

NATIONAL LIFE STORIES

ARTISTS' LIVES

Dame Elisabeth Frink

Interviewed by Sarah Kent

C466/12

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The British Library	National Life Stories
Interview Summary Sheet	Title Page
Ref no: C466/12/01-04	Digitised from cassette originals
Collection title: Artists' Lives	
Interviewee's surname: Frink	Title: Dame
Interviewee's forename: Elisabeth	Sex: female
Occupation:	Date and place of birth: 1930.11.1
Mother's occupation:	Father's occupation:
Dates of recording: 1992.12.28, 1992.12.29	
Location of interview: Interviewee's home	
Name of interviewer: Sarah Kent	
Type of recorder: Marantz CP430	
Recording format: D60 Cassette	
F numbers of playback cassettes: F2986 - F2989	
Total no. of digitised tracks: 7	Mono or stereo: Stereo
Total Duration:	
Additional material:	
Copyright/Clearance: Interview is open. Copyright is held by The British Library Board.	
Interviewer's comments:	

F2986 Side A

Interview with Elisabeth Frink, December 28th, 1992.

Let's start, Liz, right back with your childhood, where you were born, and your earliest memories.

I was born in Suffolk, in a house that my father had been born in, before me, which was nice. It's an old house. And my grandfather was a Canadian. And he'd come over to go to Cambridge, and to school, and finally Cambridge University. Never went back to Canada, because he liked England so much, and settled in Suffolk. And so Dad was born in, and consequently we all, my brother and myself were.

Was your grandmother English?

Yes. She was English, yes. My childhood memories are very good, really, because they're all to do with country things, and my dog, and my pony, for quite a while. And ...

So you learned to ride very young?

I did learn to ride very young. I was never quite sure whether I liked it, because, you know, one had very silly ponies, usually. People were a bit daft in those days, they'd stick their children on impossible Shetlands, bad-tempered, you know. Anyway, after that, we travelled around a fair bit, because Dad was in the Army, so I went up to Edinburgh. When I was five, I was up in Edinburgh, so I was at a school there. Before that I went to the village school in Suffolk. Miss Webb had 12 of us, which was lovely.

All different ages?

Mmm, yes. We were all different ages.

So it was like a large family, almost?

Yes. Yes.

What did you learn from ...

Well, I learnt all my reading and writing, drawing, you know, that sort of thing.

Did you, I mean, was drawing something you were very passionate about as a child? Can you remember it being a particular love?

I was passionate about it. I did really boring drawings.

Did you? Children never do boring drawings!

No, that's true! My son, who is a painter now, did wonderful drawings from a very early age, most imaginative. My drawings didn't take off in that sense, till I was about 11 or 12. Before that they were boring little ponies, little figures, little houses. I just don't how understand how it all emerged from that. So, after that, I went to Edinburgh, and then after that, I mean, I'm skipping a bit, but ... anyway, they were nice days in the country and holidays in Frinton-on-Sea. The Suffolk coast, very bracing, cold winds, and also ...

Did you travel out of England with your father, or were you always in the British Isles?

I was always in Britain. Till after the War, I didn't travel at all, you see, nobody did much, because he wasn't sent abroad until ... he was sent abroad ... before the War, he went to India, where he met my mother, because she was part of all that Raj ...

She was born in India, was she, your mother?

Yes. And her parents were, her father was Indian Army. Her mother was an Irish woman. And they were out there all the time, so she was packed off to school in England, but, on the whole, she spent a bit of time in India then, and went to various hideous schools. But, because of that, she met my father, because he was sent out there before the War, because he was a cavalry, young cavalry officer, and he met her there, and they got married there, and eventually came back to England. And then, by that time, he was ...

What date was that, roughly?

1929. I was born in 1930. And after that, he had various posts in England - Aldershot, and Tidworth, where I spent quite a lot of my childhood. And, and then, of course, by the time I was nine, the War had started.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

One brother, who is five years younger.

And how did you welcome his arrival?

I don't, you know, I don't remember. We were very good friends for a while, until I got into my teens, and then he was a pest, because he had a whole gang of horrible little boys, and they used to plague one, which was very annoying, I guess, you know, when you're 14, growing up. But, up until then, I used to mug around with the village boys in the holidays.

So were you a tomboy, would you say?

I was, yes. We used to explode cartridges, and all sorts of things like that. It was fun.

So it was very much a rural childhood, was it?

It was very rural, and, for instance, my memories are of immensely cold winters, a bit like the one we're having now. But all the ponds around would be covered with ice, so we used to skate a lot.

Dangerous!

And the sledges used to come out. And we always had bonfires and it was fun.

Did you play with the boys, then, rather than the girls?

Yes. And one or two of us girls used to knock about with the boys. We made funny little machines with wheels, I mean, you know, we used to skid off down the village street. And, in the summer, I remember wonderful summer holidays there. I remember harvest time, and things like that.

"There" being?

Suffolk.

Suffolk, yes.

Well, then when the War started in '39, my father was posted abroad. He didn't go abroad immediately. First of all he went to Dunkirk, and my mother and I were, at that moment, in

Dorset for three or four months. And I mention that fact because we were staying in a house, a very nice family, boarding, on the coast, and the young man there was a, a pacifist, therefore he hadn't joined up. But he taught me how to paint.

Really?

Yes. Big, big bits of paper, big brushes, big pencils.

He wasn't a painter himself?

Yes, he was a painter.

Oh, he was.

Yes.

A serious, serious painter?

Yes.

What was his name?

I think he was called Rodney Fenwick, the family were called Fenwick. I often wonder what happened to him, he was terribly nice, very sensitive. I believe he went on to do ambulance service after that. This is right at the beginning, and he got me going on these huge sort of sweeps of colour.

Mmm. And you were nine at the time, were you?

Yes. It's very much like what they teach children to do now, which was never taught in schools then, to use a broad, I mean, paint in a broad sense. And Dad went to Dunkirk, and for quite a while, we didn't know whether he was missing or not.

Oh, that must have been awful. How long did that last?

Well, I don't think it was very long. It must have been awful for my mother, because he was one of the last to get off, you know, and the news didn't come through until very late. So it

was terrible for her, because she was stuck in the house, by that time, back in Suffolk, looking after my grandfather, who was very eccentric.

This is the Canadian grandfather?

Yes. He sort of, he liked to be thought of as a bit of a backwoodsman, you know - felling trees and - ... he really wanted to be a parson, but he couldn't because he had this awful stutter.

What did he do?

Nothing. No, for a long time he taught boys grammar, in Cambridge, because we weren't far from Cambridge. When he retired, he did nothing, just became a country gentleman. And then finally Dad came back, and that was nice. And then, he was here for a bit, until he was finally sent abroad, and we didn't see him again till the end of the War, pretty well. He was sent to a tank regiment, because all the cavalry turned over to tanks, 25th Dragoons and he ended up, in India, preparing for Burma.

So how old were you when he came back, then?

15? Wait a minute, now, no, when was the end of the War?

'45.

No he came back, I suppose in '45. I'm not sure about that. '44/'45. and I'm usually the same, the end of the year, so, yes, I was about 15, 14.

Did he seem a stranger to you then?

Well, a bit. I was very fond of my father.

You were very close were you, when you were, before he went away?

Well, quite close. I can't remember, really, much about that. Then he ... he went to, I think he went out to Palestine for a bit, and then he came back. And then finally, at the end of the War, he was here for a bit, in England, and I was finishing my schooling. But then he got a command in Trieste, which is very interesting. Not long after the end of the War. The Yugoslavs were having a bang up in Trieste, you know, they were always fighting across the

border there, and they sent out one or two regiments to try and keep order. And, of course, that was the most fascinating part, at the beginning of my art studies, if you like, because we went to Venice, my mother and I, twice, and saw the Doges Palace, St. Mark's Square, wonderful sculpture, men on horses. The horses of St. Mark's.

Horses have featured in your work throughout your career, haven't they?

Yes.

And, presumably, that relates to the fact that you had a horse yourself.

Well, mainly, yes.

But also that your father was a rider, too.

Yes. I think the main thing was that, I've skipped rather a lot. I went to a Convent School, finally, during the War, between the ages of 10 and 15/16. I went to a Convent School in Devon. Mum thought it was safer, because, you know, the bombs in Suffolk were pretty bad, because we were surrounded by aerodromes, and so we were both sent away. And, at the Convent, there was a very, a very nice nun, who taught me extra art. I didn't, by that, I was drawing from my life casts. And she'd got, she had various art books, you know, which I used to look at. And then somebody gave me a book on Rodin, so I knew about Rodin, and certain Renaissance and Classical painting. But the amazing thing was to go to Venice, you see, to see all these things come alive. It was a most exotic experience, because it was in the winter, all misty and cold, and we stayed in that amazing hotel, the Danieli.

Oh yes, which is wonderful.

You were more impressed by the sculptures than the paintings, in Venice, were you?

Not especially. I didn't think about sculpting. I thought I would like to go to Art School, at that stage, and would go to, the study of painting. And eventually, I was 17, I did my equivalent 'O's.

And you did art, presumably, did you?

I did art. And I went to Guildford Art School, just, I think, I'd turned 17, I think, and I had two really hectic years there, when I was behaved very badly ... walked myself out of various

classes, and found that I liked sculpture very much suddenly, because there was a very nice man down there who taught it, very sympathetic, Trevor Tennant, he was a wonderful teacher. There were two - Harry Phillips and Trevor Tennant - they're both dead now. And they were just wonderful.

What kind of work did they do themselves?

Sort of figurative. Trevor Tennant the more abstract. Harry Phillips was figurative. And I got into clay and cement, and, and I rather threw over the foundation course, the equivalent, but ... anyway, I decided I wanted to go to London, so I moved on to Chelsea, and Chelsea took me in on my folder, portfolio. And I actually did complete my National Something of Design, as it was known then.

NDD, was it called?

Yes.

National Diploma of Design.

Yes.

And who taught, who was teaching at Chelsea in those days?

Well, Willi Soukop and Bernard Meadows', first teaching job, he was very young and blond, very handsome, and I think we behaved very pally with him, too. You know, you know when somebody's not, hasn't been teaching very long, make it difficult for them. It was a very, I had a very good time, though at Chelsea.

Who were your fellow students?

Robert Clatworthy, and from the sculptors ... it was an interesting school, people like John Berger was there.

As an art student?

I think he was.

He was a painter, was he?

I don't know what the hell he was teaching, or whether ... he used to stride up and down the corridors.

And he was teaching?

He was a painter, wasn't he?

I think he studied painting, yes. But he was teaching, not a student.

Well, I imagine, he was much older than us. And Julian Trevelyan, Ceri Richards, who I loved. All sorts of interesting people. Howell Jones, the illustrator.

Wait a minute, I'm getting confused. Were these members of staff, or students?

Staff. Staff.

These were staff.

Yes.

But they were in the Painting School, presumably, were they?

Yes, I know, but it was all down one corridor.

So did you wander in and out from ...

Yes.

So there was no strong distinction between the two departments?

No, because the life classes were all for both, and anatomy classes, and so on. And then some of us, some of them went on to the Royal College or Slade. I decided, I got a Scholarship for Chelsea, to take two extra years, so I stayed there.

So how old were you when you left Chelsea?

20.

Still very young.

No, 21, actually, probably, by the time I'd finished, yes. Because then I had a little show at the Beaux Arts Gallery with Helen Lessore, with three other people.

Immediately after you graduated?

Almost the same time I was there, really. Plaster figures and strange drawings.

And what were they of? What, were you, were you already making animals?

Men and birds. Men and birds, and horses heads, sort of, very strange sort of gothic, rather apocryphal figures, very gloomy.

What date would this be, then?

1951.

Right. I'm trying to remember when that first post war...

I did that bird that the Tate bought very early on, it was from that exhibition. It had to be cast, I remember.

Because you showed it in plaster, did you?

Yes. Everything.

I'm trying to remember when that first post-war Venice Bienalle was. It must have been about then mustn't it?

It was 1950 something, yes. Lynn Chadwick, wasn't it, who ...

Those, all those sculptors that were called "The Geometry of Fear" sculptors.

That's right. Well, you know, people still call them, call us that.

Were you ...

I knew all those sculptors.

You were younger than them, though by quite a lot, weren't you?

I know. But I used to knock around, you see, I was working in the same time. I was ten years younger, at least, than most of them.

But how did you get to know them?

Probably in a pub! Finch's, I don't know. I met Lynn Chadwick through a very interesting photographer, photographer, called Douglas Glass, who was a New Zealander, who knew everybody. And Kenneth Armitage, probably through Douglas. McWilliam I met through the Trevelyan's. F.E. McWilliam, who became a very good friend. Reg Butler I met, but we didn't get on especially well so I never got to know him. But I also, during that time I was a student, got to know all, Johns, Augustus Johns' family, which was fascinating, too.

Were they very much a group, these people, or ...

Well, I think, in a way, well, they didn't work together, by any means. But they saw a lot of each other. I seem to remember Lynn and Kenneth sort of hanging out together quite often. They were all good friends, and had all been in the Services.

Right. So they had all actually been in action?

Yes, well, they were all very grown-up, which was quite impressive to a young girl of my age. Of course, the Art Schools were full of people like that.

Had they been to Art School before the War, or had they gone to Art School when they came back from the War?

I imagine one or two had already been to Art School. But I think, I'm not sure that Lynn Chadwick didn't originally train as an architect, didn't he?

That's right. Yes, he did, yes.

Yes. I'm not sure about Lynn, whether he actually went to Art School, or whether he just switched without.

Did people talk much about their work, or was it very much ... more social interaction?

I think it was more social. I definitely ... we didn't discuss work at great length. I seem to remember rather, rather being pleased about that.

And was Herbert Read part of that group?

Well, of course, well, no, he was older, more, more ... what do you call it?

Establishment? No.

Yes, but rather grand, do you know what I mean?

Yes.

I mean, I did meet Herbert Read, of course I did, and I met Graham Sutherland and all those people. Herbert Read I remember talking to when I was very young.

But he was the critic who was most sympathetic to that group, wasn't he?

Yes, he was. I mean, he did a book on us. But, at that time, and also I was going, I was going in several circles, because I was also part of the Rodrigo Moynihan, and Eleanor Bellingham-Smith's lot. We used to go to the pub. The other pub. The Queen's ...

They were painters, were they?

Painters. Michael Andrews ... I knew more painters than sculptors. Michael Andrews, oh, Derek blast! Boshier?

No, not Derek Boshier, he's my generation.

No, well, I got to know Derek later. John Minton, and, of course, Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud. I knew all of them. And, and also, at the same pubs, a character, a wonderful character, called George Melly.

Who was a jazz musician in those days, wasn't he?

Yes, but he was also collecting. I mean, he was one of the first people to buy one of my drawings, which was nice. And, at that time, I knew Julian Bream, which was great, and we used to have big parties.

What was the atmosphere like in those days? You described the sculpture as being rather angst-ridden. Was the mood black?

No.

- and pessimistic?

No, it wasn't. I mean, I didn't really reckon that the sculpture was, particularly. I mean, I think people read far more of that into it than was there, symbolism and all that. We were all immensely cheerful, and busy getting on with what we wanted to do, busy enjoying ourselves, because, you know, after the War, it was fairly austere, because, you know, I was still on rationing when I went to Chelsea Art School. The clothes were terrible!

All the utility clothes, weren't they?

Well, I mean, we had to take our jerseys in, or paint them, or cut down our jeans, or do something mad. And we all used to go off to the jazz club, too.

Were you aware of the Beat Generation in the States? Were you, would you describe yourselves as Bohemians, or was it slightly before that?

No. No, I wasn't aware of the Beat ... when was that?

Well, the Beat Generation is, was during the fifties, but it may well be that information about them hadn't seeped across the Atlantic at that stage.

Not really. I don't think any of us were particularly aware of what was going on in America, probably the older people were, I wasn't. I mean, we were very insulated, because we didn't have, we still hadn't been, I had been abroad, but a lot of us hadn't. And we still couldn't go abroad much, none of us had any money. I mean, petrol was still very short, and my next trip abroad was when I was twenty- ..., still at Chelsea Art School, actually, when four of us, or five of us, went to Paris, and that was wonderful.

Did you go there to look at the arts.

Oh yes.

Yes. And what did you see there? What was showing?

Oh, I saw. Discovered Giacometti, Brancusi, the Museum of Modern Art, the Musee Rodin, fantastic.

And, presumably, these artists weren't being shown in London?

No. I don't know when ...

... at that time.

There was a big Giacometti show quite early on, but after that. And I saw Giacometti, you know, sitting in a cafe. Well, once we knew he went there, we used to and sit quietly in a corner, like little mice, and look at this wonderful face. You know, it was fantastic. And we lived on bread and tomatoes and cheese, we had no money. It was great.

Did you have grandiose ideas of yourselves as romantic figures?

I don't think we had any grandiose ideas at all. I just hoped I would turn out to be a good sculptor. I was quite ambitious to be a good sculptor. I wasn't sure what sort, you know.

What did that mean to you, though? Who were your role models?

Well, I suppose my earlier role model was Rodin, probably. And, after that, I discovered Giacometti and the way he built up in plaster, and I moved much more in that direction, and I worked in plaster of Paris then, and I still do, direct.

What about British examples? For instance, Henry Moore, how important was he to you?

Well, Henry Moore was pretty important to us, because he used to visit the Art School once a term. I mean, he was really very nice, very helpful, and took a lot of trouble, and, you know, then I met him, we all met him. And he became a very good friend, you know, I used to see him from time to time. And not that our work, was in no way, he in no way, he no way influenced my work, as it happened. But I admired what he did, enormously.

Did it make any difference to you that you didn't really have any women role models? I mean, there was Barbara Hepworth, obviously.

Oh, Barbara Hepworth, yes. But she wasn't, I wasn't exactly working like her. Germaine Richier, of course, was important, because I not only saw her work in Paris, when I came back to London, she had a show, and I met her. She was remarkable.

What was she like?

Lovely. She was round, I seem to remember, quite short, and very friendly. She had a show at the Hanover Gallery. And then I, at the same time, I got to know Cesar. I, I saw quite a lot of Cesar in Paris, and he was wild and marvellous, and crazy. And he had his own little circus round him, you know.

Of admirers and followers?

Yes. Hangers-on. So, I mean, all this was sort of going in.

And where were you living at that time?

In Chelsea.

In digs, or ...?

Yes, well, five of us girls shared a flat. We had a room each, and when the owners came back, we all had to stomp up for them to have it re-decorated, because it was so awful!

Had you been having wild parties there?

Yes.

End of F2986 Side A

F2986 Side B

We were talking about the artists that you met in Paris, people like Richier and Giacometti, and you saw them in a cafe in the distance. And then the people that you knew in this country, F.E. McWilliam, who were the others? Paolozzi? Did you know Paolozzi?

Yes I did. I met him in a very interesting way, actually, because somebody bought a rather nice plaster bull to me, with the tail broken off, and they said it was a Paolozzi, and I said, "Well, why bring it to me? You should take it to Paolozzi." And they said they didn't know him. And I said, "Well, I don't. But I'd quite like to meet him." So, it was an excuse, and I took it round and met him. And it was when he was sort of, there seemed to be quite a few children around at that time.

Of his? His, his children?

Yes. He was married to a blonde girl called Pam, I think.

Pam?

Can't remember. And so I met him.

And what was he like? He gives the impression of being very chauvinist, very bullish.

Well, he was frightening. But he was very nice to me. He thanked me very much, he took the bull and mended it, and I returned it to the people. And they were very pleased. I never got to know him well, though.

What was the general attitude towards you, as a woman? Were people patronising towards you, or not at all?

I don't think they were at all. I wasn't aware of it.

Do you think, because I can remember even, 12, 12, 15 years later at the Slade, there was this idea being circulated that the, that the students at the Slade who were serious, were the men, and that the women were really there to entertain the men, to be their girlfriends, yes.

But do you think ... I mean, who are you talking about? Is that a point of view of the Arts Council, the British Council, or just general public?

No. This was an idea circulating within the institution itself, so it was the staff within the institution, who ...

Who put that around?

Who definitely didn't treat the women seriously. I can remember, I mean, I don't know about naming names, I can remember Philip Sutton was very dismissive of female students, for instance. And Reg Butler argued that a woman couldn't really be a sculptor, it was impossible for a woman to be a sculptor. If she was a good sculptor, she wasn't a good woman! You know, you had the choice of either being one or the other really.

Well, you see, Reg was wicked, I always thought, because of that. As you know, he had this ménage à trois, he had his wife and children, and his mistress, Rosemary Young, who was a very talented sculptor, but, in the end, she, she didn't continue.

Well, that was usually the case, wasn't it. You had extremely brilliant female students, who then...

I know he didn't agree with it. Whereas somebody like F.E. McWilliam loved women, and, and thought they were totally equal. I'm not sure about Armitage or Chadwick, really, at the time. They were all very kind to me. None of them, I didn't feel out of it in any way, ever, from that point of view.

I mean, it may be that your experience as a child, you know, essentially being one of the boys, prepared you ...

Yes, but, you see, I naturally like men anyway. And as long as they didn't stop me working, I just got on with it. I enjoyed the company of men, always, all my life.

Were you, were you encouraged by your father? Did you have a very good relationship with your father? The reason I ask you is because ... I can't remember now who it was who did a study of women who achieve well, and one of the things that she discovered was that, very often, they were, they were either only children, or the first-born, and that they had very special relationships with their fathers, and their fathers very often treated them like boys.

Well, I mean, I did get on with Dad very well, and I was very fond of him. But I wouldn't say it was terribly close, because Dad was very funny like that, he wasn't terribly close to us

children, probably because he was away such a lot. But he was very very pleased with what I was doing, from that point of view. And I admired him enormously, of course. He was a bit of a hero, you see.

A hero in your eyes, or in actuality, or both?

Well, he was very brave in the War.

Very brave in the War?

Yes. And ...

Did he win medals, and ...

Yes, he did. In Burma. And, well, he was a hero in my eyes, of course. And most men in uniform were, if you were 15 or 16. It was very glamorous.

So do you think you had a, a rather romantic idea of men, of men in uniform?

Oh, sure.

Of war in general?

Yes.

And of soldiering, if you like.

Well. Yes, I did, until I discovered, when I was 15, I realised the horrors of war, because we used to have Picture Post photographs, Life magazine, Belsen. Now, before I left school, I knew about Belsen. We all did. News field pictures. And then, then, of course, the horrors of war came in on us.

Yes. And there are those two strains in your work, aren't there. There is the rather solid, heroic male, who seems very substantial, who you feel is not going to be easily vanquished, and then, on the other hand, you have the, the figures that seem more vulnerable, that are, perhaps, more skeletal as well.

Well there are. I mean, there are two themes of male figures that do run through my work, they always have. That's sort of, basic male nude, in a sense, strong and powerful. Then there's the other one, which is more fugitive. Probably more vulnerable.

Which is also a male, or are you thinking of the birds?

No.

You're talking about the male figures?

Yes.

Yes. Are you talking about the running figures?

Mmm.

It's interesting whether you think of them as running away from something, or running towards something?

Well, they're either, you see.

But, going back to the question I started to ask you, and then didn't, didn't ever finish asking you, all these artists are figurative, and ... and, I wondered whether that was a conscious decision, to make work that was figurative? And whether, in that case, that was a reaction against abstraction? What did you feel?

Well, I didn't think abstraction had particularly ... struck us by then, not in a sense. I mean, even Picasso's work, at the time, was based on the figure, wasn't it. I mean, it wasn't really abstract. I mean, when did really abstract work start?

Well, you'd had Moore and Hepworth making ...

Hepworth, of course.

... abstract work, by then.

Yes. Yes, but Moore was still very organic. And it's the way ... that I couldn't cope with Barbara's work, because it was too cold and sterile for me. I don't know why we were all figurative, but, you know ... what was going on in America then?

Well, it was, in terms of painting, it was Abstract Expressionism, wasn't it?

Yes.

Which was essentially abstract.

De Kooning.

And De Kooning was still making figurative pieces.

Sure. And that other man, that begins with G, a painter?

There was Ben Shan.

Yes.

He was probably still making figurative work.

Yes.

But as you said, you were less aware of what was going on in the States than you were what was going on in Europe/

I think we were very isolated.

What strikes me about your work is, that if you look at the things that you were doing while were still at Chelsea, they're already there, aren't they. The basic themes are already there, the birds.

Yes. Themes that I carried on to do, yes.

That you carried on doing. You've got the Christ figure, a man on horseback, a male nude, and then the bird, the birds, such as the Tate, the Tate bird, that you did in '52. It's astonishing how very very early those basic themes were established.

Well, it's a mixture of two things. It's being brought up in the country and being surrounded by wildlife, which I incorporate as vehicles for what I want to say, and flight, because I was obsessed with flight, and aeroplanes crashing, because they crashed all round us.

This was when you were in Suffolk?

Yes.

At Thurlow, with ... yes.

Yes, I mean, it was terrifying to see them coming down, the planes, and I used to have bad dreams, I still do, occasionally.

Did you see, see any of the pilots?

No. But we used to rush up next day, like a lot of little ghouls, and, and when we were allowed to pick up old bits of shrapnel, parachute silk, and old bullet cases.

Souvenirs of the crashes.

Yes. Proper, you know, really ghoulish.

And so those tattered carcasses of aeroplanes,

It's all part of it.

... must have stayed in your mind.

Yes, they still do. I can still have recurrent dreams of that.

Of crashes? Do you? Do you have flying dreams as well?

Yes.

Really, that's interesting.

Very unpleasant.

The flying dreams are unpleasant?

Yes. I don't know why that is.

Flying dreams are usually very buoyant.

I know, but mine aren't. They're still rooted in fear, you know, which is strange after all this time, isn't it?

Are your memories of the War fearful?

Not so much, because I was cushioned largely by the school, and then I went home for holidays, and then, then ... mmm, only I think when I became a proper teenager. Well, air raids were frightening. Goodness me! I mean, we were bombed and machine-gunned in Exmouth in Devon, in broad daylight. A little crocodile of schoolgirls walking along the front, and we just had to rush up the bank, and throw ourselves down. So, of course there were aspects that were frightening.

Did you think of your father away at the War as someone in jeopardy? Or did you think of him as someone who was going to vanquish the enemy?

Well, I, I don't think I did think very much, I just assumed he was going to come back. Therefore, I thought he'd probably be okay. And we heard he was ill in Burma, but they shipped him out. He'd got TB. It seriously affected his life after that, because he lost a lung. But I think that was a very worrying time for my mother, and not so much for us, because she sheltered us from it.

What sort of relationship did you have with your mother?

Oh, a very good one. She was remarkable really, because she had to look after us, a mad old man, and, who she couldn't stand, really.

This was your grandfather?

Yes. In a terribly cold house in Suffolk, and she hates the cold. But she did the best she could with cooking, and what we were given. She was remarkable.

So the competition for the Unknown Political Prisoner, was established while you were still a student, wasn't it, in Chelsea?

Yes. I was on a short-list, I think.

And how did you know about that? Was it advertised?

Yes. We were all told about it, so I went in for it. It's the one that Reg Butler won.

And you won a prize?

Yes. I was one of 60 runners up, from all, international.

Did you actually win any money from that?

Yes.

Can you remember how much?

Well, no, that's the annoying thing, I can't remember how much. And I'm afraid the piece got destroyed.

What was the piece?

There was a man with a bird on his wrist, a strange, cadaverous creature. A seated man.

What was, was the bird a falcon? A bird of prey?

It was a raven.

A raven. So was he, was he a warrior or was he a victim?

A victim.

He was a victim. I'm very curious about whether your cast of characters, if you like, divide up into masculine heroes and victims that are not masculine. I'm thinking, for instance, of the, of the birds. The birds divide into birds of prey, don't they. There are predators and

there are also victims, so maybe, in each category, you have both. Is that, would that be true to say?

I suppose so, yes. I mean, my birds of prey, actually became something else. I mean, they became like bits of shrapnel and flying things, you know, with the very sharp beaks.

So they were part bird and part machine?

Yes.

And part weapon, even?

No, I wasn't aware of that. No.

How was it that the Tate bought that very early bird of prey?

Well, I think John Russell gave me a very good write-up, it was probably the last good write-up I ever got for quite a while after that, because you know what it's like, you get good write-ups, and then they just all drop you. And they came round, and they said, "Oh, we'll have that."

Where did they see it?

In the Gallery, the Beaux Arts.

That was in the Beaux Arts?

Mmm. Helen Lessore. And after that, they bought one or two other small bronzes too.

It was actually quite an extraordinary thing for them to do, wasn't it?

I suppose so. And John Rothenstein liked my work very much, at the time.

I mean, I can't imagine that they very often bought work by someone who was ... that was a student piece.

Oh, they buy lots of young people's work now.

Not that young, and not while they're still students.

Mmm.

I don't think, I mean, it would be interesting to look through their collection and see.

Yes.

I would think that was an almost unique example.

Well, they haven't bought much since then! They haven't exactly made up for the ...

You must have been very chuffed by it?

Of course I was. And it was a most marvellous thing. And the Arts Council bought a cast as well, at the same time.

So that was confirmation.

Mmm.

How did you survive, financially, in those days?

Well, my parents were able to give me five pounds a week. They were very broke, because Dad had to live on Army pay, which was nothing then. And they had to run this house, and my grandfather didn't have any spare money. And, on top of that, I got various Scholarships at Chelsea, while I was there, so that bumped it up, and so I was able to pay the rent and then we pooled all our money and bought food. Food didn't cost very much. There wasn't much about. We lived on very little. But I used to model.

Did you?

Oh yes.

Who did you model for?

I was a teacher in one Art School in the daytime, and used to go to the other one in the evening, at St. Martins.

So you modelled at St. Martins?

Yes.

Where did you teach?

Chelsea. And Roland Pitchforth, this lovely deaf ... Vivian Pitchforth, wonderful draughtsman, he's dead now, white, white hair, a Yorkshireman. He was famous, you know, very well-known. He used to teach me drawing at Chelsea. And I used to scoot off in the evenings and earn quite good money, getting my bottom sort of heated up by the fire on one side, and freezing on the other! And ... I modelled at the College once or twice for Skeaping.

For Skeaping?

Yes. But then, when I went to teach at St. Martins, of course, I stopped modelling. But when I was going over on my first day there, old Pitchforth was in the lift, and he said, because he was deaf, he just shouted at me, and said, "Ah!" he said, "There's nobody strips like you! Liz" he said. I was puce!

This was nude modelling, presumably, yes.

Of course, yes. It was quite a nice little income.

How much did you earn?

Oh, only a few shillings a night, but, you know ... It was quite good. It paid the rent!

Did you, did you learn anything about sculpture, from modelling?

I think so, because, you know, when you're doing a seated pose, and when doing a standing pose, all the different tensions. One was very aware of one's muscles. I'm sure, actually, I found it quite helpful.

Did you work from the model yourself, a lot?

Yes. Quite a lot.

Yes.

And on life scale too, sometimes, at Chelsea. We were encouraged to do that there.

Did you, did you draw from the model, or did you sculpt straight from the model?

Both.

Both. Mmm.

They were very good drawing classes, very good sculpture classes. And Bernard and William were a very good foil for each other, because they were so totally different. We were very lucky to have them.

This is Bernard Meadows and Willi Soukop?

Yes, and Willi Soukop of course, yes. Because they're so different.

And were the models mostly male or female?

Well, we had about, we were lucky, we used to get quite a few male models at that time. I remember a wonderful coloured model, and I did a lifesize one of him, in plaster. Sadly, it got bust. And they were all sorts of shapes and sizes, and, I suppose, the larger proportion were women.

Did you prefer working from men, even then?

Yes. Quentin Crisp, he used to hang upside down! And in a crucifixion.

Hang upside down from what?

Oh, the wall, a chain, anything you asked him to do! He was extraordinary in those days, because he was young then. He's extraordinary now!

What did he, what did he have on.

Nothing.

Because they weren't allowed to be completely naked.

Oh, jock-straps, they all had jock-straps.

When, by the time we had Quentin Crisp, he used to wear a see-through muslin, a little piece of see-through muslin over his genitals.

You mean to say he was still modelling for you?

He was still modelling in the sixties.

I'm amazed.

Mmm. At The Slade.

Good Heavens!

And he used to take up these extraordinary poses ...

Yes.

... with his fingers raised in elegant positions.

Extraordinary. Extraordinary man.

And how long could he maintain an upside down pose?

Well, I say upside down, he was usually on his shoulders, you know what you do when you do a sort of ... legs up against the wall.

And was that the basis of your studies? Was it centred around the life room?

Well, yes, pretty well. I mean, we were also allowed a fair amount of time to do free composition.

Were you set subjects?

No.

No. So you did whatever you liked?

You did what you wanted, which was good. I mean, Chelsea was very good in those days. You know, you could be abstract, figurative, any damned thing. Nobody said "No", like, after I left and I was still teaching, and after I stopped teaching, all the Art Schools said "No" to figurative, "no" to the model, "no" to life drawing, which was so intolerant, and such a ghastly ... mistake. Whole generations of art students have come out not knowing how to draw. It's terrifying that period, the period of Caro. You know, sort of, I don't know what do they call it, it was something design. They used to go, they used to stick a model in a box, so you couldn't see her, and stick pins in, and, I mean, you know, they were crazy.

They called it "basic design", didn't they.

And ... I left. I stopped teaching at that point.

When did you stop?

At the beginning of the sixties, I suppose. I went, no, end of the sixties. I went to teach at the College, did block teaching, and then I went to France to live.

So how quickly did you get your first teaching job, after you left ...

Well, I joined Chelsea, really, a very few months after I left.

So you stayed on, basically, and taught.

Yes, which, I don't know how good that was for the students, but ... poor things, anyway!

And you taught, what, one day a week, or what?

Two.

Two. Which would have been enough to keep you going, financially?

Oh yes. That was wonderful, and then I got two evenings at St. Martins, and that changed to a day.

The two evenings were teaching or modelling?

No, wait a minute, I taught, in the end. I think I stuck to two days. I had one, I had an extra day, I took on at Chelsea, I reduced Chelsea to one, and St. Martins one. That's after I stopped modelling, yes.

What made you start using plaster, rather than clay, for instance?

Giacometti. Yeh, I mean, we learned about his technique, and we all did it, and Bernard Meadows knew how to teach it, and Henry Moore was using it anyway, so, when he used plaster.

You didn't go to Giacometti's studio, or anything like that?

No. I wish I'd met him. You know, this is a sadness that I didn't. Last time I was in Paris, I think it was February this year, there was a wonderful exhibition on of Giacometti, again.

And you were building the work up very rapidly over an armature?

Yes.

Using scrim?

Scrim and chicken wire, yes, and then, finally, solid plaster, and, very much the technique that I'm using now.

And then would you then work the surface down as well?

Yes. I used to work it down with an axe.

With an axe! God, that was pretty aggressive!

Yes. An axe, and then eventually chisels and files, any old thing, really. Of course, I use a lot of chisels now.

So, it was very much a sense of building up and then whittling away again.

Yes. Mmm. This constant process, I'm doing that.

And very physical. A lot of physical ...

Yes, physical.

... interaction with the material.

Yes. It's physical. I can get something up very quickly, which is the wonderful thing about plaster. You are, then, committed to being in bronze, or something, which, it's difficult. It's okay when you're established, but not, not if you're a young sculptor.

What, simply because you can't afford to have it done?

You can't afford it, no. And many of my sculptures got lost, because I sold plasters.

Of course, when you make a plaster original, you can then have an edition made from that, can't you?

Oh yes.

So, I mean, the standard would be an edition of nine, wouldn't it?

Six. Nine.

Six, yes. And then what happens to the original, is there a ...

Well, you break that up. Well, I sometimes keep some of my little plasters I like, in the studio, but we broke the moulds.

Is that a sort of ethical thing, rather like you cross out a print?

Well, yes, because you don't want a foundry or somebody getting hold of it, and going on making casts.

Going on making casts, mmm.

But, I mean, I think the Tate, the bird the Tate bought, was my first ever bronze. In fact, I know it was.

And that was made in an edition of three, I notice.

Yes. I can't remember where the, I know the Arts Council have one. I don't know where the other one is.

Did you, were you interested in the process of the bronze casting, or was that, or did you simply hand over the sculpture and then ...

No, I was interested. I mean, I learned about how they were all finished and chased and everything like that.

Because you have a lot of choices in terms of the colour of the final work.

Yes, well, now I do, because I'm experimenting in different colours. I don't want ordinary bronze colour any more, like all the early stuff, because it was just bronze, or green bronze, or brown bronze, or something.

And at what stage do you alter the colour? Is that in the, while the metal is molten?

No, it's when you get the bronze back, and you heat it up with a gas torch, and you mix up chemicals and water, and then paint it on. It changes the surface colour of the bronze.

So, patination happens after, after it's cold.

Yes. After it's cast, yes.

Ah ha, I see.

It's got to be made hot again.

So if you, if you cast bronze, and you simply leave it unpatinated, what colour would it be?
Is it always the same colour?

Well, it comes out brassy, pinky, sort of ... then it will go very dull.

It goes almost black, doesn't it.

Yes. Mmm, so you want to do something with it. Anyway, then you make it come alive again by waxing it.

End of F2986 Side B

F2987 Side A

So, just to recap, Lis, just to clarify everything, you went to, you went to study at Guildford in '47, and you were there for two years. Then in '49, you went to Chelsea, and you were there until '53. And while you were still a student, in '52, the Tate had already purchased one of your sculptures, "The Bird" of 1952. And then you stayed on at Chelsea, and began teaching in the autumn of that year - '53, and that same year, you also won a prize in the competition for The Monument to an Unknown Political Prisoner. And then you started teaching at Chelsea in '54. What strikes, what's so remarkable about this biography is, is how young you were. You must have been, you must have been very mature.

Well, I think in, in some ways I was mature, and some ways I wasn't. I had, I was extraordinarily wild in many ways, and, you know, I had lots of boyfriends and things like that. But I also had a very strange relationship with a ex-RAF rear-gunner, who was ... had had a pre-frontal lobotomy, but only a partial one, if you can believe that. That's true.

A frontal lobotomy?

Lobotomy.

Yes.

But ...

A partial one. What does that do to you?

Well, it was to reduce his depressions. You knew they were trying that frightful operation out on all sorts of people, and, but the effect it had on him was, that he was very very nice, when he was very very nice, and he was a monster when he wasn't. And I lived with him for two or three years. This was before I got married. And, silly isn't it. Another sort of, another sort of way-out hero, if you like - RAF, flying machines, flying man. But, you know, he used to do very violent things. He also used to take specialised medicines, which were supposed to keep him calm.

Did he do violent things to you? Did he attack you?

I used to walk out. No, but you used to know about him, yes, but he never actually physically hit me. But he used to do things like pawn my gramophone, because he needed

the money for a drink, you know, it was really infuriating! I used to come back, and something else had gone. And I didn't have anything, anyway. But, I mean, that was the end. I think that made me grow up enormously. Dealing with somebody who was, who was mental, really. A disturbed person.

But also, to live with somebody, in those days, without being married, was quite a Bohemian thing to do.

Yes. You see, my parents were in despair, but, I mean, they didn't say anything, because they just hoped to God I wouldn't marry him.

And the Convent you had been to, was that a Catholic Convent?

Yes.

So had you become, had you been a Catholic at one time?

I'd always been a Catholic.

Oh, you were brought up as a Catholic?

I was brought up as a Catholic, because my mother's Catholic, so, I mean, that was always part of my beginning.

So was this wildness part of the wildness that one associates with girls who have had strict Catholic upbringings, you know, a sort of violent reaction?

Well, I, I think it was both. I think it was the wildness of the time, you know, people were free, the War was over, it was infectious. I was young. I'd never had such freedom before I moved to London, you know, because when I was at Guildford I stayed with my mother, and go in every day.

And was this a, a genuine optimism, or was it a kind of hysteria, a kind of craziness? Because there's no exuberance in, in the work of that period, is there?

No. But then I think people were just working through that, you know. There wasn't, I agree. I mean, I know my work remained gloomy for quite a long time. I wasn't gloomy myself. There must be some sort of split in myself, somewhere.

Do you think that's persisted? Do you think there is a ...

Not so much now. I think, sort of, my personality now, and my optimism or pessimisms, such as they are, have met my work in some, some way.

I mean, the way you're describing it at the moment, it's almost as though your life was, you were able to be very optimistic in your life, and wild in your life, because, in your work, you were working through the darker emotions - the fears and the anxieties.

Well, I suppose so. But, don't forget, I didn't really discuss my work with anybody, so I just worked it out. I didn't discuss my work with Arthur, this, this airman, who was intelligent and well-read, funnily enough, but he was ... I don't think he really understood what I was doing.

Did you understand what you were doing? By which I mean, what I'm trying to ask you is whether you worked entirely intuitively or whether you actually made conscious what you were doing, and you analysed the thinking?

As far as I can remember, I worked intuitively, really. Not consciously.

What, one thing that I find interesting, and it's very difficult to talk about, because it's rather intangible, but if you compare your work, let's say, your, your work of the early fifties, with somebody like Robert Clatworthy, there is, in his work, I would say, what I would call a "mannerism", that it's, it's, the expressiveness of it is exaggerated to the point where you no longer believe in it. It actually doesn't seem to have any authenticity to it. Whereas, in your work, although there is this sense of anxiety, and of a sort of spikiness of form, which seems to be the opposite of hedonism, it seems to be edgy. Let's call it "edgy" for want of a better word. But it isn't mannerist. It seems to be absolutely authentic. It isn't made, the forms are not created for effect. They are, somehow, a mirror of something within yourself. Now, it's very difficult to know how it is that one feels that, but, nevertheless, one, you know, one does feel it. I don't know how you, you know, how you can respond to what I've just said, because I'm not really asking you a question.

Well, I suppose in, that I really was very disturbed myself, really. I don't think I recognised it. I mean, I wouldn't say "disturbed" to a degree of needing psychiatric treatment, nothing like that. Emotionally disturbed in many ways.

How did that manifest itself?

I don't know. I didn't discuss it with anybody. I was very reticent at the time. And nobody, I never really met anybody until, perhaps, my first husband, Michel, who, actually, we talked about things like that, when I was 25. I was quite young then, you see.

And what did he do?

He was an architect. Very sensitive, very very well-read, very knowledgeable. And he taught me an enormous amount.

And was he the same kind of age as you?

No. He was ten years older.

Oh, ten years older than you.

Mmmm.

Fairly established?

I, I only liked older men.

Oh, did you?

Yes.

Now, that's interesting.

I didn't go out with many young men.

I'm developing this theory that you were very much in love with your father.

Mmm.

And what you've just said would confirm that. It seems to me that you, you heroised your father and that ...

Mmm.

What did your father look like?

Oh, he was very good-looking, very good-looking.

Do you resemble him?

I am, I am very like my father. So's my brother. The same noses, and sort of chiselled.

Because there's that very famous photograph of you, with one of your heads, in profile, where the head looks very much like a portrait of you.

Yes.

But then, of course, it could also be a portrait of your father, couldn't it?

Yes.

In that ... if you're like your father.

Yes, I am like my father. And he was a very reticent man too. I know that, because I, many years later, when I was probably grown up, my mother used to say how she could never discuss anything with him, you know. She found, she found it very difficult. I was amazed, of course, you know, when your mother tells you something like that, when you're probably grown up, well then you appreciate ...

[NOISE ON TAPE]

Tell me, tell me about Michel. Was he French?

Yes. He was French completely, but a very interesting family. They moved to Ireland and his great-grandfather started the famous French restaurant "Jammets" in Dublin. So the three oldest children were born in France, and then were taken to Ireland by his father, who succeeded to the old man, when he died, and his father, Louis, was an engineer, really, but he took over the restaurant. And so they were a fascinating family, from the South of France, near the Spanish border originally, but had been based in Paris for a long time. Very erudite family, very well-read, knowledgeable. Nice, nice people. And they used to talk either

French at home, or, or speak English with an Irish accent. It's so funny! So Michel had an Irish accent, when he wasn't speaking French! The two younger children were born in Ireland.

So where did you meet him?

I met him in Dublin.

When did you go to Dublin?

I went to Dublin to see another man, huh! Who I met in London, he seemed very nice, and he invited me over, and I thought, "Well I've never been to Ireland", and I'm largely Irish, my grandmother was Irish. And so I said I'd go. And he found me a nice place to stay, and then introduced me to all his friends, and one of his friends was Michel, and that was it.

You mentioned that your grandmother was Irish. Was this on your ...

My mother's side.

Your mother's side.

Yes, but there was also Irish on my father's side.

We haven't talked about your mother's parents. What were they like?

My mother's parents, one was Scots and one was Irish, pure.

And did they feature in your life?

Yes. I mean, I had ... my Frink grandmother died when I was two, so I don't remember her. But my mother's parents I remember very well, they came back, eventually, from India, and settled in England. I was very fond of them.

Frink is your father's name?

It originates in Germany, in Holland, Huguenot. And then they went, some of them settled in Cornwall, some of them were in France, and a lot of them finally went over to the Americas,

so there are a lot of Frinks in Nova Scotia. New Brunswick is where my Canadian Frink comes back from.

Do you have relatives in Canada still?

Yes. A lot. My brother went out to live there, and never came back.

When did, when did he go out there?

When he was 21, I suppose. He's five years younger than me, so yes ... whenever.

So did you lose contact with him? Or have you ...

No, we still, you know, I started showing in the States in the beginning of the sixties, and subsequently in Toronto and Montreal.

So you would go over there and see him?

Yes. Yes.

You married quite quickly, then?

Yes. I was married at 25, and I had my son when I was 27.

Did that change your life dramatically?

Yes. I mean, you know, you just had to learn to cope with new situations. I mean, I used to take him to the studio with me, in his carry cot, and take him back in the afternoons, until he was bigger, and then I had a wonderful charlady who used to take him off. I used to drive him and the charlady down to Battersea, just for two or three hours, and then pick him up, and back home in the evening, when he was a toddler.

So you carried on working? You didn't ...

Yes. Well, no, I stopped for two or three months, of course. We went to Ireland for quite a bit, I seem to remember.

Was that frowned upon? Was there any pressure on you to be a full-time mother?

No.

No. There was no question of that?

I don't think so. But it was difficult, because I was very young, and it's difficult to cope with a child when you're very young. Everything is very worrisome, you know, doing the right thing and ... I mean, I think he's had a hell of a time, and he's come out of it very well.

Well, he's now married, isn't he.

Yes.

And has children of his own.

He's a most wonderful father. Just amazing.

And he's also an artist, of course.

Yes. He's a very good painter, which I'm really pleased about. It took him a long time to come round to it, and he walked away from his art for a long time. Had a pop group, you know, he went to Chelsea, walked out just before he did his Diploma, which is a pity, and did pop for three years, and then gradually got ...

What did he play? What instrument?

Guitar.

Was he in a band?

Yes. They made their own band called The Angletracks. They made one or two records. They got on the Grey Whistle Test, and, it was quite good. But I was terribly pleased when he gave it up, it was such a worry.

And then he began painting?

Well, then he went into cartoons and animation, and story boards for people, making a bit of money. And then, you know, I said to him, "Your vision and sense of space and volume is

so good, just start painting now. Just get on with it, and see how you get on." And he did. Its taken him a while to get going. He's 33 now, but he has, you see. He's got this very 3-D thing about his big nudes.

Do you think he might move into sculpture?

No.

No. Very difficult to follow in the footsteps ...

He wanted to, well, it's hell to follow in the footsteps of parents, period. Because I think one of my worries has been to get him going to use his enormous talent, without me constantly being a shadow. And there's nothing you can do about that. I just encouraged him, helped him, advised him as best I could. I think he's through it now.

Did he come to the studio, as a child?

Oh yes.

To visit you.

But he had endless, I mean, he was drawing fabulous drawings from the age of three.

Was he?

Yes. Really remarkable.

Talking about drawing, how much, because you're a wonderful draughtswoman. How much would you say your drawings are preparations for sculptures, and how much are they completely independent, separate images?

I think they're all ideas, in a way, images, to do with sculpture, which I may or may not use. I treat them together, but separately. You know, I can have a spell of sculpting, and then I'll say, "I'm fed up with that now!" Then I have a spell, like six weeks, two months, drawing, which is wonderful. I love to draw.

When you draw, do you ever draw from life, or from the model, still?

No.

Or do you always draw from imagination?

I haven't done any from the model for a long time. The only thing I do is the odd portraits, of course, directly, I mean, modelled.

Those are commissions, usually, are they?

Those are commissioned, yes. Which are very demanding, very difficult, and not altogether satisfying, because you have to please yourself, do a good portrait, do a good piece of sculpture, please various other people. It's a nightmare.

Mmm. Mmm. And how do you work when you're doing a portrait? Do you work with the model in front of you? Or do you work from drawings and photographs?

No. I get as many sittings as I can out of the model, and take photographs as well, so both.

If you, if you have a model, if you have someone who approaches you to do a portrait, do you ever say no? Are there people that you feel you just can't tackle?

Well, I have said no. I've had very interesting people to do. I've been most fortunate. I mean, I've only ever taken on one head, which I didn't know what he looked like, and I was assured that he was a very fine-looking man. And I still didn't know what he looked like until I went up to Oxford to get my Honorary Degree, and this amazing fellow walked up to me, and said, "I'm Bill Hoffenberg", and I said, "Oh, what a relief!" because he looked so wonderful! That was quite funny.

In order to, to accept a commission, does the person have to have an interesting head?

Yes, for me, he does. You know, I've had people like Alec Guinness, Solti, Paul Hamlyn, Gordon Richardson, who was the Governor of the Bank of England. All these people have very good heads. Michael Jaffe more recently, from the Fitzwilliam.

Do you have to get to know them, or is it simply ...

You do, when they sit there, because I encourage them to talk.

And that helps, does it?

Yeh.

In, in achieving a likeness?

Well, it keeps their head lively.

Your first commission was in 1957, wasn't it? That was a boar for Harlow New Town. Tell me about that. What was it like working to commission for the first time?

Well, I quite enjoyed it to start with. That was a nice thing to do. I wanted to do a wild boar, and they let me do it, and it was commissioned for Freddie Gibbord, who did Harlow New Town.

He was the architect?

He was brilliant. And then I went on to do the beggar, Blind Beggar and Dog? I think, next. For Eugene Rosenberg, and that was a fantastically bright partnership.

That was for Bethnal Green?

Yes. York, Rosenberg and Mardell was a very sort of famous architectural trio.

Yes.

And so that was exciting.

And did you have a free hand in each of those cases?

I seem to. The subject matter, the second, of course, was chosen by Bethnal Green. There was a 'Ballad of Bethnal Green'. Both of them have been desecrated several times.

Have they?

Constantly.

Do you find that upsetting?

I've given up worrying.

Mmm. Because that raises the question of who you're working for, doesn't it.

Yes.

Whether you're trying to address a large, a larger audience, or whether you're working for a small group of interested people.

Yes. I mean, obviously I, I like people to be interested in my work, but obviously I'm going to do what I'm going to do anyway. So that doesn't follow. But, I mean, actually, vandalism is, is another topic. But there are that, in comparison to the people who sort of like your work, or appreciate it, the vandals are far fewer.

Have you ever had experiences of making a piece for commission, and then it being, there being terrible hostility to it, either from the people who commissioned it, or from the public?

Just trying to think. You see, I haven't done that many commissions. Well, I had a ... oh yes, I did the ... the Manchester Airport, big aluminium flying figure. A memorial to Allcock and Brown, it's a big, 14 foot long, horizontal winged figure, and it was nude.

It was a male figure?

Yes.

Yes.

It had a helmet on. And when he was installed in the airport, I mean, there were people shouting "Disgusting!" before they had the thing, the wrap, wrap taken off. And then the mother, the great-granddaughter of Allcock, or Allbrown, or whatever the hell they were.

Allcock and Brown.

She came up ...

It was 1962, wasn't it.

She came up and said, she had a fleet of children behind her and said, "It's disgraceful!" she said. "Disgraceful!" she said, "Why does it have to be nude?" And I said, "Well, I want it to be a symbolic figure, and I didn't want to do just another old flying man", and she turned on her heels and walked away, with all these kids following her! (LAUGHS)

When you said you wanted it to be symbolic, how specific would you say the symbolism is in your work? Do you think of things as having very specific meanings?

Well, I was still in a, I was in a tail end, when I did that birdman, it was the tail end of my birdmen period, anyway. I thought it was entirely suitable, that's really why I did it. I knew it would be controversial. Still, it's still there somewhere, stuck up round the airport!

But the birdman is the combination of the pilot, the aeroplane, the ... the aviator, I suppose, isn't he.

Yes.

He's also the conqueror, but he's very vulnerable.

Yes.

Someone who might fall. Does he also have kind of mythic connotations? Is he Icarus, for instance?

Never been Icarus. None of my works has had anything to do with Greek myths, myths, legends, really.

So they're always contemporary figures?

Yes. They're to do with now, really. But maybe, of course, with a big chunk of the past within them. I'm interested in, you know, for instance, my main reason for doing horses is nothing to do with the fact that I was brought up with them, really. But I'm interested in the relationship between man and horse which has existed for millions of years. I mean, look at the cave paintings. They had horses then. That's fascinating. And horses have carried man to war, they still cart him around. They do, they're undemanding, they do what he asks.

They're also extremely powerful and very beautiful animals, aren't they?

Yes. Well, they are, yes.

Just as your men are, you could say, extremely powerful and beautiful animals.

Yes.

I mean they embody virility, to a certain extent, don't they.

Yes. But I don't think they're macho, you know? I wouldn't say at all, because I'm not the slightest bit interested in that aspect of men. I find that boring.

Would you say, then, that they are, perhaps, that part of yourself, rather ... do they represent the potent part of you, or do they represent the 'other', the ... the opposite sex? The unattainable other, if you know what I mean by that distinction.

No, I'm not sure.

I suppose another way of thinking about, of asking the question, would be to ask whether you feel you identify with them, or whether they are strange to you, and alien to you, and desirable to you, because they are unlike you?

Yes, I suppose ... I'm unsure. I don't know.

You don't know They could be both, of course.

They could be both, yes.

Your marriage lasted something like eight years, didn't it?

Yes.

Do you want to talk about that?

Well, only to say I think that it mainly bust up because of my immaturity, funnily enough. I'm not, I really don't, I was very upset at the time, when I got divorced, and it's silly, because it took me a long time to get over, although I was already going around with somebody else, which was a problem. But there was a lot of immaturity on my part, of being unable to cope with domestic ... the whole thing, really.

Was that partly a problem of being an artist and being a wife and being a mother all at the same time, trying to -perform different roles?

I think it was too much at once, and I think it was very unfair on my husband who was ...

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

... It was very unfair on your husband.

Yes, it was. I mean, he was very appreciative of my work. I think he was very ... I think he really didn't know how to help me, that's the point. You know what I mean? He'd been ... I mean, when he got married, he was 36, which, I suppose, is quite late.

Had he been married before?

No. He'd had girlfriends, of course, but he'd led a fairly sort of self-centred life, to a certain extent, and ... how shall I say?

Well, it must be difficult if you've got two creative people living together, both, presumably, very absorbed in their own work.

Yes, there's that. But there's also the fact that he was older than me, and more set in his ways. Honestly, quite honestly, you know, I mean, I ran the house or flat, or whatever we were living in, fairly chaotically! As you can imagine, I was more keen to look after the child and see he was clean and tidy, and shirts didn't get washed, and we couldn't afford any help in those days, anyway. We eventually had a wonderful Spanish au pair, who was sweet, who was lovely with, with Lin, used to take him to nursery school. And then our lives changed a bit and got more organised. I think it's sad that, I mean, I regret, it's silly to say this, but I've always regretted it, because I feel ...

That marriage in particular?

Yes. Because I just feel there was something, I know there's some flaw, that if I'd been more mature, I'd have recognised.

And you would have been able to do something about it?

Probably not. I don't know, because I was too young, really. But then, he also was ... you know, he was 40 at the time, also didn't recognise it, you know.

Do you think that you are difficult to live with?

No. Basically not, really. I have to work. But I'm also very keen on my house and my family. I'm very keen on my cooking. I'm fairly domesticated. Well, I should be by now! 62! But I became domesticated. Like, I became a cook.

Just because you had to?

Yes, and because I enjoyed it. That's one thing Michel taught me about was, eating good food. One of the things.

Would you say you were equipped for marriage? Or were you, like me, totally ill-equipped?

No, I don't think I was equipped for marriage. I was too young. And although the child didn't, my son didn't arrive for two years afterwards, I was then only 27, which, I suppose, actually, when you think about when people used to have children, much younger, that was probably about right. No, I was, there was, it was a flaw on my part, I think, somehow. In my make up.

Well, describe to me, if you can, how you would spend a day, let's say? What time you would, you know, you would get up, and when you'd go to the studio, and how you ...

What, then?

Yes. I mean, has it changed a lot since then.

Not a great deal, I mean, I got to the studio a bit later, with a child, of course. He went to nursery school and then I used to go to the studio. And then I used to pick him up in the afternoon, or Conchita did.

End of F2987 Side A

F2987 Side B

So you would spend every day in the studio, unless you were teaching?

Yes. Yes. Yes, I would. And then in the evening, be at home, cooking, or, or some nights, we used to go to the pub, of course.

So did you feel any conflict between those two worlds? One is a very private world, and the other's a, a social world, isn't it.

Yes. But I didn't, I mean, there's one thing I've always done, is kept my studio very separate from my, my family life. It's like I walk out of one into another.

So it's like going, going out to work, in a way?

Mmm. Mmm. Always treated it like that. Still do.

And you've been able to maintain that separation? That duality?

Yes.

And then you married quite soon after, didn't you?

Yes.

The following year, you married Edward Pool. Who was he?

Oh, he was .. his family were in the meat business in Smithfield, and he was another War hero, you know. He had a wooden leg, lost a leg in Normandy.

Had he been in the Air Force, the Army?

No, he was in the parachutists. Or, the Army.

And was he older than you, as well?

Yes. About ten years. Anyway, he gave up the meat business, and we decided to go and live in France, because, I mean, he had already bought a place for holidays, and he wanted to

write. So we went down there. And he didn't write, actually, but he started doing vineyards, and I worked down there.

It's hard labour, isn't it.

Mmm.

Running a vineyard.

Very hard work.

Did you help with that? Or were you ...

No.

You were in ...

I used to go into the studio. But my son had already been to The Lycee in London, and so he continued at the Lycee down there, and was educated mainly in France, until Edward Pool and I split up and then I came back to England with Lin.

And how old was Lin by then? He must have been about six, was he?

When we went to France?

Yes.

Yes.

When you married, he must have been about six.

Yes.

When did you, oh, you went to France in '67, so he was nine by then.

Yes.

Did, do you think that your work changed as a result of changes in your private life? Was there that kind of influence?

I don't think so. Well I think a lot of the heads I started doing, the soldiers' heads, were very like Pool's head. You know, I used his head quite a lot in my subject matter, that's all.

Was that a conscious decision?

That was conscious, yes.

Did you make drawings of him?

Yes. Yes.

It's interesting that, in your work, women feature very little, don't they?

Yes. It's not because I dislike women, I like the company of women very much. It's ... also I think their bodies are very beautiful, but I never feel I can sculpt them. I just have a ... great difficulty in, in doing so. I always did in the life class, so I know I'm very bad at it, so I just don't do it.

It's interesting, because we were talking earlier about ... what's her name? It's interesting, because if you think of someone like Nichola Hicks, or Eileen Cooper, when they had children, they then began using the image of the mother and child in their work.

Mmm.

That's not uncommon.

Yes, I found Nichola's last show very interesting, because, because she'd been, mainly actually, doing these strange animals she does, which I think are quite wonderful. I think she's the most wonderful draughtswoman, actually, Nichola Hicks. And then, I found these female figures in mud and straw, with a child, were very moving and very strong.

But you haven't made images of children, or of mothers and children at all.

No, I never did.

And also when you think about it, the fact that you, that you were brought up a Catholic, and yet the Madonna hasn't figured in your work, except that one Madonna for Salisbury Cathedral, that is also odd isn't it?

Yes, that is strange. I did a lot of drawings of pieta and depositions. I had a letter from a man, the other day, and he said, "How can you call it a pieta, because the Madonna's not there." etc., etc., or a deposition. And I wrote back, I got cross, actually. I said, "Why does the Madonna have to be there, at all? If you're doing a study of a pieta or a deposition ..." I shut him up!

Well, it raises the question of how much you see your Christian imagery as relating, in what way it relates to the tradition, because you're now making this very large figure of Christ for Liverpool Cathedral, and, right back when you were a student, you had already made a Christ figure, hadn't you.

Oh yes, I've done several. The altar cross at Liverpool Catholic Cathedral, a big crucifixion, in a church in Belfast. Another big risen Christ I did in Solihull, in Birmingham, a while back now.

Are you, are you still a believer?

I don't believe ... I don't like my faith any more, because I don't think what they're doing is right. There's poverty ... in South America ... I think the Pope is encouraging the Right-wing aspect of that whole thing, which I find horrifying. And also, I mean, I can't go to Mass now, because its so badly written, they've upset the whole Bible. They've re-written the Prayer Book. Turned it into some banal sort of trivia. So has the Church of England, too.

Yes. You prefer the old Mass, the traditional Bible?

Yes.

How would you say that your, your figures relate, then, to the tradition? I mean, the new, the new Christ that you're currently sculpting, He's an enormous and very archaic figure, isn't he. He's more like an Assyrian sculpture than he is a Christian sculpture.

Yes, He is. I wanted to make this very powerful Christ, and ... with a certain amount of compassion, when He rose again from the dead, "ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father, and from thence he shall come to judge the quick, the living

and the dead." So He's also in judgement, so He's quite a stern figure, I felt. And I know, I know that it will be controversial, because it's very primitive.

One thinks very much of pre-Christian models, I think, looking at that work.

Mmm. It is pre-Christian. I didn't want to be Romanesque either, which I love. I could very very easily be seduced by that.

How much have you been influenced, would you say, by non-European art?

A little bit.

Because your house is full of ...

Primitive.

... Indian artefacts, Indonesian artefacts.

Yes. Aboriginal.

Wonderful, wonderful things.

Yes, well, you see, I really would love to collect Mexican art, or Aztec. I've always loved that. And I think my, funnily enough, I've been more affected by that recently, in my recent work, a lot of the heads are very ... for instance, the Easter Head in the hall, which is very coloured, you know, through there. Those two, you're going to find terrific similarities with Mexican heads, but that wasn't conscious at the time.

Because you, you, when you were young, you were saying that you hadn't travelled at all. You've, presumably, travelled a great deal since then?

Well, some, but not enough. Because we had this house in France, we sort of tended to be there. I'm trying to catch up now! Now's the time!

Have you been to Mexico?

No, I want to go. I was going to Egypt, and then Mexico next.

How long did you live in France for?

Came back in '72, '73, I think. Had four years in London, then came to Dorset.

So you returned in '73, and then you, you presumably left your husband there, did you, in France?

Yes. Yes.

Had you, you'd had enough of France as well as your marriage?

Yes. But then I never considered that France would be a permanency. I didn't want to become an expatriate anywhere. I was beginning to feel the need of coming back to England, and nearer what people were doing, and, you know ... It was very isolated where we were.

Yes. You must have felt very cut off from what was going on here.

Oh well, I was.

Or anywhere in the art world at all.

Yes.

Did people forget about you, in that time?

I think they probably did, a bit. But, you see, I got, equally I got used to, I met some interesting people down there, like Lawrence Durrell, became a very old, good friend.

Oh, really. What was he like?

Fascinating. And he lived not far away. Used to see a lot of him. I got to know a lot of the Camargue farmers, through John Skeaping, and all those.

Did John Skeaping have a house there, too?

Down, yeh, Montpellier.

Were there any other artists in the area?

No. Not English ones. Quite a lot of painters in Nimes, I got to know, French.

Did your work change while you were there, would you say?

Well, it did, yes. I started doing those big, smooth heads, down there. But I think it's mainly because of the light.

The goggle heads?

Yes, they were all pretty smooth. The goggle heads were a political comment, because of the Algerian War.

They were based on a photograph, weren't they? That you'd seen in a newspaper.

Yes.

How did that work? Can you describe the process of seeing an image in the paper, and then translating that into an idea for sculpture?

Well, that's quite easy. Well, I made, ah well, I made the heads the shape they are, which was not totally unlike the photograph. The main point was the sun-glasses.

But the photograph was of Ben Oufkir.

Oufkir, with his head-dress on. And his ...

Sun-glasses.

Sun-glasses.

And who was he? Remind me who he was.

He was a Moroccan general, who was supposed to be responsible for the murder of Ben Barka, who was the Algerian freedom fighter, at the time. It was a big case. And I just saw this sinister, the aspect of the glasses, and that started me off on the goggle heads. But,

So, having seen the photograph in the paper, did you then make drawings?

I did quite a lot of drawings, yes.

And were they consciously based on that photograph?

Yes, they were. And then they became more and more removed from it. And then I did the heads.

And the scale of those heads was something new in your work, too, wasn't it?

Yes, well, they were quite big.

They were very large.

Yes.

Much larger than life size.

My work got bigger. I had space around me, which I didn't have in London before. I could stick the stuff outside. And it was enjoyable and interesting to work in another country as an experiment.

And you mentioned that the smoothness was also related to the different kind of light?

Oh, it's a very bright, hard light down there, on the whole.

So the change of texture from the cragginess, let's call it, to the smoother texture, was as a result of that change of climate?

Yes, I think so, really.

Mmm. That's interesting.

Yes. You know, England's got a soft light.

Very soft, and very subtle, and very changeable, yes.

Yes.

And also, the sun-glasses must be a very specific reference to that hard light, too, I suppose.

Mmm, yes.

And the fact that they are the part of the sculpture that are polished, highly-polished, so that they are, themselves, light reflective.

Yes. That was important.

These are the, this was the beginning of the appearance of the thugs, wasn't it.

Mmm.

Of these men who weren't any longer heroes, but were, actually, predatory ...

The anti-heroes.

Yes. Dangerous anti-heroes.

Mmm.

Yes. In fact, you've now got one of them either side of your gateway, I noticed!

Mmm. I quite like that. The guardian.

It means ... yes, the guardians of the gate. "Only the brave need enter here!"

You find them all over the world, don't you. Ton Ton Macoute, or anybody.

Am I right in thinking that you have a photographic memory?

Yes, I do. I mean, I do have a very good memory for faces. I never forget them. And things I've seen. I'm never, very rarely wrong.

And so, presumably, as you store information, that becomes like a reservoir of images that you can then dip into.

Yes, well, I, I conserve images somewhere in there.

Do you actually also conserve them in reality? Are you a collector of photographs, and drawings, and illustrations, and so on?

Well, to a certain extent, but I ... more often collect objects - sculptures. Well, you know, I'm not ... I don't collect many drawings.

When you came back to England, was there a great sense of relief at returning, home, as it were?

It was great. It was very good. And all of a sudden, I was in London, I sort of rediscovered London again. I didn't mind being in the city again.

But you'd had a gallery all that time, hadn't you, in London.

Yes, I was with Waddingtons, yes.

You'd been with Waddingtons the whole time.

Yes.

Cos you, you'd joined them in '58. So, presumably, you'd had exhibitions here.

Oh yes, and I'd been exhibiting in New York, too.

So you weren't cut off from that point of view.

No.

And then you married again, that, the year after, in 1974.

Mmm.

To Alex, whom you are still married to.

Yes.

And he had several children of his own?

Well, yes, he's got three sons.

Did they live with you? Or had they already they left home.

No, they were already grown-up, yes. I mean, they're in their late forties now.

What about Edward, had he had children?

Yes. They spent quite a bit of time with us, and I still see the daughter a lot. She's married. But being in France, we didn't see them that much.

When did you move out of London, and down to Dorset?

Well, four years, in '76. Just couldn't stand living in London any more, wanted to get out to the country.

So your return to London was a sort of short-lived love affair, was it?

Well, it was four years. It was great fun.

It's interesting, because your work has never had a specifically urban, nor a specifically rural feel to it, has it? It's, the images are archetypal, rather than specific.

Mmm. I suppose they are, yes. Well, they're not urban, are they.

No. But they're not really rural, are they? They're not actual horses, and actual birds, and actual men, so much as archetypal figures, I would say.

Ah, I don't know.

You don't know!

Archetypal, probably.

[NOISE ON TAPE]

[Tuesday morning, nine o'clock, the 29th it is, today, I think, isn't it.

Yes.]

Liz, we were talking, yesterday, about, we touched on, very briefly, the relationship between your sculpture and the kind of things that were going on in your life at the time. It seems to me it would be a good idea to talk about some specific pieces, and see if we can pin-point this a bit. Let's, for instance, talk about the birds, which were a theme right from your student day, from the Tate bird, that ...

Well, they changed a lot. I mean, as they went through, they became harbingers, and, you know, the more blunt ... kind of ... rather prehistoric looking creatures.

Would you describe the Tate bird as heroic, or predatory, or both at once?

I don't think it's heroic. Or maybe it is. Maybe it's a surviving shell of something, really, slightly blasted. And it's part raven.

Part?

And so it's predatory.

He's part raven, part ... he's part, he's part animal, part mechanical, isn't he.

Yes.

He already has the beginnings of that armour plating, that became a feature later.

Yes, well, all my sculptures after that, for quite a while, became armour plated, partly because it's the way I built up I used bits of plaster that had been thrown out and put them together, to make up these big areas of textured plates, so to speak.

When you say "thrown out", they'd already been discarded?

Well, they were bits that had been used, bottoms of bowls, and things like that, and I used to pick up interesting pieces that I thought would fit together to make a carapace, so to speak.

That's interesting. So they had a sort of shell-like form to them?

Yes.

Does that mean that you were working almost in an assemblage kind of way?

I very much was, then, yes. I used to start the basic structure with iron and, and plaster, and then add to it these bits and pieces I used to pick up, that I, sort of my own detritus so to speak, that was lying around on the floor, and put them all together, which is very noticeable as you go on through to the birds, the very late birds, of the sixties, I think, when I more or less stopped doing them.

It's interesting, this, this bird of, we're looking through your, your catalogue raisonné here, which is called "Elisabeth Frink Sculpture", which is published by Hartfeld Books, it's quite a useful source, source reference for us. We're looking now at the 1959 birds, which have become, they're earthbound now, aren't they, there's no sense that they ...

Oh, very, yes.

... could take off. They've become so heavy.

No. They're prowling, stepping creatures.

With very long legs.

Yes.

And very aggressive, horizontal bodies, that remind one very much of aircraft in, in form, don't they.

Yes, they could be. And they are, their battlesome faces. Also they're like some sort of huge pincers.

Well, that pincer, that pincer idea becomes stronger, doesn't it.

Yes.

As you, as you go on. The notion of these birds being tools, almost, of some sort, weapons, even.

Yes. Yes.

So that by 1962 ...

It was interesting, because at that time, of course, Bernard Meadows was doing his crab claw things, you know.

Yes, I do know, yes.

Sort of, his weren't birds. But I think he did do one or two birds, but they were also crabby, claw-like creatures.

Did you know of them? Were you aware of what he was doing?

Not at the time. I don't think either of us were particularly ... I mean, you know, I think he was working, I'm not sure when he was doing those, actually.

So the sense of menace, they change from being ambivalent, don't they, possibly predatory, possibly vulnerable.

Mmmm.

Possibly heroic. To becoming more malevolent, really. More ...

Yes. Well, I mean, I call the whole, I called the whole series "Harbinger Birds". A harbinger is a bringer of bad tidings, I believe. I just liked the name. And ... names are always difficult, but I thought that was quite a nice, it was a good name for them. And I went on to use the same technique, building up the lectern for the Coventry eagle.

The, the Coventry eagle's very different from the other birds, though, isn't it.

Well, yes, well, it's based on an eagle, really.

It's much more, it's much, a much prouder creature, I think.

Yes.

Has much more optimistic, more positive overtones to it.

Yes.

Did you, how specific was that commission? What did they actually ask you to do for Coventry?

Well, Basil Spence gave me a very free hand, really. All he said was that it had to hold The Bible, which was such and such a size, I don't remember. And, the only sad thing about that is, I designed a little structure of rods within its back, to hold The Bible, and the architect, his son-in-law, Anthony Blee, decided to show a proper rack. Which was a shame. So they built this huge rack to go on top of it. It was unnecessary, that's all.

The, the, the Coventry eagle is much more closely linked to the traditional use of the bird, as a ... of the eagle, as a symbol for military might, or ...

Yes. And I don't know why, but they were always used as lecterns, weren't they. Often.

They were. With, with that sense of heroic authority, I think.

Yes.

After all, they have "The Word" on their back, don't they?

I suppose that was the meaning of it, yes. The use of it.

Whereas your other, the other birds, seem to be ... almost to undermine that notion of the, of military authority as something splendid and to be admired. It's as though you're, you're turning the image over, and looking at the other side of it, in a way.

Yes. I suppose so. They're quite opposite. But they're also, they're powerful in a different sort of way, they're all ... they're predatory, and they stalk, rather than stand proudly.

They relate quite closely, don't they, to the human figures that you were making at the same kind of time.

Yes.

Which you called "Winged Figures", but are obviously warriors of one kind or another. Rather truncated warriors, in that they don't really have arms, they have plate-like protuberance which are, if you like, the beginnings of wings.

Well, I think in the beginning, yes, they're wings, because I did a series of birdmen, which is all to do with flying.

Yes. They were influenced by a photograph that you saw, weren't they, of the ...

Oh yes, the French Birdman, Valentin. Yes, he was extraordinary. Because we had a very good magazine at the time, Picture Post and Life, and he used to wear this sort of aluminium suiting, and had these wings, and he'd drop out of an aeroplane and glide down. He was an extraordinary man. Extraordinary images. Sadly, I mean, he was killed in England, I believe, at Liverpool, because something happened, his parachute didn't open. But, but I wasn't the only artist to be taken by him. Cesar did a whole series of, when he was doing bronze, winged figure, the two, with a Valentin theme. That's when I knew Cesar.

You did know him?

We did know each other. But, we didn't know that we were both doing these things.

That's extraordinary that you could be working on something so similar and not be aware of it.

I know. Extraordinary for me to be doing it, because ... not for him, because he was a French hero, in a way.

Had he been a pilot himself?

I don't know.

I mean, Cesar.

I don't know.

Because we were talking about the fact that the ... that F.E. McWilliam, and Clatworthy, and so on, they had mostly been pilots, hadn't they, so they'd actual, they'd had actual experience of flying.

McWilliam had been in flying, in the Air Force, hadn't he. I don't think Bob had, Bob was in the Army.

Was he.

But, also Bob was in National Service, he's much younger. I mean, Bob Clatworthy is my age, so he missed the war. But I think maybe some of the others, like Armitage.

Cesar's figures are more, they're more optimistic, aren't they. Their, the wings feature very large.

Yes, they were huge. They were big, sort of rectangular things.

Yes. Whereas, in your figures, it's the vertical of the human body that's the most noticeable axis.

Yes. That's right.

And the wings seem to be really quite inadequate.

Yes, to keep the man ... I think that was all to do with the fact that they weren't adequate.

They weren't adequate, yes.

As it turned out.

And, of course, it refers back to what we were talking about yesterday, of the planes crashing around you in Suffolk.

Exactly.

The idea that these people were very likely to fall out of the sky rather than to stay up.

Yes.

And also the, the wings become rather like truncated limbs, but also like armour, too, don't they. They're, they're, they seem to be extensions of the human body, almost like clothing.

Mmm. Well all those, the whole series of sculptures was plated, you know.

As though man and machine were, in some way, welded together?

Exactly.

Yes.

But not in a way that gives you much confidence in the power of either of them.

No.

I think one of the most interesting things about the early sculpture is this ambivalence, this sense of people, animals, birds of prey, or people being both heroic and vulnerable, and also being, it not being clear quite, whether they are good or evil. You know, they seem to have the potential for being either. Was that something that you were, that was in your mind?

Yes, well, I think that, because I think that is true with some people. It's very near, they're very near, aren't they, the borderlines, can be, of good and evil.

But it's, it's a very non-traditional view, isn't it, particularly, I mean, when you think of the post-War era, when it was so important to heroise our, our, our side, as it were - to paint the allies in positive terms, and the enemy in negative terms. If you think of all those early post-War films, the fifties films, they were always very black and white, weren't they.

Yes.

There were the goodies and the baddies, quite clearly defined.

Yes. Yes.

And so I think your, your work is always much more complex than that, much more sophisticated than that, much more subtle.

Yes. No, no, it isn't black and white at all. But, you know, I moved quite quickly through this period, I feel, I'm not the slightest bit interested in it now, do you know? It's strange. No, I am when I look at it. Do you know what I mean?

Yes. It seems a very long time ago to you, does it?

Yes. Well, that was the airport one I told you about. Allcock and Brown.

You mentioned that, that the gunner that ...

End of F2987 Side B

F2988 Side A

You mentioned that the gunner, Arthur Collings, that you had lived with, who had been damaged by his Wartime experiences, and he'd been emotionally damaged, and mentally damaged, and I wonder whether that didn't have some influence on these extraordinary heads that you, that you made in '63. I mean, I know that it was later, but these heads, they lead on from the earlier, rather heroic warrior type, who, who is helmeted, and who seems to be a rather potent, healthy specimen, if you like. You then, these later pieces, in these later pieces, the head has become much more embryonic, and seems to be damaged, in a way. I don't know if this is really too far-fetched.

Well, these, these ones in particular, these carapaces and horse head, and plant head, fish head, they're mainly really much more based on fossils, you know, man changing into animal, animal changing into plant, sort of evolution. A sort of development through these strange heads which I did. The soldier's head is much more the one that you're talking about.

Mmm.

The first sort of soldier's head I did, which is very blitzed, and blasted, and damaged.

He's lost his features almost completely.

Yes.

And he leads on, does he, to a whole ...

A whole series of, of ...

... soldiers heads. Where they really do look shell-shocked.

Yes.

And as though they've had such a, an extraordinarily terrible experience, that they're never going to recover from it.

Mmm. Yes.

They become, they become louts, don't they.

Yes.

They become thugs, as though they've been destroyed. As though their sensibility has been destroyed by the experiences they've been through.

I was just looking at that, it's a very big crucifixion, which is in a church in Belfast. Yes, these are brutish. Well, you know, because I feel that men are sent out to war in armies, and they become brutalised, to a great extent. We all become brutalised by the news. It's terrible.

The, the soldiers' heads, then, later develop into, evolve into these, the goggle heads, that we mentioned yesterday.

Yes, in the middle sixties I did them. Changed into these heads of ... dictators' heads, really, they were. That was a comment on all dictatorship, repressive regimes.

So they've changed from being the victims of brutality.

Yes.

To becoming the purveyors of brutality, haven't they.

Exactly. Yes.

And they've also, they take on an intelligence, which is an evil intelligence, isn't it.

Yes.

It's interesting how ... subtle, the changes can be, formally, in the work, to convey a totally different sensibility. How much would you say you knew, in advance, what it was you wanted to say, and how much do the ideas come out of the working process?

Well, I think the ideas do come out of the working process, because you always start off with an idea, and it always changes. I mean, my idea, in general, was to produce a goggle head, a head with his sun-glasses. I was not quite sure, until I'd done the first one, how it would, how it would be, which I think is, I can't remember which of those is first, but anyway, I

became quite fascinated with the idea. And I felt that it was quite a move forward from what I'd been doing, into the more monumental, more sculptural.

Yes, because they came much larger, didn't they.

Yes. Yes.

So that they were monuments rather than generalised ...

Well, I felt I was moving much towards volume and mass, than ... from the very craggy thin-legged sculptures I'd been making. So that was a major, major step forward, I think. And also the two key figures of that time, before that, was Judas, who also has shades.

He was the first sculpture to have shaded eyes.

Yes, because he was blinded by his, his greed, that he betrayed Christ. It's a figure of betrayal, that one, which is why I called it "Judas".

He's an extraordinary sculpture, isn't he. He's ... slightly larger than life-size, isn't he.

Yes.

A complete standing figure.

Yes. He's, he's important to me, that one. That's another key figure. All that period was, was good for me, because I felt I, I moved to France, I got away from England, because I was fed up with England, because everybody was doing abstract work you know. It was a good time to drop out, so I did. And I developed all these things out there. I actually did "Judas" in London before I went. And "A Dying King."

They seem to be the culmination of that whole fifties period, really, don't they.

Yes. The "Dying King" was really based on two things. It was based on a crusade of the churches, which I was very interested in at the time. And, having seen Laurence Olivier in Richard III, you know, when he dies in the battlefield, and the whole imagery was rather good.

The "Dying King" is quite, is one of the more heroic figures, isn't he.

Yes. It is Richard III, nevertheless.

It was that specific, was it, in your mind?

Well, not, so, not so specific, because he was also a crusader figure, the way he's laid out.

He has his arm,

Well, raised to protect himself.

Raised above his head, yes. And he's in the process of falling backwards.

Yes.

There's that incredible tension that, that exists in all the early work, where the, the feeling that you can't afford to relax for a moment.

That's right.

It's as though everything is permeated by anxiety.

Well, I think they're very anxiety-ridden sculptures, all those. And the assassins were. The assassins came along with the Kennedy assassination. I found it fascinating. I only did two little groups of them.

It's interesting how things in the news, and things that you had seen, feed into the sculptures, and yet the sculptures form a kind of story of their own, it's as though they follow their own path as well.

Yes. I think ... well, you know, I suppose really, if we're young, we're all very conscious of what goes on, even if we're not politically orientated, we're world orientated. Human orientated, really, I should say.

"Judas" is, in many ways, very much a contemporary man, isn't he. He's wearing gloves.

Yes.

And he's wearing goggles that look rather like motorbike goggles.

Yes.

You can well-imagine him jumping on a motorbike and driving off.

Yes. I suppose you could, really. I hadn't thought of that, but I can see it.

And yet he's, he's generalised too, so that he's not specific to any moment of time. One of the most appalling things about the image which makes him seem so evil, is the way that the head sits on top of this hunched body, so that there's almost no neck.

Oh well, there isn't. Yes. That makes it more sinister. He's hunching himself away from the fact that he knows he's going to betray Christ.

And also that look over his shoulder, as it were, to the left, as though he can't bear to look straight ahead.

Yes. That's right.

He's looking askance, he's turned away, turned aside. The, I think, in this sculpture, in particular, the ... the power of the piece comes from it's relationship to the human body, from the figurative aspect of it, but also from the use of the materials as well, this wonderful surface that it's got.

It's got a good texture.

It's almost as though it's grown.

Yes.

It's a crude ...

Well, I was doing fairly rough-textured things then.

How much was this a process of building up, and how much a process of ...

It was all building up.

So there was no ...

Well, a little bit of, perhaps, filing over the surfaces, but, I mean, most of it was put on with my hands. It always was. It's the way I've always built. And still do. But now I carve my textures much more.

So that they become much smoother?

Well, they're smoother, but, no, they're rough now again, but, but they're carved.

You've never, have you ever tried actually carving?

I did, I did at Art School. But I didn't keep it up. I mean, I often think now I'd like to carve a few.

To carve again?

Yes.

It's a much slower process.

Yes. Of course.

Of course.

We, I, I was asking you yesterday, whether you felt that your work had changed when you moved to the Dordogne.

The Cevennes.

To the Cevennes.

Yes.

It's, it became, after the, after the goggle heads, which were singularly repellent characters, people who have, who seemed to have, will, intelligence, and commitment, but entirely to negative things.

Mmm.

They seem to be dictators' henchmen, don't they.

Yes.

You then begin to introduce much more benign characters. I mean, for instance, the, the wild boar appears.

Yes.

Who is a delight. He's a delightfully pompous, little aggressor, isn't he.

Yes. Well, I used to see, I mean, in France, we were surrounded by wild boar. And then, of course, I did my first horse and rider in France.

Yes.

And that, in France, it's ... because when I, I started, at the end of my stay in France, I started doing horses again. I mean, really, for the first time in sculpture. Because, apart from the horse's head previously, very very early, I didn't involve horses at all. And this is mainly because I bought a horse, to teach my son to ride, and also to ride again, myself, down there. And also I got to know the Camargue horses, which are wonderfully wild, primitive animals. And I was fascinated by, how they moved and looked. So all the next series of sculptures of horses and things, are all based on that. The horse in it's primitive sense.

They have a completely different feel to them, these sculptures, don't they. The, the anxiety has gone altogether.

Yes. Yes, well, I'm much more interested in the relationship between the man and the horse, and, not particularly the shape of either, if you see what I mean. But, I mean, the nice thing was that this horse used to be in the stable under the studio, and he used to sleep, lie down, and never minded when I potted in there to have a look at him. It started me off on a whole series of lying down horses.

Did you make drawings from him?

Yes. Quite a lot.

And the, the men have, are now, essentially naked, aren't they.

Yes. I started doing nudes then. The man with his arms folded, 1971, I think that was, I did him in France. 1970.

1970.

That was the first of the male nudes, which I continued to do after that.

And then, they're nude in the same way that the horses are nude, aren't they. You don't feel that they've been stripped of their clothing, they seem to be absolutely at home in their bodies.

Yes, they're naturally nude.

How would you describe the relationship between the man and the horse? Are they aspects of one another, would you say?

Well, yes, because they have a very close relationship, for millions of years, man and horse, that's what interests me. You know, the horse ... has done so much for man - works for him, carries him to battle - and yet has retained it's independence in a, in a strange way, that it can, in a flash, transform everything by chucking him off. And I like that idea.

Mmm. So that it's a relationship that has to be negotiated all the time.

It has. But it also, the horse is very put upon, of course, because man has this capacity of loving the animals who live with him, but also being very cruel. That, that big lying down horse which is the first one I did, I did in France. I don't know where it is. Here. But in the book. That's a life-size one. I actually made that in France before I left. That was stolen out of a big garden in Henley last week.

Was it?

Yes. Can't find it anywhere.

How did they move it? Nobody knows, I suppose.

Nobody knows, because it was in a paddock. Had to get it over a fence, into the drive.

I was thinking ...

Miles off the main road.

I was thinking last night about all the sculptures you've got in the garden, and about whether it would be possible for somebody to come in and steal them.

Well, not really, because we have dogs here, and they're very heavy, you'd have to get a big lorry down to get them up. You'd soon be stopped.

Do you, do you, the sculptures look wonderful in the landscape. Did you, when you made them, think of them for the outdoors?

I mainly think of sculpture for the outdoors, if I'm doing a big piece, yes. Although I do like to see my big pieces inside, confined in a gallery, because it gives them a marvellous sense of busting out, which I quite like, for a change.

And I think that's, isn't that something that's true of the work from the mid-sixties on, rather than of the earlier work? The earlier work, seems to me, to be more indoor work, the scale is much smaller, of course.

Well, I suppose it was all, my scale got larger when I moved to France, because I had outdoors there. Before I just had a London studio, and a small garden. I never had the opportunity.

And it seems, too, that the fifties work, and early sixties work, is about the relationship between man and machine, whereas the, from the mid-sixties on, the work becomes much more about the relationship between man and the natural world.

Yes.

So, in that sense, they are, to a certain extent, urban, and rural, aren't they?

They are both. They could be both really. But, I mean, now, of course, after France, I spent four years in London, before moving to Dorset, but I really would never live and work in the city again.

Going back to this question of the horse and rider, I'm interested to know how, how they work metaphorically, because it seems to me that one could read them in two different ways.

Bruno Bettelheim, for instance, talks about the horse as a symbol for male sexuality, for virility, if you like, and that would be one way of interpreting your horses and riders, that together, they form an image of potency. But another way of thinking about them, and the idea arose from what you were just saying about the relationship between man and horse, is to think of the horse as, as the feminine, and the rider as the masculine. And so it would then become a dialogue between the masculine and the feminine.

I don't think it's got anything to do with either, in my case. I don't agree with all that business about the horse being a sort of power of the sexual ... I mean, I think it's, it's too obvious, isn't it.

Yes and no.

It's terribly obvious. I mean, I just don't figure it.

No.

And it is not the case in my, any of my ... I'm much more interested in the relationship, unison, or not. Or disagreement. Nothing to do with sexual overtones, or undertones, or anything else.

But, I mean, it can be sexual, one can use the word "sexual" in a much more general kind of way.

Oh, sure. Yes, I know you can.

I mean, to do with gender, rather than ...

Yes. But I don't think my horses are male, I mean, most of them are male, funnily enough.

Are they?

Yes, as it happens. But, I mean, that's ... I don't know why. But I don't, I find that confusing, really, in relation to my own work.

You don't think that that's relevant at all?

Not at all, no.

And yet, so how, how much would you say that they were specific horses? Are they portraits of actual animals, or are they generalised in the same way that, that your human figures are generalised, to become archetypes? Or symbols, rather than individual people?

Well, they're not individual people, not individual horses. It's like I've never done horse portraits or ... the only sort of straightforward horse I've done, really, is the one at Goodwood race course, and that's a thoroughbred, and that's all you can say. But I'm not interested in portraying ... I'm only interested in portraying the horse in it's true, primitive sense.

As a kind of essence of horse, if you like?

Essence and feeling of horse, yes.

Which is, of course, what ... avoids sentimentality, isn't it.

Yes. They're not supposed to be sentimental. They're all pretty rugged.

It would, it's very easy with sculpture of animals, to get into, for them to become sentimental, isn't it.

Yes.

And I suppose one of the reasons why you manage to avoid that, is because of your knowledge of horses from childhood, so that you don't actually have a sentimental view of them, because you ... they've been part of your life, throughout.

Yes.

So that you're, you're not an outsider. You don't have a romantic view of them.

No. I'm very much involved with them in a sense that I, they're very beautiful.

Would you say that your ... that the more relaxed, more benign, if you like, mood of your sculptures, was a reflection of a more relaxed and happier state of mind?

Well, yes, I think so, because I've matured a lot, you know, and I've grown older. I was much happier within myself, with my work. And it was a great, it was a great experience, actually, working in France, another country, you know, with a lot of space for the first time in my life. And then, to come back to London, was also very exciting too, having been away for quite a long time. But, after four years, I very quickly wanted to get back to the country.

And you were, you were awarded the CBE in 1969. Was that, did that mean a lot to you?

I can't really remember at the time. I mean, I think I was rather stunned, because I never thought of things like that. You don't, you know. I think I was rather shocked ... if you like.

It must, it must have been pleasing in the same way as...

Well, it's nice to be honoured for your work, of course it is.

Yes. And it must have been rather like when the Tate bought your, your bird, when you were a student. It must have been a great sense of pleasure at being recognised, and acknowledged.

Yes. Well, it is. But, you know, being recognised by the Tate, and having a CBE is somewhat different! If you see what I mean.

Which mattered, which, which felt more important?

Well, I mean, the Tate was a long time ago, and I suppose the CBE, I mean, I didn't really, actually, compare them. I never would have thought of that one, actually. If I wanted to compare them now, I'd rather the Tate bought something of my new work, and stuck it up somewhere, because they haven't, for years. I mean, they wrote me a letter the other day, Serota did, saying, "I hope you'll be pleased, as we are, to know that we have just acquired a wonderful old sculpture of yours, 'A dying hen', a 'Dead Hen'", from the whatever it was, fifties?

That must be from the early fifties, yes.

I thought, "Oh, Christ!" you know! "Great! Well, why don't they buy something new for a change?" Because my work has changed so dramatically, and they've just not bothered to look at it, really.

Well, you mentioned that you were pleased to leave England because figurative work was out of fashion.

True.

How much has that, how much has that affected you, would you say? That figurative work has rarely been in fashion since the ...

Well, it affected me, largely, internationally, because the British Council stopped sending my work anywhere, from 1957 on. As a young sculptor, I wasn't sent anywhere after that. So that was, that was hard to take. And also, it affected my international reputation, which I gradually built up, anyway, on my own. But, not to be included with other young sculptors was ... I don't know if you'd call it an irritation, but it was just ... you know.

Did you, did you ever feel ... I can't think of the best word to use ... did you, was there ever any sense that you ought to take note of what other people were doing?

Oh yes. I was aware what other people were doing, and I knew what was happening. I could see it. But, you see, it wasn't, it didn't make much difference, because I wasn't prepared to go that way. It was a road I wasn't prepared to go down, because I didn't believe in it for myself. I couldn't switch my all, my work, from which all the roots had come from animal and human forms, to abstraction. I could see, I mean, obviously, that that was the way it was going to be, and I would just be stuck outside it all.

And there was no choice about that?

There was nothing I could do about it.

No choice about that.

No. Not really. I could've, God knows, I could have changed my style, one or two people did. But I didn't feel strongly enough about it.

That, that's interesting, that, because it implies, to a certain extent, that one's imagery comes very much from one's early years, that it's formed in one's early years.

Yes, it is. But also it's formed as you go along, because you can't say any of the sculptors who changed over to abstract art, for instance, like, take Tony Caro, he changed overnight. I say that, because I know he did. I mean, he went to America, and four months later he came back, and he was abstract. You know, he'd been bowled over by ...

David Smith.

David Smith.

And Tony, Tony was doing big lumpy women, do you remember?

Mmm, yes, I do.

And, so I didn't feel that was valid. It certainly became valid for him, but not for me. But maybe he hadn't found his way before that.

Yes.

But I feel he didn't, and then he, and then he did find his way. But I'd already found, to my mind, my way, and which way I wanted to work. It wasn't, that wasn't a point of, I knew if I changed somewhat, or did something, or did something, I might have had a chance.

How do you think that an artist, what, what you're proposing is a linear progression, isn't it, in, in one's work, that, that one set of ideas leads on to the next set of ideas and so on.

Well, it generally does with me, yes.

How do you think that, that that relates, I mean, what I'm trying to ... we've already sort of touched on the way that that, nevertheless, meshes in with, with, with the currencies in the everyday world, that they feed, they feed into your thoughts and your, your image bank, as it were. It's very curious, that intermeshing, isn't it. The way that you pursue a linear course, and yet it is modified and, and enriched by things that are happening in the outside world.

Yes, because, I mean, you know, unless you are a complete recluse, or don't see anybody, I'm very much part of the world, I feel very strongly about what goes on in the world. On human issues, anyway. So you're bound to be affected, most artists are.

Do you think of your imagery as belonging to you? Or do you think of yourself as being like a conduit for ideas and images?

Well, I think it's both, really. One is a conduit, but also it's your image too. But I can be doing images that somebody in Japan is doing. It very often happens. Nobody is original.

Do you think, having said that, that you're necessarily of your generation, though?

Well, not if you look at the one, the way they worked. But, on the other hand, I don't feel I'm any other generation. I mean, I don't think I'm living in the past. I don't think any of my work, you could say, came from the nineteenth century, do you? Would you?

Not at all, no. But I'm thinking about this, this possibility of jumping, you know, this possibility of being influenced, for instance, by, by artists that are younger than oneself. And whether it is feasible, possible, to jump out of your era, if you like, to re-think yourself, to re-mould yourself, or ...

No, I think I'm doing that now.

... or whether that would be inauthentic.

I think I'm doing that now. I think my last ten years work has become very different. The big Riace bronzes, the big heads. They may be similar themes, but they are very differently conceived.

Well, let's, let's move on to those, because they're ...

Well, then, of course, we're getting into, out of this book, pretty well.

Yes. Well, you, you moved to Dorset in '76, yes?

Yes. By then, I'd started the whole running man's series, you know, all those running men, which I became interested in doing, and ... one or two commissions for the Church.

When were your, when were the series of, of ... the, the Tribute heads?

Oh, well, they started just in London, before we moved to Dorset. And they were a tribute to Amnesty International. They were a political comment, in a sense. And the heads that

follow, with their eyes closed, and then the heads that followed those, had their eyes open, so they're much more optimistic. They were still called "In Memoriam", or something.

These, in a sense, lead on from the goggle heads, don't they, except that they're like the ...

Well, the other side of the coin.

Yes, the ... they are the victims, except that they are not crumpled in any sense, are they, they're not damaged. They've remained whole.

No, I think they're survivors, really. I look at them as survivors who have gone through to the other side.

There's a tremendous sense of stoicism in these heads.

Well, they're peaceful, they're contemplative works, really.

They're also very large, aren't they. Much larger than the other heads.

They're also quite large.

So they really are monumental?

Well, my heads have got bigger and bigger.

They've become more and more monumental.

More peaceful, yes.

End of F2988 Side A

F2988 Side B

Now, before we talk about your recent work, Lis, let's briefly go back and talk about the prints, because it seems to me that they are such an important part of your work, although they're obviously not the, your main interest, but they are wonderful. I mean, when did you begin print-making? How did you get involved with it?

I started print-making through, I'm just trying to think why I started. Do you know, I cannot remember what got me going, but I met Stanley Jones from Curwin Press. I think the Curwin invited me to do a series. And I did the first black and white prints I'd ever made, I did do a print at Chelsea Art School. I did do some lithographs there which were destroyed. And they were all on the stone.

You drew straight on to the stone?

Yes. And then this first series I did with Curwin were a series of spinning men, figures, big ones, in ...

And were they lithographs as well?

Yes. They were done on the stone. Well, I did those with Stanley. Stanley taught me. And I went on to do many more after that, with them, in sort of various sessions of, finally, on zinc plates. Animals series, bird series.

They tended to be more naturalistic, didn't they than the sculptures?

Yes, well, they were. They were very naturalistic. It was, in a way, very separate from my sculpture. I'm not quite sure why that was.

You said something that I found very interesting. You said that you were least good at drawing things that you liked very much - plants, trees, flowers and buildings.

Well, that's true. I can't draw any of them. I don't think I was really interested enough to do them. Like, I love being surrounded by trees, and I love looking at plants, and I'm fascinated by buildings. I mean, you know, I'm a sort of builder manqueé, I go on building all over the place. I'm just building this new studio now. And I've already got another idea for a wooden house on one of the ponds.

And are they designed by you?

What? Well, no, not the studio isn't, as it happens. Well, I mean, I gave them a brief. No, but I just think buildings are fascinating, but I can't draw them. I was always very very bad at landscape and buildings at Art School. You know, we used to be sent out to get bits of plant to draw in our sketch books, and I could never do them properly. But I love them.

You, you illustrated Aesop's Fables. That was in '68, wasn't it. That was, that was your first book illustration, wasn't it?

Oh, that was a, that was a lovely book to do. But that was a sort of combined operation between Alastair MacAlpine, Leslie Waddington and myself. In fact, it was Alastair's then wife, Sarah, who suggested a new version of Aesop's Fables. But they're wonderful stories.

Had you read them, as a child?

Yes. I knew about them. I did quite a lot of reading, as a child.

Did you?

Mmm.

Yes. Do you think that, because you read Grimms' Fairy Tales too, didn't you.

Oh yes, all those horrendous things, which aren't allowed any more, did you know that? The childrens' reading now has become so sanitised, and so, has to be politically correct, that the seriously bad things have happened. It's like the change to the Common Prayer Book. Changes to the childrens' reading matter. I think it's awful. You know, it's all these ethnic problems we have now. For God's sake, if you can't call a black sheep a black sheep! I think it's just ludicrous. I think we've gone mad in, in this country.

What effect do you think those grisly stories had, had on you, as a child?

I think it was very very good. Excellent.

How much would you say your, your own characters related back to the, to the characters in, in your childhood reading?

Well, I don't know, really. Not particularly, I suppose. But, I mean, there might have been a certain influence there. But, to go back to prints, Curwin taught me all I knew about lithography. And I did ... a great many series were done. And then I went on to learn etching, and I did the etching, it was different. I did etching with Cliff White, who has now moved to America, of White Inc., and he taught me how to do etch. And ... his, his partner, Nigel Alsey (??), taught me how to do aquatints, and things like that. And etching became very enjoyable.

And you always worked, you always made the prints yourself?

Made the plates, yes. Oh yes.

Worked on the plates, direct.

Yes. That was the nice part, that's the nice part of it.

Did you make the drawings first, or were you improvising on the plate?

No, I usually went straight in.

Right.

It's quite ... it's much more fun like that. It's more dangerous.

You enjoy danger, I think.

You have to become uninhibited, because otherwise you tie yourself up in knots, trying to draw something you've just drawn. I try not to do that.

Trying to copy it. And then you, you did "**The Canterbury Tales**", didn't you?

Yes. I enjoyed doing that. That, that was another MacAlpine and Waddington thing, I think.

Very bawdy stories, of course.

Yes. Well, they were fun to do. But I was rather sorry it was made into such a big book. I think that was a mistake. It became huge and unmanageable. I would like it to have been square and something more handleable, that more people could have bought, not so limited.

There's a wonderful sensuality in your drawings. A great sense of pleasure at being alive, I think.

Yes. Well, I mean, I enjoyed doing those.

And then, what about "**The Odyssey**", and "**The Iliad**"?

Well, they were sort of funny ones, those. I found The Folio Society, to begin with, was quite difficult to work with. Latterly, not so. I mean, the one that I really liked that I did for them, which I did very recently, was "**The Odes of Horace**", which is, I don't know whether you've seen it?

No, I haven't seen that.

Well, that is very very sort of wild, free drawing. I suppose I did that about three years ago. And I think, at the time, I was working with The Folio over the Iliad, and the Odyssey was, when I came, this was the time between coming back from France and, and living in London, and coming to Dorset. I've never done, apart from Aesop's Fables, and Canterbury Tales, I hadn't done much illustrating. I was fairly restricted with them. Difficult.

Were you particularly interested in Greek mythology, before that?

Not especially. Never have been. And although a lot of my figures tend to be ... possibly that, possibly something like it, they're not. But, except for the recent set of sculptures, the Riace Bronzes, the big fellows, which I based on, my version of them, the two very beautiful Greek warriors that were dug out of the sea, who were very beautiful, also very sinister, because they were the mercenaries of their day.

It's interesting that you describe them in those terms, that you immediately take them into the realm of reality, rather than leave them in the realm of myth.

Yes. But then I had a very interesting conversation with a Greek scholar, Peter Levis, who said it was almost certain they were portrayals of people who had to be worshipped like gods.

They did, they did go out to battle for you, but they had to have sacrifices made. They were thugs. And their make up was war.

What about ancient Greek sculpture, has that interested you?

I like the very early Greek sculpture, enormously. The Kuros figures, for instance.

The more archaic figures?

The archaic ones, yes. I love them.

Well, your, the Christ figure that you're currently making is, has that same kind of static, symmetrical archaism, doesn't it?

Well, I'm afraid I did that on purpose, which is why they won't like it. But still, we'll see!

Tell me about the commission?

Well, it was a commission that Liverpool Cathedral had. They had a competition, and they had six sculptors. I, I honestly don't remember the list. Anyway, they were unhappy with what they got. So they wrote and asked me if I'd tackle it. And so I did. And I got it. And I got on very well with the Dean, and, and said, at the time, that I wanted to produce a very powerful Christ, and would not be a ... little. It would be big. There wouldn't be a draped figure, you know, robed. Nothing like it. It would be very basic and primitive. And he agreed with me that's what he wanted, so I think it'll work out.

He's naked except for a loincloth, isn't he, and the loincloth is very geometric. It's almost like the keystone of an arch.

Yes. I wanted that. I wanted nothing to clutter the figure up, or as little as possible.

The head is very different from the kind of head that one would expect on a sculpture like that.

Mmm.

He relates much more to your, to your other heads.

Yes, well, He's still unfinished, the head, and it's still a bit spiky. It's a difficult piece to do, because it has to start 20 foot up. So, I mean, getting the proportion is going to be a slight problem.

How do you deal with that? Because he'll look distorted, won't he, when he's up above the doorway.

Well, the head will be a bit bigger than it normally would, it won't be so ... and the legs are very long.

He's almost like a pre-Christian Christ, isn't he?

Yes. It is a bit, a bit pre-Christian.

Are you trying to make some kind of religious statement, with that, would you say?

No.

No. You're not trying to suggest that we should go back to an earlier set of values?

No. I, I mean, I don't think it would be a bad idea at all. But, as it happens, I'm not trying to do that with that sculpture!

How did you, how, where does he come from, would you say? What are his precursors?

What, in my work?

In your work, yes.

I'm not sure that there are any.

You've been doing a, a lot of standing male nudes, haven't you?

Yes, I have. I have. But I've been working towards this particular one, and I'd like to do some more figures like that, now, because I've now achieved, in the Christ, what I've been trying to achieve through the men, a sort of bigger simplicity.

Yes, they seem to me, the, the men almost, almost pre-human, some of them.

Mmm.

They've tended towards being anthropoid, rather than being human, haven't they?

Yes.

They've been so enormous.

Yes.

And had such a lot of brawn, basically, almost gorilla-like, in a, in a way.

Yes. Well, I mean, the same, this last set I've got in the garden now, I've actually given them masks, which is fascinating. I mean, it changes their whole aura.

The mask is in front of the face?

No. It's just painted on.

It's painted on to the face?

Yes. White.

That's interesting. Because you've begun to use colour a lot, haven't you.

Yes. Well, all my patination's changed, using chemicals to change the surface of bronze. I don't paint, because, paint doesn't last. But this does. The previous set I sold to a big collector in New Orleans, they were all different colours - blues, greens, reds, white. This set is mainly earth colours with white faces. They're very spooky. Down in the glade.

Why did you start using colours?

I just suddenly got very bored with the colour of bronze. I'm wanting to, I'm really restricted to using bronze with the way I work, if I want the stuff to be outside and permanent. But I don't see why I should be restricted in the colour.

It's interesting, because, in your conversation with Brian Robertson, that's in, published in the catalogue raisonné, you were very emphatic that you didn't want to use colour at that time.

I know. It's very strange that. It all, I mean, it's very very strange for me to have said that, but I went to Australia in the meantime, and got very bowled over by colour, and earth colours there, and aboriginal sculpture.

Which is painted, of course.

Which is painted, yes. And which they make up the pigments themselves. But I became so enthralled by everything I saw, the colour rather blew my mind. It just tipped me over, you know.

And your colour isn't naturalistic, obviously, but it does relate to the human features, doesn't it. You're not using it in the way that the aboriginals do, to break up the form. You're using it very much to emphasise the form.

Oh yes. And I draw on sculpture, you know. Yes. And the aboriginals are also making the stories through their ... each pattern means something, which, of course, it doesn't for me. For them, it's their history. Their dream time.

How do you think of your very large men? When did you first, when was the first very large male nude that you made?

Well, going back quite a while to "Adam", the first man. The man with his arm above his head. That was in the sixties, '64.

[NOISE ON TAPE]

How did you think of him? He, he was, he represented something more optimistic, didn't he, than the earlier male figures?

Well, yes. He was, he was eventually a sort of an Adam figure, a man awakening, so to speak.

Very very, physically, very massive, but somehow, emotionally, and intellectually, not formed yet. As though he were a tabula rasa, in a sense.

A what?

Tabula rasa.

What is that?

A blank slate.

Oh, I see, yes. To be written on to, of course.

Yes.

Yes.

Definitely, yes. He came after "Judas", I think, and "The Dying King".

And so did he represent something much more optimistic? Much more positive? The possibility for a human being who was, who didn't have the negative connotations of the "Judas" figure, and the goggle head figures? There was no evil in him.

There was no evil in him at all. It's a big, calm, figure. And ... I suppose, as such, he was rather a unique piece, at that time, of my work.

And then, how did he develop? Or, how did the theme develop?

Well, I didn't do any more on that theme. That was just a one-off. I can't even remember ... I'd started doing goggle-heads, I think, by then, because we'd already bought the place in France.

When did he reappear, though, the standing male nude?

Well, the next time I did one was, was in France, when I did the man with his arms folded, which was, I suddenly felt the need to do, start getting back to the nude again, and away from all the fantasy stuff, in a sense. And I did two more figures in London, which were very ephemeral, after that. They weren't nearly ... they were very gentle sort of ... they were called "Proto Martyr", and "Precursor". They were very slender figures.

And they were quite static, weren't they.

Yes.

Yes.

And when I look at them now, lots of people love them, but I find them very emasculated, you know. Strangely ... weak.

They're not dynamic, are they. They don't seem to be moving anywhere.

There's no, they seem as though I've run out of puff, suddenly, which I think I did, for a bit. And then when I came down here, I got very much reinforced by being back in the country again, and then I really started, wanted to do sort of more dynamic things, like the running men, for instance, which I started doing then.

And then, when they reappeared, they were very robust, weren't they.

Yes. Well, the men, the running men, the first two running men, were very strong, were very sinewy. And then they, then the figures, the next lot of figures, then became very robust and heavy.

And did you still think of them as Adam-like figures?

No.

How did you describe them to yourself?

Well, the running men were still bound up a bit with fugitive, and running to and from. The later figures became much more to do with, perhaps, an earlier theme. I don't know. Whether it was to do with whether we were ... the, the, battlesome side, and the ... covered by a veneer of looking like something else. I'm not sure. Which the Riace Bronzes are, of course.

[DOG BARKING]

When were the Riace Bronzes reclaimed from the sea?

About nine years ago, I think. They went on show in Florence, and they were so striking, they're about nine foot. I found them very sinister, but also very beautiful.

Did you actually go and see them?

No, I hadn't seen them.

You saw them in photographs.

Yes. No, because I missed them, and then it was annoying, because then they went back down to Reggio. When we were in Sicily, they were up the other end.

And were they covered in barnacles?

Oh, that I don't know, but they're the most wonderful colour now. I mean, rusty reds and green.

What era are they from?

I'm not sure. I'd have to look it up. But they were supposed to, they were possibly, anyway, I mean, I mentioned talking to, talking to this Greek scholar, Peter Levis, who said that they, it's supposed ... that they actually come from a group of these figures. There are more somewhere. And that they were standing in a big semi-circle somewhere.

And they were mercenaries?

Yes. Well, this is his, most Greek scholars will tell you their theory.

And what were their heads like?

Beautiful heads. I mean, very sort of classical heads, in a sense. But they were fierce. They were bearded, with coloured eyes inset, and sort of ringlets, with helmets.

And they made a, they obviously made a strong impression on you?

Yes, they did. And the more I thought about them, you see, and the interesting way that ... I wanted to produce something which was far more, less beautiful, but meant the same thing. And it's funny, because I've shown, people come here in the summer and they go round. And

I remember talking to a couple. He said, "What are these?" And I said, "They're the Riace Bronzes." And he said, "Oh." He said, "My wife was, saw them in Florence, and burst into tears, because she was so struck by their beauty." And I said, "Well, she won't when she sees these!" My version.

So how would you describe your version? How do they differ?

Well, they're very ... powerfully disorientated, I'd say. But they move together, but within, but separately. And there are four of them, anyway. I thought I'd do a lot more, actually, some time. I might do. Because they're all sort of ... there are two which are practically the same, but not quite. And one very, two different.

And are they very much a group, or are they a collection of individuals?

They can be individual. I have sold them individually, but they're, for me, they're nice as a set.

They, they have an almost barnacled surface, don't they. They look as if they're encrusted with something.

Yes, well, I built them up with scrim, and a lot of that is, there is, their muscles are bared.

But it's almost as though they've accrued some kind of surface texture over a long period of time.

Well, I think that's to do with the patination as well. No, but, I mean, I think they are ... it was an interesting theme, anyway, which maybe I've finished with, maybe I haven't.

There was, I remember seeing this wonderful drawing of a man and an ape. He was in conversation with the ape, I seem to remember.

Yes.

And there was very much the sense of the dialogue between them, being a vitalising one, as though the man was gaining power from his relationship with the animal.

Well, I think the man is very much the underdog here, because I feel very strongly that the ape, the baboon, has a much stricter way, morals of living, within his family group, and his

hierarchy, than we do. And that man has just busted every kind of rule on morality, that can possibly be done. And that no, no ape family behaves like they do. We do, I should say.

So we've lost something very important?

We've lost it. We've lost something very important. We've lost respect for life. I mean, animals kill to eat, and they kill only because their partner might be taken away. It's very basic and straightforward. They don't murder. Murder's quite different.

So there's no evil intent, is what you're saying?

Yes. It's totally natural. Whereas with man, it's become an evil intent. They murder to kill, lust for killing, lust for ... more damage to human beings, they can do torture. We've transgressed every possible, reasonable tenet for living. So that I want this group, I'm intending to put this into sculpture, the two talking. But the baboon would definitely ...

The baboon and the man, yes.

Yes, but the baboon would definitely be on top. Like, he will be listening, and the man will be begging him to listen, or begging him for, to listen to what he has to say.

So who is listening to whom?

The baboon is listening to the man. The man is the beggar. Man has become the beggar.

And he's asking for advice?

Well, I think maybe. Or maybe just saying, you know, ... and it's a kind of desperate situation. The man is desperate because he's come to the end of the line. We have now, I feel.

Do you feel we've lost our way completely?

Well, I do.

In terms of morality.

Yes. And the only, the only optimistic thing is that many more people are aware of this. I mean, what encourages me, how many helpful, wonderful people there are around still, who mind about going out and saving the starving, the dying, the maimed, and war-torn, you know. It's fantastic.

Do you see religion as any kind of hope? Does it offer any sort of salvation?

It only offers, offers salvation, to those who really believe in it. I mean, there are a lot of very remarkable religious groups helping, of course. I don't think the Church is helping enough. The Catholic Church certainly isn't. It's not being constructive, it's not being helpful insofar as they know they've got the millions of poverty, poor people, Catholics, tied up. The Pope goes to Mexico and says, blesses you, "I bless you my children, and congratulate you on your wonderful large families." Well, that's wicked. They're all living in dustbins. He has no right to do it. And he, he encourages the Right-wing faction.

So are you pro-contraception, and pro-abortion?

I'm certain pro-contraception, because it's, I mean, you know, these people have a right to, not to go on having children all their lives. Abortion, I've never really thought about. I mean, you know ...

That's a difficult one, isn't it.

It is very difficult, yes. I mean, you know you're killing something, which is the awfulness of abortion. And I think that's the horrors of it. On the other hand, you know, in some cases, it's just, it's another trap, isn't it.

Do you think your male figures represent man, or do they, do they represent the masculine, or do they represent humankind, in general?

I think humankind in general, really. Not particularly the masculine, because I don't really look at the masculine as part of, I don't differentiate too much.

And are they a statement of optimism? Are they offering the possibility of a, a re-thinking of ourselves, if you like? A re-evaluation of our position?

Well, yes, because, I mean, you've got to be hopeful. It's no good sitting down and saying "The world's a bloody awful place", which, of course, it is at the moment. I mean, we all have to be optimistic. And the most you can do to help, I mean, the more positive ways.

In what way do you think art can help? Can it influence people?

I don't know. I've often wondered about this, you know. I think, really, it's a civilising factor anyway. It always has been. I think people, the more art people see, the more they stop and look and think about things. I think, from that point of view, it can be helpful.

It can't give specific information, though, can it. It can't persuade, directly. It can't really function as propaganda, can it.

No. Not really. I mean, you can give propaganda posters, but what are you going to do with people being tortured? I mean, that's what it ends up like, isn't it. Or starving, some things, people ...

I want to ask you something slightly different, which is about the place of your work in your life, rather than, you know, the place of it in general. It's obviously absolutely central to your life. Describe to me how a normal day, let's say, now you live in Dorset, and you've got this wonderful studio in the garden.

Well, I mean,

You get up very early, don't you?

I get up very early in order to be able to get to the studio, really. And then I work all morning. Morning's my best time, and I might do a bit in the afternoon. But in the afternoon, I tend to walk the dogs and things like that, and go outside. It's a very strict routine. Has been all my life, pretty well. It's office hours, really. Because if you don't, if you're working on your own, it's very difficult.

What happens if you don't work? Do you, do you become, is it very crucial to you? Do you become very unhappy if you don't work?

Well, I do become unhappy, because if things stop me working, that's the worst thing. But, on the other hand, now I'm in a position to plan my life, so they don't. And, as I've got older,

I can accept times when I don't feel like work, because then I'm just in the middle of an ideas change, or something. And then I do a lot of drawing, for instance.

So if you, if you get a blockage of some sort, then you turn to drawing?

Yes.

To try and release it.

Yes.

To take you in new directions.

I always have.

Have you ever had times when you really haven't been able to work at all?

Very few. But, I mean, earlier, when I was younger. Not now. I don't get many blockages now. You know, I'm sort of, it's ironic, I'm sort of, the older you get, the more ebullient ideas bubble out.

End of F2988 Side B

F2989 Side A

For your, for your Christ figure, you've had an assistant working with you. Have you used assistants before?

Well, no, I never have, you see. I've always said that, in the way that I work, but I still believe is true, to a certain extent, I now realise that I can use an assistant. But it took me a long time to come around to. You know, the way I build up in plaster is very personal? I put it on with my hands, I model it, and I cut it off. So it has to be, the last touch has to be me, anyway. But I guess anybody who has an assistant, they don't actually make the whole thing for them, do they. It depends who you are, I guess.

It depends very much whether the actual interaction with the materials is what stimulates the, the ideas, isn't it.

Yes.

Or, or whether you know, beforehand, what you want to achieve, and then can direct someone else to do it for you.

Well, it's easier to direct, probably, somebody to make a big iron piece of sculpture, isn't it.

Yes. Yes. So, how does it work, with him? How do you manage?

Well, I mean, well, well, I mean, it has worked very well, because the armature's designed by me, and I, we put it together, put it up together. And I indicate the volume it's got to be, and the interior sort of fabric, which, as an architect, funnily enough, he understands very well. Because he understands volume and space. His anatomy isn't very good. That doesn't matter. I don't want any ideas from anybody! So he's quite handy. And, you know, he can put on, carry up a big bucket of plaster and build up something, which I'm looking at down below.

So you're directing him?

Yes. And then, I can, I can let him rough it out. And then I'm, I go up and finish it and shape it myself. So, in that sense, he's been an enormous help for the big figure.

Is there any sense that, when you're making a public sculpture, that it is less personal, as well? That it becomes a more public statement?

I don't know. Because it is seen by so many people?

Because it's not so much a conversation between yourself and the piece, but something that speaks to a lot of people, yes. The address is, perhaps, slightly different.

Yes, I suppose so.

Public speaking, rather than a conversation.

Yes, it is rather. I mean, in fact, this is so public, because it's going outside, on a facade of a big cathedral, it will be very public.

It needs to be architectonic, doesn't it.

Yes. It's got to be architectural, and that's another reason I built the figure the way I did. I thought it was very static and upright, like the cathedral. In the same way, when I did the Madonna for, it was much much smaller, for Salisbury, she's a tall, angular, gothic figure, in a way, which echoes the spirit of the Salisbury shape.

But she's down on the ground, isn't she. She shares the spaces of the viewer.

Yes. She's much less public. Well, I'm not very used, not many of my, I haven't got very many commissions around which are very big public statements.

Have you enjoyed working to commission?

Sometimes, mmm.

Do you think of your portraits as being central to your work, or do you think of them as being, to a certain extent, peripheral? I mean, for instance, when we did the, your Retrospective at the Royal Academy, we left them out, because I think there was a feeling that they were a separate activity.

Well, they are a separate thing. They're very separate. I mean, they're interesting insofar that they are people, and it's a very demanding job, doing a portrait, because you've got to

please so many different people. At the same time, it's got to be a decent piece of sculpture, a head. And I find them very demanding. Which is why I don't do a great deal of them.

It's a different kind of demand, isn't it.

Mmm.

From your own work.

Oh yes. I mean, most commissions, I've been very lucky, I've done more or less what I want. I mean, I've suggested things which have been accepted, and which I've done. The only one way-out one, which I enjoyed doing, but I wouldn't do it again, is the buffalo - water buffaloes for Hong Kong - these two massive beasts, which are in Exchange Square in Hong Kong. We've got a pair here as well.

When did you do those?

About four years ago. But I chose that subject, because of the Chinese people. And it was fun to do. But I wouldn't do water buffaloes again. I'm not an animal sculptor, as such.

That's an interesting remark.

Well, I'm not an animal sculptor, because, look at the animals I've done. Very few.

They're very specific, aren't they. They're ...

A man and a dog, which isn't because of his ... the man and dog are the oldest ... animals attached to man. The wild boar because I lived in France. And, well, more recently, the baboon, which I haven't really got stuck into yet. But I'm not an animal sculptor in the sense of the animalier, or Nichola Hicks, for instance, who has used many different animals. Her "Beasts", which I think quite wonderful, but she's used a variety of animals, do you see what I mean?

I'm not absolutely certain about the distinction. You're saying that your animals are chosen for very specific reasons?

Yes.

And because of their connections with, with man?

Yes, well, for some reason, in myself, that I've come across.

Right. So they represent something ... do they represent an aspect of the human, or ... Yes, I was asking you whether the animals represent an aspect of the human, or do they, are they a way of discussing the interface between the human and the natural?

Yes, I suppose so. Yes, but I'm not, I mean, you know, when I'm saying an animalier, is what I call an animal sculptor, the animalier, there's quite a lot of young sculptors all around us, today, doing them. Jonathan Kenworthy, he only does animals, really lions and tigers, leopards, elephants and so on. That's what I call an animal sculptor, for whatever reason. But I, my animals are more specific to do with, yes, with me and man. And there aren't very many of them.

There aren't very many different kinds of animals.

That's right.

Is what you're saying.

Yes. Yes.

So they perform a much more specific function.

Yes.

Well, are they extensions of the human?

Not necessarily, well, the horse and the dog, yes. The wild boar because, we were surrounded by them when we were in France, and they used to hunt them. So it's part of the chasse, you know. Well, I suppose that's an extension, you know, of human activity.

So that they're, you don't see them in terms of their separateness? You see them in terms of connection with the human?

Yes. More or less. I think so. It's like, you know, somebody said to me the other day, "I did love your birds. Are you going to do any more birds?" And I said, "No." And similarly, about the wild boar. And I said, "Probably never. I've done them now."

So it's a theme that's been exhausted, basically?

Yes. Yes.

But you're still working with horses, aren't you? You were talking about your war horse.

Yes, yes, I mean, I've just moved into the later, the last horse, which I like very much, is this huge, chunky animal, which is a war horse, which I started last January, and ... it was, I like it because it's massive, and it is a war horse. I got interested in, I was interested in the theme, I think we've already spoken about how, you know, in the past, horses carried man to war, blindly, you know, and were killed and smashed up. They were vehicles.

Were you interested in their faith, their fidelity?

Well, I'm always interested in anybody who will carry, carry on regardless.

Right, so it's to do with stoicism, is it?

That particular horse is, yes.

Do you want to say something about your illness?

Well, yes, I mean, I don't mind talking about that at all, because it was such a shock, and that horse is very much bound up with it, because I'd started doing it, and then I was told I had cancer, and would have to have this operation. Funnily enough, once I knew I had to have an operation, I'd met my surgeon, knew it was possible to, to do something, anyway, I went back to work, to, to go on with the horse, and that made me very happy, because it was something to do for three weeks while I waited. I was very lucky, because I was seen in three weeks. And I didn't think I, the real shock of having cancer, came later.

Did it?

Well, yes. Because once you've been told you've got cancer, but you can have an operation, do you know what I mean? You've always never got to lose hope. You have to be very

positive about it. And, of course, I realised it was a serious operation, it was going to take five hours, I might not survive, all these things went through my head. But I felt I would. And, but I just wasn't prepared with how frail I got when I came through it. I was so shattered. My size had gone down to half, and I just couldn't believe how frail I was, because all my muscles went, you know. But in three weeks, I was out, in two weeks, actually.

Working again?

No, no. But walking around. But I couldn't believe that, when I got out of hospital, I said to Alex, "I just want to go down to the top pond." And we walked down there, and I just ... just was so weak! And I realised then, you know, how, how shattered I was, physically.

How long did it take you recover?

It took me that summer to get over it. I went back to work later that summer, began to feel very good again. And, certainly, only till ... last summer, I had a set-back, because they discovered that I had a little patch they weren't quite happy about, round the operation scar.

Where was the operation?

On my oesophagus. They took it all out, and took my upper stomach up, and so my stomach's up here. I have no oesophagus, it just goes straight down. But it begins to build up a certain ... what do you call it, that, what's the stuff that makes your oesophagus move in and out? You don't have that, of course, any more.

I don't know!

Neo-elasticity, or something! Your whole system's changed, your whole body's messed up. And your whole, you know, one, terrible scars everywhere, huge slices round your anatomy. And then the set-back was last summer. I had to have radiotherapy, because they were worried about this. So they blasted it. And that set me back enormously, because I lost weight again, and I had to build myself up again. And I did that quite well, to start this bigger figure. I'm very optimistic now. But, unfortunately, it's something you can't put behind you entirely. Cancer. Because you can never say, "It's okay, it's gone."

Do you think it's affected your, your attitude? And presumably, and therefore, your work.

Well, my attitude now is that, I shall do only what I want to do - selfishly. I'm not ever going to take on too much any more. I like to see young students, because they, a lot of them write to me. I see a lot of those through the year, doing theses and things like that. But, on the whole, I've cut down enormously on, on those silly things, you know, I used to be on the Board of the British Museum, and this and that. I do just the barest minimum now, because it's more important for me to finish my life working, and being with my family. And also seeing new things. I'm very keen on travelling now. More. And, you know, I think once you've had a shock like that to the system, I don't think anything else can shock you very much, you know.

You mentioned you'd been, you'd been very impressed by aboriginal sculpture. Have you seen other things that have impressed you as much, in your travels?

Well, I haven't travelled to Mexico, that's really where I want to go, because I do love that work. And I was so impressed by the recent exhibition at the Hayward, it was just wonderfully set-up. I mean that's, I mean, to see sculpture set-up like that is perfect in an interior situation.

Also to see where some of the ideas of sculptors like Henry Moore, and Barry Flanagan have come from.

Yes.

To see the sources of those.

Yes. And I see the sources in my own heads, recent heads, the Easter heads, the head of the seated man is very Mexican, the latest one. No, it's extraordinary. It's interesting.

You said something which I found very strange, and I wonder if you could respond to it. You said that your illustrations were subjective, and your sculpture wasn't. I thought that was a very curious statement, and I didn't really know what you meant by it.

Well, I don't know. I don't know what it means, myself! I mean, I think my illustrations are illustrations, and because of as being illustrating they're subjective and literary, because they're to do with the story, and my sculpture isn't.

Does that mean that your sculpture comes as though from somewhere else?

Well, yes, I mean, it's an idea of my own, but it also comes from somewhere else. I mean, when you're illustrating something, you do have to be subjective.

It's much more specific, isn't it.

Literary, it's literary. I mean, it's a literary thing. It's a story. And my sculptures aren't stories.

I'm thinking about, for instance, Paul Klee, who talked about the artist as being like a conduit. He gave that metaphor of the tree, when he was talking about how the, you have your roots in the subsoil, and the subsoil being, perhaps, the collective unconscious, and then the, the artist is, if you like, the trunk, which is where the, the sap, or the information, or the images, whatever, however you want to describe them, travel through. And then he described the crown as being like the artwork, that's where the information, how the information is manifested physically. And he talked about there being a relationship between the crown and the roots, but them not being the mirror image of one another. So he, he was very much thinking of the artist as being like a medium, almost.

Yes.

And therefore the imagery not necessarily being his own.

No. I think that's true. I mean, I think that is a very good statement he made, because I think that's largely true. I mean, things come through you. Things kind of appear, and you have feelings about things, and they could be things that are happening around you, which come out regardless.

Do you ever make images that don't seem to be authentic? That they come through you and you feel that they're not yours, and that they're not right, for that reason? That they're alien to you?

Well, I think quite a few things could be a bit alien, yes. I'm not sure.

I mean, presumably, the process of working through something is the process of claiming it is as yours, isn't it, making it yours.

Mmm. But then everybody claims, you can claim your ideas yourself, but then you do recognise that other people have similar ideas, and they're doing it in a different way. Or maybe even the same way.

Have you, I'm trying, I want to ask you about responses to your work, how important peoples' responses to it are. And I was just wondering, for instance, whether anyone has said anything, or written anything, that has been important to you, that's given you a new perspective on what you were doing?

You mean writing about my work?

Yes, or ...

Oh yes. Well, it's always interesting. I mean, I think every person who's written about my work, it's fascinating to me, because they have talked about it in a way that I wouldn't have thought about. But that, that's interesting. I enjoy that. That doesn't irritate.

Don't you, you don't ...

I might say, "Oh, no, that's wrong." You know, "That surely isn't why."

Yes.

But I'm always interested in the way people see it.

Have there been any critics, I use the word in the broad sense of the word, who have been able to direct you at all? I often feel, with artists, that, that it's terribly important if they have someone who maybe comes to the studio every now and then, and talks about what they're doing, and perhaps ...

Yes.

Encourages them to go one way rather than another.

Well, I think it probably is, but, you see, I rather isolated myself from all that, because I went from having very good write-ups to having very bad write-ups, and I felt very alienated by all that. And, on the whole, I haven't had very happy experiences with critics for the last two decades, frankly. Well, the last show I had, I had some good reviews, yes.

So you've simply separated yourself from that?

I have really, yes. And I feel, you know, that they can be very constructive, they can be very destructive. And I prefer that, really, not to involve myself in it, because it's nothing, it's no good worrying about it.

So you don't, do you regret it?

Well, certainly.

Yes.

I think it's very regrettable.

Have you felt, at times, that you were speaking into a void, for that reason?

Yes, I think for a long time I did. I don't think it's actually done me any harm, you know, I got to America, I've shown all over the States, I ... and the only thing I'm disappointed in, I haven't shown enough on the Continent. Practically unknown there.

But is that an accident of fate, do you think?

I don't know. Well, I haven't had the opportunities.

So it's very much in the English-speaking world that your work is known.

Yes, I mean, I could show in Paris now, and probably, I have various, various good contacts there.

What plans have you got for future pieces, future sculptures?

Well, I think I have already said my next double piece will be the man and the baboon. And I like very much my seated men that I did recently, and I'll probably do another one of those, and a combination of the seated man and the baboon.

How many of the seated men have you done now?

I've done one and two. The second one I was very pleased with. And then, I think I'll probably do another big horse, if I'm given time to do it!

How far ahead do your ideas run? Do you always have many more ideas than you have time to work on?

Yes. Mmm. Well, I've thought of ideas and they probably, in the past, haven't materialised for three or four years, because I'm in the middle of past ones, you know.

And that's why it's important to have a way of working that's fast?

Yes. But obviously, I can work less fast now.

Do you think that you'll use assistants more?

I think I'll have to, because physically, I'm just, just that much frailer.

And working on an enormous piece of sculpture is physically very taxing, obviously.

It is very taxing. It's just, no, I'll have to have help for big pieces.

It'll be interesting to see what changes that brings about.

Yes, it will be. I hope only in the good sense. Brian Robertson said to me, years ago, "You've got to get an assistant." It's terribly funny! And I said, "Oh, no, no, no, no." He was probably right. But at the time, I don't think it was necessary at the time. Maybe I'd have done more sculptures.

But you were very keen on your hands in interaction with the, with the sculpture.

Yes. I still feel that too. Well, even with an assistant, I can still do that, because, after all, I finish it myself.

You're still, you're still in the studio with him?

Well, I finish it myself. The final carved bit.

When you, when a work is sold, and leaves home, as it were, do you feel any sense of loss? Is it like children leaving home? Or do they, once they are finished, are they over and done with for you?

Well, they're over and done with, but I mind not having them about. If I possibly can, I, I use the prerogative that we all have of making an artist's copy.

So do you always keep one of each work for yourself?

Well, I haven't, as it happens, by any means. Because, to begin with, I thought I couldn't afford it, it was crazy. Henry Moore kept something, one of everything he ever did. Yes, I've got a very good representative collection now.

And you want to keep them round you? They're important to you are they?

Yes, I like to keep them around, yes, key pieces. And I have my favourite pieces.

Which is your favourite piece? Is there one?

At the moment? Oh, there's always one of the day.

The one you're working on at the moment?

Yes. Yes, well, I like the horse very much, and some of the late dogs, big seated dogs.

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