Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Rudolph de Harak, 2000 April 27

Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Rudolph de Harak on April 27, 2000. The interview took place at his home in Trenton, ME, and was conducted by Susan Larsen for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsoinian Institution's Women's Committee.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SUSAN LARSEN: - morning, April 27th of the year 2000, and I am here with Mr. Rudolph de Harak, spelled R-u-d-o-l-p-h d-e H-a-r-a-k. And we are here at Mr. de Harak's home in Trenton, Maine, on the north shore. And we are - it isn't the north shore.

RUDOLPH DE HARAK: No.

MS. LARSEN: Can you tell me where it is?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, we're in Trenton.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And it's actually the south shore of Union River Bay.

MS. LARSEN: Okay, okay. And we are here to do an oral history for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, about Mr. de Harak's life and work. And we generally start these interviews at the very beginning, with a person's earliest years and background and family. And so, I thought I would ask you about your early years in California. I've read you were born in 1924 in Culver City. What can you tell me about California, and how you got your start?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, I can't tell you an awful lot about California in 1924.

MS. LARSEN: No, I'm sure you can't.

MR. DE HARAK: I don't remember much about it.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: But it's true, that's where I was born. Actually, it was interesting. We, the family, lived right across the street from the studios. And I might tell you that my name, Rudolph, I am named after Rudolph Valentino. He was a big, big hit, of course, in the early 1920s, and my family naturally had - that is, my mother and my father - had a great interest in the studios. And we lived across the street, and my mother and even my father often participated in the studios and film making as extras.

MS. LARSEN: Did they?

MR. DE HARAK: So, that's where the name Rudolph comes from. The de Harak, of course, is a non-existent name. My father was Czechoslovakian. His name was Harak, but he was an aspiring chef. And when he decided to come to this country, he felt - I'm not sure that he was right - but he felt that a Czechoslovakian chef wouldn't get very far, but that a French one would. So he added the "de" to my name. So, that's where de Harak comes from. My birth certificate says that my father was born in France, but he really wasn't. Large family. Originally, five sisters and two brothers, paired down to one brother and four sisters.

MS. LARSEN: How did that happen?

MR. DE HARAK: My - it would have been my next to oldest sister. She was killed in a car crash when she was, I think 18 months old. And then, my little brother, who would have been the youngest in the family, died at approximately the same age when he became ill. So, I am actually the baby of the family, but I am the only one that's left. Everybody in my family is gone now. Very interesting, but I think very typical of the time, the 1920s, the Depression years, my mother and father split. My mother took it on herself to try to - not to try; she had to - single-handedly support the whole family. Took in the local laundry, and we all suffered through that.

MS. LARSEN: You moved away from Los Angeles, or did you stay there for a while?

MR. DE HARAK: No, we stayed in Los Angeles until I was almost 10, and then moved on to Chicago, and stayed there a year, and then from there, moved on to New York. The reason for that was that, again, I guess show business and entertainment was very much in my mother's mind and heart, and had somehow managed to give dancing lessons and music lessons to all of the girls in the family. But two of them, in particular, who posed as adults when they were respectively 13 and 16 years old, and danced as the Falla Twins - actually, they got - they became, ultimately, quite well known, and even did some movie work, and danced all over the world. I think that we all - and maybe this temperament came from my father, I'm not sure - but they became really very dedicated Modernists in their dancing, and originally worked as the Falla Twins - Falla being my mother's maiden name.

MS. LARSEN: How is that spelled?

MR. DE HARAK: F-a-l-l-a. And they went on to then become the Falla Sisters, and did modern interpretive dancing.

MS. LARSEN: Was it related to, say, Isadora Duncan's style, or something else?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, in a sense, but no. It was very, very slow and quite extreme control work. They almost always looked like they were dancing in slow motion. But they worked, actually, all over the world. And, as a matter of fact, I saw them perform even at the Roxy Theater in New York, which was still open in the very early 1950s. The Roxy was still functioning.

MS. LARSEN: Did you -

MR. DE HARAK: But the war years really put kind of an end - just about put an end to their dancing. And it was about that time that they settled down and met their mates and married and had children, and so on. And meanwhile, I was in the service. I went in the service in 1943. But I am getting a little ahead of it. We moved around a great deal, because my mother felt that she had to do some chaperoning of her daughters, who were dancing, and she would just pick up and move the whole family.

MS. LARSEN: Goodness. How did you take to that?

MR. DE HARAK: I don't really know. I - well, I think several things. One is I think we really had very little family life. I think if you talked to members of my family, if we brought them spiritually back to talk to, they would probably disagree. But I never had a sense - or, let's say, after the fact, thinking about it - I never had a sense of a very, very close family life. I never had a sense of a lot of laughter in the family. There was never a book in the house.

MS. LARSEN: Really?

MR. DE HARAK: Never experienced a book, except for the Bible and the Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, by Mary Baker Eddy. My mother was a Christian Scientist, and we were all born into that - I guess we can call it a disaster. But the other thing is that there was never any music in the house.

MS. LARSEN: Despite the dancing? That's very strange.

MR. DE HARAK: That's right.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: There was never any music that I ever recall. A typical evening - and I do think this was quite typical, because there was very little money in those days for just about anybody, and there wasn't all of the technological amenities that we have now, in terms of, you know, tape decks and television and so on. But I do recall that one thing that we would do is, after dinner, we would all sit around the radio and we would listen to the various radio family shows, such as Jack Armstrong, The All American Boy, The Shadow, Orphan Annie, Black and Blue, and things like that. But -

MS. LARSEN: Did your father ever reemerge in this picture?

MR. DE HARAK: No, never.

MS. LARSEN: Never?

MR. DE HARAK: I never saw my father again, after I was five years old.

MS. LARSEN: That's regrettable.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. And actually, I once spent a marvelous - after I came out of the war - and this would have been probably around 1947, that - the name is unusual, de Harak. And, somehow, information came down to me or members of my - one of my sisters, that they had heard my father was up north, near Carmel. And on a stormy night, I got in the car and I took off and started to look for him. It was a very, very interesting experience. And I actually did quite a bit of detective work, and searched and found about four or five previous locations where he had worked, and addresses. And each time, he kind of slipped through my fingers. And finally, the weather was so bad, and I was getting discouraged, and I turned around and I drove the distance back from San Francisco to Los Angeles. I never did see him. But that was always a very sad part of my life, I - particularly in later years. I wanted to make some kind of contact with him, because of just a deep curiosity about him, and what his creative spirit had been. He was a very creative guy. He was a chef, but he functioned mainly with pastries, and did wonderful ice sculptures that would be placed on top of the cakes. He worked in all of these very, very exclusive country clubs up and down the west coast, and moved around a lot. For a period of time before I was born, he was the chef at the Pickfair Estates - Doug Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. But I guess fate was that I would never run into him.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Yes, that's -

MR. DE HARAK: One of the other things he did was, during the silent film days, he was very popular with the studios, because they would hire him to write letters. And the letters - as you know, everything was subtitled. And to find a way around that potential boredom, that visual boredom of just seeing the subtitles, there was a lot of notes passed between lovers, and so on. And my father would write those notes. Yes, he had a wonderful, wonderful handwriting. That's something I certainly don't have. But the reason that we left California and went to Chicago, there was going to be the Century of Progress there in 1934, and we got ourselves on to a train, and trained it from Los Angeles to Chicago, my mother feeling, and my sisters feeling, that there would be better potential for them being dancers there. We stayed there a year, and scraped by. And then, in 1934, we piled into an old Grand Paige [phonetic] - God knows where we got that - and everybody got in the car, and we drove from Chicago to New York. As we passed across the Illinois line into Indiana, we were stopped by great hordes of police who were examining every car, looking for John Dillinger. And, if you recall, historically, it was just at that time that they located him at the Chicago Theater and killed him. We went on to New York, and ended up in -

MS. LARSEN: What part?

MR. DE HARAK: Astoria Queens, which is - that's part of Long Island, and it's actually - it's a very interesting area, Astoria is. It's right tangent to the Triborough Bridge. And so, from the time that I was 10 years old - or about 11, I guess - until the time I was 18, I did my public schooling there, and the little bit of art education that I had.

MS. LARSEN: What did you know of art? It didn't seem you had someone taking you by the hand to show you works of art. Did you see things on your own?

MR. DE HARAK: No, nothing.

MS. LARSEN: Or did you have another person who was important to you?

MR. DE HARAK: Nothing. I had no concept. I mean, no concept of art. I mean, there - we're talking about art, visual arts. But also, art in any other sense. But I did like to draw. I drew a lot. And I also made a lot of dolls. And with my sister that was closest to me, we would play dolls together, and also we would - I remember lying on the floor and - you know, I was very young - and copying Dick Tracy and being very, very enamored with some of the newspaper cartoonists: Milton Keneefe [phonetic], who did Terry and the Pirates, whom I actually met later on in life; and Alex Raymond [phonetic], who was really a marvelous draftsman. And he did the strip for the first - for the Hearst papers called Flash Gordon, and also Jungle Jim. Interestingly enough, he also, for the daily papers, did a strip called Secret Agent X9, which was written on a daily basis by Dashiell Hammett. Yes. And so, I was very interested in those things, and was always taken with the cartoon scrip, Crazy Cat.

MS. LARSEN: Which is a little more fantastical, in a way.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, it is.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And I'm glad you brought that up, because I know that you wanted to talk about - something about Modernism after, and I would love to talk about George Herriman a little bit, who did Krazy Kat. But, anyway, the outcome, I guess, of my drawing - and I guess I did - although I don't recall any of the drawings - but in junior high school, which was still in Astoria, I did a lot of drawing. And it certainly came to the attention of the teachers. And when it came time to select a high school to go to, my art teacher, who was also my gymnasium teacher, he suggested that I go to the New York School of Industrial Arts. And this was a new school,

a newly developed system, actually, for - I guess for ne'er-do-wells and for dimwits, and for -

MS. LARSEN: What were they training you for?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, you know, you could - I'm - the name of the type of school escapes me, but it was a type of school that was set up that you could study auto mechanics, you could study -

MS. LARSEN: A trade school?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, it's a trade school. And that was really quite a new thing, back in 1937.

MS. LARSEN: And where was it?

MR. DE HARAK: It was in New York City, and it was called New York School of Industrial Arts. It was on west 40th Street. And it's still in existence today, with a name change. It's now called the New York School of Art and Design. But I think, if I remember right, I was the second graduating class there. And it was very, very primitive. It was actually in an old factory building. And I mean, there was no such thing, really, as nice drawing tables or anything. We sat on orange boxes, and very, very poorly equipped. And they brought in teachers - and maybe this was one of the beginnings of this kind of thing - they brought in teachers who generally were professionals, and came in and did this teaching on kind of a part-time basis. And I had a teacher there by the name of Bob Seaman, and -

MS. LARSEN: Do you remember how to spell that?

MR. DE HARAK: I think it was S-e-a-m-a-n. And we all really kind of looked up to him. And he was okay. I mean, we studied things like lettering, and we would try to draw various commercial objects, such as, you know, coffee pots or electric irons or hair curlers or carburetors, or what have you. And then, I also studied silk screening with quite a famous silk screener, by the name of - I don't remember his first name, but his last name was Beetleisen [phonetic]. And as a matter of fact, some years ago, while living here in Maine, I came across a book of his on silk screening, which I think I still have in my library. But I didn't do a lot of attending in class. I was always out, trying to hustle some way to make a buck. I mean, everything was - everything turned on somehow bringing home money. As a matter of fact, my last - I guess my last year-and-a-half that I went to high school, which is in New York City, so I had to take the subway from Astoria -

MS. LARSEN: That's quite a trip for a young person.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. Well, yes. Everybody did this kind of thing, though.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, right.

MR. DE HARAK: But it was really a very, very difficult time. I mean, one was really forced into a work ethic, something that the younger people today don't really have, which in a way is good, because it means that they had, probably, a little more comfort as a child. But when I got back from school, which was at 4:00 in the afternoon, I didn't go home. I went directly to the drugstore, where I worked in that drugstore from 4:00 in the afternoon until 10:00 at night.

MS. LARSEN: Wow.

MR. DE HARAK: And I did this six days a week.

MS. LARSEN: That doesn't leave much time for homework, does it?

MR. DE HARAK: No.

MS. LARSEN: No.

MR. DE HARAK: I didn't do much homework.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And I really worked very hard in that drugstore for a year-and-a-half, and my pay was $5 a week. I got $5 a week for that. And, of that, I turned $4 of it over to the family. So, that went on, actually, until I graduated, which was in 1940. And somehow, because of going to school in California and then in Chicago - not that I was terribly bright - but somehow I got put a year ahead of myself. And so I graduated high school when I was 16. And I guess within a month, I was working in a factory, which manufactured and produced draperies, drapery fabrics for both draperies and for upholstery. I was not doing it on any kind of a creative level, however. I was really kind of a mechanic. I etched zinc plates for printing, and also painted in designs on silk that was

stretched on to frames for silk screening. And from there, I was drafted into the Army. I was 18, and I was drafted into the Army. And that's a whole other episode in my life.

MS. LARSEN: Right. So, as a young, unsuspecting American, suddenly there was a war, and there you were, young and available. And I gather that this was a real watershed in your life, as it was in the life of so many people. And you're obviously sitting here next me long later, so you made it through. But what type of experience did this afford you?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, to begin with, when I was 18, I was a very naive young man. Oh, I had a lot of street smarts. I mean, if you're a poor kid, and you kind of live on the streets, why, you know, you get into trouble, you do all kinds of things. And I guess so much of a young man or a young boy's life is predicated on "being a man," proving that you're a man, or you're manly, and therefore, it's superficially involved with trying to do manly things, getting into trouble, and so on, so that when the war broke out in 1941, the talk was always, "Do you enlist? What are you going to do in the Army?" And, "Are you going to kill Germans," and so on, you know. So, I really thought nothing of it when I was drafted. I was put right in the infantry. And this seemed to me like the logical place to go. And the truth is, the only other place you could - I mean, well, you could theoretically have gone into the Air Force, but I have always had some aversion to heights. Never particularly wanted to do that, or I never particularly wanted to go down in glory in flames. I always felt that if you were on the ground and got shot, you had a chance that you might come out of it anyway. So, I did end up in the infantry, and with an incredible kind of patriotism and eagerness to serve my country, and do all of the things that government expects you to do.

MS. LARSEN: Where did they send you?

MR. DE HARAK: I went - when I was drafted I first went for orientation to a place called Camp Upton, Long Island, and then took an incredibly long train ride down to Camp Butner, North Carolina, where I did my basic training. I did my advanced training, and then my maneuvers, all of which took about a year, and then shipped to England in March of 1944, just several months before the invasion. And -

MS. LARSEN: What did you see there?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, when I was in Camp Butner, North Carolina, I was with what was called the 78th Lightening Division. And we had a lot of pride, and we thought that we would go overseas together. But they - in, I guess, typical Army fashion, they broke up that division and sent us all over as replacements, which they anticipated, I guess correctly, that they were going to need. So, just after the invasion, I went in as a replacement - I was a rifleman in a line company, the 4th Infantry Division - and somehow managed to squeak through all of Normandy, Paris, the liberation of Paris, the run through Brittany into Belgium, into the Siegfried Line, and then into the Hurtgen Forest, and then to the Battle of the Bulge.

MS. LARSEN: Did you lose a lot of comrades around you?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, my goodness.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, my goodness. I think, if my memory serves me right, in 21 days in the Hurtgen Forest, we lost 10,000 men. And I was reading recently - I have actually been writing some memoirs on the war recently, and I read recently that the 4th Infantry Division suffered more casualties than any other division in the war. It was a pretty brutal experience. And I think, actually, the experience was more - I guess the two main things was fear -

MS. LARSEN: Sure.

MR. DE HARAK: And -

MS. LARSEN: Terror, really.

MR. DE HARAK: And loneliness. Not loneliness, but hopelessness.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Hopelessness is the word.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And it made a very, very deep impression on me, one that is very vivid to this day, more than 50 years later.

MS. LARSEN: How did you feel? Did that naive patriotism carry you through, or did you feel differently as you were confronted with -

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, absolutely. That patriotism dissipated relatively soon. But, anyway, I was ultimately hospitalized, and I was taken off the line, and spent about 9 or 10 months in - I was reclassified into non-combatant service, and actually had some pretty fun and exciting times in Paris, because I was stationed in Compiegne, which was just about - really, about 40 miles from Paris. So I was in Paris a great deal, and had some pretty wild times there, and it was quite marvelous. When I -

[CD stops, re-starts]

MS. LARSEN: So, you came back as a survivor, thank goodness.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, we - yes, thank goodness.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: I guess thank goodness. I guess if I didn't, I wouldn't know it. I shipped back to the States - actually, I arrived on New Year's Day, January 1, 1946, and spent a little bit of - oh, a few weeks in New York, seeing some old friends, but then went on back to California, because my family had moved to California while I was overseas. I really didn't have a trade. And I had to go to work, so I was actually doing hard labor for, oh, I guess about six months - a concrete block factory, doing all kinds of dumb -

MS. LARSEN: Whatever somebody would give you, or what you could find easily?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. But I was working in a concrete block factory, and also laying some brick, and then I also was delivering huge commercial cans of milk to restaurants in the middle of the night. It became too much. And I stopped it, and I went to an employment agency and, fortunately, met a really quite wonderful lady there, who was very sensitive. Asked me what I liked to do, and what I wanted, and I said, "I want a job where I don't have to lift anything heavier than a pencil." And meanwhile, I had also told her that I liked to draw. But, strangely, I had also had some strange, mysterious compulsion to paint. And I was painting these very, very strange, ghoulish, death-like figures in blues and purples and blacks, some very, very hopeless and ominous -

MS. LARSEN: Sort of a purging of your war images, maybe?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, I think it had a lot to do with that, of course. And - but anyway, she came up with a job for me as an apprentice in an art service in Los Angeles, a small little company. And I was very nervous, and I went in. And it was a little art service that mostly serviced the needs of advertising agencies, but they also had a few clients. They did mostly fashion work. And I was expected to do nothing but mechanicals. Interestingly enough, nobody in that office knew how to really instruct me in doing a mechanical, not even the boss.

MS. LARSEN: Could you - just for those of us who are pretty ignorant, can you tell me what a mechanical is?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. A mechanical is taking the layout, which is usually on layout paper or tissue done with chalks or layout pencils, and putting it into a form that allows the engraver, or the printer, to put it in front of a camera and copy it, and then make plates from it, and then print from it, so that it requires ordering type from a compositor, getting what's called reproduction proofs, pasting them into the correct position on a piece of illustration board, and what we call key lining, where the illustration or photograph would go, and so on. None of those words, of course, did I understand, or know what they meant. I had no idea of what a typeface was. And I did - I guess I did something that was pretty smart, and I don't - and that was that I just figured if the printer or the engraver, as the case may be, had to work with this kind of material, they must have it all over the place, and they must know exactly what they wanted. So, at night, I would go to the printer's or to the engraver's, or both, and they were always eager to help, because it was to their interest, from a business point of view, but also to their interest from a craft point of view, that they would get something that they could work with, with the least trouble. So, I really learned from the printers and the engravers, what was the best way to produce a mechanical. So I got very good at it, and in a very short period of time. Interestingly enough, I was - actually ended up running that office after about five or six months. The boss was rarely there, he was always out playing golf, and so it worked out that I was really doing all of this stuff, and I also was going to see clients, and deliver work to them, and so on. A lot of responsibility. I was 22 years old at the time. I had still never read a book in my life, never. About that time, I had a marvelous experience, and that was I bumped - I was walking down the hallway of the office building that I worked in, and I bumped into this chap that I had gone to school with in New York.

MS. LARSEN: Who was that?

MR. DE HARAK: He was a designer. His name was Hal Tritel.

MS. LARSEN: Is that T-r-e-I-t-e-l?

MR. DE HARAK: T-r-I-t-e-l, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Okay.

MR. DE HARAK: And he was a whiz. He was very, very smart, very bright. He was an intellectual, and a very talented chap. And he kind of took me under his wing. And he had been in the Army, but for just a very short period of time, and so was really able to kind of get himself established. And he was working - I guess, as I remember right, he was working as kind of an art director in a small firm. And he started to introduce me to going to the museum, or museums, recommending books to read. But mainly - it was certainly all of those things - but also terrific exchanges, just talking about things.

MS. LARSEN: He had a whole range of outlets and ways of learning and growing that you didn't maybe know about, or you hadn't been encouraged to take advantage of?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, just didn't know about it. I didn't know about anything. But it was really like - I can't explain it. It was just like breaking out of a shell. All of a sudden, the whole world was brighter, and with possibilities. At about that time, he told me about a lecture that was being given. It was a lecture and an exhibition at the old arts center school in Los Angeles, by a man by the name of Will Burtin, B-u-r-t-I-n. And Will was German, and had come here, oh, I think probably around 1936, something like that. He ended up doing a lot of work for the military, for the Army, in particular, designing explanatory manuals, how to assemble and disassemble and M1 rifle or a machine gun, or what the nomenclature of a 74mm shell was, or what have you. He did all of these kind of wonderful drawings and diagrams. Later, he was employed by - you know, as a freelance designer, as a - for the Upjohn Company, doing marvelous pharmaceutical stuff, but was currently, at that time, the art director of Fortune Magazine. So, the whole halls were decorated with the layouts that he did for the inside pages, as well as covers. But he also had a small exhibit. And I think that - let me just reference that. Yes, this lecture was titled, "Integration: The New Discipline and Design." And Burtin not only spoke about design and communications, but he also presented an exhibition of his work, which guided one through the entire process of experiences, which were described as four principles, or the four principal realities of visual communication. There were: the reality of man, as measure, as measurer; the reality of light, color, and texture; and the reality of space, motion, and time; and the reality of science.

MS. LARSEN: That's quite a lot.

MR. DE HARAK: He was the first person that I ever heard use the word "visual communication." I tell you, I was blown away. I never understood that - I guess this is retrospectively, of course -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: - but these were feelings I had, that visual communication could transcend common experience, and, in fact, become art. This was an incredible realization for me.

MS. LARSEN: But had you mostly thought of it as selling something, or -

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes, just -

MS. LARSEN: - satisfying the boss, or just -

MR. DE HARAK: Just making a living.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes, just getting it right, and -

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, and not getting too tired.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Just terrific, you know? You would do something and get paid for it, and you didn't have blisters on your hands, you know?

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Or a creaking neck or a back. And then, to realize that this was a thing that you could fulfill yourself, and also be paid for? An unbelievable realization. This was augmented more than double by the next experience, which took place maybe a month or so later, a lecture in the same place by Gyorgy Kepes. Gyorgy Kepes went on later, he had an incredible life, and is still alive, but he became head of visual perceptual studies at MIT.

MS. LARSEN: And his writings have influenced people for generations.

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, yes, yes. Anyway, I heard the lecture of his [phonetic] - a little hard to understand, he had a very, very heavy accent. He still has it today, I think he enjoys it. But what was amazing is that they came at visual experience through - on different streets, but you kind of ended up in the same restaurant, you know? It was extraordinary.

MS. LARSEN: Really, was -

MR. DE HARAK: This was so traumatic for me - and also, I think, for Hal - that we both quit our jobs, and decided to become designers.

MS. LARSEN: And how does one do that?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, we -

MS. LARSEN: By going back to school?

MR. DE HARAK: Well -

MS. LARSEN: Or setting up shop, or what?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, we didn't go back to school, we set up shop. We started to work on putting together hypothetical designs. But, of course, Hal had some material that he could really show. I didn't have much. And we would go out and see people, and try to get freelance work. And we worked out of a basement that was really, really kind of marvelous. There was a woman that - her name was Doris Lippman, and they women's situation - and she was a designer, and a very good one - she was more mature, and had a more mature understanding of design than Hal did, even. But she never went by "Doris," she just went by the initials, "D.R. Lippman," very masculine treatment of her letterhead and her stationery.

MS. LARSEN: This is post-war L.A., so -

MR. DE HARAK: This is post-war L.A.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes, right.

MR. DE HARAK: This is -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: I am talking about 1947.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And she was doing some work for the studios, but also for a number of other people. But she had this large basement that she rented and worked out of. She was actually a wealthy woman, but we didn't know this. And she was a couple of years older than me, I guess, that's all. She is dead now. Became a very, very lifelong friend. But she gave us space there - I forget, it was some crazy sum, like $25 a month or something like that - and we worked there. And there was also a photographer there that worked out of there by the name of Phil March. And he and - well, anyway, the group of us worked together there, and it was a pretty exciting time, trying to learn things, and so on. I tell you, for probably the next five years, I rarely went to bed. I mean, I would just go to sleep, exhausted, because I would spend all of my time reading, trying to do some writing. I bought a camera, taking photographs, experimenting with emulsions, and everything else, and going to museums, and also painting.

MS. LARSEN: Where did you go to museums, just as a - if you recall?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, there was a couple of galleries that we would go to, and then there was the LA County Museum. And I guess not much more than that.

MS. LARSEN: Was it the Landau Gallery? Was that one of them?

MR. DE HARAK: It could have been.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: It has a long time ago, you know?

MS. LARSEN: Yes, sure.

MR. DE HARAK: You know, we're talking about 60 years ago.

MS. LARSEN: Right, right.

MR. DE HARAK: But, anyway, one of the other things that we did, we decided that we really - California was a desert, I mean, in terms of -

MS. LARSEN: That's why I'm asking, because I'm trying to figure what was there for you to take into -

MR. DE HARAK: And so it was terribly - I mean, we would see things in magazines that big, famous designers like Saul Bass and Erik Neitzche and Paul Rand [phonetic] and people like that, what they were doing. And then, on occasion, you were maybe lucky enough to see something that came out of a European book or magazine. But there was really not much. So, what we did was, we felt we ought to have a club of some sort. So I guess about three or four of us got together, or five or six - no, I guess three or four of us - and Solbass had emigrated to California from New York a couple of years earlier, and Alvin Lustig lived in California, and he was very famous. He was doing all of that work for New Directions book covers, and so on. And we called them up, and they joined this group, and it was called - I guess it was called The California Society of Contemporary Designers, or maybe "Los Angeles," I can't remember. But, actually, that really - there were seven of us that were charter members, and that grew into a big organization. I don't think it's alive any more, but they produced some very large exhibits after I left, so it was a very positive thing. I stuck it out until 1950. So I was in California after the war for about four years. And I just felt there was nothing left in California for me. And so, in - I guess it was February of 1950, I took the train cross-country, and came to New York, and moved in with a buddy, and looked for work there.

MS. LARSEN: Wow, that's a completely new start.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. And it was scary. But I had a little portfolio, and I was determined - I was absolutely determined - to find a job that would be right for me. And I had a number of kind of offers that didn't seem quite right, and I got 20 times that number of turn-downs, saw a lot of people. Actually, I practically lived in Grand Central Station. I was staying with a friend all the way out in Corona, Long Island, which was a long way, you know -

MS. LARSEN: Yes, I -

MR. DE HARAK: - it was about a 45-minute or an hour ride into Manhattan. And, in those days, you could take showers in Grand Central Station, and you could have lockers. And I would keep all of my stuff there, and I would arrive early in the morning, and stay all day, trying to find work, and then go home in the evening. It was a long haul. And then, I would keep my portfolio in the locker, so I didn't have to carry too much. Anyway, I got a job at Seventeen magazine, as the promotion art director.

MS. LARSEN: How long had that magazine been in business? A long time?

MR. DE HARAK: I can't tell you how long it was in business, but -

MS. LARSEN: It was already well established?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, very well established. And, as a matter of fact, the previous art director - and what was nice about Seventeen in those days, it was a jumbo-sized magazine.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: The way the original Fortune Magazine was, the original - the way Look magazine was.

MS. LARSEN: I remember, as a young girl -

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: - just doting on every page.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: And it was thick, and it was sort of squarish and big, and -

MR. DE HARAK: Well, it was -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: As I remember, it was something like 11 x 14.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: But, anyway, there was a woman there that was the art director, that I didn't know at the time, because they had had a political purge, and she was forced to leave. But her name was Cipe Pineles. And she is still an important name. Cipe -

MS. LARSEN: Is it S-I-e-p-e?

MR. DE HARAK: C-I-p-e.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, C-I-p-e.

MR. DE HARAK: And then Pineles, P-I-e-l-e-s. It is wonderful how things come together. I never knew Cipe in the beginning. She lived in Rockland County, and was married to Bill Golden [phonetic]. Bill Golden was one of the most famous art directors. He was the art director of CBS, and he designed the CBS eye.

MS. LARSEN: Oh.

MR. DE HARAK: And Cipe was a terrific art director, herself. But she is a story in herself. Cipe lived in Rockland County, in a place called New City, with Bill Golden. And who was their neighbor? Their neighbor was Will Burtin -

MS. LARSEN: Oh, may.

MR. DE HARAK: - who was married to a German woman that he had been married to for years and year. And, as the story unfolded, Bill Golden died. I think it was a heart attack. Shortly thereafter, Will's wife died. And Cipe married Will Burtin. Anyway, when she was the art director of Seventeen magazine, she did incredible things. She would hire people like Saul Steinberg [phonetic] - do you know the painting of Richard Lindner [phonetic]?

MS. LARSEN: Sure.

MR. DE HARAK: She would hire people like Richard Lindner to do illustrations.

MS. LARSEN: For Seventeen magazine?

MR. DE HARAK: For Seventeen magazine. Ben Shawn [phonetic] constantly was used in the magazine. So -

MS. LARSEN: Very sophisticated stuff.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, very sophisticated. It probably pre-dated your experience with it somewhat.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, it did. Right.

MR. DE HARAK: But it was an incredible magazine. Anyway, she was forced out. And a - her assistant, by the name of Joan Fenton [phonetic], took her place. And when Joan Fenton took her place is when I came in. And I didn't really have much to do with Joan. I mean, I worked in the same space, but Joan was editorial, and I was promotion. But they had a little multilith press, which is a small offset press. And they used it for nothing but doing, you know, little announcements or -

MS. LARSEN: Invitations, maybe, or -

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, things like that.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, stuff like that.

MR. DE HARAK: And they had a new editor of the magazine. The name will come to me in a minute. And I went to her, and I said, "You know, you've got this press here. Why don't we use it for some of our promotional material?" So, she went along with it. And I produced some really pretty neat stuff on that little press. It was a terrific experience. But the thing that was marvelous about being at Seventeen magazine at that time is that - well, this whole thing is just marvelously crazy. When I started at Seventeen magazine, they were located at 11 West 42nd Street. I mean, talk about these wonderful coincidences.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Who had an office at 11 West 42nd Street? Will Burtin. And, of course, I thought he was God. But I never even got to see him there, but I knew that he was there, and I could see his name -

MS. LARSEN: So you were in the right neighborhood, anyway.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: Okay.

MR. DE HARAK: But then the architects, Emery Roth & Sons, were putting up all of these what we call wedding cake buildings all over New York, buildings that had -

MS. LARSEN: Step back.

MR. DE HARAK: Set backs. And we moved into one of their buildings, 488 Madison. I mean, you talk about the heart of Manhattan. We were across the street from CBS. It was before CBS went into the Saren and Black Rock [phonetic] Building. But CBS was across the street. And the building we went into was called the Look [phonetic] Building. And in that building was Look magazine, Fleur magazine, Esquire, Coronet, Apparel Arts, the William H. Weintraub Agency, which was headed by Paul Rand. It was - plus two or three other agencies, and plus Seventeen magazine. This -

MS. LARSEN: So you had made it.

MR. DE HARAK: This was the -

MS. LARSEN: You were in - yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: - I mean, it was the mixing ground of all of the - and so, at - but all of these marvelous, crazy things. Like, at Look magazine at that time was a guy by the name of George Krikorian. And George had left Look and went over to the New York Times. And I - when applying for a job, I had met him at the New York Times. There was a guy, a wonderful designer, by the name of Herschel Bramson, who worked for Flair magazine, and I had interviewed with him. And he had always wanted to hire me, and he couldn't hire me, but I was friendly with him.

MS. LARSEN: You maintained contact.

MR. DE HARAK: And so, I met all of these people. And then, we had a guy by the name of Art Caine [phonetic] came in as the assistant art director to Joan Fenton, and he was a dynamo of a guy. And then there was a guy, Henry Wolf [phonetic], who came in as the art director of Esquire, who was dynamite. And Art Caine and Henry and I used to go out photographing together. It was just a wonderful time of -

MS. LARSEN: So, your learning curve, too, was really steep?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, it was incredible.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: It was incredible. Shortly - after a year and a half there, actually, I went into another agency in the same building, at a tremendous increase in salary. And it was a very commercial agency. I don't think I - I can't even remember the name of it, at the moment. But from the moment I got there, I hated them, and they hated me.

MS. LARSEN: It sounds like - even the way you said that just now -

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. LARSEN: It was a bad fit.

MR. DE HARAK: And I stayed there for about six months. But what it proved to me was that I couldn't really work for anybody.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And I had to work for myself. So, meanwhile, all of these guys were making lots of money, these friends of mine, and I was struggling as a freelance designer. It was interesting, ultimately, the tables turned somewhat. That is where it all nestled, and where all of that -

MS. LARSEN: Signing up with this agency, though, did you begin to see the business part of this whole endeavor?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, you could see that.

MS. LARSEN: Yes?

MR. DE HARAK: But they just did these terrible accounts. One of them was Ex-Lax, and the headlines were -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: - you know, "Are you suffering awful hot flashes," and -

MS. LARSEN: This is not -

MR. DE HARAK: Really bad stuff. And the other was Detecto Scales [phonetic]. I don't know how I remember these things -

MS. LARSEN: Low on inspiration, huh?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, gee, yes. But when I started to freelance, the - I was, of course, getting a - several things happened when I started to freelance. In 1952 - now I'd been in New York only 2 years - in 1952, one of my acquaintances, who was teaching a course at Cooper Union - I don't know whether - I guess he got sick. He had a hernia operation, or something, I don't -

[END CD 1]

MS. LARSEN: Beginning of tape 2, an interview with Mr. Rudolph de Harak, taking place April 27, the year 2000, in Trenton, Maine. We had covered your career, up to, in many ways, the - just up to the serious beginning of your functioning as an independent graphic designer in an environment where you were meant to be, all along. And we were, what, about 1952?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes -

MS. LARSEN: When you were setting up your own studio in New York?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. I actually started - let's see, I actually set up my studio about late 1951.

MS. LARSEN: And where was it? Oh, I don't mean the address, I just mean in what - same area where you were working?

MR. DE HARAK: In New York City, oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Madison and 42nd, or in that area?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. I think at that time I had actually gotten a little studio on 40th Street and Lexington. It was still residential in there. Now, of course, all of that is gone. Yes, this - actually, the real beginnings were, of course, coming to New York and getting a job at Seventeen magazine. But the realization that I really wanted to work for myself, and had to work for myself, I just - somehow I didn't have the temperament to have a boss standing over me. I mean, you always end up having bosses, but it was kind of important just to be on my own. You know, at this point, of course, I was reading a lot of European publications, and was very taken with - I was still very naive about it, but I was very taken with the whole concept of the International School of Design, and so on, which really germinated in Switzerland and Germany, but mainly Switzerland, just after the second war. But, anyway, I think that the last tape left us where a friend of mine needed somebody to replace him for the remainder of the semester at Cooper Union. And, of course, this terrified me, but it really interested me. And so, in 1952, I started teaching at Cooper Union at $4 an hour. And what I lacked in experience, I think I more than made up for in terms of my commitment and my enthusiasm, so much so that Cooper Union asked me to come back the next year. And I continued to teach at Cooper Union, with the exception of just a couple of years in the early 1960s, but I taught at Cooper Union, really, from 1952 to 1986.

MS. LARSEN: That's amazing. Long time.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. And also, I taught at an awful lot of other schools, too. I -

MS. LARSEN: You taught at Yale?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, I taught at Yale for a couple of years, in the graduate program. But I - as a matter of fact, I loved teaching. And while I was running a design office, and a busy design office, I was teaching at Cooper,

Pratt, and Parsons, all at the same time. The same time.

MS. LARSEN: What was your focus in your teaching? What did you hope to share and develop in the students?

MR. DE HARAK: Well -

MS. LARSEN: I guess I mean -

MR. DE HARAK: - to give - I guess to enrich and broaden their aesthetic senses, to give them a much better understanding of typography, which is the roots of graphic design, I mean, if you think about it. You know, about 99.9 percent of everything you see is typography, and the rest is illustration, photograph, and symbol. So, one has to - if you're going to be a graphic designer, you have to either love, or learn to love, typography. If you don't, you should do something else. But, anyway -

MS. LARSEN: Is that - did you teach courses in typography, or -

MR. DE HARAK: No. I taught - actually, I enjoyed very much teaching the sophomore year. They had had a year of foundation, and had made a decision to study graphic design. And so I really took them deep into graphic design. And, of course, it was a vicarious experience for me, because I had no schooling. And here I was, in a really top university, and it was like I was going to school. And I guess some of the students sensed that, too, but it was a -

MS. LARSEN: Was that okay, or -

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, it probably was.

MR. DE HARAK: I think - oh, I think it was very good, yes. But - so I was learning a great deal. This was an incredible period of time for me, because I now had a very strong feeling of where I wanted to go with my design. You have to realize that I really felt - I mean, to be a designer, for me, there was no compromise. It was not a question - as I've mentioned to you, it was not a question of wanting to be a painter, and compromising myself and being a designer, because that's the way I could make a living. I believed that design could change the world.

MS. LARSEN: Many people did.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, and -

MS. LARSEN: But not - but they didn't really follow through on it as completely as you did.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, but I really believed that.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And, of course, in the very early 1950s and 1960s, it really was kind of a revolutionary process. And -

MS. LARSEN: Can you describe how that - I mean, I think that one has an awareness that suddenly the look of things changed radically in the American landscape. But can you kind of describe what was being displaced, and what was coming in, or -

MR. DE HARAK: Oh -

MS. LARSEN: - what you were aiming at?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. I think that - I think, in a way, it's not a new idea. For example, the Bauhaus came into being, following the first world war, when a group of designers, painters, and crafts persons were sick and tired of the grand manor style of art and art education, and put together a kind of gestalt of all of them together, with a common purpose, which was to break with that kind of phony - well, it's hard to say "phony," but with that tradition, which was not working for them. So, what you had was, you know, Gropius at the head of the Bauhaus, and coming up with the glass curtain wall, which today is, you know, still prominent. And what we had was the end of the second war, which really introduced the New York School of Painting. And so - and you also had all of these, you know, marvelous poets, guys like Kenneth Patchen, and then you had all of the painters that were breaking out of that whole kind of WPA Depression painting, you know? So, if you look at what Jackson Pollock did during the days of the WPA, and then what he did - or also Mark Rothko -

MS. LARSEN: Right.

MR. DE HARAK: - you could see that it was just - it was like a door opening. It wasn't transitional, it was just, bang, that is the way it was. And it was that way with graphic design, too, and that is that all of a sudden the - and this was inspired. This was inspired, certainly, by the International School, and that was that it came about because there were scarcities of paper, there were not big budgets. You got a tremendous amount of black and white printing, because color had not really developed. I mean, certainly, there was color printing, but it had not really developed. And it was a whole asymmetric concept.

MS. LARSEN: And a kind of stripping of ornament -

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: - and excess?

MR. DE HARAK: Stripping - yes, it was cutting away all of the unnecessary appendages, leaving only those elements that stated facts, thoughts, and ideas. It was starting in the upper left-hand corner with Sans-Serif type, and reading down from left to right. And close margins. And why did they have close margins? Because paper was expensive, and it was at a premium, and they wanted to get as much information as they could. They cut away everything that they could. And, at the same time, by doing that, this put tremendous demands on them, in terms of understanding the hierarchy of order, of space, of where the emphasis would come, in terms of typography. But not so much by changing typefaces, but using one typeface and making that one typeface function in all of the ways that many other typefaces might have functioned.

MS. LARSEN: Was that an economic issue, as well as a design issue?

MR. DE HARAK: It was an economic issue, but it was also a very strong philosophic issue. So, you had, you know, in Switzerland, you know, really great designers. Well, it was interesting, because of course we know that Switzerland and Italy bump borders. So you had some terrific people, like Carlo Vivarelli, who was a transplant from Italy and now was in Switzerland. You had guys like Max Hoover, who was from Switzerland, but now was a transplant to Italy. So, in both cases, these guys would bring kind of the humanness and the warmth and the passion of the Italians to Swiss order. This is still -

MS. LARSEN: A nice combination.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. This is still reflected, for example, in the magnificent work of - he's a dear friend, and I can't think of his name. It will come to me in a minute. But you had -

MS. LARSEN: I think of Herbert Bayer. Is that the name, also? Herbert Bayer? Is that also -

MR. DE HARAK: Well, Herbert Bayer is - he's dead now. Herbert Bayer was a student at the Bow House. And Bayer was one of those, but pre-the International School. But he came up with his own alphabets, which, by today's standards, are a little corny. But they were very important then.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And he migrated the States many, many -

MS. LARSEN: Right, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: - you know, before the second world war. But I was thinking of people, of course, like Armand Hoffman [phonetic], who is still, to this day, teaching, and one of the great, great artists. I mean, his - what he does, still today, it transcends design in the traditional sense. It's a complete artistic statement. Or Joseph Mueller Brockman [phonetic]. These were giants. And then we had some giants in this country, too, that were transplants, men like Will Burtin. And certainly Erik Neitzche was very important. George Giusti was very important. We had some terrific people in this country. But they were all people who brought with them the roots of what they had learned in Europe.

MS. LARSEN: Now, with this - your desire to apply yourself to important things, things other than Detecto Scale or Ex-Lax, you probably had to think hard about who your clients would be, and who their audience would be, and how you would fit into this triangle of needs and opportunities.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, sure. And that was a very, very difficult thing, because you know, you would see maybe a poster, or an ad in a newspaper, or come across a brochure or something that reflected a kind of graphic spirit that touched your heart. And so, maybe you would try to see whoever it was the advertising manager or art director of that particular thing. The other thing is that you searched out record companies, you searched out book publishers, you searched out the pharmaceutical companies, the ones who seemed to have more of a

sympathetic eye to a contemporary approach to communication. We're talking about something here that - and, of course, I was always trying to discover - this gets maybe a little spiritual, or mysterious, but I was very severe on myself. And, to begin with, I never did a design for money. I did a design, and certainly I wanted to be paid for it. Very, very frequently I wouldn't be paid for it, because the client would be so upset with what I did, he would think I was sabotaging him.

MS. LARSEN: Oh.

MR. DE HARAK: I was always trying to do things that I didn't know. I was looking for answers to questions that I had never asked myself. I was looking always for a hidden order, or a hidden meaning. I was never a - what was going on in New York at this time, in the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s was a philosophic approach to design that dealt with a bright, illustrative solution to an idea. I will give you a corny idea, for example. An ad might say, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." And the designer would design -

MS. LARSEN: Birds and bushes.

MR. DE HARAK: - a very unique bird sitting in a hand, right, and maybe a bush over there. Done very well, done symbolically, and so on, but it would be the illustration of an idea. Or, another approach would be a play on words, what we call graphic puns. I never did this. My work was generally quite hard-edged, and very, very pure, and very abstract. And I prided myself in thinking that I would come up with some kind of form configuration that had such a dignity of its own, or a power of its own, that it would imply the idea, or some idea, to the person who came in contact with that. Very, very tall order.

MS. LARSEN: Well, especially since the great American public is your audience.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. And, consequently, I frequently looked for not a public audience, but a professional audience. So, if I could deal with doctors, if I could deal with technicians, scientists, I felt that their minds were more susceptible to the abstract. I'm not saying that I am right, but that was my thinking.

MS. LARSEN: That seems a reasonable assumption, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Consequently, an awful lot of my work was rejected. You see, I designed because that's what I really wanted to do. I always painted. I was always a painter, but never because I wanted to be a painter. I was a painter because I was terribly taken with painting, I loved painting, and I was terribly interested in process. And I -

MS. LARSEN: That's a -

MR. DE HARAK: - painted very, very steadily, really, my entire career.

MS. LARSEN: Really?

MR. DE HARAK: I mean, it became much more extensive, starting in the 1950s. And in the 1950s, I was very taken with the New York School and painting in an abstract expressionist style. I still - even when I paint the way I'm doing now, I still think an awful lot about that. And I don't think I will ever go back to that, but I respect it a lot.

MS. LARSEN: Now, the social world that you've described, the people you became friends with, and people you admired, seemed to be pretty much in the design world. Did you know painters? Did you make your way out into the world of art?

MR. DE HARAK: I didn't know many painters, no. I didn't. I certainly knew of them. I mean, in the 1950s, I don't think I ever missed an opening. You know, all of the openings in New York were on Monday nights at that time, and you would go from one gallery to the other. And I remember the Stable galleries, and Franz Kline's work there. I remember also, when I used to teach at Cooper Union, the Cedar [phonetic] Bar was just -

MS. LARSEN: Just down the road.

MR. DE HARAK: - practically steps from there.

MS. LARSEN: Right.

MR. DE HARAK: I used to go in there, and I would see all of the big guys in there, you know. And - but never

really knew them. I was very caught up with my own -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: - clique of designers.

MS. LARSEN: Right, right. Well, it was part of the life of the city at that time.

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: And so were you.

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes, yes. And then, the other thing that I did, which was really a marvelous adventure, is that I was never making any money, but on practically nothing I would get these charter flights. And every summer, I would take a full month off, and I would fly to Europe. And I would decide to do, let's say, Sweden and Denmark, and look up all of the designers. And they - and, actually, it was interesting, because at this time I was getting a reputation. And the reputation was very, very small. But the European designers were terribly interested in what the Americans were doing. And I was doing almost regularly, every month, these little kind of Dada illustrations for Esquire magazine. And I would get $75 each for them. And, if I was lucky, I would maybe do two or three of them in a month, and that, with my $4 or $5 an hour at Cooper, and maybe doing a book jacket, I would squeeze by with the rent, and get to go to a movie or something. But I would go to Europe, and I would look up these guys. And I tell you, I came to know every important designer in Europe. And I remember just sitting for hours, listening to Max Bill [phonetic], you know? And listening to Max Bill was listening to him speak mostly German and - with his lady friend, Margaret Schtabat [phonetic] - I think that was her name, but -

MS. LARSEN: Translated?

MR. DE HARAK: She - anyway, she would translate.

MS. LARSEN: My goodness.

MR. DE HARAK: So it was an incredible experience, doing that. And I felt very much at home with the European designers. About this time, also - this was in - it started, I guess, about 1960 - I had a studio on Lexington Avenue and 60th Street. And Alvin Lustig had a studio on Lexington Avenue and 58th Street. And Alvin died very tragically. He had diabetes and passed away at 40 years old. And he had this wonderful - and Alvin was a very small, tiny man. And when he died, his widow, who was Elaine [phonetic] Lustig.

MS. LARSEN: Elaine Lustig, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And she then later married Arthur Cohen. But they really had to sell Alvin's studio. And everything Alvin had was custom-designed for him, the way he did it. He designed everything. He prided himself on being a designer that did everything. The only thing he didn't do was ever take photographs or paint. But who came to the rescue, was Will Burtin. And Will Burtin bought the studio. Will was about 6' 5".

MS. LARSEN: Oh, so these things didn't suit him.

MR. DE HARAK: And so, Will appeared like a great giant in this studio, which was really designed for somebody much more miniature. But Will had hired several people who were students of mine. And so, these students were always talking about me. And so, Will wanted to know who is this de Harak. So this - they passed this information. So, I called Will, and we went and had lunch. And that followed a wonderful relationship for a number of years, until he died. But I always thought of him as kind of my surrogate father. Later, I had a marvelous experience with Gyorgy Kepes, the other person who was so important to my career.

MS. LARSEN: Those two early voices that transformed your life, really.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: In Los Angeles, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: That was why it was so thrilling.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And Will couldn't quite believe, when I told him how I felt about him. And, as a matter of fact, he recommended in 1963 - that's a long time ago - he recommended me for membership in the Alliance Graphique Internationale, which is a very, very exclusive design organization, which - today there is only a couple of hundred members, internationally. I have been a member all of these years. But that also - then, when I would

make trips for the congresses, and so on, I would meet more of these people. But I was doing a project in 1963 for the Atomic Energy Commission.

MS. LARSEN: How did something like that come about, you know, from your studio on Lexington Avenue? Did they find you, or you find them?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, they found me.

MS. LARSEN: Found you, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. I forget what the circumstance was, but they called me up and asked if I would be interested.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And it was a great project.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: It was to design four rather massive books. And so it took several years to do it. And I had to travel all over the country to work with the various universities that were doing atomic research, and so on. It was research for peace, you know, dealing with atomic energy and industry and medicine and education, and so on. But as I was working on these four books, we had to determine what the book jackets would look like. And so, I had suggested that maybe we could have three painters and myself do a book cover. And so, that was how I got together with Joseph Albers and Richard Anaskeovitz [phonetic], who was a student, had been student of Albers at Yale, and Gyorgy Kepes. And when I called Kepes, Kepes of course said, "Well, I know who you are," and so on. And so that started a kind of a nice friendship, in which, for a number of years, we exchanged greeting cards, and so on. We never got together personally, except ultimately, just before I moved here to Maine, I had an extensive interview with him in Cambridge, which was very interesting. So, it's interesting, how, as they say, chickens come home to roost, you know?

MS. LARSEN: Well, when you're walking on the same path.

MR. DE HARAK: It's one big circle, isn't it?

MS. LARSEN: It is, it is.

MR. DE HARAK: It's one big circle.

MS. LARSEN: It really is. Now, may I ask what role, if any, Museum of Modern Art played in all of this?

MR. DE HARAK: No role at all, except that they collected a number of my pieces in their graphics collection. And also, in 1963, I did a series of clocks that I just did on my own, that I was interested in maybe marketing, and they worked out very well, and the museum got excited about them, and took three into their collection. I was never able to market the clocks.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, really?

MR. DE HARAK: No.

MS. LARSEN: Oh.

MR. DE HARAK: I went all over the -

MS. LARSEN: You think they would be a natural for their store, you know?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, yes. But it never worked out. But it's okay. And - but that's the only role, other than my interest in going there.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And looking at exhibits, and so on. But it played no role at all in my life, other than that.

MS. LARSEN: Because they were the one museum in New York that seemed to have a place for design in their program.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. Their literature was reasonably well done. I always found a lot of fault with it. I found fault with everything, you know, I guess unless one of the great people did it. But - and, you know, their publications

were interesting, and certainly their design collection was interesting. And I got to know Edgar Kauffman, Jr. [phonetic] very well, and he was the one that really set up the design program at the Museum of Modern Art. But, anyway, this - what happened in my career was I guess a rather natural thing, but it doesn't happen to too many people. I was always interested in kind of spreading out and tasting all of the various dishes. So - and also, ever since I was a kid, I was always interested in materials, and how things were put together. I am always - you know, if I see an interesting -

[CD stops, re-starts]

MS. LARSEN: So, you had the Atomic Energy Commission as a steady client, then. And did - was that - did you do pretty much that for four years, or did you do other things at the same time?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, I only did the one project for the AEC. But I wanted to get back to where I was at.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, okay. Yes, all right, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And that is that I was - when the tape ended - I was always interested in how something was put together. And what this resulted in was when I would do, let's say, a trademark for somebody, ultimately, when I did this for - I forget who the client was - they said, "Well, we want to put it on the side of our building." I said, "Well, that's a whole new problem. Here, I've designed something that is really two dimensional, that is flat, that just gets printed on a piece of paper. And now you want to put it on a building." We're dealing with a scale change, we're dealing with a material change. We're dealing with something that now becomes, at least, in relief. But it may become sculptural. And we're dealing with a problem how to make it. And then, how do you get it on the building? Very, very - just the simplest thing. It's a very complex idea.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: This came about the same time that somebody would say, "We're doing a building" - and maybe it's a client of mine - and they say, "We would like you to do all of the signs in the building." This is many years ago, and up to that point, there were many sign companies. And what would happen is the architect would design a building, and then turn to a sign company, and let the sign company design the signs. And the sign company had no real understanding of typography or anything, they would just do what suited them, in terms of what their experience was, and what were their specialities. Maybe it was only a woodworking company, so you would get a wooden sign. Maybe they didn't have metalworking facilities. But when a designer would come in, the designer would make a decision based on, really, what the quality of the building was, and what his experience as a typographer was, and would select the material and find a company that could make it, but also would supervise the quality of the manufacture. A tough, tough order.

MS. LARSEN: Maybe you can work with the architect, or at least speak with the architect?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Then you would work with the architect on this, of course, and it would be usually the architect that would start to call you. I was one of the - I don't like to use that word; I was going to say "pioneers" - but I was certainly one of the first people to really get involved with this kind of thing on a large basis, so much so that, today, one can make a decision and make a career out of just being a designer of architectural signage. It became a very big part of my business. Ultimately, when I had many people working for me, we did, for example, all of the signage for the World Financial Center, the two twin towers.

MS. LARSEN: Really?

MR. DE HARAK: That was a four-year project. Four years we worked on that. So, it was very much of a staple, in terms of bringing in an income.

MS. LARSEN: Sure. Then you dealt with I.M. Pei and his firm, and those people?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, that was not I.M. Pei.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, that wasn't?

MR. DE HARAK: That was Caesar Pelli.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, Caesar. Okay.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, I.M. Pei didn't do that project.

MS. LARSEN: Okay, okay, all right, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Right. But I have worked -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: But that was another marvelous thing, what happened with my career, and that is that I had the opportunity of working with just about every top architect, you know? Ed Larrabee Barnes, Phillip Johnson [phonetic], Kevin Roche, you name them and I worked with them.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And it was very interesting to know these people and work with them. Anyway, there was a - okay. As - so at some point which was around in the 1970s, I started to do this kind of work, and it became a very big part of my business, and it meant that I had to increase my staff. And then, the other thing that occurred was I started to do exhibition design.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, how did that begin?

MR. DE HARAK: It's very, very amusing. A friend of mine, who is still a dear friend, who is very much of a nomad, he would work someplace and then move on to someplace else, and so on. He ended up teaching design at - I guess it was called the University of Ontario, but it was in Kitchener, Ontario. And the Canadians were planning Expo 1967. And the year that these occurrences took place were in 1965. And the Canadian government really didn't know quite how to go about this whole thing. So, what they did was they hired - and Kitchener, the - I guess it was called the University of Ontario - they had - for some reason they had a design program there, which was quite minimal, but it was mainly an engineering school, as I understand it, or recall it. And the Canadian government, which I believe had put the project in the hands of the Department of Defense, hired the University of Ontario to do studies on a series of pavilions that would make up - would be part of a series called - I think it was, "Man and His Universe." And they needed somebody - so they were doing the engineering on this building, which was rather atrocious, actually. Actually, the building itself looked rather nice, but their methodologies were very strange. But, anyway, they needed somebody to do the exhibitry for it, and they had no way to -

MS. LARSEN: They didn't have a lot of time, if they only had two years.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. Well, that's generally the -

MS. LARSEN: Is that it?

MR. DE HARAK: - lead time. But anyway, my friend suggested me to design the exhibitry, and I had never done an exhibit. I had never done an exhibit. Well, they sent the guy down who was head of the program to see me. And he was supposed to arrive in the afternoon. There were tremendous rainstorms. And so, he finally got in, but he didn't get to my office until, I guess, 8:00 or 9:00 at night. So I was waiting for him, of course. And I remember I was playing Billie Holiday on the turntable, and kind of killing time. It turns out that this guy, of course, was out of his mind over Billie Holiday, and we had a couple of drinks, and so it turned into kind of a nice social thing. It had nothing to do, really, with work. And then I showed him some of my work, which is impossible to believe, but what I showed him was some book jackets that I had done, and he thought they were terrific, and everything. And so, they invited me up there to make a proposal. And I made a proposal, and it was very complex. But I had to do it immediately. I had never done this before, and I had a hotel in - well, I went to Kitchener, and met with him, and they said, "Can you give us a proposal this weekend," and I said, "Yes." So, I went back to Toronto, to my hotel in Toronto. And, for the weekend, I wrote this proposal. I don't know, I may still have a copy of it, I don't know. Anyway, I figured this whole thing out, and got a hotel stenographer to type it all up, and I brought it back to them, and they bought it.

MS. LARSEN: Did you even know how you would have these things fabricated, or who you would get to work with you?

MR. DE HARAK: That wasn't the problem at that time. The problem was to figure out what a team would be, and what kind of hours it would take the team to produce a preliminary set of designs, because my proposal was for six months' work. So, I wrote the proposal. They accepted it. I did not know what I was going to do, so I went back to Will Burtin, because Will and I were good friends now.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, that's great.

MR. DE HARAK: And Will was one of the major exhibition designers in the world. And I said, "You know, what I really need is a guy that really knows his business, that's a job captain." And he says, "I have a terrific guy

working for me, and he's just finishing a project, and maybe he would come to work for you." He did. He's a dear friend today. And, as a matter of fact, he was the project captain on this, as well as the World's Fair we did in Osaka. So, that's how we got started. And it worked out, and it was a very, very stressful, very exciting experience, but very stressful. You know, I was flying up to Montreal sometimes three times a week for two years.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, goodness. And that was a very high profile fair.

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. LARSEN: That was a real successful one, from a public awareness point of view.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, yes. So, anyway, this is what got me into it. And then I ended up doing a lot of corporate exhibitions, you know, a company would -

MS. LARSEN: For example, could you tell -

MR. DE HARAK: - would build a new corporate headquarters, and they would have all of this dead space in the lobby. And the architect would suggest that they have a corporate museum, you know, dealing with their history. And they would hire me to do it. It was good work, it was exciting. And so I did major exhibitions for people, like General Foods, for Conoco, the oil company, and Eli Lilly, and -

MS. LARSEN: That wonderful image of the engine all taken -

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, that was for the Cummins Engine Company, a very famous company.

MS. LARSEN: Where was that?

MR. DE HARAK: That's in Columbus, Indiana, where - that's the architectural Mecca of the world, there. That's where Irwin Miller [phonetic], the chairman of the board, would - anybody coming in - he renovated all of - not all, but a great deal of Columbus, Indiana. And that was the home office. And every building that he built, which included banks and everything else - he's a very wealthy man - he would hire a great architect to do it. And then, they had a foundation which would encourage any client that wanted to establish a headquarters there, the foundation would give them a list of architects, great architects, that they could use, and underwrite the fee.

MS. LARSEN: Goodness.

MR. DE HARAK: So -

MS. LARSEN: So this encouraged the perpetuation -

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, so every great architect is in Columbus, Indiana. So that was one of the richest projects I ever did, the project for Cummins Engine Company. But I did an awful lot of that, so that my closing years were mostly exhibition design, a great deal of sign programs for big corporations.

MS. LARSEN: How did that wonderful clock come into being on St. John Street?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, that was, again, a question of doing a - doing what we called all of the environmental graphics for a major financial building.

MS. LARSEN: And where was it located?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, that was on John Street and can't remember, but down - lower Manhattan, in the financial district, at 127 John Street. But I had previously done a building where I did also that piece of sculpture at 77 Water Street, which is for the same client. And I did all of the graphics. And I put an airport on the roof, which was a marvel.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, my goodness.

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, that was wonderful. We - he - the client was Mel Kaufman, who is a terrific guy, and he wanted me to do something with the roof, he said, "because people fly over it." So, I said, "Why don't we do a World War I fighter plane with a landing strip and a wind sock, and the whole thing?" So we got a terrific sculptor to do a full-scale, perfect replica of a World War - British SE5, and caused a lot of trouble with the Federal Aeronautics Commission, because people would fly over it, and they would see this wind sock, and they would get confused. But, anyway, after that, I did all of the environmental work, the tunnel and a lot of sculpturing, and the clock.

MS. LARSEN: Now, can you tell me about the neon entrance to that one building in New York?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. We wanted to find a unique way to get into the building. And the way the architects had designed it, it was an extremely awkward long tunnel that you walk through, that was - oh, it must have been 250 feet.

MS. LARSEN: And where was this, and when was this?

MR. DE HARAK: This was in 1970. And it was down on John Street, in the financial district. And I don't know how I got the idea, but I decided it would be just great to get - oh, I know. Mel Kauffman always enjoyed the idea of found objects, and simple mechanical ways of doing things, and finding industrial objects that would serve as furnishings, and so on. So, I got this idea of getting a really large sewer pipe, which was about a - I guess a 9 or 10-foot diameter, and -

MS. LARSEN: Made of?

MR. DE HARAK: Galvanized corrugated steel. And putting this sewer pipe in there. And then, having - and the sewer pipe went all the way around, but then there was a walking platform, which was about five or six feet wide, that would be very beautifully carpeted, that ran the full distance. And then the tunnel would be ringed with neon. And -

MS. LARSEN: Very strange, very unusual, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Well, it was probably the most - and all of the fashion magazines would use it, you know, and they would -

MS. LARSEN: As a runway for their models?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. Oh, it was terrific, yes. That's destroyed now.

MS. LARSEN: It is?

MR. DE HARAK: They have sold the building to somebody that wanted to make apartments out of it, so they've changed that. But they've kept the clock, and they've kept some of the other things. That was an interesting project. Anyway, about that time, I was - I guess I had gotten - had my fill of teaching, I had been teaching for 36, or 37, or 38 years, and that was enough. So I retired from that. And then, really, had my fill of doing graphic design, as such. Not so much the process of doing it, but the entire area of seeing clients and smiling when you didn't want to smile, and that kind of thing.

MS. LARSEN: Before we leave this, could we go over what you did at - and with the Metropolitan Museum? Because that's such a fixture in New York life.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Well, I worked on that project for 10 years, 10 years.

MS. LARSEN: Now, you worked - who did you work with?

MR. DE HARAK: The architect was Kevin Roche, and the director at that time was Thomas Hoving. And later, it became Philipe DiMontibello [phonetic]. And Hoving was terrific to work with. And, of course, Kevin Roche is a great architect, and it was a pleasure to work with him on that.

MS. LARSEN: Now, you designed the "M" that they still use on the bag?

MR. DE HARAK: No, it's not an "M," it's the - it actually says -

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes, "Metropolitan Museum?"

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: But it's in very large letters that run around, so you do see -

MS. LARSEN: Right, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. And -

MS. LARSEN: And when was that design done?

MR. DE HARAK: 1973.

MS. LARSEN: And they still use it?

MR. DE HARAK: They have sold something like several million a year. They sell the bags. And it's been going on now for almost 30 years.

MS. LARSEN: And -

MR. DE HARAK: And they had great reluctance to use that design.

MS. LARSEN: Why?

MR. DE HARAK: I think it was too modern for them, although I used a very classic typeface, the Caslon 540 [phonetic] on it, which they later used for almost everything in the museum. But I used primary colors for the bags.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: They would have loved it if I had given them some kind of marble motif, or something like that, you know. But anyway, I worked on that project for 10 years, and did many other things in the -

MS. LARSEN: You did the Egyptian wing, yes?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, yes.

MS. LARSEN: What kind of adventures did you have in that?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, it took me to Egypt.

MS. LARSEN: Did it, really?

MR. DE HARAK: And -

MS. LARSEN: Yes?

MR. DE HARAK: - got me acquainted with Reader's Digest, who underwrote just about all of that. Very interesting project to do, and I'm pleased with it. The real challenge was to - the project was going to be broken into three phases, doing one section at a time, because they never wanted to close the entire thing. And I knew a great deal of time would be involved in it. So one had to be so careful how one did the first couple of phases, so that 8 or 10 years later, you still had an open mind to working in the same vernacular.

MS. LARSEN: So, what kind of choice did you make?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, I - all of the typography is in a beautiful classic face, it's Caslon 540, designed during the time of Charles Dickens. And, of course, most of our typefaces, you know, our really good typefaces, are dated. I mean, even the Sans-Serif Berthold Akzidenz Grotesk, which is exactly what it's called, here in this country it's called Standard Medium. But that typeface was designed during the Industrial Revolution in Germany, you know?

MS. LARSEN: And, still, it looks so modern.

MR. DE HARAK: Modern, of course, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Now, today the word "modern" has all kinds of problematical connotations for people younger than either one of us. Modern is a philosophy, as well as a time. Did - and I think that, looking at your work, a lot of it looks to me very classically modern. It has that fundamentalist quality, that leanness, that directness. Do you still feel close to that aesthetic, and still believe in that?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, very much so, yes. Actually, it's interesting. I think that sometimes I am tempted to put typography with it, because, you know - but it - modern is - it's funny, because the word "modern" is a little - almost a little offensive, because it is used so indiscriminately. But it seems to me that something is modern if it's really of its time. And when we say something of its time, it seems to me we have to think of being as something perhaps, again, rather mysterious, of a future time. Because, for it to really be modern, it has to be

original, it shouldn't have been done before. And my process is always to try to do something I don't know. Now, it's true that one painting I do will lead to another, but it will lead to the other, really, in the most mysterious ways, a way that I have no control over. Interesting story. Let me - this will explain it. Recently, about two years ago, I was talking with a friend up in Toronto, who - a very fine graphic designer, and he's also a painter, and he paints in the same idiom that I paint. And I was talking with him on the phone about painting, and the process, and so on. And he said - and I was talking about - yes, I was doing some studies. He said, "You mean you're doing them on the computer?" I said, "No." He said, "You mean you don't work with a computer?" I said, "No." He said, "You're crazy." He said, "You've got to do - you've got to get a computer, and I will send you some stuff that I do, and it really works out terrific, you get terrific colors that way, and you get this whole thing worked out, and then you paint it." And I said, "Gee, that sounds interesting," so he sent me the things and they've very good. This caused me to spend $4,000 on a computer, and a 21-inch monitor, and all of the stuff, although I didn't know how to use it. And I got some instruction, and I actually produced a couple of pretty neat designs. And then it hit me. This is the thing, this piece of paper now, is the thing, not the painting.

MS. LARSEN: Not the painting.

MR. DE HARAK: And if I take this into my studio, now, and want to paint it, what am I going to do, make a grid, and -

MS. LARSEN: Just -

MR. DE HARAK: - and copy it?

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: So what I would become is a copyist of something. I said, "This is offensive." It's okay if you stop with the computer, and that is terrific. But now, to translate it as an acrylic or an oil painting onto canvas doesn't make any sense. Because what I do - and so the computer has kind of gone to waste, except for e-mail, and a few things like that - but what I do is I maybe make a little thumbnail sketch of a possibility. But it's just in pencil and so on. And I say, "Yes, that's a beginning." And so, each time that I put an element down, that invariably makes me reconsider the shape of the next element, what its location is, its scale, its surface, its color relationship. And I find that the painting is an extremely painful process, very, very difficult, in which it keeps trying to tell me what to do, and I have a hard job understanding what it's saying to me. And when I ultimately get it finished, or break the back of it, I know what it's going to be, then -

MS. LARSEN: You feel very -

MR. DE HARAK: Then I feel good, and I have a lot of joy.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: So, modernity, for me, is something that deals so much with process and dealing with the unknown.

MS. LARSEN: See, as you know, post-Modernism deals a lot with taking things retrospectively, finding pre-existing elements, recombining them, quoting from the past, assuming that there really is no futuristic vision. It's just a different mind set. And there are a couple of generations now, who have grown up with this other attitude. So they look at Modern as a Utopian dream that had a time period. And it's a - and then there are other people who say this is just another permutation on the modern era.

MR. DE HARAK: Well, I think, to begin with, literary specialists, you know, find it necessary to give titles to things. post-Modernism, to me, means really - I think what you're saying is true, and yet it's always meant something else to me. What it meant to me was a direct connection with - the progress of post-Modernism was in direct relationship, for me, to the progress of the computer. I, personally, don't feel that the computer has ever done anything that has made my life, or anybody else's life, really richer. If you look at a Charles Dickens manuscript for the Christmas Story, you see that he wrote it on foolscap, and crossed out, and so on. And, ultimately, when the thing was put into hot type and printed, it looks the same, or as beautiful, as anything that is done today with a computer. What the computer does for us is it can accelerate. Meis van de Rohe didn't use a computer, and there is nothing as timeless as his work, I think. The thing that the computer did was almost single-handedly, in one stroke, almost destroyed the traditional graphic design industry, as we know it. It put countless typographers out of business. It introduced a level of waste, in terms of line of type machines and fonts of type in the millions of tons that was just thrown out and melted, and so on, and gave us, instead, something that came out on a sheet of paper without the use of type. And also, to get around the legalities of using typefaces, typefaces were ornamented and changed slightly, which -

MS. LARSEN: Just to get them -

MR. DE HARAK: - destroyed the honor of that type. The great typographic craftsmen don't exist any more. The great craftsmen were fired, and secretaries were put in the position to set type. This all came in relationship to a new style called post-Modernism, which was reflected, certainly, in architecture, but it also reflected in graphic design. They ran absolutely parallel. And the foolishness and obscurities that - the foolishness is really a good word that is reflected in so much of the post-Modern architecture done by some of our most prominent architects, is direct in line with the foolishness that is -

[END CD 2]

MS. LARSEN: April 27, the year - this is tape number 3 done on April 27, the year 2000, with Mr. Rudolph de Harak. So, we were - when we left off, we were at a point where the world of design was changing, and partly just because of time passing, but also because of the introduction of the computer. And we were talking about the years - the early 1980s, I believe.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. There are several things that happened. Without doubt, the computer was a dynamic force that really altered a tremendous amount of - or, to a great extent, it altered the direction and quality of graphic design. It also altered very much the interest that young students took in graphic design that they might not otherwise have done, because the computer, you know, started to take a great importance. Like parents saying, "You ought to be a lawyer, you ought to be a doctor," now they say, "You ought to be a computer programmer or specialist." So it had a certain magnetic draw to it. But there was another thing that happened. The Swiss, who were the driving force, really - and certainly the Germans played some role in this, but the Swiss were really, I think, the driving force behind what was called the "international style." It, however, did have a relationship - a very strong relationship - to what was happening in Germany just following World War II, and that is that Max Bill, who was not only a very special painter, and also a very special sculptor, but he was also an architect. He had been a student at the Bauhaus, and he also was a terrific typographer and graphic designer. He was really - he wore a lot of hats. He was kind of a Renaissance guy. He was also a politician, and served, I believe, in what would be the equivalent of one of our state houses in the assembly, or what have you. And he was the driving force behind a new school in Ulm, Germany. He designed the school, as an architect, and he became the school's first rector. And the idea of the school was that it would teach nothing but applied design. So, it was typography, it was product design, things of that sort. In fact, it really picked up, on a certain level, where the Bauhaus ended. I actually had been offered a Fulbright to go there and teach, and did go over there, but I never did teach. I just decided I just couldn't do it. I had too many other things that I was caught up in.

MS. LARSEN: About when was this?

MR. DE HARAK: This would have been about 1963, in that period. So, there was that power going on in Germany, but I am even speaking, you know, of 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948. And the Swiss really were, in my opinion, the prime movers in this new movement of typographic style. Some time later, while all of this was going on, a young man by the name of Wolfgang Weingardt was a student at the - trying to think of the - I will think of it - one of the prominent schools in Basil [phonetic], the Kunskavaberschul [phonetic], that was it. And he was a student there, and became very, very powerful, as a designer, and became even a teacher there, and a very important teacher. And somewhere in the - I would - I'm not absolutely certain of this date, but I would say that it would be somewhere probably in the mid-1970s, he started to become rather fed up with this innate discipline that was brought to every graphic design problem, using either Helvetica or Akzidenz Grotesk as the typeface, everything being asymmetrical, and so on, and started to take extraordinary typographic liberties, which were really quite revolutionary, and very upsetting. And he did it mostly on posters. And he started to bring these ideas to his teaching. And that really was the beginning of post-Modern graphic design. And so, we had wonderful designers such as April Greiman, who lives in California. She was a student of his, and very dynamic woman, and she brought this to California. And it spread like wildfire. Unfortunately, it was, again, grabbed up by all kinds of people who had zero talent, or next to zero talent. And when April did something, it had a great deal of meaning. Whereas, somebody else would do something, and it was just kind of -

MS. LARSEN: Just kind of messy?

MR. DE HARAK: It was just messy. Grunge, as you called it. So, that was basically where all of that started, and I think that that is kind of important.

MS. LARSEN: And then -

MR. DE HARAK: I never could come to terms with it. And a number of - shall we call them classic Modern designers - could never come to terms with it, guys like Paul Rand could not, guys like Bradbury Thompson could not, guys like Saul Bass could not.

MS. LARSEN: There is no reason why you should have to, you know?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, but it was kind of expected of you.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: But - and also, great designers like Massimo Vinelli have never done it. Anyway, as this was permeating the field, and as the computer was making an incredible inroads into the thinking and philosophies of graphic designers, I was getting more and more fed up with the business. I had been doing it for many, many years, and I didn't feel like smiling at clients any more. And it's interesting, because I had always felt that nobody should live anywhere but New York. It was the Mecca, the place to live. Now, of course, I don't feel that way at all. And I made a decision to get out.

MS. LARSEN: How did you come to Maine? Had you come here before?

MR. DE HARAK: An - no, I had never been here - well, I had been here, but not - actually, I came here once to give a lecture in the winter time, in Portland, at what was then the Portland School of Design, and - Portland School of Art. And that really convinced me Maine was no place to be. It was an icy day in February.

MS. LARSEN: In Portland, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: But, anyway, how I got to Maine was another aspect of my personality. Not so much now, but for many years I was a very, very dedicated fisherman. And, oh, it was really - you know, the way I would do everything, I got into it very deeply, and would end up making my own rods, and my own lures, and -

MS. LARSEN: Fly fishing?

MR. DE HARAK: No, I was not a - I was a surf fisherman.

MS. LARSEN: Oh.

MR. DE HARAK: Because we had a house on Fire Island, and I used to fish the surf for striped bass and bluefish, and was very, very much into it. So, when Carol and I decided to sell the Fire Island place, and also to sell the loft that we lived in at lower Manhattan -

MS. LARSEN: When was this, what year?

MR. DE HARAK: This was in 1986. We started to look on the north shore of Long Island, and we looked in Connecticut, and we looked in Massachusetts, and then we kept going north, and we looked in Rhode Island, couldn't find what we needed. We ended up in Maine. And originally, we thought it would be great to be around Portland, and the airport. And we kept going until we got up here, near Bar Harbor, in Trenton, and we found what we wanted on the water, and settled in, and designed our own house, and -

MS. LARSEN: When did you meet Carol?

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, I met her 34 years ago, in 1966. We've been married for, I guess, 32 years. Anyway, it was great to come up here, because I was able to maybe get a little more distance on my life. I had done so much traveling, and spent many, many, many trips to Europe and meeting painters and designers, and so on, and I didn't want to do any graphic design anymore, which I really don't. I do an occasional thing for somebody, but I just really wanted to examine painting. I had started, the last two years that I was in New York, to make a lot of collages that were based on tickets and the typical trivia that I had picked up on trips, and so on. And I was doing collages, and I came up here, and I actually had a couple of shows.

MS. LARSEN: They're beautifully framed. Those frames are yours, as well, are they not?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, that's really part of it, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, sure.

MR. DE HARAK: But, anyway, I really started to very intensely paint again. I did paint - all of those years, I painted a lot of stuff, destroyed most of it, and gave a few pieces away, sold a couple of pieces. But -

MS. LARSEN: Did you ever exhibit as a painter?

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. I had a - but they were only exhibits of my painting peripherally to my graphic design. I had a major exhibition at Carnegie Tech, which was - it's now Carnegie Mellon, but it was Carnegie Tech. And then, another one, The American Institute of Graphic Arts, and a couple of other places that I don't recall. But it was

always ancillary to the actual graphic designs. And so, somehow coming up here and being on the water and being amongst the trees and - it gave me some calm and -

MS. LARSEN: Did you go through a -

MR. DE HARAK: To do things - excuse me - to do things without a sense of urgency to them, and to do things without any concern whether anybody else would like them, to set the beginnings of a problem - the problem which I really didn't know - and start to work through it. And it's amazing, the way I feel about the work, the way it has changed and developed, and -

MS. LARSEN: As we are talking, and I am getting to know you better, I think that one might assume that, you know, for much of your life as a graphic designer, that you solved other people's problems, and now you're setting [sic] your own. But in the last few hours, I have kind of understood that those problems were always your problems, even when they were someone else's.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, yes.

MS. LARSEN: And so, you kind of defined it as that creative thing belonged to you, all the way through.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. It's interesting. One situation which involved maybe, really, in a way, my most important client, which was three years of work for McGraw-Hill, which I did about 350 book covers for them, so I would do anywhere between 10 and 20 book covers in a month, you know, and it was really wonderful. And what happened was, the editor - and it was mostly trade stuff and it was always paperbacks - what had happened is that he had heard of me, and he called me to do a trademark. So I did the trademark. But when I was doing the trademark, I wanted to show it in application. And I said that to him. This guy's name was Dick Fisher [phonetic]. And Dick sent me, I guess, half a dozen books that they were intending to reprint. They were doing a very big reprint program. And so, I took those covers, and I applied the trademark to them. And when he saw them, he said, "Oh, I love the trademark," and there was no question about it. And he said, "But, you know, you've done these for these books, and can I use them?" And I said, "Of course we can use them." So, we talked about a price, and he said, "I never understood that. I didn't think that you would be interested in doing the book jackets," and I said, "I would love to do the book covers." And there was almost never a discrepancy with what I did. I mean, he would ask questions and this and that, but I would do the book cover design, and he would just approve it, and I would go ahead and do it. It was a very scary thing, because the - it meant that I was not doing it for him, I was doing it for myself, because he accepted me. And I thought this - I have to do these so that they are - you know, really make a challenge out of it, and so on. So, this went on and on, and finally he said to me, "You know what? Why do you even bother making the design? Just go ahead and you design it, and do the mechanical on it, and just send me the mechanical."

MS. LARSEN: Golly.

MR. DE HARAK: And at that time, I started to get pretty nervous about it, because I thought, "There has to be something wrong if somebody can accept my work that readily."

MS. LARSEN: I see.

MR. DE HARAK: And I must be very candid. When I ultimately laid out on the floor all of these book covers, and filled the whole floor, I very analytically went through them, and I really felt that there was only about 10 percent that I really felt that I really reached something. But that was a lot.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes.

MR. DE HARAK: You know? That was -

MS. LARSEN: Well, they are very familiar.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: I guess, to me, because I was in college at that time, and your book covers were everywhere.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: We all knew of them.

MR. DE HARAK: So that was a very, very interesting challenge, and - but back to the painting. I can only say that I - the painting really tells me what I should do. I -

MS. LARSEN: Do you feel the painting requires more of all of you, or is there a -

MR. DE HARAK: No.

MS. LARSEN: It doesn't?

MR. DE HARAK: No. Graphic design was very painful and very hard. And it was doubly hard, because you found yourself trying to second-guess clients.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: But it was more profound a problem than that. What you were doing is you were making a design that had to satisfy a client, but it had to anticipate what that client felt was good for a broad-scale audience. And these two ideas don't necessarily mesh. And then, on top of that, if you want to do it and satisfy yourself at the same time, it's an extremely complex trilogy.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, right.

MR. DE HARAK: And it was very, very difficult. Then the other problem was, of course, as time went on, and I put more and more assistants to work and so on, then you had to somehow really control the way that assistant worked. Very, very complicated idea.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: And if one were to ask me what was really the most satisfying time of my rather lengthy career, I would say the period from 1959 to 1965, a 6-year period, in which I did a lot of book covers - of course all of the McGraws, but I did also a lot of record covers and some posters - and also where I somehow touched the skirts of God, in terms of my enthusiasm and my opening myself up in a very, very rich way. But I -

MS. LARSEN: So now that you're here, and you're painting, you're doing this pretty much alone. Is that a very different experience for you?

MR. DE HARAK: Well, it's much -

MS. LARSEN: You have Carol, who is also a creative person -

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, yes.

MS. LARSEN: - a photographer.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes. And, you know, I always try to bounce things off of her, as she does me, with her work. But it's a solitary thing, and it's hard work, as you know.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. And this time, who is your audience?

MR. DE HARAK: My audience?

MS. LARSEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. DE HARAK: Me. That's all. I mean, I'd like somebody like you to like it, and I like my wife to like it, and I have a circle of friends and some painters up here that I certainly would like them to like it, but - and I give shows. Don't sell much, but I - and also, you know, it's interesting. I really, in a way, don't like to sell it. I don't really need the money, and I don't like to sell it if it's to somebody I don't know. I feel that there is very much a living part of me in those paintings, and I want them to - those paintings to rest with people whom I love. I think that's a very important aspect of this.

MS. LARSEN: They're hard won, I think, too.

MR. DE HARAK: They're what?

MS. LARSEN: They're hard won.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: They are very intricate paintings.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: But your paintings have gone through even a few phases since I have known you, which is a couple of years now, that you - they felt rather architectonic, and then suddenly they felt atmospheric. And now they

feel -

MR. DE HARAK: Cosmic.

MS. LARSEN: Cosmic, yes. And yet, there is still that architectonic -

MR. DE HARAK: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: - aspect to the whole thing.

MR. DE HARAK: Yes, yes. I think that I am gifted and fortunate in having a rather strong sense of order. And I learned so much of that as a graphic designer. And not because I was a graphic designer, but because I made myself alert to the inter-relationship of things: colors; forms; and -

MS. LARSEN: Where does the order come from? Is it -

MR. DE HARAK: I don't know. I mean, I guess somebody else could have worked just as hard, and studied as hard as I, and not grabbed it in the same way. I guess it's - you know, it's kind of like saying, "How come John Coltrane played the way he played, and Charlie Parker played the way he played," you know? It is - one doesn't - I don't know. I -

MS. LARSEN: But there is a very strong need for that order in your life, in your work, in yourself.

MR. DE HARAK: Oh, yes, and the way I arrange my furniture, and you know, do things like that. That's true. You know, there is another interesting thing that Carol commented on, that up until - I guess up until two years ago, I was painting in a very, very disordered environment. It was down in the basement, and not a lot of light, and I have a wood shop, and the dust would blow in there, and it was pretty messy. And then I had a guy come in and do most of the heavy work, but redesign the whole thing with good lighting, everything was painted white, everything was tiled, plenty of storage space, everything was done. And I find - what Carol commented on was that, "You know, your painting has really changed. It's gotten better, and you have another attitude, kind of philosophically, in your painting, now that everything has changed." And it is true. And, for example, you see that painting room right now. That's the way I keep it. And, now, when I take a tool, I put it back, and -

MS. LARSEN: But there is an expansiveness that your work has now that - maybe the order is all around you, so you're not feeling you have to make it, impose it necessarily, as much in the picture. I don't know.

MR. DE HARAK: Maybe. I don't know. I don't know.

MS. LARSEN: But there is a warmth and a generosity and expansiveness in the work that even - even a sense of humor, or paradox.

MR. DE HARAK: In some of it, yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: Now, there is a painter that I respect a great deal, Robert Slutzky, who sees a great sense of humor in my painting.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. DE HARAK: I don't feel funny about it. Now, there is another thing that has happened, which is really interesting. In the past, I could never paint to music. I think music is actually a much more profound experience than painting, than the visual arts. I mean, you know, it's in our soul. And I never was able to play music when I painted. But now, as a matter of fact, there is a whole group of five paintings that I have dedicated to Lee Konitz, a great jazz saxophonist, because I feel that his playing - because I was playing his music - that it inspired me very much, and it directed me in some sense. So now I find that I -

MS. LARSEN: You can.

MR. DE HARAK: I play a lot of his music, and I play a great deal of Keith Jarrett when I am painting, and these - I'm comfortable with that. And it's - I mean, sure, I turn it off when I have to really think something through, or something, but generally, I keep that music going. Anyway, do you think that this explains enough about me?

MS. LARSEN: I think so. I think we -

MR. DE HARAK: Is there -

MS. LARSEN: I think we have done a very broad coverage, and I am sure there is lots more to know, but I think that's pretty good.

MR. DE HARAK: Well, I don't know. I don't know if there is much more to know.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, I think -

MR. DE HARAK: If there is, maybe I don't know it.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, I'm sure - yes.

MR. DE HARAK: I just - but I love doing this, and I love the joy of having a result that I feel comfortable with, and that I feel that the effort has been profitable. Because it's painful doing this.

MS. LARSEN: Sure.

MR. DE HARAK: You know, it really is.

MS. LARSEN: It's very intimate, and it -

MR. DE HARAK: It's tiring, and -

MS. LARSEN: Yes, yes. But we're very grateful that you consented to do this. And, dear friend, thank you very much.

MR. DE HARAK: Well, you're welcome.

MS. LARSEN: Okay.

MR. DE HARAK: It's a pleasure.

MS. LARSEN: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...July 3, 2008