



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Hananiah Harari,
1992 Sept. 24-Oct. 15

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Hananiah Harari on September 24, 1992. The interview was conducted by G. Stavitsky for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[tape one, side two]

G. STAVITSKY: We're talking now about other work of yours. Fortune Magazine cover.

HANANIAH HARARI: Now, this is precision.

G. STAVITSKY: May, 1946.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And here's also an illustration I did, for a different issue of Fortune. And you wanted the article for some reason. I copied the article that I was illustrating.

G. STAVITSKY: Thank you very much. Well, these are from the 1940s, and it was in the forties that you started your career as a commercial artist?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Right after the army. So there's that. That's number one. Now, this is for you.

G. STAVITSKY: Thank you.

HANANIAH HARARI: Now, other precision things -- I don't know whether any of this is a still life. Well, it's not a still life. It's a landscape, almost, too.

G. STAVITSKY: 'Plane Fittings.' Are these parts from airplanes?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. These are simply -- I love good tools. Like tools, but done almost like a landscape.

G. STAVITSKY: I see. With the different strata -- the different layers.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Space, and all that. Here's another type of precision that I made. This is a still life, half completed. Actually, you can see the beginning with the , and then the first coats and the second -- still, there are a few that are --

G. STAVITSKY: And this is called 'Sea Sharp Tool Feud.' Oh, this is a recent work from 1974.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: It's big. Thirty by eighty inches. Now, is this characteristic of the work that you were doing in the seventies?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. Well, let me see what else I can show you.

G. STAVITSKY: Well, we can come back.

HANANIAH HARARI: Here's another one I did in the seventies. That's called 'Nude Descending the Stairs.'

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, this is a take-off on descending.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. But it's also a take-off on Burne Jones.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: See, there's art history.

G. STAVITSKY: Right. Which Burne Jones painting is that, again?

HANANIAH HARARI: 'The Maidens Descending the Stairs.'

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, this is really interesting.

HANANIAH HARARI: That's in the Tate -- his.

G. STAVITSKY: And this is a work from --

HANANIAH HARARI: Around the seventies. Sometime around there.

G. STAVITSKY: I see. Because I find it interesting because both of these are fairly realist representational.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. Listen, throughout my career, I did both. The still life that you have -- I also did a realistic one, at the same time.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. I want to talk more about the various pairs that you've done.

HANANIAH HARARI: Look at this. That's realism.

G. STAVITSKY: Okay. So this is a realist painting called 'Thirst Knows No Season.'

HANANIAH HARARI: Right.

G. STAVITSKY: Now, is this actually from a magazine?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. It was in all the magazines. Life and Saturday Evening Post. This is a photograph of it.

G. STAVITSKY: So this was an advertisement for Coca-Cola.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And it was a beautiful painting.

G. STAVITSKY: And it's a painting that seems to suggest your interest in people like Harnett and .

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. Of course. And it won a prize. This won a prize. It was a very unusual series that I developed. I did a whole series.

G. STAVITSKY: And it won a prize in a show?

HANANIAH HARARI: This won a prize -- it's like the movies give Oscars. Well, the commercial art field gives prizes to . Now, while I did that, I did this.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, I see. So here is the abstract version, which is called 'The Season.'

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: And these are from the late thirties?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. This was late forties. 1949.

G. STAVITSKY: So was it from about starting in 1939, and then going through the .

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

G. STAVITSKY: Pairs of realist and abstract.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

G. STAVITSKY: The and .

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. It's not just still lifes, either.

G. STAVITSKY: Do you still do this kind of comparison?

HANANIAH HARARI: Sure. I do it in one painting now. [laughs] I'm doing a very nice portrait of an artist, and I have him in about eleven different places. Some are real and some are not. Oh, yes. They're all tools.

G. STAVITSKY: Was this -- I mean, especially the idea of doing the realist work -- was that done of your commercial work, in effect that you were doing this nine-to-five?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. It's the other way around. The commercial came after I had done these realist still lifes. The ones that were in the Museum of Modern Art for a while.

G. STAVITSKY: I see. The ones that were in the show realists of 1943.

HANANIAH HARARI: This is one. That's 1941.

G. STAVITSKY: 1941. 'Lavender & Lace.'

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. That was in the Museum of Modern Art. It was sold. I bought it back recently.

G. STAVITSKY: Wow. That must have made you very happy to be able to do that. That was in the 'Magic Realist Show,' which you got a lot of attention with the five paintings that you had in the show.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Now, speaking of realism, there's another part of my story that we haven't come to yet. But because I was doing advertising, and because I was also working -- doing work for -- McCarthyism, so I could no longer earn a living doing advertising. So I went into .

G. STAVITSKY: This was in the mid-50s, with the McCarthy ?

HANANIAH HARARI: The early 50s.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh. So that is when your career as a portrait started.

HANANIAH HARARI: No. I always loved to do portraits anyway. I loved them. But this was my -- I put it to commercial use. Here's one of my portraits. I don't know whether you ever saw this.

G. STAVITSKY: No, I never saw this one, of Jennifer and Patricia Point. And the portrait paintings then, since the 50s -- you've been continuing to do these?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, yes. But I try to stop it -- final. I mean, I want to be liberated. [laughs] Here's another one I did.

G. STAVITSKY: A little boy at a desk. Larry Roberts. And these are from the 60s?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. The 60s. Maybe 70s. Now, this one was a work on paper that I did of a studio that I had on 12th Street.

G. STAVITSKY: Okay. This is 1945. 218 East 12th Street.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. It was a very crowded place.

G. STAVITSKY: Kind of a synthetic cubist interpretation of the crowding.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. It's a very nice painting.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: And this is a drawing I've made for it.

G. STAVITSKY: That is also 1945. 'Screws in Studio.' That says it. [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: See how I came prepared to talk to you?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes!

HANANIAH HARARI: But this is only the tiniest. I have so much documentation. Maybe too much, you know?

G. STAVITSKY: Well, it's fantastic. Maybe you'll give it to the archives. [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, yes. I had a painting restored, and these are the two restorers who did it. They came to my studio, and I paid the bill by doing their portraits.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, so this was recently.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: I love those a lot. 1990.

HANANIAH HARARI: Now, Gail, I think I've showed this to you. I know I did. But this is me in Paris, as a student.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. You showed me this wonderful picture. This is Paris -- summer 1933. Academie de la Grande

HANANIAH HARARI: That's right.

G. STAVITSKY: Which is where you studied with Leger?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. I studied with him around the corner, practically, in another place. He had some kind of space. I don't remember what it was. I lived right across the street from there. I went there for drawing, more than anything. And painting, too.

G. STAVITSKY: Was there any particular person teaching there, or --?

HANANIAH HARARI: There were. And some of them were fairly well known. Now, if you go there, you'll see right on the street entrance, they have plaques -- who taught there -- and some of them are fairly .

G. STAVITSKY: -- was he there?

HANANIAH HARARI: was in another place, too. The area was full of Italians.

G. STAVITSKY: Because I remember that the people you said you studied with were Lomere, Andre L'hote --

HANANIAH HARARI: That's right. L'hote had his own place, and it was very, very exciting. He was a wonderful teacher. , too.

G. STAVITSKY: What kind of education did you get?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, it was post-graduate. [laughs] You know, it was inspiring, I think. First of all, I was supplementing. I don't know about the words. I was supplementing what I was learning from all these guys by walking the streets. There were galleries all over. I saw for the first time Marquee. I saw , and all these wonderful - - it was really thrilling. You know, this is great.

G. STAVITSKY: Do you mean the whole range of --

HANANIAH HARARI: Not to mention that every day I went to the Louvre. Or to the , where I saw the black garden. It was then called Negro Land.

G. STAVITSKY: That's right. And then the mask that appears in the painting was the frog.

HANANIAH HARARI: That's right. It was as a result of my interest because I did many drawings of other masks.

G. STAVITSKY: And that was an African mask that you actually purchased and brought back with you.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Right. That's right. And this is when I visited in 1985 -- the same school.

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs] That's great.

HANANIAH HARARI: I showed you that, too.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. That's funny. Well, I definitely want to talk more about your education, I think.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. But I have lots of pictures. I have a picture of me that I meant to bring for today, of me studying mural painting in Paris. I studied Fresco. I did beautiful Frescos.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, was that at the Fountainbleau School?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Right. And you have this. I showed you this. This was from --

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, yes. Adirondack Construction -- 1946.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Now, I want to get back to the precision because that's what I'll leave with you.

G. STAVITSKY: Okay. Thank you. These are things you can leave -- or borrow?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Here's another one. I don't know whether these come with your idea of what precision is. Now, that's a large still life that was so beautiful.

G. STAVITSKY: This was 'The Mathematics Lesson of 1949.'

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And that was sold.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. I would say this is actually somewhat more abstract than a lot of precision things.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. It looks like a bunch of tables because they're tabular planes.

G. STAVITSKY: overlapping the cubes.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. I love that painting. Here's another one. Did I show you that one?

G. STAVITSKY: No.

HANANIAH HARARI: This is also a still life down in New York. Without the skyscrapers.

G. STAVITSKY: It almost looks like neon lights.

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, the colors are . The new color in Xerox. This is one you never saw. You might think of it as precision. This is me geometry.

G. STAVITSKY: 'Man And Sky.'

[end of side two, tape one]

Second Interview - October 15, 1992

HANANIAH HARARI: These were young middle-age -- maybe mid-forties or late forties. This couple -- the collectors -- who were at the gallery. And as I was showing the work, and photographs to Ellen, they were over our shoulder, looking. And they were fascinated. They asked me a lot of questions -- the kind you would ask me, about what was it like. All sorts of ramifications that they wanted to know. Well, of course, they collect that period.

G. STAVITSKY: Who are they?

HANANIAH HARARI: I didn't get their names.

G. STAVITSKY: And they collect works from the 1930s?

HANANIAH HARARI: Right. And from Ellen who has a lot of artists. In fact, do you know who walked in while I was there, was Hugh Mesigov. Does that ring a bell?

G. STAVITSKY: No.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, well, he's an old-timer, like me, and we met recently at the Newark Museum, I believe it was.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, I'll have to find out about him, too. We were talking about Ellen Shrago.

HANANIAH HARARI: She's a very nice gal. She knows about that.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh. We had a brief conversation. That's great. Well, anyway, we can begin at the beginning [laughs] with the fact that you were born in Rochester, in 1912?

HANANIAH HARARI: 1912. Right. In the hospital on Main Street. [laughs] My mother was a young woman. I was born exactly nine months after their wedding night, so I'm a love child. [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs] That's perfect.

HANANIAH HARARI: I know it. They were married on the 30th of November, and I was born on the 29th of August. Figure it out! You see?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. Well, they wasted no time.

HANANIAH HARARI: That's right!

G. STAVITSKY: How did they choose -- you have a very distinctive name. I was wondering about the origins of your name.

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, it's a biblical name. And my mother was always a Zionist. Even long before she was married, as a teenage girl, she was a Zionist. It's an early prodivity for her. In those days. I mean, generally. She had a bunch of sisters. And of them -- well, they were all Zionists, but not as fiery as she was.

G. STAVITSKY: Do you think you got some of your leftist inclinations from her?

HANANIAH HARARI: I got, I think, my interest in affairs of the world, say and cultural aspects of the Jewish people, from her. She wasn't a synagogue goer, although she kept a kosher kitchen. So it was -- don't forget, she was born in this country, too, see. By the way, I brought --

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, you brought something for me!

HANANIAH HARARI: [laughs] Oh, it has to do with -- that's Sylvan Cole. [laughs] I'm getting mixed up, aren't I? This has to do with the politics later, so we can come to that.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, great.

HANANIAH HARARI: Unless you want to go into it now. This has worked very good for the New Masses. I wouldn't do it today but then I did. This is a collage, and it's about the British torries who were very pro-Hitler, and for surrender. You know, they were appeasers. It was from this group that what's-his-name came. The prime minister.

G. STAVITSKY: Chamberlain?

HANANIAH HARARI: Chamberlain. Yes. Do you know who was thick with him? Old Man Kennedy.

G. STAVITSKY: Joseph?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. He was thick with these people. Now, look what I did. I took a nice, old castle, and I put snakes, skunks, rats. [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: And the rat has a swastika around its neck?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. You're very observant. A vulture. And this is the fifth column. Do you remember? They were called fifth columnists? That was one of their . . .

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I forget. These are various symbols. Here's the rat with his fly, and that's the umbrella of Chamberlain.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, yes. [laughs] And the flag says "Elite Order of the Copperheads.

HANANIAH HARARI: Because they were the equivalent American appeasers of the Civil War. And I think that may be even an illusion to the American Ambassador who was thick with all these, friendly with Cliveden Castle. We don't know this, but Cliveden Castle was where they had their meetings.

G. STAVITSKY: That was in London?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: And this says that it was illustrated in the New Masses in the late 30s.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. At the time of Munich. I should have had the date on it. Anyway, I sold that thing for seventy-five dollars to a collector.

G. STAVITSKY: And it says it was in the United American Artists show. A collage by Hananiah Harari for the forthcoming United American Artists show.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: Was that a show of political --?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And probably the American scene -- the suffering, and all that, going on. Here's another one I did. This one is funny.

G. STAVITSKY: The caption is "The Führer has given me his solemn word that he will not send you to the eastern front." [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: [laughs] That's Mussolini talking from his balcony, you see?

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, okay. "Il Duce" and his name is crossed out.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And these people, one is under the soldier. He's holding his nose. This guy has turned

his back to him. I got this from one from a painter like de Chirico.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, yes. The Italian piazza.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And these were the posters, being torn off. I think that's a very good one.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes! Do you still have these?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. I gave them away. Who knows what they did.

G. STAVITSKY: So you had these on almost a weekly basis, in *The New Masses*?

HANANIAH HARARI: No, no. Just occasionally.

G. STAVITSKY: And you also wrote articles for it?

HANANIAH HARARI: No, I didn't.

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs] 'On Safari With Harari.'

HANANIAH HARARI: I used to do a column.

G. STAVITSKY: What is this from?

HANANIAH HARARI: That's from the *New Masses*, also.

G. STAVITSKY: Another format?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Do you see where it says, "The Army is going to bring three hundred ex-foes as students here." This was after the war. Look who they are. They're very good caricatures. I don't know whether you recognize this.

G. STAVITSKY: Well, I do recognize Hitler.

HANANIAH HARARI: . . . and there's Göring and Goebbels, this is Goebbels, this is Himmler, and Hitler.

G. STAVITSKY: And the class is Geo-Politics II.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: Who can tell us how many miles it is to Moscow? [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: [laughs] They're raising their hands to answer. And this is the college students with the raccoon coats, in those days.

G. STAVITSKY: The same cast of characters.

HANANIAH HARARI: They have Ilsa. [laughs] Ilsa. That was a famous woman commandant. It was a torture in camps. Her name was Ilsa Koch. I don't know what happened to her. This is an American confronting -- you see, they're running down an American student.

G. STAVITSKY: And that's Hitler in a raccoon coat, with a banner saying, "Alma Mutter."

HANANIAH HARARI: [laughs] Isn't that funny?

G. STAVITSKY: That's very funny. You have quite a sense of humor. [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: [laughs] This one is an attack on -- do you remember Cardinal Spellman?

G. STAVITSKY: Not really.

HANANIAH HARARI: [laughs] Anyway, he was a big Cardinal, and he was a reactionary voice. So that's a very good cartoon of him. He's digging the grave. [laughs] So these are the things that the *New Masses* claimed he was opposed to -- public schools, *The Nation* magazine. He made a big stink about that. A Connecticut Yankee by Mark Twain, because Mark Twain was an anti-deist. Oh, and then he wanted to infringe on the separation of church and state, so he's digging the graves of these issues.

G. STAVITSKY: And this is your 'On Safari With Harari.'

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. So as a result of that, along with the McCarthy attack on various things was a thing called Counter-Attack. They would expose various communist types, or some radical types. Their doings.

G. STAVITSKY: And were they working with McCarthy?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, they were associated with him. Yes, they were.

G. STAVITSKY: So this is a letter dated July 21, 1950 to the subscriber of this magazine, Counter-Attack.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: 'Coca-Cola and Old Sunnybrook Whiskey go on Safari with Harari.' "Hananiah Harari is an abstractionist painter, a commercial artist, and a cartoonist. But not many people know of his cartoons. This is because the communist publication Masses and Mainstream has a rather limited circulation." Is that the same as New Masses?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. New Masses changed to Masses and Mainstream.

G. STAVITSKY: Okay. "It is a monthly magazine of higher Stalinist cultural propaganda. Even the average communist party member does not read it. It's designed for the communist intellectuals. Hananiah Harari's 'On Safari With Harari' cartoons are a regular Masses and Mainstream feature. In recent months they have ridiculed -- in some instances, an obscene manner, President Truman, General Eisenhower, Cardinal Spellman, J. Edgar Hoover, and other leaders who are anti-communist. One of Harari's latest cartoons, "June," portrayed General MacArthur dressed in the armor of a Japanese futile warrior, and brandishing a samurai sword while he crushed the people of Japan under his feet, and held Emperor Hirohito and the Japanese Army non-existent under control on a string. But Harari wants to be popular and close to people, according to Time magazine, which recently gave him a nice publicity plug. So Coca-Cola and National Distilling Company have come to his aid. The Coca-Cola ad for July displayed throughout the United States in national magazines, etc. was painted by Harari for a tidy sum, an ad for Old Sunnybrook -- also the work of Harari will appear in the July 31st issue of Life magazine. What to do? Send our letters to president of Coca-Cola, the president of National Distilling. Ask them if they can't find artists who are not contributors to communist publications to paint their ads." My, God! What was the upshot of this?

HANANIAH HARARI: The upshot of it was I was blacklisted. I immediately lost all --

G. STAVITSKY: All of your commercial --

HANANIAH HARARI: All of the commercial artwork. So I went to Portraits, Inc. to do portraits of the wealthy class. They didn't know about these things here. But today -- you see, unlike -- who is that playwright who wrote -- she was a woman. A well-known playwright. She never disavowed her affiliation, or never expressed any sorrow or disagreement about it. And unlike her, I am furious that I was hoodwinked to do that sort of thing. Today I know that -- for instance, that General MacArthur did a wonderful job of introducing democracy into a feudal -- not feudal but fascist Japan. I was just listening to the extremists. Foolish. Foolish. But this sort of attack is also reprehensible, too.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, sure.

HANANIAH HARARI: Except that the widespread political left needed to be -- I wouldn't say put out of work. But they needed a lesson. I got my lesson. Not from this, but from later reflection. And from observing and experience. And I'm proud to say that I know what communism is. It's no good. Here is an example of what the communists had to say about me as a painter, in those days. It's a long review, but I can give you the essence.

G. STAVITSKY: Okay.

HANANIAH HARARI: I don't know how to consolidate it. But maybe if we have time. The point is, they criticized me for working for the big corporations.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, so you're getting it from both sides.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. They said that I should turn my talents -- portraying the misery of the oppressed -- and to portraying the hope of the future, you see?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I think they gave credit to this sort of thing -- the cartoons. Anyway, it's really a despicable article. The interesting thing is that Crichtlow is a fellow teacher now in the league. [laughs] He's a black artist. And he has always shown black people. And because in those days and now, the left thinks that the highest

calling is to portray the blacks sympathetically, and so forth. You don't want to attack them. But just because you are a portrayer of those oppressed people doesn't mean that you are on the right side of it.

G. STAVITSKY: Actually, maybe just for the record, say this appeared in The Daily Worker.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. It was the communist organ at that time.

G. STAVITSKY: And on May 2, 1950, in it's review -- oh, I see. It's a review of a show that you had at the Laurel Gallery.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. My one man show. And he had a one man show at the same time. And they were comparing the two shows.

G. STAVITSKY: I see.

HANANIAH HARARI: And our two attitudes.

G. STAVITSKY: So they are basically criticizing you for using your competence and skill to do advertisements.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And not, towards politically correct, or as we'd say today, or to the propoganda mill -- the Stalinist type of -- you know, because at this time, Stalin was leaning very heavily on Soviet artists to do that.

G. STAVITSKY: Now, in 1950, was this around the time that you were starting to re-think some of your positions, or was that later?

HANANIAH HARARI: No, no. That came later.

G. STAVITSKY: Now, did you ever, at this time -- was there any recourse, or any way you could challenge the blacklisting?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, I think that much bigger fish than I lost their jobs. Some of them committed suicide.

G. STAVITSKY: Terrible.

HANANIAH HARARI: I really was out of work, and it was tough for a while, until I got rolling. But once I got connected with Portraits, Inc. Do you know what they said to me when I brought my samples there?

G. STAVITSKY: No.

HANANIAH HARARI: They said, "Where have you been all this time?" [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: They knew nothing of this.

G. STAVITSKY: I wonder if they would have cared, if they did know.

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, they were two society ladies who ran it. Charming ladies. One of them was a very distinguished figure in American art. She went to the League. Her name is Helen Appleton Read.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, yes. A critic.

HANANIAH HARARI: A critic. Yes. But she studied with Bellows, I think, or one of those big guys. It might have been Henri. Yes, it was Henri. I didn't know that that was a changed name, because he had to flee. Did you hear that? Did you know that?

G. STAVITSKY: No, actually, I didn't.

HANANIAH HARARI: His father had to flee, having killed a man, and they changed their name.

G. STAVITSKY: That's quite a story.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes! [laughs] I read that in that show on the Eight.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, yes. That's right.

HANANIAH HARARI: We've got a diversion there.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: And have no fear, I know what communism is now. [laughs] It's really -- but the sad thing is that a whole generation doesn't know. Even now, they don't know what a trap it is. Intellectual trap.

G. STAVITSKY: So it's an intellectual trap that you think that your mother might have had a small part in getting involved with?

HANANIAH HARARI: Not really. Actually, I think my parents -- both of them -- my father was a businessman -- I think they rather -- they never actually said this to me, but I think they didn't like my flirting with the left. They didn't really like it. They were liberals, as most people. But they tolerated it. They tolerated all my awful bratty brash, rotten things like getting married too soon, and all that.

G. STAVITSKY: Well, were they --

HANANIAH HARARI: And staking me to art.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, okay. That's what I really wondered. If they encouraged you.

HANANIAH HARARI: They did. They had been told that I was talented, because the local museum in Rochester, to the classes of which I went, as a kid.

G. STAVITSKY: As a high school student?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Twelve years old maybe. Or thirteen. They were encouraged by that. And besides, I mean even as a much younger kid -- they knew that I wanted to be an artist. They were worried how am I going to make a living, rightfully, being middle class, hard working. But they were sweet. I have good memories of my parents. [Tape Off/On]

G. STAVITSKY: I was just curious if your parents or anyone in your family had an interest in art.

HANANIAH HARARI: No.

G. STAVITSKY: Or how you came to this, yourself.

HANANIAH HARARI: I just started to draw as a kid, and loved it. I used to go out doing silly -- I mean, real ridiculous landscapes. You know, I'd paint a field or a barn, and didn't know anything. But, oh, what a thrill! And they were very, very impressed. In fact, they saved all of my crummy stuff and handed it around to the relatives.

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: So they knew that I was interested in it. I remember once going out, doing a landscape, and there was another -- what I felt, a very old artist. He probably was in his late twenties, maybe.

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: And he was painting, and I was enthusiastic. He was a nasty man. He said that I'm ignorant, and that I can't do well at this. He tried to discourage me.

G. STAVITSKY: That's terrible!

HANANIAH HARARI: Made me think I had a bad life as an artist. It's quite possible. [laughs] So that was my first, uh, barricade.

G. STAVITSKY: But it obviously didn't come from within your family.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, no. Far from it.

G. STAVITSKY: Also, I guess, just for the record, do you have siblings?

HANANIAH HARARI: I had a brother. He has died. It's a very tragic story because at the age of two -- and I was only a year and a half older -- he developed Polio. There was a big epidemic in 1916. He was born in 1914. And they didn't know how to treat it. I just remember as a -- one of my earliest memories is of despair. My parents -- and here's a kid that can't walk all of a sudden -- with sturdy legs, he had. He was husky, always. More huskier than I was built. He never recovered. He was badly crippled all his life. And my young parents went through that -- is something bad. Well, I've had that kind of tragedy, too, myself.

G. STAVITSKY: Do you mean with --

HANANIAH HARARI: With my son. Not Polio. Something worse. My poor son developed a syndrome called --

there's a name for it. When someone is fixed on something. I'll think of it. Anyway, it leads to inaction. And this he got, I think, from drugs. He was a child of the 60s. The 60s is also a result, I think, of the left bad, bad time, I think. And children of the 60s are now professors, and they're teaching all these -- they're misteaching, misguiding. So I have those not happy thoughts about --

G. STAVITSKY: But it sounds like at least as far as the encouragement you got, in your experiences with art -- that sounds like that was a happy part of your growing up.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. That was wonderful. Absolutely.

G. STAVITSKY: So you pretty much knew at an early point that you wanted to --

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. And my parents protected me as best they could from the many trials that they had to go through with a crippled child, trying to get him well. And farming me out to relatives while they went. But it's so -- what they went through. But I've gone through it.

G. STAVITSKY: Coming out to a good point. But it sounds like you actually, then, started studying art at a pretty early point --

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: And this was at the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: And you continued when you went to Syracuse?

HANANIAH HARARI: Then I graduated high school. Through high school I tried to draw and paint. This must sound a little to you like Esther's stories, because she started very early. Most people do, I think.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: Although Balcomb Greene didn't. He was a very intellectual academic type. So then I went to art school.

G. STAVITSKY: At Syracuse?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. I had a wonderful time. It was intensive -- mediocre teachers -- but we had a very good class. I mean, my fellow students were great, and we all competed. But I left after two years.

G. STAVITSKY: So you were there from about 1930 to 1932.

HANANIAH HARARI: Exactly. And in 1932 I went to Paris, to continue.

G. STAVITSKY: When you were studying at Syracuse, were you studying both fine and commercial art?

HANANIAH HARARI: No, no, no. Just fine. I intended only to be a fine artist, from the beginning. But the training was very -- the grounding was sound. I think there's nothing that -- as a matter of fact, in the same building, there were commercial art courses, which I didn't take. But there were -- two years ahead of me, were two marvelous commercial artists. They're in the Valhalla today -- America has produced the greatest commercial artists. They are super. I'll give you their names. One was called Harry Anderson, and the other was Tom Lovell. I don't know what happened to Harry Anderson. They both were wonderful illustrators! They worked for all kinds of publications including National Geographic, for example. Their tradition was Sargent. They were very beautiful. Now, what happened to Tom Lovell was -- he's a little older than I, by two years. By the way, they were earning money through college -- through art school -- by doing covers of magazines. Even then they wowed us -- all the other students. They were really good. And they were modest, as I remember. Anyway, Tom Lovell graduated from doing the heavy deadlines of commercial art. He went out west, and he became a great western artist. One of the pinnacle of them. And he's a millionaire from it. He sells his things in the six figures. And they're great paintings.

G. STAVITSKY: But you were aware of him while you were in school?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes, I was. And I think that that may have echoed on me. After the war, I didn't know what to do. So maybe their example fired me a little bit. I know it did. I remember now. Because I used to cut out their things from magazines and study them, in my files.

G. STAVITSKY: Was there any teacher who made a particular impact on you?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. My teachers were ordinary artists. Just very ordinary. But nice. There was one who sort of was a little fiery. Her name was Polly Phillips. Boy, I liked her. There was a sense of being aware a little bit of the outside world. This was so insular, all this. There was a student there who came originally from Rochester as a poor boy. He was a little older than I. I think he's still alive. I've had him over to my house in years past. His name was Haskell Etkin. This guy knew something about Renoir. He knew something about Modigliani. And he would paint -- instead of the usual realist things, he would paint a nude a little distorted. I found it fascinating. I think that was my first awakening to modern art. It's so round-about. But then, of course -- no, I did some studies when I went home from that school, that are very much like Matisse drawings -- I must have seen them in magazines or something -- of my mother. She consented to pose. And I exaggerated her a little bit. She said, "Oh, my God." [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: She said, "This is what you've been learning?" [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. [laughs] But I still have them. They were good drawings.

G. STAVITSKY: That's fascinating. I'd love to see them some day.

HANANIAH HARARI: So this was the beginning of my discontent with what I was learning.

G. STAVITSKY: Which was, essentially, what an academic kind of painter --

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. But I should have studied more, even. You know, I came back to it later. I don't know why I say that. George McNeil would be mad to hear me say that because he thinks that academic studies are the worst thing for an artist. That they should right away be as free and liberated and slash -- the way he's doing now. But I don't quite agree with that.

G. STAVITSKY: So you feel it was important that you got the basics.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Because I'm wild about Sargent, and I'm wild about this Spanish artist. Not Zurbarán, but the other one. You know, he's up at the Spanish Museum.

G. STAVITSKY: ?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. He's a twentieth century. Well, I'll think of it. And Zorn, and Cecilia Beaux, and all those. And Boldini. I love it! But the thing is, I love too many. I like every skill that I see in art, you know? I marvel at it. I try to get my students to marvel at those things.

G. STAVITSKY: So you like really a wide range.

HANANIAH HARARI: A wide range. There are certain things I find dull. I don't know whether I should mention the names, but it's --

G. STAVITSKY: Sure. For the record. [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: But yet it's wrong to do it because every one has some -- even in a big oeuvre which is boring, there are a few pockets that are nice, and so forth.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I'm very tolerant.

G. STAVITSKY: Do you think that is what in part inspired you then, to go on to Paris? Was it to get to see a wider range of modern art?

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, well, first of all, in high school I was a good French student. I mean, I loved French! I became a francophile. My teacher's name was Renée Dumont. She was an American, but she had that wild name, and I loved her. [laughs] She was very picante. She was lively and enthusiastic. Oh, yes. I liked her. Isn't it interesting that it can be a person, and not something academic that sets you off?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: And she did. So -- and then there were people -- when I would come home from college -- there were people who had been to Paris, and told me about places. They told me about the Café du Dome, and I used to live near there, and I would have my morning coffee there, at the bar. At the zinc bar. And I did a nice collage of that. And the other day a collector who first collected my commercials -- some of my commercial samples -- and has since grown tremendously, and is now a collector of modern. Anyway, he came to my house, and he saw this thing that I did in 1932, when I first got to Paris, of the Café du Dome, and he said, "It's on your

wall. Would you mind selling it?" I said, "No, everything is for sale." He said, "How much is it?" I gulped, and I said, "Well, it's a thousand dollars." It's a little thing. He said, "I'll give you cash for it right this minute." [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, my God!

HANANIAH HARARI: The reason he was able to do that is that his business is antiques. You know, he makes a living doing that. So he has to carry cash because if you see a good antique, and you have to wheedle it out of somebody, cash sort of does the -- it greases it, so to speak.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: So he explained that to me. And he's the one that wants one of my good paintings.

G. STAVITSKY: Great! Well, I'm not surprised he wants it. This collage -- it was a view of people sitting there, drinking coffee?

HANANIAH HARARI: It was a gouache of the zinc bar, which I portrayed in silver gouache. I don't know where I got silver paint, but it looks silvery. And then I had sort of very stylized figures at the bar, and then a bartender. And then they had these espressos in the back, and so forth. And it was right in the corner.

G. STAVITSKY: Were there ever any artists that you saw there? I mean, someone well known?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, I went to academies, and my fellow students. They admired me. I was talented. In fact, I had this experience. [laughs] I did a very nice painting. I have a vague recollection of it, in class, and it was gone from the racks. You know, you start them. I had a very nice older man. He seemed very old to me. He probably was in his twenties, I'll say. [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: He was Greek. He spoke a nice French. He was very sympathetic to me. He saw that I was green -- very green -- and he tried to guide me. In a way, he protected me. I was so -- ah -- innocent, too. Stupidly innocent. He said, "I think I know who stole your painting. It was another student." So I said, "Well, how can I get it back?" He said, "Go to his house." He found out the address. It was way the hell out of Paris. It was a suburb. I went there. He devised a plan for me. I went there. I rang the bell. This other student -- I knew that he would be there. I forget how, but through the good offices of this Greek. And the minute he saw me -- oh, and as he opened the door, I saw my painting way on the back wall. It was in the house. He was so embarrassed, but he gave it back to me. But I don't have that painting. I don't have a lot of the stuff that I did. First of all, how am I going to -- I traveled after that. Well, you know. It's a wonder that I carried back some.

G. STAVITSKY: So you were studying in Paris, for what? A few years?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, almost two years. And southern France for the rest of the time, to complete the two years. You might say that I was a very precocious student at Syracuse. The Dean begged me not to go. He offered me a scholarship, and so forth. So I know I was esteemed. But I was now determined -- and in a way I was right -- to study modern art. I did. But I also went to the Louvre almost every day.

G. STAVITSKY: And were you doing copies of the old masters there?

HANANIAH HARARI: I did copies of the old masters. And I also did drawings from the past. Everything.

G. STAVITSKY: Of everything?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And that's where I found out about black art -- negro art. Oh, geez. At the Trocadero.

G. STAVITSKY: That's where Picasso found out about it.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, did he?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I didn't know that he did. I mean, I knew that he understood it. But I didn't know that it was at the Trocadero. But anyway, I went there, and I made lots of drawings, and it was very moving to me. About then I saw so many other artists -- wonderful. I studied with Leger and André L'hote.

G. STAVITSKY: I want to hear some about -- first of all with Leger -- what kind of teacher he was, and what you feel you learned from him.

HANANIAH HARARI: He was a very dignified man. Very quiet, is how I remember him. And a man of few words. By the way, he taught a lot of Americans.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes, he did. Including George L.K. Morris.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Well, George L.K. Morris wasn't the innocent I was, and he also was a man of wealth. So he was able to -- I was living on nothing! Beans.

G. STAVITSKY: How were you surviving?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, my dad was -- it was the depth of the Depression. He still sent me about twelve bucks a week. I don't know how he did it, but he did. And that's what I lived on. Because he would have had to stayed - - he wouldn't have had to, but he was planning to take me to college. They were very disappointed that I was leaving college, because they saw college as a back-up. And in a way, it is. But I couldn't stand the academic courses that I had to do. I was only interested in painting.

G. STAVITSKY: Did you find Leger's method of teaching -- was it more informal than what you had dealt with at Syracuse?

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, it was completely different. It had to do really with everything that's modern -- that I was getting interested in, which was how to see. In other words, there are so many ways of seeing. The Velázquez's way, or Frans Hals's way, or Monet's way, or Sargent's way is one. It's not one, but it's that tradition. The modern artists -- my God! When you think of his painting at the University there, on Washington Square. I mean, that's what he was teaching. Color, form, liveliness. But I remember one thing that he used to say -- more than once. He would say, "Honor the object." In other words, go back to nature, you see?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: And derive your inspirations and ideas from it, and then -- it has a lot of aspects -- nature does. You know, they know the back part of it, they know the side part, they know the distillation. Miro, whom I saw there, too -- I mean, his work -- was a good example of how to go through this transformation. Oh, there are so many. Do you know who gave me time in his studio, and was very -- I remember him with great affection -- was Brancusi.

[end of side one, tape two]

In Paris, my brother-in-law came. My future brother-in-law. I married his sister later, when I came back to the United States. But we were good friends. We had studied in Rochester as kids, together, and we were very close companions. We went to the museums together, and so forth. We each had a girlfriend later on, when I had a wonderful place. But he was not getting any money. So we were living, really, together, with the two girls!

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, my God.

HANANIAH HARARI: His girl's name was Rola, and she was German. Mine was Renée. Renée, also. She was French. She was from Brittany. Anyway, he was a sculptor, my friend. .

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, .

HANANIAH HARARI: It's Herzl Emanuel.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, sure! Yes!

HANANIAH HARARI: He knows about you.

G. STAVITSKY: Another person who needs to be interviewed!

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes!

G. STAVITSKY: Okay. So you two were together, and he was the one who knew Brancusi, then?

HANANIAH HARARI: No, no. He was a sculptor, who was studying with Zadkine, and I knew very well. I made two paintings of Herzl sculpting away, with Zadkine in it, too, at that time.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh!

HANANIAH HARARI: But it was really Herzl's efforts that got us to see Brancusi. He was interested, and I was, too. Brancusi is wonderful. And his studio -- it's like going into a forest -- a holy forest -- of stone and wood. Marvelous! And he was such an interesting man, and he had a beard, and he was very gentle with us. Do you

know who else we saw, who granted us an interview in his studio? Chagall.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh! How did that come about?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, that's another story. [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: You have a lot of stories. [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Too many. Too many. We were, because of the Zionist business, we were determined to go to then Palestine. We felt he would do sculpture, and I would do murals. Again, naive stupidities. But from Paris, we wanted to do that.

G. STAVITSKY: And you did get there, though, right? For a little bit?

HANANIAH HARARI: We did, we did. Yes. But knowing as we did that Chagall had been to Israel -- to Palestine -- we wanted to ask him about it. I remember his looking at us as if to say, "Oh, are you going to learn a lot!" [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: He was very nice with us. Very gentle, again.

G. STAVITSKY: Well, actually, I want to hear what you learned in Palestine from him. I'm also curious about --

HANANIAH HARARI: I learned Hebrew, among other things.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh!

HANANIAH HARARI: The people were wonderful. They were Russian, first wave Russian immigrants. People who came there, say, in the early part of the century, when the foes were busy in Paris, they were in Palestine. They were the types -- they even antedated a little bit the Prime Ministers -- Golda Meir. They're from that generation. I'll tell you who else. The first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion. And these people. Shamir, and the current one. But they were wonderful people. They were farmers, and we worked on the farm. We thought, "Well, we'll start with the farm, and then we'll get the art." Never, never. [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: You were on a kibbutz?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes! And also in Jerusalem. I did some things in Jerusalem, too. Oh, but, oh, it was so hard.

G. STAVITSKY: So you were mostly farming, and just a little bit of painting?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Oh, yes. Very little. Very little.

G. STAVITSKY: What was your painting like at this time?

HANANIAH HARARI: I did very nice drawings. In fact, I just wrote -- oh, do you know Avis Berman?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, I wrote her a letter just and enclosed two drawings that I made in Tel Aviv. They were Xeroxes of them. The reason is that she has undertaken -- is this all right to say? It's a side track. But what's the difference?

G. STAVITSKY: Sure. We'll get back to Paris.

HANANIAH HARARI: You're going to have to see me again. I can just tell.

G. STAVITSKY: Well, we can see. We're doing pretty well. It's only 3:30.

HANANIAH HARARI: Akiba has a brother who also was in France and in Palestine. We were together. And he came from Rochester, too. And he started out not being an artist. He started out being a sort of theater man -- an actor. He was good looking. But he developed into a painter. And he's a damn good painter. I told you about him.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: He's going to have a show. I thought it was going to be this fall, but it will be next spring, at the Alexander Gallery.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: And Avis is writing the [catalogue essay] about him. , she's writing it. So I thought they would be interested in seeing the drawings that I made of him. Akiba drawing, and Hertzl. I must have shown you the photograph of the three of us in Tel Aviv. It's a wonderful photograph.

G. STAVITSKY: No, I haven't seen that.

HANANIAH HARARI: Anyway, I sent that to her. And I told her -- isn't that book that she wrote wonderful?

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, on Julianna Force? Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: She wrote a little thing in it for me, and I finally told her how much I loved that book. It's got so much information. Oh, my God. You guys floor me!

G. STAVITSKY: Well, you floor me. I mean, all the experience and --

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, come on! I mean, after all, all I did was survive.

G. STAVITSKY: Well, it sounds like -- just these few years in Paris sound like they're incredibly rich.

HANANIAH HARARI: They were.

G. STAVITSKY: The range of people that you met and studied with.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. We met a guy named Benno who had a show recently. We met Chuck Basof there, and he taught me how to skip rope, which I still know how to do. Because he was a boxer -- he had been. He was also a businessman and a painter, and an interesting man, and he was one of the ten.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. One thing I also wondered about Paris -- you were studying with Leger and L'hote, and Graumere --

HANANIAH HARARI: We all had little places. But, actually, L'hote ran the more complete ship, you might say, because it was his school, his place. I think Leger simply was a visiting professor. But it was all in Montparnesse. Go ahead, but I interrupted

. . .

G. STAVITSKY: I was wondering -- you studied with these three artists who all were cubists, and I wondered, did you start painting in a cubist style at that time?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes, a little bit. A little bit. But I was influenced -- I was just in a whirl -- I was a whirling deruish of influences, and trying everything out. Very normal, and completely confused. I didn't know myself yet. You know it takes a lifetime.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, sure!

HANANIAH HARARI: But there are certain sort of leaps that one makes. There are certain intuitive grasps that are very precious when one is young.

G. STAVITSKY: Now, it's interesting that you went from studying with them in Southern France in the --

HANANIAH HARARI: No, no. I didn't study in Southern France. What we did was -- it was on our way to Marseilles, to Palestine. We were waiting for visas, don't forget. It was a very tightly locked place. The British didn't want to fill that place with people of Hebrew persuasion. They were scared of annoying Arabs. The same kind of thing that goes on in the State Department, and so forth, because the Arabs speak with a louder voice. Anyway, so we went -- we stopped there. And we found kind of a stone barn on a hillside. Because is very hilly. It's a wonderful place. Cannes-sur-mer is from there. That very room -- that very building -- was the studio for Soutine.

G. STAVITSKY: Wow!

HANANIAH HARARI: We found out. We didn't know. We had friends there, too. They were -- oh, boy! [laughs] They were Danes. They lived right at the very crest of the hill where the castle was, and the church was, and the square was, and the cafes were. They were beautiful blondes. The mother was -- her name was Traustnelda. Oh, and was she gorgeous! But, of course, she seemed very old. She probably was forty, maybe. Maybe thirty-eight. She had a daughter -- a sixteen-year-old, I think. Oh, boy! She was live, tanned, blonde, blue eyes, of course. And she had a brother just like her! Anyway, do you think Herzl -- Herzl was the ladies man. He got her. He got her. Anyway, it turned out -- I forget how it happened. But he found another dame. Maybe through these people.

And he fathered a child. And that child is now a grown woman, and he has contact with her. He has the biggest luck, this guy -- with children. He has children from two marriages. Well, the first one was sort of mad at him. But his other children are very loyal to Herzl. When you hear his story -- [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: Yes, I'm going to hear his story, too.

HANANIAH HARARI: He sculpted while I painted, at this place.

G. STAVITSKY: At Cannes-sur-mer?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Now, later on, after he got married for the second time, and he went back to -- he lived in Rome. He'll be there in a few days. He has a studio there. So with his new wife, he visited Southern France, and he went to Cannes-sur-mer, and he went to the very place, and he found one of his sculptures on the terrace, still, that he had left. Now, that's a remark. He'll tell you that story. [laughs] Isn't that interesting?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: There was a fig tree in the yard. We weren't eating too good, but we had figs. We had cheese, too, and bread, and olive oil.

G. STAVITSKY: So you were in Cannes-sur-mer, but weren't you also in Fountainbleau, studying fresco paintings?

HANANIAH HARARI: No, no. Not in Fountainbleau. That was in Paris. That was in one of my schools in Paris. Fountainbleau Ecole de fresc, but that was in Paris. I don't know why they called it Fountainbleau, but they did. Now, that was a wonderful place! Do you remember the picture of me there? I showed it to you.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: With the mural of -- a huge mural! It was this sized wall, easily. That's a good ten or twelve feet -- that high. Well, it was the actual size of Giotto's 'Death of St. Francis' and I painted that. I didn't know what colors to use, but I made a color sketch, which I still have. It turns out that it was pretty close. I just guessed.

G. STAVITSKY: That's amazing.

HANANIAH HARARI: And my big thrill was in 1985. No, '79 -- it was on my honeymoon for my second marriage, because my first wife had died. We went to the usual places. Rome -- because we were staying with Hertzl in Rome.

G. STAVITSKY: This is with Shirley?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. In Rome I made some drawings there -- some nice drawings. Then we went to Florence. Or was it the other way around? Venice and Florence. But in Florence, we went to Sante Croce. We didn't know. We just would see a church. I didn't know that that was -- what a beautiful place it is! I didn't know that I'd find my Giotto there. What a thrill that was!

G. STAVITSKY: So that seems like that was an interest of yours very early on, to do frescoes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I thought I'd be a mural painter. Yes. That was my idea, by the way. That in Israel -- in Palestine -- it wasn't Israel yet -- to be a place for mural painting. Now there is. But then it was too early.

G. STAVITSKY: So you thought that you might actually remain in Palestine, and do mural painting.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes, I thought so. Yes. But we got homesick -- very homesick.

G. STAVITSKY: Now, when you came home -- and we did talk about New York a lot last time -- when you came back to America and settled in New York, was this really the first time that you spent a lot of time in New York?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. First of all, we were met by my mom and dad at the pier when we came back.

G. STAVITSKY: And this was in 1935?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And they drove us to Rochester. And it was there that I first met Herzl's sister. I liked her, and courted her, and we got married in 1936, in Rochester. In May. And we came right away, on our honeymoon, to New York.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, so it was in 1936.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And traveling along with us was Herzl. [laughs] Because he wanted to get back to New York. And we stayed at a place right near where Lincoln Center is now. But then we went back to Rochester, and lived in my parents' house, because I was still not earning anything. They offered -- they were very glad to, because they hadn't seen me for a long time, and they liked Herzl. They knew Herzl's family -- and his sister. They gave us a lot of room. And one of the bedrooms I used as a studio. That's where I painted that painting that Sid Deutch had in his last show -- in that room, in Rochester. That was in 1936.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, right.

HANANIAH HARARI: 'Birth of Venus.' This was after 'Birth of Venus.' This one, which is called 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel' -- the first thing after we came back -- after three months -- mainly because Frieda didn't want to stay with my parents. I was willing to. It was free rent. [laughs] But she didn't want to. So we found a real dump in Brooklyn, on the Heights, in an old brownstone. A crazy guy owned it. A real character. And it was very cheap rent, but full of insects and varmints. And it overlooked the harbor. I painted that. Hertzl had a studio there. I think Hertzl found a place. A beautiful studio with a yard. There was a very nice photograph of him that I took, sculpting -- maybe holding a cat. I forget. But we lived upstairs. So that was our first place in New York. This I painted there. In fact, I had a nice photograph of this painting hanging on a wall in that little apartment that we had.

G. STAVITSKY: Now, by the time you came back, and you were doing 'Birth of Venus' and 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel' -- it's interesting, these traditional subjects, and you transform them into this very inventive way into these paintings that seem to be very sophisticated -- cubism and surrealism.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes.

G. STAVITSKY: So it seems like you must have had a lot of exposure to surrealism, as well.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes! Absolutely. Absolutely.

G. STAVITSKY: Were these two sort of like breakthrough or watershed paintings for you?

HANANIAH HARARI: These two?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I hadn't thought of them that way. I think there were a lot of others.

G. STAVITSKY: There were a lot of others. But they are the paintings that also -- the paintings that you were showing with the American Avant-gardist group.

HANANIAH HARARI: I did. I had both of them. And others. I had a long one once, like the mural type, that was sold from one of the exhibitions. One of the few that was sold -- for twenty-five dollars -- to a wealthy collector. I thought she was, anyway.

G. STAVITSKY: [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: And I think that incurred the scorn, and that may be the wrath of many members of that group. I think that they felt that we didn't really belong in that group. Well, you know, there was that dichotomy. We spoke about that, I believe.

G. STAVITSKY: That the purist abstraction --

HANANIAH HARARI: Right. The Kandinsky hard-edge or who else? Well, there were people like Gris. Gris was very much their God.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. That's true. Where it seems like your interests were such a broad range of Picasso and Klee and Miro.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. I was showing these to Ellen, but you've seen them. Since this is not visual --

G. STAVITSKY: Well, okay. You know, I did want to ask you about some of your other works. I mean, we talked a lot about the American Abstract Artists last time. We also talked about the range of your subject matter, the technology, images of flight, the aeronautical, and the social and political concerns.

HANANIAH HARARI: That's right.

G. STAVITSKY: One other thing I thought was interesting, too, was -- I think what we maybe didn't start talking

about is that at one point -- I guess it's in the late 30s that you started working with the concept of the pairs of realist and abstract paintings.

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes. I did that. Yes. It began about then. 1939 or 1940, and continued. As a matter of fact, do you remember that one that I did in advertising for Coca-Cola?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I did the two. I showed you those.

G. STAVITSKY: Right. And those were in the early --

HANANIAH HARARI: They were done in 1949. All through then. Five of the trompe l'oeil paintings were shown in January of 1943, at the Museum of Modern Art.

G. STAVITSKY: In "The Nature of Realism Show."

HANANIAH HARARI: So they were done in 1939 and 1940 and 1941 -- those paintings. And some of them I made -- and others, too, by the way -- a couple of them are lost. Like the other one -- the companion of yours . . .

G. STAVITSKY: Right. That's what I was thinking of -- "Still Life With Bottle" is a 1939 painting.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. That was one of the early ones. Right.

G. STAVITSKY: What led to those?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, what led to it was that I was living in the Village -- East Village -- and I used to see Edith Gregor Halpert Gallery. One day I walked in, and there, for the first time, I meet Harnett -- I mean, his painting.

G. STAVITSKY: You saw Harnett's painting at the Downtown Gallery?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. It knocked me over. I'd never seen anything like it! I should have known because I might have seen -- you see, I don't remember seeing these wonderful Dutch still lifes, or even the early American ones. You know, from the Peales. They would have felled me, too. But Harnett was even more so. So I said to myself, "If I do this kind of painting, I'll sell them. I'll make a living. And then I'll do abstractions of them." I mean, I followed, you see?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: That's what it was. So I know definitely it was that.

G. STAVITSKY: I found an interesting article -- a letter to the editor that you once wrote. I actually found this among the Archives papers. The papers of the American Abstract Artist, where you had written a letter to the editor that actually the National Academy had shown. I think your painting 'Man's Boudoir' --

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. The one that is now in a Tucson museum.

G. STAVITSKY: And that's the one I think you won the Hallgarten Prize for.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes!

G. STAVITSKY: Someone commented -- they thought that maybe you had changed your style, because they thought you'd been doing abstractions, and you said, "As I see it, the two styles are not altogether different. Abstract painting and realistic painting have much in common. The sole criterion must be quality."

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Of course, there are different, but I think what I said before is that I'm crazy about all good work. [laughs] No matter what the style. They are different. There was a school of criticism that used to say about representative art, that, "Oh, it's abstract, too." It really isn't. There's a difference. I changed my course of learning about, too.

G. STAVITSKY: You mean you did a lot of studying of Harnett's work at that time?

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, no. I saw that exhibition. In those days, catalogs were so modest. I've got a catalog, and it had some color photographs in it. So I had that. But I said to myself, "Maybe I can do something like this," and indeed it is something like this. Let me show you. [Tape Off/On]

G. STAVITSKY: This was in the Magic Realist Show?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. At the museum.

G. STAVITSKY: And it's 'The Old Ballantine' 1941.

HANANIAH HARARI: So it's creditable. And here's one -- I don't know whether you ever saw that. That I bought back.

G. STAVITSKY: 'Lavender and Lace' 1941. And this was also in the show, wasn't it?

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, yes.

G. STAVITSKY: The show was very well received. And as a matter of fact, I know I have a review that you sent me here, where it says, "There are some good healthy realisms here, and one of them is the work of Harari, who shows five straightforward super realism still life arrangements, painted with an extraordinary concentration and knowledge of his equipment."

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. So in a way -- what shall I say? It sort of puts a period to that first meeting that I made with Harnett, you see?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: That it was gratifying to see that. It's almost like saying, "You're right, Harari. Not bad. You set out to do something, and you achieved something towards it."

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. And it seems like you got a lot of recognition when you started to show these a lot, it seems, in the early 40s. I guess that was actually after your first one man show that we talked about last time.

HANANIAH HARARI: Do you know who noticed it was Emily Gennauer. She was very taken by -- I had these paintings in the one man show. So she described the workmanship of the trompe l'oeil, and then the abstraction of it, and she said -- I think it's a little foolish, but she says that it proves that abstractionists can draw, or something like that. [laughs] It'll put it to the light of those that say it's a hoax. Something like that, she said. Did you find that article? I can give it to you. It was a big article in the newspaper.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. Actually, I don't think I have that one. What I have instead -- maybe referring to the same show. Is this the Pinakothek show of 1943?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: I have what Clement Greenberg wrote.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. But this was Emily Gennauer. It was a very successful show! But I didn't sell much. And what I did sell was for peanuts.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, dear.

HANANIAH HARARI: But Helen Schrago of Today told me -- she gave me some hints, and she also bucked me up. She said, "You know, you're not the only one from the 30s who is timid about prices." [laughs]

G. STAVITSKY: Or any period. I know it's difficult.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: So, then -- at this point, had you started doing commercial art yet?

HANANIAH HARARI: No.

G. STAVITSKY: So you were basically painting --

HANANIAH HARARI: Well, when I was in the Army and vegetating for two-and-a-half years, I was thinking, "What am I going to do when I get out?" That's when I started to think about commercial art.

G. STAVITSKY: This was towards the end of the war.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: I see.

HANANIAH HARARI: Anyway, you know that dealer -- she died recently. Willard. Marian Willard?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: Her husband was Dan Johnson. He was a representative for commercial artists. I forget how I got to know him. Maybe through Marian. It was through Marian. Because Marian gave Akiba -- Herzl's brother -- his first show in America -- a very good show -- at her East River Gallery. Charming. And it was a beautiful show. She also gave David Smith his first show there, and it was a lovely show. I met her husband through her, and I forget how it came about, but he saw these paintings. Maybe he saw them at my show. I don't know. He said, "That's the kind of thing that we can use for commercial art. You can be a commercial artist." And he represented me. Not very well, but he did. [laughs] He's the one that lost this thing. He sent this out. He represented me in fine art, too, at the time.

G. STAVITSKY: This was after the war, that he represented you?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Of course. I was in the Army. But as soon as I got out, that's when it started. Do you know what Herzl said?

G. STAVITSKY:

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. And there were other ones, too. There was another one that he lost.

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, dear.

HANANIAH HARARI: But it's my fault. Herzl says that that was my big mistake.

G. STAVITSKY: Going with him?

HANANIAH HARARI: No. This was when Motherwell and that drip guy --

G. STAVITSKY: Pollock?

HANANIAH HARARI: Pollock. They got in with Peggy Guggenheim -- I don't know how Pollock arranged it, but Motherwell didn't have to worry about money.

G. STAVITSKY: Because they got around?

HANANIAH HARARI: It was the beginning of abstract expressionism. I could have been one of those guys. That's what Herzl says. Herzl is very kind to me. Although we've grown apart a little bit -- politically and otherwise -- he esteems me. He said that I got very diverted, and I did. To live -- in order to live.

G. STAVITSKY: But do you feel that that was the direction that your work was heading in?

HANANIAH HARARI: If I didn't have a family to take care of at that time, I think -- or if I was less cowardly -- I had every gift that was needed. I had every chutzpah. I just didn't have faith in myself. I couldn't see myself -- I think my middle class background -- my parents being still alive, and so on -- how was I going to face them? Tell them that I'm a Bohemian, still? You know, things like that. It was a surrender.

G. STAVITSKY: So you feel that you would have very whole-heartedly pursued abstraction without working on the realist direction?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Sure. The only thing is I couldn't ever have been satisfied with just taking some paint, splashing it on the canvas and saying, "Gee, that's an interesting thing." No. If I saw it, I would say, "Then I'm going to develop it." On the other hand, a friend of mine -- Ad Reinhardt -- he went back from complexities to where I think was insanity, you know?

G. STAVITSKY: With the late black paintings?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. He had a show at the Museum of Modern Art, and the last room was all that.

G. STAVITSKY: It's interesting that you brought him up because I did bring in what you gave me. You know, the wonderful cartoons that he did had a look at modern art in America in 1936.

HANANIAH HARARI: That's where I think he was a fantastic genius. He did these things. Well, you saw me -- I did this sort of thing.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes! And it was very interesting, because I immediately thought there was a real affinity --

HANANIAH HARARI: We were good friends, he and I. Oh, I admired him. I liked his -- in his show, he had two early -- was it collages or goauches? They were beautiful. Lovely. Lovely. I always liked those. But then, that wasn't

enough for him.

G. STAVITSKY: Well, I'm curious about what you think about where he placed you on this tree of abstraction.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. I could never figure it out. It's somewhere up here. Oh, yes. That's it.

G. STAVITSKY: You're right next to Fannie Hill Smith.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Well, she was in the group. And d'Letra was. And who else? . He was French. Maybe he came to America. And is a good artist. A very good artist.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. Well, I don't think he was in the American abstract --

HANANIAH HARARI: No, no. He wasn't. Curt Rosche. Oh, I must have done a few things like him, too. You know, he's very astute, the way he placed these things. And what's this?

G. STAVITSKY: Gottlieb is somewhere in there, too.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Because he did pictographs, and I did some of that, too. And Kamrowski -- yes. It's not bad.

G. STAVITSKY: And as we move down, you're sort of opposite Miro, Klee, Kandinsky, Bonnard, and Max Ernst.

HANANIAH HARARI: Right. I loved Bonnard and Klee. They're all interesting. And Leger, too.

G. STAVITSKY: Did you like Max Ernst's collages, by the way? I'm just curious.

HANANIAH HARARI: I liked them. They're not powerful enough, though. The whimsy maybe takes over too much for me. Do you think that these names are pointed in those direction?

G. STAVITSKY: What he's trying to do is establish a spectrum here.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: And it seems like he was putting you somewhat towards the center of between abstract and surrealist.

HANANIAH HARARI: I think that's fair.

G. STAVITSKY: He was probably thinking of people like Miro and Klee, and maybe even the sense of humor that they . . .

HANANIAH HARARI: But it was remarkable that he was able to observe all these artists, and remember.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. So you obviously seem to have had a real sense of everyone's worth, and --

HANANIAH HARARI: He was a remarkable guy. Funny, funny. Oh, yes.

G. STAVITSKY: How do you feel about him putting you with Miro and Klee?

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, fine. I like Miro and Klee very much.

G. STAVITSKY: You know, when I think about their work in relation to yours, I see kind of a sense of humor in all of your work.

HANANIAH HARARI: Do you mean in Klee and --

G. STAVITSKY: Oh, yes! Especially your work.

HANANIAH HARARI: Today I brought three beautiful collages -- you would love them -- to Ellen. One of them is like this painting.

G. STAVITSKY: Of course he has Picasso at the very bottom of this tree, and that's appropriate. [laughs]

HANANIAH HARARI: Oh, that's very, very good. And the biggest. And Picasso is. He is the seminal -- the root. Oh, absolutely. I always think of Picasso as I think of Bach. A giant of the millennium. One of the collages was like that in spirit.

G. STAVITSKY: This is 'The Mathematics Lesson' 1949.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. But the collage that I brought over was ten years earlier, and it had a lot of -- it had these tabletops whirring around, which are really cubes. And on each one, instead of this kind of diagrammatic decoration, there were biomorphic. It was amusing. It was like Klee and Miro, when you stop to think about it.

G. STAVITSKY: Biomorphism -- it seems that that's a key element of a lot of your work.

HANANIAH HARARI: Mine?

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: I think so. Here. I was showing her this, too. You see, she didn't know my work.

G. STAVITSKY: I mean, I was wondering for you, if you felt that was a way of not losing the sense of life and vitality, but painting abstract.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. I never went for just pure geometry. Yes. It doesn't come naturally to me. Although, look. Now, this Brooklyn Museum one is sort of geometry, but it's a free wheeling one.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes. 'Jubilee' 1939. This was one of the mural studies?

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. Right.

G. STAVITSKY: Which ties in nicely with your past -- that you had these desires to be muralists, and doing all the studies for it.

HANANIAH HARARI: Right. That was a very, very satisfactory assignment on WPA. And Diller was the encourager.

G. STAVITSKY: And yet Diller somehow was never able to find you a final assignment.

HANANIAH HARARI: He couldn't find it for Esther either, or for Roslind.

G. STAVITSKY: A lot of people went through it.

HANANIAH HARARI: It was so limited -- the possibilities. Here is another mural. Now, this has definite -- both geometry and biomorphism.

G. STAVITSKY: Yes.

HANANIAH HARARI: And that's in Phoenix.

G. STAVITSKY: 1938.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: I wondered, just because I wanted to try to get some sense of the range of your work, and it seems that especially in the 30s and 40s you were working a lot with abstraction.

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes.

G. STAVITSKY: I was wondering if, when during the 50s, when you started working more and more with your portrait work --

HANANIAH HARARI: Yes. That took a lot of time and energy from me. And I had to slow down my production. Then I went into a crazy thing, too, of "Why not use my skills to show another kind of realism?" This kind. Some of the cubism and some of the surrealism would be combined with it, like that.

G. STAVITSKY: Okay. This is your painting called 'Mind.' This is from the 60s?

HANANIAH HARARI: No, that's from the 80s. The mid-80s. That's what I was thinking of doing. And I'm still very interested in that sort of thing.

G. STAVITSKY: Now, this painting -- you're in your studio, holding your hands open, claiming everything. And some of it is your work, but a number of those pieces are by other artists.

HANANIAH HARARI: By artists that I admire. This, of course, is Ingres; Van Gogh -- one of my absolute favorites, Picasso, Velázquez. And this is a little portrait that I did in the Louvre. I did one of the princess of Velázquez.

G. STAVITSKY: Is that something you had done recently, or a long time ago?

HANANIAH HARARI: In the early days. And this is my home, and my studio.

G. STAVITSKY: In Groton on Hudson.

HANANIAH HARARI: By the way, this is Canaletto, a drawing in front of St. Mark's. And then the rest are our children. This is Shirley, Shirley's son, daughter, another daughter, and another son, and my son.

End of Interview

Last updated... *September 23, 2002*