Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Thomas Nozkowski, 2009 June 11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Thomas Nozkowski on 2009 June 11. The interview took place in High Falls, NY, at Nozkowski's home and studio, and was conducted by Kathy Goncharov for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Joyce Robins Nozkowski reviewed the transcript in 2019. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

KATHY GONCHAROV: So—

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, I was born on March 23, 1944, in Teaneck, New Jersey, to my mother, Edna Ruth Angevine, and my father, Edward Stanley Nozkowski. My father was in the Pacific in the navy at that point. And my mother was doing various kinds of war work in northern New Jersey. I was raised in Dumont, New Jersey, a town in Bergen County, about 15 miles from New York City, and spent my weekends and my summers at my grandfather's farm in the Hudson Valley. My father was the only one of 11 children who didn't continue working on the farm or buying farms, living on farms nearby. So I had a substantial connection to the Hudson Valley and to that kind of life.

My father's family were Polish immigrants who came to the U.S. in 1924. And my mother's family were of both Dutch and English extraction from the Hudson Valley, going back to about 1680 in Kingston, New York.

[Side conversation.]

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KATHY GONCHAROV: Okay. We're interviewing Tom Nozkowski [for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution] in his home and studio near New Paltz [NY, June 11, 2009].

TOM NOZKOWSKI: In High Falls, New York.

KATHY GONCHAROV: In High Falls, New York. Okay. So continue on what you were saying earlier.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. So I spent my childhood divided between Chester—Sugarloaf—New York, about 50 miles north of New York City, and a suburban town in Bergen County, New Jersey. I was pretty much raised under the influence of my mother's family. I went to a Dutch Reformed church. My aunts were schoolteachers and principals in the school system I was educated in. But I also had quite a bit of the farming culture of my father's family.

I skipped a grade in grammar school, and so graduated from high school when I was 17 years old. Before that, I'd won a scholarship to New York University School of Art Education. They had a scheme that they tried for a few years where they would have a competition for art students in the metropolitan area. High school students, juniors in high school, if they won, and there would be 20 of us every year, would come into New York on Wednesday afternoons and spend—and have a six-hour class with some of the teachers—Hale Woodruff and Robert Kaupelis—at NYU.

I loved the city and wanted to be in the city even more than I wanted to be an artist. And having the opportunity to go to this class was really a wonderful thing for me. I would sometimes try to make a day of it and go and wander around the Village and go to bookstores and movies and go to the Museum of Modern Art. And then, you know, take this studio class. Very much an Abstract Expressionist class. As I remember, Hale Woodruff, who I think, was the department chair then, a black artist. And Robert Kaupelis, who was—I think he's still around—who was a very interesting second-generation Abstract Expressionist painter, very loose, very juicy.

My father was a mail carrier, and my mother had different, odd, low-level factory jobs or sometimes bookkeeping jobs. There certainly wasn't any money in my family. I have a sister who's eight years younger. And it was clear that I couldn't go to college unless I got a scholarship to go somewhere.

I took the test for Cooper Union and, to my surprise, got accepted to Cooper, and jumped at the opportunity to be in New York, where I wanted to be, and on the Lower East Side, where I wanted to be, within what I wanted to be, you know. NYU also offered me a scholarship. Actually, they offered it to all of us who were in that high

school class. I think most of us had also been accepted to Cooper, and we all ended up there as a little subgroup. Some of my best friends to this day are from that original group.

So I entered Cooper Union in the fall of 1961 and worked with a number of interesting artists. My drawing teacher was Robert Gwathmey, who was much loved and was very easy to love. A very positive, pleasant, amusing, larger-than-life character. Also in that first year I worked with a color guy named Ben Cunningham, who's not too well known now, but had a bit of a flurry of interest during the Op Art movement that sort of came into play around the same time, maybe a year or two later. And at Cooper Union I also studied and failed miserably at architectonics, which I failed in my first year and had to take again in my second year. Which is curious because it ended up—architecture has ended up—being a great interest of mine as an adult.

Anyway, I went to Cooper Union for three years. I worked with Angelo Ippolito, with David Lund, Victor Candell, John Kacere. I met a lovely man named Richards Rubin. Reuben Kadish, an abstract sculptor, very good sculptor. Varujan Boghosian for three-dimensional design. I'm sure I'm leaving somebody out. But it was a nice group of people. Hannes Beckmann, another Bauhaus color person who was at Cooper.

The school is fairly small, about a hundred people in each year, of which maybe two-thirds were painters and sculptors. No, let me take that back. One-third were painters and sculptors, fine artists; one-third were graphic artists; and a third were architects. And we pretty much all took each other's courses. It was only in the last year or two that the graphic artists and the fine artists separated off. And we truly used to hate that, the fine artists, that we had to take typography and illustration and lettering and calligraphy and things like that. But, in fact, those things paid off for me later and gave me a way to make a living that I even enjoyed, designing books, for many years. Books and magazines.

Oh, I should also point out that this was the—entering in '61—this was the second year of Cooper Union offering a real degree, a B.F.A. Before that it was a three-year program with just the certificate that it would give out. And if you wanted to get a degree, you would have to go to some other school, typically Yale, to flesh out with humanities courses and so forth your certificate from Cooper. People like Sylvia Mangold, for example, did that. So anyway, they had just started this degree program, and it was filled with all kinds of peculiar glitches as they tried to find, you know, ways to offer humanities courses in this very small building. Tried to find places where we could have gymnastics courses, things like that. So gym took place in a bowling alley on University Place. And our humanities courses included things like public speaking and oration and—it was quite a curious program.

Anyway, it was great to be in the city, as well. That was probably the most interesting part of it. For the first time in my life, [I] had people I thought were genuine friends and people who spoke the same language I spoke and wanted to live the way that I wanted to live. It was just a wonderful time.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Who were some of those people that you're still friends with?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, gee. I just spoke on the phone last night to a painter named Robert Sussman, who is not as well-known as he should be, but had a show two years ago at the CUE [Art] Foundation. And has exhibited off and on over the last 30 or 40 years. Another painter. My first roommate in New York and also from that NYU program was a realist painter named Sam Thurston, who I think was just accepted into the National Academy [of Design] and travels in realist painting circles, even though he was an Abstract Expressionist like the rest of us back in 1961. There were other people in the school in my year who I think went on to some success. It was a little amorphous. I mean, I was about to get to the point where I dropped out of Cooper. Actually, I was sort of forced out because I was failing all my courses in 1963, in my third year. Actually in 1964, in my third year there. I took a year off and then came back and redid my junior year—my senior year—as a more well-adjusted and balanced student.

But in any case, at Cooper at the time, Chris Wilmarth and I bounced—he also dropped out for a while and then came back - we bounced back and forth a bit. Ben Schonzeit, a Photorealist painter, was there a year ahead of me. Howie Buchwald, Howard Buchwald, a painter who is still around, who was a year ahead of me.

In a way it's curious, though. I mean, Cooper arguably was the best art school in the country at that point. I mean, I'm sure we thought so. And I think other people thought so as well. And of the hundred people, and let's say, of the maybe 50 people who were involved in fine arts in each year there, so let's say a total of almost 200 people, it's surprising how few of us continued to function in the art world. My wife is one of them; I met my wife there.

Often today when I talk to the parents of students, people I'm teaching at Rutgers University, working-class kids, and, you know, they say, "My God, what are you teaching my kid? What are they going to do with this, this ridiculous information?" And I point out to them what my compatriots at Cooper Union learned - if not to become great artists, or if not to become great illustrators and designers, they did learn how to think on their feet and how to—not just solve problems but to invent problems in the first place. And I don't know anyone who went to

Cooper who didn't come out and be successful in whatever it was they finally chose. I'm sure some of the most successful car dealers in the metropolitan area went to Cooper Union.

Let's see, what else? It was great being on the Lower East Side in those days. And one could meet pretty much any artist you wanted to meet. One could - you know, the world was around. I remember—I've always been interested in film, since I was in high school, and I had a German teacher who was crazy about movies and would take me and some of the other students to Cinema 16, which was an avant-garde film program in the city at the New School. Well, I always interested in film. And I remember—and I'm going to guess that the year was 1962, could have been a little later—Robert Whitman had a loft on Great Jones Street. I think he had also been working for Joseph Cornell. And for a few weeks he had evenings where he showed Cornell's collection of movies, which included extraordinary things like a hand-tinted copy of Lubitsch's, Ernst Lubitsch's, *Sumurun* [1920], just wonderful, wonderful things. I went to Happenings at the Green Gallery. I saw, I think, another [Robert] Whitman piece there. I'm not sure. Yes, it was probably a Whitman piece, and I can't remember the name of it, of course. It was a good time to be in New York.

Oh, here's a story that might indicate a little bit about how open the city was to a young artist at that point. In probably late '61, early 1962, I was walking in the 30s [streets] in New York City with my girlfriend, a woman named Marsha Salo. We walked past a brownstone, and there was a sign in the window, "WBAI." WBAI had just become a noncommercial station; it had just joined Pacifica. It was the station we listened to all the time. So she said, "Well, let's go in and see how they're doing." And we went in. And after a bit, somebody came over and asked us what we were there for. We said we were just fans and we like the station. Well, a couple of more people came over, and they said, "Well, what do you like? What don't you like?" We told them. And one of the things we said was that we were young artists. And we thought they had no art programs at all; wouldn't that be a wonderful thing for them to do?

So they asked if we wanted to do some art programs. And in the full enthusiasm of youth we said, "Sure," you know, "we could do great art programs." We suggested a few ideas, and they liked three of them. One was on why artists came to New York in the first place, older artists, functioning artists.

The other was on the gallery system. Actually, this would help date exactly when this happened. The Tanager Gallery had announced it was about to close. This was a 10th Street co-op. And again this was a place that we liked very much. It was a few blocks from our school. We probably saw every show there. And the Tanager was closing. Really, this was a great scandal that this wonderful gallery was being allowed to close. So we did a show on galleries and why Tanager was closing.

The third show we did was through friends of friends. We had met an art dealer, a woman named Rose Fried, who had a salon on the weekends, on Saturday or Sunday. We would occasionally go up there and sit around and talk to her. And we said we would do a radio show on her reminiscences of abstract painting in the U.S. in the '30s and '40s.

So we set out to do these three shows. We phoned people up, again starting with some of our teachers. And they would recommend other people or make suggestions that we followed up on. And the show on artists coming to New York and on the galleries, on both of those we interviewed Ad Reinhardt, Paul Brach and Miriam Schapiro, Philip Pearlstein, Leo Castelli and Irving Karp, Lois Dodd.

KATHY GONCHAROV: How about Dick Bellamy?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Boy, I barely knew who Bellamy was at that point, which was a shame. I mean, later we became great friends. I knew Bellamy only as a character in *Pull My Daisy* [1959], and as somebody who I would see sleeping on the couch at the Goldowsky Gallery on Madison Avenue. Anyway, it was great fun. Reinhardt was the most compelling and most interesting. When I play these tapes back, I am absolutely struck by what a 17-year-old moron I was, or 18-year-old or so at that point.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So you still have these tapes?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, yes. Yes. And in fact, a few years ago John Zinsser transcribed the Reinhardt tape. The transcription was a little better than hearing my squeaky voice ask Ad, why, you know, why his paintings were all black. But it was a wonderful experience. [Laughs.] It got a little surreal, in that in those days, tape recorders were not like this small digital machine you're using. They were these monster boxes that weighed about 75 pounds and had big heavy microphones. And BAI sent a technician out with us, a man named Hamish Sinclair. He was a middle-aged—to my eyes; he probably wasn't much older than I was, if I really saw him again—but they sent this man, and Hamish Sinclair is our engineer. Very political man. He ended up in Harlem [Harlan] County [KY] organizing miners. And turns up in a couple of [Bob] Dylan biographies scolding Dylan for sending rock star clothes down for the miners instead of writing them a check.

Anyway, Hamish Sinclair came with us. And I think for the first few days, no problem. He just figured this was,

you know, patty-cake, kid stuff, talking to these decadent artists. But after a while he started getting really steamed about, you know, how corrupt the galleries were and things like that. Reinhardt drove him crazy by telling him—he was very aggressive about Reinhardt because Reinhardt talked very politically, but then you would see these kind of ivory tower paintings. And the two of them got into quite an interesting argument. And Reinhardt, I think, to my taste, won by saying, "You know, advanced thought is advanced thought, whether it's in politics or in art. I mean, the goal is the same: to increase human freedom. Whether you do it by increasing what the brain can handle or what the body can have. What's the difference? That's the direction we're heading in."

When we went to interview Castelli—and I think this might have been the last interview we did—we went up to 77th Street, and we set up the equipment. Leo came into the room. And before my friend and I could ask a single question, the first thing out of this guy's mouth—I mean, he must have been burning. Maybe by the fact that he was on the Upper East Side, you know, in a townhouse that totally sent him over the edge. And the first thing out of his mouth, in this Scots accent, was: "Tell me, Mr. Castelli, is it true that a dealer is nothing but an artist's pimp?" [They laugh.] Castelli was totally unfazed. He looked at him, he paused. He said, "That's very interesting." He said, "My assistant, Mr. Karp, has some very interesting ideas about that. Let me get him for you." And Castelli left the room, but we never saw him again. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] Karp came in to do the interview. So, yes, it was pretty funny.

I edited them over the summer out in Berkeley at WKPFA, and I never heard them on the radio. I was told they were played. I have no idea what the real, you know—when, where, how, why, or what. The interview with Rose Fried, the dealer, she was very indiscreet. She said a lot of things that she probably regretted about artists. And she demanded the tapes back.

[Telephone or fax ringing.]

I gave her some of them, but I think I still have some. And that show was never broadcast.

[Telephone or fax ringing.]

But a couple of other things I remember was, Paul Brach and Miriam Schapiro were absolutely luminous in talking about coming to New York after World War II and moving into Noguchi's studio on MacDougal Alley. It sounded like something out of, you know, everybody's dream of moving to the Village, with the snow drifting down and moving into a great stage-set kind of a house. Well, that was a long digression.

I dropped out of Cooper in '63 or '64, at the end of my third year. And thanks in large part, by the way, to a great typographer and book designer named George Salter, who I truly loved—I thought he was just wonderful in every way. One of the reasons I ended up doing book design was how much I admired his work. He, in his turn, could not stand me. He thought I was Satan incarnate. I did not believe [laughs] in many of the sort of cosmetic things he believed in. I was a great advocate for down-and-dirty attacks on design. George made it clear that he could not pass me in this course because I just would not play that particular game. I was also smoking a lot of pot in those days, and that probably also contributed to my exit from the school.

But having said that, I must say that people at Cooper Union—and I know I didn't appreciate this at the time, and probably only when I started to teach myself, which was just, you know, eight or nine years ago—it was only then that I realized how much love and attention I had been given there by all kinds of improbable people. Even when I dropped out, everyone made it clear to me that I could come back whenever I wanted to, which was really quite good. I [laughs] looked at my grade transcripts a few weeks back—they turned up when I was cleaning some files—and [it was] amazing that I was asked to come back.

KATHY GONCHAROV: What did you do during that time?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I smoked a lot of reefer, and I chased a lot of women. Oh, you mean, when I dropped out?

KATHY GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, I had very little money, which was a problem. I'd been pretty much supporting myself by working, you know, sweeping out bookstores, and I worked in a White Tower up on 14th Street—or a White Castle, whatever it was. You know, any kind of odd jobs I could find. Around this time—I also worked as a dog handler in Broadway shows, but that's a separate story I'll get to in a second. Actually, I must have started that in the year I dropped out. I dropped out, and the first thing I did is I worked with someone and saved a little money. Then with two of my friends back from that NYU art class, with two of my friends, we moved to a farmhouse in northern Vermont, about 30 miles below the Canadian border. The fact that we moved in December shows that we really didn't have a drop of common sense in our heads. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] And I spent the next few months there with my friends living on, you know, Kraft macaroni dinners. I think that was the only thing we ate for that entire period.

And I came back to New York because I heard that Godard's *Contempt* [1963] was about to open. It was a movie I had been reading about and wanted to see. And came down to New York to see that. The car broke down when we were in New York, so I ended up staying in New York for the rest of the winter. And shortly after this—I had a very inexpensive apartment on Seventh Street that was my first solo apartment; I'd had a roommate. I think it was about $30 a month. It was at 66 East Seventh Street on the top floor, next to a coffee shop called Dumego [ph] [possibly Deux Magots –JN] that was a popular joint at the time.

And I had this apartment, and I had a phone call from an ex-girlfriend who said that someone she knew—it may even have been her ex-husband; I really can't remember at this point—someone she knew, a photographer, had been beaten up in Spain. He was on a job for *Life* magazine, and had been beaten up in Spain, and was hurt. But he was better now and back in New York, and he needed a place to stay in Manhattan. And I said he could stay at my place on Seventh Street. His name was Nat Finkelstein, and he was a guy—I think he's still around—was a very good magazine photographer who had done interesting photographs of early Happenings. He'd done a lot of great photos of [Claes] Oldenberg's Happenings. And a lot of journalism work for *Life*, for *Look*, for all the picture magazines.

Nat came and stayed with me for a couple of months. And it was, you know, a bit of a drain. He said, "Don't worry, kid. I'll repay you. I'll get you a job with my brother Howard, who's an animal handler and has animals in Broadway shows." And through that, for the next few years, I would work off and on as a dog handler. I had a pit terrier in the show *Oliver!* [1963]. I had three matched Russian wolfhounds in a John Osborne play called *Luther* [1961] with Albert Finney. Also had two small Harris hawks that looked like little eagles, also in *Luther*. And I had a miniature donkey in a play called *Carnival* [1961] with Anna Maria Alberghetti [Kathy Goncharov laughs] that was based on the movie *Lili* [1953].

And every night I would have to take these animals from their theaters to a storefront on East 47th Street, where we were illegally keeping these critters, all of which seemed to want to eat each other. I mean, it was a nightmare. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] In *Oliver!* I actually would get to—they had an integral set, a revolving set, that would move around. And I would have to crawl out to the middle of the stage when Bill Sykes was calling his dog, with this dog under a big, kind of black muumuu that I was wearing. I would crawl out, release the dog, and have to crawl like crazy off the stage so that no one would see me in the shadows. And then, of course, catch the dogs as they came careening off the stage [laughs] on the other side.

It was an interesting job. One of the stranger aspects to it is I never got paid, at least by Howard; he was a total crook. And I supported myself basically by selling peyote, and methamphetamine, and pot to the chorus members, which was very lucrative. I mean, they were just like—it was like shooting fish in a barrel. And that was probably the best income-producing time of my student days. Yes. I could go on about it, about this. But I should probably stop.

KATHY GONCHAROV: But you were on the Lower East Side. You were still living on the Lower East Side?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Still living on the Lower East Side.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes. So you went to Oldenberg's Happenings?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I did. I then went to *The Store* [opened December 1961]. That was very early on. That must have been in '61 or '62.

KATHY GONCHAROV: What else was going on?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, the 10th Street co-ops, we went to all of them all the time. Probably more than any uptown galleries.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Music scene at all?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, yes. I used to sing, and I had two friends who were guitarists. We would go to Gerde's Folk City on Monday nights, which was sort of an open mike night. And would sing there often. Saw a lot of the great old bluesmen, since it was the time they were all getting rediscovered and being brought up north. And I remember going after drinks, afterwards, with Roosevelt Sykes. And meeting a lot of interesting people. One of the guitarists who I would sing with occasionally, and who was a friend from Cooper, was a man named Stefan Grossman, who went on to become a very famous guitarist and has a couple of record labels and things like that now. Met Reverend Gary Davis. Yes, that part of the music scene was pretty great.

It was also a wonderful time for movies. The same day that I dropped out of Cooper, I bought issue number, I want to say, 27 of *Film Culture* magazine. And this was the issue with Andrew Sarris's American cinema article, which was the idea of bringing the *politique des auteurs* to the U.S. And I sat in a restaurant on Seventh Street, in Kosh's, which was a poet and Cooper Union student hangout. And I sat in Kosh's, and I read this issue of *Film*

Culture, and I thought it was the silliest thing I'd ever read in my life. And around the corner at the Lowes Commodore, which later became the Fillmore, was a double bill: of Howard Hawks's *Hatari* [1962] and John Ford's—no, it wasn't *Hatari*. It was Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* [1962], and I can't remember the other film, but another auteur-ist master. And I went to test out the *Politique*, and I came out transformed. And spent much of the time I was out of Cooper in grind houses on 42nd Street just trying to see as many movies as I possibly could. And there were a lot of great theaters all over the Lower East Side, with two, three movies for 75 cents. It was a great time for cineastes. Other events of the moment on the Lower East Side—

KATHY GONCHAROV: Poetry groups?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: A few. It was never a major interest of mine. Oh, jazz! Of course, jazz. We used to hang out at the Five Spot, especially when it reopened on St. Mark's Place. It had been closed for a couple of years when they left their original spot on Fifth Street. And I'd only been to the Fifth Street place once. That was to see Rahsaan Roland Kirk. But when they moved to St. Mark's Place, right off the corner of Third Avenue, you could often go in in the afternoon and hear that night's acts rehearsing. And, you know, have a 50-cent beer and listen to [Thelonious] Monk or almost anyone play the piano. And we would go at night as well. I mean, it was just a great thing. Monk was by far my favorite performer, and I saw him many, many times there.

KATHY GONCHAROV: What kind of artwork were you doing then? If any?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, good question. Yes, no. No, no, I tried to be serious about that. Initially, again as a working-class kid from New Jersey, I'd been very lucky in that my high school art teacher, a man named John Pappas, had been to NYU in the late '40s and had been close, I think in an intimate way, with Larry Rivers. And loved Ab Ex painting. And so, I mean, I'd always been an abstract artist. I learned art as abstraction, as being the important thing. And coming to Cooper, and meeting Robert Gwathmey, was actually the first time I had worked representationally.

And that was really interesting, you know. It almost seduced me. But luckily I came to my senses and fell back into the sway of Abstract Expressionism. Which I do think was the great moment in American art, you know? It was a time when New York was like Florence [Italy], where there were just so many wonderful artists, rich artists, very complex system of art-making. And an idea that people believed in, you know. Or worked against. But a dominant, interestingly dominant, idea. And I don't normally like dominant ideas. Maybe you have to be 17 to like a dominant idea. What can I say?

KATHY GONCHAROV: When you were a kid, what kind of art did you make? I assume you—

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, yes. Well, you know, having aunts who were schoolteachers, you always had access to lots of cheap drawing paper and drawing materials, which I think made a big difference. I mean, I drew pictures all the time. But in many ways I was a difficult child. Having skipped a grade, I never really had friends. And I loved reading and had read every book in the library, in the town library, by the time I was maybe 10 or 11. And many of them twice. [Laughs.]

KATHY GONCHAROV: What were your favorites?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, boy. You know, my favorites, okay, it depends on what moment in my youth. Probably—I was great fan of John Steinbeck all through high school. I read everything. Actually, my high school art teacher did me a great kindness. He gave me a list of books that he thought every intellectual should have read, about 150, maybe 200 books. And I still haven't read all of them. But it was a good list. It got me reading in the right direction. I've always read nonselectively, you know? I mean, I enjoy reading everything, from thrillers to avant-garde prose. Just part of my life.

Okay. So back to Cooper. Two more years, I met Joyce Robins, who I would marry a year or so after we graduated. Actually, the year that she graduated [1966 –JN] and just after I graduated, which would have been 1967.

And in my last year at Cooper—actually, no, it must have been at the end of my junior year at Cooper—I had my first loft, which was a loft on Pitt Street, 53 Pitt Street [inaudible], right next to the Delancey Street bridge, the Williamsburg Bridge. And this was a great loft: 2,000 square feet, windows on three sides. Free gas and electricity. Fifty dollars a month. And the landlord loved artists [laughs], and so nobody ever paid him.

KATHY GONCHAROV: There were other artists there too?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, the problem he had was it was a seven-story building without an elevator. And you cannot get a C of O [Certificate of Occupancy] for a seven-story building without an elevator. So each floor had two artists on it. I shared my floor with an avant-garde musician named Burton Greene, who I'm told is very popular in Germany these days. Played prepared piano. Anyway, yes. And then there was a music producer who

lived above me, who worked with a lot of great black groups. It was just a great building to live in. At one point a fire broke out in the building, though, and we had to leave very quickly when the fire department discovered that this building was filled with completely illegal lofts.

But again, it was very easy in those days to find inexpensive apartments and lofts. My wife was sharing a loft with another woman, named Sharon Gilbert, who's passed, but was a very good book artist—a very political book artist. She and Sharon had a loft on East Broadway. I can't remember the number of that. [59 East Broadway. –JN]

We got married in '67. And we needed to find a place very quickly. Her roommate did not want us living there. And the building I had moved into on Grand Street was about to be—was condemned by the city and about to be torn down. So the day after we were married, we walked around, and we found an old, abandoned synagogue on Hester Street. We moved—we spent the summer, and money that our relatives had given us for getting married, fixing the place up. And by September we had this great loft. Which we have to this day.

KATHY GONCHAROV: That is a remarkable loft.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Thank you. Yes, and having that, and having a communist landlady who was very generous with us, and just a wonderful, wonderful landlord.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So you're still renting.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, yes. Yes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh, I thought you owned it.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: No, no. We have the best of both worlds. And it's made it possible for us to stay in the city, as a lot of people have been chased away. We've had this place. And knock on wood, we have it a bit longer. Okay. What else shall we talk about?

KATHY GONCHAROV: Ah, okay. Well, your artwork.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, okay. Oh, great. Yes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Inaudible.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, at Cooper I was very much a painter. And did fairly large paintings, even though there was a moment in my last year there when I tried to do—and actually did for a few months—a whole suite of very, very small paintings, smaller than the ones I do today. It's interesting, I'd pretty much forgotten about those. And I would often tell people, when they ask, you know, when I started doing small work, and I would date that to the early '70s. But in fact, there had been a time around '66 or '67 when I had experimented with small pictures.

KATHY GONCHAROV: That must have been very different from the time when people were painting quite large.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, I was even painting quite large, you know. [Laughs.] Yes. It's one of these things that, the more I think about it, the more complex it gets. But there was a wonderful Puerto Rican artist at Cooper a year or two ahead of me named Richie Quiñones. I have no idea what happened to Richie. But he did very small, very brightly colored paintings. And I'm sure it was under his influence - when I saw how powerful his work was, I said, "Gee, that would be great. I can save a lot of money on cotton duck." And they were nice paintings. They were all-over dot paintings; [Color]field painting interested us in the day.

Like everybody in the '60s, all the students, we all wanted to find a way to work past Abstract Expressionism. And the tactic that most interested me then was what Lawrence Alloway would come to call "systematic painting"—"systemic painting," rather. And my last years at Cooper and for the next few years after that, what painting I did do, was all in that mode. Think of a set of rules and kind of follow those rules through. And those paintings are so—I did a lot of them. But, you know, they were so boring that it's no wonder that I really had to stop painting. I mean, I really could not go on acting like I was working in a factory, you know?

KATHY GONCHAROV: What did they look like?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I could actually physically show you some, but that wouldn't do the tape recorder much good. The ones I was most comfortable with - first, these all-over dot pictures. Actually, I'm going to go get one because then I can maybe describe it with it in front of me.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Have you shown them?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. Actually, fairly recently Geoffrey Young has shown some. These are gouaches from the day.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh! Oh, goodness.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: And let's see. And then, you know, I would sandwich them between pieces of Plexiglas so that you had [inaudible] and [inaudible], like that. And I did very, very large things in this mode. So, I mean, they're interesting, you know. Someday somebody will put up a show. They're always on grids, as you see. I mean, drawings—

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: —they're on a gridded paper. And it's basically curving a line in, curving a line out.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Everybody did grids in those days.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Everybody did grids, that's right. And it was always hard to get grid paper because it would sell out the minute it would come into the shops. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] Anyway, that's fairly typical of the dot [loud noise covering his voice].

Anyway, painting became very tedious for me. I was too dumb to realize that I really had to rethink, you know, where I was. I expect it's a problem a lot of students have. Back in that day, there wasn't any kind of real pressure from the art world, you know, from the "scene." There was no particular scene that you could feel that one could easily connect to. If there was going to be a scene, you would have to create it for yourself, you know, around your own kind of work.

So I started making sculptures. The sculptures were made out of completely banal materials: pieces of cloth, sticks, stones, all kinds of detritus. My wife had been a sculptor and had left sculpture and was making paintings. She had done ceramic sculpture, so I had a lot of her materials at hand. And she was able to help me make forms and shapes out of ceramics. And I also did a number of sculptures that were strings of flat imagery on wires that would hang in the air. If you imagine something like a big charm bracelet, that would be one of these sculptures.

If there were two sculptors who I admired, probably more than I realized at the time, and influenced what I was doing and how I was working, it certainly would have been Richard Tuttle and Barry Le Va. But again, if you had asked me at the time, I would have said, "My, how could that be? I'm not influenced by anybody." But it becomes apparent that—I certainly—these were ideas that were in the air, and one breathed that air; one swam in that water. Curiously enough, the first job I got out of art school was to work for Betty Parsons, the gallerist. And in fact, I took Richard Tuttle's job there.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Richard worked with Betty.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Betty was a sculptor, too.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, and a painter.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: And a painted sculptor.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Now I think about it, her pieces [laughs] exceeded some of Richard's.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. Oh, yes. And anyway, I took a job there. Actually, a friend of mine had gotten the job directly from Tuttle and couldn't stand it and left after a couple of weeks. And I was offered the job. It was to go in for half a day, maybe four or five days a week, to straighten out the back room and to help hang shows and just be a general handyman around the gallery. And that was a great job. Betty was very sweet and loving and nice, and very supportive of young artists. And put me in a couple of group shows eventually. And, you know, if I brought in a piece, she'd put it up in her office for a week or two. It was good. She would send people over to my studio sometimes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Did you sell?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Not a thing.

KATHY GONCHAROV: No.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: But my first show in a commercial - in any gallery really - was at Betty's in a new talent show in like—I'm going to say the year was '72, but I'm not sure; it could've been '71. Through Betty—Betty one day said that one of her artists needed an assistant to help polishing some sculptures. And it was a woman named Ruth Vollmer, who became a very great and close friend. I worked with Ruth in her studio on Union Square polishing a group of sculptures that were made to be given as awards to some—at some function; I can't remember what it was for. And Ruth befriended my wife and I. And for the next four years, five years, we would visit Ruth at her home at least once a week, maybe twice a week. And she would always make sure we had a good meal. She knew that we were slowly starving ourselves to death on the Lower East Side—not quite true, but close enough. And Ruth was great; Ruth was great. She bought work from both of us. She would encourage people to come and look at our work—was a great friend. And Ruth had a salon, a real salon, that we would be invited to. And met a lot of artists there in that context. And a lot of art world people. Flora Whitney Miller, [inaudible] Biddle—

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Inaudible.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: —would be there. And Michael Lekakis. Tuttle would be there. Sol LeWitt. Before we were there, she had broken off her friendship with [Robert] Smithson—alas! So I never met Smithson. I met Eva Hesse. Eva had been sick, had a bit of a remission; I met her then, at a party at Ruth's. When Eva went back to the hospital, I went with Ruth a couple of times to Eva's loft to clean it up and to move some things around and leave some things there. God, who else did I meet? A lot of terrific people. It was a great moment. I met Lawrence and Sylvia Alloway there. Nico Calas, Nico and [inaudible] Calas. Lot of interesting people.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, and also a woman who would later be important to me: Alicia Legg, who was the sculpture curator at MoMA at the time.

And Ruth was a good friend. She eventually suffered from some dementia and passed away in the late '70s, I guess [1982]. Late '70s, early '80s. But we own two sculptures of hers, which are probably the most beautiful objects in our collection. And I think to this day that she is a very—

KATHY GONCHAROV: Alicia?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: No, no, Ruth Vollmer.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh, yes.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. I think to this day she is a very underappreciated sculptor for a lot of reasons. Gee, what else?

KATHY GONCHAROV: What was the relationship with museums in those years?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, yes. Well, the first problem I had was, by the—starting in '72 and for sure by '74, I'd figured out a way to start painting again. Was working on 16-by-20-inch canvas boards. And trying to find somebody who wanted to show these things or even look at them.

People thought I was really crazy. This was—I've spoken about this before in other places, so I probably won't go on too much about this. But people really thought this was the most peculiar thing in the world to do. You know, paintings that had no signature style, that were all 16 by 20 inches, painted on kind of Sunday-painter materials. For me, I thought it was a political act, you know? And I thought it was a way of integrating real-world politics with the kind of mandarin politics of the art world, you know?

I mean, it's very nice that the art world is composed predominantly of people of the left. In a way it's a remarkable thing, because when you think about who we are and what we do and how we work, you'd expect us all to be kind of crazed right-wing kooks, you know, coming out the hills from gold mining or something. But in fact, we are liberal humanitarians—quite, quite the surprise. Except when it comes to our systems of exhibiting and distributing and selling and showing our work.

When I figured out my theories [laughs] about working small, about making paintings that could fit into my friends' apartments, that didn't need bank lobbies and museums to be shown in, boy, I thought this was a real institutional critique, you know? I thought this was something, that if people saw these paintings, everybody would be painting this way. It was the great surprise of my life that that didn't happen. But that's how it goes.

As I said, Betty and Ruth and Alicia Legg would send people over to the studio to look at my sculptures, which were getting more interesting. I think I had worked my way free of some of these early influences, and I think I was doing some interesting work. They would send people over, and I'd show them the sculptures. And, you

know, then I would say, "While you're here, would you like to look at some paintings?" And I'd generally pull out a cardboard box filled with these. I mean, I really did not know how to promote these things. I'd pull out a couple of cardboard boxes filled with canvas boards. Stack them around and show them to people. This was going absolutely nowhere fast.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Do you still have some of those?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, yes. In fact, I think 16 of them will be shown at Yale this coming fall in a show that Jennifer Gross is curating called "The Continuous Present." And some of them go back to 1972. I'll show you one or two before you go. They were not—they're interestingly different from how I work today. But you would recognize them as being the same person, I believe.

So to find a way to get these out, I decided that I would try to join an artists' co-op. In 1979, my wife and I were offered guest shows at 55 Mercer Street, which was one of the better artists' co-ops of the—certainly after Park Place, the best artists' co-op in SoHo. It still survives in some mutated form out in Long Island City. But anyway —

KATHY GONCHAROV: It just closed recently—last year, I think.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: In SoHo, yes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, and they've reopened in Long Island City with perhaps another name. I don't know. And in 1979 we had a guest show there. And then I was voted in as a member and had a second solo show there in 1979.

In the first show I showed sculptures and drawings. The second show, I showed mostly paintings and drawings—overstuffed. I mean, I had a decade's worth of work. And put up much more than I should have. But the most wonderful thing happened with that show: I had sent out a poster—I'd made a poster with sort of flat, graphic images of some of the shapes that were in the paintings. And I sent it out to a mailing list that somebody had given me. It had gone to all these, sort of, art world people, all of which promptly ignored it, I assume. They just ignored it.

But one day I was sitting there. And of course, you have to sit at this gallery and watch it for yourself, which is a peculiarly humbling kind of humiliation. A man came in, looked at the show very seriously and for a long time. And then left. And when he left, he signed his name in the guest book. And he went out the door. I, of course, spun the book around to see who it was. And then was embarrassed when he jumped back in the door and [laughs] said, "And I'm coming back. I really liked your show. It's very good." And it was Joe Masheck, who was then the editor of *Artforum*.

First thing that happened after this is all the *Artforum* critics came to see the show, because I guess he talked it up to them. And none of them liked it, as far as I could tell. I mean, very quick looks. Nicholas Calas came, who I'd met before at Ruth Vollmer's, but, of course, he hadn't known my work. And the only thing he said to me was - he said something along the lines of, "You're not a Surrealist," which I could have told him without him even coming to the show. But it was great that some people actually saw it, you know? I don't know if a hundred people came to that show, but maybe 30 of them I didn't know before. And that was a big step forward for me.

I also met two people, two people who came to that show, who have continued to be good friends and painters who I admire. One who came when I was installing the show was Chris Martin, and we had a long conversation. I think, actually, that evening I walked over to his apartment on Elizabeth Street to see what he was doing. And then after the show was up, a young artist came in named Jonathan Lasker, who had just gotten out of CalArts and was looking at the galleries in SoHo and had taken a chance on Mercer Street. And we've gotten to be friends with both of these guys ever since. As I say, I admire their work.

So I showed at Mercer Street a few more times, probably five times totally, before I left there. I was president of the gallery for a while. My wife joined us in the gallery. And it was very democratic. I mean, this place, everything was done by vote. The only way it survived for so long is that we had really no rules. You got the keys for three weeks, and you did whatever you wanted. And you passed the keys on to the next person.

KATHY GONCHAROV: And it was inexpensive to join.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: It was very inexpensive. And actually, it was exactly the rent divided by however many members we had. So, yes, there was no profit-making. There was nothing except this bare bones space. And you know, there were a few critics and writers who supported us, often for political reasons. And I mention their names only because there were some people who would no more go to an artist co-op than they would

voluntarily, you know, hammer a nail in their head. I mean, just on general principles. It was too declassee. But—

KATHY GONCHAROV: But it wasn't so much in those years [inaudible]. It also had a good reputation [inaudible].

TOM NOZKOWSKI: They had a good reputation. But believe me, to get high-end art writers or other gallerists to come and see shows there, very, very difficult. Collectors, no, no. So I do want to give a shout-out to Lawrence Alloway and to Joe Masheck and Roberta Smith, who came to many, many shows of mine—every show that was there. Roberta may have come because it was part of her beat. But I think she was very, very good, I mean, and supportive in a necessary way to that institution.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Who was she writing for?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: *Village Voice*. So again, it was part of the beat. But still other people have written at the *Voice*, and it wasn't part of their beat.

So let's see, what else? Oh, yes, okay. So Joe Masheck left the editorship at *Artforum* and felt he could write again, which he hadn't felt able to do while he was the editor. And Ingrid Sischy became the editor there. And so, luckily for me—and I did not know about this until it was literally being published—he wrote an article about my work in 1982 for *Artforum*. And I did not know that this article was happening. I knew he was doing something, and I'd given him transparencies. But the fact that it was a solo article on my work was a complete, flabbergasting shock to myself. I didn't know until fact-checkers from the magazine phoned up to ask about the titles of the pieces and what side was up and so forth. So I owe a great debt of gratitude to Joe.

Because of that article, you know—and this is interesting, too. I mean, you think, boy! Once I get it out there, you know, the phone will just jump off the hook. Everything will be peaches and cream. I got two phone calls as a result of that article. One was from a California private dealer who wanted to buy four of the five paintings that were reproduced in *Artforum*. [Laughs.] For the least possible amount of money. And the other was from an art dealer named Rosa Esman.

Rosa wanted to come to the studio. And she immediately offered me a one-person show. I showed with Rosa. I had, I think, four one-person shows with Rosa over the next four or five years. And continued also to show at 55 Mercer Street. So I had these two venues. Politically, I wanted to stay with Mercer Street, and for a while it was a viable option. I would often show paintings at Rosa's and drawings at Mercer Street, something like that.

Shall I just continue with my biography like this?

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Inaudible.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: So I showed with Rosa, again, three or four shows. I probably should have kept a biography here in front of me. And our relationship deteriorated. It's hard to explain why. I mean, I don't—I certainly don't think Rosa is a bad person. But just a lot of friction developed. And it culminated in my last show there, when I came to the opening and she wasn't there. And in fact, I learned that she had gone to Paris for the weekend with her husband and left the gallery in charge of the two kids who, you know, ran the desk. I was absolutely beside myself.

When she got back, I said, "This is crazy. I mean, we had people there, collectors, people interested in this work. Why—I needed you there as a sign of your interest in what we were doing." And it got down to, "Well, you can't talk to me like that. And if you don't like it, go to another gallery." I said, "I will." And she said, "Well, come get your work." And the show went down after about a week instead of its full month. And I came and picked up the work, and that was the end of our relationship.

And it was very—I mean, I was really quite irritated by the whole thing. And I have not seen Rosa since, until I ran into her about two months ago at—actually, more than that, three months ago—at an opening of Bob Mangold's drawings at Pace [Gallery]. And, you know, the years have rolled by. And I'm doing okay, and Rosa's a little old lady, so I didn't yell at her. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] Even though she still owes me $2,000. Anyway, onward.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Did you have any collectors at that time?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Not too many. What had happened was—let's see, my first collector—the first collector I had who wasn't a family member or an acquaintance [laughs]—was a man, Henry Fiewel. He bought a piece at Mercer Street. And actually, he had been the collector of one of the artists showing at the other space at Mercer Street. And just by chance he had liked my work. When I went to Rosa, I picked up a number of more serious collectors.

Also, for my first show—this is how I got into this in the first place - for my first show at Esman, Alicia Legg came

in and bought a painting for MoMA, which was quite the feather in my cap. It took them over a year to commit to the deal. They got a discount, like I think I had to pay them practically. But they did take a very nice painting from that show. And it's been shown twice there—both times, oddly enough, in recent acquisition shows. I always had the sense that they had a lot of difficulty finding a place to show a small painting. The first time they showed it, they built a little wall, and I was on one side, and a small Mark Innerst was on the other side. So it was like being in a little ghetto for small paintings. But I'm very grateful for that purchase. It was a wonderful thing for a young artist.

So anyway, sometime in the mid-'80s—yes, it must have been about '87 or so. Oh, back to collectors. I had a number of artists who began collecting my work. I met John Duff because he wanted a piece of mine, and we traded work. I met Gary Stephan and Suzanne Jolson because they wanted a piece of mine, and we traded work. Big collectors early on: Duncan Boeckman, who was a Texas collector, mostly of Russian and early Constructivist art. When I told John Lane at the Dallas Museum [of Art] that the Boeckmans owned one of my paintings, he said I must have been the only person born after 1920 who was in their collection. So that was interesting.

But through Rosa I met a number of—acquired a number of real collectors, of people who were serious collectors. And the most interesting of which—and I don't think this was really through Rosa, but probably through John Duff a little bit—through John Duff I met a man named Bill Katz, who actually helped me install my last couple of shows at Rosa's. Bill was an advisor. Among other things he was—he is still—a wonderful architect, interior designer, clothing designer, book designer. Through Bill I met Emily Fisher Landau. And she started collecting my work quite seriously. And ended up with, I guess about - I'm guessing - 17 paintings, mostly bought in the '80s and early '90s. And then one or two very recently.

So, yes, people were starting to collect my work. And the kinds of collectors I seem to attract are ones who are interested in collecting it in depth. So I have very few collectors who own one piece. I have many collectors who own several. Maybe because my work always changes and is different piece to piece. For whatever reasons.

So I was without a gallery for a while and looking for one. And I'm not sure who the connector was. It may have been Gary Stephan, who had shown sculpture with Diane Brown [Gallery]. But Diane Brown came to the studio and liked the work and wanted to show me. And this turned out to be a really wonderful place for me to show, in that Diane was specializing in showing only sculpture, and I was the only painter in the gallery.

KATHY GONCHAROV: And, you know, Rosa showed a lot of sculpture, too.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Rosa showed a lot of sculpture, as well. That's right.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So you seem to have always had that sculpture around.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, yes. Rosa showed painters, as well. But Diane did not show any other painters in the gallery. And, boy, was that great. Because there was always an empty wall. [Laughs.] You could never do a show that had an empty wall where I could stick something. And I admired many of the artists in her gallery. I mean, Wade Saunders and Joel Fisher continue to be good friends of mine to this day. And I liked Diane very much. We put up a number of shows, some of the best shows I ever did.

KATHY GONCHAROV: And Sid Sachs was working there.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: That's right. Well, actually I suggested that she hire Sid Sachs. When I showed with Rosa - I think it was my first show - a young man came up to me at the opening. It was Sid Sachs from Philadelphia. And we struck it off, and we talked for a while.

And a year or two later I got a phone call from him saying that he was opening a gallery in Philadelphia called Matthews Hamilton. It was money from one of the Campbell Soup heirs. And this gallery was a great gallery. It was the first place I showed outside of New York. And I did two one-person shows there with Sid. Yes, it's really how the art world is always smaller than we think it is. At Rosa's I met a young intern named John Post Lee, who was a Vassar [College, Poughkeepsie, NY] student working there. And John's father became a great collector of my work. And John went on to Tibor de Nagy [Gallery], where I showed in many group shows there over the years, and a gallery that I continue to have some relationship with even to this day. And of course, with John himself and his gallery. We did a drawing show two years ago and an oils-on-paper show.

So I showed with Diane for a number of years. Had probably three one-person shows there. Maybe more. I was happy with all of them. Diane was having some money problems, and it was, I mean—again, this is—in a way it's to her credit that she kept the gallery going as long as she did. It was very difficult for me because I really needed the money. I mean, I was supporting myself not so much with the work. I was also designing books and magazines. But it was a substantial part of my income. I had a new child. It was important to me that I have this money. I told her that I would have to leave the gallery unless she could pay me the money she owed me. Ultimately, she paid me every cent she owed me, and we are good friends to this day. But I couldn't go on like

that, and I left the gallery. We left as friends, and I went, and I joined Max Protetch [Gallery], who was in the same building just down the hall from Diane.

And I had a 17-year relationship with Protetch. I had many, many shows with him, both at 560 Broadway, which was that first—where I was with Diane Brown - and then when he moved to Chelsea, I went with him. Very skeptical. I said, you know, this Chelsea thing is not going to catch on. Why don't you get a gallery in Williamsburg? That's where the next big thing is going to be. But had many shows with Max, and my work became more well known. I started being able to support myself with the work.

And, oh, I guess by about, probably by about 1995 or 1996, I stopped working in publishing and just painted full-time. I was offered a teaching job at Rutgers, which I took. It was only two days a week; I was given tenure in three years. I am now slowly weaning my way out of that. I've been mostly on leave and sabbatical for the last few years, and teaching my graduate class only last year, and will do that again this year. And I think that might be the end of it for me. I like working with students, but I also like being in the studio.

What else can we talk about?

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KATHY GONCHAROV: I was going to ask you about showing in Europe.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Okay.

KATHY GONCHAROV: There was a wonderful show at the Venice Biennale.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Thank you.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Extraordinary.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Thank you.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Great pairing with the other artist whose name—

TOM NOZKOWSKI: [Raoul] De Keyser.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Right. It just escaped me for a moment. So how was that time for you in Europe?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, interesting. My first exposure in Europe was a German dealer named Rolf Ricke offered to give me a one-person show in Cologne. And he took half a dozen paintings from—I'm not sure if I was still with Diane Brown at this point or whether I had started up with Protetch. I think I was with Protetch. Pretty sure. I had met Ricke, I know, at Diane Brown's, but I think the formal relationship was when I was with Protetch.

And Ricke took half a dozen paintings. And, I gather, had a lot of difficulty showing them to his clients. That one-person show vanished like a morning mist in the sunlight. The next time I had the opportunity to show in Europe was at a gallery in Paris that Alain Kirili arranged. Because Kirili—Alain has always been a supporter of my work and my wife's work as well. Kirili set me up with a man named Franck Elbaz, who still has a gallery in Paris, and he gave me a one-person show there, of which I think nothing was sold.

Then my next show [laughs] in Europe was only a few years ago, maybe five years ago, six years ago. I was approached by a woman named Christiane Schneider, a German curator who had worked at Dia [Dia Art Foundation] in New York. And one day, leaving Dia, she had walked into one of my shows at Protetch and was completely struck by it. Which happens sometimes with people who don't—have never seen the work before. After she left Dia, she was hired by Haunch of Venison [London] to be their director of exhibitions. And absolutely out of the blue, she phoned up and asked if Haunch of Venison, which had just started, could do a show of my work. And she was thinking specifically that it might be interesting to do a career survey, since no one had seen my paintings in Europe before. I put together a 20-painting show for Haunch. It was shown in probably the beginning of their second year of operations in London. Also did not sell a piece, and got no press at all, and was ignored by everybody except young art students. I generally do well with young art students.

And let's see, after that—oh, yes, my next exhibition—my next one-person exhibition—in Europe was in Dublin at a gallery called Rubicon. We did a show of oils on paper. And I think the wonderful Josephine Kelleher, who is the gallerist there, sold if not the entire show, most of that show. So that was my first commercial success in Europe. And then just last month I had a show at Stephen Friedman [Gallery] in London, a small exhibition of about, I think, eight paintings and eight oils on paper. And I have yet to hear how that show did. But considering the market, my hopes are not high.

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Inaudible.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Actually, the two things I left out were my two most successful European shows, which, as you mentioned, was the installation of the Venice Biennale two years ago, which got a lot of attention for me, and I think was very good for me.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Has Rob Storr [inaudible] been supportive?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: You know, yes, he has, in interesting ways. I mean, I first met Rob when Peter Schjeldahl brought him to, I think, a show of my wife's work at 55 Mercer Street. And we had a kind of passing acquaintance after that. When Rob was working at the Modern [Museum of Modern Art], I was working nearby at *Mad* magazine. I would often stop by at lunchtime, and if we saw each other, would have a bite to eat and talk and so forth. I think he was always interested in my work and appreciated the political aspect to it, which is not immediately apparent. But I think he got it. So, yes, Rob has been a support. I have a show opening in two weeks, a career survey with 62 paintings at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, and Rob Storr wrote the catalogue essay for that. And then right before the Venice Biennale, I had a show at the Ludwig Museum in Koblenz [Germany], about 40-some-odd paintings, which I think was a very beautiful show. Nice catalogue.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Well, two things you just mentioned: working at *Mad m*agazine, which I think is fascinating. How has that influenced your work?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Not at all.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Did you have a lot of fun?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: No. It was just a—

KATHY GONCHAROV: Why exactly did you—

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I'll tell the whole thing. It was a—you know, it wasn't bad at first. It was fun as long as Bill Gaines was still alive. It was a job, you know. For me, my life is in the studio. How do you support that? How do you support a wife and family and a house in the country and things like that, without giving up your art life? And one of the things that both Joyce and I did as young artists is we swore to each other that we would never take a job that was more than three days a week. And, you know, if you look hard enough, you can find them.

My first job in publishing—this was after I stopped working for Betty Parsons and stopped being an animal handler—I was hired to work at *Time* magazine, as a group of people who handled the magazine at the very end of the deadline, who would be there Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights and work as late as necessary to get the magazine to press. And this magazine had always hired people from Princeton, Brown, or Yale. I mean, that was that. You had to go there to work at Time-Life. Or so it seemed.

A couple of people in the art department there had decided they would really take a chance in hiring some art school people. They hired me from Cooper Union, where they put an ad. And they put an ad at Pratt Institute, and they hired my good friend Judy Linn, who's a great photographer, who shows at Feature [Inc.], and who I've collaborated with on some projects. Judy and I were the laypeople at the photo desk at the magazine. And I had that job for a number of years.

What was curious was I knew absolutely nothing when I went there. I remember going for the interview. And, you know, I had this kind of Cooper Union name behind me, and they expected I was some kind of red-hot graphic designer. I walked in wondering how I was going to fake this. And the first words out of their mouths were, "Now, you have to forget everything you learned at Cooper Union. We have our own way of doing things." So I started my career in publishing.

After I left—and my wife and I had bought a place in the Adirondacks, a shack, about a mile and a half from our nearest neighbor. I think we paid $15,000 for it; it had no electricity, no running water. But it was pretty fabulous. What our plan was would be to work about, you know, work a few months every year to save up enough money to then be able to go to the Adirondacks and paint as long as we could 'till we ran out of money. And then come back and earn some more money.

So I eventually left *Time* magazine. We went up into the Adirondacks. Came back destitute, and I needed to work again. And discovered to my absolute amazement that having on your resume that you had worked at *Time* magazine was a real recommendation. So I got a job at Warner Books, and I worked there designing paperbacks for a while. Went freelance and continued to work for them and for pretty much every publisher. And my specialty were picture books. I did a lot of movie tie-ins. I think I did every book on earth about the Bermuda Triangle, and I even wrote one of them.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Really?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes, yes. They had 40 pages of manuscript from some woman who had been trapped in the Bermuda Triangle. And so I was hired to do a picture section and to write the captions for that, another 40 pages, till we filled the book out. And I started, and Warner Books, which was always my biggest customer, did all of the *Mad* magazine paperbacks. I designed them, which, of course, wasn't much design, just sort of pasting them together and making sure you came out with the right number of pages. But through that I met the art director at *Mad* magazine, a man named John Putnam, and the editor, a guy named Al Feldstein, and we all got along. I mean, it was hard to get along with Feldstein, and it was sort of a miracle that I did. But it put me in good stead there. When it came time to do calendars, I was actually hired to write the calendars as well as to edit them and to put them together. And this was a very lucrative project for me. I also did projects at DC Comics and did calendars for them, as well.

My friend the art director, John Putnam, died at *Mad* on a trip. And I was brought in to replace him. I made a deal with Bill Gaines that I would only work three days a week, and I did that for the next—God, for almost 20 years. It was a great gig, and it paid me a lot of money, and it was very pleasant, again, as long as Bill was alive. When Bill died, it was taken over by Time-Warner, and it became much more corporate, much less fun. And I had an odd relationship with Bill. He could be extremely generous. I mean, he was a right-wing lunatic where everyone else at the magazine was about as left wing as you could get. So that was strange. And he was very paternalistic.

He took us all on trips. Every year he would take us on a trip for a week or two weeks, either on our own or with our families. This would generally be about 50 people, all the freelancers, all of the office staff. And we would go, you know, on safari in Africa; we would go to Taormina in Sicily [Italy]; he'd rent us all sports cars to drive around in Zermatt in Switzerland. And he loved great restaurants. So we would go to Paris and eat in every Michelin restaurant. I mean, it would be a pretty—it was a nice perk. On the other hand, if you made a phone call at work, you had to pay him for it—a dime for a local call, and long-distance calls, you would fill out a slip where you phoned. Then when he got the bill, he would tell you you owed him 75 cents or a dollar and a quarter. A completely crazy, crazy guy. But, you know, I would tell him, "Bill, I have a show coming up, and I have to go install it." Or, "I've got to be off for a week." You know, it would be really no problem. I mean, he wouldn't pay me for that time. But, "Just make sure the work's done. Go, and come back when you can come back."

The office was only about five people. I gave up being art director to my friend Lenny Brenner, who was the production director, because Bill decided that the art director really should be there five days a week. But the production director could be there three days a week. There were five of us in the office. And one secretary, one woman who worked the switchboard, and one kid in the mailroom. And everything else was freelancers. You know, it was like working at a Kabuki play. It was exactly the same every issue, you know. Dave Berg would do five pages, and Mort Drucker would do six pages, and Antonio Prohias would do three pages of "Spy Versus Spy." It was pretty painless, pretty painless.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Were you interested in comics at all? As a kid or even in art school?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, sure. I mean, as a kid, I loved *Mad* magazine. But it was long past those days. I was interested in it, I liked working in it, but it's not something I brought home with me, you know? [Telephone rings.] I met a lot of interesting people because of *Mad*. Everybody wanted to bring their kids to see the office, whether it was Rob Storr or Steve Reich or Robert De Niro. There were always interesting— [answers telephone].

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Do you want to test it to make sure everything's right?

KATHY GONCHAROV: No, I can see that it's doing—so, back to comics.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Have you been influenced at all?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: No. I tried to do a painting once based on a Harvey Kurtzman image, part of a Kurtzman image, that interested me. And, no, not really. I mean, some of the things that stick with you—you know, life is always complicated. What do you use; what do you remember? And four-color process printing really interested me intellectually.

So here I was learning about color in comic books. And this is something I learned in working on some of these calendars - for DC Comics, for Superman and Batman and so forth—is there are four process colors, CMYK, cyan, yellow, magenta, and black. And in comic books they take four steps—or actually five steps—of each of those colors: no color, 25 percent saturation, 50 percent, 75 percent, and 100 percent. [Telephone rings.] And everything in any comic book is just those four combinations of those four inks. And that interested me, and I used it in a number of books I designed.

We did some very interesting things with colors. In fact, I did the first—what I'm told was the first mass-market full-color paperback book. Small book on baseball cards. And then we did some things with DC, some of the first attempts to collect—we did a book called *The Secret Origins of the Superheroes* [Dennis O'Neil, ed. *The Secret Origins of the Super DC Heroe*s. 1976], which was, again, a mass book. I mean, there are a lot of comic books and a lot of graphic novels that are printed. But this was, I think, some of the first attempts to do this.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Did you meet some of the great comic artists?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, sure, sure. In fact, I just got in the mail, Abrams just published a book on Harvey Kurtzman. I knew Harvey. At the end of his life, Harvey came back to *Mad* and worked a little bit with us. We got along pretty well. But Al Jaffe is a good friend. Al Jaffe had some connections to the fine art world. His cousin—his cousin? His nephew was Ronnie Lanfield, a Colorfield painter.

But working at *Mad* was actually pretty interesting. Because I was always the guy who got to explain the latest art movement to them. And Bill Gaines, whose father had been one of the inventors of comic books in the first place and had a hand in the creation and evolution of comics all through the '20s, '30s, '40s, and '50s— Bill was obsessed with questions of copyright. I mean, it just drove him nuts. And when appropriation art turned up, I had endless hours of trying to explain this to Bill. And he would call in the editors and, you know: "You won't believe this! People can just steal our art." They can do this, they can do that. Funny guy, funny guy.

Some of the things I'm proudest of in publishing—I mostly did schlock and was very happy doing schlock. It was very freeing to do schlock. I did a novelization of Steve Martin's first movie, *The Jerk* [1979]. And the one demand that was made on me—and the reason I got the project was, because they knew I was interested in art and would try to be creative with it—was that he didn't want a novelization, you know, the typical novelization. So I did it as a photo novella, by taking a couple hundred stills from the movie and putting in balloons and doing it that way. And that was pretty successful and got me a number of similar projects over the next few years.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Does he collect your work?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: We have met, and he has started collecting my work. I tried to tell him about this, and it didn't compute. You know, it's like somebody from—there's one world, and here's another world. I'll tell him again sometime and see if that [Kathy Goncharov laughs]—I'll get him to autograph my copy of it. But, you know, there are probably other stories, but I can't think of them right now.

In 1967 I married Joyce Robins, who was then a sculptor, who became a painter, and who is now a sculptor again. And Joyce and I have a son named Casimir who's now 32 and who is a young filmmaker who lives in Carroll Gardens in Brooklyn.

What else can I tell you about my life?

KATHY GONCHAROV: Well, maybe we can go back to the art influences.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Good, good.

KATHY GONCHAROV: You talked about your work in political [inaudible]. Can you expand on that?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. I mean, again, I've gone on about this at length in other places. But the short version would be that for any artist raised in the '60s—I mean, politics was exactly the world we lived in. This was it. Whether it was the war in Vietnam—the civil rights movement was vital and happening. The early days of feminism, you know, were right there. I think gay rights were probably just starting up at the end of the decade, gay lib. It's the way I think you have to go about looking at a lot of things that were said and a lot of things that were done. Even the most ivory tower kind of work would often have a political agenda behind it, you know? Often a faulty one. And I think that, as I mentioned on the first tape, that I really came to think that my compatriots were delusional, doing works that could only be afforded by rich people, that didn't have a—you know, that didn't reach out to ourselves.

I can tell you the exact moment that this really hit home on me. Again, you know, it's never quite as simple as it is when you tell a story. There's all kinds of sources and roots. But I went to a show of Ray Parker's at Betty Cunningham's gallery, when it was over Finelli's in SoHo, on, I guess, that would have been Mercer and Prince Streets. I learned later this was a commission for a bank in the Midwest, but I didn't know what it was when I walked in. And the entire show was one painting that was 40 feet long. And I became almost physically sick, you know. It was like, my God, what the hell is this? You know, you're a collector - what're you going to do with this, wrap it around your house? You know? Like the 800-pound gorilla, you know, it sits wherever it wants to sit.

And at that point I swore I would never—and I was routinely doing paintings 90 by 110 inches. I found a pile of old silk-screen frames that were 90 by 55 inches. I would double them up and make these gigantic two-part

paintings. I wish I—I think I only have one left. I hope I only have one left. There could be some lurking in storage someplace. But, you know, I decided I would never work large again. And I've stayed to that.

Now, it's interesting. As political thinking, this is not very deep. And once you get into the question of—I mean, once I was telling this story at a talk in some school. And one student, who was brighter than some others, said, "Well, what about the price of these pictures?" And you realize you can make them as small as you want, but if they cost a lot of money, they're still not going to penetrate into tenement apartments.

So I probably would have given up on the idea if that had been all there was to it, but once I started working small, I realized there was another, maybe more subtly political thing happening, which was this: when I did very large paintings, if I had an idea, it would take me days to implement it, to play it out and to see it. And if it didn't work, if I didn't like it, it would take me days to get rid of it, you know? And no matter how disciplined I was, I know that I was censoring myself. Oh, blue never works, and gray will always work. And some things along that line of thought.

Once I started working small, I could take any idea, no matter how capricious, and I could put it on the canvas and see it in a minute. And if I didn't like it, I could take a rag and wipe it off in another minute and do something else. And serendipitously I discovered all kinds of things that I would never have found in this more programmatic approach that was dictated by the size of these canvases. I mean, there's nothing harder—when I look at early Al Leslie paintings, these gigantic improvisations - I mean, those things are more heroic than you can even imagine. Because to sustain improvisation on that level of effort and scale is startling. It's as mysterious to me as how Seurat manages to keep the image resolution of the picture, of the drawings, he's doing, you know, as he's doing them. It's just, kind of, an arm that's 12 feet long - how do you do this? How do you work like that?

So anyway, working smaller, a subtler kind of politics, that I was no longer the, kind of, slave to institutions that demanded large works - well, it's not important if it isn't big, you know. And I think there's still some belief in that. I still meet collectors who say they're waiting for a big one. I hope they don't hold their breath. But I think that—we don't want the studio to be like a factory, you know? I want to be free in the studio. I want to be energized in the studio. I want to be connected in the studio. And I want to be as free as I can be.

Freedom is a big issue for me. Freedom to make any kind of an image, freedom to act in any way I want to act. And freedom to play out an idea as long as I want to play it out. Somebody asked Jean-Luc Godard, you know, what do you want to do? What's the ultimate thing you want? And he said, "I want to go to the end of an idea." And I find that a very attractive and compelling proposition. That I define how far I go or where I go or how long I take this thing. So that interests me.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Back to your interest in film, how has that influenced your work?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: More than comic books, I think. Yes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Because I would have thought comic books, because of the colors and eccentric forms and —

TOM NOZKOWSKI: To make a direct connection is probably possible, but maybe more attenuated than one can talk about. But I'm very interested in genres. I'm interested in genre music; I'm interested in genre filmmaking. You know, forms that are more or less dictated by the culture. And because of that formal framing, artists are free to improvise wildly and to act on their own within those contexts. That interested me. I would say, even, in a way, that I don't think I really understood art until I understood specifically American classical filmmaking. That it wasn't—it isn't—stories. It isn't the subject. It isn't—you know, it isn't almost anything that it appears to be. In fact, it's something else. It's what kind of alternative world an individual can create within any given context. How richly they can imagine something. It is absolutely irrelevant what it is they are imagining. It's how profoundly they can understand anything.

I think that what we admire when we look at any work of art, whether it's a film or a painting or listening to a piece of music, is - I think what we see is the fact that another human being did this. We're like, oh, man! You know? It's possible to go that far down that road. I think that's what's so thrilling. It holds the promise for all of us, that we can be so committed to something: a thing, an idea, a place, a whatever. So that's interesting to me.

Films, yes. That's the short answer. Long answer, I don't know. I hate painting at night, so you've got to do something. So watching a movie is pretty good. I have a pretty good collection of films—at one time on VHS tapes. Actually originally on film, then VHS tapes. Now I've probably got about 2,000 DVDs. So there are a lot of nights we can take care of here.

KATHY GONCHAROV: I was going to say! [Laughs.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I've lectured on film; I've written a bit on film. When I was in Cooper in my first go-around there, in my third year, we had to take—I think it was my third year—we had to take an aesthetics course. And it was taught by a man named Paul Zucker, a very well-known old-school German/Swiss aesthetician. I still have several of his books. Very, very good man.

And of course, I was screwing up in his class. But we'd have interesting conversations before the class and after the class. He knew I was interested in film. So he told me that he wasn't interested in film at all, and that he would pass me if I could do some lectures for him on film in this aesthetics class. And so I did. I lectured for my wife's aesthetics class, the one that she was in, which is how we met actually, from the talk I gave there. And I showed some films at Cooper. Over the years I've showed Max Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* [1948], Don Siegel's *Hell Is for Heroes* [1962]. Oh, God, just some interesting genre filmmaking. I talked mostly about the *politique des auteurs*. As I understood it then. And some other things as well. So—

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh, also you're interested in architecture, you said earlier.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I am. Very much so.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Very much so.

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Inaudible.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, that! I think—I've done a lot of—you know, every painting I do comes from something in the real world. And while those sources are not always specific physical things—they can be more of an atmosphere or an idea, a context— but when they are a physical entity, they're as often architectural or related to architecture than not. I think that's a big source of imagery for me.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Or at least something else that helps me locate my imagery. I hate to be so vague about this. The source of a given painting can often be something very, very trivial, but it is the idea of going back to it and investigating it, you know, and putting in the context. And that context often becomes an architectural context. So that may be one of the sources of it. And it's also probably that I had two years of architecture at Cooper Union that it's a subject that I find fascinating. But, for example—I guess the mic can't come with us, but right in the other room where I have a whole set of drawings, there's a whole suite, actually, of architectural drawings that I did back in the '80s. I went to a library fair, and I bought 10 years of the *Journal of Architectural Historians*, 10 years' worth. I said, "My God, if I sit down and read these, I won't do any work for two months," you know. So here's the discipline: I will read them, like I want to, but I will do a drawing for every single article I read. And hanging up on the wall are some of the drawings from that suite of drawings.

When my wife and I travel, we make it a point to look at architecture. Two years ago we went to Oklahoma and drove around looking at the architecture of Bruce Goff. I think R. M. Schindler in Los Angeles may be the greatest—certainly the greatest architect of the 20th century, to my taste. And maybe the greatest artist. There's no artist I feel closer to than Schindler. I mean, I think he's a wonderful, wonderful artist in every way. Anyway, that's how I feel today. We were in Dublin recently walking, looking at Georgian architecture. We both find architecture a fascinating subject.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And that leads to your working process, too. Do you make drawings first and [inaudible] move on to the canvas?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I was taught by Abstract Expressionists. So preliminary drawings are an absolute forbidden thing, you know. Can't do it; work directly. As I said, there's a kernel, a source for every painting. I try not to even think about that source, other than to desire it before I get in front of the canvas. It's something I want to do. But what my approach will be, I won't even think about that until there's a brush in my hand and paint on the brush, and I'm moving.

And actually, every artist has their own set of disciplines that they create for themselves in the studio. One of mine, and this probably comes from—my wife and I shared raising our son together, you know, absolutely 50-50. When he was born, you know, you would have a very specific, limited time frame to work in. And I made the resolution then that I would never be in the studio, you know, sitting around reading the *New York Times*, as I had liked to in the past. If I was in the studio, there'd be a brush in my hand, and I would be painting. And I pretty much kept to that over all these years.

So, oh, drawings. So, no, I don't do preliminary drawings. But I do two other things. One, I do conventional separate drawings. I'll talk louder as I go and grab some things in a second.

KATHY GONCHAROV: You're incredibly organized.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, you've got to insist on [inaudible]. [Inaudible.] You know, for something like—and these are just as the moment arises—mixed media, different materials, anything that seems interesting. I'm doing less of these these days. There's an interesting reason for that. Since I've renovated the studio—It used to be this studio would get so fucking cold in January, February, and March, that I would go in the house, sit in the kitchen, and draw. So I had two or three months of mostly drawing. Now with my new studio and my radiant floor, I'm doing less and less of the kind of off-the-cuff drawings.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Do you miss it?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I do. I like drawing better than almost anything. So I probably should make the time. There's never enough time to do everything you'd like to do. And then I do another kind of drawing: large oils on paper. These are oils on a sheet of 22-by-30-inch Stonehenge. In my studio, next to my easel, I generally keep a sheet or two of the Stonehenge pinned up, either on the wall or on a drawing board. And the way I work, again taught by Abstract Expressionists, every time I come back to a painting, I will wipe it off or scrape it down. Do something to put the whole painting back into play. I don't believe in tinkering. And sometimes you do that, and you go like, oh, man, I'm going to lose something really nice, you know. It's not going to be the final painting, but it's a good thing.

What I'll do then is I'll take the paint that's on my palette, and I'll use it to work on a sheet of paper, on a piece of the Stonehenge, and do an oil on paper. So those are sort of— [sound of a drawer opening; Tom Nozkowski is farther away from the mic]. In some ways it represents the life of the painting. Things are happening in the painting as I'm working. [Inaudible.] So something like this might appear, you know, as the product of some painting. So those are the two kinds of works on paper I do.

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Inaudible] printmaking.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I do a lot of printmaking. Actually, I shouldn't say that. I've started making prints seriously in the last few years. I've tried for a number of years.

About 20 years ago, I think, Carol Weaver and Felix Harlan, who are great printmakers—they do Kiki Smith's prints and Louise Bourgeois's prints and James Siena's prints, some of James's prints—they brought me in to work on some etchings. And we did two nice etchings, but it was a very laborious process, and not economically viable for them, certainly. And maybe not for me either. I mean, it was just a lot of time went into it. I did some woodcuts—where I cut the plates myself—published by Diane Villani. But I never was really happy. Oh, I did some lithographs for a place called Echo Press out in Indiana. I was never really happy with the results of this process.

Then through my friends Bob and Sylvia Mangold, I met Doris Simmelink and Chris Tsukamodo, who had just moved to the Hudson Valley from the West Coast. We started working together, and we turned out to be kindred spirits. We collaborated together extremely well. And it's been a complete joy working with them. We've done a number of suites of prints. They have just left to go back to the West Coast, so I'm not sure how our relationship will continue. But through them I've learned really how to make prints, how to think about prints in interesting ways. And I know this will be a major part of my life from now on.

This October I'm doing a show of my complete prints and drawings for a local community college here that has—annually they try to show some major artist who lives in the Hudson Valley. And that show will go to Pace Prints in Chelsea next February. I think my total oeuvre in printmaking is about 35 prints at this point.

KATHY GONCHAROV: I thought there was more.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: No, no.

KATHY GONCHAROV: There will be more.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: There will be more.

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Inaudible.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: That's exactly right. And I hope to have them done in time for the show.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] I do, too.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: So I guess that's it. You know, I said my [inaudible] teachers at Cooper Union [inaudible]; that was one of the names I forgot. I worked with Cion [ph] Boyd and Karl Schrag and Michael Ponce de Leon, who were all names back in the '60s—even more in the '50s. But the best person I worked with at Cooper Union for

two—actually three—years of printmaking was Bob Blackburn, who was the shop tech, who really sort of showed how to cut through all the stuff and just get to work making prints.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Well, working in prints speaks to the collaborative process.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

KATHY GONCHAROV: And you have collaborated before—you mentioned how. And have you collaborated with Joyce?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: We have occasionally on odd, small things. I don't know that either of us would want to claim them as part of our either singular or collective lives. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] You know, it takes a lot of red wine to get a collaboration going between a husband and wife. Yes. I'm interested in collaboration. In fact, I gave a talk on collaboration at Yale this spring that I'm hoping to publish. So there will be a lot on collaboration. But I —

KATHY GONCHAROV: Who have you collaborated with?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, yes. And in different ways, different ways of collaborating was the subject of my talk.

I've collaborated a bit with John Yau; we've done one book together already [*Ing Grish.* Saturnalia Books, 2005], and we're about to do a second one with the Rutgers Center for Innovative Printmaking.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Brodsky Center.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I'm sorry, Brodsky Center, of course. And I am doing a book for the Yale University—actually, I'm doing a book for the Yale University Art Gallery and the Beinecke Library at Yale with the poet Cole Swensen. I've actually finished the 10 etchings that will illustrate that book. Remind me to show them to you before you leave. I like working with other people. You know, one of the great dangers of the artist's life, and also one of the great joys, is that you're on your own. And you have to sustain yourself. You have to find ways to keep working.

When you talk about collaboration, I think one of the strategies that every artist uses is to collaborate, but not necessarily with living, functioning people out there, but, in fact, with our brothers and sisters over time, right? If you ask any artist, if you push them hard enough, they'll tell you that there are historical artists who inhabit the studio. And that cast maybe changes over time, but, you know, they're there. And you're sort of playing for their approval, you know. Like, what will [Antoine] Watteau think of this color? Right? I bet he would've really liked it in one of his paintings. You know, that kind of thinking. I'm making it sound trivial. But in fact, it really is important, the sense of a community that extends through time. I think it keeps a lot of us going.

I mentioned before how few of my brothers and sisters from Cooper Union ended up continuing in the fine art world. And I would suggest to you that most of them stopped working not because they weren't getting shown or they didn't have outlets for their work, but because they couldn't stand the silence of the studio, you know? I really do think that is one of the hardest parts of it. And if you ask me, why do artists show their work, you know, the first glib answers is, well, to make some money. And of course, any artist will tell you that's kind of a dumb answer because 90 percent of the time, 90 percent of us don't make a penny. I think you show as a kind of reality test. Let's get this out of this hermetic, private, mandarin place and test it in the world. Am I crazy: is this self-delusion or not? That was certainly a fear I had all through the '70s, painting these paintings that nobody wanted to look at. So.

KATHY GONCHAROV: But you were persistent. So how did you get that strength?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: You know Polish. There's some Scots blood in there as well, some Dutch blood. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] Svetlana Alpers says she would have known me as a Dutchman the minute she met me, even with the name. I'm not sure that's true. Yes. You know, again, I mentioned that I was a fairly lonely child because I had skipped third grade. And then wasn't around on weekends. Wasn't around in summers. It was just, you know, a very disruptive childhood.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Why weren't you around on weekends and summers?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I was on my grandfather's farm.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: And aside from a couple of Polish cousins, I didn't know anybody there. I'd been a very solitary child. So I think that gave me some strength to endure the '70s. Also, here's the other thing. Look, if you —I tell my graduate students this—don't sell short the idea of actually enjoying what you're doing. That goes a long way [laughs] to give you all the strength you need to keep it going. Elizabeth Murray came to Rutgers and

gave a talk shortly before she died. And she said, "I know one thing." She said, "I know that I want to be happy in the studio. The rest of the stuff, they give it to you; they can take it away. I want to be happy in the studio."

I like living in the country. That's made quite a change in my work. It's increased my productivity. And, you know, productivity is an interesting thing. Back in the '70s I was probably doing 30 paintings or more a year, maybe even like 40. By the time I was in the mid-'80s and onward, it stabilized probably anywhere from 12 to 20 paintings a year, fairly slow worker. And I would work on them over years. Not that I'm proud of working over years; it just takes me a long time to get them right. You know, it's tough getting these paintings out. Moving to the country and getting away from the city and the distractions of the city, I've increased my productivity probably 20 percent, 25 percent. So the [inaudible] studio helps as well. So.

KATHY GONCHAROV: You said [inaudible] studio. One more thing about teaching.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Sure.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Do you enjoy teaching?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I do, very much so.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Do your students influence you ever?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, all the time. I don't regard a day teaching my grad students as a successful day unless I find something I can steal from one of them. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] Yes. You know, I once tried to do—this is fun, maybe. I once tried to do a series of paintings, actually [inaudible] on paper, that each one was going to be dedicated to one of my students and would try to have something of who that student was. And be painted in something of the style that student painted in. I got two or three of them done before I gave up on it as being a crazy idea.

But it was a lot of fun to try to—and that's the best thing about teaching. You know, it's always the same problem, which is how do you act, how do you make something new in the world? How do you do that? I mean, it's almost a hopeless idea, you know? And watching young people struggle with that is, in a way, a wonderful thing. And I especially like teaching undergraduates. But that's impossible. It's too hard for me right now. But I loved teaching undergraduates, and I loved seeing those moments when things would click, when they would get something, and it would happen.

I mentioned I had aunts who were schoolteachers and school principals. And as a ridiculously young boy, 10, 11, 12, something like that, I read my Aunt Thelma's John Dewey's *Art and Experience* [*Art as Experience.* 1934]. And that still strikes me as a pretty true and intelligent book.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So who were some of your students that [inaudible]?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Who have gone on to fame and fortune?

KATHY GONCHAROV: Or [inaudible] somebody now?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, I've only been doing this for a few years, you know.

KATHY GONCHAROV: How many years? Nine years?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Nine years. So let's see, Wendy White shows at Leo Koenig [Inc.]. She's quite—does some interesting work. Matthew Day Jackson shows at Peter Blum [Gallery] right now. Those students were from my first year there. A lot of people who you're less likely to know. Aaron Williams has shown with Protetch. Good painter. He showed with [Manfred] Baumgartner when Baumgartner had a gallery on 24th Street—as did another student of mine named Wes Sherman. Very, very interesting artist. They're out there. They're coming at you. Ask me in five years, and I'll have a few more names for you. [Kathy Goncharov laughs.]

KATHY GONCHAROV: I'm sure you will.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I've taught some kids of great talent, really great talent.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Have you ever taught anywhere else but Rutgers?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, I've done a lot of visiting gigs, like everybody else. But that's just a day in and a day out. We've just finished going up to—I've gotten some new file cabinets. I've been filing old letters. I tend to save everything. And we found my sign-up sheet from one of my visits to Yale, back in the '80s, I guess; it must have been the '80s, mid-'80s. And both [John Curran and Lisa Yukavage –JN] are on the list for studio visits.

I met John [Curran –JN] at a birthday party for me and Peter Schjeldahl a few months ago. We talked for a bit. And both of us remembered that we had done a studio visit, but neither of us could remember one single word that transpired in it. So it couldn't have been very eventful. I would like to have said, "John, give up this abstract painting and try doing figures." [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] But I don't think that was the case.

Yes. I always enjoyed being—the visiting gigs are good, you know. You get to do an hour presentation on your work, take questions. I like getting questions because they sometimes throw you off balance; they come at you in odd ways. So it's good. You know, I've been luckier than most artists in that—knock on wood that it continues—but so far, my career has been, you know, a nice, inclined plane. It really has not suffered any big ups or any big downs. And I tend to have collectors who like my work. It seldom turns up in auctions. And I tend to find people who stay with me for the long run. So it's all been good that way.

KATHY GONCHAROV: That's wonderful.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. So knock on wood. [They laugh.] Double, double [inaudible]. [They laugh.] What else could we talk about?

KATHY GONCHAROV: I don't know. I'm trying to think of something.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I like living in the country. There's a lot of artists who live nearby who—

KATHY GONCHAROV: We saw Carolee Schneemann at the bus stop.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: [Inaudible.] We saw Carolee Schneemann at the bus stop. I spend a lot of time with Gary Stephan and Suzanne Jolson, who are here in the summers. We see a lot of Catherine Murphy and Harry Roseman, who are here year-round—in Poughkeepsie on the other side of the river, but close enough. David Levi Strauss and his wife Gret Smith are good friends. Martin Puryear—Martin and Jeanne Puryear—are good friends.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Do you see much of Martin?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Martin and I used to hike together at least once a week, until both of our knees went. I saw Martin about two weeks ago. I should give him a ring. But, yes, he's nearby. Yes, there are a number of artists in the area, and it's a nice little community.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Not so many artists that it drives you crazy. But enough that if you want to go out and have a drink, you can drink with somebody.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So you're not bored up here.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: No, I'm not. It's wonderful. My goodness. No, it's very pleasant.

KATHY GONCHAROV: I consider it's an absolutely stunning studio.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Thank you.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes. It's terrific. All those beautiful [windows –JN] .

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, I'm sorry we couldn't arrange a sunny day for you.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes, it's too bad. [Inaudible.] So anything else? Is there anything we didn't cover? Future plans of what you might do?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Future plans, yes. Want to be a cowboy, you know? [Kathy Goncharov laughs.] You know, I want to continue as is. If I had one wish, it would be that my knees were better and that I could go back hiking. Hiking's been a big part of my life. And one of the reasons we're here specifically. There's a whole intricate trail system on the Shawangunk Ridge behind the house here.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So do any of your images come directly out of—

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Oh, you bet!

KATHY GONCHAROV: —the scenery here? I would think.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I don't know if you—you probably don't know my work well enough - but over the last decade I've started doing some 30-by-40-inch paintings. I've finished seven of them to date. And they are all concerned with the local landscape.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh! Are they here?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: All sold.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Off in the world.

KATHY GONCHAROV: I've probably seen them, but I don't know which ones.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. There are generally one or two in each show. There was not one in the Pace show. Hadn't finished one.

KATHY GONCHAROV: How about in the [inaudible] show?

MR. NOZKOWSKI: No, no. The last show at Protetch had two, I think. But they're damned hard to do so—but, yes. Actually they'll all be, every single one of them, will be in this retrospective in Ottawa, so that'll be nice to see them all in one place again.

KATHY GONCHAROV: And will that travel here?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: It was scheduled to go to the Norton [Museum of Fine Art] in Palm Beach. But I have the feeling that there's some money problems there. I don't know for sure. But, you know, suddenly I'm not hearing anything from them, and I'm skeptical. And already two museums have dropped out for money reasons. So, yes. It's not a good time [laughs] to be traveling—trying to travel a show. But it's going to be a beautiful show, and the catalogue is lovely. Big hard-cover, nice, nice catalogue.

KATHY GONCHAROV: How many retrospectives have you had?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: It depends how you define that. Really, this is—serious ones in serious museums, this is my second. If you want to count the 20-painting one that Haunch did that was in Texas at Southern Methodist [Meadows Museum], that's one. I did a drawing retrospective at the New York Studio School. Things like that.

KATHY GONCHAROV: I understand.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. We hope there'll be more in the future.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Well, of course, there will be.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes. You never know. Let's see the art world come back booming. That's what I want.

KATHY GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Me, too.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Future plans: I'm going to stop teaching. Spend more time here. I'm very lucky. I'm getting to do everything I want to do. If I had a wish, it would be only for more time, and it's just not possible. I'd have to get bigger brushes or something. On the wall here, these are a set of prints that I'm doing for *Art on Paper* magazine. Peter Nesbitt is trying to do cheap prints, inexpensive prints that are mass produced. And this is my contribution.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Oh. I didn't know he was doing that. That's really interesting.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: He did—the first one's been published. It's Polly Apfelbaum. I'm number two. And he's holding off till he gets enough advance orders before he publishes it.

KATHY GONCHAROV: So how much are they?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: You can have all four for $900.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Wow!

TOM NOZKOWSKI: And they are very nicely done. I mean, they're nice reproductions.

KATHY GONCHAROV: And how are they done?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Mass offset.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Just mass—just offset?

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] But on a proofing press, so they're being watched very closely. The color is very—they're nice. I mean, if you wanted to do - if you wanted to revive mass-market posters. You know like [inaudible].

KATHY GONCHAROV: I've always been interested in doing that.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: You should give Peter a ring, see what he's up to. He's having some problems, but he's learning a lot.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Because I've had a lot of resistance from my people [inaudible].

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, they may be right. In other words, if you have $900 for all four, or 250 [dollars] for one, or whatever he's charging, right? You say, well, you know, I'm getting a poster. I can go down to a poster shop and get one for $50, $25.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes. But not like this.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Right. But the people who spend that kind of money, once you—there's a price point. And I think they say, well, maybe you can get a $500 print then, a real print, or a $1,000 print.

KATHY GONCHAROV: That's true for $900.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: So you're just in a dicey area. But he's also—see, and here you're a professional in the field, and you haven't heard about these. So that's a problem.

KATHY GONCHAROV: And [I] know Peter.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Yes.

KATHY GONCHAROV: I'm sure I will hear about it very soon. But I'm surprised that I haven't.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: You know, at the Art Pier he had a booth, and he had Polly's prints up.

KATHY GONCHAROV: That's why I don't know. Because we did a project with one of the [inaudible]; so I went to New Orleans, and the other people went with us. So I did not see any of that. I would have.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: But even so, you know, he should have penetrated the market somehow. Well, for him, if it's a mass thing, you've got to get to a mass audience.

KATHY GONCHAROV: That's true.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: You don't do that with a booth in an art fair. You do that with an ad in *Artforum*.

KATHY GONCHAROV: Yes. Well, [inaudible] what I would like to do, and as I say, I've had a lot of resistance. But I was very close to Vera List. I don't know [inaudible]; I know she's here. I guess I can't remember anything. I'm surprised she didn't. But anyway, she started the List Poster Program, in which [both speaking at once] -

TOM NOZKOWSKI: Well, I have done that.

KATHY GONCHAROV: The original. I'm trying to think of what it is. It must have been from '97, right? Because she did it for all kinds of nonprofits.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: I did it for "Mostly Mozart" [Lincoln Center summer music festival].

KATHY GONCHAROV: Okay. Yes, I'd love to see them.

TOM NOZKOWSKI: [Inaudible—walks away from the mic.]

KATHY GONCHAROV: What's nice is you could get a fine art print. But then [inaudible].

TOM NOZKOWSKI: [Inaudible.] [They have moved away from the mic.] Hold on a second. [Sound of someone climbing stairs.]

[Audio break.]

KATHY GONCHAROV: I guess I should go back to the tape recorder and tell [inaudible] still here [laughs]. To whoever's transcribing, we just went to look at Tom's print that he made for the Lincoln Center List Poster Program. So we're going to pause.

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[Track AAA_nozkow09_5879 is a test track.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]