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Oral history interview with Sergei Isupov,  
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**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Sergei Isupov on 2010 December 21–22. The interview took place at Isupov's studio in Cummington, Mass, and was conducted by Mark Shapiro for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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

MARK SHAPIRO: This is Mark Shapiro interviewing Sergei Isupov at Sergei's studio in Cummington, Massachusetts, on December 21st for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And this is the very first card; this is card zero.

So I'm going to start by asking Sergei where and when he was born, and what it was like where he was growing up.

SERGEI ISUPOV: I born in 1963, in the summer, in August 17, in a city called Stavropol. It's the south of Russia right now, but in the time like I born, has been country but not exist right now, Soviet Union, what been, I think, 14 republics. There's like Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, and so and so—Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, yeah. But it's basically been Russian language. In some countries where exist other language, it's been dual-lingual, so that each, every writing been in two languages.

My parents—I born in the same city where my mom, but my dad from Siberia. And my parents study art school in Ukraine—Odessa, still been part of Soviet Union, and move later to Ukraine. My dad in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, my dad studied there—university.

MARK SHAPIRO: So how old were you when you moved to Kiev?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, well, they move before I born. [00:02:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: Oh, I see.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. [Laughs.] They moved before I born. My dad been accepted to university, and my mom get a job in a factory. That's 20 miles from this capital. So actually we not live exactly in Kiev, even we have a strong connection with the city because my dad been study there.

And before I born, my dad go to military service. But back there needs to—all men to go to military service for three years. And I born, my dad been in army. And I think I just born and he just left. And so my mom get this pregnant—how this called?—break from factory and go to her parents' house, so she feel more comfortable there.

I not think she feel super comfortable, because after six months we both left back. [Laughs.] It's difficult, but—so I born in the city, but I not have much connection. Later in my life, I not visit much my grandparents. Every time, this whole experience, I been fond of—I think my parents been—grandparents been really nice people.

But my parents feel like I come back—usually if I visit them, I come back too spoiled. They're not artists, so they're kind of been more, you know, kind of spoiled, and I lose sort of discipline, where my parents try to introduce really hard. [Laughs.] And so less and less I visit them. So I not have much connection with the city where I born, but still in the papers I born in this town. [00:04:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: Sergei, what was the neighborhood like where you were growing up?

SERGEI ISUPOV: This city where I grow up from six months old. So I been live really simple, really working-class, this little town. There's been like a lot different factories, and one ceramic factory as being one of them. And because my dad been in military, so I, from early age, been in kindergarten, all those things. And neighbors take care of me. So like really social environment, but always like really simple folks. But been really nice.

And my mom rented this house—or, even been, uh, earth floor. This not been wood floor. She told me like once she read somewhere if you get like some good oil—some machine oil, I don't know, some—I forgot, even in Russian, how this is called. It has like specific name, but something with—yeah, if you put on the floor this oil, this give you kind of really a strong base, like a—it's made like it's cement. So one day she put this—[inaudible]

—she only rented one room, in a house of two rooms. In one room there's live some old lady who rent it, and one room where my mom live with me. And she put, I think, all house with this thing. So this woman really freak out actually; give her bad time with this floor.

Right now I think about maybe it's right. This may be too much chemicals, you know. But back there was really actually give you kind of at least not much dust flying everywhere in our floor. [00:06:00] That's not for people, if people live right now that floor.

Hmm. So I been close to earth, yes—

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: —see this clay—[laughs]—in my body from childhood.

But I remember my childhood really fondly. Probably my parents remember differently. But I—this kindergartens, I love it. And I been kind of cute—curly hair, white hair, blonde guy like cute, and I think all these lady love me.

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: And all these neighbor—neighborhood kids. Like girls who took care of me really loved me too. I not remember from my childhood. I not remember my childhood, but I see pictures. After my dad come back from army, he took a lot pictures of me. And I see I been all the time surrounded by, like, girls who sort of take care me, I guess. So it's been really nice.

MARK SHAPIRO: So you were ethnic Russians living in Ukraine—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: —but there wasn't any sense of being different than the local population at all?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I start feel difference later, like after I go in school. But in the early age, I not feel different, yeah.

Yeah, well, I think my dad go to university, and there been [in] school for six years too. So I guess he not been much in the home too. Sometimes he stay there in the city if he have like too much homework or something.

MARK SHAPIRO: How far were you from this—from your capital?

SERGEI ISUPOV: That's 20 kilometers. But I think like to get there probably take hour-and-a-half, you need to. This not been that clear way: like to get like—this been—you need to take it one bus to train station [00:08:00]; from train station, I think, 40 minutes on the train, or 45 minutes; and there again you need to take a bus already in the city to place where you wanted to be.

So it's kind of been distance enough, if you consider there like—there been not really this late trains. So if you—I think last train left in 10:00 in the evening, so if you're late, you not—you're late. And you imagine like if you student, so much happen in the evening. So I think my dad spend a lot of times in the school. What actually give us access to big city in a way: All our friends come to our house—when we looks really different like our neighbors.

And I live in a block house—a block house. I think, gosh, I been already three or—no, probably four or five when my mom get from this factory apartment, and it's been a fourth-floor apartments block house. We live in the fourth floor. And it's been each floor have four apartments. It's really packed—really packed. And all these cats who pee in the—

MARK SHAPIRO: Stairwell?

SERGEI ISUPOV: —stairwell, and all the stuff. It's really, like, really—oh yeah, and neighbors from down apartment, a couple of times beat me up because we've been too noisy. [Laughs.] Yeah, like, in really rough, in a way, childhood. What do you think this is—this is how it is, you know. This normal. Right now I—finally I remember this. Never been kind of problems. And I think I been really communi-capable [ph] and really been active kid, so it's not really—

Right now I look at—thinking about that, like, wow, it's been like terrible. [00:10:00] Like we live in a two-room apartment; four people—like I have younger brother, eight years younger—and how we able to actually to live there, eat, and yeah. Life been really limited compare how I live right now.

But this not made less—say, less emotional or something. This still been like really rich—really rich experience: Go to store; get milk, and milk come from straight from like cows. And I mean, in the store. And bread, like you—every day there's bringing bread. I think 8:00 in the morning, come out, bread is still warm. Like really cool, so you got this milk—fresh milk, with bread. Ah, taste so good.

So this childhood been really nice—all these bicycles, which we actually a lot sort of spend time in—Ukraine is really nice weather. Have like really winter, but not so long, probably three months winter, with snow, so we have skis. In the summer we have bicycles and all this nature. Been really nice.

Been probably a couple—August usually really hot, and maybe for three weeks really hot. But normally it's kind of really nice climate. A lot of apples and vegetables. And so all these babushkas sell it—sunflower seeds. We actually like really love sunflower seeds. Like everybody spit—[laughs]—chew this and spit. And have movie theater, like on the open air. So after 9:00 they show like movie theaters. So there's no rule if you see stars, and sometimes like boys throw behind—throw these apples in the—inside the movie theaters, like, ugh. [00:12:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: What kind of movies were you seeing?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Indians been movies a lot—Indians. From India.

MARK SHAPIRO: Not propaganda?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No. A lot romantic. Old movies, Russian movies really deep and heavy, you know. You really cry a lot after movie. Right now I look at with nostalgia sometimes, like so funny. [Laughs.] Not usually give a nice end; usually kind of sad end. Been some French movie; and been a lot Indian movie—Indians; and some Italian movies too. And a lot more are funny, like serious.

Yeah, this all needs to be politically correct. But in childhood I really actually not feel difference. It's just been—just movie—just go do something fun, but not necessarily what kind of movie it is. Yeah, it's been kind of nice.

And later I start already be prepare for me go to art school, so I spend a lot times in my neighborhood to do landscape paintings. This been fun part. I mean not fun—I need to do it. So every time I get all this ammunition like for do landscape painting, like watercolor boxes, a chair, blah-blah-blah. So I get like a couple suitcases with full this stuff.

And I just walking out to select place where I start to draw. So sometimes take me like three hours just walking around neighborhood where I find the space with people not bother me. So be something really interesting to draw; and same time where I get shadow or something, even the sunny days, so not get on my paper. And just wandering around my neighborhood to find a spot that's actually give me some sort of my past, and my sort of thinking. [00:14:00]

I been kind of probably, in some way, probably moody kid, because I really like it, just been walking and wandering. So I builded up this sort of, "OK, I need to find a space and draw." Like in a moment, usually I become already so frustrated, I feel like, that's it—I already am hungry. And I'm supposed to be already returned. Timewise, it already become so dark, and I'm not yet finded the space where to draw. So a lot of times I just accidently—and sit and draw—[laughs]—the first things.

Yeah, and my first school been in the other side of town. And I've wandering—like in school, I usually like need to working really fast. But from schools what take me—supposed to be a half-hour walk, and sometimes I walking for four hours. Just like, you know, I got some stick, and with stick I just walking and wandering, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and go from different, like different—from different directions. Yeah, I have fond memory from this about small town.

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SERGEI ISUPOV: And I think if you physically look the same, it's no problem, but if you just slight have different physical presence. I remember I listen on *Voice of America*, like most difficult immigrants to U.S.—most difficult problem what they have, this—all this diversity of people to go through this diversity. Because really we're all pretty much same—same height, same color, same physical appearance. Maybe slightly, Asian people been more typical, because we have the south of Russia, there's Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan where have little Asian-appearance people, so there been some.

But actually later I move, grow up in Ukraine. Later I moved to Estonia. In Estonia, everybody have blue eyes, white hair. In Ukraine, dark eyes, dark hair. So like if somebody in the class have white hair, they're so popular. But in Estonia—[laughs]—if somebody have dark hair, he's so popular. So it's really—I think I take advantage to live in different countries and to live in different cultures because, looking back, I see what is more, I think, important or necessary.

I think how this really—even right now I see, if we in a group show, for example, sometimes you paid for increasingly good, just because different, but this not necessarily good. So there's all this interesting stuff.

Yeah, so my parents, both artists. All both come from not artist family. And that's why they really wanted their kids be artists, because they're really been [00:02:00]—live with family who not understood what they do, and not support their art—interest in art. So they really think if we be artists, we be pleased, because we get what they're not get. [Laughs.]

MARK SHAPIRO: Now, did you mother and father also grow up in Ukraine, in Kiev?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, my dad from Siberia and my mom from the North Caucasus. So it's really different places.

MARK SHAPIRO: How did they end up in Ukraine?

SERGEI ISUPOV: They both study in the school—art university—it's been like I think not—art school in Odessa. That's like south. And I think my dad fall in love with my mom, because—actually, from their story, mom fall in love with my dad, because her girlfriend date my dad, and she really like his jacket. But turn out later, it's not his jacket.

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: But it was funny. But this important, their hook up. And I think it's like really accidental, like typically. And after they graduate this art school, my dad go to Ukraine to university. And my mom got work in a factory, like artist. That's really typical stuff for school—you need sort of pay back to government for free education to working where they send—sent you for three years.

MARK SHAPIRO: And that's a factory doing ceramic design, or—?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, factory made some—this majolica factory, and she working like one of artists who make new product. [00:04:00] And this lady been—some old babushka, sort of, like—and do sort of reproduction, let's just say.

MARK SHAPIRO: Like reproduction of historical pieces, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: No, this what my mom designed. So my mom been like designer—

MARK SHAPIRO: I see.

SERGEI ISUPOV: —for new products, like plates, vases, like decorative stuff too.

And this been not big city. It's been sort of small city. Probably—it's probably 20 miles from capital, Ukraine. And this how come out to Ukraine. So both Russians, but come to Ukraine is okay; Kiev really a Russian-speaking, and still probably does, even this Ukraine is—but Russian and Ukrainian language really close—similar.

And because my mom ceramic, and she working in this factory from time like I—I born, and she already working in this factory, really young, just after school. My dad studying at Kiev this arts—painting, and—

MARK SHAPIRO: Now, was that the same place you were at—the Ukrainian State Art School, or a different place that—

SERGEI ISUPOV: A different place. I study in school like from fifth grade to 12th grade. But my dad already—

MARK SHAPIRO: University.

SERGEI ISUPOV: University, yeah. And I think this is the factory where my mom working been sort of introduction me to clay. But I no clue; I let it be—use it in my—sort of, like material to express myself like artist. And I think that's been really fun.

And childhood I think been really nice. I have younger brother. He eight years younger. But we still have like a nice family thing. [00:06:00] Like because we grew up with my brother in sort of town where—like working town mostly, and our parents been, say, intelligence—intelligentsia. So like, pretty much be in, like all holidays we working; or, like, and where other workers working, we have holidays. So actually choose ourselves what time—

MARK SHAPIRO: So you had more privilege than—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Privilege, like to get advantage of country—you know, like forest and lakes and stuff. So I think

we have been like always not fit much with this community, let's just say. Because community around us been really simple folks. But really nice, but it kind of help kind of sometimes finding picture from childhood, like where guys playing harmonica and drunkards [ph]—all this like really interesting—[inaudible] [cross talk].

MARK SHAPIRO: Now, your father was quite a well—became a quite well-known painter in Ukraine, right? Or more in Russia, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Well, hard to say well-known. My mom more well-known artist, let's just say. I think my dad really have good school and really have a strong heart. But I think he really shy, and has not been work for—much for this well-known. Well-known, they still need to kind of: were married—really made good marriage, or be like really outgoing—outgoing, or say, like, know how play good guy and stuff. So it's really not much about art really.

MARK SHAPIRO: So did he teach at all, or did—he was just a studio artist—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Studio artist. Never teach. But before, in Soviet Union they have system where artist working for government and government pay really good money. [00:08:00] They do propaganda stuff. So like each village and each city have community house, and all these community house needs to be decorated, like propaganda-wise. Like do have like a big frescoes, and mosaic and sculptures. Each town have like portraits of Lenin, like mosaic about Lenin childhood, or it's really silly stuff. But this made good living for artists.

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SERGEI ISUPOV: Maybe I talk too much.

MARK SHAPIRO: No, no, no, no. Go, go, go—go ahead. Keep going, yeah.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Okay. So and my—so I look—try to look—right now looking back and find out why I am who—like who—yeah, why I—who I am. Like from childhood [ph] in art, for example. And you know what's funny, I have this daughter right now, and I see she have already character. And I think I probably have some character like I been kid but still to this day with me.

I remember like my dad always give me something to do. Like they left to city or to do something, and all day I spend by myself in home playing, and I need to do drawings. And I think two hours I need spend to do drawings. And usually I wait for—and I know exactly when they come, like because it's they're come on the bus. So I know like all this timing.

And I remember once this been—I look at in the clock. It's already 15—in 15 minutes they are coming, and I supposed to be draw this composition for two hours. Spend like two hours to do drawings. And I need something—come out really quickly with something. And something I need to do in 15 minutes that look like two hours. So I need kind of made it up really quickly.

So I made composition about—I spend—it has been summer, I spend all day in the beach with friends. So I draw composition like our lake, beach, and the view of it from like above the scenes. So I see lake, I see beach, people on the beach, and this box for change clothes [00:02:00]—you know, like wet clothes to dry clothes. And some bird stole a bra from woman who changed clothes in this change-box. [Laughs.] And my dad really love it. And he, like, oh, man, that's so good. [Laughs.] So he actually really give me a lot compliments.

But I constantly feel guilty because I supposed to be spend two hours. But just because it's like subject been so interesting, he just forgot, you know, or like not pay attention. This important I done good things something, you know. So I think this been turning point where I realize how much, if I sort of be interesting, you know—this kind of help me to get if I just draw something like really correctly over two hours.

MARK SHAPIRO: So you reapplied for—to be—to the art school the next year?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I reapplied to next year. And this happened—I've been twice in fifth grade. It's funny, like —

MARK SHAPIRO: Twice in?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Fifth grade. They start from fifth grade. So because I lost one year, I need to go back to class, what I already actually—once already started, like fifth grade.

But I not been good student—but, how to say it—academic side. So I not been really good student. Really, I have hard time concentrate. I think this first teacher who been in my—from first grade not been really supportive with—and not really been nice to me, I think. She all the time joking like my parents artists, for some reason. [00:04:00] And it's been really small school, and Russian school.

MARK SHAPIRO: How many kids were in your class?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Maybe 20. And this been—like I said, this village been working-class kids, and nobody actually know how read and write in the first grade. And I already read some books. I read *Robinson Crusoe*, and I think *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. So because my dad try to sort of, again, make me sort of interested in this, and I draw composition about this. And I think I been—come in the school pretty proud, and but I feel like nobody able to read. But teacher all the time joking, so, "Oh, *Robinson Crusoe*"—[laughs]—you know, for some reason. I probably been brag, and tell I know how read, and I read this *Robinson Crusoe*.

So I think she joking a lot, so I think I'd become kind of not been interested in school. Just nobody been support this part. But been more interesting with kids to play stupid jokes, and I think I been kind of bad student with this. So I like always provoked student to do something bad, not good. And this why I kind of become more interested in actions, like really, than knowledge.

MARK SHAPIRO: So how many students were in your class at the art school in Kiev?

SERGEI ISUPOV: In art school we have 30 students. But this for art, we divide in two, so 15 students in one class. And this been—the school go pretty quickly. Like, in first grade I feel like—like back there you need to have 10 years, is I been in school. And in the first grade, I think like, oh my god, 10 years—10 like this, 10 years. [00:06:00] This been so awful. Turn out, I study much more—[laughs]—much more. Because like I'd miss one—I mean, like twice in fifth grade, and later in the school been 12 classes. So fifth—five plus seven—and later, university, six years university. So it's like, whew.

MARK SHAPIRO: Right.

SERGEI ISUPOV: But actually every year go faster and faster.

MARK SHAPIRO: So did you have particular professors—teachers who encouraged you, or who taught you in ways that were particularly significant for you?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Not really. I think most have been interesting to was my teams—teams? Like friends—like from class. Because we every semester have exhibition what we done, and there, school commission come and give you grades for art. And I think every time we put on the walls all, like, our art. Been interesting to see, so you kind of see—you able there compete, very visually you see result. If in—[inaudible]—

MARK SHAPIRO: Calligraphy?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No. The normal study. You sort of like this more personal. You know, this teacher ask you a question, you tense, or you don't know how good you are or like how bad you are. But in this—like, see art all together—I think is been much more clear, or you see result of your work.

MARK SHAPIRO: And did you learn all the techniques, the classical techniques of rendering, drawing—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: —during that time?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. I don't like much this academic side. But I still been, I think really, like at this composition where I need come out with some idea, which are completely different story, sort of. Like the same about bird stealing bra. [00:08:00] I think like—I like this to turn somehow, probably looks effective, or people forgot if there's been made [by] kid or adult, because it's been subject.

And I think this what mostly I been—I'm curious with this composition. But technical, academical [ph] side, it's been much more you need to do it. That's not been much fun. Just need to do it. We do like some portraits for 50 hours, just portraits, with all these different pencil, like H, HB, 3H, 6B, you know, like—[makes sound.] But not—I don't know if I use it right now, this knowledge or not. Anyway—

MARK SHAPIRO: So were you—were you becoming aware of any historical artwork or contemporary artwork at that time? Were they also teaching you art history?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. We study art history, but I think mostly I got this from my parents, because each holidays or something we go to museums. And my dad is really a big lover of books and museums. And all my childhood I been packed with all these names. And my dad really love—if somebody he love, he's like, that's—he like really praise a lot.

And this give me a lot complexes. I'm not good enough. And I respect a lot my parents, but because I been bad students, I always feel like I disappoint them, I think. So in some way, my biggest teacher has been my parents.

Not in their presence with my fear to them, to want they be proud, and my teams—schoolmates.

And I think I got like really good advantages of to have parents artists, because not many students have parents artists, and specifically parents artists who wanted to motivate me to do something. So every time I come for weekends home, I need to do one landscape painting or one drawings. [00:10:00] But I think not many parents made kids do it.

So I saw how every time we have breaks—school breaks, or holidays or weekends, I become better and better compare [to] other students. And this give me kind of some motivation to—nobody see it, me to working. And I working really quietly and later so clear have results.

So in the summer, for example, I have like—we have like three months break, or two-and-a-half months sort of break, and each day I need to do landscape painting. And all together, that I have a huge exhibition in the beginning of school in September, and I see big difference of like how I grow in such a short time. And same time—

MARK SHAPIRO: So at that point, were you also resistant or resentful of being asked to do that, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Resentful. But still that clearly—I started seeing these results and it motivate me. I consider myself really lazy—

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: —but I really wanted to be really sort of stick out. And I see like something what I do where nobody see it, and later to show it. And if everybody have about me idea I'm a loser and lazy, and see results, be like such a shock, you know. And this is what I actually like it. And I think I still use it the same unconsciously, you know.

And in my class in this art school, the kids have been lucky—so talented. They're like really brilliant. Like, you know how some people really talented—like just see something in a picture and do exact the same; or just with lines; or like somebody with sketches—so good. And their parents not artists; they're just born with this. [00:12:00]

It's funny, I not one—right now artist. I not keep in touch much, but I know there's nobody—like all these disappear. So like I not saw these classmates who been really talented get results—

MARK SHAPIRO: Do you think they didn't become artists?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Not become artist. Yeah, so—

MARK SHAPIRO: Did you feel you had that facility, or not so much—that capacity?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I never been a—I never stick out in a class by some talents—born with talent. I have really always been mediocre. Only in a composition—maybe my composition been a little bit more sort of twisted, so this what—I think what been separate me from other students.

But the same time, this painting school—like I said, my parents all the time pack me with this art, with all—like other artists, about like all this history of art. So—

MARK SHAPIRO: Were there particular artists or periods of work that stick out in your mind, as when you were young, as being inspiring or interesting, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: I think probably my parents like it, so I sort of probably like it too. Like I say, these parents—big influence on me. Even like I denied this, but I guess you see everything through parent's eyes.

But I still a couple artists—really love it—like Pieter Bruegel. I still like in awe and think it's cool, and think he really influence—influential to my work; and Lucas Cranach, I still like really like it. But a lot contemporary artists, like Picasso, Matisse, Braque and Chagall, there like my dad been really fascinated with them. And I like still think like, ugh, they actually screw my childhood—this—[00:14:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: So I still like really think like, damn it. Well actually, I think this why. And I think mostly because I'm, right now, in this position to be artist, to have career, to have name, people some sort of think I am have something to say—something to say. And I realize how this all is propaganda. I think this—yeah, Picasso is pretty good. He's really cool and clever. But he been in the right time, right place and doing the right things, he have good salesman.



And I think this too close. Like if Pieter Bruegel, you just see work. You don't know who this person are and don't—nobody really promote him. I just see clearly, often that's it. This how I think. Maybe still somebody promote, because we know him. So somebody restore it, probably collect it, da-da-da-da-da.

So later actually I discover—well, not discover. After I graduate painting school, I need to choose what university degree I need to take it. And we have six years education. It's a little different system like here. But I already have seven years behind me to do this painting. Even I been kid, but they still kind of trained pretty good academically and stuff. And I done like one year research, by myself—I mean, without help of parents. I have couple of friends who travel in a lot schools.

We have like—usually if you live in a state, or this Ukraine—say it's state—you need to supposed to be going the university in the same state. And if you go other state, you have different rules—more stronger, like you need more competitive rules, because—

MARK SHAPIRO: Did you need special permission to do that?

SERGEI ISUPOV: You don't need special permission, but you sort of have different tests. [00:16:00] First of all, you go without like really clear lines. So you have like different numbers of people who compete for this seat. Say, like in the ceramic department maybe in St. Petersburg been 10 seats for, say, ceramic. So it's been like three foreigners; five locals; and two like me, who come from other state. And you compete with all of them, you know, so it's much more tougher.

But I'm so been against this study [at] university in the same city where I studied this painting. In some way, I not been popular kid, and I want to change sort of life. And I see opportunity if I move somewhere, nobody knows who I am. And because I've been bad students, everybody expect I am kind of bad student. If something happened in the school, first what they think, "Oh, Sergei done it," you know, and I'm not. And I already change, but nobody think. And I think I've been late bloomer—how you say, late bloomer?

MARK SHAPIRO: That's right.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Physically, I always been like second-from-the-last-one student, and 30 students. I've been like really small kid, and physically not been mature for a long time.

And I been all the time—in a school really you clearly see who is more popular. More stronger? You more popular. So I never been popular. And I think this image stuck really strongly. And I need to go in the university with same kids, same classmates. So I really not doing—[inaudible].

MARK SHAPIRO: In the state art school, you were living and dining and sleeping. What were the living conditions like?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, actually—[00:18:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: Because you told me a story at one time about the pigeons and—I don't know if you remember that.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. [Laughs.] Yeah, this actually—this why I reflect a lot why I'm right now really like it is *my* studio, you know—[laughs]—this is solitude. Because we been—there's every year different. Sometimes four kids in the room and sometimes six kids in the room. And I not remember each year been a little bit different situation, or the rooming.

And we have like one room where we sleep and one room where we supposed to be study. And [the] study, like much more students, probably 30 students. But this room has been really regular. If I look at right now back, conditions been so bad. But back there you don't know difference, so I just took it how it is. Well, every day we need like—by, sort of, circulation—to clean this room, and every day somebody come to give you some score how good do you clean it. And there's been for some reason discipline been much more important, like really your personality. So if you fit this norm, you good students. We have grade for your behaving. Have here in school too?

MARK SHAPIRO: Not so much.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, we have grade for your behaving. This big, important grade. I think this all this communist sort of system—this socialism, where you kind of need to be fit.

MARK SHAPIRO: Community member, yeah.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Fit for this, like a frame. And like, again, I'm always been not good. I never like break much law, or something—break this, to go too far. I think I been like really a cute face, so that a lot I been forgiven. But I'm

not been super nice. Done a lot that kind of silly, stupid—

MARK SHAPIRO: So when you graduated from the state school in Ukraine, [00:20:00] you applied for the—to go to St. Petersburg?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No, I choose myself. Yeah, I go to St. Petersburg and choose ceramic.

MARK SHAPIRO: But did you have to apply—competitive application to do that?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I need to do—go through a tests. You possible apply anywhere, but you need to choose you have chance or not. And St. Petersburg, you know, really prestige school, been really hard to get in and big competition.

And you need to be—sort of like each—still each state have like slightly different rules for like what they're looking for from students, right. And this been a little bit difficult to me to figure out what they wanted. They have little different approach to drawings or painting and composition. So I think each schooling asking different approach. Even this in academic looks like same, but they still a little bit different.

Yeah, I choose St. Petersburg. I don't know why, just really—city been really nice, people been friendly, and far away from where I grew up.

MARK SHAPIRO: So you were about 20 years old when you went there, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Eighteen.

MARK SHAPIRO: Eighteen, you think?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Eighteen, I think. Eighteen.

I not been accepted the first year. I, like, fail. I get really bad grades. [Laughs.] Because been so different what their expect.

MARK SHAPIRO: So you got—you were accepted to the school, but you failed painting school?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I expected to do tests. But I fail tests.

MARK SHAPIRO: I see.

SERGEI ISUPOV: And tests been, like I say, huge. Like, a lot people—like been for competition 120 competitiveness. And we sit in one room to do these drawings, painting. I think the competition go for two or three weeks, so every day. [00:22:00] So we do drawings together, like in one room with all these 120 students, and later accept only 10. So it's been like really tough.

And really like more sport, because like if you psychologically not fit in, you kind of lose too. So you need to be like really: know where I am, who you are, how strong you are. And I been really not prepared emotionally. And schooling—a school asks completely different what I—how I—what I be study. And not I been sure. I choose ceramic at random, just because—

MARK SHAPIRO: And you hadn't done any ceramics in Kiev?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I done ceramics like from childhood, probably from, I don't know, one year's old.

MARK SHAPIRO: But not in the school?

SERGEI ISUPOV: But never in school and never professionally. It's always the ceramic been for me like a game, like presents for my classmates. It's been a really popular part, and I really like it—sort of ceramics been always just like a game, in a nice way.

I spend a lot times with mom in the factory. And like a lot in the summer, my parents do this commissioned work and use some ceramic facilities, like factories and stuff. Would have been really easy to have this possibility to do commission in the old Soviet system. In socialism, factory belong to workers. [Laughs.] So they're like just give presents for director, and have this ability to do—to work.

And so I have like knowledge, and I have this, say, experience. But I never look at in this like a part of art. Ceramics been a little bit—have not good reputation in the art society, but there—it's been more like sissies, like girls, like this more a kind of group. I mean, not sissies. See, like if I have 120 people [00:24:00] compete for 10 seats in the ceramic department; for painting, compete maybe 220. So I been like, in this way, I say "sissy,"

because much more competitive.

So I choose, for example, ceramic because I feel like I have a more chance. And first year not accepted. Second year—

MARK SHAPIRO: So what did you do when you weren't accepted? Did you go back home?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I go back home. And I knowing my father feel who really—actually really start push me out. Thanks, actually, to him, because back there I feel like really—I feel psychologically kind of drowned because like my old classmates, some—mostly my classmates been accepted in the school in Kiev, and I just left behind, let's just say.

And I spend year just—I'm working somewhere to do art, but I not exactly remember what I done. Some propaganda stuff, like for government, that kind of silly stuff—[inaudible]—*Pravda* or something, just something to do. And the second year I—

MARK SHAPIRO: So you went back to the same school?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Back to same school whose idea I already be—know what they wanted. And I been prepared, but for some reason, the school even not offer me place for do competition. And they denied my application, and told me this in a kind of last minute, like we—all universities in the country accept papers on the same day, and you need do tests on the same day. So if you fail a school, you need to lose a year. You not able to—time switch to different—run quickly a different school. It was funny.

And get me to the end, denied my application. So I need to really quickly pick some different schools. There's been only one day left to give documents to school. [00:26:00] And closest school been in Estonia. It's been six hours on the train, let's just say. So I jump on the train; drove into school. And that's been second time I visit the city and I really like it. People really nice; school really small. [Inaudible]—group in 10 students in a class; we have three students in the ceramic. And I like, wow. And I fall in love. They're so nice people.

MARK SHAPIRO: And isn't that also moving west? I mean, it's the western-most part of the Soviet Union.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, Estonia been most democratic—

MARK SHAPIRO: Europeanized, kind of?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Europeanized. I think because I can really come to part of Soviet, because after—before World War II, you know, so there are still people who remember how this country been independent. This a big part, I think, because it's really culturally much more organized, and people kind of more sort of—socialism really spoil a lot people, because if it is not yours, you not care. And there's no private property or no—you not own nothing in socialism because all belong to everybody, so you cannot care. There's dirt everywhere. You know, it's not—no individuality.

But in Estonia been really clean, everybody working hard, be really nice, and been really foreigner too. The language [ph] so different. And you feel like you in other side of the world.

MARK SHAPIRO: So you didn't speak any Estonian when you arrived?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Not speak. But because it's been part of Soviet Union—still being a Soviet, how you say, republic—there been dual-lingual. So like every sign in two languages would simplify it a lot.

And Helsinki been really close. Through Baltic Sea, it's like been only 40 miles. [00:28:00] So it's a lot—it have TV station in—Estonian people got. And there have like much more progressive vision and stuff. And all schools in—

MARK SHAPIRO: But you didn't know that before you went there?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No, I don't. But I still see difference. Like St. Petersburg and Ukraine want to have bribes to get to school. Like bribery, like, really big deal there, so—and really tell you blank in the face, you know. And for some reason, my parents never good with this. Sometimes they try I think, but never successful. So they been really fair. So I not been introduce how do this.

You need to actually do be smart, because if you're not doing correctly, you actually break law. But if you doing correctly, you succeed and get everything that you wanted. And you don't need to give much, but sort of know how do—how deal with this. It's like other language what I never been learned. But in Estonia not been bribes. Like really been honestly judge you, good you are or not.

MARK SHAPIRO: So did you also have a several-week examination?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, three weeks examination. But I actually done really good for something, but I never been proud though; I got really good grades. I mean, something what I am not good—been trained less—in Estonia I got, like, just because I been so confident and I love this place; I got good grades.

But for composition, for ceramic specifically, I apply again for ceramic. It's been like four tests—specific tests for ceramic. Like, they have—like, some you need to design some pictures, or something, and you need to—I not think you need working with clay, but you need to done really sketch, or specific examination for like ceramic. [00:30:00] And there's been like four—this composition, [which] a lot. Like if you have two drawings and one painting, and four composition for clay, it's been big—percent-wise [ph].

So all the rest academic stuff, I get like best grades. But in composition, I get worse grades, so I not been accepted again. So second time in failure. But I stayed there a year in Estonia.

MARK SHAPIRO: What did you do during that year in Estonia?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I need to be working somewhere in the city to get permission to live in the city. Because we have this passport system, but you really need to be—to live there, you need to have permission. So I working in a military factory. But I done some furniture stuff, with furniture. I been part of military factory, been like one side would give [inaudible].

And I hang out with the students; learn what the school wanted; sort of just make friends; and every day again, try to keep it all this what I learn from my childhood. Like every day, even like my father already not live there, I still every day do painting, or like landscapes painting, or—it's been really cold. Estonia is really north, like Alaska. So I done a lot, this composition on drawings, in bars.

Like, I sit in the bar, get like a coffee cup, and with this coffee cup, like for three, four hours just sit there and draw people, and all this. So I kind of actually, from this time, I know a lot people. I not socialize much, but physically I know them. So that would help me later a lot, because with some of them I become friends. [00:32:00] And Estonia so small—don't need to know much faces to recognize a lot of them.

And on the third my year to go to school, I been accepted to Estonia. So I live and study in Estonia for six years.

MARK SHAPIRO: And then are you living in a dormitory at that—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I live in dormitory, but been much more—I think you already kind of adult. See, like I start do test like I been 18, right, like to apply to school. But later I already been 21, so really already adult. So I really know what I wanted. I have this experience of deny—[laughs]—I call this nobody's—means lose, you know. So been already pretty tough, in some way, and I really more clearly know what I wanted.

So it's actually funny looking back all this stuff, what I think like, "Why me?" "What happened is so bad with me?" Looking back, I think this best what happen to me. Like all this—in this moment you think this negativity; turn out actually positivity. It funny. Almost everything what I able to complain with, come with first impression of, that's bad things, later turn out this best advantages.

So this experience been good. I really clearly know what I wanted. I already really actually kind of wanted to do ceramic. Even in the beginning I been not sure. I see like kind of playing with this: Maybe I want be accepted or not.

And this—I start really actively from first grade. And I say, school really small, and country, but I really like it to be, and has been really active. And I have really nice classmates. Teachers, I never been like really fascinated with teachers. And like all my—if I look back, I have a lot teachers and nobody who really give me something. [00:34:00] Mostly, like I say, classmates and all these people who look at my work, or who respond some my work.

MARK SHAPIRO: In that regard, I wanted to just ask you about David, because he was a—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: —he was an influence for you in your household as you were growing up, I believe, right? Wasn't he—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: —close with your parents, or—?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: Could you just—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, it's funny, he—

MARK SHAPIRO: —describe his influence, and when he came into your life, and—?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, his influence been more—

MARK SHAPIRO: What is David's last name? It's—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Miretsky. Miretsky. Yeah, he—well, it's, you know, funny. It's like teachers. It's more a myth about him being for me sort of—been my mentor. [Laughs.] He been study school with my dad. And he done really different work what all the rest students done. And I remember him like I been kid, like seven years old, eight years old. And I think he left country like I been eight years old, nine years old.

And I think I been short time student. Maybe three—two or three times in class. He give classes to kids. And been really interesting. He would have completely different approach. And he Jewish, so actually in the first wave of Jewish immigration, he left to—he left. But for some reason, he left such a big mark to my memory. And he left a lot work—his work, like presents to friends.

But I always like it. Like really like, say, contemporary Bruegel—Pieter Bruegel. [00:36:00] Like, so he made like little stories, like just ladies feed these birds in the street, and they have like red shoes, red suitcases, red coats—like a lot Soviet artist been doing cliché, like—

MARK SHAPIRO: Also, wasn't his work quite small?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, been miniatures—

MARK SHAPIRO: Miniatures. Yeah, like icon—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Really small, yeah. And really, objects what he actually wanted to have it. A lot Soviet paintings been so—this realism, but kind of being completely without feelings.

And David, for some reason, give me a couple lessons. Like he all the time draw sketches, and he introduced me to use it this to doing sketches to be useful. Like, he said, "Well, before there's been this communism, and I have a lot fears, and we have like a lot in the stores lines for if you want butter. Not have pre-packed butter; usually there's a big piece of butter and a salesman cut for you piece of butter.

And it possible—And it have like you able to get these cuts from—and would probably be a little older or from middle, so you really depended how this salesman—how you affect salesman, give you better piece or worse piece. So if you represent yourself like you kind of more maybe is KGB or power, they give you better piece. So maybe you trouble for them, they be nicer.

So he introduced me—like if you do sketches, they think you write something there, like a spy, like a—not spy, like a KGB, like, "I saw a cockroaches," or something. [00:38:00] So they don't know what he doing in sketchbook. But he always have sketchbook and pen, and he draw, and they think like he somebody who actually possible make problems for them, and give you better—give him better piece.

I use this a lot. Like I mention to you, in dormitory I have—I need to drive train. And this—I need get tickets on the train, and sometimes been not really easy. You see train come, and so you run to get train. And maybe conductor come, check it your tickets, sometimes not, so it be like really random. And without tickets, I have such a fear to conductor come. And I do—and first time it was happen accidentally: I drew sketch of somebody who sit in the train. And conductor come, and he really been excited I draw somebody who looks like, and he not ask me show him tickets. So I start using this a lot, so never ask me tickets.

If you do something like—you know, if you looks different, it never—take you like differently too. And I remember in the planes been really cool too. Like if I draw sketches in the planes, sometimes stewardess ask me to come to pilot—on the pilot seats. I remember I flew—I could been kid—like they take me to pilot and I drew sketches of pilot. They give me like play with this rule—[laughs]—and stuff.

Well, they have two captains, or two seats, right. One, is possible switch. They switch me on the off side, so I able to kind of, you know, play like a pilot. But privileged to be artist, being really visible from childhood. So I really hooked to this art, so maybe by accidently. But I still already feel like I not spend already so much time, so I not able do nothing else, just on the art.

MARK SHAPIRO: So after David left, when you were in [00:40:00]—what, about like eighth grade or something, after three years—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, it's been probably fifth grade.

MARK SHAPIRO: —did you ever have any contact with him after that?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No contact with him.

MARK SHAPIRO: You reconnected with him when you were in New York, or in this country?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, but really accidentally. I think my dad been really a friend—a good friend to him. And my dad only one who come to say goodbye, like on the train station, like he leave to America.

But back there—and later they break off friendship because my—because David actually all the time talking about Israel—"This our country," "Israel," Jewishness, da-da-da." And my dad been really supportive, and really proud he have this sort of voice and saying.

But in the process of immigration, he left to U.S. And my dad been really—been disappointed in his, such a Jewishness and proud of Israel, but choose something what for his—

MARK SHAPIRO: Career as a—

SERGEI ISUPOV: —for benefit, you know, not like proud of his nationality. And I think he keep in touch with his friends, but not with my dad, because they have like sort of this misunderstanding or something.

MARK SHAPIRO: So, Sergei, to return to the art school in Estonia, so was the instruction there of a higher quality; not necessarily? Or did you have opportunities to begin to exhibit work, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. Yeah, there's not been much instructions, but—

MARK SHAPIRO: Were the facilities good?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Not really. But I not be—

MARK SHAPIRO: I mean, to learn—to learn ceramics is very—there's a lot of technical information.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Just been really good atmosphere. Like really, really creative atmosphere. Been a lot like creative students would have like, kind of, working and see results. [00:42:00] Been more democratic, so more—been easy to kind of show your work, and been—if your work even not politically correct, you possible be much more open. And I think it's a lot my parents age and struggle a lot with this politically correct stuff, but in Estonia be much, much loose.

And normally in Soviet system you able to do one-man show only in some university. Like 50 years old you have like first your exhibition, you know. But in Estonia, it's been really much free. So I start made first one-man show, I got in the second year in Estonia.

I have work, so I proposed to some museum—I think like a history museum of Tallinn—and they think it's great and I have exhibition. And this kind of open flow, so every time—

MARK SHAPIRO: What kind of work did you show, your first exhibition?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I still, like I mentioned before, like in the summer times I working with parents in factories where they're doing commission work. But usually with my brother, we just play with clay. We not do commission; just do on our art. And I got a lot connection with same factories.

So in the summer breaks, I back to these facilities, already like feel like I'm ready right now study ceramics. Before I just playing, but right now being specific. And already have like some my classmates who will be competitive, and sort of see who better, come with idea, or some numbers of pieces. So I think I go to this factory and produce a lot just sort of inspirational work, or like just—

MARK SHAPIRO: Sculptures—

SERGEI ISUPOV: —to impress my classmates, you know.

MARK SHAPIRO: Any sculptural pieces, representational pieces? Do you remember that?

SERGEI ISUPOV: All kinds of. [00:44:00] I just—I think I kill them all by numbers, you know.

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: [Laughs.] I mean—and I think this been simple way, because actually in Estonia not easy with ceramic. They not have there clay and no kaolin. The earth like not give these clay materials. Only I think low-fire—really low-fire red clay, but not really—

MARK SHAPIRO: So did you have to bring clay in?

SERGEI ISUPOV: They bringing clay from Ukraine. [Laughs.] That's funny.

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: And not really good facility to access to kiln, you know. So it's mostly actually education in Estonia being on paper—like do sketches, do prepare sort of—except, mostly working on the ideas, sketches, and presentation, not exactly work. But I have this knowledge, and I go to summer in this factory where I able to produce how much I wanted—this clay, how many I wanted. And so all—

MARK SHAPIRO: In that Soviet system, they just accept you to come in the factory and do what you want to do, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Connections. It's all been connections. So probably my parents been nice enough to leader of this factory. And Estonia have really high reputation like a foreigner country. So I ask from school recommendation for a couple places. And I come with this recommendation, and somebody deny; somebody say, okay.

I remember like one factory where I use it a lot. The same factory, their director say, like, OK, make me ashtray, and do anything what you wanted. So for one ashtray, I working three months. And I made so much, and using their clay, they—

MARK SHAPIRO: Free materials, everything.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Kilns, yeah. Only if you not come in the time kiln be open, is possible you lose. Somebody steal at work. You have workers there like really—they pay so little for workers there, steal it a lot. [00:46:00] The Soviet system, everybody steal it. Everybody steal it. It's like nature.

So with this new group of pieces, I been visit—to come back to introduce and start make shows. And I start make a lot shows, probably like two in years—

MARK SHAPIRO: And your other—

SERGEI ISUPOV: —in different places.

MARK SHAPIRO: —your fellow students were not doing that?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No. Not been so active. I guess because there's less success to clay. Some of them I introduce. I introduce this place—[inaudible]—once I go with somebody from my school. But I think it's been more difficult, because you need to rely on the friends. I think art really self-centric, because really it much easy to do everything by yourself. Like, this how I feel. This what—this what be more—much more my success, to rely only on yourself, to provide only yourself, sort of.

Yeah, so this give me like really a good jump, and it really sort of respect. In Estonia, I still been foreigner. I been Russian, and Russian not have really good reputation. They're occupiers. I mean, not reputation. How to say? Sort of attitude from local people to Russians. They been like two community, let's say—Estonian and Russian. And my school been mostly Estonian, really little people from different republic. But I still been judged by art, so I think this—I been—the people been blind on my nationality.

And I think, like, I remember I complained with my dad about this, or talking about this. And he said, you need to be—I have a girlfriend. She been a really privileged family. [00:48:00] And all doors, before even she open, lot been opened for her because she been like privileged. And I complain a lot about this with my dad. And he said, well, if you want succeed—I mean, like stick out with this group, you need to be 10 times better.

And I think this why I try to say like "I kill them by numbers." Just produce enough, so when they're able—not able to not see it. But slowly these numbers become quality. And I been like really sort of not afraid express myself. I think first exhibition probably be like really a lot complexes [ph], but later I just go like open flow, and go much.

MARK SHAPIRO: When did you start making—were you always making figurative sculpture?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Well, it's been hard to avoid this, because my first school academic. And because this experience with this composition about bird stealing bra, I also try to feel this advantage—my advantage to able to bring everything from other side, but to seem more, say, more from this decorative art.

Like, this clay always been for me like a tool. So I not been really fascinated where this clay come from or how does glaze made? You know, they have all these classes in the school; I never been with this fascinated at all. This has been like completely been not interest to me. I just want the results, you know, and this been only tool. And still to test the edges, use it like a tool.

And I think I good with clay, because this come with sort of nature. I guess because from childhood I've been introduced to this. Something I do without thinking. About like I build my work really not think much, mostly on instinct. Like hands are feeling, you know, feeling right—this too dry or too wet; or how thick, how thin; where applying or something. [00:50:00] There a lot on instinct.

So only my, I say, artistical [ph] come with this creativity, where I feel like this composition or this approach to simple things from other point of view. And—

MARK SHAPIRO: So that program was three years or two years?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Six years.

MARK SHAPIRO: Six years.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Actually, more correctly, it's painting been six years. And ceramic or glaze, or all this three-dimensional work been five years. But the interest in school I find it like last year before—before last year, like in after four grade—and four grade like four years in the school. I been introduced some factory in Ukraine where like give really good facility. And just happen I already really know what I wanted to do, and really good facility. And I feel like, wow, but I need to go back to school.

So I start search how I able to kind of stay one more year without going to school. And I find out if you sick, like have some paper from doctor say how able to get your break. In Lithuania, I get friend—doctor friend who play—we made—I make appointment, and he recommend what I need to complain of, what had to be tested. So I have some heart problem, but not able—nobody able to test it—[laughs]—correctly. If I sick enough, he give me a paper. So I come with this paper to school and I got year break. And I spend this year in this factory. And later—

MARK SHAPIRO: This was like a ceramic dish—like a dish-making factory?

SERGEI ISUPOV: It's been huge factory what made toilets. It's been a lot of different section of this factory, but it's huge. [00:52:00] This made like a big cisterns for chemicals, and they like size like this room, made all by clay. And been some stuff what made with porcelain, really small stuff, too; and toilet factory. Their kiln is huge. There was just like some factories humongous.

You know, you just never know how much—for example, they're doing all this electric things what actually huge, like this size—like clay like this, like table size, and solid. And they just put on this turning table and [makes expressive noises]—[inaudible]. Amazing I saw. And just have this excess. The director been very nice to artists. And I been introduced this place. He give me like one room for able to lock and stuff.

My parents helped me. I think their connections—that's how I been introduced to this place, and great. Later, it was all this work—

MARK SHAPIRO: This is in Ukraine, this factory, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, in Ukraine. And later was all this work. I not remember how I bringing this to Estonia; still like distance pretty far away. Ship it or bring it myself, I not remember. Somehow like all this stuff that I made in a year would been huge. Some composition be like three meters tall because this facility so big to make it. So I—

MARK SHAPIRO: Tile compositions or like three-dimensional—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Sculptures. Oh, yeah, yeah, sculptures. So it's been different kinds. Like some composition been like even six meters, but with parts. And I made—

MARK SHAPIRO: Do you have image of those pieces?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. I show you—I give you—remind me, I give you this disk, if I find it. I believe it's from Estonia. So in some way, I been become really popular in Estonia. [00:54:00] I got like a—get art union, local art union, yeah, I suspect. Well, to actually really hard to get in. Like you will get able—you need to sort of prove it



that you have enough exhibition, and you need prove do you have enough experience. You have like accomplish something to able to in. Some people only able to get this union in 30 years old, or 40 or even 50. So this really not easy to—but Estonia give me this—I mean, I am apply and been kind of—[inaudible]—still student.

MARK SHAPIRO: So did that give you—

SERGEI ISUPOV: It's really been unique in a way.

MARK SHAPIRO: Did that give you certain privileges?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. This give me access to bar. [Laughs.]

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, this really actually have café. Like where usually coffee or food, and have lines because there are so few. But this have—like art union have, for example, café restaurant, with prices much cheaper. And you have like full access, so go any time. And they're all artists, and they serve you really quickly food. So it's been easy.

Honestly, I not use it much this, but it still privilege. You still able to take somebody, like my parents come. This been like cool to, you know, you just push the—put this card and the door open for you, and, you know.

And plus I think this give you some access to—you able to apply for studio with the support by government. And I got I think studio because I been in this union. Something, but not much benefits. Like, I mean, not pay you for this, just—but still been some supportive.

And in old Soviet Union actually, by law, you—everybody need to work, or have like a workplace. And if you in the union, this is your work. So you not able to kind of work. Otherwise, you need to prove it, you working in some factory. And even sometimes—[00:56:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: So in a way, it gives you the privilege of being a studio artist.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. Yeah, or free artist.

MARK SHAPIRO: Good.

SERGEI ISUPOV: And I done actually very good living by doing this, like because of different exchange in money, like Soviet money, or foreign money. I have some people who purchase my work, but be not expensive for value abroad, but been really expensive in Soviet system. And with this exchange—

MARK SHAPIRO: Is that black market, or not really?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, well—yeah, probably, let's just say. Yeah, this illegal, so no taxes, no—I not supposed to be have foreigner money too, but it's been kind of real loose about that.

MARK SHAPIRO: But—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. This not been loose like for my parents' age—time like they grew up, but been a little bit more looser, and particularly in Estonia. It's given me some privilege. So I really actually never feel problem with money or problem with why I make this artwork. The old work, what I done it, I just done it for my friends, to prove it, to show it, to show up, you know, to kind of—they're talking about my exhibition.

So each exhibition—I later, in I think last year in school, I already have professional gallery who do international show too. And I made probably two exhibitions in a year in this gallery. So each opening has been kind of big deal, like—

MARK SHAPIRO: And is this in your last year at the institute—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: —or is this after you graduate?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I start working last year, and after graduate I still live in Estonia. Yeah, and after this exhibition, what I done with this work, what I working here in the factory, I got status like "best young artist"—[00:58:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: Yes. Right, right—

SERGEI ISUPOV: —yeah, in Estonia. What been, in a way, cool, again because I still been foreigner. So I been

kind of accepted to be foreigner. Been really helpful to me being foreigner from early time. Because like in Estonia really competitive, because so small country, but they think I'm from Ukraine, so give me kind of a green light. You know, like because, "Oh, anyway, he just—he not ours," you know, and I able to be like who I am. But in Ukraine they think like, "Well, he study in Estonia," you know, and not—I not been problem for them too. So in a way, I been kind of between.

And I still between in this country too. It's kind of funny, but have like other sad side, you know, because I was foreigner, you know. [Laughs.] But I guess I already so used to. And for artist, I realize it's good. You need to have some sort of pain, or like, say, dissatisfaction [ph], you know, something what bother you, you know, to be—have more depthness [ph] in your art.

And I think this sort of where I sometime think like I not have my place in this world, bla-bla-bla. Was bullshit, but still—emotionally, still, I sort of touched a lot by who I am, you know, what nationality I belong to, or to what family I belong to.

But this give me some sort of, like I say, freedom, in some way. Not be connect to nobody. Because each family or each nation give you like really clear rule, what expect from you, or what they need to—what you need to be fit in. But in some way, be foreigner give you kind of, whew, you not belong to nobody. [01:00:00]

This your fault—your fault, and you be pay for this by be lonely, but you still kind of have your, sort of, way to see everything or doing everything.

MARK SHAPIRO: So did that award—was that money involved, or just prestige, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: I think some money involved too, but it so small. But like I say, back there I been already spoiled to have foreigner buyers, so I not even—that's funny, I think I remember like one museum, local museum bought work from me. Not much money, but still like 300 rubles. But normal workers have like 115 [rubles] a month, so I have I think two months' wages.

And I put it in bank and completely forgot. And later I left, I forgot. And later money changing, I still money there. That's it, I lost—I lost this money. I been so kind of funny, like I feel like I'm really frugal, but sometimes with money I so stupid, kind of, in this way. I feel like I safe. I'm OK. I have it. But where there are I don't know. [Laughs.]

MARK SHAPIRO: So when you graduated in 1990, is that when you started participating in some international events—in Norway and—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I start participate early because like I been active, so I got a lot invitation. And I think like word been spread out. I have a lot publications in different magazines, and I think a lot—

MARK SHAPIRO: In Estonia, or in—

SERGEI ISUPOV: In Estonia.

MARK SHAPIRO: —the Soviet Union?

SERGEI ISUPOV: And still—in the Soviet Union, in Estonia and Finland. I don't know how they get it. There sort of I make exhibition; somebody saw from Finland, they want I make exhibition in Helsinki.

What a lot international exhibitions before handled by critics or by some museums—local museums, so this not been through me. I just like—they took work for me and they're doing all these exhibition. [01:02:00] I not get nothing from this. Sometimes been work stolen or broken.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_isupov10\_1655\_m.]

But I get this—all this publications. But I never been collect—but I think I have a lot.

MARK SHAPIRO: So were you always working, at that time, at cone 6 porcelain, or cone 10 porcelain, or what was the—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I like working all the time in different materials. So it's like been everything—stoneware, porcelain, bone china porcelain, and like I say, be different sizes.

I think I been really excited to kind of switch so quickly from small to huge. And like I say, been interesting to show—to meet, sort of, impress friends. And it's easiest impress by kind of doing something what they're not expected. And I think Estonia been this really good training ground for this. I really like playing for this.

MARK SHAPIRO: Did you have—were you doing sculptural pieces that had this drawing on the surface at that time?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, pretty much all the time. But there's been some story about this how I sort of analyze this part. Because in history of art, I learn about Greek vases, and how these myths been so understandable for everybody—those stories been such a big part of art. And so story—like, all the stories been so literal, and so everybody understood what is talking about if you mention only one hero, you know, like Zeus. Everybody knows what he done. So you don't need to tell all story, just need to mention this story.

And all this Odysseus being proved by the symbols, like symbols of Zeus, [00:02:00] or symbols of Andromeda, or some hero of what means something. I guess like something like a bottle [ph]—you know, like each means something—hero. And so for example, and it's have been useful for everyday life: If your like guest come and sit too long, and you want he already like go home—

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: —you bring to him like a dish or some plate with suggest you about myth, about how somebody sit too long and later what happen. So, you know, like, man, that's such a clever. So I actually start using this a lot in my work to kind of say something for—I been—I think I been pretty sexual, but I always been, like I say, late bloomer, always feel shy about this. Like shy to approach girls, or shy to share my feelings or something. So through art, I think like, wow, it's such a easiest way to say what I wanted to say.

So I actually start—this always my sexual work what I got a lot recognition, like artists who do a little bit maybe naughty work or something—I start from this period of time, where I try to kind of tell something through object what I actually, in real life, have a hard time to tell.

MARK SHAPIRO: Was that work in any way more risqué, more transgressive in the former Soviet Union or in Estonia than it is here?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I think this really become perestroika—everybody be not care. So I got actually like my creativity—I start grow up in the perestroika time, where government be not care, so everything been already open—plus in Estonia. In Estonia, all the time pretty much been open. [00:04:00] So like Estonia been really not part of Soviet Union. Even this in the border, this always been real loser, much loser, like—[inaudible]—country.

This give me advantage, just like later I had made exhibition in Ukraine from this work in Estonia. And I have like become there very popular, but really actually taboo artist. Once they close my exhibition. I make them huge exhibition. And at the same time, I have exhibition somewhere in London, so I left to London. And I realize—and I come back, after months back, and I realize that all this time their exhibition been closed. It still been there in a showroom, but been closed because there's been some nudity there—what been somebody have fear if somebody see it, and tell somebody, to maybe have problem from government.

And there is this lady who actually, in the door, not let us, nobody in. But you sort of give her bribe, like chocolate or ruble, and she let you in. So everybody saw, because a secret exhibition, right, but it still been—government close. So there been so big difference. Estonia, in this case, been much more appealing and cooler.

Yeah, so and this work, what had been narrative work, been really from early time in ceramic. And now it's been functional work, because I want they use it. You know, just like not copy Greece, but have this idea from Greek art. So I done a lot teapots with this suggestion. Because I think everybody have cup, but not everybody have teapots.

So teapot been kind of nice subject, would been cool, really sculptural, and same time really able to say a lot on this object. [00:06:00] And have like spout, with pretty sexual in some way, handle, lid, and each thing is possible be really cool. Just have like something you will be put in and pour out. Like really literal object by themselves [ph], but if you combine with some storytelling, inside this be really powerful. So I done a lot teapots.

But become really handy; I move to U.S. and some jeweler who first start show my work—Martha Connell from Atlanta—she saw from my old portfolio I done a lot teapots. So she want teapot exhibition. I make like in America teapots, and have been really successful—sold out. And the last three years, all my tea pots have been sold out really quickly.

And it's funny because this change actually—really change rules. Because in Estonia all my friends use their tea pots who I give it to. In America, nobody really likes to drink much tea.

MARK SHAPIRO: I'm going to pause this for a second and change the—

SERGEI ISUPOV: OK.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_isupov10\_1656\_m.]

MARK SHAPIRO: So this is the second card. It's Mark Shapiro interviewing Sergei Isupov at the artist's studio in Cummington on December—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Twenty-one.

MARK SHAPIRO: —twenty-first for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Again, this is card number two.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, we talk about teapots—my first exhibition in America, teapot exhibition. So it been very successful, but like I not consider myself specifically teapot artist. And I been surprised how this response in America been, because not many people actually drink tea in America or use it in this manner teapots.

But I think this really collectable item, I suppose. And, yeah, and I think for a couple of years I just stuck with these teapot things.

MARK SHAPIRO: So this is after you went to Norway?

SERGEI ISUPOV: This after I come to U.S. Norway, that been—

MARK SHAPIRO: Can we be able to talk a little bit about before that, you know, maybe—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Uh-huh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MARK SHAPIRO: —because you came to the U.S. in '93, right?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: And you met—you met somebody that you later married at one of—at a conference, right?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Right. Yeah, a symposium. Yes, it been some international symposium.

Yeah, I think there's couple things: like I been student, I got this freedom to express myself in material called ceramic. I lost this—I lost this fear of be artist, like I have to do paintings because I have all these big names what been really hard to compete with. [00:02:00]

And in ceramic I realize that for this, there's no contemporary tradition to express yourself with this material. I find it fascinating, clay—specifically with this, because you make object. But object be always more appealing. I want to create some—I want make art what be appealing for people, and I think clay been great with this.

And perestroika, been in same time like I been students, would give me kind of second level of good luck—or how say, first, good luck when I been accepted in the school that I actually really like it. And I find that this company what I been really fortunate with.

And perestroika give me kind of another freedom too. These old borders open up. You able to kind of working not only for this Soviet community of audience, and you able to kind of show your work abroad.

And I still been young enough to not have fears of commitment—a family, or something like this. So I think I have this really unique situation in timewise, and still be students—still be student and be—supposed to be not really responsible or does not have time to build career.

I already build sort of reputation and career, would give me kind of freedom. Later, after I graduate, be fit very easy in this new—in new age of do the art for living, [00:04:00] without sort of schooling, without obligation.

And I have couple places that start invite me for participate on some workshops, or symposiums or some trips. And because I made—produce a lot work and been exposed in different places, I get a lot different kind of proposals.

And I think back there like perestroika start, Soviet Union been really on top of the people—[inaudible]. Been a lot exhibitions in different part of world about this Russia, so everything been interesting.

So I been kind of funny go in, in some system. But I never able, for example, go in right now, because back there has been popular, been cool. So like London, Norway, and Sweden, Finland, yeah, it's been a lot—a lot of places where I just go with this invitation to be who I am, kind of like be artist and represent myself.

I not have much experience to kind of be on this public space. And in Norway, the symposium where I need to give workshop, I not speak English. And I been so young, and I need to give demonstration. And there's been at same time give demonstration with couple American artists, and one of them been—but all done at different time, but I been in a room together with Don Reitz. It was Don Reitz I give workshop.

So he in one side of room and I am in other side room. [00:06:00] And he have probably hundred people who at his lecture—[laughs]—and I have one. [Laughs.] Imagine, without—I really no idea what it's all about, you know. I'm like been really silly about things like art—it's art, you know. Like and art is something what you not talk about, but there you need to give workshop and talk about.

But it's, again, been such a good experience in such an early stage of career to realize it all performance. You know, it's not necessary talk about art. You just need to entertain people, really show what you do, but in a funny way, so they're able to actually spend time and watch.

MARK SHAPIRO: Are you building teapots?

SERGEI ISUPOV: [Laughs.] Yeah, I think so. Something what kind of be appealing. So I picked something, tea pot—I think something more recognizable. And this person who has actually been a director of the symposium, who actually invite me, he said, "Oh, Sergei, don't worry. I saw this already, four or five these workshop, on Don Reitz. He talking about same things. It's all bullshit. So don't worry. You have your spot. Don't look at everybody watch him, you know." So actually not give me much confidence, but is sort of like I understood this sort of different game, and different rules and different place.

I still been student, so this always still be kind of part of experience. So I actually, like I mention a lot, like I been so active to be student. So I actually not really fit with this student program too. I have a lot problems with education system, like with professors, because a lot of them still be part of working with this old Soviet Union system, where there's nothing been able to do. They're not been so active.

Like I just been on the same level like them. [00:08:00] They been like much more junior—like older and experience with me, but I been—like, we meet in the same exhibition. I been student; they been professor. And this be not fair, so I feel a lot tightness from them. They're not been really supportive of me on this level.

Right now, I see them and they're really proud—[laughs]—and supportive. But back there, I like all the time feel that we have some difficulty. They put me some kind of "sticks in the wheels," how you say. They never allowed me to firing kiln, firing my work, only work what I made for specific school—

MARK SHAPIRO: Projects.

SERGEI ISUPOV: —projects, but not with my free stuff. So I need all the time kind of be really juggling to find some space where I able to get clay or where I able to get kiln. We not have back there supplies for art materials, so everything—this part of it, actually union card give you freedom to buy it from supply. They have like supply, not for everybody, only for if you in the union. But still you all the time get what you get. So if there no this clay, there's be some other clay; you get some other clay.

You ask me if I using some specific porcelain or stoneware. You use it what you find it—[laughs]—and every time you find it something different. So after I move in America, I realize, wow, you able to buy brush same—same brush after 10 years, you know. Or same clay—be the same, you know.

And this been actually big relief. Like back there, every time need to invent new machine—[laughs]—you know, a new bicycle. Because every time you need to use new clay, and new glaze, new kiln, new system. [00:10:00] But, again, give me good freedom to able to do a lot things.

Education in Estonia been based on each half a year they have a new technology in clay, between china paints, to slipcasting, to hand-built monumental work and hand-built jewelry, I think. So you actually, in the time of the study of ceramic, you actually study so many different techniques. So this based on idea, so in the last year you choose what you actually good with, or you like it with, and one year is spent to do this diploma, this real like glasswork material, and a technique what you choose with it. I think it's really good. So every half year actually be different teacher.

MARK SHAPIRO: So the art school prioritized technical and practical over self expression, in Estonia?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I think both—I think both. In Estonia, have been like—been really self-expression has been popular, what probably not been popular in all the rest Soviet republics. So be not fair to say more technical.

MARK SHAPIRO: But there's a very strong focus on practical?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Practical. Yeah, a strong focus on practical.

MARK SHAPIRO: On technical, practical?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. There still been three-dimensional work, so that what really practical, really specific rules. But be nice to be break later rules, and still in process of learning. I working in these factories and I see different technique, [00:12:00] and there been acceptable. But you go in the school and professor tell you it is impossible to do it.

So we actually have like system where you do a sketch to show teacher—different sketches of, say, a picture. You bring in the sketches; teacher choose one; and you kind of work in kind of these directions. And then after, you with teacher selects a sketch, you do real life-sized plan, like a cooler plan and like architectural plan, like I mean like thickness of pot, thickness of handle, really unpractical.

So after you done all this, you need to do the real work. But a lot times really not right way to do. So—well, because the material give you—

MARK SHAPIRO: [Inaudible.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: —they are completely different rules and expectations.

MARK SHAPIRO: So kind of a design approach?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Design approach, yeah, and this school been more famous by design. And in my case, actually I done always differently, but I never tell teacher. So I first made, say, picture—like I say, every half-year different taste, but I just mention picture because some picture—and done picture, and later from this picture put in sketchbook.

Usually teacher say, like, "No, it's not—impossible. This not good design. This doesn't work, you know." But more work for me. I usually come with some new way of see picture. Maybe with some picture would been broken up on a pot and that are glued together, so I got more—been interesting on this sort of expression of not necessarily design, dry design, but more like, for like me, contemporary approach to this. So make picture; break picture; and glue together; you have all those lines where you been fixed together.

But teacher, of course, say, like, "This impossible to do." I already done, but he don't know. [00:14:00] So in the end of, like, my semester, I show like six works, what I already done without his knowledge, and one, this monster what I made for program. And there they see how I'm laughing about their system. But they not able to do nothing; just make me feel bad. So they actually make me not show it, all the rest of art.

So it'd be like all the time been—some teachers been on my side; some teachers been against me; some been actually real sort of war between. And I think every—some semester we have like student sales. And all my work what been supposed to be not. I made these pictures what be monster, and that monster sell so quickly. And this monster—[laughs]—nobody buy it. Such in conflict between really what people wanted to see and what program tell you to do.

But still been pretty loose, so nobody really fired me from school, but they are actually able to do it. So in end, I get like some, you know, fans to support sort of my, kind of, freedom.

MARK SHAPIRO: So Sergei, you meet a woman at a workshop or symposium, and you fall in love and you come to the United States to Louisville, Kentucky. So what was that like—your first impression coming to the United States? And what—well, did you have any—did you have any doubts about coming?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Estonia really small country. It's one-and-a-half million people. And be like famous or younger—best young artist in Estonia is like being—[laughs]—like that's like your family. You know, like that's every year have somebody from your family become, you know, best. So it been pretty tight. [00:16:00]

I not done this on purpose, like fall in love with American woman. But I think I fell in love with this idea "world big," you know. Because, like, we met each other; she not speak Russian, I not speak English. So I think she, for me, been exotic or representation of this big, and good, and like opportunity and stuff. She learned really quickly Russian. In two weeks she start actually saying something and later would communicate only in Russian.

And I don't know if how actually she really been into it. We fall in love really seriously, and she been really into bring me to America. But I not been against—she first actually took me to her parents' house. I think we go for Christmas, or something, and we spend two or three weeks. But like I been tourist. That's been completely different—like later I move in to live. But that's been nice—been really interesting trip, like world been really big. I travel already back there, but not so on this level. Mostly like for exhibition, and—

MARK SHAPIRO: And is that where you met this dealer from Atlanta you mentioned earlier?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, in Kentucky, yeah I met.

So I move to U.S. It's interesting, actually she wanted to—we need to make papers in Estonia to me to marry this woman. And she go to American embassy and ask what kind of papers you need to do to marry some Russian. And they look at her say like, "Girl, you need to go first to psychologist."

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: "Who want marry to Russian guy?" Well, this really normal—some American guy come and marry a Russian woman. [00:18:00] That's for some reason acceptable. But woman to marry to Russian guy is so stupid.

Her parents—her father been lawyer, and she mention to him too, like, "Dad, I want married." He like: Good. Oh, I so glad for you. For who?" And she like, "Oh, some Russian guy." He, like, "Yeah? What he do?" She, like, "Artist." He, like, "Whoa, how much this cost to me?" [Laughs.] That's the other side of America, but I learn later.

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: But in the beginning, I really fortunate not speak English, because I was being exotic. I really love everybody. And been everything what I see being like really in awe. I think all talking about poetry, and music and high stuff, you know, like—I mean, high stuff like spiritual stuff. And I really glad I saw America from this point of view. Later being not disappointed, but I already been accepted to see other side of real life.

So I been really kind of high beat to come this country. I have a lot complexes. For six months, I have bad breath from all this nervousness—like I'm not good; not fit with this group anyway; like is my shoes too bright; I won't fit in.

But this definitely take me some time to learn English, to sort of—to find this, like, so many new things—like family, new things; country, new things; like, my place like a artist here. So it's been like really dramatic time. I been really—I think really been active and energetic, but at the same time give me a lot nervousness. And like, I mean, just been [makes expressive sound]—[inaudible].

And maybe this why we actually, like marriage turn out—doesn't work out much. After three years, we have divorce because it become so complicated. [00:20:00] We start so many things. She been artist too. We started have business—small-business production work. We started teaching in our studio, and we both—

MARK SHAPIRO: So is that one Nine Pines Artists?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Uh-huh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MARK SHAPIRO: What is that?

SERGEI ISUPOV: That's just name for this business—

[Cross talk.]

MARK SHAPIRO: Was it what you had together?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, that we got together.

MARK SHAPIRO: And what were you making?

SERGEI ISUPOV: We done actually stuff what sells. [Laughs.]

MARK SHAPIRO: So?

SERGEI ISUPOV: With using my capability to do sculptural work—We done a lot sculptural work, not directly functional. We done like some hooks like a bird heads, or animal heads—you know, put on the walls like hooks. We done like some hands, with sort of possible to use it like for your jewelries, you know. Something I come out with, this design with our assistants able to sort of recreate—

MARK SHAPIRO: How many people did—worked at that studio?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Around four or five—like, in some level, where you need to know all names. [Laughs.] Later I been so disappointed with this business idea, and I kind of promised myself, if I want to do again like some business, I want to have enough workers where I don't need to remember all their names.

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: Is only I think is able to have profitable. Otherwise, psychologically I need to deal with all these individual—and the most about shipping and talking, and not necessarily about working or producing something.

But it's, again, been really good experience. Even I really like it to do this production work, like with coming up with something clever, or something easy to do, or something would stick in. Even I like this repetition work.

MARK SHAPIRO: How were you selling that work and marketing it?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Through craft shows. This how actually I got in Smithsonian show too. Like through these, some craft shows, I got this first dealer who represent me in Atlanta. Because she saw some work; we start talking. Well, through all this craft show—[00:22:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: What is her name?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Martha Connell. Connell, something like this. I forgot name of—forgot it. Just like, she has been really—sell it really good. And she been first who actually told me about this, all the system, how works like in America, like pricewise, and all this—how we do.

This so different [from] how I grew up and what I working for. Like in Estonia I made for friends, but here you do for selling. And this completely different approach.

And all my life I grow up with this idea: art is not for sale. Arts is something bigger, you know. Art is sort of the highest level of expression. But I still like it too—still this so deep in me where I still not like to do even production work. I still honest and really believe in this high approach: still art not for sale directly, but if you are selling, that's a compliment how good you are. So I took it to sell, so our capitalism approach.

Definitely it's much cleaner: like, just I like it, or don't like it. Because right now I sometimes do—I done just last year a couple of shows in Estonia. And there are a lot compliments, but so what? [Laughs.] Still like I feel like, "Well, oh yeah. Well, thank you so much. It's really nice."

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: But—or I be spoiled, or I just like—or just completely different, I guess, level of living, and expectation and something else.

But I like it how like life long enough, where you able to change and switch. [00:24:00] And maybe something, like you controversial—to yourself, like you already done this, but actually what you tell—"Before, I believe in this," but later you change your mind, and I think with artists.

MARK SHAPIRO: So when you did the Smithsonian show, was that with your own work, or was that with production work from the 9 Pines Studio?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, we start like three careers. They got production work, teaching in studio, and each individual have their work. So with my individual work, I go to Smithsonian. Some artists recommend me do it.

MARK SHAPIRO: And this is 1995?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Something like this—[inaudible]. Even people ask how long you in America, I think like, "Well, I don't know, 10 years?" But I think already 16 years or 17—even more. Every time like a year, and I change it after it here, come one more year.

MARK SHAPIRO: So was that a different experience of the American market, to be at the Smithsonian and to sell at that level, compared to what you had been selling?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I already have couple galleries that I work with to do my art—I mean, to produce my art. And I selling I think at four galleries, and—

MARK SHAPIRO: In the United States?

SERGEI ISUPOV: In United States. And Smithsonian—

MARK SHAPIRO: Who representing your own work, not the studio work?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, represent my own work. Studio work and—this why I have different name.

MARK SHAPIRO: Do you remember what those galleries were?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Dorothy Weiss; Martha Connell; some Handworks [ph]—I think this right now become like



different gallery based in Philadelphia; and Leslie Ferrin, Ferrin Gallery.

MARK SHAPIRO: So you had met Leslie before the Smithsonian?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No, actually it's my ex-wife—Leslie introduced to my ex-wife. [00:26:00] I just passing—go pee or something [ph]—[laughs]—and Leslie come up. But I introduced to her gallery earlier. I saw in the SOFAs. I been in the SOFA a couple of times to check with what gallery I want working with. And this SOFA been really good to see all together.

And with this, my first gallery through Martha Connell, who teach me like about idea about this market, and money and all. I mean, like, she give one evening visit for maybe three or four or five hours, and she talk about like all this system. But I never been introduced before, like what gallery I need to pick, where you don't want to be best, and you don't want to be worst in a gallery. So you want to be in the middle, kind of like pricewise.

So I look at specifically what gallery I like it in the SOFA where I be kind of middle, and Leslie Ferrin been pay very good. I like it her gallery, with such a diversity of different artists. Like always have interesting to something to see. Some galleries been like really clean, and have like one or two artists. Well it been really good, but it's been kind of boring. Like in America, a lot of artists working in the same type of work. So if you see one, you see second. But Leslie, because she have so many different artists, there's always been like something to find it. I like it.

Yeah, so some of—some artists who saw my work in some craft show recommend me to the Smithsonian. I apply for Smithsonian. I am apply, and accidentally this year, Martha Connell, who represent me, be on jury. She been really tough. I ask her like couple of times suggest what slides I need to, for example, to show to Smithsonian to select me. They been like really—she been really tough. Not really try to help at all. [00:28:00] I been have more fear, like confidence to know somebody on jury.

But turn out I been accepted. And turn out—accidentally—this year been celebrate like artists from different countries who live in U.S., like foreigners in the craft world. And I been selected to be artist in this, who Washington Post write article and put me on the front page. And been really kind of big—[makes expressive sounds]—deal, but really not been my—just been just lucky, right time, right place. And still, I been this in a young stage.

MARK SHAPIRO: And was your work—

SERGEI ISUPOV: It's been just third year, second year in—

MARK SHAPIRO: Was the work that you showed provocative and sexual at that time at all, or what?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I not remember. Definitely it is my point: I come to U.S. I look at what around, and really with open eyes—without like not speak English, just visually. And I see why—what this people like it. I been in travel. I go see different shows and just see apartments and style life. And I see they like cooler. They like kitsch. They like, say, sexuality maybe, a little bit, like just something provocative little bit, just looks different.

And I, in this point, feel myself really confident and I feel like professional, and feel like I able to do anything like a professional artist. If they want color; I do color. [00:30:00] If you want provocative; I do provocative. And this not been against my beliefs. I just see this my professional level to give them what they wanted, with my point of view.

You know, come back to this story about this bird stealing bra. It's same things. Say I need to sell something—which is not easy, but looks expensive; you need get attention, get—so I think all I—all this time from childhood I been trained with this, you know, training—you know, same things you need to do: sketch, in the subway so nobody ask you tickets.

And I kind of come to meet to U.S., been the same—sort of see what I wanted and do it through my point of view, right. And turn out to have been really not many artists who actually do both, like decorate and sculpt in one object. And I kind of saw this sort of my real field, or sort of—or this is really easy. And you—[inaudible]—get this rewards: This show start selling really good, like all this—my twisted stuff.

Like I—we teach in the studio, and my English been really short. This actually how I started to speak English because I started with students just say "er," "oo." [Laughs.]

But communicate to do what you like it, and what you know, much easier. So I started sort of playing with clay, with students and they been—I think I have four students, and they been old—like old ladies that have enough money, I guess, to—and time to sort of play with this clay. So with them mostly I visually working with them, so we're working together. So I start some form, and they're doing same way. And we to get some construction,

like already remind you something—like I say, we today make car. So I make car and they sort of make car with some of my technique. [00:32:00] And later, we all separate, but we put, like, what kind of car they wanted, or what kind of car I do it. So this not been really they're doing exactly like me, but sort of construction-wise we do same, and in the process I sort of show technique and—

So a lot of times this work what I need with students, I finished by myself later after they left. And this work actually been really kitschy and really colorful, because of the students, and really easy sort of going. And this what I actually finish and put in the show, like my art.

And response has been really kind of good and easy. People feel like there's probably easiness in my work. And, yeah, and this Smithsonian show been pretty successful. There's all this noise and propaganda. Like I say, been interesting. And my price has not been like sort of high enough. But this nobody remember. Everybody remember I sold out in the first two days.

So show open week, in the first day I sell everything what I have. I not have much because was all this pressure of do production work, do teaching and do this—have different galleries. Still I think I have maybe 15 work or 16 work, and each one of a kind.

And I sell them today. So I remember I go to some other artists, ask, like, "You have red dots, you know, like—[laughs]—to borrow?" I think, like, a lot artists hate me—oh, not hate; they're all joking. You know, this guy with accent, you know, come to borrow red. That's me—like right now I understood how it's not really, you know, maybe nice.

But I sort of made this impression like I'm really this guy who sold out. And back—and in this time, in this show, [00:34:00] Leslie had been interested in with my work, and I start working more intensely with Leslie Ferrin.

MARK SHAPIRO: But not exclusively at that point?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Not exclusively. Not exclusively for such a long time, maybe five, six years. So we quit first do teaching because it become like really difficult. You not have space to grow. And it's just like stuck with this for people because they have space shortage, short space and time. And later I made less and less working with this production work. And this time become the worst. So we split out; so my ex-wife take it, the business, and I just took—start doing my art work.

And this moment, like, have been pretty tough to have divorce because actually I come to this country because [of] this woman. And I feel like why I'm live here if I am—no reason to live here. But I sort of stuck with already all these obligations in different galleries and already have some sort of enough success to hook me up and feel like already have so many proposition.

So I explored this side more because I'm have freedom and really not have nothing to, you know, fear or support. I just really feel like, well, if worst come to worse, I just go back to Estonia. So this give me kind of freedom explore in the arts side too. So a lot of times, for example, after divorce I have a lot work really emotional and really sort of disturbing, like a lot people with open chest and hearts, and all this really emotional and a lot sexual in this period of time.

MARK SHAPIRO: Is this when the statuettes start, or are you already making statuettes before then? [00:36:00]

SERGEI ISUPOV: I still doing teapots. But really already been so twisted and so sculptural, really hard to find it where lid, where spout. It's already for a little while it's my teapots been hard to—because I realize there's nobody using teapots. Really there's more symbolical part, like we need to show where lid, where spout, and you supposed to be OK to be teapot.

But I still really been educated—hear this called "teapot," you're able to use it. So all my teapots able to be functional, so I glaze it inside and all this technical stuff, and complete.

But already been really twisted; sometimes really hard to—actually a couple of times I even forgot make hole for spout, just split from—[inaudible]—because it's already become so sculptural. But it's been OK.

With all this success, my prices go higher. And become like such a conflict between, like, a teapot—like functional stuff—and this price, like logical—psychological. Maybe because I'm not so much—not speak English much in the first couple of years. This all be about this art and all this producing have been like more psychological for me—game—or psychological life, right. Just more analyze, visually analyze, and thinking about all this psychology, and why does people like it? How they're selling better, da-da-da.

This part become really, to me, say, really change a lot my work too—how approach. Well, I been—fortunately, this—or two—well, like art, not necessarily need to have language. It's already language. So more symbolical.

[00:38:00] So I kind of more explored the symbolism in art, where you—everybody able to see what they wanted to see, not necessarily what I want say. So I just collect different symbols in one object. What to me means one things, but for them it means different things.

MARK SHAPIRO: And while you're—while you were beginning to do more and more of this three-dimensional work and selling it, were you always making—doing a lot of sketching?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, all my work I made first plan, like sketch.

MARK SHAPIRO: But in terms of like actual drawings that you would show, that comes later?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No, yeah, I not made—this clay tooked so much time. And again, success really made you kind of really be into one thing. So I not draw just only the sketchbooks, but planning sketchbooks. Sometimes sketchbook really helpful, like if I go in a company where I talking too fast in English and I not get it, sketchbook really good excuse to sort of skip—be a part of group, but not been really need to be in. So just my ex-wife realized really quickly how I have this excuse not be—not be present.

I realize how be foreigner give you a lot excuses. But I start use it really maybe sometimes too much. Like even this, speak English not really good, I realize how this good advantage. First of all, so people try to listen more carefully because your words maybe not really easy to follow. So I got this attention, right. And secondary, this exotic because sounds different, so people like start—again, like more get attention. And this is my excuse when I speak English, right. [Laughs.] [00:40:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: So after you divorced—

SERGEI ISUPOV: And easy to actually ask somebody to help because I said, like, oh, my English, I not write in English really good. Maybe you write for me this.

MARK SHAPIRO: So after you divorced you stayed in Louisville for a few years?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. I planning to live—

MARK SHAPIRO: You think you—

SERGEI ISUPOV: —but at this house where we live, even we in the process buying this house, we need to finish this contract. So I start arranging this house where I—so I live in the same facility, but change a little bit—rules. And stay three more years in Kentucky. Been really comfortable. There's been, like, nice property and separate buildings for studio and building.

MARK SHAPIRO: So at that point you had your independent studio.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I have independent studio. And there's been already after Smithsonian. And in Smithsonian exhibition, like where I sold out, people really like it and everybody who wants more, put on a list name. I have like 93 people—a waiting list who want it. I need just send them slides.

And like after divorce I was still keeping—we been still really on friendly terms. We just understood it been really hard to find it, like, together, just one, like a family—but like colleagues or like friends. We still been on friendly term. And plus Dana really understood it's been her—it's been her idea to bring me here, so she feel really obligated to help me, and so she been really helpful, fortunately with these friends. [00:42:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: So at what point do you stop making teapots and start focusing on the figurines?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Where prices go higher, I realize how this difficult to buyers to sort of go through this knowledge, this teapot and this price. But I realize if you just do sculpture, it's really OK these prices for sculpture is not a high price. But for teapots, like functional work, it's already been some limits—

MARK SHAPIRO: Did that give you more—

SERGEI ISUPOV: —psychological.

MARK SHAPIRO: —freedom also, in terms of the frame?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. Yeah, like I mentioned this—my teapots—already been really hard to recognize this teapot, but give me really much more freedom to not do a lid, or just figurative work. But then I already working really intensely with Leslie, who give me kind of more space and more regularity. Like I made like two of the SOFA shows. What I sort of consider like one-man shows is, always I have, like, a big site of booth work what I made in the six months. So every six months we have new shows. And with my new group of work would help

me like really quickly been acting like put—made it, put on a stand, and people see or choose. And I mostly been with show too. And been interesting to see how people watch. And through their eyes I see a sort of reflection what been I struck in the right place, and what has been sort of sellable.

In one party, actually, in the Smithsonian show, this lady who working there, Jill Mason [ph]—I think her name was; maybe a list give later—[00:44:00]—well, she organized this craft Smithsonian show. So she ask for dinner. And been really different people, like me who just sort of started, young artists. Some been collectors, some museum directors. And been not big party, maybe nine people or something.

So I guess she got this idea to meet us, talk about what all go through, or something. So she get this theme, so each need to say something. And she said, like, how about if we're now start talking about the best compliments in your life—you know, what you got, what you receive best compliments in your life. And it's been—so, like, one dentist had essay, like somebody come to his office to done with teeth from Canada. It's like from different country, so he feel really tight [ph]—somebody from so far away, just using his, you know, capability. He feel this really compliment to him, and be different.

But I been almost last, so I able to hear it all. And in all this time, I think, like, what is my best compliment? That's real hard time—so same time be sounds right and sounds really truthful and honest. And really what I go through.

And I—and I start saying them best compliment if people buy my work. I feel like nobody want spend money just for nothing. If somebody really choose to buy art—and that's compliment to me, you know. That's a compliment somebody to, like, in America. Like probably in Estonia, the compliments, it's if your best friend say that you good, you know, this probably be really important to me.

But in America, I think like pocket—that's much more I thinks what hard to—and nobody want say goodbye to money, right. [00:46:00] So if somebody who actually really—I think it's been compliment.

And really, I just made this idea for this specific question. And later I kind of start think more about this philosophical things, and I really, really respect buyers with this idea. I want help them, you know, help them select my work. So in a way, all my creativity go a lot about this with this visual, this effects to be them more understandable. There is sort of—this what I want to say, like a person who wanted really, conflict, or something. They're really somewhere on a deep level, not on the front. So in the front I won't get this sort of things what they really want. I want to create some object what you really wanted.

So different side. Luckily, America is so big. So somebody probably really like it; they just need to find this right group where to show it. But this is some other level psychology where you actually depended more on the dealers who do this. But for me, like, artists made—create something but be appealing, been some big part. I'm not sure—but I don't know where this fit to this creativity or be artist, but I think it's some way of surviving too, but again, on this level of professionalism.

MARK SHAPIRO: So when did you start—I know that you were a very disciplined exerciser. And has that been something you've done your entire life? And how does that fit into your creative process?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Well, it was my dad introduced me to sort of do this every morning go run. And my brother, younger, have been much more loose. He was supposed to be go with him together. [00:48:00] And I—we live close to the stadium, so I need, like, run 10 times around stadium? I forgot. Like some number. Anyway, my brother stay in the corridor and wait for me after I run, or he may just—[makes panting noises]. Looks like he done.

But for some reason I always feel—it's been hard to me to do it, but every time I feel dishonest to do it. It's been silly to—I played to my parents. Like with these drawings, you know, two hours. I supposed to be but I done in 15 minutes. But I still like honest enough to kind of still—I believe or trust with them.

I able to sort of run faster or slower, but I still need to do it, right. And every time like this bedtime come, I remember what my parents tell me to do. So I think like discipline away—I never been disciplined, but this what parents told me and teach me. So I let it become really handy, like after I become independent. Like I start living in dormitory in the first—young age, and then in university where you really need some adults who sort of support you in a way; and I think my parents been always in this position.

I don't think they tell me specifically what to do, but I think they are because their sort of been varied life have been example to me sort of in a way, with their respect. I sort of remember there what I need to do to get something, right things. And I think my father been really educated person and love books, and he really know a lot. And he really practice a lot different new approaches. He fasting, for example; like this health foods, exercise, like this stuff, but not necessary to do it. [00:50:00]

And again because I been like so small in childhood, I constantly feel I am, like, too small. So there's my—I do exercise because this fear of be, like, weak. And same in the school. I never have patience and I still feel like I don't have patience. And because probably I so—my work so patiently done, because I—inside I know I'm lazy.

It's funny how everything controversially—like all your life you doing something what you—who you not are. [Laughs.] I just joking this, I made formula from this—maybe it's not necessary to everybody—like if you born with curly hair, you really want all your life straight. And if you straight hair, you go in and make curly hair.

Like, I mean, we want to accomplish something what we are not are. And this why easy to psychologically look at people who they're try to represent themselves, and you know they're probably opposite. You know, who talking about a lot sex? Probably not really good, you know.

And opposite, the quiet people usually—

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.]

SERGEI ISUPOV: —really not quiet, and not some other level—position. But actually, art a lot about psychology. So there's all the time we have this really deep relationship with creativity and person who create. So this all the time have something to say, have something to learn, grow. And more on the next level you go, you see like, wow, I not have—but I'm so weak, you know.

I think more with age I'm more actually become more with this insecurity about what I do. [00:52:00] Like, I mean, not insecurity, just see how it is impossible [to] create something what I really want, because you always want more. You know, you always compete with life. But you meet—there's still static objects, you know, and one object, static. And you never copy life. There's always be just—there's always be secondary. There's always come from you, and you like a sponge, suck in and represent this. But there's always be like, secondary.

But this actually argument—it's all stuff. But still you create. You still—you able to create energy, but in life, maybe that's not so visible. You able to create something where people see it, and see a deafness, or like this energy where they get to look on their work. So this have something to actually working on. But you always unsatisfied much because you always wanted a lot, like in my case, for example.

MARK SHAPIRO: Do you feel like exercising is giving you energy to do work—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Oh, yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: —in the studio?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, yeah. I forgot to talk about exercise. Exactly. So exercise is give me this capability to be more effective what I do. And it's pretty stressful in some way in the studio. I have a lot what I wanted to do. So this exercises help me, like move me out for a short time from studio, from this be creative, and same time give me this pace on other level and give me more energy.

It's—I always wanted to kind of live more like 24 hours. [00:54:00] And I think some people able to live—like, I become fascinated, like, Obama become president. I just start think like, I mean, imagine like you wake up next day and you president of America. Imagine. Even he not have 24 hours. This energy or this effectiveness of his position. Maybe he—imagine like this, just how you, you know, just kind of energize or this—have this responsibility. And this definitely not 24 hours. Even clock he have, same like we are. So this my idea to kind of create this more 24 hours.

MARK SHAPIRO: I've also been—knowing you over a number of years it seems to me that you have a very, very intense studio time, and then when you show, often that's your social time. And it's very separate. So when you're in the studio—and maybe that's different now, and we can talk more about what it's like to have a child, because I'm sure that's changed everything.

But it seemed like one of the ways that you organized your life was, you know, very long, intense periods of studio time and exercise, and then kind of more social, extroverted times when you're showing your work, which are much—as a proportion, a much smaller amount of time of your life. But, I don't know, is that—would you respond to that? Am I—is that correct, or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. Well, this looks like this. But as I—I think psychologically on different level. I spend a lot times in the studio because I still fight with my insecurity a lot. Like insecurity—I feel like—there where I feel comfortable, you know, because it's something what I know how to—and in a way this maybe escape from a lot different things. [00:56:00]

Sometimes, you know, for people who go to work, go to in the studio actually escape from work—[laughs]—psychologically. Like because I actually go in my little world, you know, where I not feel like I laboring. First of

all, I do pretty much all what I like to do, so—and I not feel like I need to do it. Happened with all these years with all this—how I lived this creative work and have dealers who deal with this selling stuff.

I think that I need to have more discipline in paperwork. For me, I just playing, you know. Probably better if I not tell nobody, otherwise there nobody want to pay me. So really I spend time in the studios—really, actually, I working, and it's true; but at same time I actually live in this—my little niche and little world. And the social life, yeah, this actually—all my work come from these interactions.

If there's no people, I probably not do nothing. There no sense, no reason to do. I really do for them, like for this social interactions. And I got this, all my idea, from social interactions. And definitely a lot influenced my works on technical knowledge, you know, something that I learned to do or get more freedom to do, or some new material—but mostly from social interactions. My work interact socially, and me—and it's both, like a—like on a team.

And right now this—with time, this change. Yeah, I remember before I been more excited with all this, like, parties, and I see world, see how people are respond to my work. And right now less and less, for some reason. [00:58:00] Kind of search for more depthness in the work, or—but I think maybe it's not I lost this first my—first how I saw America, with these fresh eyes. Like, yeah, okay, there need color, there need really sexuality; for, like, I sold—you know—[makes chirping sound]—in the kitchen. And there need to kind of little kitsches [ph], so stick out; you know, I have like new idea. That's it. That's it. So there's not much a question. And right now I think I forgot this my first—and this, I think, has been really clear and cool. And I still think it's probably cool.

And I become so used to already have something to lose, so I already have some fear maybe if I not sell enough work. I mean, it's silly. I got from this energy too, so everything what I try to do I kind of create for myself atmosphere where I won't able be productive. So I exercise just to be more productive. Fear is be more productive. Just social appearance to be more productive. So everything kind of be more productive. And I try to figure out why I need to be more productive.

Maybe I have some fears to not fit in. It's kind of funny—possible to be like—I start from one things and jump to completely different things, and not really right now analyze much. But once in a while I call my father. My father been really critical from childhood, and sometimes I really not have enough like some really honest critique. In America, nobody wanted to do it. Everybody's so nice, so polite—

MARK SHAPIRO: But didn't—

SERGEI ISUPOV: And if somebody—

MARK SHAPIRO: —didn't David give you critiques—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, David give critiques. That's true.

MARK SHAPIRO: He can be tough, huh?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That is good. I like. I like it. Russians really criticize easily. But sometimes you complain his criticize without—you kind of wanted somebody criticize you who know your capability. [01:00:00] You cannot go over your head, right. So you can't accomplish something what you're not capable to do.

So you want somebody like your parents who know you from childhood sort of tell you like, you're okay, you know. Well, or I guess I wanted criticize but I really want they're saying, like, you good, you okay. And I think my parents really good with this. My dad still like every time. And sometimes I pissed—

MARK SHAPIRO: How's your dad's attitude now towards your work?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Well, I think like far from parents to live, they're more like you and more love you. and they really respect what I do. But I think there's not been really same, like I been close, you know. And, again, all family—my brother artist right now too, professional, and all really individual and all big.

I think it's really different, too. And of course, like always, some in our little world, and really sometimes hard to—somebody pay attention for you to—everybody busy with themselves.

But I think my dad really good. He give me enough compliments. I even like pissed off. I say like, say something. Just tell me something so I feel, you know, blushed, you know, or something. [Laughs.]

MARK SHAPIRO: [Laughs.] So, to go back to your kind of biographical trajectory: So you leave Louisville around '97 and move to Richmond.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MARK SHAPIRO: So what was—why did you choose Richmond, and what was that like for you?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Richmond—

MARK SHAPIRO: And why did you decide to stay in this country, or was that—was that ever a question that you wouldn't? Or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I already hooked to stay in this country. I already start to have fear come back. I have already something to lose. So I already kind of stuck here. In a way I still have pretty freedom. [01:02:00] I am able to travel to see my friends. And I think it's been pretty okay, so really it tends to work better. For a couple of weeks I go back to see my friends and have been really comfortable.

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MARK SHAPIRO: So Richmond—why'd you choose Richmond?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Richmond pretty random. I just want to leave Louisville. I start to get this sort of sense if I not leave, I probably never leave. And in America it's really typical. People not stay in one place. People is like moving. And I see like how this enrich you. Like after I decided move and buy a house, really random—I just bought it because it had been in the market and I just know if I start select what house, and probably I spend so much more time and energy and money just to kind of research—and in it I never be happy anyway.

So I just bought it, like first house what I saw very much. Somebody said, "Sergei, I think this house on the market. Do you remember, you love Richmond." Some from Finland—I teach—give couple times in Finland. I have like some—[inaudible]—of people who knows me, I feel like are friends; but we never socialize much.

And I visit some group of friends from Richmond, Virginia, and I really like the city. So one of this friend call and said, "Hey, Sergei, I saw this house on the market. It's really cool. And I remember you like Richmond, and you even mention you not mind to live there."

So, like, huh, okay. So I go check it out and bought it, this house. So it been really quick.

Biggest complexes in the United States—I got choices. Too many choices. And looks like there supposed to be good things, right, but actually psychologically never satisfied. You always like pissed because you go collect—select, say, pants. You go like—you want jeans. You go in the store—like, six types of jeans. And you go in next store, completely different brand, and again like six or seven types jeans. So you end up choose one. You walk out. [00:02:00] And you feel like, man, maybe this been stupid. Maybe other store sell cheaper, you know. So this been really hard to me still, these choices. So I think like always my work, ceramic life, I think I always try to build this frame, like limitations. Like, I like in the clay because give me limitation, the rule of clay, you know, ruler this kiln.

So I think in a—[inaudible]—can be a little difficult, I think, because you able to do anything, you know, like—and you think any way and reflect. Maybe you're not so much based on a technical approach. It's not much—too much rules. Possible be much more expressive, let's say.

MARK SHAPIRO: I think it's always—it's always a frame. I think—I think that's the whole thing, is this, you know, the freedom that comes with limitation.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. I like it—I like it, clay, because you don't need frame too, just open kilns, already glaze—under glaze and frame. [Laughs.]

Anyway, yeah, this like limitations is good. Well, there's always be. Doesn't matter what you do, you always have limitation. But I sort of like—I like it, this sort of have kind of point myself up, so you kind of know kind of where you stand.

MARK SHAPIRO: Did you work change when you moved to Richmond?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, a little bit, because it's give me kind of new—I been more—I need to create the social network, but in Kentucky I still have from my marriage, but in Richmond I need to create this. But not been easy, it turn out.

I able to sort of start something new. [00:04:00] I mean, like new approach to everything, you know, like select my way to living, you know—a house and studio. And I realize, say, okay, I afraid to move somewhere because I afraid to lose law, rules of law. Like in America, so you pay taxes, you pay—you kind of deal with neighborhood, you know—

MARK SHAPIRO: And wasn't there some issue in Richmond about having to cut your lawn, or something?

SERGEI ISUPOV: [Laughs.] Yeah. Well, this other side—

MARK SHAPIRO: I remember you told me a story—

SERGEI ISUPOV: —so I move to downtown. If I live before in the country in Kentucky—like in the big city, but I on the border of cities, so it's been like kind of, I not see neighbors from my house. But in Richmond, I live in downtown, like historical neighborhood, really nice. But turn out I not fit for this. I not be good house owner. Never cut grass or like—so city send me violations; if I not cut in 24 hours grass, just penalize me not much—but over \$120. Not much, but I still don't want pay for—so I quickly cut my grass.

And fence, like this, my fence not fit to this sort of image of this neighborhood, so I need to do it, this too. But just been real hassle. Like it's OK. Still, like, I take pleasure to walking in my neighborhood. Just the other neighbors clean the yards. But for some reason I not think I need to do it too. That's part of Russian—you know.

MARK SHAPIRO: You're a bad socialist.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Oh, yeah. Well, it's like all day I'm working. I am just want to enjoy it. Anyway, so this actually what help me to move here, because in some point I already start thinking maybe I need to move to apartment where I have more settle. Plus, I start travel more, in my traveling. Sometimes with work. It become longer and longer, So this has been real—I feel insecurity to left house alone. [00:06:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: Now it was about that time you started going to Penland and in that period, going to Penland and to Kohler for the first time, and also down to Harvey Littleton's, to the—to make the vitrographs?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, yeah. I start travel more to do my work in different places, like Australia for three months, like—yeah, Penland, it's not long, but it's still three weeks. And well, I start get this all these possibilities to go somewhere. What been interesting to kind of broaden—like just make more richer my everyday life too. Like have new—see new people, see how I fit, like in the process of working with different people too.

MARK SHAPIRO: Well, how did you like being at Penland, for example?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I really like it. I really like it there. Everybody lives together and working together. I give couple workshops where students only come for workshop, and [inaudible] home. And I think like the Penland situation where they all live and eat and working together, and hard to go somewhere because nothing around, I like it, this real community, real village of people on the same sort of—everything group—feel a real group feeling.

It's been a little bit difficult to give for all these workshops and give classes, because to be teacher, you kind of stay on the pedestal in some way, and you kind of—people look at you and ask you, and you feel kind of important in some way, psychologically. Then I come home and feel like, oh, shit, I need cut lawn, alone, or something, just do regular stuff, and nobody pay attention for you. And I start feel like jammed after these workshops.

And every time so sad—you in three weeks become friends where you need to live. Of course, there's like such a communities and they feed you; somebody help you like clean it, [00:08:00] and make materials, dah-dah-dah-dah. But everything actually you need to do yourself in real life.

So less and less I start actually accept these invitation to go somewhere just because I just don't want—I want to be more sort of settled.

MARK SHAPIRO: But when you went to, for example, to Kohler or to Harvey Littleton's studio, was that different because you weren't put on a pedestal as a teacher, but you're more there to make specific work?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. This been interesting to go on this—get new motivation, like working on different material in different space. Those give you kind of—stretch your routine, so—and testing you too, like how much you able to produce in this situation where, like, completely different materials or facilities, or written—like Kohler, for example.

MARK SHAPIRO: How did you find the experience at Kohler?

SERGEI ISUPOV: It's good. I not produce nothing, but I have been so fascinated with this capability of, like, I have all kinds of material and it possible do anything. So I really have hard time to sleep there. I mean, not because I have hard to sleep, I just don't want sleep, a waste of time. And I was just want 24 hours. I think I left there around 12:00, or after 12:00, and come back to studio 6:00—earliest, like 5:30 or something.



I just like feel like I need to get everything. [Laughs.] There's so many possibilities. I have like one break in noon. Like, they have like really cool sport facilities. And I like swimming pool. There's two pools like for people who do laps and who just—[makes lapping noise]—and playing with water. And have really good saunas, different types, and usually nobody there. [00:10:00] So actually, like, every time I realize I'm sleeping in the sauna, I just—[makes snoring noise]. [Laughs.] I guess really take for me—but, again, the sports really helped back there, like give you kind of—[makes expressive noise]. Yeah, so been really good. But because this new material, [it's] been really hard to produce something. And because—

MARK SHAPIRO: Right, because I remember you made those ears. And then you also made those very large, almost like tile drawings.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. I have—there you need to fit in with their technology, and they do casting. I not do casting; I do one-of-a-kind work, so each individual work—and they build just one and that's it, and move to next one. They have been, you know, a bit difficult because you need to do casting.

MARK SHAPIRO: So no undercuts and things like—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, and you need to do, like, reproduce them. And there been much more hard. And be stupid—not reproduce, because you spend so much time to just make the form. And it's been really physical work too because form so heavy. I remember I come back really fit, you know, real—I feel like muscles stick out. [Laughs.]

But still I learn a lot, like new tools I got like in my sort of studio. I bringing something, new knowledge, a technical knowledge, and I use it a lot. So even though I not feel like I'm done something what I proud or sell later, I still get a lot interest in, you know, purchase. And it has been good experience.

MARK SHAPIRO: Did you meet other artists there who—was there a feeling of esprit de corps there? Or—

SERGEI ISUPOV: There, I expect—this what I actually wish, and I wanted, and to not—or just happen, not be nobody in this time. Or just everybody so busy, same like me—no time to look at somebody else. And really, you kind of—there are not many. It's just only doing the clay and doing the metal.

I happen to be in the half session. Somebody—I come as somebody already been there, like a couple months, and later they left. [00:12:00] A new group comes. So I actually kind of been between. Normally they have three months. I been two-and-a-half, so I sort of been kind of between groups, and with old group I not fit actually in because they already been on their kind of speed, and I just started. And later in new group, I been in it—

MARK SHAPIRO: Right.

SERGEI ISUPOV: —kind of written, and they're just started.

MARK SHAPIRO: So when did you start drawing on the underside of pieces?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Underside?

MARK SHAPIRO: Yeah. Like some—to make, so there's a part of the piece that's not revealed unless you seek it out. Or was that a—was that a—what gave you that idea? Do you remember when you got that idea, or was that—was that kind of something that was a little bit transgressive for you?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I think this was respect of art it started. I just feel like I want to create some object. And in a clay artist, it's funny. They're like always looked in the bottom; there's a lot technical part. Like say if you—like if copy turn upside down, there you kind of know this just fake or real, you know. Not by label, but just sort of quality of stuff.

And I think come from this intention to—like I consider this three-dimensional work, not have sides. Like each side represent each—has a meaning. I like it how sometimes you just put this work on a—not position they're supposed to be stay, but still actually more interesting because become like some abstract form.

With this kind of attention, I kind of go deeper and deeper and start, like a half-space underneath. And because I'm being—not believe in wasting time on tests, so there's actually bottom in tests for some glazes' combination. Like technique—my technique not simple and a lot similar. [00:14:00] But all this in a combination—say, like, one color too close to other, what this be looks like. Or like this side is glazer—glaze more thicker or thinner. Some nuances really. Nuances what actually not—nobody see at these tests there still some subjects underneath.

And later I create more and more—more and more I realize, man this is such a good way to actually help people to buy your work because usually kind of in anything you need to have last drop, right, to—[makes "dropping"]

noise]—to be—how this—measure—measurements?

MARK SHAPIRO: Yeah, to tip the scale.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Tip the scale. You need last drop. So this, actually, bottom turn out this last drop too, or like I start analyze my action, my doing bottom, just like last drop, like, say people—you see this; they're walking around this sculpture already third and fourth time, and then when it—sort of help to select these pieces, like, say buy it. So those were actually bottom, become usually handy—you kind of introduce them, like, hey, he knows the bottom, too. So they're actually—you know, how in America, love the sales, like 20 percent more for same price—

MARK SHAPIRO: Value-added.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: Value-added.

SERGEI ISUPOV: That's everybody love it. Everybody love this sale. I mean, 20 percent off, or something like this. Or 20 percent more for same price. And I think—well, there's—and me, same. I actually analyze a lot my actions too. Like I go in the store and buy shoes and if cheap shoes, I'm, like, maybe not be so proud. But if I expensive shoes, first of all, they're much longer to live, because I'm so careful with them. [00:16:00] Second, I proud, so I walking really with like—proud of my shoes, as if, for example, shows anything, you know.

So I kind of realize, actually, these prices for my work mean not for me. I spend all money anyway. It doesn't matter how much I have. But they need it for them, you know, to enjoy it. You know, they feel they get something precious, you know.

**A**nd same with this bottom. So respect for buyers or for objects is really high. I'm not sure, maybe I—maybe this—I pay this—because I have such a high respect, maybe I pay with something else. Maybe with creativity because I spend more time to done some details, but nobody see it. And what not really important, right? Just like looks really done.

It's part actually, too, I realize—I think, anyway, psychologically if you done really good, you possible say any subject matter. Like, if you done poorly, there's work, maybe, looks like pornography. But if you done really good, it's like high art, you know. It's just one little drop, tip the scale.

So I think quality—I feel like this really sort of sellable already. People possibly not understood what is art, but they are all understood this quality or like the precious of work.

MARK SHAPIRO: So what do you think about work that doesn't—artwork in the fine art world that doesn't have a high degree of craftsmanship? You know, all this installation work that's more driven by ideas as opposed to a mastery about materials. And also maybe—you know, I always think, you know, when I see your drawing I see, you know, the influence of somebody like Dürer, or somebody who is—you know, technically has exquisite technical precision. [00:18:00] So I'm wondering, you know, this seems like the direction of the art world is somewhat away from that, and it's more towards this sort of idea-driven things in three-dimensional work in installation and so on.

SERGEI ISUPOV: I don't know, maybe I man of my time. You know, I guess it's in my time, there's been this introduction to this. It remind me this my expression—impression of America art and Russian art in this—in the first year I move to U.S., I realize how much here—so this like—because everything so here organized and clean, and smooth in U.S., that's my first impression. But later I not see this exactly. But still comparing Europe, where everything dirty, and garbage, and everything like not clean and not clear. There artists want to make everything clean. So at least in the art, we have like clean and super, you know. But here I feel like everything so clean, at least in—we need little garbage in the artwork. So—it's silly. But this remind me, this what I—how I feel like back there.

Right now a little bit different. But I think, like, with still something but really deeply here respect to object, or, like, I want to people—like still with this something, what you come out long time ago, and you really hard to change.

Actually, already, for a couple of years I wanted to be much more loose. Loose in the way in art. I want to even be more—again, this remind me this first experience with my father with the sketch of this bird. The more story, this quality, is maybe be secondary. [00:20:00] I want that, so that's hard because it's hard because I'm so used to this. And really hard like—for example, if I take a piece of paper and say like, OK, just do that, just like do, you know—[makes expressive noise]—and done. I just have fear of this paper, fear of market this paper. Why? Why I need to done something what I don't need to keep it later? Like with this respect, and because I so productive,

been for a long time, from—imagine from just my childhood, I always am produce something. And if we pile all this together, it be a lot.

I don't know—luckily, I don't know where all this disappear—sell, presents, bla-bla-bla. But imagine if you need something to keep it, you need every time—couple times I move. I move from Ukraine to Estonia, from Estonia to America, from Kentucky to Richmond. Imagine if I need all this keep it with me. Man, why I need to make one more what I don't keep it, or I not sure I need take it with me or not.

So this part where I—on the side of create something what have sense, or meaning, or—not something that you want throw away, but you want really keep it with you, or somebody want keep it.

But this new generation, I guess it's—they reflect who we are right now, like in this time. This new generation maybe sees this—so every new generation wanted to completely change what has been before. And this all the time go by—remember how like long hair, like everybody shave, been cool. And right now everybody shave because long hair already boring, you know. And like—and there's like, oh, constantly with this fashion—like, these clothes from grandparents already cool. But from parents, blah, such a bad taste. [00:22:00] So this constantly change.

And I don't know, just like you bought a couple chairs and—from some Craigslist. It's cheap. But—I mean, cheap chairs. I need fix something. But anyway, it's been funny, some chair would definitely be in their time, like 15 years ago, been junk, you know. But right now they're nice chair because it become more junk. [Laughs.] They're more plastic right now and more like done. Their chair 50 years ago be like still sloppy done, but right now it's still already—still quality there. But right now probably more like machine-made than—[makes expressive noise]—done.

So I don't know. I don't know about this contemporary art. I think it's—I definitely have space for them too. I have space for everybody. And I think something—I heard somebody really good, like Chelsea filled with all this installation, full of this shit work, and filled with all this like just blah-blah-blah, just look at me, look at me.

Specifically, my impression, after I see all this exhibition together, take some time to see a lot—I feel like—feel big relief. I feel like this freedom. You possible do anything. But if you ask me, you saw something? I said, no. Those all shit. You know, the steel—all this—[makes expressive noises]—noise, and all this, like, and there, and there, and there, and there actually give you this kind of good feeling of, wow, it possible to really express yourself on any way.

Anyway, so it's good. But somebody told me interesting—so maybe from this thousand artists, somebody want become really good. And I think this—probably all this benefit this one who maybe come from all this— [00:24:00] [makes expressive noise]—you know, like this, all this junk. It still works, still competition between them too. So I guess still somebody probably really come out of something would be really interesting to—and stick in history in a way, or get this kind of new way of see it. So why not?

And this always been like this. In our time, same. I mean, same, like, this become popular work on the wheel, and everybody do wheel, and a lot shitty work, and left right now a couple only. And right now or maybe already not really fashion to do this; everybody do installation. So that probably thousands of those people who do installation, but only a couple left after that. So I think this—I think this like time and generation.

And I think our time come back, or something again be respect for something what we in our time think is important, but right now maybe it's not stick out so much like something more fashionable, like photography, probably really cool like art. But back before, it's been really complicated. You need to have like all this complicated equipment, a lot of work, like a dark room, da-da-da. Right now there's all this digital. Everybody photographers.

And they have like new different fashion too, I think. Everybody want to be part of life, you know, like can be artist, and pay for this. [Laughs.] And I think, like, if you, with camera, you get all this, you would be a part of acts, and same time you kind of have a creative side too. But how many down to [ph] survive? Not many. More of them; probably competition much more higher, and probably just a couple only who really become really good.

So I think competition is good, in some way. It really made somebody who be really good. Same like these singers. Like, still, if you look at this popular music, contemporary is only chance. But a sound really good, will really actually stick out in every country, [00:26:00] and still have really good musicians who you listen and think, like, wow, wow. But much, much more plenty of them who you listen in, like, elevator and think like, oh, wow, you know. So, yeah, just have space for everybody, I think.

MARK SHAPIRO: OK. Sergei, should we stop for today and finish tomorrow?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah.

MARK SHAPIRO: It might be a good time, because I wanted to talk—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, you come up with some question more. We kind of get all this [makes expressive sound]  
—

MARK SHAPIRO: No, no, I think it's very good. I think—let me stop this.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_isupov10\_1658\_m.]

MARK SHAPIRO: It's Mark Shapiro interviewing Sergei Isupov in the artist's studio in Cummington, Massachusetts on December 22nd, I think, the second day of our interviews. And this is card number three for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

I think we were talking yesterday, yesterday about your time in Richmond and why you decided to move; so you end up moving to Cummington, Massachusetts to your current studio in 2006, is that right?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK SHAPIRO: Since 2006, after all those people got you so annoyed about cutting your lawn. So I don't know if you want to talk about that move, what was going on in your art work and your life at that time.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yes, I think it's always stories become much more anecdotal. For example, there's not only one reason why I moved to Cummington because I'd been annoyed by not being a nice—a good houseowner. I think it was like complexes, many different things. But it is something easy to tell, a good excuse, sort of stick out like nice story.

I'd really actually been ready to move somewhere from Richmond. Again, I feel like this is—my move been too spontaneous and not rational and it's really nothing really keep me there. And I think in this time I already working with Leslie exclusively and happened before I have like four or five galleries that I worked with, [00:02:00] and not have exclusive with not one of them, so I just ship it work for different shows and been okay.

But my style work, how I working, each my work one of a kind and—and I think I've really productive and really sort of even—even I wanted each work represent all my career or like art, so you don't need to see couple or a group of work to realize—or realize who I am like artist. I think like each work is supposed to be get all this package.

Same time, I feel like this probably be more compliment to me like artist if people see like all work that I do in sort of one place. I mean, if I ship it—I mean, group of 25 and ship it, like for five galleries like five there, five there, five there, it's been not really—less powerful for, let's say I show all in one place, that's slowly—and so I start working more with Leslie. She'd been like really reliable, she'd been not pushy. I never feel from her some untrust. She always trust me, always believe me. Like artists really respect this.

More and more I already start working only with her, less and less with other galleries. And in the end, I really probably, maybe for three years working only with Leslie. Even I not have exclusive with her, or still have some work, still not finish contract with other galleries. But Leslie suggest me to have exclusive [00:04:00]—exclusiveness, describe for her this be more security to invest in me like artist. So she feel more comfortable if I be working only with her. She able to be—not have fear to put more energy in my career.

Within this point become really easy because I already work only with Leslie, and I still really want somebody be really take care of this business side. It's not been too easy for me with, say, English, writing and stuff. So I feel like if Leslie deal with all this paperwork, she set up—we are already meeting and talking about exclusiveness and what this means. And I think I very quickly been agree. I see her point and we draw contract, but it's funny enough, we never signed it. We have this sort of talk, we agree. And still, even we decided this, our contract been built on sort of trust and in mutual kind of affection in the work.

So if I, say, don't produce enough work, if she will sell more faster, like, I able to produce, so our contract probably doesn't work. Like if I'm sort of stop working, or if she stop selling my work and not be effective with her work, then our contract sort of been—doesn't work too. So in this case, been really clear and open.

MARK SHAPIRO: Did the new relationship with one dealer who is taking care of a lot of your business, did that enable you to have more time in the studio?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yes. Definitely. [00:06:00] Same like to Leslie this contract gave me security. I feel more comfortable, comfortable to kind of doing more work without thinking about politics. But still, around people you always have some politics on—in a social scale.

I get a lot of fears from my friends, who say, like, "Well, it's maybe bad idea to put all eggs in one basket," so that I kind of think about it. And if you—from what perspective you do look at. If you look at like, I built a relationship with this dealer and quit all rest things, maybe this be considered like all eggs in one basket.

But I working, and so I develop my professional skill in the process of working, and I built a reputation through gallery, so I consider this part of different baskets too. Like, I mean, just who be deny I become more professional because I spend more time in the studio? It's definitely something advantage from my side. And same time reputation would be built to working both like a team. I can't deny that will Leslie, say, quit working with me, I still have all the knowledge and experience and some reputation. So I think it works.

MARK SHAPIRO: So does that period when you became—worked more closely with Leslie correspond to you moving away from the teapots and the smaller work into more of these figurines?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Right. That's been practical and I think Leslie suggest too. She see how I am moving, like the teapots become too twisted. [00:08:00] And she want—she never push me do one things or another, but she still suggest what direction probably good idea to take it, and you see this be more effective to do, to go more in the fine art. I always think I not divide—never divide this fine art or craft. I also consider myself artist without this. If my work looks like craft, it's okay. So I don't like this statement.

I think this is not my position to give statement. There's some critic think, "This is it, this is it," but to me their opinion not really—not bother me at all. But I see how this come out different in the prices. But I think this not—not claim you one of—or fine artists or craftsman. This not really give prices a completely different way, but it still give some sort of separation, but maybe give different origins [ph], and different origins and different bias give these different prices.

But I still been Leslie as trust dealer. This has been her art, build this reputation. And I start built more sculpture just because I really wanted to be more sculptural. And funny how this label of teapots stuck—stuck very strongly for many years. People still ask, "How are your teapots?" So this means I actually realized they really not care, and they really actually not see it when you work. So people, who knows?

MARK SHAPIRO: You know, I looked through some of the work that you've done and I look at this work in the—that was done in the mid-1990s, it becomes sometimes extremely complicated with the drawings on the surface and the color and the shape and so on. [00:10:00] And then it seems like—and, you know, correct me, please—as your work goes on it in a way becomes more—you work more at least with these singular figures, these statuettes, and it becomes—it's a kind of trajectory toward something more simple. Was that also—was that something that just—I don't know. First of all, am I right? And second of all, was that something you intended or is that just the way it unfolded, or how did you feel about the really complex work that you did in the, you know, in the mid- and late '90s?

MARK SHAPIRO: Not really intended, but I think just a change. My position like artist I think in the beginning, I really wanted to be, get attention. And through all this complications I want—like in the work, like all this movement and conflict and busyness, I back there think this what bring—bring for my work attention. And I think that's what I wanted. I want this work screaming like, "Look at me."

But with, again, some sort of position what I start establish with this intense work with Leslie in doing like a lot exhibitions, I feel like this less and less necessary. And you always go, like each—each work I feel like in my career, it's like walking on the stairs. So without this work it can't move out—up. So each work sort of stairs to next. And you definitely go on some—I think, you have like some turning stairs and some stairs maybe straight up and some maybe go like—

MARK SHAPIRO: Spiral.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Spiral. [00:12:00] But yes, but I think this changed a little bit in the process where I moving new space; it's actually interesting story. Like to move to Richmond, I got really small space for studio. It's been like really narrow, high ceilings but really narrow. And I working for these group statuettes, would been—not have hands stick out. They all been like sort of hold it around body, nothing like—just like a really tall pieces. And somebody suggest, like it's kind of funny why they all have hands on the chest. I never pay attention for this, but I, like, think, I don't know; it just looks good, you know. It looks simple, looks good. I like this simple shape. And I working in the studio probably six months, so they come out in one group, like a pretty strong group. Yeah, this work.

And later I moved to a bigger space that's become available—a bigger space, and all work again come like with hints, yeah. So it's—without my conscious I reflect surrounding, you know. So because the narrow space, my work been kind of narrow, totally narrow. And to get bigger space, again, like my thinking become much more wider, or as say to say, give space. So this part possible be reflected too, like my personal life never directly reflect in the work, but the same I use all emotional part where I get the theme from.

I think this revelation come from being in the art school still in Kiev, where I get all this academic school, really bombarded by all these names and museums and big artists, and I come with this—probably I become like teenager, 15, 16 years old, and this realization of I not good enough. [00:14:00] Like, I look at this Picasso, thick books where he draw like drawings in 13—13 years of age, and really good.

And of course, like you look at this old—his drawings with knowing—know who he are become later. But I look at my work and feel like, "Well, it is not good." I mean, and I was copy somebody. Just like I walking behind somebody pet. And I think almost like in one day, but I doubt it—probably this come slow—but I just realized, wait a minute. There's nobody like me, same like me. I don't know nobody who be me, you know. I only I.

So this kind of revelation about this knowledge, I am only I. I am feeling this. It hurts. For me it hurts. If I late in the school, only I be blame, you know. And this realization comes, like I got this idea, huh, this means I don't need to copy nobody. I just already have everything. Just if I'm sort of know how made through me, all this what I already have, and put on the paper—

MARK SHAPIRO: So this was when—do you remember around when you had that revelation?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Well, 15—where I start get this teenager life, or a realization of, you know, parents already not idols where I need to already find it my way, and you want kind of make revolution and break all those rules and start dating girls. [00:16:00] Like all this self-discovery. And usually this happens around 15, 16, and this where I got this idea. This really help me later.

You still kind of need to play by—need to play by system, with assistance, stay with system. But help me later because I would think like I was going to still do—all that I what do just reflects my, say, emotion or like something what—not directly. I was collect in the work symbols. Not necessary like I make some portrait of my parents or, like, friends who I addressed some suggestions, but just collective simple-like, or this female or male or this old man or old woman or some animals.

And a couple of years after I moved to States and I start to make teapots, I start to make dog teapots. I have two dogs myself and walking in the park with dogs been sometimes difficult in America, people particularly in Kentucky so friendly. All the time everybody want talking to you. Smile and say, "How are you, what kind of dog is this?" And I have Great Pyrenees and I have hard to say like clear English, "I have Great Pyrenees." "What?" "Great Pyrenees." "What? What kind of dog?" So I like really have hard time, like I don't want to go in the park with—or if I see people, so I try to avoid them, just they are not ask me what kind of dog is this.

It's funny, I start make dogs in the artwork [00:18:00] and people just constantly asking me what kind of dog this is. I just made like, for example, long ears because that's a bit more stable, or like long nose because maybe it looks great, yes. So they are asking me what kind of dog is this. And actually, I been like—I just right now joking, I say tiresome, but I feel like something wrong because if I really they're asking, they want to know, so this means I'm not really been clear with my language—to their need to ask. I start make monkey, funny, nobody ask me what kind of monkey this is. So this actually—sort of—I want to not have a question, or like not have a question from me; they already see it, they already get idea.

So, like, I not think necessary to me be have presence close towards with people. I'd be like, say, like, "Yeah, I see this; describe me," or "I not understood what you tried to say; describe me." I wanted people have a question because actually this like hook.

In some point I start thinking this, do art and do business with art, it's like a fishing. So you kind of put like—if you put more hooks and different, like, types of worms, you have more chance to catch it, you know. So you kind of fishing; all this business become like fishing. And like each work just have like a lot of different hooks like, and different, what is called, like—what do you catch fish on, like worms and—

MARK SHAPIRO: Bait.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Bait, yes. Yeah. I love bait. So I kind of in one point think like, I want everybody find it in my work something. Like truck drivers see, like, chick there, you know. Or like person who like know about ceramic see my kind of, like, new discovery, technical side. Like some people who want to look for some spiritual things, [00:20:00] like relationship things or like angry on a woman, they find it there too, like some story behind. And well, I not sure if right now I still kind of fishing with art. But it's been fun.

MARK SHAPIRO: What changed for you?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I think I become less connected with people who watch my work and less connect with people who buy work too. I start fear like they have more higher expectation who I am, and in some point I find that this my relationship with them, or like my connections with them to—are deficient. I really want to be honest with sort of their—like all my honesty me too, only for me. It's really to tell somebody what you care. Becomes really

boring. You need to kind of make like really cool story to make people able to listen.

And then some point I feel like I already said what I want to say in the work. I don't know, it just become like, you know, not up there to schmooze. In the beginning, like I said, it's been really thrill; I love all those people, love this—all this kind of talking, be—have these interactions. And yes, I love this.

Still sometimes people ask me what this work about. I no clue. I forgot because I working right now with new work and so I completely with this new work and old work, maybe I something remember and something probably remind me what I probably think about it back there, but not really clear. It's already done. So that not really have much relationship with this work. [00:22:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: So around that time in Richmond before you moved here you started doing some very large drawings and showing those with the work sometimes?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MARK SHAPIRO: Was that a new kind of departure for you to draw on that scale and to show the ceramic work with the drawings?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, I started travel more so I like start take it more sketches and sketchbook and like artwork and places, so I like start get more two-dimensional work. And in ceramic I start get more two-dimensional elements, too. And once we have some group show with Leslie, and she wanted to—she wanted to put some other artists behind group of my work. And I not been really like this artist, this particular work. Not remember who is this, but some two-dimensional work, so she suggest somebody else.

She start kind of in this show like SOFA or different group shows, usually space is so small you need like packed everything like really compact. And this wall's been, like, empty, so she want fill it up. She want somebody else, and we like, "No, I don't like this." So we have argument together, so she been real kind of mad at me, said, "Well, OK, well, so you make yourself." I said, "OK, I make myself."

And just been by sort of argument I kind of decided, I wonder what is actually what I really want. If I have really opinion what kind of this work not works with my work, like some other artist not fit, so something fits. So there's been kind of this idea to have, I mean, these first big drawings to what I considered this be fit to my work. [00:24:00] This been some big elements, like more like detail.

MARK SHAPIRO: Well, I was thinking what's interesting to me is—I don't know, you can—maybe I'm off-base here, but is that so you have still making kind of maquette smaller sculptures, but behind them you have very big heads that are drawn.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Right. Right.

MARK SHAPIRO: And then you see your work sort of move so that the sculpture itself becomes big heads. That's no way—that's a kind of—like that's in terms of scale there, the drawing precedes the—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, do bigger work actually has been Leslie['s] proposal. She start talking to me like you become bigger artist, bigger artist needs to get like a bigger size. I think she will get from other artists who sort of similar to me, who kind of start get bigger scale and that becomes more successful, too, with the scale. So she suggest me. She never pushes. That's sort of we have this conversation. Sometimes I want have her opinion because sometimes it give me motivation too.

After exhibition usually I come back to studio, and I need start new group, so I want some sort of push, like push maybe from what I see popular, there in the show from my work or just something what I saw more defective. Sometimes it's funny, I see somebody apartment, and I kind of see the space, what is not—what kind of I want it make work, what fit there—what something there not needed for this apartment. This been some motivation too.

So Leslie suggested me do bigger work, but I have side—here, I feel like bigger work take it more physical work. I also wanted to have more creativity and less physical work. [00:26:00] I mentioned before just technology for me just is a tool. I don't want to be like promote tools. I want promote like what you able to do with tools, like art, creativity.

I never wanted to have assistant, somebody who help me. I feel like this be more on my way, so I become really, in this case, business owner, become probably more factory, or I need to get the psychology to deal with some other person in the room, or teach them or something. So I want to do everything my own.

Anyway, with all this kind of new kind of changes in my work and in my life, Leslie suggest me to move to Massachusetts. She show me this place where been really country, and I love country. Like more and more, like I

say, I start get colder to this social life. I love people, but social life is in the way of schmoozing kind of way.

I start kind of feel like this deficiency or something. Maybe with me too. Like I for so long tried to put a lot of hooks and bait, and kind of lost this interest or something. I think this is normal process, so I grow probably to something, middle age crisis. Yeah.

So country, I feel like this never have nationality, and this help me too. I start think how I already become easy with English and I understood everything surround me, so in this case I realize what is people talk about and what is going on, and this kind of give me really much more clear vision who I am, what I from and where I live right now, and this is comparing all the time, [00:28:00] keep me kind of more, like we say, judgmental opinion. I just start get opinion, but sometimes not help in a social environment. And I—well, I mean like, you become, like, too critical but I not see—don't like see me; it is like not really productive. And I just—nature be much more simpler and much more appealing to see this how it is.

MARK SHAPIRO: So when you moved here, you have a much larger studio and it's right where you live, and you also have a much larger kiln. Was that—that was obviously a conscious choice to have that kiln. Had you already thought about making these heads at this time?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yes, this is how Leslie actually tried to hook me up. She put like all this different baits—

MARK SHAPIRO: That was her bait.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. [Laughs.] I think she already have idea and she tried to actually catch me on some of these hooks. So she put a lot hooks with this, promote this idea. So this building which she showed me, she already—she already get idea. This actually probably a lot of times happen with Leslie. She have clear idea. She just not push it, just put different hooks. And you yourself, who happen really like—[makes noise for emphasis]—if you like this, this is your idea but actually not been yours.

Anyway, well, doesn't matter. This always like this in life, and this—I think just your creativity, how you need to kind of realize this, is like, what works for you, like how made this useful for you, yourself, because this life, all this, you depended on other, what's around you.

And so Leslie showed me this building; this needs to be a renovation so I need to move not in the first day. This take us three years to build this place. [00:30:00] So in these three years I been normally kind of—if I want to, and we're still in the process, say no, I probably able to do it. This be not difficult. Would get like really simple deal in the process.

So these three years been enough for me kind of used to this idea I'm moving, and in the process like I start—because we're renovate this building, we're able to kind of process to get idea what we wanted, like what kind of apartment, what kind of studio.

So I also wanted to have bigger studio where I able to kind of easy to move. I want having the same sort of level where studio have kiln and have smooth floor where I able to kind of put tables and the wheels, so easy to be more productive, let's just say. I wanted to have like big windows, to able to look at in the windows. And I get all this. Yes, it's been fun.

Windows actually a little bit distractive [ph]; a lot lights come from some, so I not much look at. Just maybe first year, I pay attention what outside, and later not really. But it's still pretty and I like this, see like daylight and how this day come and gone. And I got this room for kiln, and I decided buy biggest kiln what fit in this room. This room not been big. So I feel like if I want make small work, I able to fire it in the big kiln too, but if I want a big work, I can't fire it in small kiln, and I think it will be a fair invest[ment].

And it's funny, this—what I have experienced before too, I have like a smaller kiln and I start with small work and slowly, slowly I got to the top of kiln. [00:32:00] I think this sort of happened like accidentally too. Like what space you have is what you—how you say—expanded to this size of this—to this space. Same happen with kiln. So this work grow gradually, and become actually size of this kiln, but actually become pretty big.

Plus, I have some proposition to do exhibition in museum in Arizona, and I showed this—I saw the space, a huge space, and I feel like if was small work, maybe the work not be powerful enough, so kind of disappear in the space. This give me a reason to start make specifically bigger work.

So I've working for this show year and test it, test it to work in a different studio. So first my big work after I moved to U.S., I build in Hungary. I've been in scholarship there for a month and a half, and I feel like this, if something doesn't work, nobody see it and not been big, say, trouble if something happens; it doesn't work, something, if I doing big work.



So I tested there, turned out really good. And very quickly after we ship here, somebody bought it, so I think like, oh yeah, works. You know, work by size, works by effectiveness, works by selling too. And same actually what happened with drawings too, because Leslie sold these first drawings, what I draw, and this give me kind of reason to do more with her drawings. [00:34:00] And I sort of promised to myself for each show make one big drawing.

And it's been less successful after this. Like we sell first and maybe we sell couple, but still—I still do those drawings more for—it's nice to reflect on my sculpture work too. So actually more and bigger slides and bigger drawings give me this kind of more experience and get like new vision on the art.

And right now I'm in a stage where I want it to back to smaller size. I want to have less labor. Bigger work take much more time and labor-intense things. I want go back because I still have a lot ideas. I want to go for where I not really spend so much time on a specific process, but each work be much more powerful.

MARK SHAPIRO: So right now, Sergei, you had the show in Arizona, in what was that, 2009, I think, in La Mesa—I mean, at Mesa?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yes, I think this was—

MARK SHAPIRO: And then you have currently a show in New York at Barry Friedman, which is up now, which is mostly the larger-scale work that you've done, all the large heads.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MARK SHAPIRO: And how do you—how do you feel about that show? How did you feel about the work and the way it was installed, and seeing your work—do you react to it like now you want to go smaller, having sort of pushed the limit of your kiln?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Well, it's interesting how this happens—and reflect, like I mentioned before, on what's going on and who you are and what you wanted. [00:36:00] Actually you get always pretty much what you wanted in some maybe different levels. So for a year, or a year and a half, very intensely working for the show in Arizona, not thinking about market at all. So this means I really working for the space and I think how to fill that space, but not, for example, how be appealing to people. How it is easy to be carried this work to people who bought it. Like for example, before, I been thinking about how people installed my work in their space. Say, like, usually 12 pieces selling much easier because it's easy find a space on the shelf. But with these big heads, I really not think about this at all. I just think how I feel about the space.

And I think artists need to probably think about—because I don't want to live with these pieces what I make. I love them, but after I done I love next one what I working on. So this means I'm not really good owner of my old pieces, because I not care that much about them.

MARK SHAPIRO: Do you keep anything?

SERGEI ISUPOV: No. Well, my wish not keep nothing, but sometimes I keep it because it's like we not sell it. And yes, so this means I need to think how, for example, people able to get it, or put in their house. So this become work so big, so have space for them, needs to think about, for example, pedestals, which completely different task, or space in their apartment. So this means you not have somebody to kind of need working more with interior designers, or you need working with [00:38:00]—so interior designers mostly work with people who much more richer, houses biggest, people who collect more fine art and stuff like this—so this completely new field.

So after I made this finished exhibition in Arizona, I have like big collection of work, but I actually don't know what to do with them. Just heavy; they're big boxes, they're really don't know how sell—it's completely different buyer group. And Leslie feels same. So we start working on where just find a place where able to show where people come with the designers.

So this come out like an interesting deal with gallery in New York who sells three-dimensional work and two-dimensional work. So perfect. This is exactly what we wanted. We wanted sort of like not be only one who do three-dimensional work in a gallery with two-dimensional work. We want like gallery sell sculpture and painting and, say, ceramic and some of this crafts material, what people use it, like fine art. So this gallery, Barry Friedman, been perfect timing.

So right now we install exhibition with collection of this big heads, but not—some we sell and been pretty good. Some museums bought it work too, these big heads, and I think it's perfect for these collections, some museums where have pedestals. I just think like much more hard install this piece in the home where you need to have pedestal too because it's home usually for living, not for showing. So this issue, I missed it, you know, in the

process.

But it's been fun. [00:40:00] Like I say, I collect this, my experience. I get what I want, but maybe Leslie not get what she wanted because she want sell it. So right now she try to figure out how to do or what to do with this new level of approach of this work—collection.

MARK SHAPIRO: And this new work was much less complex, you know. Sometimes there's very complex drawings but formally it's, you know—they're much more recognizable and straightforward, representational pieces.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Well, in the first I don't want to made same work what I done before, just bigger size. That's not my intention. I want make bigger work so I—and more bigger, even like I have kiln, so I come with this idea if I made some part, like human body, say, what enlarge—made bigger. So if I made some hand, so definitely somewhere exist all rest part of body, right? So if just make some parts really big, say, like, toes, right, but huge size. There I made like idea or like psychological idea to have exist some—this probably detail from sculpture what's huge. So these heads, I come out with this idea because they're so literal part of human body. So you really don't need to have other side, but it just has already complete form, and lots of literal, literal, literal, very possible—get stories too.

So this how I actually get this. And because bigger form, but I made with same technique what I've done before, was not sculpt in solid clay but still made from slabs. [00:42:00] Have like this physics of what need to remember, think about it, like to be more stable, and definitely shape of eggs be much more practical in the kiln. And thereby I more reserve with like sculpture and get more, say, decorative on it, decorate phase with two-dimensional drawings like sculpturals. I think sculptural be much more sort of complicated with this technique what I used.

And be fine for this specific show, for this specific moment of my career. And right now, I'm very excited to go back to some small size where I get this—all this knowledge and experience and seeing new way and vision, and try to do something much more—get back to sort of my more this moody work. So maybe become again complicated. I don't know. This what excited to me, be like artists where I not planning exactly what I do, is become like being bored. I still like really expressionists, maybe.

So what surround me and who I am in this moment, go to work, this make me excited to see it, and in this process what made me kind of excited to go in studio and be workaholic and productive. So it works both way.

MARK SHAPIRO: Sergei, your life took a huge turn in the last couple of years because you have an almost one-year-old daughter now. And would you be willing to reflect on how that changed the way you think of yourself and the way you think of your artwork?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. Yeah, that's been big change, but is funny how again everything comes so gradually. Yeah, this woman who right now my wife and mother of our girl, [00:44:00] I know for a long time, so our relationship already really long. And it's do—have her now kid put us in a new position too. It's really interesting how everything kind of go in and out in a different—that same what happened in the art. We kind of like constantly flow somewhere, and same time just flow from one ball to another, and this flowing kind of change, and same time kind of repeat themselves too.

So we feel like this already been before our relationship, but right now same relationship on a new scale and a new dimension because we have right now a responsibility for our relationship and our kid. And I have fear before be parent and have kids maybe because I'm not have—I not been parent or husband, as I say. And right now I am, and this become, like, so natural, I think.

I suspect this be some dramatic change in one day. But it's never, not—this always go so slow. Pregnancy goes so slow and it's change so smooth. And fatherhood, too. Like, for some reason I also feel like my kids realize how I'm stupid and tell me this, and I probably feel like this probably really hurts. So but they're probably seeing this, and find out this, but not quickly—[laughs]—not they need to but this realization happened so slow that at first I listened a lot, and later learned how say this. [00:46:00] So after they're say, I probably really not been care much and probably think they are stupid too.

And I hear from my colleagues too, like if this reflect on my artwork to get so change in my life. But it is again so gradually, where definitely reflect, but nothing that I immediately observe. I see some my subjects become much more mellow.

MARK SHAPIRO: Just those new heads are very serene, very peaceful. Like they, you know, they just seem so kind of—some quietness to them, even with all, everything that's going on on the surface compared to the work before. It seems much more kind of frenetic. And it's a different energy.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. I am not able to describe why. I guess, again, it's just that—who I am. And I think—I only—like, art is able to kind of give little push in one side or other side, but still I not much control where actually flow goes.

MARK SHAPIRO: I noticed—

SERGEI ISUPOV: A lot on the instant; I just feel it's right, but why, I not really try to analyze. It's still really visual. See, this art what I do, really visual, so I kind of more base on the visual. Not because I draw—like I see baby there because I'm right now father. Mostly because this looks good there so I just do there. Maybe because I so used to, and right now I do a lot sketches of my daughter and it's much easy to me draw this, so I probably go easiest way, so I wanted to have some—on this part, some object or some subject or some figure, [00:48:00] so I do there what is kind of fits right now, what I know right now really good and what I easy with this form and subject.

MARK SHAPIRO: I was looking at your artist's statement and, you know, I think it's a very interesting way you put it. You say, "Everything that surrounds and excites me is automatically processed and transformed into an artwork. When I think of myself and my works, I'm not sure I create them. Perhaps they create me."

SERGEI ISUPOV: Right.

MARK SHAPIRO: Do you think you—can you expand on that a little bit? Do you think that's—how do you feel about that at this point in your life? Does that express where you're at at the moment?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah. This why I mentioned I have hard time describe why I make this work. In some way, this probably what I mean, like work maybe create me because in the process of create some object you go through the stages, like first idea, later planning, later, like, make first cut, later cleaning, later decorate it. In the end you do see finished result and put on the stage. Right? And I think same happen in life, in world life—say, you kind of build yourself, create yourself, polished, and same time—like, I mean the same you get from basic to more complicated and complicated, complicated. But in the process of make work is probably in two weeks I will see all this—all this gradu—how does—[00:50:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: Gradations? Is that how—

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yeah, how this actually start and finished. And it give me a lot of knowledge. So if in the beginning I start make more forms, say, and not been really designed well physically, right, so this pops in the kiln, so for this I need get like really good base, say like structural thing, how does—what this works. So this constantly work through this, like see results. Like you get idea, you build, you decorate, and you finished and you got response. It help me in life too, see same sort of—same sort of behaving.

And this why I mentioned work maybe create me because it help me kind of deal with some choices what I need have in everyday life, and sort of what is what important. So in a way feel like a little like a god to my work, like creator, let's just say. But it's true—they're maybe not alive objects, but still same—same—depends how much you put in, is how much you get back. So this help me in life too, give more to get more.

It's definitely not so simple, and is again more emotional knowledge and more like psychological process. But still, this why I mentioned like they're maybe create me. [00:52:00] And this constantly working at this—give me this experience, I teach myself more not analyze, more feel. Train my instinct. If analyze too much, or do—do good sketches where I think all those details, work probably become really dry, and I think—and probably be boring to do it too. You just feel like you're just laboring, repeat like what you're already planning to do.

So in a way this inspiration, improvisation is really important in my work. This give me kind of life. Work make more alive because you in the process able to change where the work wanted to go. And this way this happened a lot, you kind of—particularly in big work. Sometimes you build and some form start moving in one direction. So I try to not stop for some more promote this. Like, OK. Well, anyway, changing the process.

And I think so I trained myself more in this instinct. I feel right. Why, I don't know. So I think that was where I need position to be artist. If you too analytical, it's probably better if you go to math or physics, where they really need this sort of knowledge. So I think we need more less knowledge, more less feeling. Feeling, yes?

MARK SHAPIRO: Yes.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Like just—I do it. I can't describe why.

MARK SHAPIRO: I think that's great.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Yes. [00:54:00]

MARK SHAPIRO: Do you think that's a good place to stop?

SERGEI ISUPOV: Sure. Yeah. This future—in front of us, ha ha.

MARK SHAPIRO: I don't know. Do you want to talk about being in Estonia at all? Back in Estonia?

SERGEI ISUPOV: I think this nice—this door still open for this new experience. Definitely this baby girl, my relationship with new wife become more, move in different direction and inspiration. I need to choose, say like where kids wanted to grow up, you know. And what kind of school and what is more important for they. So I guess it's still—go so much this level, and my wife Estonian by nationality. So her first language Estonian, my first language Russian. Even I connect with Estonian really strongly, I still—I still—this is country where I come already adult.

So it be interesting see how my wife feel here comfortable and how we not lose it what we already have, and how this introduce to our baby. And it's big challenge. At the same time, this what I wanted. This what give inspiration for work. So maybe definitely work become maybe less appealing to truck driver. [Laughs.] Maybe hooks be in a different bait. I still working on hooks. I think it's a good idea.

I say this, like artist, you never try to lie but you always—but you still thinking because you create something, you imagine something, so you cannot really made it up. [00:56:00] But you kind of want made it up closer to truth and something what you care about, so in this case become much more natural and honest. And all this like difficulty what you go through life, actually being pretty reflective and really great, and really inspirational. So I really curious myself what will be next.

MARK SHAPIRO: I think that's a good place to leave it.

SERGEI ISUPOV: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]