know there was no end to what I could become or how great I'd be and all of that. But I realized that being the kind of artist that I am, that the, uh—life has contrived to place me in this position, and I find it probably about as good a position as I could be in. I'm not even sure that I would, uh, be able to survive real fame because the burden of worldwide fame, I think, would be totally destructive for somebody like I am. I mean just imagine the pressure on a person of huge reputation to keep on producing, showing something marvelous every time. Uh, I don't know if I'd have the character to, uh, withstand that kind of pressure. I like to think that I would but also on a very objective way and looking at the whole thing objectively, I can see that my work simply doesn't fit

comfortably anywhere in the scene, really. I've been doing figurative art all along, and yet, the new realists of New York would be suspicious of it because my work isn't like that, you see? I'm not a—a fingernail and, you know, a follicle man. I'm not interested in that. And I—uh, my work has curious qualities about it, strange intrusions in there. It would be their opinion; although, they know that I'm able. You see, they wouldn't—I—I would have no position in the mainstream of anything. It's clear and I accept it since I—obviously, since I have no choice. That's the way it is. I have to—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you accept this fairly early on or has this come—

HAROLD TOVISH: No, I—I—you see, I thought with the typical misapprehension of an inexperienced person, that everything would fall in line behind me, you know, when obviously that was not going to happen. There are certain dynamics in—in art and people's response to it, which made that to be a foolish notion, since there were things happening that apparently, uh, gripped everybody's imagination and, I think, swallowed, you know? Uh, when Abstract Expressionism burst on the scene, I was nowhere involved with that, [laughs] nowhere. Rejected it. Although I was interested, I rejected it. It was not for me, for me to have done that. See, here's an interesting thing. Um, a certain kind of professional artist who constantly seems to be answering this question, what is pertinent now? What is relevant? These are very competent and very intelligent artists who feel that somehow the business of doing art involves a recognition of what makes sense at any given time. I—I'm—I find that so totally foreign to anything I could conceive of, a reason to do art, that I'm always stunned by such things. You know that for example that, uh, Pollock, Gorky, Kline, Guston, and, you know Rothko, all of these guys start doing these things, the whole scene of this as all other artists begin to feel that they've got to, uh, cope with what these—the questions that these artists raised in their work.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you don't put much stock though in what makes sense or what is pertinent at a given time?

HAROLD TOVISH: Not at all. You can't do it. I'm well aware, I mean my—you know, I'm—I'm curious and I—I look at everything. I'm well aware of what is happening but always as an outsider, always as an outsider looking at it from some, uh, distance.

ROBERT BROWN: What is the—that mainstream [inaudible]from say bursting of it upon the scene of Abstract Expressionism, which seems to happen about the time you were getting out of school or the Army?

HAROLD TOVISH: That's right. That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: This thing is accelerating really now.

HAROLD TOVISH: I—I—

[Cross talk.]

HAROLD TOVISH: You know, the mainstream is something that, uh, is given. I mean if enough people say that the mainstream of art is gonna be Abstract Expressionism, that's the mainstream. If they say now that, uh, the New Realism is going to be the mainstream of art, let's say for the next five to six years, the streams dry up you notice. Right? Very rapidly. But, uh, I know I'm not gonna be in that because my ambitions are not along those lines. I—I—you know, I don't want to do that.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you conceive of an artist performing along those lines? Were you—

HAROLD TOVISH: I beg your pardon?

ROBERT BROWN: Can you conceive of an artist performing in that mainstream?

HAROLD TOVISH: I could conceive of, uh, of a—of people whose minds and—and spirits have a predilection for that kind of imagery, vision, and who fall naturally into that. Let's say they fall into the stream or leap into the stream rather with pleasure. Others will go into it because they're afraid of being left out. You know, that has exerted enormous influence. The sense of being ahistorical is terrifying. It's like being dumped into a chasm with no bottom to it. Uh, it—what could be more terrifying than the notion that one might have spent an entire lifetime doing totally irrelevant work? It's—you know, that's a very scary thing. And I could see why, uh, the isolation in which one operates for some might be unbearable. I don't mean to be isolated in society, but to be isolated within the narrower society of art and artists. You know, it's no joke being always on the edge of things, and I don't see it as a heroic position. I think it's a very—it's only heroic if it's successful. You see, the hero is the one who might, willy-nilly, find himself in that role and then later on is vindicated by recognition. The slob is the one who plays the same role but never is vindicated, and that's, of course, the tragic figure. And it's one that, you know, I—floats through my mind every once in a while, but I've never been able to look at what was being done around me and feel that it had to be included somehow in my work. Although, undoubtedly, I've been

influenced with the human—[tape stops, restarts.]

ROBERT BROWN: I know. I mean the, uh, if there was one thing about, uh, the heroic figure of the slob, these two opposites. Now as a young man, you saw yourself right up there, at least between, um, Michelangelo and Donatello. They had this heroic idea.

HAROLD TOVISH: Of course.

ROBERT BROWN: Right?

HAROLD TOVISH: Sure.

ROBERT BROWN: And if you don't make that, you're a slob. Isn't there a kind of a medium in there?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, no, no. First of all, let's—let's—let's get it straight. Uh, Donatello and Michelangelo hardly suffered from lack of recognition.

ROBERT BROWN: I know.

HAROLD TOVISH: What we're talking about really is, uh—I mean it's the romantic image of the artist where the artist is very—it's very possible that the artist will live a life of poverty, of, uh, self-denial, and a total lack of rewards of any kind, even of money or recognition. I know that's more like what we see the general fate or one of the possible fates of ours, in our time, whereas in the time of those boys, Michelangelo, you were simply were a sculptor, you were busy. It didn't matter whether you were a—a genius or not, there was a lot of work for you to do. It's a very different story there. It was a real trade, and you could actually earn your living and so on. Uh, and again, of course, the—I have had the sort of recognition in which I would be—you know, it would be dishonest to say that that recognition that I've gotten such as this, uh, has not been important for me to be able to continue. Without any kind of response to my work, I—I suppose I might have simply gone crazy. I've seen it happen to artists who get a little like, you know, literally loose in their head from sheer misery. Uh—

ROBERT BROWN: You've had enough through your career sustain you as a—

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —as a success?

HAROLD TOVISH: Really almost—uh, when I look back on it, it's almost embarrassing. You know, the grants, the Guggenheims, uh, the jobs, you know, lectures, and I mean, you know, a whole route. It's a—it's really a very ordinary routine for—for—for somebody who hasn't gone past a certain point of career level. And there's nothing outstanding, the prizes, all of that are—none of them are international. It's the sort of thing, that, uh, when—when you die and they look back on you, they write your obituary, they'll trot out certain little facts, you know, this, that, and the other thing. But, I—it—you know, it really doesn't amount to anything tremendously significant.

ROBERT BROWN: But something there at one point or another, aren't they?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, it was significant for me at that time because they were a visible sign of recognition and encouragement, no doubt about it. Uh, but you see, I've—I've really don't—I haven't done a hell of a lot to, uh, encourage or particularly deserve a lot of that, you know, in a very stern way of looking at the whole thing. Because here I am 52 years old, and I'm sta—I started—let's say I became a professional in my own mind about 1951. And that's—that's a rather long period of time, and in that time, I've had no more than 10 one-man shows. You know when you stretch that over the years, you'll find that that's relatively small exposure. And like I said earlier, that's, uh, an amazing thing that I have been able to extract as much recognition as I have from, oh, you know, relatively small exposures as an artist. Uh, when somebody—you know, one of my wise guy acquaintances suggested I must be some kind of smooth operator to have been able to milk so much from so little. But the truth of the matter is I haven't really, uh—I have never made any efforts to get my work circulated around. I've always more or less left into—in the hands of other people. I've just been very, very lucky. I really believe that.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, as you've described, your, uh—the experience for you of making art and—and—and creating something that you think will succeed, it's all a one-to-one thing. You had to work.

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, it really is.

ROBERT BROWN: You've not at all talked, at all, about the extension beyond to the realm of the collector, the dealer—

HAROLD TOVISH: Right. My work has been collected. It's in very respectable, uh, museum collections. Uh, I'm—I'm left with virtually no work except for some of my most ambitious pieces, which nobody seems to want. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: This is all left to others, right? This is external—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes I've never—I've never pushed in any way, uh, and I don't condemn artists who do that. Uh, I—I really don't make any moral judgments on other people. I—I used to have a certain kind of, uh, contempt for a certain type of artist who appeared everywhere. You know that, but I don't anymore. God knows it's a rough existence, and any artist who has the energy and the desire to go around pushing that ego thing, and getting their work seen, and making themselves visible everywhere, all power to them. I don't resent artists selling their work for fortunes and I know that I'm better than they are. It doesn't matter a damn anymore. It used to, uh, as one had the childish illusion that there was some sort of justice in this business. [Laughs.] And God knows that's the last thing there is. Uh, well one knows that eventually, uh, what really counts is the—is the respect that one has from fellow artists. I don't give a damn what critics think. I don't give a damn about it, about that kind. A critic's function in my mind, uh, has a—an economic factor. They like your work, it helps them. They dislike it, it doesn't, but it could hurt you. Like, you know, I had this show at the Guggenheim and I get, uh, very good reviews everywhere except where it counted, *The New York Times* and Hilton Kramer trampled me to death. And, uh, there was a—quite a direct effect on interest in my work. I accepted Kramer's son-of-a-bitch lines and so on. But the point I'm making is that I, uh—you've got to weigh chances, you know, then they happen to fall that way. And, uh, I recognize that "that's the way the cookie crumbles," as they say and I accept it. Although, it would still be very nice to be able to earn a living from artwork and, uh—although, there's nobody who's gonna really stop that if there are people who respond. You know, I—I'm, uh—I for example, uh, extracted myself from the art of business by the time I gave up my gallery in New York. I operate strictly on this, in this local area now. I'm very active in the union, as you know, because I believe, uh, that it would be marvelous if an artist had more control over the fate of their own lives and their work, which I don't think they have now. I mean the art of business—I mean the business end of it is somehow vile; although, I don't think that dealers are any viler than other people including artists. It's just that the whole system, I think, stinks from the ground up. And I would, uh, love to see all of us have a better grasp of what happens. And that one of the things you might be able to do is to begin to create a tradition where artists attend to their own affairs a little better than they had in the past. But that's all, you know, practical stuff. We're still left with the business of continuing to be an artist in a—in a time, which, uh, is really quite difficult for an artist to—to maintain the impetus to go on producing. It's a tough business. It's really—

ROBERT BROWN: Why is it a tough time, in business?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, you know, I—I'm—I'm well aware that there's a lot of attentions given to art. Oh, it's best not to examine too closely the quality of that attention. Right? But, uh, when you begin to have some sense of what society is really like and the use to which it puts art, and on what—what is it's likely fate. And that is to become simply another form, a coin of the realm, and that the sort of thing one tries to inject into the work of art, uh, somehow gets buried in the process. You know, the real quality, uh, when you succeed the thing you felt was the best thing about it, somehow, it gets—it's as if it's bought and then violated. Again, you see, I—I have this almost childish attitude. Maybe it's stupid of me. After all, why shouldn't it be a commodity? But, you know, I—I don't know is that bad? I really—I'm not altogether clear in my mind whether the fact that it's being a commodity is what's so, uh, demoralizing, or the fact of all the phoniness that circulates around its commodity value with its fake trotting out of credentials, the overinflation of reputation as—you know, I don't have to spell it out, but it's just really a disgusting business. And I think a lot of artists are badly affected, very badly affected. That's why I stated early, my peripheral position is—it's really not a bad one to be in. I don't brood about these things too much. But for the time being, I'm really quite happy to be out of that thing. You know, I don't wanna feel any pressure to perform for anybody. And I've been through this rather long, apparently dry period. I've been doing a lot of drawing, been doing a lot of thinking, and I perhaps—I—I see a way to get back and do a sculpture again. It might be interesting. See, that for me is what's important.

ROBERT BROWN: And you think as far as the relation to the external world, you might be able to come in more on your own terms than you did before?

HAROLD TOVISH: I'm sure as hell gonna try, sure as hell gonna try. Uh—

ROBERT BROWN: So at a practical level, it's something like this union idea, if it was applied on a wider sphere, it might carry you with it into a wider—

HAROLD TOVISH: Who knows? Who knows? It's, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: You don't know.

HAROLD TOVISH: There's no point speculating on that. Uh, the—the critical issue there is that one has to

produce work. That is the important thing, and after that, what is to be done with that work? If you have any sense about its value, its importance, I'm talking now, of course, not about the money, but I'm talking about its—its value. You don't wanna see it, uh, get thrown around, buried alive somewhere, or—or just trotted out, and where somebody else makes something of it that you don't like them to make of it. I don't know if I'm being clear, but it doesn't matter. But anyway, I got some vague thing in mind.

ROBERT BROWN: You're concerned right—you'd like to be able to control—

HAROLD TOVISH: I'd like to have—

ROBERT BROWN: —or be involved with it?

HAROLD TOVISH: —some—some control of it. Although, I have no real sort of parental feeling toward my work. I'm not that kind of artist either. You know when I've done it, and like a snake, it's uh—I shed the skin and, uh, I mean I could look at it from some distance. So, I don't have that kind of motherly attitude towards my work. Although, I would hate to hear that something of mine have been destroyed, naturally. I just think that, uh, there's a political aspect to the thing. An artist who is the prime mover of art ends up being the victim of all kinds of forces, which affect the career, the work itself. And I—I think that stinks. I hope we can do something about that. I—I think it's very hard because, you know, we live in a society, in which everybody, not only the artists but everybody is, to some extent, controlled by external forces. And then, uh, probably, we'll have to have, a—a revolution or a change of, uh, not only in politics but, a—a change in the change in the mores of society before art, again, takes it traditional place in the world. And that is a real reflection of, uh, the aspirations, the—you know the important symbols of the society. And, obviously, that isn't gonna happen for a long, long—

ROBERT BROWN: And that only happened though—

HAROLD TOVISH: —time.

ROBERT BROWN: —in traditional society, didn't it?

HAROLD TOVISH: Exactly. It happened in the traditional societies. We have not yet arrived at any such thing, however, strange it might look in the future. We—and I don't see anywhere for that, I do not see the world, uh, evolving some sort of, uh, universal concept of itself, you know? Humanity getting an idea of itself in relation to the cosmos, which will show itself in art in some way as it always has in the past. It's that traditional way that art emerges. But meanwhile, uh, we have to do the best we can, and—and I think that, uh, it's remarkable that there are so many of us that are working with all of these terrible things, uh, working against them. And I—I've been—I've been, uh, very concerned with the way the commercial business now appears to be in a depression. I hear all kinds of grim stories about the lack of sales, but I've been through all that before. It never, you know made much difference. I earn my living as a teacher, now. I thought, at one time, I might be able to earn my living as a sculptor when I had a brief four-year period when my work was selling very well and for good prices. And, you know, I had—a certain illusion began to, uh, come into my mind or a delusion then. And then later on, I realized that the way I work so slowly and so painfully, and with so few final results, that, uh, at best, it's almost if I could sell my work for incredible sums of money, I—I probably will never—but—

ROBERT BROWN: What about being a—in some secure situation, subsidized? With what?

HAROLD TOVISH: Wouldn't mind subsidized.

ROBERT BROWN: Describe—

HAROLD TOVISH: I'd love to be subsidized. You got any ideas? [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: No.

HAROLD TOVISH: I have run the scholarship route, I don't even try for those anymore. And I—I mean I always feel it's immoral to, uh, get these fellowships when there are so many people who haven't had any kind of recognition. It's much easier for, let's say, for an outfit like the Guggenheim to give a—a thing to me than it is for them to pick somebody who has not—and if I were—not that they would give me anything anymore, but you see what I mean. I've got a job and, uh, my work sells reasonably, yeah. Yeah, I don't make any money at it, but I—I'm not, uh, I'm really not complaining about it. Yeah, that's all. Maybe we better—

[END OF TRACK.]

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yeah, yeah, I've worked in this surface. All right. I'm gonna—

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Harold Tovish on—on March 17, 1977. I wanted to ask you just a few

questions about, uh, your—your childhood, your family, some of your earliest remembrances, early schooling.

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I—I was born in New York City in 1921 of Russian Jewish parents. Um, my father earned his living a—as a tailor, and my mother, until she had gotten married, had worked as a secretary. Uh, he had come to this country when he was about 14 years old and still spoke with an accent, which I still remember; although, he died when I was, uh, seven years old. Uh, she, on the other hand, was much an American young woman because she had arrived here as a baby. Whether that con—uh—contributed to a certain amount of tension in the household, I don't know. It was one of those very complex Jewish families. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. What—what sort of tension might there have been, I mean, between—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: —the American and [inaudible]—

HAROLD TOVISH: I'll give you an idea. My—my, uh, grandparents, that is his mother and father, were very Orthodox Jews. Whereas my mother had been brought up in a much more relaxed atmosphere and, indeed, was not Orthodox in any sense of the word. Uh, she could not speak Yiddish very well, and I imagine that what happened was they felt he had married someone who's practically an infidel.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: But—well in addition to which, my—my mother's family left New York City. The entire family so, uh, six brothers and sisters, mother, and father took off for Kansas City, and I don't think she saw them again for 25 years. So, she was left alone with this very strict Orthodox family, so you could see it must have been a lot of trouble. Anyway, I get all of this, you know, little bits and pieces as the years have gone by. She's still alive, my mother. Well, my father died at the age of, uh, 36.

ROBERT BROWN: When you were seven.

HAROLD TOVISH: I was seven years old. And as a result of all that, uh, my mother, even though she remarried, her—my stepfather lost his job, ironically, almost as soon as he got married. [Laughs.] Oh, God, it's almost comical. And she was forced to put the three of us, my two sisters and myself, in—into, uh, various institutions. My sisters were boarded out in what they called—what they called—you know, I can't remember—well, I guess foster homes, yeah. Whereas I was put in an institution called the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. That would have been, I suppose, just on the verge of nine years old, and I spent 10 years there so that my formative years were largely spent in an institution consisting—maybe consisting of about, uh, 800 kids. [Tape stops, restarts.] Uh, the institution itself was, uh, rather medieval in the sense that were under the most strict kind of surveillance at all times. Uh, it was understaffed, and everybody was overworked, and they had a weird system where they would take all the boys or girls and put them in charge of the younger kids. So when I was, let's say, about 10 years old, I would have a 14- or a 15-year-old monitor, they called them, over me, who had full authority to beat the hell out of me if—if I did anything wrong. [Laughs.] But it's curious how that—that part of it, uh, has faded. Uh, what I do remember about it was some friends that I made there, all of whom I've lost touch with, by the way. Uh, and the fact that I suppose, perhaps, even because it was strictly a Jewish institution, there was a great deal of attention paid to learning and, uh, to excellence. Uh, they were, I suppose, hoping that we, kids, who had gotten a relatively rough start in life would uh—by being terrified into excelling. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Would excel?

HAROLD TOVISH: Would excel, didn't work out always. Uh, but the—what I'm really getting at though is that they had all kinds of cultural, uh, all sorts of culture available to us if we wanted to take advantage of that. We had a very good choir. We had, uh, music being taught by people, I suppose, who were very accomplished. Uh, we made great use of WPA, music and art, theater projects. Uh, every Saturday after services, somebody, some artists from the WPA program would come and do a concert or something like this. And among the things they had available was courses in the visual arts. And I suppose at the age of 13, I began to get—be interested in it. And the first thing I did was, I remember, something called chip carving. Uh, you use little, sharp knives made by Henchel[s]. I think that was the name of the German company, Henchel[s] or something like that. And here, we were being, uh, shown how to make gorgeous cocktail trays. When I think about it, uh, kids in an orphan asylum making cocktail trays somehow seems weird to me, but we did. And they were sort of done with a compass, and they were all geometric and very elaborate. I suppose sort of Polish, kind of Polish folk arts sorts of—sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there to be a market for those?

HAROLD TOVISH: I haven't the faintest idea. I think all we ever did was give it to our parents that we had. Some of the kids, of course, weren't full orphans, but the reason the institution was so jammed was that the

Depression, uh, had forced the—the orphanage to accept kids whose parents were—whose living parent—I guess you had to have at least one parent then—was destitute or wasn't able to take care of a child. And I suppose, that fit my case very well. But in any case, I got into this thing. I was very good with my hands. My teachers were always, uh, pleased with me, you know that I could do things rather easily and quickly. And from that, I went into, uh, hammered copper. I did several little things in hammered copper, again starting as—it was some practical notion in mind like making jewelry, necklaces, brooches, and things like that. And, uh, then, finally, I did a hammered copper torso because I got very good at it, my teacher told me, so I tried something more ambitious. And then I left that and I went into painting. Well, I was no painter and have never been, and later on, I discovered that I was color-blind. You know that red/green deficiency? And my, uh, teachers were despairing because I could draw fairly well, but I simply couldn't use color. I remember one of my teachers said something to me very funny. She said to me, You're the only one I know who can squeeze lemon yellow out of a tube and it turns brown before it hits the canvas. [They laugh.] Hence, I was hopeless.

ROBERT BROWN: These teachers were fairly encouraging—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, they were.

ROBERT BROWN: —would you say?

HAROLD TOVISH: There were, uh, two youngish women—I suppose they seemed ancient to me, but I can't imagine they were much more than 25 or 26—who were very, very nice. And then they were both able artists themselves, and they were very eager to help us little kids. And we worked very hard. It was really quite serious. I—you know when I think about it, I'm rather surprised. Uh, in any case, one day, a man who taught sculpture came into the room and was looking around. I think he came in there to flirt with the women, but secondarily, because he had very few students. There weren't many kids interested in sculpture. And he saw, uh, something I was doing. And he was a Hungarian fellow, and he spoke in his marvelous Hungarian accent. He said, I think maybe you should come and try to do some sculpture. He said, after viewing my magnificent painting.

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

HAROLD TOVISH: So, uh, both the women teachers seem to think that was not a bad idea. They, uh, encouraged me to go ahead and try it. Well, the next day, I went in there and in a couple of hours, I had made a small piece of sculpture of an old man leaning on a cane. And I tell you—I mean once in a while, you read about somebody getting the message from above. You've found your calling in life, and it was just like that. As soon as I had made this thing, I knew that somehow this was what I had to do. It was really that dramatic.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this a carving?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, it was a little clay thing I made. He—he was a very, very kindly gentleman. He had—his name was Andrew Berger [ph], a very competent sculptor, if not an inspired one. And he—he'd studied at Academie des Beaux-Arts in Budapest, and had had a very strict training, which is common to those academies. And he was most eager to pass on what he knew to me, what I could absorb in any case. But he, uh, cast my little piece of sculpture and many others that I did. I remember, I was so enthusiastic and so full of, uh, a kind of madness about it that I think in the first year, I was in that class. I was—I think I started at 16 and a half, something like that—I made over a hundred sculptures. I—well, I thought nothing of doing a sculpture every day. If I worked on something three times, it was a long time. And, of course, he was, uh, very excited to have an obviously talented kid. In fact, I think there were only two others in the whole class, but we worked very hard. And I remember him being a very, very helpful man, very eager to do, uh, whatever he could for me, as later on, he actually was able to do.

ROBERT BROWN: These were figures, uh—

HAROLD TOVISH: These were always little—little figures and, uh, and in—in relation to this, I started to go to art exhibitions. We were allowed out of the institution once a week. Once you got to be past 15 or 16, you had somewhat more freedom. You didn't need to be, uh, taken with a parent. I mean your parent didn't have to be with you. So that I was able to start going to exhibitions, you see, and I used—I used to go every Saturday. I used to go to The Met. I really got to know The Met, and in those days, The Met was practically empty. I could go in the room in the back there where they kept the Rodins, and I could stay there for three hours and never see another person. Can you imagine?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HAROLD TOVISH: Absolutely isolated institution. Uh, marvelous for me because I—I really was able to touch the things which you weren't allowed to do, make little drawings, and so on. Uh, but in any case, I went on doing this until I was, uh—at the institution, until I was about 18 and a half, and I was about to graduate from high school.

ROBERT BROWN: They—they ran a high school in the institution?

HAROLD TOVISH: No, no, they ran a grammar school in the institution, which was open to everybody in the neighborhood. I suppose the city paid them a certain amount for that. But I went to the local grammar school. Elementary school, I went through in the institution then I went to a grammar school outside of the institution, then I went to DeWitt Clinton High School. I was really quite a lousy student because as soon as I had gotten interested in art, my, uh, interest in other matters began to fade, and as a result, I did rather poorly in school, just barely graduated.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were encouraged in this art?

HAROLD TOVISH: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Uh, it's—it's really a remarkable thing because even as a little kid, I remember I used to do so—soap carvings. You know I'd carve soap. I made a head of Lincoln, once I did a battleship with all the chimneys in it, everything you know? I always had some love for making things. I—I—I imagine—I won't be surprised if that's really quite common among sculptors, that—that tendency to wanna make things around me. Uh, where were we? Oh, I graduated from, uh, college, and this was a particularly critical moment in the history of that institution. The board of trustees, apparently, had decided to close the institution down. It was outmoded. Uh, remember we're now talking about 1942. Uh, the war was either imminent, or had already begun, I think, well, anyway, regardless. But the employment picture in the United States, of course, had changed because of war industries, and, uh, there probably were many other excellent reasons why they felt the institution was simply obsolete. It may have been much better for the kids to, uh, farm them out to families, and in the long run, it may have been less expensive to—to run such a program. But meanwhile, they had a whole, uh, group of young fellows about my age, 18—17, 18, and some 19, who were slated to leave anyway. And there was this hideous business of what were we gonna do with ourselves. The kids who had done very well in high school, uh, were able to attain scholarships from the Jewish—American Jewish Federation. Now I , as I told you, had a rotten, you know, record as a student, but I very much wanted to continue in my art. And so Andy Berger, my teacher, uh, talked me up a great deal with the authorities of the institution, and said that regardless of the fact that I was a poor student, I was not stupid, you know this, that, and the other thing. And he says, "He's a very gifted young boy. We've got to do something on—why don't you let him apply for a scholarship as an art student?" Well, they said, "He hasn't got a chance." These millionaires, Jewish millionaires down on Wall Street were not going to spend money on a kid who is gonna be an artist because there was no way he can earn a living. They were very, very practical about everything. Well, I remember, I go—I went up to this office and Mr. Bernstein, who was the assistant director, sat me down and talked to me about it. He said, "Look, I must tell you honestly, you—you probably have very little hope. What will you do if you can't get the scholarship?" I said, "I'll do what everybody else does. I'll just go out and get some dumb job, do this when I can." And, uh, later on, all of those words were reported to these trustees and to show what sterling character that I had, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

HAROLD TOVISH: But what—what finally did happen was that a day was, uh, set aside for a group of us to go down to an office on Wall Street, and each, in turn, went in and faced this board of trustees of about 12 men. And, uh, they systemically questioned us and tried to feel us out, I suppose to see what sort of kids we were. And then if this, that, and the other thing fit properly, they would, uh, support you, to some extent, while you went to school. Well, when my turn came, I was sort of prepared. I brought a portrait that I had done of the daughter of a philanthropist who was a dentist, and he used to work as a charitable contribution at the institution, uh, for free, you see?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HAROLD TOVISH: He'd come in once a week and take care of our teeth and—well, I fell under his drill on several occasions. [They laugh.] And, uh, he was a very nice chap, and he asked me what I was doing. I told him I'm a sculptor, and so on, so on, so on. One day, he brought his daughter around to see the little beggars, and she wandered into the sculpture room. And, uh, she had gorgeous hair, and she was really a classic beauty, this girl. I was interested in pretty girls. And in any case, I, uh, asked her if she would sit for a portrait. She said yes and I did one. I thought it was pretty good, but later on when I looked back at old pictures of it, it was really a pretty crude thing. But in any case, I brought it to the, uh, board of trustees and showed it as an example of what I could do, and they seemed to be impressed. And I handed them a whole spiel about now that the World's Fair, the 1939 World's Fair had used a great deal of sculpture and then I said that this was gonna open up architectural sculpture. I mean an incredible, a lot of baloney that I threw, which I half believed because I—I wanted so badly to convince myself that there was a future. Well, to make a long story short, they seemed to, uh, fall for the whole business, thank God, and I was given a scholarship. And what happened was that I went to Columbia University, uh, in what they called their extension program, which was a non-degree program, and I chose fine arts, and I studied five days a week for three and a half years. Uh, no, you see I'm wrong because I got into—into Columbia in 1940, so this must have been 1939 when I got that scholarship. Uh, I studied with a

very fine sculptor named Oronzio Maldarelli whose work I had seen in the exhibition in New York, and I tracked him down and found out that he, uh, taught at Columbia. And, indeed, I showed him pictures of my work. I had—oh, I had wonderful cooperation. People were really—when I think of it, helpful. Uh, I took fencing as another—as my sport, and I became quite good at it. And my teacher had a friend who was a photographer, and this guy came out and took pictures of all the work I had done, you know, *gratis*, and I was able to show that to the board of trustees and also to Oronzio Maldarelli who wrote a letter of recommendation, you see? So, all of this really helped me overcome a lot of obstacles.

ROBERT BROWN: So you—you were quite confident that actually, you got the scholarship?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, once I got the scholarship, I felt, you know, life was just waiting for me to do marvelous things. I got in there in 1940. Now, you've got understand the war was on, and I knew my days were numbered. Uh, I worked very, very hard as—as intense a life as I've ever spent. I rented a room with a family up on 138th Street, something like that. I used to walk to school every day. I made my own lunch, a little sandwich and something. We'd buy some milk or something. I started at nine o'clock in the morning and finished at five in the afternoon doing nothing but drawing and sculpture, that's all I did. At night, I would go home and have my supper, and I would draw until about one in the morning, go to sleep, wake up the next morning, go to school, that's the way I lived. I had—

ROBERT BROWN: Were you able to do complete—do the art completely at that—

HAROLD TOVISH: That was it, that was it. My friends consisted of a few kids who I still maintained contact with from the orphanage. Although, those were less important to me than the new friends I had made at the art school at Columbia. And gradually as I grew less shy, uh, I made more friends there. We had a small clique of friends, a very gifted group, and we were all passionate about art. Oh, it was just marvelous.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. A good many of them continued as artists?

HAROLD TOVISH: Every one of them, every one of them. Now, I should add at the very last year I was there before I was inducted into the Army, uh, Marianna, Marianna Pineda arrived at school from Colum—oh, from, uh, Bennington. Bennington has this system where one part of the year is devoted to work outside of school. And she wanted to be a sculptor also, and she came to Columbia and, by God, that's how we met. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You were less shy than you had been at first—

HAROLD TOVISH: I was less shy.

ROBERT BROWN: —[inaudible.]

HAROLD TOVISH: I was extremely shy, you know? Well, one of the things that, I suppose, is easy enough to understand is that when you've been in an institution, regardless of how rough the institution was, and it was quite rough. Uh, it formed a sort of protective barrier between you and the outside world, which was always presented to us as much crueler than anything we could imagine. Since you had to go out to make a living and nobody gave a damn whether you lived and died, you know that kind of thing was inculcated into us. We were meant to have great respect and awe of what it would mean to go out there in our—in our way. Uh, in fact, some of the kids who left there never recovered from that. They ran scared the rest of their lives. Uh, well, finally, I—I was inducted into the Army, and for almost three years, I actually was able to do very little. Although oddly enough, I did some sculpture in France when, by some kind of a mystical coincidence my outfit, uh, which was an anti-aircraft outfit, mobile, for some reason or other, uh, parked in a quarry. [Laughs.] Isn't that weird?

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: And we were there for two weeks, and I got some very soft stone and did a couple of carvings, which I left there, but, uh, that was sort of an amusing incident.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was a—fine art you—you—everything was on the back burner while this—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes, there was—you know, we—we were constantly on the move. And the element of constant danger, uh, is not particularly conducive to the meditation required by art.

ROBERT BROWN: And the war did, uh, otherwise, um affect—

HAROLD TOVISH: The war had a very, very deep effect on me. For one thing, uh, I suppose, if there was any major maturing factor, that would have been it. Because those of us who were in the war, truly in it, had our noses rubbed in li—life and death in a way that, uh, very few people in our society get so young. I suppose, you had to be living in the worst sections of New York City to have a somewhat similar sense of—of what life could be, brutal and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think it perverted your sense of life after you've—

HAROLD TOVISH: I—I don't think so since, uh, I've also managed to enjoy a good deal of life, but it colored, to a large extent, the kinds of things I did, you see, as a sculptor. Uh, people generally see me as a rather gregarious, a humorous sort of chap, and yet, they're always, taken aback when they see my work, which can be extremely dark and, well, you know, it has a touch of fatality about it. Uh, I generally don't see it that way because these ideas are such a part of me, and I've lived with them so long that I don't, uh—well, how else to put it? Perhaps the best way to put it is that there's a—a part of my life which sculpture takes care of. I mean, uh, the aspect of the kind of thing I think about and make images about is consummated in the sculpture, and all the rest of however complex a person I might be, has other—I have other outlets. So, you might say that a certain view of life is distilled in the sculpture and remains there. Uh, because otherwise, I'm not a particularly sallow person or a very, uh, pessimistic person and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: So it—go back—

HAROLD TOVISH: It is a contradiction you see, and it seems like a contradiction, but, uh, I've never gone for this business of—that the artist puts everything they are into their work. That can't be true, it just cannot be true. What the artist has to do is eliminate a great deal, uh, since it turns out to be useless for the kind of thing that they wanna do. Yes, the war had a great effect on me. I mean I saw some very bad stuff during the war, you know, uh, lots of death, starvation, the concentration camp people and all that. It was just a wretched business. I also saw a great deal that was hilariously funny in the war. Things that happened in the war are—you just couldn't invent stuff like that. You know, for example, one of my, uh, buddies in the Army had his finger bitten off by a lion. Well, you might ask how—

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.] [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: —how could such a terrible thing happen? [Laughs.] Well, it was very simple. We were in, uh—I don't know if this digression isn't maybe—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, it's—

HAROLD TOVISH: —I mean it's very amusing. This guy's name was Suggs [ph]. He was from Tennessee, a very tough, dried-up mountaineer, a lot older than we were. I'd guess he was in his 30s, and what they—we called a lifer. He was gonna be in the Army the rest of his life. Anyway, he—oh, he got—he became quite silly when he got drunk. Otherwise, he was terrified. And he and another buddy of mine named Kennedy used to go out on, uh, drinking bouts together. Well, we were stationed in—in Manchester in a place that served as a zoo and as an animal fair. We were in this huge barn-like structure, uh, where they had the animal fairs, and right adjacent to us was the zoo. And they had pubs and all sorts of things like that right in this sort of enclave. So, Kennedy and—and Suggs go and get drunk again. For some crazy reason, Suggs decides to, uh, go look at the animals. So, they stagger into this—into this, uh, lion house, and the lions were very emaciated and mangy looking because they weren't being fed as well as they used to be. And Suggs decides that he was gonna feed the lion. Yeah. It had a mesh. We all went to this famous lion later on. As I remember exactly, it was a kind of a mesh cage instead of bars, you know, a heavy mesh. So, uh, apparently, he asked Kennedy if he had anything on him to eat, and Kennedy only had a Hershey bar. [Laughs.] He was gonna feed the carnivore with a Hershey bar. Everybody else liked chocolate, why not a lion? So, what does Suggs do? He takes off one of the little squares from the Hershey bar, puts it on his finger, and sticks it into the—into the cage through the mesh. And, by God, the lions comes over and snaps down on that, and his finger comes right off. [They laugh.] The upside of the whole thing was they ran and the guy ran and he crushed that lion down, the lion apparently—IKennedy, I got all of this from Kennedy who was a closer friend. He tells me, you know, the lion, uh, was so stunned by the outburst from this guy that he dropped the finger, which was lying in the cage. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: Yikes, yikes.

HAROLD TOVISH: And they—and they took him to the hospital, oh, and that poor fellow, he suffered so much. Every day doctors used to come around, you know they used to visit these hospitals from all over the, uh, Great Britain to see what—I suppose, to see what kind of weird cases turned up, and his was a particular one. Every day they asked him, "Would you tell the doctors here what—what happened?" And Suggs who, I told you, was this very serious, terribly serious, Tennessee-mountain type, after a while refused to say anything. And when they told him that he could go back to the United States if he wanted to on a limited service, he refused. He just, "Do you think I'm gonna go back there and tell my folks a lion bit my finger off? You're crazy."

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: So, he went through the whole war minus a finger. Well, I suppose, the reason I—I digressed like this because this story is funny, it's a good one, but the kinds of things that happened to—during the war are really—it's hard to say. Could you call them real life? If—unless you accept the idea that war is a normal

state of affairs, uh, there's something surreal about the whole experience. When I think back on it, it's—just seems like a chunk of my life that's set aside in a—in a totally separate slot, you know? And yet, of course, the—what—it's effect on the kind of vision I had of—of, uh, what life was about is obviously there. Although my subject matter is not war, that's not it at all. Well it just—you know, I suppose this sense of vulnerability, of, uh, that we aren't immortal after all. We really do die, you know, that kind of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: When you returned though, you did—you got right back into your work? Did you—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You must have had a much less naïve perspective, I would—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes. When I say I matured during the war, all of what I've just told you, I suppose, uh, contributed to that maturity such as it was. Uh, I knew that no matter what was gonna happen, I didn't give a damn, I was gonna be an artist. There was nothing that could happen to me anymore that was worse than what had happened. And I figured if I could go through that and come out with my mind intact, uh, I was gonna be all right. So, I went back and while I was there, I decided, for example, that I was gonna get married. Even though I knew that that was not such a hot idea for an artist, but I'd fallen in love with, uh, Marianna. And I'd broken off with her during the war because I felt we were too different in our background. She came from the upper middle-class, Quaker background, and I just thought we would never make it. But we picked up correspondence toward the end, and I just said, Oh, the heck with all that. [They laugh.] And so when I got back to the States, I called her up and proposed immediately. She was stunned because we—you know, there had been no such talk ever. Uh, in short, I suppose, what I was doing was I was just gonna plunge into life and let it take me where it would. She was actually a lot braver or dumber than I was. She was, uh, four years younger, and for all of her seeming maturity and poise, she was after all, uh, a young girl. Uh, I met her when she was 17, and I married her when she was not quite 21. And again, we made—you know, I don't wanna go on and on about it, but the point is we did get married. And I went for one semester, I went back to school, uh, to take advantage of the GI Bill and then I found I simply couldn't go to school anymore. So, Marianna and I went and got ourselves a studio on East Broadway on the top floor on the—in the garment district, that's the sort of the poor man's garment district. Um, and I understand now that all of that area now is jammed with artists. We were the pioneers, I want you to know that historical importance.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: We had a studio on East Broadway in 1945 and 1946. Uh, our kid was born about 13—well, no, wait a minute—15 months after we were married. So, if I had intended to take a plunge into life, I certainly had taken a plunge—

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, yes.

HAROLD TOVISH: —into life, right? Um, I was living on $20 a week. For one year, I got $20 a week from the United States government as a veteran because, uh, instead of going to school—I dropped school you see—I opened my own business, and they had an arrangement that if you didn't do this, you could do that. And every week, they gave you—uh, they gave me $20, and I had that for a year.

ROBERT BROWN: What—what did you do? Were you able to get equipment? What did you do?

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah, sure. I—I scrounged equipment. I bought equipment. And Marianna and I both, uh, between us, we're able to get tools, and clay, and all the necessary things. I built stuff, you know, the usual thing artists do. And we started to produce art independently. And I worked fairly well, and in 1947, my GI thing had run out. Uh, you couldn't do this for more than a year by the way. They thought if you didn't make a go of your business in a year, you weren't worth anything. Uh, but that was such the case and, uh, meanwhile our little daughter, Margo, had been born. We were living in a two-family house in, uh, Brooklyn, in the Gowanus Bay District, extremely poor people living in that part of town. A woman on one side of us had 9 kids, on the other side had 12, and we thought we better get out of there. [Laughs.] It boded evil.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: There might have been something in the water supply, who knows? But anyway, we—we, uh—were in rather nasty straights because, uh, my money had run out. And Marianna was getting a stipend from her parents, which was not enough for us to live on. Although, it saved our lives, I suppose. So, I turned around and began to wonder what the heck I was gonna do. Well, I didn't have too many options. Before the war, while I was going to school, the seven dollars a week I got to live on from the Jewish Federation was not enough to live on. Uh, rent and food came to quite a bit more than that. And I, uh—I was brought up short when I got some kind of blood infection, which much to my utter astonishment, was the result of what they called starvation. Well, uh, he—he didn't say starvation, he said malnutrition, which is starvation. Uh, I simply hadn't been eating properly.

What I would do is eat one meal a day you see, and I didn't eat for its nutritive value. I ate for bulk.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

HAROLD TOVISH: So, I was eating, you know, junk, uh, spaghetti and meatballs, you know anything that was a lot, and lots and lots of bread, and absolutely, uh, missing out on all kinds of vital things. In any case, I developed this infection and was laid up for, uh, several weeks. And, uh, when I got better, I, uh, took a job at a restaurant. I figure I'd be eating better which was, of course, the case. Uh, but I bought a little outfit, you know, it was a busboy's outfit, and now, here I was 25. It was after the war, I had a child and a wife, and the prospect of going back to being a busboy did not thrill me, I can tell you. But in desperation, I sent photographs of all my work that I had done since the war and a few good pieces that I did while I was a student. I sent it to Bill Zorach, and Zorach, whom I knew very, very slightly—he'd come as a visiting artist, you know, a visiting critic, uh, to Columbia and had praised something I had done, and I hoped that he remembered me. I included a piece he liked. And I sent it away to him and meanwhile, weeks passed and finally, it became quite clear, I had to go and get a job. So, I went down to an employment agency, and registered my name and so on for a job as a busboy or a waiter, and went home. The next day, I went to the studio with Marianna and I got a call. And it was from the head of the art department at Alfred University saying he'd like me to come up there for an interview for a teaching job. I didn't know anything about it. He said, "Mr. Zorach recommended that we speak to you." I was just, oh, so grateful to that man. Uh, I went up there, and was interviewed, and got the job. And in this connection, I'd like to say something about Zorach. Uh, Zorach, since his death—there's been a real decline in his reputation. Uh, I cannot believe that that decline is permanent. He simply did too much, too many good, really fine things for him to be totally eclipsed. Although, of course, such things had happened. Uh, he came off as a very gruff, rather distant, indifferent man. But the fact of the matter is, uh, I have found from many sources that he was extremely generous with young artists. No matter how bitter he appeared, and he, you know, sometimes appeared very bitter. We sort of got to know him later on. He was a man who would go out of his way to help some young kid and who, apparently, did this as a regular thing. Uh, I hope someday he gets the kind of attention I think he deserves. Uh, we spent the summer in Maine once and he had a house down the—a few miles from where we were staying. And during that summer, we got to know him and got a better sense of what he was like.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this like near the end of his life in the '50s or so?

HAROLD TOVISH: No. First of all, he didn't die in the '50s. I think he died in the '60s, in late '60s, in fact. He, uh, —no, he was still a vigorous man doing big carvings, and, uh, he used to stand out in this pasture. Well, he liked to work outdoors. I remember one time, we went to see him and he was standing there, a very hairy man hacking away at this stone. And every once in a while, he'd pick up a sort of a flit gun, a large flit gun, and turned it on himself, and squirted himself with some ghastly, milky substance. And we said, My God, what the heck is this? I mean it's a sheep dip. [They laugh.] There were lots of mosquitoes, and Maine mosquitoes are famous for their ferocity.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HAROLD TOVISH: But in any case, uh, he—he meant a great deal to me.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have a lot of talks with him, I mean aside from then?

HAROLD TOVISH: He was not inclined—

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

HAROLD TOVISH: —he was not inclined to talk about art. He was not an intellectual. As you know, he wrote a book, uh, an autobiography. He was no—it does not mean any sense that he, uh, was illiterate. God knows he was very literate, uh, and a highly cultured man, but he was one of those artists who's simply nonverbal, period. For that reason, I suppose he was not a brilliant teacher. Although, curiously enough, and I've discovered this since, that when a person has done very fine work, uh, any kind of remark from such a person carries a weight. That a teacher who might be brilliant, uh, but whose personal accomplishment is not very great or even bad, it means a hell of a lot more. It just means a great deal more. You know, Zorach told me that I was—we used to talk, you know. He goes, "No, it's not so bad." He says, uh, "How old are you?" "Nineteen." He says, "Keep it up, you know you're pretty good." That meant more to me than somebody else, uh, analyzing my work, telling what its merits were and what its demerits were. You know in most cases, I usually knew myself. So that kind of encouragement from a man who was, uh, extremely accomplished meant a great deal to us.

ROBERT BROWN: At Alfred, were there, uh, notable colleagues or ones that you were the most—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well the most—

ROBERT BROWN: —close to?

HAROLD TOVISH: I suppose the most, uh, famous of my colleagues there was a man named Daniel Rhodes. He's not known very well in art—in the arts circles; although, he's becoming better known, since ceramics had become very strong in the art business now. But he's probably one of the leading ceramists in the world, and he's written several books, which is sort of like, you know, every pot shop in the country has his books in the shop. The lucky dog, he earns his—he's retired now, and he—he probably earns a reasonable amount of money out of those books. I envy him that. Anyway, he, uh, he and his wife and Marianna and I became very close friends and that was 1947. We began teaching at the same time there, and we are still good friends.

ROBERT BROWN: That was the first teaching—

HAROLD TOVISH: That's almost—

ROBERT BROWN: —you had done.

HAROLD TOVISH: That's the first teaching. I was—that's 30 years, right?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HAROLD TOVISH: That's a long time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy the teaching? Were you frightened there?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I—the first year of teaching was pure hell. Uh, for one thing, I think everybody when they begin teaching feels like a total fraud. I mean after all, what do you really know? Very little, and if you have any kind of brains at all, you know that you know very little. So, when you start teaching, what are you gonna teach? You're gonna teach what your teacher taught you or what you think your teacher taught you. You'll try to convey some sense of what you think good art is about, uh, at an age of 25, which is what I was at the time. Uh, I had a rough time and I remember there were a lot of GIs in the—in those classes. So here I was 25 years old teaching guys who were 25 years old or older and some very sophisticated kids from New York who'd go to music and art, and you know, they—they were out to get me. And I had a hell of a time, you know, just trying to convey even a phony sense of confidence. But at the end of the year, I—I learned, uh, what I suppose most—everybody learns. That as little as you know, you know a little more than they do and that's—that's sufficient. And then, of course, as you gain more experience, I suppose you have more to—to convey. I—I—you know while we're on the subject of teaching, uh, I have no idea whether we even spoke about that in the last tape we did.

ROBERT BROWN: We talked somewhat about teaching.

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah. But, uh, I've now been teaching, oh, I don't know, since 1947 and that's a long time. I don't think, in total, I've taught more than half that period. It may be a little more, a little less, I don't recall. But the longer I'm in teaching, the more I'm convinced that the whole way we go about teaching art now is, uh, sort of semi-fraudulent. I give marks for the best of intentions. Uh, for one thing, art schools are set up in such a way that they—they run on a deficit, and there's a great deal of pressure on art schools to get as much tuition as they can out of—out of the students. And as a result, they accept many, many, many people, uh, who might have certain glimmerings or sputtering of talent, uh, who show if they can coordinate a hand and eye in the least, possibly they could become artists. So, what really happens is that in an art school, let's say, of a—a hundred people, you'll get about nine people supporting one potential artist, and that's a very poor return, you know, [laughs] when you think about it. Uh, and I imagine this is true throughout, and perhaps there's nothing to be done about it. Perhaps that's the only way we'll get artists. That you do have a tremendous attrition rate. But those people who, in the end, give up, have helped support both teachers who are artists and presumably would, uh—God knows what they have to do, you know, to earn a living, and those few students who do emerge. And yet, you could see why one could be uneasy about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. You think they even hinder the teacher and the best students?

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, undoubtedly they do. They have a perfect right to expect as much attention.

ROBERT BROWN: That's true.

HAROLD TOVISH: They pay their way. In our country, if you pay, um, your fee, you're supposed to get service for it. Uh, in Europe, they wouldn't give a damn about that because these kids would probably be going to school for nothing if they went to a state school. And the teacher, uh, would handle them once a week or maybe, you know, twice a month and say nothing to them or very little, and that would be it. And if they didn't, uh, come up to snuff, they, you know, were dumped. But here, we, uh, cling to these people for four years. At the end of three years or two years even, one would, you imagine, have some sense whether or not this or that a kid has

any hope of being an artist. Although, what I usually do to, uh, salve my own conscience is I say, Well, look, who am I say to say this kid can't be an artist? I don't think they can be an artist, but that's really an opinion. Maybe the first, uh, crude drawings of van Gogh did. I've seen some. They weren't terribly impressive. Cézanne was very clumsy when he began. I mean there are all sorts of examples, uh, of artists whose beginnings were extremely modest and who, for reasons of God knows what, you know, intelligence, uh, vision, genius, hard work, came out and did something splendid. Uh, but statistically that's not going to happen very often, and I'm fully aware of it. So usually, if a kid asked me point blank, "Mr. Tovish, do you think I can be an artist?" I'd give him that story, I'm not one to say that you can't be, and they can tell by the grades that I've given them whether or not I, uh, think they're doing good stuff. I mean that should give them some hint, but I don't, uh—and yet, I always feel, you know, I'm being somewhat fraudulent.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you assessed them on—on, uh, talent, on their ability and also on intentions of the, uh—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, the gauge, the gauge, I should think, is fairly simple because first of all, one watches for the gift. Second, the passion, I mean what kind of energy are they turning towards this work? Third, the mind, what kind of mind do I perceive in the work that this or that kid has done? Uh, you get a sense of it. Once in a while, I get a couple of really very gifted people and when they come along, you know, it's unmistakable. You could tell in a relatively short time. I may not be able to tell a kid who seems less talented has a chance, but when you see one that's very talented, you know. And has these other qualities, you know that drive, the sense that, uh, they're gonna do something, it—it's pretty easily spotted. I've met—by the way, I should tell you also that I've seen talent in students who did not become artists, who had the natural gift but lacked something else. They just wanna do something else. So that's a mysterious business altogether.

ROBERT BROWN: And was it different in '47? Where there's a higher proportion of—

[Cross talk]

HAROLD TOVISH: Well you see in '47, the difference really would have been this. Setting aside people whose parents had money, and they would have been relatively few—See, my wife's mother and father were very encouraging of her going into art, and they were able to pay the way. And, of course, it was much cheaper, you see. At Columbia, it was $12 per credit, now at—at BU, it's $108 per credit, so you get an idea of what it might have cost. Um, setting aside that kind of a student, gifted or not, you wouldn't have gotten very many poor kids going into art unless they had a terrible compulsion to do it. Because as I—as you know, there was not only very little future, and it was probably guaranteed that they were gonna have a dreadful time. The number of successful artists that we had, as an example, in the '40s was very limited. My teacher was one, uh, Zorach was another, and, uh, I'm quickly running out of names that I knew. Uh, no, it was a tough business. So, that was the situation then. And in general, the students who turned up in these—a—at the school that I was, they were either women who were married, but some quite gifted by the way, and, uh, whose husbands were willing to pay their way. Or somebody like Marianna whose parents were encouraging, yet could pay, and somebody like myself. And there was one chap there who'd worked for four years as a, uh, a mechanical draftsman and then saved and he came. You see, he was terribly gifted. But now, uh, let's say by—by the time you got into the late '50s and '60s, uh, affluence began to be a—a much more common kind of thing. And—and, uh, if a kid wanted to go to art school for a few years, what harm would it do? I mean they were much more tolerant of the idea of some young, uh, man and more likely a young woman go to art school for a while. It would be nice for them, and they could afford it. And so you have art schools all over the country jammed with people, most of whom, uh, were probably hopelessly incompetent and always would be. So that's the big difference now. You see, we have a lot more students who, uh, are there because they—in many cases, they probably didn't know what else they could do. They—they like it. It's—you know it's not any driving obsession in their lives, but that it was something they'd rather do that than, uh, I don't know what, get a degree in English or [inaudible]. You'll have to ask me more questions because I'm—

ROBERT BROWN: Right. Well, you talked earlier more or less about the—I think going from Albert when you were around Minnesota.

HAROLD TOVISH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: I mean you started discussing that with—

HAROLD TOVISH: Minnesota?

ROBERT BROWN: You picked that—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: You picked that up, but we've already gotten that down pretty well.

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, I went—you know, we went to Paris.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

HAROLD TOVISH: I left that school—

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned some of that.

HAROLD TOVISH: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Why don't you talk a bit about Paris because we didn't get too much because—

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, are you sure? I thought we rather—I rather, you know, ran on and on about it.

ROBERT BROWN: You know I think, you know what, you did. Brâncuși, we reviewed that.

HAROLD TOVISH: Well, there was a story about Brâncuși, but I studied with Zadkine. Marianna and I worked—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, we did talk about—

HAROLD TOVISH: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —your view about that.

HAROLD TOVISH: I don't know really if we should go through that Paris thing again because I think—

ROBERT BROWN: Let me hold.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]