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Oral history interview with Ted Halkin, 2015
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Theodore (Ted) Halkin on 2015 July 29 and August 17. The interview took place at Halkin's home in Evanston, Ill. and was conducted by Lanny Silverman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Chicago Art and Artists: Oral History Project.

Theodore Halkin and Sylvia Halkin, his daughter, have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LANNY SILVERMAN: Hello, it's been a while. This is Lanny Silverman for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. I'm here at Theodore Halkin's house. It's July 29th, and this is part one of an interview. That looks pretty good.

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LANNY SILVERMAN: I think recording levels look pretty good, down a little. So, I guess the first question, we'll start—the idea of this is to possibly go in chronological order. Although I found with Evelyn and some people they go in circles [laughs], Vera Klement. It's okay if I call you Ted?

THEODORE HALKIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: I assume; I've been doing that. Where were you born and when and—

THEODORE HALKIN: Chicago, Illinois; 1924.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And what part of town, I guess, in Chicago that's always—

THEODORE HALKIN: South Side, and I guess it's University of Chicago Hospital, but I don't know which one. You know, they had branches and so on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Now, what was your childhood like?

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh. Oh, what was my childhood like? Well, I was a Depression baby. That is—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's very important in terms of—my father grew up then and had to give up an art career for just that reason.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well but I mean I was born in 1924. So by that—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So this is just—

THEODORE HALKIN: —time—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —I was conscious and aware of the world around me, which is, you know, the early '30s, '29, so it's some five years later. And so then the—sort of my consciousness of the world was a world of struggle, poverty, deprivation, not by my family and myself, but the sense of the world.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You had that—you could feel that, just like I grew up in the '50s, and there was a [laughs]—I wouldn't have known it at the time, but there was a repressive, I don't know, a sort of a—

THEODORE HALKIN: I hated the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —conservative—yeah, right, the—

THEODORE HALKIN: I hated the '50s.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Me too, but I didn't know that at the time I just knew that it was weird. And it's the same thing with—you're saying that you had a feeling for the Depression; even as a young child, you could sort of

sense the—[00:02:00]

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know it was—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —atmosphere?

THEODORE HALKIN: It was always a problem; there was very little money. My father was a second-hand furniture dealer, and he did that until he was in his late 70s. And he had a store on—about two blocks west of Cottage Grove in Chicago. And so, you know, it was—money was not plentiful but we had enough.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There was probably a lot of second-hand furniture at that point. People were probably—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, they would sell—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —selling—buying was probably another—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Buying was easy probably; selling was probably—

THEODORE HALKIN: Selling difficult.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Selling difficult. Did you learn—I—from my dad, who was an inveterate picker—did you learn picking skills? Like I know that—from—by way of—we'll get to this much later—

THEODORE HALKIN: What do you mean picking?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Picking is the term that antique people use for like finding stuff amongst the junk.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Finding the gems amongst the junk.

THEODORE HALKIN: I don't—I didn't know that. My father did.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Your father did?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I got some of that my dad. And actually, my dad also restored things. Did your dad also restore things?

THEODORE HALKIN: Some.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did you learn some—

THEODORE HALKIN: But—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —skills there?

THEODORE HALKIN: But he was a botcher. He told me he—

[They laugh.]

—was a botcher.

LANNY SILVERMAN: He was a [laughs] botcher? So you're—but you're a perfectionist.

THEODORE HALKIN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No?

THEODORE HALKIN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You're loose?

THEODORE HALKIN: I try my best but—

[They laugh.]

—I'm not so very good at it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So your family, were they interested in culture and the arts at all? Were supportive?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, my father. I should tell you this; my father I used—he had this store that was under the L tracks. And when I was old enough, [00:04:00] going to high school, I was in—went to Hyde Park High School, and so I would come to help out on Saturdays. And on Saturdays my father who—he was a—he was an immigrant from Russia, and he was trained as a blacksmith.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

THEODORE HALKIN: His father was a blacksmith. I guess there were two lines of work that the men in the family did—were apprentice to: blacksmithing and tailoring. So—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Tailoring my parents from—grandparents from Russia, yes [laughs], I know it well.

THEODORE HALKIN: So he—but when—well, he was silent, but I don't think that was unusual. I have a friend who's younger than myself, but still, his father was silent, too. So I think a lot of men who, you know, sort of kept their own counsel. They didn't—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's also a different culture. They came after the pogroms, I assume?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah. Well, no, they—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or they—when did they come?

THEODORE HALKIN: —no, no they came—they came in probably '90s, 1890s or so.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, so they got out before probably in Tsarist times.

THEODORE HALKIN: No, no I mean the pogroms were going on in Russia—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh he—

THEODORE HALKIN: —all the time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, all the time? I guess maybe I need to know more.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Yeah I mean, you know, it's not—it was not like, oh now we'll have a—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, it's not one day it's good and one day it's [laughs] bad, I got you. But I guess I didn't realize. I see it as sort of there's a bad time when the—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, it was not a good time. I mean, you know, the kind—[00:06:00] my father used to tell, for instance, the—they didn't own property. So they were—I'm not sure how they managed to get hold of enough land to build a log cabin, which is what they did.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

THEODORE HALKIN: So—and how big the log cabin was I have no idea. But, you know, it must have been big enough to contain somewhere between 10 and 12 children and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Whoa, that's a big family [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: —parents. And the blacksmith shop was in the back of the house. And my father would say—told a story that, you know, the—it was insulated by putting moss between the logs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so my father told a story that the—some of the logs were rotting out and they wanted to replace them; they had to get permission, and the powers that be wouldn't give the permission to replace the rotting logs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: What law was that against [laughs]? Who knows?

THEODORE HALKIN: I think it was the law against Jews.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The anti-Semitism is—

[They laugh.]

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —what it was [laughs]. Yes, I got you [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: And so he said, well, his father simply built a new cabin inside the old one.

[They laugh.]

But, you know, that's, you know—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Crazy.

THEODORE HALKIN: —mind boggling.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, craziness.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, you know, it—you know, he had—let's see, there was—you know, I don't know whether you—how much you know about your European ancestors.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, the sad part is my grand mom was a very modern woman; [00:08:00] she was very quiet about the past. I regret not getting stories.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I wish I knew more.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I didn't get much.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, but you have a lot more—

THEODORE HALKIN: But—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —than me I guess.

THEODORE HALKIN: —I got more than that. But I mean the whole thing was, you know, the families would be really complicated because the women started giving birth as soon as they had copulated—

[They laugh.]

—practically, and then so they died off relatively young. There was a remarriage; in the remarriage, there would usually be a woman who was brought in who already had a family, and there would be family added to that family.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That complicated—

THEODORE HALKIN: And so the—and so that the whole picture of—you know, I—my relatives in this country and who they were and what their relationship were to both my mother and father—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's all over the place.

[They laugh.]

Yeah, you've got layers of family.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, it was just—too complicated. And so—and my mother's father also was a blacksmith, only he was also traded which is sort of different; whereas my father's father made tools. And so, you know, they—it's sort of interesting. But—and they probably lived somewhere like 30 miles apart in Russia but never met or anything.

LANNY SILVERMAN: What part of Russia? Ukraine or somewhere else?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, the Pale.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Pale.

THEODORE HALKIN: Down, you know, the—so they, you know, the whole—you know, the number of Jews in a town like my father's, my mother's town, you know, they weren't even enough Jews for a minyan—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh geez [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: —you know, so. [00:10:00] So, you know, the whole business of the idea of these *shtetl* Jews having this, what was the play?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, *Fiddler on the Roof*, or the—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, *Fiddler on the*—picture of *Fiddler on the Roof* is a little—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, well I never thought that—with what little I know [laughs] I never thought that was accurate. But the—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, there's, you know, sweet—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yes.

THEODORE HALKIN: —and sympathetic but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sentimentalized, I'm—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —sure.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, you know, they—and, of course, the families were—not all of them came to America. So both my mother's family and my father's families were wiped out during the Second World War. And so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: What brought them to Chicago specifically?

THEODORE HALKIN: I think, you know, my father had a sister who was here already and so did my mother. So, you know, there was a sort of general connection. They didn't—my mother didn't come in through Ellis Island; she came in through Canada.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh really?

THEODORE HALKIN: Why, I don't know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's not the usual route.

THEODORE HALKIN: And my father was an illegal immigrant.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh—

[They laugh.]

THEODORE HALKIN: He came to America, and he was cross-eyed, and somehow or another, they decided that—and he may have had something else, but that's all I really know, and they wouldn't let him in the country. And so he went to Argentina, and he lived in Argentina and worked as a blacksmith, made—

LANNY SILVERMAN: They have horses there so at least you [laughs] got—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, you know, the fire escapes and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that too, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —stuff like that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, ironwork.

THEODORE HALKIN: He—there was someone who came to town and wanted to hire people to work out on the—in the country and promised, you know, great promises. [00:12:00] My father went and then found out that it was really a kind of slavery trap, and he walked back along the railroad tracks.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

THEODORE HALKIN: And then he got—he saved up enough money and he bought—he signed on as a member of a boat crew, but actually, he was a passenger. And so when he got to New York, he jumped ship.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So—

THEODORE HALKIN: And his brother was already there in New York and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: He managed to get papers eventually, I imagine.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, yes, he became a citizen—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —eventually.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [laughs] Eventually. It's a probably a longer story to—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah I—you know, the whole machination of that is complicated, and I didn't know about it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you know a lot more about your previous generations than I do in a way, which is kind of interesting. So—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, I'm a hell of a lot older than you.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's true, but I mean, I should have the memory. But, on the other hand, I didn't get—my grandfather wasn't alive; my grand mom, as I say, was—didn't want to—she only wanted to look forward, which was a very admirable aspect, and she was a very modern woman. But now in retrospect, boy, do I wish I knew more about—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —Russia from her eyes because although—

THEODORE HALKIN: I—you know, I certainly didn't ask enough questions of my father and mother.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's just—it's all gone.

LANNY SILVERMAN: All gone. Well, I—from what I'm gathering though it seems like your father and some of the other relatives had some familiarity with toolmaking and tools and crafts.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did you get it? Did you pick up any of that from your—from your family? Or do you think it was just you were just independent of that? I'm trying to get at maybe—

THEODORE HALKIN: I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —how you came to art, and that's kind of—

THEODORE HALKIN: I think—well, you know, there's some very peculiar things. My father, I'd go to work in the store on Saturdays—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's where we left; you were work—helping him on the weekends, right?

THEODORE HALKIN: [00:14:00] And, you know, they broadcast the opera on Saturday, and my father listened to the opera.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: He read Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and did a lot of reading. And was, you know, sort of really—he—he's—as a child, you know, not really young, probably about—starting about the time I was 8 or so, maybe 10. Sunday, he would take myself and my brother—I have an older sister—and he would whisk us off in a way to give my mother some—

[They laugh.]

—liberty. And we would go down to the World Playhouse, showed foreign films; we'd go to the World Playhouse to see foreign film. And often, we would go to the Art Institute.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Ah, so you remember any visits to the Art Institute as a kid? Anything stick in your memory?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well it, you know, sort of—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Just the general—

THEODORE HALKIN: —the general sense of it. But then—

LANNY SILVERMAN: There wasn't any specific—you know, you don't have any like revelation, some piece that said this is—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, no, no it's just—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —speaking to me.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's just that there was a sense of awe and wonder of going there, and going downtown and going to these exotic films.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, so that the whole feeling of being transported, in a sense.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Especially since you were talking about the Depression, so here's a world—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —that opens up rather than closes in.

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So that was for you like a—that was probably the beginning of maybe—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, no, it was really all important stuff for me.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Now—

THEODORE HALKIN: And so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, go ahead.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah there was no sense that—like I know in some families the children are expected to sort of follow [00:16:00] the parents in some kind of reverence to the—whatever tradition they thought was significant. That what—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I have a feeling you're—that wasn't the case for you but I have a feeling it's very parallel to mine. In a way, I think I was the wish fulfillment of my parents' fantasies. Sounds like your dad, in particular, had ideas of culture and intellectual and other pursuits—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes, he had that—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and this—you could live that out—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —through you, you could live that out.

THEODORE HALKIN: —then my mother started—you know, women, Jewish women, were left almost totally ignorant.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, they learned a few prayers, but they had no real contact with religious meaning at any depth. And she was sort of, I guess, very angry—

[They laugh.]

—at me.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I bet there were a lot of angry women in that era.

THEODORE HALKIN: In—about being sort of treated that way. And from the time I was about—my sister, who

was older, four years older. So somewhere along the line when my sister was thought of as responsible, I have a younger brother, that my mother started going to night school—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

THEODORE HALKIN: —to—and to go to night school meant she had to get on a streetcar; she had to go at night. She went in rain, storm, hot, cold—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So she was—she was—

THEODORE HALKIN: —night school. And, yeah, so she was getting educated. She went to grammar school; she was getting ready, I think, to go to high school when she became ill and died.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, so she died relatively young.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah, she died in mid-'40s.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

THEODORE HALKIN: [00:18:00] So, yeah, she's—but, you know, the drive to be educated, to know something, to, you know, to have a sense of her own being as somehow capable because, certainly, that isn't the way she felt.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I'm sure. And actually, yeah, I think that's not—apart from even a Jewish woman, that's even true of that era.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: A lot of women were—would have been much better as careerists than as mothers. I can—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —attest in—from my family [laughs] they made much better—they would have been much better if they'd followed what they really wanted to do, rather than resenting all the—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, so she was, I guess, an early feminist, and she was—worked for birth control and all kinds of stuff.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's neat.

THEODORE HALKIN: So—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's very interesting.

THEODORE HALKIN: So that, you know, that my parents—and they lived relatively unsocial and isolated lives, aside from their relatives.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh really?

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, they had a few friends; usually they were neighbors. But—and then there were people in the *verein*, which was, you know, the certain neighborhood club for people coming from a certain area in Russia that formed a little club.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That makes sense.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so this was my parent's social life, I think.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And, I guess, the question is—well, we were starting to get to that when you mentioned the trips with your dad to the Art Institute. When did you first become aware of the pleasure of making art? You made art as a kid, all—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh—

THEODORE HALKIN: —oh—

THEODORE HALKIN: —every—yeah. Yeah I mean, you know, that's what—I just never stopped.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well what started—

[They laugh.]

What started you? I guess I'm interested in what begins it, because for me it's pretty early. I was always passionate about art but I think a lot of kids are. [00:20:00] Not everyone follows through, so I guess I'm—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, sort of when you're a kid you—you're given Crayolas and—

[They laugh.]

—and I just never stopped.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now do you have any memories of those—what the work was like? I mean were you fairly typical, you know, in terms of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, comic strips.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, airplanes, comic strips.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs] Yeah. And you tried to—

THEODORE HALKIN: What else?

LANNY SILVERMAN: —to be a realist just like I—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, oh women.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, women.

THEODORE HALKIN: Women.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [laughs] Of course.

THEODORE HALKIN: I was interested in women.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Had a certain—oh I bet.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE HALKIN: Even, you know, really, really young, I was interested in pictures of women, and I would try to draw them.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, if you're somewhat geeky as, you know, being interested in art as a kid, one of the ways you get certain credibility among your cohorts is by drawing women, too.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, I guess so, but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That gets you a certain amount of—

THEODORE HALKIN: But I did that very early though. Yeah I mean—

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: But you were doing that really before adolescence you were saying though, even earlier on.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, well before [laughs] adolescence.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow, that's interesting.

THEODORE HALKIN: But I—it has something to do with my mother and sister, my older sister; my mother who formed this kind of union of their sex and sort of real mysterious. They would—my sister was four years older and so there were—you know, there was this bonding between them, and there were—this sense of mysterious—and world full of, I don't know what, mystery I guess.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And I was interested in them. I was interested in their—in—I was interested in their program—[00:22:00]

[They laugh.]

—of—you just—they just behaved different, and I was very interested in that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, as a young boy, I think one of the things that's very mysterious is just, you know, no one gives you a manual for this. You don't—you have to figure it out. What is different? I mean not just the anatomical; I mean psychological, emotional. You mentioned your dad—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —didn't talk very much. My mom and dad were total opposites. Mom talked like crazy, dad very quiet. Totally different, same thing you're talking about, very interesting to me to figure what that's about. Is that them particularly? Or is that women? Is that, you know? You know, I—

THEODORE HALKIN: I don't know. I think—I think it's, you know, for myself I think what went on, really before the war, constitutes a kind of homogenous culture. And certainly as expressed by the Depression; it made—the world was really different. But when the country's at war or if everybody except the very rich are poor, it's a just—there's a sense that every—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Someone can argue that that's the case now; only the very rich are [laughs] rich. It's getting—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —back to that.

THEODORE HALKIN: —everybody else is swimming in muck.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Muck, well, this is much worse than that. I mean, this is more muck. We're headed there though I think, I'm afraid.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But that's [laughs] another—

THEODORE HALKIN: Anyway, so they're at the sense of what the world is like, what kind of unities are in communities. And from my childhood it was the idea that everybody was poor or the world was at war. And so that made for a kind of homogeneity that just doesn't exist.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So for you art and the world of ideas were transporting a way out from that kind of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. [00:24:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —sort of confinement and—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, the confinement—I mean, I think people were very individualistic in their—in their mode of life. I mean, they—some people talked; some people made jokes. I mean, it wasn't that everybody was like—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It wasn't everyone—

THEODORE HALKIN: —you know, sort of—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —walking around grumpy.

THEODORE HALKIN: —sort of stamped out models that followed one another. There was a great variety of human beings in my childhood and amongst my relatives and schoolmates and so on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: How about school? I guess what was school like?

THEODORE HALKIN: I was a failure in school.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh really? That's interesting because I talked with Bill Conger, who I know pretty well, and he had difficulties in school, too, early on. I don't know if—and I think part of it is being—there's a sense of being an outlier, being on the outside. There's advantages—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I was dyslexic.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That doesn't help either because then you're different, and people don't get that. Now they have names and all kinds of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, that's right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —things they do. But—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, he's smart, but he just doesn't work hard enough.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, well, Bill then went overboard to prove it and teach himself later in life. So for you, you were—you were something of an outsider then, I take it. You were on the outside of the sort of school system.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, ordinary the—at schoolroom success, yes.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

Well in that sense of—yeah, well I mean there's also popularity and all the stuff that, if you're not a jock into sports, or if you're not like—well, actually, being smart doesn't always get you, you know, popularity; that could go the other way around probably.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, if you're really smart, you know [laughs] how to get popular at—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's true.

[They laugh.]

You can figure out—

[They laugh.]

Yes, you can figure out how to—

THEODORE HALKIN: I wasn't that smart, but I—

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Not quite enough to get—

[They laugh.]

But you were on the outside of sort of the—of things in a way, I gather.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, by the time I got into high school I managed to know—to figure out certain things; it wasn't—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Adaptive skills, huh?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So—

LANNY SILVERMAN: And did—were you making—was art, at that point—

THEODORE HALKIN: No. [00:26:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —passionate?

THEODORE HALKIN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That wasn't like a—

THEODORE HALKIN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —something that was in the foreground.

THEODORE HALKIN: No. I kept doing it, but it wasn't—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But it wasn't—

THEODORE HALKIN: —in an advertised commodity.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Well, that's actually—that's what I was getting at at the very beginning. You know, my dad had to give up an art scholarship because, in that particular point in time, it would be very difficult to, as a parent, to advise someone to go into—and the same thing happened with me is, you know, how could you tell someone to go into art, which seems like a gamble at best. That's putting it politely; that's—it's a long shot.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, the—so I went into the Army at—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, you did?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, at about 18, I got drafted. And so the question of depending on my parents for my education—

[They laugh.]

Because it wouldn't have happened, I couldn't have done it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, so this helped—

THEODORE HALKIN: There was no money there; there was no—I mean, I could have—I can't imagine sort of absolutely swimming in—against all the will around me.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The odds were very highly against you.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And there weren't as many scholarships or things that—it would—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —there weren't as many options as there are today, even.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And so, you know, though and being in the Army and getting the G.I. bill liberated me to—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That got a lot of people, I mean I think even Walt Disney; a lot of people, very famous people, got, you know, G.I. bill—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —educations in that point in time. Did you serve—were you in Korea? That wasn't the time of that.

THEODORE HALKIN: It—no, no. No, this was the Second World War.

LANNY SILVERMAN: This was actually earlier.

THEODORE HALKIN: Iwo Jima.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh—

[They laugh.]

—actually—so this is—you were in Iwo Jima?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Holy-moly.

THEODORE HALKIN: I was—well, I was also in Guadalcanal [laughs], but not—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

THEODORE HALKIN: —not during the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Not during the mess.

THEODORE HALKIN: Not in Guadalcanal, but the mess in Iwo Jima. But, you know, I was in the medical corps, and so in a way, Iwo Jima, you know, didn't last very long [00:28:00] as a battle actually, you know. It's—so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did those experiences—because I grew up—I'm about 10 years or so younger. I grew up Vietnam—

THEODORE HALKIN: I am 91 years old.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Any anyway 15—I'm 67 so, yeah, that's like—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, that's a long distance.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, you're looking great then.

[They laugh.]

You said something like you retired when you were 86, and I was thinking, wow. Yeah, you're older than I thought. You look great.

THEODORE HALKIN: No—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You're in good shape I guess, relatively speaking.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But I grew up it was Vietnam, and I would never serve there for conscience purposes. It was different in World War II, which was a very different war. But I guess, did those experiences of war—even if you were not in active battle, even though you may not have been shooting people, was that traumatic? Did that have an effect on your life? On your work?

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh it may—I—as quickly as I could, I cleansed myself of all memories of that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow. That's interesting. Because I—when I talked with Vera, one of the first things she said about, you know, I think it was Auschwitz or whatever, was she felt like it ruined her, it—basically, it was like—

THEODORE HALKIN: Who is—who is—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Vera Klement.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, Vera, it ruined her?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Ruined her. I mean, that's just like that. But that's like, you know, the camps, that's certainly a traumatic experience, but she said she was never the same afterwards. And yet she seems very functional and very engaged and very, you know, I don't know. She seems okay to me, and you wouldn't know that from the outside I guess.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I don't know her very well so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I didn't either—

THEODORE HALKIN: —I can't tell.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —until this interview. Actually, it was very interesting to hear her firsthand. I know Edith Altman much better, who's a friend of hers. She was on my board at NAME Gallery. But I didn't know her very well, but it was interesting to follow her life trajectory from somebody who started, you know, from very intense childhood. And then she came at 8, but knowing—only knowing like one or two words; that's kind of a really traumatic experience. [00:30:00]

But I would think that the war would be—to someone who's at all sensitive and probably not, I would assume, pacifist in nature I would guess. But did that—how did—you say it—you just tried to [laughs]—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —clear it out of your—

THEODORE HALKIN: —you know, your—I—let's see, I was somewhere around, what, 18 when I went in, 22 or so when I came out. And I don't know how you—how you see yourself in the—in the past. I mean, if—when you remember your past, are you remembering—

[They laugh.]

What do you remember? Do you remember the story of your past?

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know where you're going with this. That's a very interesting question. Because it's very hard to feel like you were—you had a very different sense of things when you're young; you think you can do anything; you're impervious. But you don't have that sense now, and [laughs] none of us do. But how do you—how do you even go back to the way you were then?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, yeah, I mean, the question is, you know, sort of is this their model that you've come to deal with as your past?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, that has—

LANNY SILVERMAN: How much has your memory been tampered with by the present, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, and then—well, I don't know about you, but my experience is that I'm continually in a state of becoming. I'm not—I haven't become yet.

[They laugh.]

I know it's sort of stupid to say that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, that's a Buddhist thing. They have that concept.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, but I—that's the way, really, I feel, that my experiences in some ways were now and become more and more limited. But still [00:32:00] the intensity of my experience with other works of art, literature, the newspaper, the whole business of sort of daily life, I find continually transforming. But that—if I'm engaged in some kind of contact in reading, I feel that that becomes not a kind of—very often written by people totally unlike myself who, somehow or another, make a form that is capable of reaching me through all of my senses. And in—when that happens, I'm—I've changed. I've—I'm no longer the person—

[They laugh.]

—I was before I read that. I have to—and this goes for, you know, daily occurrences also.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's very—that's very hopeful for me [laughs]. Because I—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —feel that way now, but I think like, well, do you just get completely inundated by physicality of your—

THEODORE HALKIN: I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —aging body, and do your—I'm happy that I can still read and see and have all the important things, but, you know, that—in terms of experience that you're talking about. But I'm glad to hear that you're still in the present and still feeling transformed by works of art, literature, and living and going on.

THEODORE HALKIN: Absolutely.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's great. That's very—I should tell my wife that. She worries much more than me [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, I see.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm not the worrier; she's the appointed worrier. But that's very good to hear because—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, it's just what—you know, I just—I just thought everybody did that [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: I don't know if that's the case, but you're very fortunate. I think that's a good thing. [00:34:00]

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I mean, I think part of it is you have to be open to it; I know lots of people aren't. They want the daily life to be repeated; they're frightened.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's structure. Some people—some people are very frightened by even retirement because—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —they don't—they lose the structure and their sense of themselves.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, that's easy to see, but I mean—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —it's beyond that. It's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's—

THEODORE HALKIN: —the sense that they are—if they let too much in, they're vulnerable; they're going to be erased.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Right

THEODORE HALKIN: They're not going to grow; they're going to become less.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or they're trying to hold onto their sense of self; this is what I do. This is who I am—

THEODORE HALKIN: That's why—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —I can't be anything else.

THEODORE HALKIN: —retirement is killing for them.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's true of some people. But for me I—I'm enjoying it immensely and actually I know people—I knew counter examples, people that are freaked out by it, they need the structure or the sense of themselves—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —their importance and all those things.

THEODORE HALKIN: —you know I taught until I was 85. And, you know, so then it became time not to do that anymore.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, we're going to get that.

THEODORE HALKIN: I had a wonderful time teaching.

THEODORE HALKIN: We'll get to that; let's go back to your school thing though. We're going to—we're going to try to stay in order here [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh that's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: We're going in the circles here.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's not—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But—

THEODORE HALKIN: That's not [laughs]—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well we've got the—

THEODORE HALKIN: That's not life [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's not life but that's what—

[They laugh.]

—Vera—I think when Vera was going in circles she said, "That's not my life." She's going back and forth, and it's going in circles. That's true; it—but the Smithsonian would like to have, for future—

THEODORE HALKIN: Orderly. Orderly.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Orderly, they want an orderly life that goes—

THEODORE HALKIN: Orderly life. Oh let's see—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That you grow up, but you're forwards and back. Well, you were starting to talk a little bit about—you mentioned the G.I. bill. I guess—and that's what got you to the Art Institute? Is that—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's—what made you pick the Art Institute? Just your love of art in general or—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I'd been cutting school and, even when I was 12, and going down and looking around by myself. So we—[00:36:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: And it probably is related to the dyslexia too, it's a lot—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —more difficult when they didn't have—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, the dyslexia, I meant to say something about that. The Army did one service.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: We were—I—we were going back on a boat. I remember the name of the boat; it was called the Kota Agoeng, and it was a Dutch—

LANNY SILVERMAN: What was the name again?

THEODORE HALKIN: Kota Agoeng, and it was a Dutch Indonesian—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh that's why, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —vessel.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And it had a German diesel, and we were picked up, and we were heading back to Hawaii to be sent out again on another—

[They laugh.]

—adventure. And so the German diesel went *kaput*.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Uh-oh.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so we were stranded for about a month waiting to get a new engine for the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's a long time.

THEODORE HALKIN: —boat. And so in that month time, you know, the Army distributed books and so I sat down and I taught myself how to read.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So there was something gained from that [laughs] experience.

THEODORE HALKIN: I—

[They laugh.]

And so I learned how to read.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I guess what I was getting at in terms of the art thing though, in terms of school, more difficult for dyslexics who don't know that they have it and don't understand, you know, what's going on.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah no, no. Yeah, I certainly didn't know what was going on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And so it's just—it's just bewildering, so it's a lot easier to deal with images and with that

language because it's a different kind of skill. Maybe it's something—it's—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I don't—you know, I think—well one of the things that interests me is that people who have gifts that they're not interested in. [00:38:00] I know people who have wonderful voices who don't want to sing, people who write wonderfully if they sit down and write and don't want to write.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so on and so forth. So that's interesting, you know, to have—and most people, in fact, including myself—

[They laugh.]

—you know, I didn't know how to draw; I had no natural aptitude for representation or anything like that. And so that learning to do something that you would like to do is a challenge, and one many people, I'm not alone, take on the challenge of learning to do what they don't know how to do and have no gift for.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's interesting. So the Art Institute, you—this is probably, what? This is post-war. So this is pretty early on.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's, let's see, '47, '48, '49. Yeah, 1947.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And what do you remember of that? Whitney Halstead or Ray Yoshida?

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, Whitney and I were friends; I certainly remember Whitney.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Ray Yoshida was around then, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: What?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Ray Yoshida as well?

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh yeah, Ray was a friend.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I figured that.

THEODORE HALKIN: So—well but also the—when I started school the people who were there was Franz Schulze.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, of course.

THEODORE HALKIN: And Leon Golub and Cosmo Campoli, all of those people who were—Evelyn [Statsinger]—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, of course, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —was—and we were all friends. Yeah [laughs], I guess we were all friends.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You hung out and—

[They laugh.]

—actually, even, there's some political and cultural and other sort of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —things. And Leon was amazing to work with. [00:40:00] I did a retrospective of his work before he died at the Cultural Center, and he was just an amazing man. Not just an artist, but a man too real, and I don't say that about many artists because there are so many that have huge egos, and they are so difficult [laughs] to deal with; he was a pleasure. So this is the time of the—you got associated, I guess we'll skip a little bit ahead. I—go out on a little bit of a jump, too; jump shift. You got associated with what's called the Monster Roster, which is—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —you know how the Cosmo and Seymour Rosofsky who you didn't mention; you probably knew him as well. And, I guess, Leon was originally sort of identified with them too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, Franz wrote this book and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: —so I'm in the book with all the others.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. And actually I got a—I'm going to interview Franz in the near future, too, so I have to go back. I haven't looked at that book in a while. Now, interestingly enough, when I talk to—I think I told you this, I was talking to Rhona Hoffman she didn't know who the Monster Roster was; I just couldn't believe, how could you be in town? I think it was just a willful ignorance shall we say [laughs]. So at that point in time, that was a kind of point in time—I know that you're—I've looked at your work enough to know that one of your interests is in mythology and other cultures.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did that come about—

THEODORE HALKIN: But everybody went to the Field Museum. I mean, that was the great—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well that was this teaching—

THEODORE HALKIN: —one of the great—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —at the art—

THEODORE HALKIN: —resources for artists—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —at the time. Everybody went there.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, but it's particularly fueled by the fact that there were people like Whitney and Ray that were very interested in arts of other cultures, in junk—speaking of picking, going to Maxwell Street, looking at stuff, outsider art, you know, like Joseph Yoakum, all that stuff. So is that where—I know you must have traveled by way of your stint in the Army; is that where your interest in other cultures and mythology came about? Or did you have that first?

THEODORE HALKIN: [00:42:00] I had a, let's see, what would I call him? I guess he was the brother-in-law.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: And maybe you've heard of him; his name was David Grene.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That name sounds familiar.

THEODORE HALKIN: And he taught at the University of Chicago on the Committee on Social Thought.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Name sounds vaguely familiar, but tell me more.

THEODORE HALKIN: Anyway, so he was my wife's sister's husband. And so somewhere along—I—the date I don't know; it was after I was married, certainly, which was—and when was I married? Probably—

[They laugh.]

—sometime in the late '50s. I start—she and I, we moved to Hyde Park, and he was teaching night courses, and we used to go and sit in on his course at the U of C there; a marvelous teacher. And so he taught, you know, Greek, a lot about—to people—the class actually people read Greek [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE HALKIN: But he taught it in English.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's good because that would be pretty difficult [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: And so we read the plays in English and so on and so forth. So that was—but I was really interested in that, in mythology before that. And the thing about people's beliefs is the connection with ordinary dream work and fantasy, so that the distance between playful thoughts as a child that would, you know, I'll get big and strong, and I'll knock him down. [00:44:00]

[They laugh.]

And so on and so forth feeds directly into religious and mythic beliefs of all kinds.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so I was very interested in that and not in the particular—I was interested in the stories and in some way, the sort of personification of things felt—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Like primal kinds of things, you were talking about that.

THEODORE HALKIN: —and unseen, you know. I mean, I don't know whether you're superstitious at all.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well I get—I get tagged by my super rationalist techie friend as being, yeah, magical thinking. But [laughs]—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I guess I believe in unseen and things that are—that can't—not everything can be explained. I guess I'm with you on that part of the way.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I'm not—yeah, I've very, very unbelieving. I mean, the truth—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —is I'm not—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's organized—

THEODORE HALKIN: —I believed in nothing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I was going to ask you about, in terms of upbringing, I assume that you were sort of more culturally Jewish than like Orthodox or really—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh yeah, yeah. And—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —bagels and lox.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, right [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Well my father was—he said it's all hokum.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well that's the organized part of it. The spirituality part—I was going to ask you about spirituality because—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, I don't know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —I know by way of Michele [Feder-Nadoff] that that, you know, is a big interest of hers. I mean I think her father was a rabbi if I remember correctly. But yeah, I guess there's different kinds of interest. I did—the stories and the values are one thing; the practices and the—and you talked about women in terms of like the way they're treated, in both Arab and Jewish cultures, both the same, you know. There's a real distinctive disadvantage of being a woman in those cultures, more so with the Arabs obviously. But I—it's still—it's part of Jewish culture, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I—there—so there's values in—and there's values that I certainly respect a lot from my parents [00:46:00] and grandparents that are very high ethical standards of doing the right thing. But beyond the organized, the practices, and all the hokum pokum, yeah—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, they're sort of—did—how much time did you—I was never bar mitzvahed so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I did it just—I took the cash and ran. I was in—I was a Buddhist at the time.

THEODORE HALKIN: I see.

LANNY SILVERMAN: At least I thought I was [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, the thing is I just wouldn't go to school after school [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well I—

THEODORE HALKIN: And so my father—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I stopped immediately after that I—it was a bargain; it was a deal with the, not the devil, I suppose with whatever, with the social norms. And my parents, ironically, weren't very observant either. It's just, what will the neighbors say, was more important, you know, if you don't—

THEODORE HALKIN: I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —do it.

THEODORE HALKIN: I don't think my—that connection—

LANNY SILVERMAN: They didn't care [laughs]. Well you said they were fairly self-absorbed or not—self-observed.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, they had—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But they didn't have like a whole—

THEODORE HALKIN: —the family and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —near friends. But, you know, essentially not socially engaged. Well we lived in South Shore and South Shore had Jews in it well enough, but it was Catholic and Protestant as well. So that the—it was not a Jewish enclave like the west side.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Right.

THEODORE HALKIN: So the sense of belonging to a tribe—if you lived on the west side, you really said—had a sense of the tribe.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And in the Midwest you probably did need to group together because there weren't, I mean, this is the Midwest it isn't really very [laughs] populated with—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —Jewish—a lot like the east coast, which is where I came from, Philadelphia. So—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —you were asking me about whether I was superstitious, we may have lost that trend of thought. Where—you were talking about mythology; you were asking whether or not I was superstitious, where were you going with that? I'm curious.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I mean do you knock wood?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's right because I see you're knocking wood. No, I don't do that, but I have my own little universe of rituals and [laughs] things that we all do.

THEODORE HALKIN: [00:48:00] Yeah, I mean, essentially, you know, I knock wood; that's my big deal.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: I've noticed, yeah [laughs]. And actually—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, and that's just a family habit. I mean, everybody, my mother, my father—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's all—yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —they knocked wood, so I knock wood.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I wonder if—is that European, or is that American? I don't even know where that comes from.

THEODORE HALKIN: I have no idea.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I don't either. I don't even know that—there's certain things that, you know, you think maybe came way back from old country, but that seems like it's beyond a particular culture.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well I—yeah, I think that's sort of something—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah—

THEODORE HALKIN: —primitive about that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —have to look that up. You can Google now; that's the way—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, it's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —you can find out.

THEODORE HALKIN: —sort of primitive I think that is, knocking wood.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, wood has different significance—

THEODORE HALKIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —in different cultures though, too, I would think. So we—I guess we were talking about you got the love from the professor, from Grene, from the U of C professor. You—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well I mean I got—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But you already had it you said. You were—

THEODORE HALKIN: What's that?

LANNY SILVERMAN: You were already interested in other—

THEODORE HALKIN: I was always—I was, you know, you spend time at the Field Museum, you get—I actually worked at the Field Museum—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh cool.

THEODORE HALKIN: —at one point. And so, you know, the sense of—I don't know about you, but, you know, if I look at certain tribal things, for the time I'm with that object, I believe it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, so that—and even though I go away and presumably I don't believe it, that's not exactly true.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know where you're going, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So there's something about the power of things over one's system of belief; it's really interesting. It's really—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I've taught in museums, and I know I've worked with kids and I know how strong, like particularly the Egyptian rooms or the mummies, or other cultures [00:50:00] can really take a hold of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, yeah—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —someone with an imagination; it's amazing.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, I mean it—they sort of sense, and that's one of the powers of art is the art is—and that's why Conceptual art [laughs] doesn't interest me. There—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I—

THEODORE HALKIN: —aren't enough things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: An irony is—

THEODORE HALKIN: And the things that are there I'm not interested in—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and irony is—I would much rather have passion than belief.

THEODORE HALKIN: At any rate. And I think that, if you're an artist, then you take on that sense of power that things have as something that you might be able to cash in on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, some of the cultures you're talking about, too, there's a certain kind of animism. You mentioned India, but also Africa where objects have power, shamanic power. And that's something I believe in. That's where we get into the superstitious thing, and that's probably why I'm a curator is that I believe objects have power, and I think there are places for objects, just like a curator would think, and there are places of power, and there's relationships and energy that come out of objects that—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I think, you know, it doesn't have to be art objects. I mean—

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, not at all.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, things seem to rule people's lives.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, particularly in this culture, but that's something else again.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm not sure that they own, you know. It's impossible to believe in in a world where there aren't objects that people find important to them.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure. They connect to memories, to emotions.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I mean, you want to keep warm, you need a blanket. I mean, it's as simple—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's basically functional things, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Functional things, and those functional things take on meaning through use. [00:52:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure. And then I think you also adapt to things that you're very familiar with. I remember my blanket. I had names for parts of the blanket.

THEODORE HALKIN: [laughs] I never did that. Good for you.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I had my own little—that's what I said. I have my own little areas of rituals. I may not be knocking wood, but I used to call the little part where I used to rub my finger across it, the little sort of textured part, Gaggie [ph]. I called it the Gaggie. That's very alliterative. So I had my own—this was as a kid. That's one of the things I do remember as a child.

So objects, clearly functional objects clearly have power, and I did little installations too to ward off spirits. I had a sock monkey, and I put it in the corner. That's where the bad stuff would come.

THEODORE HALKIN: Bad stuff, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You got it. I had the sock monkey, and I think I had a Peter Pan doll. So there were—I had little art installations to ward off the creepy shit. So I mean, I obviously know what you're talking about. I think not just functionally, but in terms of emotional life, objects are very important to people.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, and then, you know, I think most artists feel that they make something that that thing has potential power, and that power belongs to them because they made it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Here's a question for you because that gets into something I was going to ask you later when we talk more about your work, but we're going in circles and I'm fine with that. I guess what I was going to ask you is, it's a really tricky question, especially these days as we're much more sensitive to other cultures and the way they look at things. You know, look at Obama having to tell Africans, you know, our culture doesn't approve of homophobia, et cetera. But there's so many cultural differences that we barely acknowledge, much less emphasize with. How do you feel about the issue of—some of your art tends to look like it could have been made by another culture, you know, the hieroglyphic—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, how nice.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Actually, that's a compliment in a way. The problem is—

THEODORE HALKIN: I said "how nice." [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that wasn't ironic. [00:54:00] The thing is, yeah, that's what you're hoping for maybe. Okay. Well, the question is, though, how do you do that without there—you know, there's that whole thing about appropriation and about sensitivity to other cultures. How do you feel about those issues when you take on something like—I'm thinking more specifically, I just saw your sculpture for the first time really, but I was thinking more of the, like, hieroglyphic kind of work, things that look like they could be symbols and signs from other cultures. How do you take that on and feel good about it and doing it in your own way without, I don't know, raiding another culture or feeling strange about that? Or do you have mixed feelings about that, I guess? This is more about your work, which we'll get to later, but I can't avoid it right now. It seems like a big question.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I don't—you know, I don't think that—I don't know how other people feel about appropriation. If you experience a series of material stuff in the world and you like it and you're interested in it and you feel that you turn it this way and that, that it becomes something you can transform into meaning that belongs to what you do, rather than its source.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you feel that part of the issue is transforming and making it your own?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I mean, it's just not—I mean, you know, what—would, you know, Braque and Picasso would commit suicide.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, they in a way more directly—I mean, they've been accused of this, particularly Picasso, more directly with the African stuff.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, that's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Because that was in a timeframe when colonial—

THEODORE HALKIN: The whole thing is—well, partially what Braque and Picasso did with the African stuff is that they let people see Africa and African things. [00:56:00] I mean, they—

LANNY SILVERMAN: They also gave them value.

THEODORE HALKIN: They did it a service.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, they gave it value where it may have been—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, anthropologically interesting, but artistically insignificant.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, yeah, that's one of the things that we're talking about because they were accused sort of a colonial—I mean, using it for their own purposes. But, again, it did educate. There were people that didn't believe the Benin Bronzes came from Africa because they were a more advanced bronze casting technique than had been in Europe, and knowing there's a certain kind of racism involved in that. So just exposing people is a, you know, an educational thing.

But there is a sensitivity to that whole issue of taking something from another culture and using it. And I guess that's kind of why I'm asking. But I guess you're feeling that it's expressed through you, and it's part of—it's about your self-expression. It's not so much like you're—

THEODORE HALKIN: It becomes part of what I know and what I like and what I feel, and that's what everybody does, whether it's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's no original idea. I mean, let's face it.

THEODORE HALKIN: I mean, if you pluck your eyebrows, where does that come from? You know, sort of, you can find antecedents there and so on and so forth.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure. Well, there isn't an original idea—

THEODORE HALKIN: The thing is that these are human expressions. They're not—they didn't descend—well, who knows. The gods may have had a hand in it. But at any rate, they were gifts to human beings, who gifted

other human beings. So what the hell? What's that all about?

LANNY SILVERMAN: When you look at younger people that try to show some of the connections between cultures, too, and you see some of the stuff becomes—you were talking about primal stories. Some of them become fairly universal. You see the same basic plot or the same kind of stuff in many cultures. Well, what cultures have particularly attracted you? I'm curious. I see a Mesoamerican kind of—and I also see some masks over there that reinforce that, [00:58:00] but I see some Mexican kind of, and that kind of stuff.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I kind of think the masks that I have that are from mostly Mexico. You know, they're folk art objects, and I'm interested in folk art whether it's Mexican, American. There is a little work there.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I love the—is that Indian above that?

THEODORE HALKIN: That's Indian. Just below it is—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's beautiful. What's that? I was kind of curious.

THEODORE HALKIN: —a naive artist.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Who's that? I like that too, very much.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, it's a wonderful piece. He lived across the street.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, very neat. I'll have to look at that later, because you can't really describe it for the tape. But that's for another matter. But I guess going back to Whitney Halstead and Ray Yoshida and the people, your cohorts there; one of the things about your education at the Art Institute was that it was, not unique, but special. Like you say, the Art Institute was right there and there was this incredible collection of art from other cultures, and there were people there that were very supportive and appreciative of other modes—there's a sort of snottiness in the art world about—there used to be, about art from Western civilization, but they were very open to—the people we're talking about were very open to outsider art, people like your neighbor, and things that—and street stuff. Do you think that influenced your art, too, in terms of your teaching, your education?

THEODORE HALKIN: Sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That made you more open to looking at that stuff?

THEODORE HALKIN: I mean, everything was available. There was nothing cut off. You know, you mentioned Whitney and Ray. They were friends. I saw them regularly. They were part of the environment. I met Whitney, who was working for [Kathleen] Blackshear when I entered school, and he would criticize, you know, that art history projects were not written papers. [01:00:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: They were more like critiques of your work?

THEODORE HALKIN: No, they were in the style of, in the manner of. So that you produced a series of whatever it was that you were studying, and so that the formal elements, the arrangement, proportions, placement, et cetera, et cetera, became part of what you were finding out about, rather than the art history, which was, you know, historical, rather than stylistic.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Analytical and more trying to put it in place in terms of context.

THEODORE HALKIN: Something less formal.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So do you remember the project—I mean the projects you did in the style of? I'm kind of curious.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I did lots of them. You know, I did lots of them. You know, usually something that the Institute had up and then you played a variation on that or you saw an illustration in a book or whatever. And so Whitney used to do the grading. And so that's when I met him, and I thought, "He knows things I don't know. Let's be friends." It's nice to know people who know things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's the way you grow, of course, people who know more than you; otherwise you're—

THEODORE HALKIN: So we became friends, and we stayed friends for a very long time until his death.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And did you get—when you were in school, did you have exhibitions? Did you start getting—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, did I have exhibitions?

LANNY SILVERMAN: This was pretty early on in your career.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, every now and then, I forget what it was, but, you know, there was a Chicago show at one time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, you know, I guess I was in my second year. I submitted something to the Chicago show and I got in. Ta! [01:02:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That was a big deal in town here. The only game in town.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, especially for me, my God. And so, you know, over the course of my education, you know, there's opportunity to show and stuff like that. And, you know, for somebody as ignorant in that as I was and probably am today, it was sort of wonderful to find acceptance.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So this was your first experience of what it meant to be a professional artist perhaps or like feeling like one?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did you think you could make a career out of it at that point?

THEODORE HALKIN: I didn't care.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You didn't care.

THEODORE HALKIN: I was just going to do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You were just going to do it. This is what I was saying about youth, the invincible nature of youth. You just knew that you were passionate about it, and you just moved forward.

THEODORE HALKIN: I was going to do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You were going to figure out the rest later.

THEODORE HALKIN: I was not going to not do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So I know that when I was talking with—I think it was Vera Klement, she was saying that they were so on the—what she was doing was so on the outside of what was normally done that they formed their own little group to try to get their own shows in public spaces and things like that. I forgot the name of them, but I'm sure it's on the record now. But did you have a sense of community with fellow—with Cosmo or Seymour or Leon or any of those people?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, we all hung out, and there was *Exhibition Momentum*.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, sure, that's a big one. I know about it.

THEODORE HALKIN: So then that's later on we were at that anti-Chicago show.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I wonder if that's what she was talking about. But anyways, yeah, go ahead.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, you know, that was a way of—that was interesting as it was the judging of—the admissions took place on Navy Pier. [01:04:00] The work was sent there. Mies van der Rohe was a judge. Who else? There were other very—if you really want information about all kinds of stuff and documentation talk to Tom Kapsalis.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I know Tom. Actually—

THEODORE HALKIN: Tom kept everything.

LANNY SILVERMAN: He kept everything.

THEODORE HALKIN: He has records.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting. We did a show at NAME Gallery of Tom, and that's how I met Tom. I see him on the bus or the El every now and then.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, Tom's an old friend. I see him.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and a really good artist, too. Unfortunately, another artist that didn't get that NAME Gallery show as partly because he wasn't getting much recognition. I was kind of trying to get him a show at the Cultural Center, too. That's why I talked to him last time I talked to him. I don't know. Does he show at Corbett vs. Dempsey [Gallery] or no?

THEODORE HALKIN: I don't know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I don't even know if he has a gallery. But anyways.

THEODORE HALKIN: But I see Tom, you know, fairly regularly.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'll say hello to him. And actually, he's a nice man.

THEODORE HALKIN: And he's really an old friend.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you had a sense of camaraderie with these people. Now, let's assume you graduate. Did you get a regular gig in the real world or did you—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, well, you know, by the time I graduated, there were only something like four galleries in the city.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And I connected with Frumkin, and so I had a commercial outlet.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you had some sales at that point? At least you were beginning—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah, there was hope.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There was hope. There was hope. You could stay alive with that.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm sorry he's dead. I'm really sorry. When you're young, you're such a son of a bitch.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you don't know. You don't have the knowledge.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, you don't know. I mean, the thing is that Frumkin was very decent, a little funny guy. [01:06:00] He was a funny, odd fellow. Did you ever know him at all or no?

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, not really.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, he was sort of—I don't know how to describe it. Carefully self-aware. So that he was composed. I mean, he was guarded. He was composed. He—so—but, you know, it was a really great thing to be in his gallery at the time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did you get critical response, too? Were there reviews?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, no, that was all very nice. And it's just that, you know, I never said to him, and I regret not saying to him at some time or another, you know, how much I appreciated his work.

LANNY SILVERMAN: People usually sense that; people usually sense that, but it is nice to say it. There are the things we wished we said.

THEODORE HALKIN: I am sorry I didn't say it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, sometimes, yeah, it's a whole other level.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, you know, then so that was a great—it was a great thing. It was a great thing because it gave me a sense of confidence that I didn't—I had no reason to have.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you don't realize—again, I was talking about the imperious—the certain—the way, when you're young, you think you can do it all. You don't realize how many artists there are and how few slots there are for artists.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you have an idea. I mean, one of the ideas after all. The number of artists in Chicago were not as many as today, but there were certainly many more than could be handled by four galleries.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, four galleries is not a lot of artists. [01:08:00]

THEODORE HALKIN: So if you knew if you had—did you know George Cohen?

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, I didn't.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, too bad. He was a—I'll tell you a little story. So I was a friend of Leon's when we were in school, and George—and Leon and George were friends. I think that they were friends—I guess Leon went to—was at the Art Institute before the war and so was George. They were both there before the army grabbed them up. And so when I became a friend of Leon's, well, then we—Leon and George would go painting out of doors, and George was living in Hyde Park because he was studying for a Ph.D. And Leon says, "Well, let's go painting with George." So that's how I met George.

We went and met him in Hyde Park. And he was living at about 57th Street. And so one Saturday, I guess it was, I guess we took the train down. I think Leon was already living in South Shore, too. So anyway, we took the train down to Hyde Park, and we knocked on—I knocked on the door, on George Cohen's door. And this incredibly beautiful woman answers this door. It turned out to be [01:10:00]—and she was, you know—in the morning, she was messed up, but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Still beautiful.

THEODORE HALKIN: Beautiful. And that was Connie [Cohen]; that was George's wife. And so we went out to paint on the Midway [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: I don't think of Leon as an outdoor painter. You know, a nature study kind of painter.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, we all try everything.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's interesting also. We're going to get to that too in terms of—yeah, I didn't think of that as your kind of work either in that kind of way, but apparently you tried a lot of things, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, yeah, I'll tell you what happened, but maybe we should hold off on it. Anyhow, so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So should I mark that for a later story? Is this the George Cohen story?

THEODORE HALKIN: No, this is—you know, we went out, and we painted on the Midway, and the both of them were very adept. And I [blows raspberry].

LANNY SILVERMAN: I was just curious about what you were saying about what's for later. Is this for off the record, or is this just—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, no. It's just personal. It concerns the development of the work, but I'll get to that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, we're going to talk about the work later. This is more just, you know, going out. I guess what I'm also curious about is, now that you have a sense of yourself as an artist and you've got a gallery that's representing you, do you have people or art that influenced you? Do you feel like there are things that you felt were really important to your development? Either colleagues or some of them are your friends.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you interviewed Evelyn.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And she was, you know, this really—I guess I met her when she was 19 years old. I wasn't much older, but I was 22 or 23 or something. And, you know, she's a really interesting woman. [01:12:00] She knew things I didn't know. She thought in a way that I thought was an interesting way to think, and so on. And so we became friends, and I think I learned a lot from Evelyn. And I enjoyed her.

LANNY SILVERMAN: She's another artist that has tried a lot of different techniques and styles and things, and I think that's admirable because that shows just what you talked about. It's a theme you've got about how you grow and learn and get stuff that's not just doing the same thing or being really good at one thing. There are artists that are great at doing that, but the ones that are, in a way, the most impressive are the ones that continue to grow. And it seems like Evelyn's one of those, fits into that.

THEODORE HALKIN: So that's—so then, you know, these are people that, you know, sort of were essential to my sense of what it was like to be an artist.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So that's also a personal model, what it's like to be an artist. How about art that influenced

you? Maybe that was like global—art that's like from art history.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I'll tell you, when I was really very young, and I was going to the museum by myself, and I don't know why, but, you know, they had—who was it? Chester Dale, was it?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure, Chester Dale. Someone else has brought him up. I can't remember who, but yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So they had the *Family of Saltimbanques* at the Institute before it moved off to Washington. And they had that and they had some Cubist pieces. I like the *Family of Saltimbanques*. I thought that was—break your heart.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, it was very strange. That painting is a very peculiar painting because it's nostalgia. It's, you know, about things you didn't know.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's strange to connect with, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, but I think everybody gets that. You know. And then there were Cubist paintings there, and I don't know why, but I really didn't understand them. I didn't know anything about them. I didn't know—I really liked the Cubist paintings.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You took to that naturally for some reason.

Well, we'll get to that when we talk about your work because there's an interesting—this comes up with Evelyn a lot. I didn't know whether or not to think of your work as landscape until I see something else more in front of me that seems much more directly landscape. But it almost seems like you create, just like Evelyn, sort of places and worlds that are not exactly symbolic and they're not exactly—it's a little bit like Bill Conger too. They're not exactly a landscape or urban-scapes, and they're not exactly mythology. They're somewhere in between.

And that's something we'll talk about I think more when we talk more about your work, but I'm getting more of a sense of it. But the Cubist work is a particular kind of language. It's a more pure kind of abstraction, although it does always refer to reality just about. It's hard not to.

THEODORE HALKIN: Now I think that—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think it's synthetic Cubism, anyways, yeah. You know. So that language just appealed to you naturally.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes. Yes. And, you know, one of the hardest—in a funny way, the abstraction of the Cubism isn't nearly as difficult, I think, for most people at some time or another, as somebody like Léger, [01:16:00] who presents them with these sorts of familiar/unfamiliar images that celebrate all the things that at one time were thought crass.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's a different kind of jump, different kind of leap.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, sort of now Pop art and the rest of that has sort of erased that distinction.

LANNY SILVERMAN: We're going to get to that, too. But that's changing, the theory of the high and low and the other cultures.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, but that distinction, which I think a frontier was broken by Léger very early to get involved with the sort of direct use of—well, maybe it's not any earlier than the collages, but of commercial images and colors and so on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Using the real world. Well, the Cubists did that too when they started to bring newspapers and things into the—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, and with the collage.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, the collage. That was what you were saying.

THEODORE HALKIN: And that's when the whole kind of—you know, that's how color enters into Cubism and so on is through collage. I should warn you.

LANNY SILVERMAN: What's that?

THEODORE HALKIN: I taught art history for a very long time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's okay. That's something that I'm passionate about, too. And actually I became a curator because really I could have gone the art history route and done it that way. There weren't programs in museum studies or curatorial programs, but I enjoyed art history quite a bit, too. And I also studied art from many cultures, too. I studied Indian art and Asian Art at the Cleveland Museum with Sherman Lee and some of his cohorts. So I have some similar overlap with you. You won't bore the hell out of me ever. Maybe future people listening to this, but not me. I can't overdose enough on that.

THEODORE HALKIN: But at any rate, you know, the sort of, the sense that [01:18:00], that the people around me and their sophistication was illuminating. I mean, coming from my background and my experience, it was just all—it was like I came in as a clean sheet of paper, and I got some dirt on me from different people.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You were open to it. I think that's the thing you've really made clear. You were looking to learn and to grow and to see what's out there.

THEODORE HALKIN: I wanted to know what other people knew.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and I guess what I'm curious about is what directions—that's why I was sort of asking about, like, influences or which cultures; what things caught your eye or what things—you know, I have certain areas, like as a kid, when I was bored by western culture I went to Asia for music and art because I found that to be so much the opposite. I'm wondering what things got your attention and got you interested.

THEODORE HALKIN: So here I am. I'm maybe, I guess, about 13. So I'm going down to the museum, cutting school, and going down to the museum. And the museum at that time, they still had fabric wall covering.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, wow. That was before I was here. I don't remember that, so that's before I came 20 some years, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So if you went into the Medieval and the Renaissance galleries—what is the—so there was—it was, you know, it was very—and I always felt in those places like I had not enough air.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah, claustrophobic is a certain—[01:20:00]

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, it wasn't just claustrophobe. It was like I didn't know how to breathe in there. I didn't—I don't know how to express it, but it wasn't just that I felt cut off and trapped. I felt that I didn't have the information that would let me breathe with any comfort because there were all these images, and some realistic and less realistic, and I didn't know anything about Christianity. And, you know, I'm 12, 13 years old, what do I know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, medieval stuff is also pretty heavy in terms of atmosphere and weirdness. It's kind of dark.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I really—I was fascinated by the Spanish, I guess diptych, triptych? Was up. It's still up. And, you know, this mysterious world, oppressive, frightening. And so then I would go in there, and I would not stay a long time because I didn't understand it, and it was scary. And it was about, you know, something impossible.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I think it's very hard to, I mean, I listened to a lot of medieval music and its way of expressing emotion musically is so different a language that it's hard to even get into that, to empathize and feel what it was like. I think the world was very, speaking of the Depression, take that and even make it—we're talking about bubonic plagues and things that are much heavier, and inquisitions. It's a very heavy period to get into. I think that would intimidate a lot of kids if not—

THEODORE HALKIN: So that the things that are—I don't remember it clearly. I liked all kinds of things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you looked at a lot of stuff from a lot of—

THEODORE HALKIN: I looked at a lot of stuff.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —from a lot of cultures and a lot of kinds of art history.

THEODORE HALKIN: [01:22:00] So—but one of the things I must say is that I felt that a lot of things that I looked at and shouldn't have known anything about, I felt I understood them. I felt that somehow they really weren't mysterious. And I was very surprised later to find out what I had thought about things out of ignorance was on the mark.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you felt a connection with them somehow.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And I thought about them in a way that was right and that, you know—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So objects can communicate something beyond the language and all the intellectualizations.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah, it was just something about sort of the sense of them and what they were involved with. I liked Picasso always. Who could not like Picasso? I tell you who I couldn't quite get a handle on: Rembrandt. I didn't know what to do with Rembrandt.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's interesting.

THEODORE HALKIN: Partially I think that that's—Rembrandt makes grown up art.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No kidding. It's pretty much an adult—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I mean, you know, it's really—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Not as much play as many other artists.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, it's really grown up art.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, think about the times, though, and why he was making the art. It was probably wasn't for the same reasons that—you know, Picasso's in a whole different—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, but I mean he's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —intellect.

THEODORE HALKIN: Picasso's playful.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Definitely.

THEODORE HALKIN: Picasso is arbitrary. Picasso lives out of his senses and out of a sense of permission. He gives himself permission. But Rembrandt, he's—that's grown-up art.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Definitely grown up art.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's grown up. [01:24:00] So, you know, I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But I can't think of—I'm going back in art history, I like Fra Angelico and other earlier art, things that are even earlier than that, but I can't think of—those are times when I don't think people were playful. I don't think that was art's function was, to play.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, yes they were. Their whole—you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You know, I mean, way, way back. But I mean—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, no. Renaissance is full of hunt scenes, *Cupid and Psyche*, *the Birth of Venus*. What are you talking about?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Okay. So that's a sense of play, but in term—I'm thinking more stylistically, but I guess in terms of content, yes, there are things that are probably flirtatious or sensuous or things that are probably—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I mean, who knows. *The Birth of Venus* is absolutely playful expression of a desire for the possibility. It's not real, and it's a legend brought into practice, and there's this naked lady who looks good. So there, you know—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I was speaking more in terms—

THEODORE HALKIN: Botticelli, he's full of it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, I guess, but there's a huge gap between that and between being able to just sort of fool around. The art was to tell stories. It was to make a facsimile of an emperor or a king.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, we don't know. I mean, for instance, you know, there's the whole business of somebody like van Dyck building parade floats. What do they look like? We don't know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or da Vinci, even going back further, he did some wacky shit, you know, figure out what's going on there.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, what is—so we don't know the full range of what it was. And also they designed costumes, and actually clothing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, there's a whole sense that as artists they were involved in other things. Da Vinci is a perfect example of distinction [01:26:00] in which artists could move in their territories besides the making of images.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Definitely. As a matter of fact, there's a lot of things that would be very contemporary in terms of performance or technology, any of that stuff is a very different—

THEODORE HALKIN: So we don't know, and so that—all kinds of—even, you know, Michelangelo, who's about as serious as you get, you know, he hangs his face, you know, this sort of, you know. So there's a sense that the imagination is really, after all, a play with possibilities. It is not a play with facts.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I guess it was a much more prescribed language is what I'm getting at. If you lived in a particular—that's where I'm going with that. If you lived in a particular culture, you were either telling a story—it depends where and when, and we're going over very broad art history here. But, you know, you're doing a portrait for the king, you'd get in trouble if you're, you know, you're a little bit like Goya, if you start to do stuff that's a little too edgy. You have certain prescriptions by who you're selling it to and what it's for, your patrons.

THEODORE HALKIN: No, but you're going to see artists make the standard. They don't just come into a standard.

LANNY SILVERMAN: They also can—

THEODORE HALKIN: They make it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: They can push the boundaries, yes.

THEODORE HALKIN: And they change what the standard is.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure. That's why I'm talking about Goya. I think you're right, and they're people like Bosch. Where does that come from? I mean, what the hell's that about? I mean, there's certain kinds of Flemish painting that that comes out of, but then all a sudden there's this wild phantasmagoria.

Yeah, pushing edges is definitely what artists—that's playful in a weird, psychedelic kind of way. There are definitely histories of artists that—there's a huge history of artists playing, but I think the boundaries were much tighter before the 20th century, [01:28:00] and I think that's—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I think the sense that the customers were also much more restricted.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I was getting at.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, sort of, who in the hell was going to get involved with it? So that if you get into Holland, and you get into the sort of the Dutch century, then you have, you know, *Smiling Cavalier*. It's fantastic.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I don't know. Let's see where we're at in terms of time. I think probably—we have a little more time. I wanted to do a little bit more before—I wanted to use the second session to get together and talk more about your art and your studio process, and maybe a little bit about how you work in the studio.

I guess going back—I guess my circling back in the wagon thing was, sort of, ask about—you were getting exhibitions at Frumkin [Gallery]. Did you have, like, was Alan Artner back then? Who were the critics? Dennis [Adrian] was probably writing. Did you get critical response when you were—

THEODORE HALKIN: Gee, I don't remember.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did you have—you had an audience. Obviously, people were buying occasionally.

THEODORE HALKIN: Occasionally they would buy, and I guess somebody like—I just don't remember. I'll tell you honestly, it isn't that I wasn't ambitious because I certainly was, but—I don't—I never really read about reviews or anything like that because I didn't want that. I didn't want that to be part of my consciousness.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You wanted to do your work independent of that.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, I didn't want to sort of think about something—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It wasn't to please people. You weren't looking for love and attention. Everyone is.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, sure I was, but, [01:30:00] you know, if you read a lot of things people say and write about you and so on, then it—somebody says, "Well, he should take a bath more often," you start taking a bath more often.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. You can get caught up in that.

THEODORE HALKIN: So it was that sort of thing. You know, the whole sense that there's an important intrusion because it's concerned beyond the personal. And so I have never paid much attention to any of that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's probably—I was telling you that about my wife when we were talking on the phone, that she's just given up on the art world and decided to just make the art because she needs to make it, and, you know, if you start to get involved with market issues or what the gallery wants and all this other stuff, it becomes something else entirely.

There are a lot of kids these days—we'll talk about that more probably, about changing art world—but there are a lot of kids who are more concerned about the attention and the spotlight than they are about the sincerity or the passion in the art.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I think that—well, you know, we have evolved into a personality culture.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, fame is a big thing, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, I mean, that's that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And in a sense we have this facility, the internet, that permits certain individuals who are interested to make their physical presence known to other people. Wild, crazy!

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's insane. The amount of time and energy. I don't even do it.

THEODORE HALKIN: So this is—and when you have a sense that, in fact, [01:32:00] with the internet, there are all kinds of intimacies that are simply expected.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, it's a different kind of intimacy. I'm not sure it's real intimacy. Not the kind that you or I think of.

THEODORE HALKIN: Wait, I'm not sure. You and I have been talking for an hour or so.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: We know something about one another.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Not a hell of a lot.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, but we're getting there.

THEODORE HALKIN: But something about one another. But in a sense, we don't want to know what they want other people to know on the internet.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's not the same information.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, it isn't.

THEODORE HALKIN: So what is that information? That information is like movie star information.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. And you talked about—earlier on, you were talking about how your older self views your younger self. Well, the information that they have is a certain kind of fiction, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Absolutely.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's made up. It's for the internet. It's not reality.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's movie star information.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's movie star information. It's not any realer than—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, no. But I mean the thing is—and in a sense that's their physical intimacy, that is a disrobing and showing off their physical assets, whatever they may be. So then you have—that's not a world I know anything about. I don't use a computer.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I'm somewhere in between, but I find it equally frightening. I don't own a cell phone. That's kind of pretty amazing because my wife has one. And I do use computers, but I have to say I have quite a bit of hesitation because I think it changes the way you communicate. Not just the kind of information like you're getting at, but also even just verbal facility. [01:34:00] Texting and emailing, people no longer are literate. Yeah, it's just all—there's no nuance.

It's all—I guess you could look at, you know, you look at Basho or haiku, you look at people who condense literature intentionally, but there's an incredible force and incredible amount of knowledge that's condensed into one thing. Here it's just fast and speed. It's about how fast can you communicate. And there's a certain, I suppose, beauty to that, but I can't get into that.

THEODORE HALKIN: The image of condensed milk is the image of condensed—I don't know. So in my childhood there were cans of condensed milk.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I remember those. Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So when somebody says "condensed," I think they put it in a can. Whatever it is will fit into a certain amount of space.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I mean, it's a little hard—I mean, we're biased because we come out of a rich environment where it's not just intellectual curiosity but it's about expression and the ability to express yourself. I mean, could a Proust exist today? You know, there's novels now. People are writing things in like shorthand. There's people doing things that are using text—the conventions are—they're not even—they're not just condensed, they're also, like, code. There's, you know, code for ways to talk about things. But it's not getting more expansive and expressive. It's getting less and less. It's down to emoticons, you know, little pictures of little smiley faces. That's where we're going with expression. I have great fears for the potentials of—I mean, I think it even affects art. I think a lot of art is affected. We'll talk about art and technology, too. I gather we'll have an interesting conversation there, too.

I just wanted to wrap up with a couple things, I guess. So you were in *Momentum*, and you were in the Chicago show [01:36:00] and you had a gallery, so you were doing pretty well, at least in terms of, you know—but you weren't—you're not—I didn't know about you then until I heard about you from Michelle. I guess my question is you don't—and you're probably in Franz's book, which I haven't seen in a long time, *Fantastic Images*. I guess you're not in the mainstream. You weren't associated with the imagists, even though you knew a number of them, I'm sure. They're a slightly different generation. A little younger. You know, like Carl and—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, I knew them well.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You knew them and all that, but you don't tend to be in the Chicago, oh, I don't know—

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm not—you know, you look through this. You see I'm suspect.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You're not stylistically—

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm suspect.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You have different styles [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: I know I'm suspect. And because I'm suspect, every now and then some asshole, not knowing who they're talking to, says something that makes it clear that the world wants a consistent brand name, and I did not provide that. And if you don't provide it, you can be Picasso and not provide it, but you can't be me and not provide it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure, and actually—

THEODORE HALKIN: And so this is the—not for a minute do I regret not having a brand name.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's great. No, that's good. You're comfortable in your skin, and that's great because, I mean, if you're doing it for the other reasons, as I was saying on the phone with you, then you're in the wrong business.

THEODORE HALKIN: Listen, I know people who just work when they're going to have a show.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. That's a whole different way of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. This is—otherwise, it's golf.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and that's a whole different mentality. No, we're old school. I think the people that are involved in art in our lives are people that are passionate about it and do it because they have to do it, not because it's—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, not have to. Nobody has to.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Not has to, but at the same time it's—

THEODORE HALKIN: [01:38:00] Well, let me just say another thing about have to. Nobody asked me to do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. This is something that you felt strongly about, but, yeah. From an early age. So you clearly had a sense of direction.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, and I think it's really important for artists to say that to themselves every time they feel used and abused, is they should remind themselves that nobody asked them to do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and just the fact that you've made a space to be able to do it, this is what I tell my wife and some other friends who whine—in the art world, that is—and say, well, you have the resources and the time and the space and the physical ability to make it and do it. What's the problem?

THEODORE HALKIN: Lucky, lucky, lucky.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and I feel the same way. I mean, how many [cross talk]—

THEODORE HALKIN: But, you know, I understand also the sort of discomfort, unhappiness, the sense of being used and abused, and all the rest of that shtick.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, we had that conversation on the phone, and the gatekeepers—that's what I was getting it. You're not in the standard history of Chicago, but part of that is because, again, you don't have one signature style, and also even if you pick any one of those styles of yours, and they don't exactly fit into anything, either. They're sort of in between, and that's kind of wonderful, but it doesn't make for an easy historian or, you know, art historian as you've taught. They like periods and things to be neatly mapped out.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes, I know, I know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And so you don't fit into that. And more power to you.

THEODORE HALKIN: Partially that's—circumstances of life take you to places you don't expect to go. So, I mean, that, you know, there—if you're living a complicated life, there's no reason that the work [01:40:00] shouldn't be full of complications, too.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, it should express something of who you are, and that's what you're saying is that's you. You're always looking for something new. I was really impressed early on when you were saying that you're still hoping for transformation and growing and new things, and that's why your work evolves, and that doesn't make for an easy career to fit into slots, but—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, that isn't why I was doing it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, but it worked out well for you. You managed to still be doing it, and you're still making it, and we'll talk more about the actual art, I think, more next time because I wanted to sort of, you know, section that off a little bit more. And I think that—is there other stuff on these topics, I guess, that we've talked about that you feel like you want to cover?

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm happy if you're happy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yean, I am, too. And actually, I think I'll stop.

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LANNY SILVERMAN: Okay. I guess we're going to start back where we—where we sort of left off—

THEODORE HALKIN: Okay. I taught a—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —which was about—talking about teaching, and your philosophy of teaching and that stuff.

THEODORE HALKIN: I taught at the Art Institute for 50 years. I really liked it. I had a wonderful time. And I think I was a pretty good teacher. They thought I was a pretty good teacher too.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: I still see many former students who are full of remarks about how glad they were to have me as a teacher, stuff like that, which is lovely, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I was going to ask you a little bit about Michele because that's how our—six degrees of separation—that's how I knew about you the most.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But, in terms of your teaching, did you teach studio classes? Or did you teach art history?

THEODORE HALKIN: I taught—I came in and I started by teaching art history.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Because you mentioned that before. Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I am not an art historian. I was one lesson ahead of the class.

[They laugh.]

Okay? But, before I came—I worked in the school; I worked in the museum. I was a docent—adult docent for the museum. And I did that for a couple of years. And that was—you know. I got the job because I was teaching for—did you know George Cohen?

LANNY SILVERMAN: We—you mentioned him the last time. So, I was going to follow up on one of those stories. But, now I didn't.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, George was away on leave, and I had picked up his class. I was unemployed. And he—I picked up his class at Northwestern. [00:02:00] And when—what in the hell's the guy's name who hired me—to give a lecture at the museum. It was a gallery talk.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, I thought, "Oh, money."

[They laugh.]

I was—I had two children.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, I said, "Yes. Of course." And so, I did that. And that seemed to—he seemed to think that was pretty good, so that when I—George came back to teach at Northwestern, then he hired me, too, as the adult docent there. A new director—I was just there for a couple years. A new director came into the museum, and I was not his cup of tea.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's the politics we were talking about. Yes.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And so, I had to go find something else to do. And what happened was I went to—I got a job at the Field Museum. And I was the—I worked for the anthropology department. At the time, each part—each department had its own installation artist.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

THEODORE HALKIN: And I was the installation artist for—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, neat.

THEODORE HALKIN: —the anthropology department.

LANNY SILVERMAN: They have some wonderful dioramas there, too—old school.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. But those dioramas, I think—I don't know how many of them are left. I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think they're trying to change over to modernize.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, it isn't that, so much. I think that, for instance, there's the very famous one of the morning star ceremony in which there is a sacrifice of an Indian girl. And that became offensive.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There—yeah. [00:04:00] There are political correct issues there [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So, there's lots of that going—

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's a lot of issues like that, now that I think about it.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, no. What I did there at the Field Museum is I worked for the curator of Chinese art. And so, part of the installation of the Chinese and Tibetan art, that's still there, I guess—I have trouble going back to places where I've worked.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know that feeling.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, I installed the Tibetan exhibition and a good deal of the Chinese. And, working at the Field Museum was really—I ran a coffee clutch for the curators. It was very relaxed. The guy who was supposed to be curating the Tibetan and Chinese was interested in research and not willing to give very much time to the collection and installation.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I was—when I was telling you about the Indonesian things, I was saying the same thing.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. They're interested in their careers and not necessarily—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right. Absolutely.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —maintaining that.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, they hired—a wonderful Tibetan woman came in from—you know, it was about the time when the—when Tibet was being taken over by the Chinese. And so, she came by, and we went—and I did a lot of reading. And so, she straightened out my assumptions.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Because it's a pretty esoteric culture.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And a lot of the romanticizing, particularly in the '60s and '70s of—the romanticizing of Indian and Tibetan cultures, and you know, from the west.

THEODORE HALKIN: Anyway, so that got done.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, that's—so—[00:06:00] and, while I was working there, they gave me time off to teach at the University of Chicago, downtown center, an art appreciation class. So, I did that. And—for a while. What exactly happened at that—oh, there was a moment which—I guess—I guess I got—I got an offer to come to the Art Institute. And I head up the art history department.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's great, especially since, as you say, you're not technically—

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm not an art historian.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —technically not an art historian. And they tend to be pretty—yes.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, Whitney Halstead was an old friend of mine. And he was—I'm not sure what his role was. But, anyway. He was empowered [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: He had the ability to help you out in terms of—yes.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So, I took the job as a—in art history. Somehow, when I was teaching art history, heading up the department—I don't know how it happened, but it happened that somehow or another I got a double appointment, both in the painting department, and teaching art history. And so, the painting department took over. And, fortunately, I wiped the sweat off my brow.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, art history is tough to keep—like you say, to keep ahead of the students.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Because these days they can read everything and—

THEODORE HALKIN: But, anyway, it—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: But—so then I taught in the—[00:08:00] in the school for a long time. And, you know, I became a chaired professor, and all kinds of—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's great. It's a little like me. Went from—you managed—without a whole lot of credentials, you managed to just work your way up the—to a reasonable place.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's always, you know.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know. So, that—and I had really wonderful time teaching there. It was really great.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You probably learned from the students, as well, as you were saying.

THEODORE HALKIN: Of course. You always do.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's one of things that's exciting about teaching.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, you know, it was just—it was a wonderful teaching experience and life experience. And it constituted a significant part of what I—I mean, for instance, part of the work that I do—did when I was teaching was to realize I couldn't do with—I should not do what they're doing.

[They laugh.]

Because what they were doing was right out of the most current magazine. And so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. They look at the art forums and they want to be like Mike. They want to do this—whatever they see, then—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right. And that's a good way to start. I mean, that's perfectly legitimate.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Everybody has to start somewhere. And so, that's—I just didn't do that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. That's important because you had already developed a voice, even if it varied. As you say, you went from thing to thing. But, nonetheless, you had something to say that was—you were more developed as an—as a—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So—and until that—essentially that's pretty well my career move.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's your teaching career. Well, just out of curiosity, before we move on, which I think—to

the main topic, I was also going to ask you—we talked a lot about art. I know some artists are very, you know, focused on just art. And I know you were friends with Leon. Were you involved in politics? Were you involved—are you interested in other arts, other—

THEODORE HALKIN: Marginal. My wife was—I met her in art school. [00:10:00] So, she was an artist. But we got married, and she just gave it up, making things. And she said as a half joke, "Oh, well, I caught a husband. I don't need to have any"—

[They laugh.]

—and so, anyway. But she was a very interesting, much smarter than I am, woman.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, there's different kinds of smart, Ted. We know this.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, she was really smart.

[They laugh.]

And extraordinary in many ways. And we'll talk more about that when we get to the work.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. I wasn't going to push that, but I'm kind of curious because I—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. When we get to the work I'll—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —I'll tell you more.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But she was more political? Is that where you were headed?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, she was more active.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Active in politics.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so she would go marching and so on, drag the kids along.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yes. Because you, like me, lived through the '60s, a time of, you know, rebellion, and of excitement, as opposed to the repressive '50s. So, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So, she would drag the kids along and march in a protest of some sort. So, anyway, it was a good marriage [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: And did you have other interests, other than art, apart from, you know—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, making a living [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Making a living. Yeah. Well, that's kind of important, especially with a family.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, essentially, I always did a lot of reading. And, at different times there were opportunities to—I think I told you about my brother in law.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: And so I was taking classes at the U of C, talking to people. You know, just generally sort of—pretty much sort of self-directing a kind of education that I didn't have. [00:12:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, yeah. This is an interesting theme. So, if you had a fantasy career other than art—do you have—

THEODORE HALKIN: Fan dancing.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's a hilarious answer. I thought you were going to say something like anthropologist because you've mentioned anthropology a fair amount.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I mean, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. But you're playing with me. But—

THEODORE HALKIN: My interests were broad. And—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. And I kind of got that. That's why I thought—when I went back and listened to this—when I was, you know, looking for transcription help, I was thinking, "Well, we're talking only about art." And I know you're a very curious person. So, you must have other interests. But, since I didn't know you, I didn't know which to ask. Are you interested in music? I had a feeling—

THEODORE HALKIN: I listen to a lot of music.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I had a feeling that's the case.

THEODORE HALKIN: But I don't—I don't—you know, it's not—it's not a passion in my life.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Right.

THEODORE HALKIN: I do a lot of reading, but I'm not sure what that means.

[They laugh.]

I subscribe to the *New York Review of Books*. And I always feel so smart for the 20 minutes that I read it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [laughs] I, a long time ago used to, and now I just read the *New Yorker*. But, I used to like the *New York Review of Books*. And, actually, I've thought about—I have time now to read the things—see, I used to only be able to read art stuff. Now, I can read the other stuff. And I'm starting to get back into that more. But, then, now—

THEODORE HALKIN: But, you know, you feel smart for 20 minutes.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: But, you know, since you're probably going from article to article, and I don't read the whole thing at once. I have a great pile of them upstairs—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know the pile [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: —to get to. And they come in very handy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And I read along the way. And you feel very smart. You feel very informed. And you're really totally ignorant because they're gone. All of that goes away very quickly because it's serial reading. You know, it's this and this and this and this. And so—and I do a lot of other reading, novels, short stories. I like all that stuff. Again—[00:14:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Who knows what it's—where it's going? Well, I'm just curious because I figured you had an intellectual curiosity that was much broader than art, but we didn't talk about that. You may have mentioned a little literature. But—and a little bit about music. But, I figured, yeah. You're definitely interested in the world.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I'm interested in the world. But I'm not a great participant in it [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Are you disengaging? I'm finding myself disengaging a bit more, maybe happily.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, how long have you been retired?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Two or three years. So—

THEODORE HALKIN: I see. Well, I stopped—let's see. I—85, 90—15 years ago I retired.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That's a while back.

THEODORE HALKIN: 85, 90.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: 91—I guess it's not that long. [Halkin's age at the time of the interview. -TH/SH]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, in any case—

THEODORE HALKIN: That's six years ago. [Halkin retired at age 85. -TH/SH]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —that's a while back.

THEODORE HALKIN: Anyway—and I find—you know, when you were talking about, you know, every day is like every other day.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: I think it's—that's true. And, in a way, it's both horrifying and a great pleasure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I'm with you. Like, on the fact of just being in the—and my wife is, "What'd you do today?" I don't know. I just—how do you account for it? I just—I'm doing the stuff that I do.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, the combination, you know, the realizing that, you know, the time is going by, and you haven't even done—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you could get—you could get very goal directed and feel like, "Well, why am I not doing all these projects I said I was going to do?" But, on the other hand, just—I loved what you said in the first interview about just being mindfully just present in the moment and grateful for the experiences, and the things you're doing. That, to me, is very important because when you're in the ambition wheel, when you're in that sort of circuit, you don't have time to really appreciate what it is you're doing. And you're sort of like in a different frenzy.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I—you know, I consider myself extremely lucky. I mean, you know, my parents were Russian, Jewish immigrants. [00:16:00] And I grew up in a time where, at one point there was no Jews on the board of the Art Institute.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I was alluding to. Yes.

THEODORE HALKIN: And there were no Jews on the faculty.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: But, then that changed very gradually. I was one of the first—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Egon Weiner was the other Jew.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, as I said, Rhona had a counter-story, which was more nuanced. And, indeed, some of the people at the Art Institute—it wasn't quite as black and white as maybe the stories I've heard. But, still, the fact that there's Midwestern antisemitism has to play into it, because I mean—

THEODORE HALKIN: What's Rhona Hoffman's origin?

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's a good question. I'm not sure. I don't know if she's German. I—it seems like—

THEODORE HALKIN: German.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I bet she's German.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'll bet you—I'll bet you—

LANNY SILVERMAN: We're both guessing German.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'll bet you—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm guessing German, just from the name. But I don't know. But there's something about that that sort of—the fact that she was being so coy with that. Now, admittedly, she helped form the board with Helen Goldenberg of the MCA. So, she has a hand—she has an alternate fiction that she would like to create. But, I know for a fact—I came to the Midwest—you know, when I was in Madison there weren't—there weren't any black people, much less Jewish [laughs]. They weren't very—until the boatload came from Cuba. This is in the early '80s. But I know what it's like to be amongst all blonde haired, blue eyed. And I know what that feels like. And she's just sort of ignoring her history. I don't know what that means, but [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: I think that she's chosen to have a very select role.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. And I appreciate that she's looking at it from a perspective that's more nuanced. But she acts as if it didn't happen that way. And, I'm sorry. You—there's just too many people have told me these stories.

THEODORE HALKIN: I mean—I mean, you know. People are allowed to make their own fictions.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm going to make mine.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [laughs] Well, you know, that's what gets interesting is the interaction between them all. Well, I guess we've pretty much covered what I wanted to—now we can get into—let's talk about the art. I know that's what you're—

THEODORE HALKIN: All right. [00:18:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —oops—what you're hoping to do. And—

THEODORE HALKIN: All right. And let me start from the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Let me come around here.

THEODORE HALKIN: —beginning of the catalogue, which is, essentially— [The catalogue is *Theodore Halkin: a retrospective* from an exhibition organized by The Illinois State Museum in 1999. The authors were Theodore Halkin and Robert Sill, with contributions by Michele Feder-Nadoff, Edward M. Maldondo, Franz Schulze, and Dennis Adrian. -TH]

LANNY SILVERMAN: This is chronological?

THEODORE HALKIN: —chronological.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that'll make everyone happy [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, so the—

[Much of the conversation from this point on refers to works included in the aforementioned catalogue. Halkin and Silverman look through the catalogue as they speak about the works. -TH/SH]

THEODORE HALKIN: So, essentially, the first paintings in the catalogue are ones I made when in Paris after I finished school. And that's 1950.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, this is pretty early on. This reminds me a tiny bit of, like the cave paintings, perhaps, at Lascaux.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I went to—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You visited them I imagine.

THEODORE HALKIN: I visited the caves.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I read somewhere on—that's why this caught my eye, because I'm thinking—yeah. Corbett—John Corbett mentioned something about the—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you visited the—Lascaux?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Lascaux. And we were—I went with a friend who—do you know Cosmo Campoli?

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. He was probably dead by the time I got here. But, I certainly know about him, of course—

THEODORE HALKIN: I see. Well, Cosmo and his wife were in Paris. And they took off for Majorca after a while. But, for a while, they stayed—lived—just stayed in Paris. And we went to the caves together. And the curator of the caves took us through with a little light.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's very neat. I don't know if they'd closed them off yet, but I guess they get oxidized.

THEODORE HALKIN: No. They hadn't closed them off. And, in fact, he took us down into the little hole where the bird-headed man on the bison was. And it was already being subjected to moisture.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. It's sad.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, it would glisten.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh. Yeah. Well, the stuff is really fragile.

THEODORE HALKIN: But, anyway. So, it was an extraordinary experience. It was just absolutely mind blowing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You didn't see the Werner Herzog movie about the cave?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes, I did. [00:20:00] I thought it was not sufficient.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's funny that you say that, because I was a little disappointed. It got a lot of—I like Werner Herzog a lot, but it wasn't—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, he's a wonderful movie maker, but he—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. But he—it wasn't quite as excited as I expected. I saw it in 3-D, too. Did you see it in 3-D? I don't know if it's worth doing that either.

THEODORE HALKIN: No. I don't—you know, he did not really do justice by those things. And it may be the limitations of where they let him go in the cave.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That could have a lot to do with it. As a matter of fact, that's just what we're talking about. Because this was a different place, but it was a place that probably is not open to the public. And then, what parts are? Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, you know, that may not—but I thought I could barely see what in the hell was there.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's some of the excitement. When you're in some of these places—like I'm thinking of like in Asia when you—you know, like Angkor Wat, or something like that. The context is really important.

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: To see a sculpture coming out of rotting jungle is very different than seeing a picture of it, which can be very romanticized, too. But, something about that is very different—or being in the—inside a cave where you can barely see, and you get these dank experiences. Very different.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So, these are partially a result of—well, not only that, but the idea that I was on a voyage, that I was moving through an experience. And I think that's reflected in the work.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And it's got a sense of the space—the flattened-out space, and sort of a narrative story telling—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —which is what you've picked up on. But, you're saying it's now a different kind of journey. It's more—it's not about their content. Although, I see animals in some of your things that might be similar.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, yeah. There's lots of—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Very interesting. And the palette is very different than your later work.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's a very browned-out, earthen hue.

THEODORE HALKIN: And it's—texturally, it's rather thick.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I guess this is why you might have been part of the Monster Roster by way of the Franz Schulze book. Because it relates a little to, like, I know Leon's early work, which was more based in Greek

mythology. But it also has a similar feel in terms of, I don't know, [00:22:00] spiritual, mythological journeys.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I think this—you know, that's right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That's—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, that even, you know, in this case bicyclists are—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, yeah. That's not even—

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm not exactly going nowhere. They're going somewhere. But, where they're going is not clear.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you like ambiguity.

THEODORE HALKIN: I guess [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Who doesn't? I mean, that's sort of—other than Republicans or something.

THEODORE HALKIN: All right. This is after—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, here we come another body—

THEODORE HALKIN: —I've returned from Europe by this time. And this really represents, I think—were you old enough to be awake and alive to the world around you in the '30s?

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. I was—I was born in '47. So, I'd be post-war boomer.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Anyway, in the '30s, when I remember my childhood—I was born in 1924. So, by the time I was 8 or so I was aware of the world around me. And the Depression was on. And one of things about the things around me in the '30s was a sense of—for instance, every neighborhood had a carnival come to town, set up in an empty lot.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And they would have many of the same things—did you ever go to Riverview?

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. But we had Willow Grove in Philadelphia and I've heard a lot about Riverview. I guess that—I've seen pictures.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, Riverview was—and this is part of that kind of '30s sensibility, of which there is a kind of both an overstatement of cosmetic use [00:24:00]—movie actresses had very, very tiny eyebrows—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —and rouged cheeks, and rouged knees, and much lipstick and mascara.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Very baroque and very sort of—this is a very much more ornamental style for you, too. This is very—an obsessive style almost. Interesting shift, because the other work was kind of loose and sort of, I don't know, not so detail oriented. This is very—much more obsessive detail. And it's also got that sort of baroque sensibility you're talking about, that sort of gilded ornamentation.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I had a babysitter who was a leftover from the '20s. So, she rouged her knees.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

THEODORE HALKIN: She wore too much lipstick, too much mascara. But the thing I remember is—most acutely about heads like this is that when—there were games where you had to knock down dolls.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And these stuffed—I don't know what they were stuffed with.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Guacamole, of course [ph]—there's a name for that, but yeah. They're straw I think, or—

THEODORE HALKIN: No. They were stuffed I think with BB shot.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, BB shot. They were heavy for a reason. Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Very heavy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And they were—they looked like this in a way, with a smile.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Scary.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, they leer—they were leering. They were challenging. And so was a good deal of the makeup, and the context of entertainment. So, Betty Boop is leering, and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, if you look at the early Disney stuff, before he got cutesy—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That stuff—it's like very primal, primeval. It's like Freudian.

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And there's real scary—

THEODORE HALKIN: Right. And so, this is—these images really belong to that sense of circus posters, freak shows—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Grotesque?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Grotesque. Yep. Intriguing, attractive, glamorous [00:26:00]—all of that piled into, you know, this sort of world that is not quite safe. And so, the world of the Depression was not quite safe.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, here's a question I was going to ask in general, so I might as well bring it up in our first instance. I know with some artists, it's quite a transition, as I say, from the first work we looking at—the things that were inspired by the cave painting. It's a shift in terms of tightness of focus. It's a shift in color. It's a shift in even symbolic content. What makes transitions for you? What gets you to the next—did you get bored with one thing and—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, it's partially—you can't see it there, but I'll show you something that—when we go out in the studio I'll show it to you.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's a relief I did in Paris.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: And it's a relief that, in a funny way, sort of begins—

LANNY SILVERMAN: The transition between?

THEODORE HALKIN: —the transition.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, so it was in 3-D.

THEODORE HALKIN: And, another thing is that when I was in Europe there were—I was very interested in Romanesque sculpture. Do you know Romanesque sculpture?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure.

THEODORE HALKIN: The capitals and so on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: So, a lot of the things we're going to see are really much influenced by those capitals—the tympanums, and so on from the Romanesque.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But this after you came back?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, this had a lasting influence on you, even though—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And—I went—later I went again to Europe.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

THEODORE HALKIN: And went and had—made special trips to see Romanesque cathedrals.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, that was going to be one of my other questions, is "Where do you get your inspiration from?" So, that—you've started to answer that a little too, although I'm sure it changes as we move along. But—so, when you get to transitions, do you get to a point where you know that a particular body of work is done? Or do you just—

THEODORE HALKIN: I get bored.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You get bored. You want to—

[They laugh.]

That's what we were talking about the last time. [00:28:00] You're one of the artists who likes changing up ideas.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I just get bored. I don't want to keep repeating things. It's not—it's not interesting to me. For instance—

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. The process changes; it doesn't become as creative.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. But, no. I mean, for instance, I—we'll get to some of the still lifes and landscapes. And I had to learn how to do that. I didn't—I couldn't draw like that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's interesting too, because, from what you said, you're somewhat self—not just self-taught in terms of learning, but also some of the artistic process.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You didn't get a whole lot of that at the Art Institute when you were there?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Technique I mean—I'm talking about.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, I don't know about—I mean the thing is there really—I came into the Art Institute from the Army. I was 22 years old. I was so surprised that I was admitted.

[They laugh.]

I was so happy. I—the first year there my mother became ill. And here I was going to school, thrilled. I can't express the sense of sudden freedom and recognition of kind.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And you found your place, too, which is a—

THEODORE HALKIN: That was so alien.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: This world was so alien to me before I got into art school.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know the experience you're talking about. And—

THEODORE HALKIN: And, you know—and I was in the Army and I went through that. But my mother was ill, very ill, and was dying. And I was at the Art Institute, so happy. And I would visit her in the hospital. And I thought, "What can I do? What can I say to my mother that would be somehow"—so, I told her how happy I was. And that was a good thing to do.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's probably the best gift you can give in terms of her feeling like her—she'd done her work, or that's the right thing.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Definitely.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's right. And so—[00:30:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: We talked a little bit about some of your parent's—or my parents, too—fantasies. Just that whole notion—being able to do things that they couldn't do. That's a huge thing.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So, she—so, you know, she was very ill. And I was—so, I went every week and spent at least, you know, three, four hours with her. And just told about what was happening inside my head. And, you know, before that I don't know much. I never said very much to my parents.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I was very close to my parents—not to my sister. I mean, I think actually—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, not—it wasn't that I wasn't close to them. It's just that I didn't talk.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You didn't reveal as much. Well, when you're different, different values and things like that it's—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, my father didn't talk.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's what you were saying. Yes. Your father was quiet.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So, I had a model [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Okay. You had to—yeah. Actually, ironically, my father was—I told you, was similarly fairly shy compared to my mom. Well, one of the things I was asking about was just like technique, because you went from a—from a fairly loose technique to a really tight and obsessive technique that's totally different. And you just—you just learn—teach yourself the tools that you need for the work at hand?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, thank god for acrylic modeling paste. Otherwise it couldn't have happened.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, so these have some 3-D—I didn't look at the mediums.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. This is—this is—this is a 3-D.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. It would be hard to tell that, because it gets flattened out of course—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And these are built up too.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, they—and I know you were going to move on to—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —to some 3-D work, too. And, actually, these look like really—

THEODORE HALKIN: Okay. And so, these reliefs are just born out of the development of the work with the acrylics, and the interest in the Romanesque capitals. And—

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I see—oh. Go ahead. Sorry.

THEODORE HALKIN: —and I really loved relief. I thought it was just, you know, something between, you know—which it is, you know, sculpture and drawing essentially.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I was going to say [00:32:00], you took out—a conscious effort. You took out a lot of the color to maybe emphasize more of the texture, or the Romanesque sort of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, the sense of the sculptural aspects of—you know, color tends to diminish.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It distracts your—

THEODORE HALKIN: Unless you're in Greece [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you a secret though. I was in southern India and I was looking at a temple that looked—and it just—and this is in Madurai or something—somewhere in the very south of India. And it was a temple they were just restoring. And it was in the psychedelic Fellini-like color. I said—they had just restored it. And I was saying, "That can't be right." And they said, "No. There's a romantic thing that Americans and Europeans have about these washed-out colors." This is the way it originally was [laughs].

So, we have a notion, speaking of fictions, we have—in our history we have a notion of the way colors should be based on all those faded colors. And perhaps they would have preferred the really bright, you know—

THEODORE HALKIN: Do you know the Philadelphia museum?

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm from Philadelphia. So, of course I know it very well.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, I thought—well, there's the painted sculpture imitated from Greek painted sculpture.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And I always was so amused, because, you know, the Greeks had this wonderful light that let the sculptural quality express stuff, Philadelphia not.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That's the thing is that I think our—it's a little like what you were talking about, going back and looking at your past. Our looking at the past is very different than maybe what it was like to be in that past. I was thinking about that with medieval stuff. It's very hard to enter into some of these cultures really. So, you went to the reliefs and you taught yourself a certain, you know, technical facility with three-dimensionality, which is, I mean, some of the materials. What are some of the materials that you were—

THEODORE HALKIN: This is all—well, mostly I think this is—about this time I started working for—or I was just finishing up working for the Field Museum. And at the Field Museum they had—they stuffed animals with taxidermy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Mâché. [00:34:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, a lot of the things are made out of the papier-mâché, taxidermy. I still have a barrel full of it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, you're kidding. That's funny. And you ever go back to that medium?

THEODORE HALKIN: Every now and then. I'll show you.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Okay. Well, that's kind of interesting, because that's the other thing in terms of—I was going to get to in as far as transitions. It seems like there's a—there's a—it's not—there's probably—you know, if you're an art historian, or someone who's looking for a narrative thing, there's probably a progression. But it seems like you might jump back and forth. I was asking about transitions. Maybe you, you know—you remember or are influenced by something from ages ago or you go back to something. You don't always go in a straight line.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know. I mean, you know. They vary in theme and content. I mean they're—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, now we're—next body of work.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's a relief too. That's *A Sailor's Dream*.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But now it's got a little bit—you've added the color and you've got a little bit more of the mythological and, oh I don't know, like, you know, mask like and the grotesquerie from the earlier period. So, you've—that's kind of what—

THEODORE HALKIN: We make marriages.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That's kind of what I was saying. So, you've now—there's a narrative for an art historian or someone who's looking for a—to impose a narrative which may or may not be there. There is a sense of combining, perhaps, the two most recent themes of what you're doing.

Now, I'm—this is a question a little bit out of nowhere but when I did look up the Picasso painting, the Saltimbanques painting, one of things that interested me was that it was so much—as a past, possibly, psychologist, or want to be, I'm always fascinated by portraiture. I find so much information in the human face and in expression in the human face and in portraiture, and stories of cultural history and other things that are embedded in it. You, generally speaking, don't tend to do that much along those lines, even though you were very moved by that painting, as you said. You don't tend to do—I see a little bit of some sense of portraiture here, but it's more iconic and—or mythological, or [00:36:00]—oh, Catherine [ph] will too, speaking of which. Yeah. It's not so much about ordinary people, or even like circus people, like in the Picasso painting. Have you

ever—even though you don't necessarily work by the things—the things that influence you don't necessarily inspire you to make work, have you ever worked in that medium where you've done portraiture, or—

THEODORE HALKIN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I didn't think so.

THEODORE HALKIN: I—no. I—I'm very bad at likeness. Some people can get likenesses.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah. Tough to do. So, that's—you just realized your limitations and that's just not—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, that's why that didn't happen there. That's interesting too because—yeah. Sometimes—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know. You can teach yourself. They didn't interest me that much.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

Well, I know that we were talking about Evelyn. Evelyn taught herself a lot of—just like you. When she changed techniques she would teach herself different mediums.

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: She had the same sort of process I think that you did in that regard. But, there are certain things—yes. And sometimes you have a natural tendency to be a certain way. Like I tend to draw really tight. I much prefer to be a Matisse or a Picasso. But that's just in my makeup. Just like you were saying, you know, likenesses—I don't know. So, now we get to a completely different—here we go. And this interests me.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, they're more reliefs, and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: More reliefs, but it's now becoming—now the—now the reliefs are becoming as much like sculptures on the wall. They're having a—they're having a sort of a presence of sculptural form on the wall, as opposed to being the standard rectangle or square with a relief embedded in it. Now, it becomes an object—the outline of the piece becomes part of the—part of it, and it becomes more almost like an installation. So, that's a whole different kind of work. And now it becomes, I think, even closer to sculpture, a fountain. This reminds me a tiny, tiny bit of some of the Giacometti sort of, almost landscape-like pieces, [00:38:00] the sort of surreal landscapes that he did. Of course, he had the figures usually by them. But, is that somebody that you—that you admired or had any—

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, I think, you know, he's a great artist.

LANNY SILVERMAN: How could you not—yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: What's to say?

LANNY SILVERMAN: What you can say bad about—well, there's people that say bad about everybody I suppose. So, you moved towards moving that sculpture—the reliefs off the wall to become sculpture at a certain point.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Was there just—you just wanted to play and see what that led? And I know you've done—I guess they're coming up. I know you've done some pieces that were—oh, these are more sculpture. And they also—some of them have forms that are sort of geomorphic or biomorphic. They're sort of—they look—that looks like the—there's a goddess, a Greek goddess that has all the breasts. I've forgotten the name. You know who I mean—we—two art historians searching for their memory.

THEODORE HALKIN: I think she's Etruscan.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That sort of reminds me. My wife did a piece that related off of that which makes sense because she also loves biomorphic forms. So, that's kind of wonderful. And I actually was—that's the kind of work of yours that I had no familiarity with at all. I'd seen some of the early work, and other things that fascinated me too in terms of—so, that's a different even kind. The other sculpture that you were doing had a harder edge to it and a little more geometry. This is more biomorphic form. You changed it. This too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well—and that's—these were made out of the taxidermist's papier-mâché. Some are—were cast.

LANNY SILVERMAN: This was cast. Yes. I see.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So, I don't know whether this one was—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That one you have in bronze, but you may have started it out with the [inaudible] or the model.

THEODORE HALKIN: That was cast too. So, there's some pieces that were cast.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you were—

THEODORE HALKIN: Eventually, that one back here was cast—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Okay.

THEODORE HALKIN: —in bronze, and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Okay. So, this is the—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —first version of it. So—

THEODORE HALKIN: And it won a prize. I have a medal.

LANNY SILVERMAN: A medal for a metal [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: I have a medal for the Chicago show.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I was going to say, "Was that in the Chicago show?" Okay. That's interesting.

THEODORE HALKIN: [00:40:00] Yeah. Not this one. The fountain.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The fountain one.

THEODORE HALKIN: This one I have—I'll show you the medal. I just ran across it the other day.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's funny. Did you see the Richard Hunt show that was at the Cultural Center? Did you know Richard?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I figured you probably did.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And, because he was working in a—he did a lot of things. But he was working in a not-too-dissimilar way at some point. Actually, I liked his early stuff best in a way. That's my taste. But—so, and then—yeah. This kind of biomorphic stuff interests me a lot. And, actually, it's kind of quite beautiful, and somewhat distinctive, even though I could probably—being in the field, I could probably throw some names out. But it doesn't—it's got its own—and this wood piece has this sort of use of wood that reminds me—I mentioned Edith Altman before. She was doing those wonderful wood—very solid, wood-like, platonic forms, but they were made of a wood that ended up looking like that.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, that's just layered upon—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Layered—well, she was using layered wood in making these plinths that were in these—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. This is layered plywood. That's all.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. You don't—you're not familiar with her work, are you?

THEODORE HALKIN: Not those pieces. No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. Because those are my favorite pieces of hers actually. Those are really quite beautiful. They're like ovoid-like shapes, but they're all made of layered wood and they stack. And you can restack them

and make them into different sculptures. Quite beautiful. And this is kind of a little bit reminiscent of that. But anyways, I could throw out names of people, but I think what I like about this is this is a very distinct style. And yet, it's also completely different—I love this—completely different than what we were looking at before. It's—it doesn't even relate much to the reliefs. Although, you could say that the almost female form that may be alluded to or some of that may relate to the things that were in the—but it's done, treated very differently.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, materials count.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, material—did materials dictate—and there we have some layered wood again.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Materials count. And they—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do they dictate some of what happens?

THEODORE HALKIN: —they tend to direct the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you sometimes start with a material? You see some material that attracts you, and then you just—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —what can I do with it?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And then you just—that changes the whole body of work? [00:42:00] Did that happen at all in this body of work, which a lot of these were wood? Not all—some are papier-mâché. But—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I got—the time the—I forgot exactly what, but yeah. All of a sudden they—there was laminated plywood around the world. And I thought, "Oh, geez. That's really nice." So, I got a band saw and I made these.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's the discovery you make. Yeah. That's kind of funny because materials—I know this living with a process artist. I know sometimes—and you look at someone like Eva Hesse. Sometimes the materials can dictate the work rather than the other way around. And then, what can you do with it? Where does it lead you?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's sort of what you're saying. Now—but the kind of—your use of symbols and of sort of iconic or mythological forms. That sort of is an undercurrent to all your work. So, there is something that's distinctly yours, even though if I—you know, when I mentioned Edith Altman, her work is much more related to, as I say, platonic work or to things that are ideal forms, rather than mythology or, you know, psychologic—

THEODORE HALKIN: Totems.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Totems. Yeah. So, yours are—and, actually, I'm going to look at this here. Now, we're getting to some drawings, which are a whole different—they're related very much to—

THEODORE HALKIN: They're related to the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: They're related. They seem like they almost might be studies for the sculpture, or vice versa. Or—

THEODORE HALKIN: They were done simultaneously.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you—sometimes that brings up the question—do you sometimes—do you do studies for work and then do the work?

THEODORE HALKIN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or you go—you're—it's like the beatniks. First thought, best thought.

THEODORE HALKIN: I just do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You just do it [laughs]? You just get in there.

THEODORE HALKIN: I just do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And then sometimes the things that come out of that. So, maybe there's overflow, or—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, then—I—you know, I don't which goes first.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, or maybe it's the other way around? Maybe the work comes and then you get some overflow and some other things happen.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now, we're back—so, we went from—we go from the wood which is fairly, you know, monochromatic work, and some of the bronze pieces as well. We're back to color and to something that gets you a little bit closer to Chicago Imagists.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, and they're—but you see, I mean, they're also related to the sculpture.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: [00:44:00] Only they're—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think that probably the safer—the safer path, rather than to try to throw a narrative on it is to—well, just, you know, that was the first take on it—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. You know, they're a sort of expansion from sculpture into painting. And, you know, sculpture begins to sort of eat up all the space in the world.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [laughs] And, I guess what—you know, why I mentioned the Imagist thing is, generally speaking, you're pretty much—you're more associated with the earlier—the Monster Roster people. But this particular work could easily be taken to be a relative of something of the Chicago Imagists' work. Was this conscious, unconscious, or just happened to be—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I think, you know, if you—

LANNY SILVERMAN: The color's brighter. It's not quite as—quite—this may be the reproduction I'm looking it. It's not quite as loud and as vulgar as—

THEODORE HALKIN: No. It isn't. But, I mean, you know, it's related to the sculptural forms and the drawings that proceeded it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And it's very much about abstraction.

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I guess there are some—there's some humanoid kinds of forms in here too, and some, maybe, still life things. I guess the question I was going to ask you, which I've asked both Bill and Evelyn—because all of you have some things in common—are you trying to create an imaginary place? Is it a place that's just loaded with symbols? Is it related to specific landscapes, or things that you dream or imagine? Or is it just—you know, where does this stuff come from, or what are you hoping for it to allude to? I guess that's a good question for all of you artists. You knew each other. Particularly, you know Evelyn I know. Is this like an imaginary space that you're creating? It's a sort of—

THEODORE HALKIN: It's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —an unreal space.

THEODORE HALKIN: —I mean, the truth about it is that nine chances out of 10, the spaces in this are domestic.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. These look like still lives. These are work from the '60s I should comment.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. So that, you know, this kind of sense of my life [laughs] being dominated by home and family.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Sure. This is your everyday existence.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, you know, even the scale of the things depend on—[00:46:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, they're smaller scale too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. These are—how big were the reliefs? Reliefs were pretty big, I'm assuming.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, not—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Not really. Maybe not—

THEODORE HALKIN: Four by five is as big as they get.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, okay. So—but you've gone to a smaller, more intimate scale. And you're dealing more with every day—so, there's some sort of play. You're alluding to the fact that there's some sort of play between your everyday world—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —the fact that these are domestic scenes, even though they're abstracted. And the space doesn't seem very real, and the objects don't necessarily seem too real, unless these—you know, like maybe a teapot spout or—a couple things that allude to specific objects. But, if one was looking at this, one would get the feeling that you're not sure—your bearings—you'd—yes. You'd know it was still life, but you wouldn't necessarily know where it is or what you're looking at. I mean, they're—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. No. But, I mean, I think they relate to the forms that preceded them, sculptural forms, and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, definitely. That's why it's neat to do this, because we can see, as I say, a narrative for somebody. I know you mentioned Leger. I see, either Juan Gris, or sort of Léger like sort of shading kind of.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, great.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [laughs] Just a little bit. Just reminds me a tad of that. But, by and large, that's what's interesting.

THEODORE HALKIN: I really love Léger [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know. When you mentioned that you made the mistake to—as somebody who's going to look for patterns. Now that I see it I think, "Oh, yeah. There's little hints of some of your"—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes. Stolen from a good guy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you steal from the best. And, you know what? Everyone steals, and this whole thing about appropriation that we were talking about—how many original ideas really are there? I mean, everyone—you see stuff around you and you—what you do is make it your own or—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And we all live in this—in a time that we share, which also influences what we can do.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. I was going to ask you a little—we'll talk about that a little bit more in the future, because I wanted to ask you about how the art world is changed and how it's affected your work as well. Now, we go to some different kinds of work.

THEODORE HALKIN: Okay. Now, let me tell you about the houses.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: They're all this house.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really? That's funny.

THEODORE HALKIN: And, when we moved in here, this neighborhood was a Polish neighborhood, [00:48:00] working class neighborhood. This is a shanty. This has no hardwood at all [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, yeah. Maple floor here.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm looking at the floor. Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Wood maple floor.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Okay [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: But the whole neighborhood was made up—there were little factories down—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

THEODORE HALKIN: —on the block. And this was a working-class neighborhood. They worked in the factories. It was Polish. The church across the street was a Polish church, and at one time a school. But the school had—wasn't functioning by the time we moved in, which was in the '70s. But, the neighborhood, when I'd walk around it, was full of people whose shanties were all treated to upgrades, imaginative upgrades. Okay?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, across the street there was, of course, a bathtub virgin.

[They laugh.]

And coming from in back of it was a telephone pole. Not a telephone pole—a flagpole. And the flagpole had on the top of it what I presumed was a birdhouse. So, it was way up there. And on the roof of the birdhouse was a TV antenna.

[They laugh.]

So, the whole neighborhood was full of things like that. There was a wonderful march of caryatids down the block, which were made up of cement boots, rubber boots, you know, high boots?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: They were all cement. And on the cement were casts of a dressmaker dummy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, it was a torso.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. I know what you mean.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, that was in cement. [00:50:00] And on top of that were cement baskets with real plants. And there were four of them and they marched down at a diagonal through the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm almost having trouble picturing this, it's so weird.

THEODORE HALKIN: The—it was wonderful.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: And the whole—everybody in the neighborhood was making it better. Someday I'll tell you the story of the Polish campanile. But it takes a long time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wait—[laughs] it's one—you should tell me, because you started this with another story. You're getting me more curious, not less.

THEODORE HALKIN: All right. I'll tell you the story. I'll tell you the story of the Polish campanile. This was a Polish church.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: They had built the church, and so on. And there's a double garage at the side. Across the street was a parish house. And above the church itself was a school. But the school was no longer functioning. But the church was. And the parish house was occupied by a priest. And the services were in Polish. Double garage at the side and back an area parking lot. And on top of it was a metal, derrick-like structure. And on the top of this was a bell. And the bell was—called the parishioners to service.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure.

THEODORE HALKIN: Okay. So, the bell was a big brass bell, about—I can't tell, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Three, four feet—whatever diameter.

THEODORE HALKIN: At least four feet.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Oh, it's pretty sizeable.

THEODORE HALKIN: Three, four feet. And, when it was rung it went, "Bong."

LANNY SILVERMAN: A dud [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Had no resonance at all. [00:52:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: No resonance.

THEODORE HALKIN: No resonance at all. So, one morning I got up and I—to get—Sunday morning, and I go out to pick up my newspaper on the front step. And I look. And I see the women of the parish, I presume. And the men of the parish are climbing up the metal scaffolding. And the women on the ground were like the women at the foot of the cross—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, this is quite a scene. Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: —in the—in the Giotto—praying, looking upward and yelling at their husbands to be careful. It was in Polish. I presume that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But you got the content easily from the visuals.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I would presume that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Men climbed up, and they took down the bell because the scaffolding—the bell, the metalwork was becoming fragile. So, they took down the bell. All right. Everybody is safe and sound, and the metal campanile comes down too. And I don't—and I was glad I was up to get the paper to see all of this. The next Sunday morning I get up, go out for the paper, and I hear, "Bong."

[They laugh.]

And I look.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's back.

THEODORE HALKIN: No, they did take it down. They had recorded it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh. Interesting.

THEODORE HALKIN: So, they—that was their bell.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It was going to be—that clunker was going to come back to haunt you.

THEODORE HALKIN: That was the sound they were going to get that was going to call—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It was very distinctive.

THEODORE HALKIN: —call them to service.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, what I love about some other cultures that are more orally, sound oriented—I lived in Indonesia with a family in Jakarta for a while. At night, when it's pitch black, they could—you could tell—the sauté vendor would come. Each one had its own distinctive two or three note thing. And you could tell in the pitch black, "Oh that's"—whatever. You know, "That's Mohamed. He's got turtle sauté." Or whatever—because you—he had a distinctive—[00:54:00] everyone had their own tone. So, they were proud of the tone even as much as it was a clunker.

THEODORE HALKIN: It was theirs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That's—

THEODORE HALKIN: It was theirs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's great.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so, you know, that's the way they called to service then.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: Was, "Bong."

[They laugh.]

[Inaudible] but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's pretty funny.

THEODORE HALKIN: —the whole thing with the metal, and the taking down the bell, and so on—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you didn't—you're already seeing, like in Giotto, you're already seeing this kind of symbol and sort of symbolic kind of scene. But, in terms of the house—you were telling me that this is based in—the house-like pieces that you did are—or, they are houses—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, so everybody here was fixing up their house.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: All their—so, I thought, "You know, okay. I have this shanty. It's the first house I've ever owned." [laughs] I thought, "Well, what kind of"—I'm not going to do anything radical. So, these are the result of an imaginative reconfiguration of this house as an ideal form. So—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Some of them are—yeah. Some of them are somewhat deconstructed, like the one with the mesh.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And these are twist tabs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, those are twist tabs. That's what that is.

THEODORE HALKIN: And, let's see. This one is made out of tape.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, cool. Oh, that's too bad because you can't see that in there. But that's what—that really makes that piece. That's kind of wonderful.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And then—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, and you've got cement here. So, you're using interesting beach pebbles.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. That's a cement. And that's cement. This is—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Beach pebbles, rather. Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: This is one—a piece I traded with Roger Brown for a painting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course, he does lots of house-like things.

THEODORE HALKIN: And you can see the painting, in the living room.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. I'll take a look in a little while.

THEODORE HALKIN: Anyway—and so—and all of these, then, are variations to make this house more wonderful.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I hate to make comparisons, but you obviously knew Don Baum. And this was done in the '70s. Did you know his work of—there were those house-like constructions. He did a lot of them.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, but his were fantasy works. [00:56:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: His were not based in—yeah. They were fantasy pieces, and they may have related more to outsider, or other kinds of—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. This—these are also—

LANNY SILVERMAN: This is all versions of your home.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. These are all portraits of improved houses.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's a—this is home—you sort of call it home improvement [laughs]. This is literally home improvement.

THEODORE HALKIN: I mean, this is a little—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's a way out—there's one of the—

THEODORE HALKIN: —knick-knack thing that I found in the basement.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you are a picker? You actually do—then you make art from things you find.

THEODORE HALKIN: And then this a—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Scrub brush.

THEODORE HALKIN: —brush I had. And so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, that one's pretty far afield. That's less house-like. You went real far afield on that one. But it's related.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, it's—then they're made out of, you know, the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Stuff from the house too. So, they're—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. Well, they're made out of, you know, salt dough—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

THEODORE HALKIN: —sculpture. Those are all—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's what the—that's what the skulls are—

THEODORE HALKIN: They're all salt dough.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: I think that one of them is covered with the silver paper, this one.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh. That's why it's got a metallic sheen to it. Well, I love your use of materials. You have fake fur. Of course, that, in terms of, you know—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, that was a fashion. Remember when everybody had sheepskin—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. It's come back in terms of—

THEODORE HALKIN: —clothes. And they all—it was all coming apart. You know, all the seams were covered—would show the fur.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. Well, of course, the famous Surrealist object you had to be aware of—the Meret Oppenheim—the fur cup.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes. The fur cup. Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Because you got a fur—you got a fur briefcase, which I think fur lined, fur outside it, lined it.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And that—

THEODORE HALKIN: And so these are sort of—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, these are a lot of fun and these are a completely—again, these are a totally different direction and the materials, each of them is slightly different, and there are some that are really interesting uses of materials. So you went on a binge of—

THEODORE HALKIN: House improvement.

LANNY SILVERMAN: House improvement things. And then I see there's some follow-up. This is what you're talking about in terms of colored pencil. There's drawings and things—they may not be follow-up. They may have been before, but they're related to the work.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, they're with. They're done at the same time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And these are much more—they're done in perspective, and these are much more—they're not like other drawings you've done. [00:58:00] They're not so much abstractions as they're much—they're representation, which you said wasn't your strength, but it looks very—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, what I like doing is learning things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's what I was about to say, you probably taught yourself a little more representation because these are very convincing in terms of not just perspective, but lovely sense of color and a sense of a real space and place, even though it's a little hard to tell exactly what's going on. Like they may be real objects. This is like—and then you've taken it outside. You've done a drawing that's actually an oil painting, but an installation of a bunch of them together, so it's now a framing device. You're looking at it from the outside, looking at what you've done. So that's kind of an interesting way to sort of summarize it. And then I guess, you know, I was somewhat surprised when I was looking—when we first started the interview and I'm looking behind me, and I'm looking at a somewhat Impressionist—you know, a cheery Impressionist, lovely, colored work that seems totally different than my sense of who you were and you said, "Oh, I did that." I was like, oh, you taught yourself landscape.

THEODORE HALKIN: Let me tell you, my wife died.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I assumed.

THEODORE HALKIN: And she—just about this time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So this would be in the '70s or '80s?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. It was an automobile. She was hit by a car.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's awful.

THEODORE HALKIN: So it was a hit-and-run, and she died. And at that time, you know, these things are fairly rich and imaginative introspection, and it was the one thing I couldn't do after that because opening yourself up to your imagination—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's a tough point in time to make art, yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: It was very, very—it was impossible. So I'd been growing a garden for a long time. [01:00:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did your wife garden at all, too?

THEODORE HALKIN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Okay, just because of the obvious—

THEODORE HALKIN: No, I did the gardening.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You were the gardener, actually?

THEODORE HALKIN: I was the gardener, and so I didn't work for a while. My wife worked for the government. She was killed in an accident. She was insured, so there was money, and so I got money, and I thought, "Well, what should I do with this money?" And what I did with the money was I built a studio. So that's a present from my wife, the studio. I'm sorry she had to do it that way.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. It's not something you or she would have chosen, of course. And I see that it looks—I should mention that it looks out into a garden, too, the studio.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, it looks out into the garden.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that wouldn't be obvious to a person listening.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so then I decided that I would—the thing I could do is paint representationally and look at things, and that's what I did.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Now, this style is even more—this is—I mean, these are—

THEODORE HALKIN: So I painted. During the summer, I painted the garden; during the winter, I painted—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So this is somewhat a therapy, in a way. This is a way of coming out of mourning, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: So I painted the still lifes. So that's how these came about.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm also noticing that yeah, that these are a very light and airy kind of color. I mentioned sort of like Impressionist in terms of French Impressionists is what I meant, in terms of just a light kind of color and sensibility. So it's interesting that, even though it's a period of mourning, there's a verdant, very green and very rich—and yet, style-wise, you've taught yourself even further, not just representation, [01:02:00] but it's not that easy to deal with—there's a lot of people that attack a landscape—oh, I know, going back to the landscape, there was a story that you may or may not have—it was George Cohen and Leon Golub. That's right.

THEODORE HALKIN: [laughs] We went out to the Midway, to paint on the Midway.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So I think you said there was more to that story than maybe you told, that maybe you were saying this is at a point in time where you weren't a *plein aire*—you weren't an outdoor painter.

THEODORE HALKIN: Look, Leon and George had gone to art school before they—the time I knew them. So they were semi-trained, and they had been interested in art for God knows how long. And both were extremely gifted men full of—well, full of stuff.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: They were also very—I know Leon, very bright and intellectual in the true sense.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes. And George in his way maybe more so.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Even—yeah, that's interesting.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, George studied at the University of Chicago and was on the brink of a Ph.D.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That's the real deal there.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's heavy duty. What's lovely is that—I'll tell you the story; it's lovely because he never finished the Ph.D., so he had the Ph.D. in the basement. He'd come to teach at Northwestern. He eventually just moved into painting and sort of gave up the Ph.D. Now the Ph.D., [01:04:00] I don't know what the length of time at the University of Chicago is for you to finish the Ph.D., but it's a pretty long time. There's no rush. At any rate, so just about the time that the Ph.D. was due to be finished—which it wasn't going to get done, and it was in the basement of their house here in Evanston—for some reason or another, George went down to find that—he went down and he found a dead skunk rotting on his Ph.D.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's symbolic.

THEODORE HALKIN: That takes care of that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's the end of that. So when you went to the Midway—so at that point, the story was that you were just sort of following along and they were the ones who had the skills.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. They had skill. I had no skill.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But you come back—the irony is—the strange irony is that later down the road, here you're doing—I mean, they're much more controlled than maybe just working—well, you're working from nature but basically you learn those skills. So eventually—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I like learning things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Clearly. Because even though you were berating the fact that you didn't have the skill at that point, and we're now back to some still lifes, too, in terms of the—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, during the winter I did still lifes. During the summer, I painted the garden.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Now this is a style that if I had seen this, I would have no idea that this was yours, I mean, from what I characterized as your work. On the other hand, it's very much a part and it probably is part of a progression you were going through. And actually now, it's starting to get a little more abstract and then it's going back and forth, a little more of a sense of almost like [Giorgio] Morandi in terms of controlled and very, very still and quiet. That's, you know—and a little more subdued color. So you even tried—you've applied different sort of technical skills to even within that.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So that's interesting to see how you [01:06:00] do in terms of even one—but then we go back to something that's a little more post-Impressionist looking in terms of the greens and the dappled kind of paint work. You've got different paint application, different—and then here's one that's more flat, I think less brush work, although that's wax.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, it's a drawing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, it's a drawing. So in terms of technique, in terms of—was it partly just teaching yourself the different way of applying paint—or not always paint because I'm looking at a wax—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, I'm always trying to be smarter than I am.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's interesting to see because this is like your little primer for how you've developed [laughs]. You've learned—you learned this particular kind of application and then you went to a smoother, less paint—than when I went to the Morandi thing, you know, less texture and less abstraction. It's much more about creating an impression of the actual stuff and a solidity that's different. Then there's dappled paint work, and then there's stuff that's flatter.

THEODORE HALKIN: Usually the subject dictated to some degree what.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. So that's what I was going to say is that sometimes it's you're wanting to learn a particular style but sometimes the subject changes the way you—and then you go back to a little bit more abstracted, a little bit more Cubist-influenced in terms of different angles and approaches to the perspective. So you've tried all different kinds of things within—even just within landscape.

THEODORE HALKIN: *Homo Ludens, Man at Play.*

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's cubistic. And I must say, some of the paintings I was most interested in was Cubism as a kid.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what you talked about on the first—when we were talking before. Now we get to something that almost has a completely different shift. We were talking about Miyoko Ito. That may have been off the record, but we were talking about her and what a lovely painter she is, but here, this looks sort of more Asian and bigger block, or Ellsworth Kelly. There's some things that are much more—closer to pure abstraction and different kinds of—[01:08:00] and flatter kinds of less—there's some texture. Just like Bill Conger, there some things that are—you know, I see some textured space. But they're generally flatter and more just sort of volumetric. Just big planes of shapes with some texture

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, they're kind of reduction of a still life.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And this is where it relates to, I mentioned, Bill Conger something where they come out of the real world. They come out of still lifes but you've taken it and you've abstracted it. It's interesting. That's very clearly—and if you look at, for that matter, Mondrian, if you look at some of those wonderful trees, the studies he did, he started out from the tree and he looked at the patterns and then they got the patterns and then you could barely tell they're trees by the time he's done. And this leaves us at a point which—is 1999 because I saw some of the more recent work that John had shown at the gallery and it changed quite a bit, too. So I had some questions in general and maybe you should take a look at my prepared questions.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But I think it's fascinating to see so many different—you taught yourself a lot. It's been quite a journey, yeah?

THEODORE HALKIN: Lucky as hell, huh?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Lucky as hell. Well I feel the same way. How did I get to be so privileged with this stuff? I guess I started asking before like where ideas come from, and it's becoming apparent that some of them are by just the stuff around you or with the situation, like with your wife dying, and then it's sort of like, well, that led to a situation where you were maybe dealing more with the garden or just needing to recover or Lascaux where you're looking at the work and it influenced the kind of work. So generally speaking, you don't use dreams ever for—

THEODORE HALKIN: I'll show you a dream.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Okay. I want to see a dream painting.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, it's not a dream painting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, maybe not literally.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'll show you a dream. [01:10:00] Where the hell is it? I've skipped it somehow. It's a case of gloves. It's here somewhere. That's my wife and kids.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course, being as nosy as I am, I want to see. Wow.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's Oxbow. Now where the hell is it? It's in here.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So it's a 3-D object?

THEODORE HALKIN: Hm?

LANNY SILVERMAN: The gloves are a 3-D object or is it a painting?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, it is. It's a case. It's a glass case. That was dreamt whole. I dreamt that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

THEODORE HALKIN: And I just got up and made it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Cool. As a matter of fact, that's very interesting and it's very surreal. So you have no idea where that came from?

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, you know, there's a number of gloves. There's de Chirico—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, of course.

THEODORE HALKIN: And then there's a famous series of graphic works about gloves, German.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And hands, of course, are a very big thing in terms of expression. I mentioned the portraiture and the face being so much—having so much content but hands are—

THEODORE HALKIN: And so this is dreamt whole. I just got up and made it. I found the case and I—well, I have to tell you about why gloves are really important. My wife had, I forget what it's called—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Psoriasis.

THEODORE HALKIN: No, her hands. The circulation to her fingers. Raynaud's syndrome.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I don't even know that one.

THEODORE HALKIN: Raynaud's syndrome. [01:12:00] She had to sort of protect her hands because the circulation wouldn't be there and so at night, she would wear gloves, cotton gloves with cream and so on. So eventually she stopped buying them and started making them. And then they would be washed so all over the house on a little drying rack.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So again, it almost deflates the wonderful poetry of it because there's obviously a function. This is around you. This is what you see all the time.

THEODORE HALKIN: So there are the gloves. And then there are rubber gloves for washing dishes and then actually a pair of gloves that became worn out, which are these, are hers. Oh, I have to show you something.

[Halkin shows Silverman a round, wooden box filled with shrunken leather gloves; this is not featured in the catalogue.-TH/SH]

LANNY SILVERMAN: So this is very personal. This isn't—even though this—hang on a second, I'll tell you what, I'll just disconnect this. Oh, this is lovely. I said I love objects. Miniature gloves. And there have been—

THEODORE HALKIN: You can just pour them out on the table.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You know what, I think they've been—when you boil leather, it shrinks. Is that what happened here?

THEODORE HALKIN: Boiled?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Boiled?

THEODORE HALKIN: Boiled leather.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, boiled leather, yeah. Because I've done that by mistake. I don't know how I found that out, but I boiled some leather for some reason. I don't know why, but it shrunk all up and shriveled up. But these are wonderful. So they become something else entirely different. The scale changes and everything, and there's still the sense of history in the fact that they're related to human hands, but they're wonderful. So is this part of an installation or something that you just—

THEODORE HALKIN: A piece of crazy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Piece of crazy [laughs]. I like your way of—that one's beautiful. Look at that. All the striations. Isn't that wonderful?

THEODORE HALKIN: I like them.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [01:14:00] Oh yeah, they're wonderful. You don't need to—that's the thing, sometimes either natural phenomenon or things that you find are sometimes hard to improve upon. It's a little—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, boiling these improved them.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Boiling improved them. Well, I don't know how I discovered the same thing but I didn't get the wonderful wrinkled up—I don't remember what it is that was leather that I boiled but—it may have just been hot water. So that's kind of fantastic.

THEODORE HALKIN: I've never shown these.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Those are kind of absolutely wonderful. The black one has a real presence to it, too, because there's something forbidding about it.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, things like snaps and buttons don't change.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No. So then the scale gets really weird because you have the real scale of the snap but the hands have all shrunk. It's a little like those, you know, the Amazonian Indians where they have the shrunken heads. There's something that happens when it shrinks up and gets all, I don't know, contorted that's kind of wonderful. Oh yeah. That's a whole piece in and of itself. I don't know—it's just wonderful as it is and they're all a little different. Some of them maintain pretty much don't get all as wrinkled up. The black one's kind of really scary and wonderful, both of them, I guess. Maybe it's a quality of—a particular quality of the leather. Oh, that's another striated thing. That looks like an underwater, not lichen, but the coral almost.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow. I go snorkeling and see some coral and stuff, I think—and the colors and stuff, how can you even—it's hard to even want to make art when you look at something that's so naturally beautiful.

THEODORE HALKIN: Did you ever see the photographs of the crocheted and knit?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, we had the show at the Cultural Center.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh did you?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, there's a woman that does that stuff. It's a whole project. Yeah, we had that at—it's too bad you didn't see it. It was about five or 10 years ago.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, I didn't. I just saw photographs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, we had that show. I can't remember her name, but yeah, she's done a project where she's crocheted essentially all of—

THEODORE HALKIN: All of coral reefs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —coral reefs and forms. I've forgotten her name. It's almost like a shaker—

THEODORE HALKIN: Talk about crazy. [01:16:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, speaking of a piece of crazy. Well, I don't know. So I guess I had some prepared questions, which maybe are worth getting into as well and some things that probably are—I guess, do you see yourself as a Chicago artist, whatever the hell that might mean?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm not sure that you really think that your work is—

THEODORE HALKIN: Dependent on Chicago?

LANNY SILVERMAN: —dependent on Chicago. And I see some hints of that even though—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, I think so. I think there's something—I tell you, Leon is a wonderful artist but—and I don't mean the "but" to deny anything great about Leon.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure.

THEODORE HALKIN: The sense of his heroes and the sense of his victims was a piece of ambiguity to me. You never could quite tell who he was for.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh really? That's interesting. Well, you know, a lot of the allegiances of politicians in the time period you grew up in changed quite a bit when things—when people figured out Stalin wasn't—you know, that these values that sounded so good, the same thing happened with Mao. I know people that were very excited, and I have a friend, a good friend, who was very keen on the whole Castro thing. She went to roll cigars in Cuba many years ago. Anyways, this romanticizing—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, but if you look at Leon's work and there are heroic good guys, bad guys, but the difference is unclear and I think in some way that's purposeful, that the sense that the shift between good guys and bad guys belongs to a situation, not to the reality. [01:18:00]

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm thinking also that one of the things that I really admire about his work is that it's not so important, the specifics. It's more about the power, about the situation of power, abuse of power, and about torture and about all those things that are—I'm thinking particularly of Nicaragua, those paintings.

THEODORE HALKIN: But you know the bad guys are heroic in size and painted with the same sense of almost glamour.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, I know what you're saying. There's a strange quality to it.

THEODORE HALKIN: So when you look at them, you realize that, yes, you're supposed to know who the good ones are—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Who the good ones are and who are the bad.

THEODORE HALKIN: But there's a shadow of doubt about that and in a way, Chicago. When we lived in Hyde Park, we were told don't call the cops.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure. Well, you know, you saw what happened with the cops in '68. That was a police riot.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. But, you know, don't call the cops. Why not call the cops? Well, you're calling the robbers.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well there's a certain sort of class warfare and there's a scenario, a script, but the script, I think is much more—it's a little like what we were saying about nuance. It's more nuanced than that because the good guys and the bad guys share an interest in power that isn't always—

THEODORE HALKIN: A good thing to say.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] It isn't always that different when you really get down to it style-wise, so maybe that's what you're hinting at.

THEODORE HALKIN: It makes sense, you know, with Leon's work. And so I think that sense of urban reality makes something in Chicago.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And there's a blue collar—there's an aspect of Chicago—there's the Studs Terkel. There's a whole bunch of things that come out of Chicago. It's the, you know, shock-y art, and there's a certain kind of feel. I got this from talking to Bill Conger, too. There's a feel of Chicago that's very different than anywhere else.

There's a really different atmosphere. [01:20:00] Also, the Midwest is very friendly and much easier to deal with than New York in some ways in terms of having come from the East Coast. There's a Midwest sensibility that's hard to describe, but it is very—it's warmer, friendlier, easier. It's not necessarily always as sophisticated as New York but it's getting there. I think it's growing. I guess that's the question I was also going to ask. How have you seen Chicago or the Chicago art world change over—you've seen a lot of changes over the 50 years or so.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, when I first started exhibiting, there were, I think, one, two, three, four galleries.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, you mentioned that before and I was appalled. That's like nothing.

THEODORE HALKIN: So you mark out the changes.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's one major change. But in terms of just styles of art?

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I think that the—it's curious. I mean recently in the New Yorker did you see Art Green's painting?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I know there's a show there and actually, yeah, there was a review.

THEODORE HALKIN: So there, all of a sudden, there's—believe the thing that's going to go to the University of Chicago. There's a kind of—well, I'm 91 years old, and I'm historical.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm not—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But you're still growing and transforming and curious. You may be stuck—in some people's minds, you may be stuck in the past, but you're moving forward, which is—

THEODORE HALKIN: But I mean, you know, but the point is that that kind of—to live that kind of length of time in reasonably good health and with some degree of sanity, and then to find yourself historical is really peculiar.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well it's finally getting—I mean, you're referring to the show—[01:22:00] it was a show in New York and it's finally getting—and Peter Schjeldahl is reviewing it. Finally Chicago is getting put on the map as history. Better to be history than to be written out of history.

THEODORE HALKIN: [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: I suppose if you had to choose one, you'd pick the history rather than no history.

THEODORE HALKIN: But anyway, it's very odd. And you know, you think about people that are really famous who grew to be old men. You know, Picasso—Matisse, particularly. And you realize that they had been living history for quite a long time. They weren't discovered in old age to be history. They were history as young men.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, they were making history, and they changed art history as they went along.

THEODORE HALKIN: Right, right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually, that's what so amazing about both of those.

THEODORE HALKIN: And so that's a different state. So it's very interesting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, have you seen—I mean, you've seen it by way of students, certainly. That's a while ago because you retired, but you've seen a difference in the attitudes towards art. First of all, you see a lot of technology and things that are—that you're not particularly—that's not your thing. But I guess, do you see that stuff changing in terms of the way people are making art?

THEODORE HALKIN: To some degree. But you know, Corbett Dempsey [Gallery] is a perfectly good example of, you know—people still buy things for their over-the-couch.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. There's always going to be that. Let's face it.

THEODORE HALKIN: And that's—and the conceptual pieces that invite public participation—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure.

THEODORE HALKIN: —really goes along with the internet.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's a whole social media, internet and technology thing.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's not—you see that stuff and it doesn't really—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, and the museums are cashing in on it. Everybody is in to play [01:24:00] and in a way, it's—I don't care.

LANNY SILVERMAN: We had this conversation the last time, and I'm sure we both had our pretty negative points of view about this because there's so much stuff that is lost. There are things—any technology is only as good as what you use it for. There's good and bad, of course, but there's so many bad things that people are not paying attention to. You know, literacy and nuance and real conversation, real one-on-one conversation as opposed to this stuff. And you talked about, like, Hollywood—speaking of fictions, creating fictions on the internet. Yeah, there's a whole different way of being.

THEODORE HALKIN: And you know, sort of, I don't have a computer. I don't use the internet.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I will say, though, that the fact that you're not—this is something I tell my wife too in terms of marketing. In terms of having a presence in the world, forget about galleries and museums, most kids and most people are looking at art and stuff when they do search. When I search looking for your art, it's lovely to go through the catalogue because it's very hard to find very many images for you because of that. Whereas if you're like a 20-year-old just out of school right now, they've probably got a website with, you know, links and images and inspirations and God almighty. So if you wanted to be visible, which you may not give one flying about [laughs], nonetheless, if you wanted to be, that would be an important thing to tell you.

THEODORE HALKIN: The competition is too much.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's the other problem. You're inundated with information and stuff and how do you even—it's true even with like medical. I mentioned like looking up medical stuff online. There's good stuff. There's bad stuff. There's no editors. There's no connoisseurship anymore. There's tons of crap. I mean, you can find more art online than we ever knew existed. But how much of it is worth looking at?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. And in a sense, the—Walter Benjamin talked about the art in the age of reproduction. This is beyond the age of reproduction.

LANNY SILVERMAN: This is something else.

THEODORE HALKIN: This is the age of—[01:26:00] I don't know how—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well you talked about Hollywood. I think it's also about—people are so careerist. It's not so much about being passionate or making a statement. It's as much about positioning yourself, marketing. It's a meme. It's an idea for the ages.

THEODORE HALKIN: Let them do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Let them do it. You're not the least bit—so you're not affected by that but you've seen a number of other things come and go. You obviously saw images come and go and you've seen—

THEODORE HALKIN: I always applauded things that I liked. I mean, I really—I have a Jim Nutt in there. I have a Roger Brown. I have, you know, Karl's [Wirsum] work and other artists' work I have and I always—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So they were younger colleagues but they were people that you appreciated as well.

THEODORE HALKIN: And you know, so that the sense of the art world in Chicago is now so vast. There are so many artists.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Actually I think one of the problems that happens when people see a review, like that Peter Schjeldahl review in the *New Yorker*, is they think of Chicago as being sort of univocal. It's like there's one voice, but we have very sophisticated—we have Conceptual artists. We've had people—you had that sort of pod-like sculpture; we have a number of artists, Frances Whitehead and Barbara Cooper, who's a good friend. I mean, there's a lot of art that doesn't fit into those things at all and it's just a disservice to just keep dragging that same horse around and I love the stuff but the thing is that if we're going to get recognition beyond Chicago, you would think people would look beyond the surface, and then they find like Ted Halkin. They find people that don't fit into any easy narrative or fit into, you know, cliché of Chicago art.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, from my point of view, I've made a living. I have two children who are [01:28:00]

relatively successful in their own lives.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You're doing fine. Yeah. So here's a question for you. You're obviously in physically good shape, and you're still making art. Has the aging process changed how you make art? Does it change your scale?

THEODORE HALKIN: Yes. It's changed the scale.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, hang on a second. Let's go in and out then. We should probably put this on pause. So I guess the thing—looking at your most recent work, it helps me to answer my own question, which was going to be, do you ever rework pieces that you've done with them, and you're done? You don't go back—

THEODORE HALKIN: Done, I'm done.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But, what I did notice in the new work is that you've reworked certain styles. Some of the work is kind of abstraction that brings in relief and a kind of pure form of abstraction, more playful geometrics, sort of glyph-y kind of form that you did way back but with much hotter, more vivid color.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm the same person.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You're the same person—but when we talked about going in circles, this is a little like what's happening with your work, and I was asking about what—you know, how—if you see any limitations in your work. I don't see any—you know, you may not be working big, but you never worked big. That was never your scale.

THEODORE HALKIN: No, I never worked really big.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But just with your life story that we're going through, we're going around in circles, some of your style is just sort of—yes, you're the same person. Things are coming to the fore and the back.

THEODORE HALKIN: Also, you know, the time changes and gives you—and you know, you swim in the water of your time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Definitely.

THEODORE HALKIN: There's no ignoring it. And I think artists who develop a closed style, they really can, more or less, minimize the passage of time. But if you look at somebody like well Matisse or Picasso, [01:30:00] there's no such thing as that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I was telling you about being so disappointed by how few ideas I saw out of Jasper Johns. As lovely as they are, I was thinking, how could you bear doing that that often? I guess you make a lot of money, but then you look at a Matisse or a Picasso that just changed whole—just gave up everything and changed it completely for different—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, I mean, you know so that their sense of their life in art really was a most intense of their experience, and they dragged—well, both Matisse and Picasso dragged the people in their life into the work.

LANNY SILVERMAN: We won't even talk about their treatment of women, or at least particularly thinking of Picasso here. I don't know as much about Matisse, his wife or wives. I don't think he was as bad, but he was, actually.

THEODORE HALKIN: There's a wonderful photograph of Matisse with pigeons. Do you know that photograph?

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know that one, I think. Yeah, it's sounding familiar. Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's a wonderful photograph. Marvelous.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, what I'm particularly liking is that your new work is just as searching and challenging and challenging to yourself and to the viewer as ever before. And I love that and the fact that you're not stuck in a historic mode, as you were calling it. You may be stuck in history, but you're still—and so that's great that you're still inventive and still looking for—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I have to amuse myself.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's the thing. My wife asked me—some people are very easily bored. I could be in a room by myself and be happy. There are people like that, and I take it that you probably are like that, too. You have the ability to sort of figure out the stuff, the problem-solving, you know, invention, and some people need a

lot of change and difference. But you can do that from within, and that's what's so amazing because your work is as lively, and it's really sad, you know, that the gallery is not necessarily [01:32:00] looking at the new work because it looks as strong as ever.

THEODORE HALKIN: I thank you very much. I appreciate you telling me that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, I mean it. I don't say that casually either. I'm quiet when I don't mean it.

THEODORE HALKIN: I appreciate that, you're telling me that. I really do.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, that's kind of fascinating.

THEODORE HALKIN: Because not many people have seen the work, and you know, I can't go shopping for a gallery. I just can't do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's not easy.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I mean, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There aren't that many anymore. Some of the galleries are closed, some of the really good ones.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Aron Packer just closed.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh did he?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That just happened this summer. It's really sad. I didn't go to the last show. Ingrid Fassbender closed a couple of years ago. She was important. There's a whole bunch of people that are closing that were very important galleries and, you know, there are new ones that show up, but most of them are for the kids, and they're a whole different thing.

THEODORE HALKIN: But, you know, that's just too much to go shopping for a gallery. It's not—I've had really very nice and very—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You've had good experience, as you mentioned, from them, so I hate to tell you—because I can give you sob stories from either my wife or from friends. It's not—and the people that are either crooks or that are creepy or that are just not really supportive; it's not an easy game.

THEODORE HALKIN: I should have—you know, when I was young, I was such a snotty kid [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Me too. I know that feeling. You think you can rule the world. You have certain arrogance.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, and I didn't behave as well as I might have, and that makes me feel uncomfortable and a little guilty.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's youth. I mean, you have an arrogance of youth. People have that when you don't realize how vulnerable and how little you really know.

THEODORE HALKIN: But anyway, they—Jan Cicero was just a kind, nice, supportive woman. [Alan] Frumkin was terrific. Phyllis Kind was Phyllis Kind [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well yeah, we had that conversation a little bit. [01:34:00] I was surprised at how much nicer she was in all the people's stories because I heard from artists, and everyone had Phyllis stories because she was quite a character, but I don't know.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, you know, we were—my wife and I and my kids were there when Phyllis and Josh were up there with their kids and my wife—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Up where?

THEODORE HALKIN: At Oxbow.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I figured you probably meant.

THEODORE HALKIN: So my wife was high-strung, careful. A careful woman. She'd look at Phyllis Kind, and she'd say, "Why can't I be like that?" And I'd look at her and say, "Thank God you're not" [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's some things—yeah, you don't know the repercussions of that.

THEODORE HALKIN: But she thought that to walk through the world that kind of sense of empowerment would be lovely.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's interesting too. Yeah, I know that dynamic. And actually, sometimes being careful—I mean, there's risk taking and then there's—there's advantages to both sides, I guess, is where I'm going with this.

THEODORE HALKIN: She was fun. Phyllis was fun. She was outrageous and fun, and you know, in a sense that there are people like that with that kind ofchutzpah, drive, and bluster, and in a way generosity.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I was surprised by. She was incredibly generous with me. Of course, I wasn't looking for anything from her other than a loan of some work.

THEODORE HALKIN: She was not mean.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No.

THEODORE HALKIN: [01:36:00] So you know, [knocks] for her. I was thinking the other day after you came, and did you know Josh Kind?

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, I only met Phyllis. I mean, I'd seen her in the gallery, but I only really met her when I went to New York. She had already moved to New York, and I was trying to get some of Karl's [Wirsum] works from her gallery, so it was much later.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, I see.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I had heard so much about her, and I didn't know Josh at all, no.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, somehow I thought about him, and I think he's still with us in this world.

LANNY SILVERMAN: She might be too, for that matter. She was in California.

THEODORE HALKIN: I ran into her one year just a couple of years ago. She was peddling at—

LANNY SILVERMAN: One of the fairs?

THEODORE HALKIN: One of the fairs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: More outsider art these days, I think.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, outsider art and whatever she could push. She's terrific [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: You were starting to say about Josh.

THEODORE HALKIN: So I was thinking of getting in touch with him, and I wonder what that—you know, I always thought he was really a nice fellow, really a nice fellow.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, I haven't heard stories about Josh. I certainly heard lots about Phyllis, and I actually, you know, I'd go into the gallery, of course.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, Phyllis made friends and made enemies.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. And a lot of the stories made me think that she was going to be something of an ogre but she was incredibly—she was very literate, very interesting, and very charming. My wife and I just sat in the gallery and talked for about an hour or so, not about anything in particular, but it was very enjoyable, and actually, I found her to be virtually charming, considering, you know, all the scare stories of the—she probably had a side that's a little—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, my relationship to her was just easy, and you know, when she moved to New York, I don't think she—[01:38:00] I dropped out of her gallery scene, and I'm not sure what—I don't know, things happen.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, things change.

THEODORE HALKIN: Things happen. It's all right. You know, somebody said that—I asked somebody who was from New York what was happening with Phyllis, and he said well all of the money was going up her nose.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh geez. She was—her gallery was at—wait a second, it was—I'm trying to remember where it was. She had gotten into a really small space, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: She really—her quarters were really getting smaller. I'm trying to remember where it was. It was probably in Chelsea. I'm trying to remember exactly where, but she had a small space there.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. I think she got into some bad stuff for a while.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's too bad.

THEODORE HALKIN: I think she pulled herself out of it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I guess one of the things—we were starting to allude to this before—is how would you like yourself to be—how do you see yourself? If you were looking—if you were an art historian, you've sort of played at a little. If you were an art historian 50 years from now, how would you look at Ted Halkin's work? How would you want it to be seen, and how do you think it will be seen or something along those lines?

THEODORE HALKIN: I think it would be seen as eccentric.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Eccentric? That's a positive term. That's a little like—

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I think, you know, if they were interested in it at all, they would have difficulty sort of making historical sense out of it in a kind of conventional way.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, we just went through a series of, you know, different periods' work, and if you were an art historian, I could say that that would confuse people because it's—I have friends—I mentioned Chuck Walker. I have friends, when I first saw his slides, I thought it was like multiple personality disorder. A little bit of this, a little bit of that, everything. [01:40:00] I think wow! People like a simple story. This is another thing in terms of marketing.

THEODORE HALKIN: Brand names.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And branding, yeah. So we had that conversation. So you would say that you would be confusing, perhaps, to people because of the—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, because of the thing. But maybe this would—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Maybe people will figure out there is a continuity. I'd say just from the beginning of the familiarity with it, a little more depth to seeing your work, there's some things that—you know, it's pictorial language, narrative sort of symbols and things that float in and out of your work that are coming back to that now. Like, they're sort of taking over more, and the color is confusing because you go from earthy monochromatic in the relief work, to things that are now brightly colored, and you have some that are more modulated, more like Miyoko Ito, sort of very Asian.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, I think color is—really interests me, and often I find it difficult as many artists do. You know, the sense of making structure out of color represents, you know, not just a problem for me but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah. That's a whole—that's a very big—

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, but a problem for Matisse.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually some people pare down. The color can change over the course of many artists' work, and I'm thinking—but some people have certain kind of signature color schemes or sort of color sensibilities.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Marsden Hartley, what's his name? One of your pieces, the early one, that's who I'm trying to think of. The one with the little—the grotesquerie with the masks over it. Do you know his work? The sort of—like related to Arthur Dove and people from the '30s and '40s.

THEODORE HALKIN: I know Dove. I have a book of Marsden Hartley's. I'll look that up.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that reminds me a little bit of that. I'm sorry, it just came back to me. I was trying to think of the name of that.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'll have to look.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. There's a little bit of something there. Well, certain people have signature—getting back—I'm sorry, that was just an aside. [01:42:00] Probably not helping our linearity here either. But I was just thinking certain people have a color scheme—whoever it might be. Even someone abstract like a Cy Twombly. There's a certain color thing where other artists, or Matisse even. There's a certain color scheme that you can associate with them whereas you've mixed it up quite a bit and even in terms of like a feel for color palette, you've tried enough—you're just experimenting. You're learning.

THEODORE HALKIN: Opportunism.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well that's what I think I find most amazing about your work is it's about learning and it's about discovery, so you're looking to find what other ways there are to do. Today it's very, you know, brightly intensely hued and maybe tomorrow it will be back to very mottled or very modulated colors.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, something in between.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or something in between.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, it's not—I think in a way, color, even representational color, is always a choice. It's not inevitable. It doesn't have—I mean, a contour has a certain kind of inevitability but a color, not so.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well and there's times—and one of the things that's so wonderful about modern art from Blaue Reiter and people, it can be arbitrary. You can get a lot of expressive power by denying the natural world color.

THEODORE HALKIN: And then, you know, light and then the time we live, the way light plays across the world. We have presumably, you know—domestic lighting has so many different colors.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually the kind of lighting we have has changed so much. Now we have all these things that are closer to outdoor lighting indoors. You can make indoor outside. In the past it was artificial lights in the 20th century.

THEODORE HALKIN: [01:44:00] So that, you know, the sense of what color is and what it means sort of constitutes a kind of choice; whereas if you have an outline, it's an outline. Except, you know, you have a sense of, what is your outline supposed to do? Are you moving through space with a line? Are you making a sharp, clear contour? What in the hell are you doing with it? But it does have sort of a declarative sense that color doesn't have. I mean, look at that. What in the hell does that declare except that it's hot.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, right.

THEODORE HALKIN: But so does that, and it ain't hot.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's a very particular weird color. Yeah, that's a very strange, yeah, the neon orange stuff. That's like not in the natural world, at least not to my knowledge. Totally unnatural color.

THEODORE HALKIN: I think it's—all of that is just wonderful fun. Great fun.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you're still having fun, and that's what—I was going to ask that. One of my last questions is you're still making art, and you're still driven to do that. It's that act of discovery. That's what drives you to continue making it.

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. It's really fun. I really—yeah, it's painful, and it's full of anxiety, and it's full of frustration.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But that's the world.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's fun.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's great.

THEODORE HALKIN: It's fun. If you make something and you say, "Oh, that's not bad," the real secret is that, in making works, you find out who you are, and you remake yourself.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So it goes back and forth. You look for the next thing and then all of a sudden, you become

the next thing. So this learning process is a little—you mentioned transforming at the beginning. So it's a cyclical thing where you learn something new, and you become something new, and then you move onto the next thing. So that's what the process is for you.

THEODORE HALKIN: [01:46:00] And I think it is, for many artists, the sense that they are in a state of becoming.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what you talked about that I was very taken with.

THEODORE HALKIN: And you can, you know—Picasso and Matisse are the best examples.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. That's the good role model, I think. I mentioned that show I did called *Artists' Magic* with artists as sort of a magician, but also somebody that sees ahead and moves and transforms maybe even the culture a little. Maybe Leon helped a little there. Although talking about Leon, there's ambiguities about that, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well Leon is, you know—at one time, we were really pretty good friends. Circumstances were that somehow there was a kind of alienation, but I never stopped respecting and admiring him.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, he had a difficult time in the art world because he didn't—I mean, he wasn't entirely accepted in Chicago, not really, and he wasn't lionized, and that's probably the right term in a way. And in the same time in New York, he had an even harder time because he was making political art which was a no-no in many people's eyes, although who knows now; these days that's probably a way to get more attention.

THEODORE HALKIN: And you know, he and Nancy [Spero] were a remarkable couple.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I could tell that from the little that I had to deal with him. As I said, they both struck me as very remarkable and not just as artists but as people.

THEODORE HALKIN: No, they were remarkable.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you've had quite a journey, too, and you've had, you know, as you said, just like me you feel very privileged to be where you're at right now.

THEODORE HALKIN: Oh, lucky as hell.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Lucky as hell.

THEODORE HALKIN: You know, one can hardly imagine. I could not have predicted this life. Could I predict? No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually when I asked about alternative careers, you'd be hard-pressed to think of something else you would have done.

THEODORE HALKIN: [01:48:00] I was fearful I would have to spend my life selling shoes that didn't fit to ladies who had big feet and wanted them declared small. I sold shoes when I was in high school.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what my dad did. Actually, he worked in the shoe business, and then he was working in bars. He ended up being able to do interior design of bars. That's how he got his art chops in there. But basically, it was the Depression era. It was post-war. The bars did very well after the war, but then that became a whole ugly story, too.

THEODORE HALKIN: But anyway, you know, in high school, you had to go make some money, so you could take out girls, so you could sort of act like a sport, smoke a cigarette.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, it's amazing that we've managed to get as far as we have in this particular culture which doesn't really value art like Europe or many other cultures do, traditional cultures—

THEODORE HALKIN: And you know, sort of, I don't know whether—I don't know. I scare people.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You mean your art or you?

THEODORE HALKIN: I don't mean to scare them. Personally.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Personally? How so? You seem like a cuddly, easy person to me [laughs].

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, that's because you are who you are.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's probably true but maybe there's context too.

THEODORE HALKIN: Both of us are rather forthright.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. We had that conversation.

THEODORE HALKIN: That's scares people.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah. I talked about that in the Midwest. I was having this conversation with my wife about learning to tone it down a little.

THEODORE HALKIN: That scares people.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know that. As a matter of fact, I never cared a whit. I don't worry about that, but on the other hand, in the museum world, there's a certain sort of—you know, sophistication is ruled as being something where you don't reveal your hand. You're non-vulnerable, and you don't ever [laughs] state who you are. You're sort of very, I don't know, subterfuge. [01:50:00]

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, there's—art expertise, which presumably people in the museums have.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, they used to [laughs]. I'm sorry. I'm being bad. Anyway connoisseurship. Those things are—

THEODORE HALKIN: They're supposed to.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, they're still out there.

THEODORE HALKIN: And in a sense, connoisseurship is a secret, and they don't give it away.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Right. There's a certain kind of, yes, this is their realm.

THEODORE HALKIN: And in a way, they extend that to their person.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

THEODORE HALKIN: So that their person is also this package that is a secret.

LANNY SILVERMAN: At a certain point way back in the '50s and '60s in my early art field too, early growing up in the art field, there was a class thing, too. It was mostly wealthy people and it was—see as in other cultures, like in Africa or Indonesia, you live with the art, or in Mexico, whatever, it's part of your everyday life. Here it's like a temple. You mentioned the fascist palace that we've made in Ontario.

THEODORE HALKIN: If that's recorded I want you to—

LANNY SILVERMAN: We've both got our opinions, so whatever. We're not the first people to say that. That's sort of the going critique of that.

THEODORE HALKIN: I'm going to get these.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And you're going to edit it out. Whatever.

THEODORE HALKIN: No, I won't edit it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's fine. In any case, it used to be the province of the wealthy and there was a whole sort of division. Now—there's some good and bad in this as well. But not just Pop art and pop culture, but it's all seeping out. I saw a show on hip hop that was at the Brooklyn Museum a long time ago, about 10 years ago, and it was like just clothes, and it was just like outfits. [01:52:00] And this was in the art museum. It's like the culture—the difference between popular culture and everyday life, it's seeped into the museums, and the old days of connoisseurship, I mean, I studied with some of those like Sherman Lee, whatever. Those days, those people are fewer and further between. It's more, how can you get what the most current thing is? What's the latest trend? It's a whole different—we're talking about museum.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, you know, that's all showbiz.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Showbiz. It's become entertainment. Well, that's provided a career. The fact that we have so much more leisure time means I picked the right field. You can afford to pay me because people are now looking at it as entertainment; however, it's alienated me and you and a lot of other people in terms of like standards, and yeah, I'm very interested in pop culture but I think there are standards and there are differences between Kim Kardashian and a real person of substance that gets attention for reasons that are, you know, something more than just being famous at being famous.

THEODORE HALKIN: There's a sense of, I mean, you know, Donald Trump running for president—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's a good example.

THEODORE HALKIN: —and gathering people around him. And that is about showbiz.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I love that Arianna Huffington on the *Huffington Post* has categorized him. I hope she didn't take it out. She now no longer has him under politics. She has him under entertainment, which I think is perfect. As an entertainer, he's pretty good. He's got a certain—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah. He's scary.

LANNY SILVERMAN: He's scarier than all hell, but he's—I'll watch it only because he's so bizarre that—

THEODORE HALKIN: Yeah, of course.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —I'm mesmerized like the rest. On the other hand, I'm like you, appalled that our country could actually take this seriously or begin to. Anyways.

THEODORE HALKIN: I don't know the world. I'm really innocent of the world.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I suppose, yes, we're probably alike in that manner.

THEODORE HALKIN: I just don't know it. My life has been sheltered. I've sheltered it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: We live in a bubble. We're living in the art world bubble. You've got lovely butterflies out there, too. [01:54:00]

THEODORE HALKIN: I had the most lovely experience last year. By the door, I had a sunflower growing, and it was about six-foot tall.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Those big ones are great.

THEODORE HALKIN: And I went out to get the paper one morning and in the middle of it was a monarch butterfly just about eye level. I nearly swooned with delight.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, the colors. That's kind of incredible right there.

THEODORE HALKIN: So I planted a sunflower, a bunch of seeds. One grew, and what did it do? It bent to reach the sun, so now it's a very big plant along the ground.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, it's trying to find the sun in Chicago. I think we pretty much covered—we're starting to just chat, which I find very enjoyable. I've got to hit stop.

THEODORE HALKIN: Well, this was great.

LANNY SILVERMAN: This was very enjoyable and actually—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]