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## OH 562

Full transcript of an interview with

## SILVIO APPONYI

on 06, 15 & 27 March 2000

by Jenny Palmer

for the

## EMINENT AUSTRALIANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Recording available on CD

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J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, MORTLOCK LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIANA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 562

**Jenny Palmer interviewing Mr Silvio Apponyi, sculptor and artist, at his home on 6th, 15th and 27th March in the year 2000. This recording forms part of the *Eminent Australians* project and is commissioned jointly by the State Library of South Australia and the National Library of Australia. [See page 40 for the recorded preamble to this interview.]**

TAPE 1 SIDE A

**Now, Silvio, I've read variously that you were born in Dachau and Munich in 1949: which town was it?**

Dachau was a village which is on the outskirts of Munich and I was born in a displaced persons' camp there.

**Right, and the month – – –?**

Not in the other camp.

**The month?**

The month was July and on the fourth of July.

**On the fourth of July 1949.**

In 1949.

**And your parents, what were their names?**

My mother's name is Lisbeth Marta Gertrude Reissenweber, and my father is Albert Friedrich Apponyi.

**What's the origin of that name, Apponyi?**

Father was Hungarian. Apponyi is an old royal family name of Hungary. And my – we think – my great, great, great grand-uncle, who was the Prime Minister of Hungary – he is actually my great, great grand-uncle – and his sister had a little bit of flim-flammery with someone who was also in the royal family, and the offspring was shunted off to some farm people to bring up and eventually was given the Apponyi name.

**Something that – – –.**

This is all supposition; this is what we've tried to work out. We're not actually sure of what the details are.

**So this grandfather with all the greats preceding it – I lost count of how many exactly – that means that he would have been a servant of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at some stage of the game, because that many greats would have gone back that far – yes, of course.**

I can't tell you for sure. I mean, I really don't care about what my ancestry is, what – where I've come from. I don't really associate much with the Hungarian community. Occasionally they invite me to take part in an exhibition and I take some work there and take part in it, but I don't speak Hungarian and I don't really feel as if I'm Hungarian. I feel as if I'm Australian, and Australia is what I'm interested in.

**Your mother: that was – she was Hungarian too?**

German.

**German, that's what I thought. So did they meet in the DP camp?**

Yes. My father was a Luftwaffe pilot. The story which I've been told – and it gets altered – my mother re-writes history occasionally – he was graduated as a pilot, received his flying licence, went to his base in Hungary; as he arrived at the air force base the Russians came over the hill on the other side and he left. He then evacuated out of Hungary and went to Germany, where he was in the displaced persons' camp. As much as I know. While they were in the displaced persons' camp, which must have been from '45 to '49 – we came to Australia in 1951, I think – while he was in the displaced persons' camp, he was actually going back to Hungary as a spy for the Americans. And there were a group of half a dozen of them, of his friends, who were all doing the same thing, and the Russians got all of the other ones except him. They got the last one shortly before they left for Australia.

**He was a very lucky man.**

In many ways, yes. As am I, in many ways. My mother was born in – my father was born in Esztergom in Hungary. He was – well, he died in ’81. I can’t remember exactly how old he was; my wife will tell you, she knows all that stuff better. My mother was born in Thüringia in the north-east of Germany; it was East Germany for quite a while.

**So how come she was in a DP camp in Bavaria?**

She wandered around the place. She was – wait on, she was married to another German bloke name of Gunther, who was a medical orderly, who was killed in the War. And whether she was in Bavaria because of that I don’t know. At one stage she was a secretary for someone in Paris, and she considered the War years to be wonderful because that’s when she was in the prime of her early life, I guess.

**In occupied Paris.**

Yes.

**How old were they when they were married?**

No idea.

**Twenties?**

My mother’s now seventy-eight, in 2000, and I think they married in ’48 – or might have been ’50, I don’t know.

**But you’re not the firstborn, are you?**

No. My mother had a son from the previous marriage, whose name was Peter. Peter died when he was twenty-nine and he was five years older than I.

**But you are the first child of your parents’ marriage?**

Yes. And I have – there was a girl who was stillborn, and there was a younger brother who died of a hole in the heart in about the ’80s.

**So you’re it?**

I have a sister.

**Ah.**

Ildiko Vivienne Gabrielle Geraldine Apponyi (laughs) –

**That is a – – –.**

– who is three years younger than me –

**What is it with these – – –?**

– and she's a housewife in Para Vista.

**Extraordinary collection of names there!**

I don't know. (laughs)

**All right; well, that gives us some of the background and so we've got an idea of the shape of the family. What was behind the decision to actually emigrate to Australia?**

Okay. They, at one stage, had the papers and money and whatever they needed to go to Argentina, and just before they were going to get on the train or whatever and leave, her handbag was stolen, the one with all the money and papers and whatever. So, by the time they cobbled together some more papers and money, the option was then Australia, for which I'm profoundly grateful.

**And South Australia?**

They came to – – –.

**Would they have come *via* Western Australia and Bonegilla?**

They came – Bonegilla.

**Bonegilla.**

Bonegilla, yes.

**And then into South Australia.**

Yes. And we lived first at Semaphore, and then at that time I spoke Australian, German and Hungarian.

**You were just a little chap; you would have been –**

Three years old.

**– three years old.**

And my father then was sent off to Woomera for a year to paint Woomera, which was what happened to him. And – – –.

**What was he? He had been a pilot; what else was he qualified to do?**

I'm not sure. Someone, a Hungarian chap about five years ago, said, 'I knew your father when he was at high school, and I've got a copy of his high school leaving results, and here's a copy.' And at the top of the list he's the only student who has got top marks in every subject. Religion, maths, Latin, Greek – you name it; there was about a dozen subjects.

**Did they speak any English when they came here?**

I don't know.

**Did they find it difficult to speak English once they came here?**

My mother still speaks 'Germlish'. Although, I mean, they spoke pretty good English after a while, yes.

**Okay, so father went to Woomera and left mother and the babies, I suppose: how much – – –?**

I remember having a black cat called Mauntzi when I was in Semaphore. (laughs) I had very white blond hair, and that's about all I remember. We then moved to number nine Lanark Avenue at Seaton Park, and we were there for a number of years.

**Rented accommodation, or Housing Trust?**

Housing Trust, I think.

**And what was your father doing then?**

Selling insurance, various things.

**So he didn't actually pick up a career, as such, when he came to Australia?**

No, no. Oh, hang on, I think when we were all living at Lanark Avenue he was working for an advertising company.

**Doing what?**

Doing – designing advertisements, I think.

**What, graphic design sort of work?**

Yes, something like that.

**So he was artistic?**

I've seen some of the works he's done. My mother and father went to North Adelaide School of Art doing part-time classes in about the early '80s.

**After you were there?**

Yes. And my mother did a portrait head of my father, which is actually pretty good. But my father's were not quite up to it. (laughs)

**Why did they do that?**

Who knows?

**Just a part-time hobby?**

Yes.

**Right. Did your mother work?**

My mother wanted to get a job working in Myer's as a beauty consultant, and so that she could do that they sent me off to live with someone, my auntie or various other people. In my primary school days – I think I added up to about nineteen different schools I've been with. When my sister came along, when my sister was about twelve – which is probably getting ahead a bit – my mother and father had a big split-up and my mother took my sister and went to Germany for a year, and my father went to New Zealand to start up some new business making Lecho pies – tomato and capsicum and (whispers) meat pies – and put me in a foster home down at Victor Harbor with the Tripp family of

Aborigines. And I was there for – I don't know, somewhere between one and three months. Another one of the various places I've been in my youth.

**How traumatic was that?**

I think it's had a very great bearing on who I am and what I am and what I do.

**So how old were you then?**

Young.

**In your early teens.**

Nine to – no, I might have been fifteen. Yes, I would have been fifteen.

**You said your sister was twelve.**

Yes.

**Yes, so you were in your early teens. Not a good time – not that any time is a good time, but not a good time to be going to – – –.**

Um – yes.

**You say it had a profound effect: in what way?**

When I was twelve I decided that I would not be anything like my parents. In any way that I could influence.

**Which things in particular did you want to be different (laughs) about yourself from them?**

The fact that their morals, scruples and sexual whatever, I wanted nothing to do with that.

**So they were – what? – promiscuous?**

Yes.

**Had other relationships?**

Wife-swapping, you pick it. (laughs)

**Well, was this within their – the community of migrants, migrant people – I mean, were there friends that had come out too –**

No, no.

**– that they knew, or – – –?**

I mean, I didn't really know. I attempted to disassociate myself from their social life. Not that a kid really can, but (pause) – – –.

**So when people –**

When I – – –.

**– came to the house, or there were visitors, friends and so on, what used to happen?**

I'd be out playing under the pine trees around the corner or up the block, or I'd run away, or – – –.

**And what – did they drink and have loud parties, or what was the general form of entertainment when people came over?**

I think I've closed the book on those memories and pushed them deep down, and there are only flashes that come up every now and then. And it's taken me probably until about five years ago to deal with all the emotional ratbaggery that has been going on in my head, and it's – I think it's really only five years ago that I've become a whole person in myself, in that I feel that I'm a worthwhile person. Up until then I felt as if I was a piece of crap. Who'd want me? They want to do something, they just toss you off to someone or send you to Mount Barker Salvation Army home or any one of twenty other places to get rid of me.

**And was your sister treated similarly?**

My mother wanted a girl and dressed me as a girl when I was a child, and didn't really want a boy. My brother received the worst end of the deal, without a doubt, and his personality reflected that because he was a pretty nasty type sometimes.

**Were you beaten?**

Many times by him.

**What about your parents: did they beat you?**

Not particularly; it was more emotional beatings than physical beatings.

**So what was their response to your schooling, for example? Were they totally disinterested?**

Pretty much. They were a pair of solipsists.

**Have you ever considered how that may have come about because of their wartime experiences, the dislocation of their own lives?**

Well, you can choose to make any excuses you like, but someone's nature is pretty well formed and circumstances don't really alter people's natures. And my mother in particular – I wouldn't want her to hear this before she dies – has only one concern in life, and that's how to get another dollar out of anyone she can.

**… So childhood for you was a fairly disenchanting experience.**

To put it mildly, yes.

**So who did take an interest in you?**

My uncle, Uncle Harry, was in the main a pretty decent bloke and he – when he was around – – –.

**Whose brother, or – – –?**

My mother's brother, younger brother. I think he's about – oh, just a few years younger than her.

**Emigrated at the same time?**

Not long afterwards, yes. And he and my father's sister got off together for a while and then had a big break-up. And he now is the longest-surviving person with a ping-pong ball heart valve – twenty-odd years or something. You used to be able to hear him coming: (diminishing to whisper) tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock. (laughs)

**But he – – –.**

He's a really lovely bloke. He's probably the reason why my mother's still kicking along because he lives just around the corner from her now in a old

folks' village. He comes around, he's at her beck and call. She screams abuse at him; she treats him *really* badly; but he's her brother and so he just keeps looking after her.

**So he cared about you.**

Yes.

**How did he show that? How was that demonstrated?**

Well, I've one fond memory of him. I did something wrong and he went off to the shop and bought a big tub of ice cream and ate it in front of me. (laughs) No, but in the main he was someone that I regarded quite fondly in that he was always reasonably pleasant and there weren't many who were.

**I've read that you began modelling, chipping away – – –.**

Yes, I started – they tell me I started carving when I was about five.

**Well, was he interested in that? Did he commend you for these? Did he take an interest in them – did anybody?**

Don't really think so, no.

**What did you do with them all?**

Lose them. I had a half a tractor for a toy, I found half a tractor somewhere so I carved another bit to fit and made a whole tractor. And then I thought, 'Well, this is all right,' so I made a few more wooden toys then.

**At school, did you draw comparisons with other children and deduce that you were neglected by comparison with other children and – – –?**

It wasn't really something that I thought about. I mean, I just (muffled sound of passing motor vehicle), 'Oh well, that's my life,' so you get on with it. I often spent time – I was often staying with my aunt who I got on really well with.

**And whose sister was she?**

My father's sister.

**Oh, your father's sister.**

Yes. And she's mildly schizophrenic: she has bouts of bad schizophrenia occasionally. We used to be really close – I'd go and see her every week, much more than I would my mother – and then she separated from her husband, who was a Polish chap, Richard Miller – that's his actual Polish name! (laughs) – and she borrowed some money from me and just disappeared. Didn't see her for nine months or it might have been eighteen months, and then one day my wife bumped into her in Burnside and that was the only way we made contact again. I mean, at the time that she borrowed the money it was everything we had.

**You were quite young then?**

Yes.

**What about your sister? Was – what was your relationship like with her?**

Well, I was a bit jealous of my sister because she got the better end of the deal, I always used to think, mm. My mother cared about her more than me – until I discovered later, after we had a good heart-to-heart, what her end of the deal was, and then it wasn't so good after all. And I think the fact that we had that talk was a big help in setting me back on an even keel, in that I wasn't the only one who had crap, you know, and she had all the good stuff.

**That was relatively recently, that conversation.**

About five years ago.

**So – just trying to think. With your sister, you didn't actually discuss that you were miserable, or did you used to fight with her, or – – –?**

Oh, we fought, but (sighs) I didn't hate her. I didn't love her. I had great difficulty loving anyone for a long time. Didn't love myself for a long, long time.

**What were you like as a child? Were you shy, were you sociable, ebullient, aggressive? I mean, did you – you're a big, strong man –**

I was –

**– were you a big child?**

– I grew this size when I was about seventeen; I just shot up. When I was sixteen I weighed eighteen stone and I was about a foot shorter than now. I was in hospital with peritonitis for a month and I nearly died. I – – –.

**At what age did you have the peritonitis?**

I think it was seventeen. Sixteen, seventeen. In the middle of my Intermediate high school exam. Woke up in the morning, felt really bad, went to have a shower and collapsed in the shower. I went from eighteen stone to twelve stone in a month.

**I mean, eighteen stone is (hesitates) fat, isn't it, so – – –.**

Well, I was fat, had to go sideways through doors.

**Do you think this was part and parcel of your self-loathing, that you were like this?**

No, no, no, no, no. When my parents went off on their separate way we had a yogurt factory – they were the first two people in South Australia to make yogurt, Ritters yogurt – and I'd be up until two or three in the morning sticking labels on yogurt containers in my exams and all sorts of stuff like that. I developed a mask which I showed to the world, and the real me was not visible, and that's how I got through life.

**Until relatively recently.**

Occasionally I retreat behind the mask still.

**So with your high school – that's where you went to, high school, isn't it? – were there any teachers there who recognised that you were talented?**

Yes. I'm where I am today because of a teacher who was at Woodville High School.

**Who was that?**

Heinfret Heyer – he was the art teacher there when I was there; that would have been '75, '76, somewhere round there – no, '65.

**Earlier than that –**

’65, ’66.

**– ’60s, yes.**

Approximately then. First year high school they said, ‘You’ve passed your IQ test with high whatever it is, and we’ll put you in 1A because you’re smart.’ And they said, ‘You’ll do Latin, Maths 1 and Maths 2, History, English, and because you’re intelligent you’re not allowed to do Art.’ And so in Year Two I got fifty-one per cent for Latin and fifty per cent was the Roma stories which everyone memorised forwards or backwards – English to Latin – so I got really one per cent for Latin. And the Latin teacher, who was Mr Phillips, who was the biggest bastard I’ve ever come across, he had a cupboard full of canes that he would apply joyously to anyone who didn’t play hockey and didn’t do well at Latin. So I played hockey as a goal-keeper (laughs) and managed to keep out of his way with the Latin. There was a reunion at Woodville High School not so long ago, and I went along wondering if I should take a cane and beat the crap out of the bastard if he turned up, and when he did turn up I really wished I had brought the cane.

**Yes. So what was the master again who did recognise your talent?**

Heyer, Mr Heyer.

**Heyer, yes.**

In second year they said, ‘You’re an idiot,’ and they put me down from 1A, 2A to 3D, and in 3D we had Mr Cinzio who was a lovely Italian bloke who we gave a heart attack from pinging rubber bands off his ears in class. The standard of attention in the class from 1A to 3D dropped considerably, and the standard of students dropped considerably; however, in 3D you got to do woodwork – which wasn’t art, but at least it was making something with your hands – and then, because we pinged too many rubber bands off Mr Cinzio’s ears and didn’t do any study they put us down to 4D, and in 4D – or was it 4E? I don’t know,

might have been 4G – you could do Art. So I wandered over to the art room and I lived in the art room. I didn't go out and do anything except art.

**And that was tolerated?**

The art teacher was a lovely man who said, 'You will apply for this scholarship and you will then go to art school with it,' which I did.

**Did you see him after you left school?**

I went down to visit him maybe ten years ago, and made a little horse for him to present to someone, for his daughter's trophy or something.

**What was the demographic at Woodville High School like when you were there?**

Forty-five students in 4D, six boys and the rest were girls.

**Many migrants?**

Not really. No, wait on. Zollo, Burzens – yes, there would have been.

**What was your feeling about the environment, because I mean had you had a chance to actually see much of South Australia beyond Adelaide and the environs by that time?**

I'd been to Victor Harbor to the foster home, and I'd been to Mount Barker to the home for wayward kids, and I'd been to Port Adelaide because I used to get on the train and go to Port Adelaide instead of going to high school – to primary school, rather.

**So you wagged school?**

At every opportunity, yes.

**Alone, or with friends?**

Alone.

**So you were solitary and neglected emotionally, oppressed emotionally.**

I guess.

**Were you lonely?**

Very.

**You felt lonely. What did you like to do? Was music part of your life, for example?**

Not really.

**Reading?**

Read a lot.

**What did you read?**

Comics. My father would tear them up with monotonous regularity.

**I'm just wondering about your – – –.**

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: TAPE 1 SIDE B

**[What did you read?**

Comics. My father would tear them up with monotonous regularity.

**I'm just wondering about your] fantastical life: what sort of fantasy life you had.**

Science fiction.

**Science fiction. Did you – – –?**

Started off reading comics and then war comics, and then I discovered science fiction and I've read that pretty narrowly since.

**What about – – –?**

Read the odd good book, but – – –.

**What about the movies and –**

Yes.

**– radio, television: did you used to – – –?**

Listened to radio plays and things like that. Got memories of sitting up next to the radio, listening to the old *Blue Hills*, or whatever it was.

***Superman*?**

Yes, all that, yes.

***Night beat*?**

(laughs) No doubt. (laughter) We didn't ever have television as kids, so I would go and stay at a friend's place so I could sit up and watch the TV. I still am hopeless, if I come into the house and the TV's on and I sit there for a minute and look at it, that's the end of the night. I'll sit down in front of the TV and watch whatever crap's on.

**It's an escape, isn't it?**

Yes.

**Yes, so tell me about the circumstances of you entering art school for a start. What did your parents think about it?**

Never really thought about it. They were supportive. There was a well-known Hungarian woman painter in the background somewhere –

**Whose opinion they respected?**

– no, an ancestor. One generation back or something.

**Right, so they really did believe that you did have artistic ability.**

Yes.

**They weren't – – –.**

Well, I carved all the time. That was what I was doing, all the time. I would steal a knife from somewhere and find something to carve and carve it.

**Did they tell you it was beautiful, your work?**

Don't really remember that.

**You don't actually remember – – –.**

They did actually keep a piece, a little figure which I did when I was about eleven. I remember the circumstances: we went to visit a family where I couldn't stand the kids in the family, and I went out the back and broke a piece

of wood off their fence and sat there whittling this figure out of it.  I remember carving.

**Did – you had a family car, did you – – –?**

Yes.

**Yes, so did you feel poor, and were you poor?  Were your parents comfortable?**

We weren't wealthy.  My parents would spend money faster than it came in – I'm a bit that way myself.

**They liked a good time.**

Yes, definitely.  (interviewer laughs)

**Okay.  So you entered art school on a scholarship, and you would have been seventeen –**

Yes.

**– or so?  That's right.**

Probably nineteen when I went.

**How come?**

Somewhere round that.

**Why, because – were you older because of your dislocated schooling? Turning eighteen in first year art for five years of high school.  You did five years of high school?**

Four years.  No, wait on, five because I repeated Year Four twice.  Five years.

**So you would have been seventeen, eighteen.**

About that.

**Yes, that's right, yes.  Were you at all politically aware at this time of your life –**

In first year –

**– for example, you would have been eligible for the draft.**

– yes, I was drafted.

**You were?**

Yes, they called my marble up.

**And what happened?**

I received a scholarship to study in Germany and went.

**I see, so you – – –.**

And it was delayed while I was studying, and then when I came back it was no longer there.

**So your marble didn't come up until you were well into art school?**

Yes.

**That's right, okay.**

And if I had been drafted I would not have gone, because I do not agree with it, and I would have said, 'Up yours.'

**So did you take part in the demonstrations at the time?**

Occasionally, but I wasn't really a political being, as such. I didn't go to demonstrations out of conviction. I just did not wish to go to another country and kill people I didn't know and had no interest in, and didn't believe what the government was doing was right. (sound of passing aeroplane)

**What were your political persuasions at the time? Were they aligned with the Labor Party or were you an independent thinker?**

That's the one. (laughs) I vote now according to what I believe the country needs rather than what the parties say. The parties will say, 'This is what we should do,' and the other one will say, 'No, that's wrong.' And then when they're in power they say, 'Oh, well, we believe in this now,' and the other ones that believed in it before will say, 'Oh, no, that's crap now.' And I think that is just so pathetic.

**And you were like that from an early age.**

Yes.

**Yes. What about your friends at art school: were they similarly inclined?**

There were some students at the art school who were politically active, but I'd found something I really wanted to do and I just burrowed into that.

**Did you feel, though, there that at least there was a community of like-minded people, that at least there was a community of like-minded people there? Did you feel less isolated, did you feel –**

Yes, definitely.

**– less peculiar once you got to (laughs) art school?**

Well, I'm a bit of a chameleon – I appear to be some things which I'm not. But, for the first time in my life, I felt that there was a purpose, that I had somewhere where I really felt I belonged, and (pause, sound of distant female voice) then I met her, and then I didn't feel so lonely any more.

**Get to Natalija in a moment, but what about your teaching at art school? What are your memories of that? Was it good?**

When I left high school, in the year I left high school, in the high school magazine in the centrefold there's a photo of an abstract wooden sculpture on one page and a realistic charging elephant on the other page. When I went to art school they accepted me because of my drawings and because the carvings I'd done, where my scholastic record was not quite up to scratch, shall we say? Lost my plot.

**Well, we were talking about the teaching and the response of teachers to you –**

Okay. I went to art school –

**– even though you were (laughs) – – –.**

– carving, and not being really interested in drawing and painting or any of that: I wanted to be a sculptor and I wanted to carve. Max Lyle said, 'The Ubangi tribe in Africa carves wood, and at art school we weld things out of metal,' because that's what Max Lyle does. And Owen Broughton was more the sort of

person who would say, ‘Okay, you want to weld two bits of metal together, I don’t care what you make when you weld these bits of metal together, but I’ll show you how to weld them together so they don’t fall apart,’ or ‘I will show you how to cut this piece of stone or temper this chisel so you can carve that stone,’ or – he was more into facilitating you to do what you had in mind, rather than trying to push his bag of crap onto you to make you into a little Max Lyle. Max Lyle is a lovely bloke, but he’s very narrowly affixed to his welded lumps of metal. So while I was at art school I made enough welded lumps of metal to appear to be fascinated by it, when I went off in my own direction and organised other things I wanted to do.

**Like what?**

Started carving stone, did some wood carvings which I would keep at home, really, I wouldn’t bring them to art school.

**How did you acquire the materials, because you were on a scholarship. What did you do for money?**

Scrounge, steal. (laughs)

**Steal? (laughs) Let’s explore that one. (laughter)**

There was a – I would go to the rubbish dump with a trailer full of rubbish and come back with a trailer full of raw materials – you could still do it back then.

**What sort of raw materials?**

Oh, bits of steel, bits of wood, rocks, anything.

**And would you make them into abstract –**

Actually –

**– works?**

– worked – (aside) not too many of them in here; don’t think there’s any of the other ones in – started doing abstract and realistic. While I was at art school I virtually only did abstract pieces. ‘We don’t do that; the African tribes do that.’ Then, when I left art school, I continued along in that vein for a while, but I’ve

always been with one foot in each camp. I like the abstract and I like the realistic.

**Were you being influenced or inspired by anybody in particular at this moment in time, from books, or – – –?**

Brancusi, I liked his work, and I really liked Ernst Barlach, who's a folk art realist from Germany.

**And you found these people in books?**

Yes.

**At the art school?**

Probably, yes.

**So you didn't have any broader horizon before you actually got to art school –**

No.

**– in terms of reference for work?**

I liked simple, smooth shapes.

**So, as a kid, wandering around the city, for example, did you respond to public sculpture then?**

Not that I remember.

**No.**

There wasn't any sculptor I knew of whose work I wanted to emulate or – no, not really.

**Okay, that's fine. Right. Now, we'll just move to Natalija. So she features very largely in your life from this (laughs) moment on, really, doesn't she? You met at art school.**

Yes, first day of common course I walked in the back door and there she was marching down the passage ahead of me and I fell arse over head then.

**She paints and –**

Paints.

**– and was – – –. Was she set on becoming a painter?**

She wanted to be a dress designer but her father wouldn't approve of that so she went to art school to be a painter.

**And what's her background?**

Father's Lithuanian, escaped from Russia, escaped from that. Escaped from Lithuania in front of the Russians, came to Australia much the same time as we would have come.

**And her mother?**

Scottish. Cameron, from Murraytown up in the north. Third generation Australian.

**And as I see her now, was she happy and – because she appears to be, anyway, at least, a very buoyant person.**

Fortunately for me she is, yes, most of the time.

**And she was obviously – I shouldn't really say things like that, 'She was obviously', because I wasn't there and it wasn't obvious to me: (laughs) I correct myself on tape at the moment – but what was it, then, about her that appealed to you?**

She looked pretty lovely, but I had discovered by then that there's more to life than just a lovely body and that what happens between your ears is far more important. And I wanted someone who'd walk alongside me, not before me or behind me; I wanted someone who knew what was right and what wasn't in life; I wanted someone that I could trust utterly and who would love me as much as I loved them.

**Now, you were pretty young at the time: I think you married in '71.**

Yes.

**February, early in the year?**

Sixth of February.

**That's right.**

Twenty-nine years last week or whenever.

**And so you were only in your early twenties.**

Twenty-one.

**Absolutely convinced at this stage about this partnership. It's a very strong contrast, as you say, to the kind of family life you'd known through your parents.**

Yes, well, I had a very clear picture of what I didn't want, and because of that I had a pretty clear picture of what I did want. I wanted integrity and utter commitment.

**You'd thought this through, or can you – you could have articulated that at the time, or – – –?**

I think so, yes. I had a clear picture of what I was looking for, who I was looking for.

**Because it's at this stage –**

But –

**– that you make the – – –.**

– at the stage that she walked down the passage ahead of me all of that went out the window and it was – goodbye! (laughs)

**Yes. I have been asking around about you prior to this interview, and I have it on strong authority that – of course the art school was on Stanley Street (laughs) which is adjacent to the parklands, and that there were occasions on which Silvio and Natalija could have been seen rather amorously involved.**

Yes, windows all fogged up, yes. (laughter) (loud knocking, brisk loud voice) 'What are you doing in there? Move along, move along!' (laughter)

**So it was a passionate –**

(loud whisper) 'Bugger off!'

**– a passionate affair.**

Very much, yes.

**So in fact this is when you first made the newspapers, Silvio, because there was a report in the newspaper about the bed that you made, little tiny, weeny piece in the newspaper in 1971, about how six foot three Silvio had to make this special bed and Natalija had made a one thousand square crocheted spread.**

It's still on the bed. (laughs)

**It's still on the bed after twenty-nine years.**

Yes.

**How did that make the papers? Who put that in the paper?**

I've no idea. (laughs)

**Had you begun by this stage, after three years at art school, to be known in any way – apart from to Natalija (laughs)?**

In the last year of art school we had a students' exhibition in the Art Gallery. I think it was the only time that's ever happened. I had a large stone carving, which is up the driveway covered in ivy; had a number of big metal abstract crab shapes – maybe that's why I had them.

**Now, on the strength of your work there, though, you were given a scholarship – on the strength of that work, or did you – what was the basis for you getting the scholarship at Deutsche Academy?**

When we both left art school, in the third year of art school my wife quit because Gordon Samstag – who was not a particularly nice person despite what everyone says about him now that he's made a big donation to the arts – Nat wanted to do portraits and she's very good at it, but her portrait career came to a sudden stop then because Mr Samstag came up to a portrait which she had painted and said, 'Look at that, look how easy it is, it actually looks like him. What's the good of that? Why don't you put some gold leaf around the ear and a bit of pink across the side of the face? Why don't you do something interesting?' And if she had been the sort of person who would turn around to him and say, 'Piss off, you old bastard, what would you know?' – but she's not. And she felt utterly crushed by that. I would have told him to stick his head up

his arse, (woman's laughter from another room) but she just quit. And it's only now, for my fiftieth birthday, that she's done that portrait of me.

**Yes, which is in the Greenhill Gallery as we speak and is extremely good, and I think it's the same shirt –**

Same shirt.

**– that you're wearing. (laughter)**

I was demonstrating in there today; that's why I wore it.

**That's right, the checked shirt. No; that's an extremely good likeness and it's a lovely rich portrait. Very, very good indeed.**

She's got huge amounts of talent but no drive at all. She's put all of her drive into raising the kids. The reasons for that are that her father was an alcoholic and her mother was not openly very affectionate because of her Scottish upbringing where no-one showed any affection, and she's poured all that into the kids. Now the youngest daughter has now pretty well come to the point where she no longer needs nurturing because she tells Mum, 'Get your nose out of my business,' and so now she's finally going back to her art. The four girls who were really good friends at art school, Cathi Heysen [Steer], Diana Schofield [Gulpers], Jane[1] – can't remember her maiden name; she's a Minney now – and Nat had an exhibition last year at the Fullarton Park Centre and they're having another one next year, I think, or maybe later this year, I'm not sure.

**She went with you to Germany?**

Yes. The reason we got the scholarship was because she wrote it. I supplied all the photos of what I'd done, but she wrote it. My skills with a typewriter are very basic.

**So Natalija wrote the application with Silvio's work as the basis for the application, and – – –.**

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[1] Jane Tindall. SA

And the twaddle we wrote appealed to the German Government and they gave us a scholarship to study in Germany.

**And did you choose the location –**

Yes.

**– back in Munich?**

Yes, I thought, 'Like to go and see where I was born; I'll go to Munich.' At the time – what's the name of the place? – Düsseldorf was supposed to be the vibrating art centre of Europe, but – – –.

**'72, '73.**

Yes. The vibrating arts at the time in Adelaide left a lot (laughs) out of what I thought was wonderful so I didn't want to be part of that. I wanted to go and do life modelling, do a bit of jewellery, maybe some stained glass, find out about bronze casting.

**And you did all those things?**

Yes.

**So how long were you there?**

One year.

**One year. Through all four seasons. Now, how did you like that?**

The first six months were very much finding your feet, finding out where you can get that, how you go about doing this, coming to grips with the country and our place in it. The trouble with the scholarship people is that after three months in the country they ask you if you wish to renew or you wish to go home at the end of that year, and that's far too early because it takes at least six months before your feet are actually on the ground and you're not adrift and don't know what you're doing. So it was only in the second six months that I actually started to produce some worthwhile pieces.

**So where did you live and how did you live?**

When we arrived in Munich we stayed in a hotel and then we went to a room where the landlady gave us a lounge about that wide and said, ‘That’s the only bed; the furniture’s coming and the painters are coming,’ and after a month she said, ‘Now we want the – what do you call it? – the –

**Rent?**

– not the rent; the deposit you leave with them in case you scoot.

**Bond.**

The bond money, yes. And my wife, who’s pretty tough, said, ‘You can get nicked. You haven’t done any of the things you promised; we’re moving out. Goodbye.’ (high-pitched voice) ‘You ….. ….., you’ll never get anything as good as this anywhere else!’

**Did you?**

Yes, we did. We found a room in an apartment with the Achminov family on Prinzregentenstrasse which is the road where all the police went racing out to the airport when the nasty business happened at the Munich Games – that was all up and down our street, and we actually went to the Olympics a couple of times.

**Were you both speaking German?**

Nat actually studied German for the time between when we knew we were going and we went, and she got to the point where she could understand my mother quite well and could speak reasonably well, but that’s German; and when you go to Germany in the south they don’t speak German, they speak Bavarian. And she was ‘(wailing sound) – they don’t speak German, what am I going to do!’ And it probably took her another three months, six months, before she could understand enough of the Bavarian dialect to be able to communicate with the people in the wash – laundry or the supermarket or whatever.

**But you had the language still?**

My mother would speak to me in German as a child and I would answer in English, but I understood, you know, all the fundamentals of it. I was rusty with actually dredging up the extremes that aren't spoken in the kitchen but, you know, by the time I left Germany I was quite fluent and no-one knew where I came from. They knew I was German, but not quite sure which part of Germany I came from because I had Bavarian students in my class who I picked up a bit of that, and I've always spoken Düsseldorf – not Düsseldorf, Thüringian German with my mother, so the odd slang word of that would come through. I can still speak – I can understand a hundred per cent of what people say to me in German. It's rusted away a bit, in that I haven't spoken German for quite a while, but I can communicate quite well with anyone in German.

**So did you develop a circle of friends relatively easily?**

Yes, yes. There were a group of about six sculpture students at the art school in Munich that I got on really well with, and one in particular.

**I think I might change the tape here because we're on fifty-six minutes and we'd stop up a sixty minute tape, so I'll just stop this one.**

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

**Right. Recording the second tape with Silvio Apponyi on the 6th March 2000, and we will continue now with his tales of Munich. So there were a group of six or so students with whom you developed relationships, one in particular.**

Karel Charp is the only one whose name I really remember. Ernst Kalenbach was one of the lecturers, who was a bronze sculptor. Künot was another one of the bronze lecturers. The class lecturer we had was a really lovely bloke – can't remember his name just like that (snaps fingers), it'll come to me[2]. I think I was very fortunate to have him as a teacher at that time, because he was quite keen on the figure – not real keen on the way he went about doing it, but he pushed me with models, so we had models pretty well every day of the week.

**And were you doing realistic –**

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[2] Hans Ladner. SA

Yes.

**– sculpture –**

Yes.

**– like naturalistic form, not abstracting like Henry Moore at this stage?**

Got pictures here somewhere if you want to look.

**Of your early work that you did, that would be good, actually, to have those.**

We had a huge, fat woman – *enormously* fat woman, and we had a very skinny woman and the contrast between the two was terrific because you could see why all that fat was the shape it was because the bones were supporting it or not supporting it, and the really skinny one you could see where all the sinews joined in and could see how the muscles worked and could see – everything; you could see the breasts were hanging down at pudenda, but the structure, you could really understand why things worked the way they do, and that is probably the most important thing I've learned. So when I do a (knocking sound) carving of a frog I know what happens if I put my hand that way, I know what'll happen to the arm here and know why, and I tell a story with the sculpture that I make, and the story is the anatomy of the subject. So I show one hand one way, another hand another way, and just describe what happens. And telling that story is what I'm getting slowly better at. Some of the early stories are a little bit fuzzy.

**So the body's a bit like a narrative: one bit leads to another and this and this will happen because of – – –.**

Yes. And – no, the rest of that's a bit later, but I might forget: the reason that some of the things I do have got a life rather than being a dead piece of wood is that the story they tell brings them to life.

**Through their form.**

The way the composition runs, the way I make your eye follow something, sometimes (snaps fingers) they come to life. Sometimes they don't.

**Now, it sounds like a ridiculous question, but did you find this really difficult work? Were you challenged by it or disheartened by it or exhilarated by it?**

The latter, yes. It was a release of all the compressed frustrations I've had all through my life to be able to put joy and love into a piece of material. All the things I never received I dredge out of somewhere and put them into there.

**Did you ever have Natalija as your model?**

Couple of times, but she's not real keen on it.

**So it was only a year that you were in Munich, and you would have been working –**

At the –

**– very hard.**

– three months after being in Europe – March, April, May, June, July – would have been my birthday – four months, I had a birthday celebration and Nat got pregnant and (laughs) it was time to come home at the end of the year, because – no, she must have known in March that she was – – –. Well, anyway, when they asked us if we wanted to stay or not she was pregnant and she wanted to come home to Mum.

**And that's the reason why you returned.**

Yes.

**Had you not become pregnant, what do you –**

We could –

**– think you might have – – –?**

– extend the scholarship for up to six years maximum, so we could have stayed in Germany for six years.

**On an income that a scholarship pays you a living allowance?**

Yes.

**That's extraordinarily generous, isn't it, up to six years?**

Extremely so. The fact that we came back at the end of that year – so I came back on the tenth of March '73; my daughter was born on the ninth of March – I've always felt was a good thing, because if I had stayed in Germany for a longer period the sort of work I do would have been influenced by that Germanic style and I escaped that.

**When you say – I know this is very hard because it's an oral product that we have here – can you be a little bit more vivid?**

The German style, h'mm.

**'That Germanic style' – what sorts of things are you alluding to?**

The depressive, dark, melancholy stuff that was everywhere.

**(laughs) You're alluding to pieces of art, I take it, when you – – –.**

Yes.

**What, the materials?**

No, the sort of things they were doing. There was some bloke who had a bucket with grease in it and a big lump of felt on the wall; and there were these etchings of all these horrible, bleeding things. The outlook in Germany was very, very negative. You know, there were atom bombs next door; there were Russians who were going to attack at any minute; there were – no-one was having children. You couldn't buy maternity clothes anywhere in Germany because they didn't have any. Fences everywhere, the lawn with big signs: 'Do not tread on the grass'. And if there were kids playing, people would open their apartment windows and shout at them to shut up and go away.

**No joy.**

Yes. And I'd been in Germany for a year and I hadn't been able to go fishing and I hadn't been out on the sea and I hadn't seen blue sunshine and water and I wanted home. I was homesick.

**Did you get to Paris?**

Yes. We bought an old bomb for sixty bucks and we tootled all over the place. Whenever there was a holiday we were off.

**And was that good?**

Terrific. One of Nat's art school friends came over and visited us and we travelled with Candida van Rood, and we went through Switzerland to France, Belgium, up to Holland. She had relatives in Holland. And we stayed in a railway hotel somewhere in Switzerland, and there was a pop song at the time about some bloke who had two girls – wasn't like that – and the three of us stayed in this one room in this railway hotel, and in the morning when we came tootling down some of the workers there started singing this song and looking at me, and I'm going (pause, laughter) –

**Eat your heart out.**

– eat your heart out, yeah, you bastards! (laughs) – which wasn't the caper.

**And so the artistic influence of Germany you think was morose and dark, but –**

Melancholy, yes.

**– what about other places: did you get to Italy, for example?**

We drove to Italy *via* the highest, most difficult road: in the middle of summer the pass was snowed in. The car broke its gear shift on the way up to the top of the pass and we didn't make it.

**What about Paris?**

We went to Paris and I wandered through the Louvre for a whole day. The *Mona Lisa* left me cold and I walked past endless marble statues and once in a while one of them would reach out and hit you between the eyes, and I wanted to do the ones that hit you between the eyes, not the dead ones.

**What about Rodin –**

Rodin –

**– the Rodin Gallery, Museum – that would have been there then?**

– yes, I went to the Rodin Museum. Rodin was difficult because some things really appealed to me and others really didn't. I didn't want to be a Rodin, I didn't want to do – I didn't want to be a Michelangelo; I wanted to be a me. I wanted to do – I wanted my own road to climb.

**Do you think it was as much subject matter as well as technique that you were brooding over at this stage? I mean, you saw, for example, the figures that Rodin did and you thought, 'Well, I'm not interested in that,' or was it, you know, the smoothness of his work, or what was it? Because, I mean, your own – your work now is very glossy and smooth and – – –.**

I don't really know. It didn't appeal to me. There are a couple of Rodin's pieces which appeal to me.

**Which ones?**

*The thinker* was one, and the woman who used to be the gorgeous ….. Marie, I suppose, a sculpture of a very old woman – I think that piece is terrific. That says so much more than what you see. There's an extra whole bag of stuff which is there which, if you've got eyes and perception, you can see.

**There's a life experience in that.**

Yes.

**Yes, so – – –.**

That appeals to me: not to make that so it's beautiful and slick.

**Or to necessarily do a perfect likeness of a head or something like that.**

No; if I do a portrait of someone I want to put into that portrait what I see in the person, and it may not necessarily be what the person wants other people to see. (sound of passing motor vehicle)

**A lot of that, isn't there? So I have the answer to why you came back, which was that there was a baby on the way, and it's a question of family again.**

Okay; I arrive in Australia and get greeted by my mother at the airport rather than my wife, which was a big shock, and told that she's in hospital and that the baby's already arrived.

**So was the baby a little prem, was it?**

No, on time. Well, two weeks premature, two weeks, yes. And I go in and give my wife a kiss and she says, 'Well, go on, over there, have a look.' 'H'm? Oh – oh, the baby! Oh, yes, I'm a Dad.'

**Was it love at first sight?**

I'm probably closer to my first daughter than to the others, although I am now as close to the second two as I am to the first.

**And your first daughter's name?**

Anele –

**Anele.**

– Cymbeline. (laughs) My wife's heritage is Scottish and Lithuanian and mine is German and Hungarian. Anele German, Cymbeline Scottish. My second daughter is Katalin Anastasia – Katalin is the Hungarian version of Cathy, and Anastasia is the name of Dan Dare's spaceship which I used to read his comics when I was a kid. Aladar Vytas – Aladar is an old Burgundian Hungarian name, and Vytas is the knight, shining hero of Lithuanian legend. And Margit Annelese – Margit's Hungarian Margaret and Annelese's a German Anne.

**So baby number one arrived, and what are you going to do in order to feed this child after her mother stops breastfeeding her?**

Well, obviously I'm not going to feed her by selling sculptures because no-one knows (laughs) about me. I'm just one of those yobbos from art school.

**You had done something beforehand: didn't you get commissioned to do a – well, you'd done two or three things, but didn't you have a commission to design an Oscar or something or other for the theatre –**

I had done a number of things, yes.

**– company, yes; but not – – –.**

They didn't like Oscar without any clothes on. Why I insisted? Because I was a stubborn prick, I suppose. I had to put a fig leaf on him. (laughs)

**That was before you went away, wasn't it?**

Yes, I think so, yes.

**Yes, it was, actually, yes.**

I've still got an original, unmodified version, which I gave to my mother.

**You also did one of your eagles on – well, quite early, but that was after, after you returned.**

I had done eagles on many occasions. I like eagles.

**Well, in '73, when you came home, you had an exhibition at the Cricklewood Gallery – what did you actually put in that exhibition?**

Some of the pieces I had done in Germany, brought them with me.

**Large? Small?**

Biggest one was about that big; it was a sort of a –

**A metre wide.**

– flying through the air figure. I can show you a photo.

**Human figure.**

Yes. An abstract of –

**Oh, okay.**

– Superman, it was.

**So who was it that was at Cricklewood Gallery at that stage that decided to show your work there?**

The lovely woman who came to the gallery today just to see me, whose name – it'll come to me[3].

**We'll dredge it up a bit later on and actually make sure that we actually get it there.**

She saw my work at the exhibition in the gallery –

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[3] Alfreda Day, owner of Cricklewood Art Gallery. SA

**The student exhibition –**

– yes –

**– before you went away?**

– yes – and asked me, wrote me a card and said, 'Can you please come to my gallery?' and took me for a walk around the gallery and said, 'What do you think of the gardens? Nice big space there, nice big spot under the trees here. Would you like to have an exhibition at my gallery?' And I said, 'Bloody oath.'

**She was already placing your work outside in a natural environment. That's very interesting. She wasn't thinking of putting your things in rooms or corridors particularly?**

No, no, no. She is an absolute gem of a woman.

**And did you have to then make more pieces rapidly for her when you came home?**

Yes.

**What were you also doing for money at that stage?**

I went to Blackfriars Priory School, and I taught art. I filled a place in the art class for about half a term. Before I came to take a place in the art class, there had been seventeen other teachers for the first term and the first half of the second term.

**What, was – because this was just general riotous behaviour, was it people away?**

All the scumbags in the school were shoved into the art class, and my job was to keep them away from the rest of the school so the rest of the school could get on with its job. Now, I wasn't aware that that was the case.

**Your memory of Woodville High School should have served you well in this respect.**

Well, I coped with it by taking them all out to the soccer field with a soccer ball and letting them run amok. I brought clay and I was going to build a pottery kiln and fire the things they made, and I came into the class one morning and all

the clay things were on the ceiling and the whole place was destroyed and that really disheartened me. And I'd come home from school each night and I'd be a total mental shivering wreck because I'm not good at communicating really. I'm not – I don't want to be someone who's (in loud, stern voice) 'You will do it this way, or else!'

**You're not into confrontation.**

Don't want to be part of that.

**No.**

I'd rather retreat behind the mask. So I stuck it out until the end of that term and they'd organised to have, you know, some monstrous teacher who was going to beat them into shape. I said, 'Good luck to you.' Occasionally one of those students would call out, 'G'day, Mr Apponyi, how are you doing?' One of them tried to sell me a car – he's as big a scumbag now as he was back then. (laughs)

**So did you then go to Tillett's?**

I then went to Tillett's. I thought, 'Well, I could go to Norman, Turner and Nottage and carve the same piece of furniture five thousand times, or I could go to Tillett's and carve tombstones and learn how to carve granite.' It's what I did. So I worked there for twelve years.

**During that time – this is the mid-'70s – John Dowie had just done the relief: were you there when he was working on that?**

No, he'd done that just before I came. The foreman at Tillett's, name of Arnie Dale, he actually did ninety per cent of that piece and then John came along and chipped the noses a bit. And the foreman at Tillett's, Mr Arnie Dale, was the stone carver of Tillett's and 'I am *the* stone carver and *you* will keep in your corner and cut letters and you will not carve cabbage roses or pigeons. My job.'

**Not even a pigeon?**

Not even a pigeon. (laughs)

**Let alone an eagle! (laughs)**

And if I appeared to be watching him when he was carving, (banging sound, as of something falling over) the old bugger'd turn his back around so you couldn't see what he was doing. And I think that, you know, the way he behaved then has been one of the formative things in what I do. I mean, I went to Malaysia to teach stone carving to Malaysian students, because of the way he treated me. You know, I could have carved better things than he was ever doing when I was there.

**What – do you mean you wanted to be another sort of teacher?**

I mean, over the years I've taught myself to work stone in ways that I don't see anyone else doing, and I don't want it to be lost when I'm dead; I want to hand it on. So I want to give it to someone else, to say, 'Okay, I can show you how to do – you want to make that? I can show you how to do it. I'm not interested in *what* you want to make, but I'll show you how to make what you want to make.' I don't want to be an art school teacher who says, 'The only thing you can make is this thing that I make and you have to make it the same way I make it and you have to make what I make or you're a piece of crap.' I want to show someone who wants to be – you know, who wants to make stuff, I show them how to make. And what they make, that's their bag, I don't want to be part of what they make. But I want to show them some of the steps along the way so that it's that little bit easier. It's so damn hard to do it anyway, that, you know, you give someone a little bit of a kick along, maybe it'll help them, maybe it'll make a difference.

**How well paid were you for your work at Tillett's?**

The first three years I got sixty bucks a week, which was the beginner's wage. The improver's wage.

**So you would have been about twenty-four.**

About that, yes. Twenty – yes, twenty-three, twenty-four.

**And you were essentially teaching yourself technique at this stage?**

They said, 'This is lettering, this is the pencil and this is the stencil knife, and we want you to do that, there it is, go for it.'

**And etch it into the stone.**

Yes. And after three years doing that, I then said, 'I'm no longer going to accept your eighty dollars or ninety dollars a week; I'm going to work contractor and I'm going to charge you so much per letter and I will supply all of my own materials,' and that was what I did and my pay jumped up to two hundred and fifty bucks a week.

**And how many children did you have by this stage?**

Two. Two. (telephone rings)

**Right. So you then did many a 'Dearly beloved wife of –' in your day.**

Yes. Amazing how often you add the date of the husband or wife to the tombstone a year to the day after the previous deceased. It's either a couple of weeks after or a year to the day or thirty years after.

**What other profundities did you come up with as a result of – – –.**

The funniest name I ever did on a tombstone was David Babbington-Quigley [?]. Apart from that it was pretty boring and mundane.

**So it was mostly memorials, headstones.**

Tombstones. Yes, I was a letter-cutter.

**Nothing else. No public statuary with dedications or anything of that nature?**

Arnie Dale did all those.

**Ah, I see.**

And then, after twelve years of doing that –

**Twelve years!**

– twelve years – – –.

**What was your frame of mind? – because we'll draw this interview to a close before you have your inspirational visit from your friend.**

I hated cutting letters. (interviewer laughs) I (in loud voice, banging fist) *passionately hated cutting letters*!

**Did you – – –?**

But I had a wife and four kids or whatever by then and you got to feed them, you got to get shoes for them, you got to get tools for yourself, you got to look after the family.

**But did this frustration impact on your relationship with Natalija at this time?**

Oh, yes.

**Because you must have been hugely frustrated.**

Yes, we had some reasonably bad stretches in between, yes.

**Because you were very young.**

Yes, yes. We were pretty good from when we got married up until about ’83, and then – you know what happened then. (pause) Oh, that German sculptor came along –

**Ah, yes.**

– and gave me a kick up the bum, wanted me to come and work for him for nothing in Germany and bugger the family, they can go to hell.

**Well, we’ll draw a line there, go back. So you were actually managing your family life quite well –**

Yes. When –

**– up until this point.**

– when I started working for Tillett’s, the first three years I worked for wages and I would work on sculptures at home, and in that period I was probably exhibiting pretty regularly. I think I missed two years in *The Advertiser* Open-Air Art Exhibition.

**Well, you were in *The Advertiser* Exhibition in 1978 with a welded steel eagle, it says in my notes here, for a hundred and fifty dollars.**

….. ….. ….. …..  Three months' work.

**One hundred and fifty dollars.**

Yes.  (laughs)

**Yes, I was – – –.**

If any mug had bought that, they'd be laughing their heads off now.  (laughs)

**Exactly!  And you exhibited in Mildura in 1979.**

Yes, that was a stone granite, blue granite, piece about that big.

**So you made that time, you had that time.**

I – – –.

**What about space?  I mean, because – – –?**

I had a shed.

**Oh, right.**

Had a shed.

**What about the neighbours?**

They put up with me.  (interviewer laughs)  Because I wasn't doing it all the time.  I would – see, I was renovating houses, too.  When we came back, we stayed with my parents, my in-laws, for about six months.  (sound of rattling dishes)

**….. ….. ….. ….. …..**

Lived with the in-laws for six months and then they helped us and my parents gave us some money and we bought our own house down at Kilkenny.  There were some old sheds out the back and I worked in those.  We stayed there for two years and then moved to Millswood, and when we moved to Millswood we lived with my in-laws again for six months while I built, rebuilt the kitchen and the bathroom and all that, and we moved in and put up a shed.

**So all your artistic inclinations are highly frustrated; you haven't got work that gives it any outlet particularly, except that you are acquiring techniques of some description.**

Yes.

**At home a lot of your energies are going into the renovation of houses –**

Yes, yes. So – – –.

**– but the marriage is holding up quite well.**

Yes. We had times when we couldn't afford the grocery and my aunt would actually buy the groceries once a fortnight for us through a period there of about three years, which really was immensely important to the family.

**And just before we end this, you mention that you missed fishing, you missed the sea: has this always been important – – –?**

I started going fishing a lot at that period.

**This was to get away from the children?**

Probably. Just find a bit of space, yes. And I started to fall into a very self-centred, melancholic mood, because I was doing less and less sculpture, renovating the house, going fishing a lot, and that creative thing in here beating to get out wasn't happening.

**Feeling sorry for yourself?**

Probably, yes. And because I wasn't happy with what I was doing, the amount of work I was doing at work was going down; I was doing not enough – I wasn't generating enough income to pay the mortgage and, you know, Nat was seeing all the bad side of life, so she wasn't happy, and I was feeling all the – perhaps they wouldn't let me do what I wanted to do and I didn't *know* what I wanted to do because I'd lost sight of sculpture. When I came back from Germany I worked pretty intensively, and then that slowly went down and down.

**When you said when you came back from Germany, from the scholarship?**

From the scholarship, yes.

**Yes, and so it's petering out through this time.**

Petering out, yes.

**Okay, we'll stop there today.**

Yes.

**Okay. (laughs)**

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A: TAPE 2 SIDE B

**Oh, right. Joy to the world. Now, I'm going to ask you to stop playing with those photographs.**

Aw – – –.

**Okay. And I'm going to –**

Lead on.

**– record at the head of this tape, which is the second session with Silvio Apponyi, the introduction to the interview which I should have recorded at the beginning of the first one. So this is actually Tape 2 of an interview with Silvio Apponyi –**

….. ….. ….. Apponyi.

**– Apponyi, that's right, Apponyi. And Silvio Apponyi has followed a distinguished career in sculpting. He will be speaking with me, Jenny Palmer, for the Eminent Australians oral history project conducted by the National Library and the State Library of South Australia. On behalf of the Director-General of the National Library and the Director of the State Library of South Australia, I would like to thank you, Mr Apponyi, for agreeing to participate in this program.**

My pleasure.

**Mr Apponyi, do you understand that copyright is shared by you and the Libraries?**

Yes.

**This being so, may we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording should the Libraries decide to make one?**

Yes.

**We hope you will speak as frankly as possible, knowing that neither the tapes nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority. This interview is taking place today, the 15th March, at Sturtbrae, which is the home of Mr Apponyi. And we will now go into the interview.**

Goodo.

**I'll sit down first in this leather chair and you will not play with the microphone cord like you did last time. Right. (laughs) Here we go. We're going to recap just for a moment on last time, because we left you at a very low ebb in your life and we're going to pick it up from there. I just want to ask you about a couple of things first of all. When you returned in 1973 to Adelaide, you were twenty-three, something like that.**

Twenty-three.

**And you told me, almost in passing last time, that your elder brother, your step-brother, died at twenty-nine and he was six years older than you, so –**

Five.

**– Five years older.**

Five years older.

**So he died shortly after you returned to Adelaide. What were the circumstances of that death, and what was the effect on the family?**

He was always a heavy drinker, smoked like a chimney. Got throat cancer, was living in Queensland at the time, wrote to my mother – rang my mother, rather, I think – not sure – wanted to come home. My mother said, 'No, it's better if you stay in Queensland.' And it was about the time of the Bathurst 500. He borrowed the boss's ute, went down to the Bathurst 500 and on the way home he planted the ute firmly into a Stobie pole at ninety miles per hour.

**Deliberately, you think?**

I'm pretty sure it was deliberate. He'd had some intimations of mortality, because he'd said, 'If I ever die, I don't wish to have a priest read over me; I want to be cremated and have my ashes thrown in the sea at Cape Jervis, and I don't wish to have a priest anywhere near me.'

**Had priests been accustomed to coming anywhere near members of your family up until this time?**

No, no. At one stage the priest at Whitefriars or Blackfriars Priory School, Primary School, where I was going, wanted to have one of us for a priest, and my father showed him the door very rapidly.

**So the family was technically Catholic, was it?**

Technically Catholic. My father was Catholic, Roman Catholic; my mother was nominally Lutheran. I was sent to a Roman Catholic school – one amongst the seventeen-odd primary schools I went to. It was not a happy time at that school. The nuns beat me with a big leather belt[4] – one particular nun, whenever she saw me, and I could never understand why that was, so I passionately loathed her and all nuns.

**So which school was this?**

It's a small primary school which is between Woodville Road and Kilkenny Road and David Terrace. I'm not sure what the name of the road is it's on. But I lived on the second house from the corner.

**Is it still there?**

I've no idea and no interest.

**You haven't returned. (laughs)**

No. It's only since I broke my right hand and cut all the tendons that, from speaking to my mother, I realised that I had been ambidextrous as a child. And the nuns were beating my use of my left hand out of me – that's all I can work out it could have been.

**Were you left-handed?**

I was equally proficient with both hands. And after that I was only a right-hander.

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[4] I worked out later it was because I was ambidextrous. SA

**So did your brother leave a family, or – – –?**

My brother – my step-brother – was used as a game-piece on the chessboard of family life between whoever she felt like playing a game with and my brother, and my brother left as soon as possible. I think he ran away from home when he was fifteen. We ran away from home on a couple of occasions.

**Together?**

Yes. On one occasion, when we were living at Lanark Avenue, which must have been when I was less than ten years old, I remember running away for about three days.

**Where did you run?**

Well, we slept in the golf course. After three days we were getting somewhat hungry, so we came home to a resounding beating (laughs); but, anyway, it was better to get beaten and be home and get fed than to be starving outside somewhere.

**You said – not in the interview last time, but when I was talking to your prior to doing this interview – you said – because it's not a phrase one would be inclined to forget – that your brother died, 'And,' you said, 'I jumped for joy.'**

I did indeed. Whenever my brother came home, the placid life which I managed to lead when he wasn't around abruptly altered. It would be fine one day and the next minute he'd be beating the crap out of me for some reason – who knows?

**So it was a miserable life.**

My brother was a very disturbed individual. Now, what the reasons are for that I don't know.

**He never got into trouble with the law, or – – –?**

We visited him in jail regularly.

**Ah! For what?**

For rape, for theft, for you name it.

**Here in Adelaide?**

Yes.  And in Victoria.  (pause)

**So – this is leading ahead to another piece of work that you finished relatively recently – but I was thinking about you and your mother and your anger with your mother, and the fact that she has, after all's said and done, lost or did lose three of her five babies.  How much compassion do you have for her in regard to that?**

I've come to terms with my mother on the terms that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the fact that she was my mother.  The fact that all the good, the bad, the horrible things which have happened to me and which are me allow me to do what I do.  The experience of my life is what I draw on to do what I do, and I choose to do the subject matter I do in the way I do because of the experience of my life.  I have no wish to do horrible things, works which do not bring joy into the world, because I've had a gutful of the other.  I do not wish to produce stuff like that.

**Fine.  Well, we'll leave that point there.  What about Natalija's family, because you had married young, a baby came very quickly into your life –**

….. ….. ….. ….. …..

**– oh, well – – –.**

We both went to art school.  We went in '66 or '67.

**You married while you were in art school?**

I saw Nat on the first day of art school and fell head over heels.

**We've got that.**

Right.  And then nothing ever happened, because I was too shy to make the first step (laughs) for three years.  That was in – – –.

**That's very shy.**

I'm a big, bumbling, shy person (laughs), really.  (microphone feedback)  Ooh.

**What did you do then?**

Well, moved.

**Right.**

In – it was probably at the end of second year, I'm not sure. I'd always gazed on her from afar and tried to make a move on her at the odd party, but because I just walked alongside her and thought, 'Oh, wouldn't it be nice,' instead of grabbing hold of something she thought I wasn't interested, so went off and found someone else. And it wasn't until her boyfriend wouldn't go with her to the ball because he didn't want to go to an ethnic ball or something like that, her girlfriend said, 'The next person who walks through the painting room door who has a suit, can drive and can dance, you'll take to the ball.' 'Twas I.

**You had all three of these attributes.**

Yes. I had a pin-striped suit with the pin stripes missing on one knee; I had a clapped out old car; and I had been going ballroom dancing for many years with a friend.

**Where had you been ballroom dancing?**

At the Wonderland, at the Norwood Ballroom, at – can't remember the name of the place – there was a dancing lessons place on North Terrace.

**Was this in an attempt –**

Aubrey Hall's, Aubrey Hall's.

**– Aubrey Hall.**

Yes.

**Aubrey Hall. Was this in an attempt to meet people, or because you loved dancing?**

Oh, I loved meeting women.

**But did you like dancing?**

Yes, I like dance – I'm hideously bad at it. I start off in the right step and then I change feet or I smash someone's foot, or (laughs) – which I still do. (microphone feedback)

**I don't know why that mic's doing that. I must say you don't really (laughs) come across as someone that you might think of as fleet of foot as a dancer, but – – –.**

Well, I could dance, yes. I still can if I do a bit of practice in it, yes.

**Right. So you were the one, and off you went and never looked back – to the ball.**

No, well, we had a small difference of opinion at one stage, because once I had a grip on her I didn't want to let go, but I came on a bit too strong and at the time there was a chap at school named Philip Humphreys [?], who was a good friend, and he was a little bit odd, to put it politely. And I took on this odd personality as well (microphone feedback), and I used to – it's probably looking at the mic or the speaker or something.

**I don't know why it's doing that.**

Feedback happens when a mic looks at the speaker. (sound of squealing car tyres)

**Shall we just move the machine?**

Oh – – –.

**No, we shouldn't have to do that. Anyway, this Philip Humphreys, yes?**

Okay; I started swinging from doorways to impress her with my manliness, and she thought (in high voice) 'He's a psycho. Aagh! Go away!' So she cooled right off and I was pretty head over heels in love by then, I mean, I was really gone.

**Besotted.**

Yes. Always had been; I was just hiding it from myself.

**Are you still besotted?**

Yes, very much so.

**That's good. So what about the family? Because your family had a particular kind of influence, in that you have operated in opposition to it, in a sense. What about Natalija's family? Because what you told me last time – a drinking father and a mother who found it difficult to express herself emotionally – what joy was there in the Natalija family scene? Any?**

She and her brother got on well. Her brother was very badly influenced by her father.

**In what respect?**

Well, he wasn't shown any affection by the father even though he felt quite a lot for him in retrospect. I can't really – – –.

**Drinking, men behaving badly?**

Well, he would – if I went to a dance with Nat and came home late with her, Nat's father would be sitting at the table in the kitchen; he would have half a dozen bottles of beer in a row in front of him, and he'd have a dozen or so on the floor next to him that were empty, and I once – foolishly – sat down and spoke to him. And for the next three or four hours he asked me the same stupid questions over and over again, and if I answered differently he got really upset that I'd said something – I was lying to him because I'd obviously said something different. And I never, ever, sat with him again.

**How – did he live a very long life, or did he – – –?**

He died when our second daughter was born. So he died of liver cancer, I think it was.

**And he had been an alcoholic?**

Very heavy drinker. Smoked heavily.

**And what about her mother?**

He –

**Oh, sorry.**

– he ate himself to death in his mental – – –.

**So he was a huge man?**

No, no, no, no; he chewed at himself spiritually. He was a – wait on: he was born in Lithuania. He was a very intelligent man who received no education. He was married to a Lithuanian woman and had a child, a girl. When the War happened, because Lithuania was under Russia's control, they passionately hated the Russians. The Germans came along and liberated them, so they were all for the Germans. He got a job as a German policeman. Now, I have never investigated and I don't want to know, but they might want to know what he got up to, but maybe that ate at him too – who knows? When the War ended and the Russians came, he had a choice, stay there and be killed or get out. He got out; his wife and child remained. Would not come with him because they were already in the throes of falling apart – why I don't know, I never found out. He came to Australia as a married man with a child who knew not what happened to his family. He heard that they were sent to Siberia and, you know, ninety per cent of people who went there died, so after – – –. He had come here right at the end of the War, or I think he was earlier in Australia than we were. He met Nat's mother, who was a school teacher, in Broken Hill – not Broken Hill – Iron Knob or Iron Baron, one of those places. He charmed Nat's mother off her feet, and they became pregnant and got married. Nat's mother is a warm person who hides it behind a rather reserved façade, and when I married Natalija I inherited a mother and I already had a mother-in-law. And that's always been my feeling about Nat's mother.

She had a very unhappy life because they were able to marry because the priest gave them a dispensation because the previous wife and child were believed to be dead because he hadn't heard from them for six years or something. When Natalija was born, they received news that the wife and child were alive and well. As Nat was growing up he never cared about her because he already had a daughter. He only cared about the son because he didn't have a son, and she never understood why she was irrelevant. If she'd known, could

have coped with it better. But she brings an equal amount of baggage to our marriage as I do. I understand exactly how she'll react under certain circumstances, because I know what that baggage is, and she knows what my baggage is and she knows pretty well what I'll do, you know.

**Why I'm asking this is because you did live with your in-laws for this – for quite a long period when you returned.**

Yes, six months. When we came back from Germany we had about four hundred dollars. Had a child, had no way of supporting a family, so I went home and tried teaching at Blackfriars Priory School –

**We covered that.**

– couldn't cope with that; left, went and got a job cutting letters at S.D. Tillett Memorials on West Terrace.

**For twelve years.**

Worked there for twelve years, and in the first period when I came back I exhibited quite a bit, and then – that would have been the first two years – and then when we moved house the first time, that was the period that we stayed with my parents-in-law again, and we stayed about six months. When we came back I think we stayed with them for about three months. I think, when I was working at the Priory School, I was staying with her parents, and then by the time I got the job at Tillett's we had our own place. Both my in-laws and my parents gave us a thousand dollars, so we had two thousand dollars and I'd managed to save a bit of money and Nat saved a bit of money, so we had enough for a deposit on our own house.

**That's when you moved to Millswood.**

That's when we moved to Kilkenny.

**Oh, Kilkenny.**

And we were living in Grayson Street[5] – no, in – no, can't remember.

**Doesn't matter, but – and then, when you went to Millswood, you had another spate of time with them again, didn't you?**

Yes. When we sold the house at Kilkenny – Nat didn't think it was a nice place to bring up kids; she wanted somewhere a little bit up-market, which I think has been a very sensible thing, in retrospect. When I look at my mate's family who lives across the road, you know, he's had quite a few problems with drugs and whatever with his kids – as we have, too, but nowhere near as bad. The house we bought at Millswood we bought in about '75, I think, and I ripped the kitchen out, ripped the bathroom out before we moved – before we even took possession – and rebuilt the kitchen completely, knocked a storeroom out and built it all into one, and put a proper bathroom and toilet in.

**Because I just wondered whether the family relationships – in other words, Natalija's family relationships – were just another depressing factor through this time?**

In that period we were pretty happy together, really.

**You had – – –.**

It was when we moved into Millswood and I was renovating and all I was doing was renovating bloody houses, didn't have time to do any sculpture because I was renovating – that's what I have to do for the next week as well. Won't be so bad – and I really stopped doing much sculpture at all at that time.

**So you had how many children by now?**

Two by now. The first two were at the first house and the second two were at the second house.

**Now, you are – we've got you at Millswood. We talked a little bit about the Cricklewood Studio exhibition and you talked about the woman there and we're going to look up her name later.**

I expect I had two exhibitions with (pause) – still can't pull it out – with – – –.

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[5] Number 25. SA

**Now, you weren't finding it possible to do any work at all; you told me that you'd gone fishing quite a lot, you were doing a lot of fishing (laughs) at this stage and rushing off to the sea. So we're coming up to this watershed of 1983. Tell me about this visit.**

Well, before – in the years up to '83 I had been – over the Christmas holidays I would go and find a piece of stone and I'd make a big piece of sculpture. I did that pretty well every year. So I had –

**What were you doing?**

– one of a decent size.

**Like, what were the images?**

Oh, they were either abstract stone pieces – there was a sheep's head at the Waite Institute which is from that period: that was the piece that he saw, as well as the one which is out the front there.

**Which piece? The – – –.**

That oval – the intertwining two sort of disks.

**Right.**

Behind the letterbox. Rough male one and smooth female one, joined together.

**And who was he?**

The chap who came was a Rumanian sculptor – can't remember his name.

**He had such an influence and you can't remember his name?**

Well, he was a bit of a scumbag as well, so I've put him out of my mind as well.

**He's another one – – –.**

I have a book of his work somewhere, which – – –.

**I think we have to actually excavate his name –**

Yes – – –.

**– and we'll do that afterwards because I think you're very good at this, aren't you (laughs) – burying pieces of information?**

Oh, it becomes necessary when you get too many bits of nasty information. (laughs)

**So he came.**

He came to Adelaide –

**Why?**

– on a Göethe Institut assisted grant to have an exhibition in Adelaide of his work, and he came here nominally for that reason, but actually to visit his son who was living in Adelaide. And this chap was brought up under Communist Rumania, so he had learned how to work the system. What he did was the Göethe grant said that you will bring your sculptures to Australia, you will exhibit them and you will take them all back home to Germany. So he brought ten or twelve sculptures to Australia, and each sculpture was very badly welded up out of four sculptures. So they were actually four separate sculptures welded together to make one sculpture. And, of course, in transit they broke because they were only just tacked, so he claimed the insurance on the damage to his works, he sold the three works that fell off, claimed the repair costs and brought the work back to Germany!

**All four pieces.**

All twelve pieces.

**Oh, twelve pieces, right, yes.**

And he showed me various things about life as an artist and – – –.

**How did you meet him, first (microphone squeals)?**

He came to the *Advertiser* Open-Air Art Exhibition and saw the big stone pieces I'd done, rang me up and said, 'You're a Hungarian, why don't you speak Hungarian?' in Hungarian. And I said in German, 'I don't speak Hungarian; I speak a bit of German.' He said, 'Come on over.' And I thought, 'He's a famous sculptor from Europe; I'll go and say hello,' and he conned me into driving him to Melbourne, paid no fuel – I was as poor as a church mouse –

browbeat me into taking him all over the place. My wife was terrified shitless that I would actually pull up camp, leave her and the children and go to Germany with this scumbag and live under his direction in his studio. And he said, 'Family? Family doesn't matter! You just go and do what you have to do!', which was what he did, he left his wife in Rumania and went to Germany.

**So what was his appeal? Was it just that here was somebody that was showing an interest in you?**

Well, he was a sculptor who was making real sculptures and making a living doing it, which I'd always dreamt of doing. The two important things he did for me were, one, I realised that he was a right bastard and I didn't want to have anything to do with him – he tried to con me into paying for the insurance on his sculptures to send back to Europe, because they wouldn't insure him because of his big claim on coming here, and I refused and he's never spoken to me since, for which I'm profoundly grateful. He also gave me a hell of a boot up the rear and said, 'You can do good sculpture; stop doing poxy tombstones and do good sculpture.' And I did.

**You hadn't met anybody else at this stage in Adelaide who was making a living out of sculpture? Was there nobody making a living out of sculpture?**

At art school I'd met Max Lyle and Owen Broughton. They were both making a living being sculptors but they were teaching, they weren't working professionally at what they do.

**And John Dowie?**

I didn't know John Dowie. I'd sort of always been a bit in awe of him and never wanted to impose myself on him.

**Also, too, he mostly – *mostly* – models, and –**

And –

**– you don't build up with clay.**

– I knew from Arnie Dale, the foreman, that he didn't carve even the figures at the airport: Arnie Dale carved them and John Dowie just came along and put a

few creases in the mouth or something. So – oh, you know, I respected him and his work, but there wasn't really any reason for me to become acquainted with him because there was no real – I couldn't see any interaction.

**No technique that you were going to actually learn anything about particularly.**

Yes. I mean, he has a very rough model surface and I prefer a smooth surface. He was working in portrait heads and I do animals. I've only really begun – the fact that I'm doing animals was a reflection of my rejection of people. I didn't want to do people. I didn't want to do people because my mother was a people. So I reverted to animals. Animals don't give you a hard time, they just give you affection or bite you.

**Talking of biting, you don't do – there's a little silky-haired terrier in the latest collection at Greenhill Gallery – – –.**

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B: TAPE 3 SIDE A

Yes, I've done two dogs so far. One is a West Highland White, which was for the Waite Institute because they couldn't afford Mr Waite in bronze so they had his dog instead – Greg Johns did the gate of Mr Waite and I did a bronze dog which they put there – and in Sydney there are a couple of people who are friends who asked me to do a dog, their dog, their deceased dog.

**Why haven't dogs featured?**

I've been bitten by dogs, so – – –.

**Too much like your mother? (laughter)**

And also I don't do horses particularly, because they stop at gates and you fall off their bloody heads. So – – –.

**I see, righto. Okay. Righto.**

I have thought of doing horses, though, recently.

**How else did you change? This man comes into your life and –**

Okay.

**– did you go off with him at all out of the country? Did you leave the country?**

No, no, no. I realised, by the time I'd been associated with him for a week or so, that he was a right bastard and he was one of my mother's type. Didn't want a bar of him, go away. However, he did give me this hell of a kick up the rear, and I guess I was at the point where I was ready to pop. He couldn't have had that big an effect on me if it wasn't that I was ripe for that to happen.

**So what did you – – –?**

So in the period between *The Advertiser* Open-Air Art Exhibition closing and August the sixth, when I had an exhibition, a one-man show in the Adelaide University Art Gallery, and I think I had sixty-seven pieces of work there: they happened between *The Advertiser* Open-Air Art Show (laughs) and August the sixth. I disappeared from my wife's existence. I woke up before dawn, I went into the studio, I worked until it was time to go to work, then I went to work for six hours a day – because I was a contractor I could suit myself – I achieved more in the six hours a day than I had been achieving in two days before, and then I went home and did more sculpture.

**So you were a man on fire.**

I had a fire in my belly and I was jet-propelled. That was, as far as our relationship goes, my wife and I, it was the worst year of our marriage in her eyes, and the best year of my life in mine. (laughter) We have since sort of fallen into a more even level. We've had a couple of really bad patches, one time when we nearly split up – we were very close to it – and I said, 'This is no good,' so I dragged her along to the marriage guidance counsellor and she was really angry that I didn't consult her because this is my biggest problem: I wait for things to happen and when they don't happen I just do. So when I ask her to draw plans of something so I can do it and she doesn't do it, then I just go and do it, and if it's not what she wants, well, 'You should have drawn the bloody plans.'

**That's in the renovations?**

She does now.

**So you worked like a madman. What did you make? What were the images, what were the shapes?**

I have a photo album full of them here. Mostly they were stone pieces about, oh, two foot by two foot – marble, granite, whatever. Ninety per cent of the work was abstract pieces, sort of with a slight animal theme to them – there were whales and frogs and birds.

**Whales so early?**

Yes.

**Oh.**

As I said before, in the high school magazine, there was a realistic charging elephant on one page and an abstract, Brancusi-ish wooden piece on the other page. Always sort of wandered between the two. Even now I still – you mentioned the birdbath on the front lawn: every now and then I do an abstract birdbath and four, five years later, someone'll say, 'Wow, isn't that lovely!' and buy it.

**The birdbath on the lawn.**

They take a long time to go.

**Well, the birdbath on the lawn's intriguing, because the polished sections, if you like, really do mimic the shapes of the goannas and so forth that you're actually –**

Ahhh, a woman of vision!

**– that you're actually placing on those now.**

They actually *are* the same. The composition in the one was the same composition in the other, it's just some people can't relate to it unless there's an animal on it.

**I really must ask you, though, to remove the lavatory brush from the base of that one that's out there (laughs) because it doesn't really do much for it!**

No, no, no; it's not used for a lavatory; it's used for scrubbing out the cocky poo from the (laughs raucously) – – –.

**Okay, but it doesn't look good!  Okay, so you're on fire as, you know, the artist now, as well as still doing the odd bit of chiselling.**

What happened in that period – and it was about four or five months – was that I would – previously I had made a piece of sculpture and you learn something from each piece you do, but if you don't do another one straight away it fades away, you know, the relationships that you're trying to establish.  Your brain doesn't get the right track in it.  It's like learning a language:  once you've learned a language your brain knows how to learn a language.

**Did you make notes about your work?**

No, I never –

**Do you make any kinds of notes or notations?**

– never do that; no, I just look at it and my brain says, 'Oh yeah, that's it.'

**No sketches?**

I draw a few lines on things sometimes.  I don't draw it first.  At art school there was a subject, 'Drawing for sculpture', marked by Owen Broughton.  He realised what I was and how I did things, but I met the conditions.  I went home and I made a sculpture, then I drew it laboriously in various versions, I submitted the drawings and then, at a later time, I brought in the sculpture.

**Supposed to do it the other way round?**

Yes, and I – – –.  However, because I actually sort of submitted it as required, I passed the subject.

**Now, what intrigues me about this period is that you are not far from the time when you are going to go to Goulburn and do the big merino.  I was *astonished* when I realised that you were responsible for the big merino – part, at least.**

That was in –

**How did you reconcile –**

1985.

**– yes, how did you reconcile what appears to be *crass* commercialism with the fire of the artist?**

Ah, well, the dollar came into it. (laughs)

**The same reason you went home when you ran away!**

Yeah. What happened was, in '85 I was going more towards the animal side of what I was doing. I'd been doing stone abstract pieces, and then I was making realistic animals out of little bits of steel which I hammered and welded together so they were half weld and half hammered plates – there are still a few in existence: my son's got an eagle in his bedroom. Those pieces took three months to make, and they were – they weren't really very profitable. You sell one for three hundred dollars and think, 'Wow.' I really hated cutting letters the whole time I did it. I did it to support the family. That was an agreement between my wife and I. She would stay home and look after the kids; I would support the family. I agreed to do that, so I did it. With more or less success along the way.

**Because you hadn't exhibited in New South Wales at this stage, had you?**

No, no.

**So how did these people discover you?**

Okay. The company that made the big merino are Glenn Industries who are run by Glynn Sennar who actually lives up the hill. He was in contract with a sculptor from Victoria to make the big merino, and the design they had was of the golden fleece sheep, basically: this stiff, dead thing. They had built a multi-storey RSJ steel construction, they had put the scaffolding two metres away from it all the way around, and the sculptor had pulled out – whoever he was, I've never found his name. They told me once but I don't remember. They heard about me from someone, and at the time I was making little welded elephants, about two foot long. And they said, 'Go on, you can make an

elephant. A sheep, about the size of my hands spread out, can't you?' And he's standing there looking into the sky, and I see him holding his hands out and I'm thinking, 'Oh yeah, six foot. I could make a sheep that big, no problem.' So we negotiated a price, ten thousand dollars for eight weeks, which was big money for me in those days, and I said, 'All right, I'll do it.' And I went to Tillett's and I said, 'Okay, I've been offered this commission and I'm going, and if you can do without me, well, tough; if I've got a job when I come back I'll take it. If not, well, that'll be too bad.' And this was a very big step for Nat (laughs) and kids and me, and I've never been more happy that I did it.

**But it was a little bit more than six foot, wasn't it?**

Yes. It ended up being fifty feet high. And when I arrived in Goulburn – oh! And bloody Glynn Sennar, he said, 'You'll have the use of a car when you go there.' And, of course, when I got to Goulburn there are six people and Glynn Sennar's car, and Glynn Sennar likes chasing the girls – didn't say that – so Glynn Sennar was off with his ute and we were sitting in a motel in Goulburn all the time. Bastard.

**Who's 'we'? Who's 'we'?**

The five workmen. There was a – there were two sprayers, two concrete blokes and myself and Glynn.

**So – I mean, I know you – it's a fibro-cement structure, isn't it?**

It's – there's a steel girder construction, which was four and a half storeys high, and to establish the shape you weld a bar about the diameter of my thumb and about two foot long with a little bent L-shape on the end to that construction, and then you bend steel rods about half inch diameter over the tips of those bars, and you criss-cross a lattice shape – – –.

**So you actually make the shape in – – –.**

You make the shape in mid-air.

**Out of metal?**

Out of rod.

**Rod.**

So you're making a chicken-wire thing out of nothing. You've got a basic thing to attach it to and you've got a latitude of about a metre from that shape.

**So what did you have to do, did you have to – how did you maintain your sense of perspective to know that this was the right shape?**

Well, when I arrived in Goulburn I freaked out of my head. I thought, 'They want me to make *that*?' And I thought, 'Mmm, all right, I'll start at the back end because it's a simpler shape and by the time I get to the head I'll know what I'm doing.' So I climbed up the scaffold and I'm scared witless of heights so I'm hanging on with my toenails and my bootnails as I'm going up, and by the time I finished I was standing on a twenty foot plank inside the head fifty feet above the ground, standing on one foot on the plank holding a rod down with the other foot, holding a mask and trying to weld it into the position as I'm wobbling up and down.

**So you actually did all the welding?**

Oh, half, yes. They got a welder along halfway through because it was taking too long for me to do all the welds.

**Extraordinary.**

I'm a good welder.

**Extraordinary story, though.**

By the time I got the back done, there was a huge RSJ coming out between the legs and it looked horrible, and so I built a *huge* pair of testicles over this RSJ (laughs) – which weren't in the right place, but (shouts) front page news in the *Goulburn Leader,* or whatever it was! Rambo! Look at this! (laughs) I think they were about two metres by two metres! They've since disappeared from view: they built a big sheep shed to cut off the view!

**Oh, dear. Well, I – – –.**

That was a right hoot, it was.

**I must say that discovering that was – – –.**

Okay. The couple of people that Glynn Sennar was actually contracted with to build the sheep were a couple of Hungarian (with emphasis) entrepreneurs. I remember one conversation when we were sitting in his petrol station, which was alongside – which was why the ram was built so people'd come to *his* petrol station and not the one down the road – he was bemoaning the fact that at Collector, which is between Canberra and Goulburn, he'd had a petrol station and he hadn't realised you're allowed to put so much Standard in the Super, and he *bemoaned* – every time I saw him – this loss of extra profit, and I thought, 'Glynn, you poor bastard, you're not going to get paid.' And he didn't. And I told Glynn, 'Glynn, you want to be very careful with these buggers.' Anyway, at the end of it all, they got the local fine wool ram judge to come along and give an okay, and after he'd walked around it a couple of times he said, 'Okay, you've forgotten one thing.' And I said, 'Ooh, what's that?' He said, 'You've got to put a brand on the horn and it's got to be A1,' which I thought, 'Oh, sh –.'

**Other than that it passed the test?**

Yes. It's signed on top of the head, so if you fly over with a helicopter you'll see it, and the Mokani brothers put a big plaque – well, it's not a big plaque, but a plaque on the foot saying that they built it, and I went home and then waited for my money and waited and waited, because I didn't have a job and I didn't have any money. And the Mokanis didn't pay him, and Glynn actually gave me a bit of money and it took about six months before he got paid.

**So you didn't get the ten thousand dollars?**

I did, but it took a while.

**Goodness me. Now, did you get to be known in New South Wales as a result of the Goulburn experience?**

The – – –.

**Because you had an exhibition in Holdsworth Gallery in Woollahra, which is no mean gallery –**

I did that – – –.

**– in July of '86.**

Yes, I managed that because somewhere during that period I went off to Sydney for a weekend, and wandered around and met Gisela Scheinberg [?], who ran Holdsworth Gallery.

**Well, obviously, and – – –.**

And she had a string of artists that she liked and she only dealt with the ones she liked. She took a liking to me and said, 'I'll give you a go.'

**Yes, well, and you had quite a reasonable review there, too. 'Highly stylised work', the ram's head, then, you know, the term 'art deco' was actually used, and then your curved female torso shapes, and – but it does seem to have been pretty much an abstract –**

Pretty well, yes.

**– collection, that particular one. Yes, so you didn't ever think about going to live in Sydney or to work in Sydney?**

No.

**Never.**

No, no. Adelaide was where I felt at home.

**Right, okay.**

Of all the large cities, I could live in Melbourne, but I don't think I would cope with Sydney very well.

**What, just the congestion?**

Oh, just the hustle and bustle and how far it is from nature and – too many people, too much noise, you can't have peace and quiet anywhere. Here I've got peace.

**That review of you, and a couple of others from this particular period, do suggest that there is this sort of struggle to define you, because you're called on the one hand 'a monumentalist and journeyman artist' (laughs) which I thought was rather nice; and the next breath you're described as 'an heroic sculptor', and the comments being made that you're not necessarily marrying your stone and your timbers together very satisfactorily. So were you feeling any kind – I mean, I know that, as you said, you've always moved between the abstract and the realistic –**

Well –

**– but were you feeling any real sense of confusion about it yourself at this time?**

– I hadn't really found my style or whatever; I was still looking. The pieces that I do now are a fusion of that abstract and the realistic. The most important part of them, the bit that brings them to life, is the abstract composition, the way I focus the movement in this lump of rock, which I learned to do from doing abstract work. The realistic element on top is a challenge, because to make something look real and bring it to life and make it out of a lump of bloody hard rock that's brittle as buggery is quite (pause) a bit of fun.

**I can see that.**

What I've always tried, though – what would it have been? '85 to '87, somewhere in that period, was probably around '87, might have been later, I'm not sure of the exact date, it's in the CV somewhere – there was a wood exhibition and conference in Canberra, and I'd carved a wooden wombat which I thought was the ant's pants, and I had lovingly polished it with micromesh, which is some stuff they polish glass with, and it was *glistening*, and it was not lacquered, it was just the wood polished, and it totally killed it. And I put this piece in this exhibition and there were all these badly-sanded things that still had a bit of vitality in them, and the judge looked at my piece and thought that I had varnished it to death and wouldn't acknowledge it as having any worth.

**But you'd polished it to death.**

Yes, but I hadn't varnished it to death; I'd polished it to death. There's a technical difference. (laughs)

**Yes, exactly.**

It's not slick, it's – well, takes a bit of (loudly) skill to polish it to death! Anyway, it was an important lesson. I came along to this conference thinking I was the best thing since sliced bread and there were, I don't know, two or three hundred exhibitors, and there was stuff there that made my jaw hit the ground. And I learned something then which has always been something I've tried to follow: I didn't become jealous of someone else because they could do something fabulous; I learned that, to make something fabulous yourself, you have to make what you do yourself better. Every time I make something I try and push the parameters of what I can do. You know, if I can make a piece of wood this slim or that shape, the next time I try and make it a little slimmer and just see what will happen until something snaps.

**Till you can actually see through it. Well, you must have been doing something right, because – certainly in terms of your granite, anyway – because your black granite sea lion, I think the Zoo needed seventeen thousand dollars to purchase that or something or other in 1990.**

The price was twenty-four thousand or something or other, and the wholesale price was eighteen thousand. And there was an exhibition called 'Talk to the animals' or –

**That's right.**

– something like that, animal sculpture at the Zoo. And a very pushy lady at the Zoo talked me into bringing the seal after the exhibition opening, so I had a number of smaller works – a granite platypus and a pelican and a bronze pelican and some other small ones. She knew of the seal; she said, 'If we pay the crane will you bring it here?' So Doctor Crompton – – –.

**That was a seal, not a sea lion.**

It's a granite sea lion.

**Oh.**

South Australian sea lion. Seal. *Pinniped*. So I got the crane and I brought the seal in the next morning, and Doctor Crompton, who had bought two pieces at the opening, came back the next day to look at his pieces, saw the seal there and saw that every child that came along ran over and climbed on it and stroked it and related to it, and said, 'That has to be here!', and bought it. So we negotiated – as there was no gallery in the deal – that he could buy it for wholesale price, give it to the Zoo.

**Yes, because there was a piece about that in the newspaper, and it's a gorgeous piece. Exactly. Now, I've got fifty-four or so minutes on this, Silvio, so I'm going to stop this tape and put in a fresh one so I don't have to keep on looking at this machine. Just a sec.**

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A: TAPE 3 SIDE B

**This is the second [*sic*] tape from the second session on the 15th March, and it's the fourth [*sic*] tape of the series. End of identification. All right, Silvio, we've got a nice new tape in now. So what about this measure of success now on family life, because, I mean, I can imagine that these materials aren't exactly cheap. I don't know how much money you're making at this stage, but it must have been –**

Barely enough.

**– barely enough? So Natalija hasn't rushed off to buy designer labelled clothing for her wardrobe (laughs) or anything at this stage?**

Sorry, kids, you can't have a pair of shoes this week, wait until the cheque comes in. Our life has been as lilies in the field for many, many years. We've had numerous occasions where I've gone to pick up the cheque and the car's blown up because I've been going to the bank or some such thing. Somehow, the money coming in has just managed to keep up with that going out. Wouldn't have been if it weren't for the way Nat keeps her eye on the money and keeps her lump of lead on my spending hand so I can't spend.

**What are you likely to go off and spend money on?**

Tools! Bronze! (laughter)

**I see, yes.**

I get money and I think, 'I need a crane, I need a grinder, I need some more braces.' We're going to go shopping it's Nat's department; she'll worry about that. I'll go and get some – something like that.

**Right. But it was – I mean, the output from this time on seems to be prodigious. You've got the Maria Creek thing happening around about this time – I'm not absolutely sure – – –.**

'85 I did the Big Merino, then for a couple of – then I worked – – –. When I came back to Adelaide I eventually got a job with Nalty's, who are another monumental firm who are out at – oh, near Churchill Road. And I worked for Mark Nalty for about three years. And that was the wind-down period; that was where I was still doing some letter cutting, from '85 to '87. Christmas of '87 I quit. At the time I was building a big factory shed at Wingfield. We'd bought some land and we'd bought the shed and I was erecting it. I was one step ahead of my actual financial possibilities. (laughs) We actually had to sell the shed, so I got it finished and sold it, so that we got out of trouble. Then I built – I'm not sure exactly what the date was on that, could have been – it would have been around '87 – I then realised that I needed a house where I could work in the house and not have neighbours complain about dust and noise and sculptors in general, and Christmas of '88 I was working on a big wooden commission for the State Bank, *Past, present, future*. It was about three cubic metres of Queensland maple laminated together with Westepoxy. When I was in the final stages of completing that commission, we were at number 21 Ormond Avenue then, and Nat had been looking at the paper, and she'd seen this house in the paper, and I was working twenty-four hours a day, ten days a week, on this commission trying to get it finished. And she said, 'I'm going for a drive, come on, you need a rest. I've seen this house: why don't we go and have a look?' We'd been looking up at Heathfield, we'd been looking at industrial houses at Mile End, we'd been looking at the possibilities. We came through the University because I knew vaguely this area – I'm not sure why, actually. I know I was familiar with it for some reason – we came through there, stopped over there, looked across the road, looked at each other and said, 'Oh, shit.' I'd

had it up to here with renovating houses, didn't want to renovate another house in a fit; I wanted a nice, new, modern bungalow or whatever. We looked at this and thought, 'Here we go again!' We managed with – the price they wanted was beyond reach, and we negotiated with them. They must have thought having a sculptor here was worthwhile because they actually came down a fair bit. It had been on the market for about three months and hadn't sold, and it had been vacant for four years before we actually bought it from them.

The house was owned by the Mills sisters, who were two spinsters who lived one in the front, one in the back, and rarely spoke to each other. One of the Mills sisters had a brand new Mazda RX-7 sports car which she'd bought with the proceeds of selling land off up the hill. Went down to the garage, went to open the garage, the garage door fell off and broke her pelvis, and she died not long afterwards, as old people do if they break their pelvis. The other sister – I'm not sure of the history from then on, but the other sister willed it to the University as – in perpetuity, not to be sold, blah, blah, blah. The University considered turning this into a child care centre, but the design of the place is so totally *non compos*, it would have cost too much money and they would have been better off to build another one. And in the end they sold this and built one over there in the Uni grounds.

**And it did turn into a child care centre – the Apponyi child care centre. But it's a wonderful house, because it sits in among the bush, still, doesn't it, even though it's actually part of the suburban – – –.**

Oh, it's part of suburbia, but it's got huge gum trees on it. There's two acres of ground here. That's enough to keep the neighbours just at arm's length so that the noise has had time to dissipate, the dust's had time to just settle out a bit, so that makes a hell of a difference to the friendliness of the environment because I don't aggravate anyone enough so that they want to grizzle about it. There was one particular Hungarian woman who was left by her husband who lives near the park up the other end – don't know her name – she was causing a lot of trouble, but fortunately one day we were looking out this window – they're cooking – and there was someone up there digging bulbs out of our paddock,

and it was this woman. And I went up there and gave her an earful and sent her on her way, and she's never caused me any trouble because I've had that little hold over her.

**Another Hungarian. (laughs)**

My aunt is, you know, schizophrenic. I've met lots of Hungarians who are very odd, and my father was not someone that I'd really recommend anyone to know, and I really haven't wanted to be Hungarian. So I've become Australian.

**And rightly so. Tell me about this range of creatures that you are depicting now, because – I mean, you don't have to explain *why* you're doing animals – but the enormous range, because when you look at the work down at Kingston, you're working moths and caterpillars and then larger creatures, of course, like, you know, oh, lizards and so on.**

When I was a kid I'd go for a walk in the pine forest. That's one thing my parents used to do, we'd go to the pine forest up at Williamstown and pick those brown *Boletus* mushrooms with the yellow sponge underneath. They're actually all right if you don't eat too many at once. When my mother went to Germany with my sister, we had a whole pile in the freezer and I ate these mushrooms all the time and got very sick at one stage so I stopped eating them.

**So you went for walks.**

I've always looked under logs, turned over stones, caught lizards, studied wildlife. When I go for walks with the kids I tell them about spiders and what that one does and why it's this. I could quite easily have become a zoologist or a whatever you call them.

**A naturalist of some sort.**

Yes. I've always had a very real interest in other life forms apart from people. I've not related to people very well. And I guess in the last ten years I've resolved some of the personal relationship issues in my family to the point where they don't eat me any more, and I've warmed to people more. I don't feel that the whole world is full of my mothers. There are other people who are

lovely out there. And so I've actually begun doing portrait heads of people. I've done – I don't know, might be up to about ten now. ….. ….. ….. ….. …..

**Well, you did the wood carving of Jimmy James for the memorial at Berri. I mean, that would be a fairly early realistic sculptural piece, wouldn't it?**

That would have been about '89, I think.

**Was, I think, yes, '89, '90, something like that. What attracted you about –**

Before that –

**– oh, sorry.**

I had done a piece for the State Theatre Company, David Field. It was a two-thirds life size puppet head. They commissioned me for the princely sum of three hundred dollars to do this portrait of the artist, of the actor, to make a puppet for the production. And I really should have said I'd rent it to them for fifty bucks and have it afterwards but I didn't, so – – –.

**Why? Because you liked it so much?**

Well, I'd avoided doing portraits because my mother wanted me to do a portrait of her and I utterly rejected the concept. I'd made a total mess of the portrait of her so that she'd leave me alone. But I really enjoyed doing the portrait of David Field. I didn't do it from life; I took a whole lot of photos and did it from that. But something clicked, you know; something happened.

**So how – what material were you working in?**

There was a birch tree growing on the lawn when we moved in. It died. I cut that down, I carved a piece of birch.

**So it was carved, wood carving.**

Wooden carving, yes.

**Yes, right.**

I've got a slide of it somewhere.

**What about the Jimmy James one, because that's a wood carving, too?**

The Jimmy James is actually a photograph which was in *The Advertiser* of Jimmy receiving his medal for rescuing a girl who was kidnapped. They wanted a bronze plaque, so I did a relief carving using the photo as a basis. I drew from the photo. I did – sort of superimposed the two. And I did a half-inch deep relief carving.

**Who approached you to do that?**

The Riverland Cultural Trust approached me. The Jimmy James memorial had been designed by Stephen Fox and Bluey Roberts.

**Bluey Roberts.**

I think it was mostly by Stephen Fox. They'd made a polystyrene model painted black of this granite memorial and Bluey had painted on some Aboriginal designs and they'd stuck a photo of – a reduced-size photo of Jimmy James there, and that was the memorial! The Cultural Trust had decided, yes, this was an appropriate thing to do and raised the money. I think it was seventeen thousand dollars, which was bugger all. They approached me to take it on and I said, 'Oh, it's not much money,' but I at the time had a huge tax bill because I had finally made some money and I'd bought some furniture and stuff for my house because we'd never had any. I wanted one room that you could live in. So we had something like twenty-five thousand dollars in tax owing soon and (laughs) no way of getting it unless I worked like a maniac. So I took this job on because I had to pay the tax, and when I'd actually agreed to do it then Bluey suddenly turned up and because he was the artist he should get paid and he should get paid half of the money. And I thought, 'God, I need the money, so yes, I'll still do it – for half the money.' I made the main part of the job the big boulder. The one they chose had flaws all through it, piece of crap, so I had to get another one. Had it cut by Tillett's at a very high price and polished by Tillett's at a very high price – that's his *forte*, charging a high price.

**No favours for an old friend?**

Ooh, no, I left. (laughs) And I made some modifications to the piece. The base which they had depicted on their ’styrene model the stone actually sat on, well, I sort of sat the top into it a bit and I carved walkways because he was a tracker. His totem animal was the echidna and the sleepy lizard, I think – can’t remember exactly – so I did echidna tracks. At the quarry there was an echidna just happened to come through one day, so we put it in a bucket, cleared an area of sand, smoothed it all flat, put the echidna on it, it burrowed a big hole and we left it alone and went away and then the echidna walked across this sand. I took photos of the tracks and then I carved those tracks on the memorial. I did the same with a sleepy lizard. And he was famous for tracking dogs that attacked sheep and criminals or lost people, so there are echidna tracks, sleepy lizard tracks, boot tracks and dog tracks on that base stone. That part is my design and my addition to the idea. The top part’s Bluey and Stephen Fox.

**And you accommodated it.**

I also added some boulders with animal tracks through the park – that’s all my idea as well. And Bluey was being paid as he was receiving part of the money for the job and he was being paid by the CES for the other part so he had to be there. (sound of clattering dishes) Bluey used to work in a quarry, drilling holes with a jackhammer, so he was happy to run a jackhammer; but the jackhammer holes you had to drill on that were all at funny angles so you had to hold the weight of the hammer while it was drilling on an angle. There was one day when Bluey was there and I couldn’t go because I was doing something associated with the plaque, the photo of Jimmy Jones. Bluey came along and drilled all these vertical holes through one section of boulder, which meant that for his half a day’s work I had seven days’ work removing two cubic metres of holey granite. I then told the people at the quarry that if he came to the quarry and I wasn’t there, they were to give him a packet of cigarettes and a cup of coffee and lock up all the jackhammers. We got on okay. I probably wouldn’t include Bluey amongst the people of Aboriginal descent that I’ve really got to know well and liked. I’ve met some others that I really do like. Bluey’s one of

those who's learned to work the system to his advantage, you know. I mean, it's understandable that they do.

**You've had some funny collaborative experiences – funny peculiar – because had you done the other sundial in New South Wales by this time? Because there was a story there, wasn't there?**

In '88 I did the Bicentennial Park in Tamworth where I collaborated with an Aboriginal artist there – Billy Reid. He was quite well-known as an emu egg carver. He did a drawing of a kangaroo in the Aboriginal style. He drew it on the rock and I cut it into the rock with him standing there directing me, you know, 'Shall I do this deep, or that not, or – – –?' So that was a real collaboration between two artists. I was producing *his* work in a three-dimensional way; I wasn't doing a drawing and doing it myself. That was *his* piece there. The Bicentenary Park was the cultural, social, trade history – the natural history of Tamworth, basically, so it begins with Aboriginal trade, goes through white settlement and finishes with the industry of Tamworth and the council logo stuck on the front. Country and western singer and the whole box of dice. The first thing is a big Aboriginal axehead. A local historian took me to the Moore Creek quarry where the Aborigines would mine axe blades, and then walk down to the creek and rub, sharpen them on a sandstone rock, so there are all these grooves next to the creek. The historian said it would take about four days for an Aboriginal to carve an axehead and polish it so that it was a useful tool. I went to the Moonbi Cutting [?], which is near Tamworth, with a crane and trucks and we hauled great big lumps of granite out of the cutting where they'd been blasted and dumped, and in four days I carved an axehead about a metre high by – oh, it's not a metre, it's about nine hundred high – by twelve hundred long in four days out of a lump of granite. And that was the beginning of the Aboriginal trade, because the Moonbi quarry – the Moore Creek quarry, rather – was represented, right, the axes from that quarry were represented within a five hundred kilometre diameter radius around Tamworth, where the axes had been traded off. So that was Aboriginal trade, and that was the beginnings. And then white settlement was a white bootprint with hobnails

and a date, you know, when the first white man walked through there. Then, in the first part from the axe, coming around there were a *nardoo* stone, some drawings of plants which the Aboriginals used, and then there was a land grant, a map of the first land grant, line drawings just cut into the stone –

**Which you did?**

– yes; so, instead of using a pencil on the stone, I used an angle grinder as a pencil to cut these drawings in. I think there were seventy-odd –

**Pieces.**

– various either drawings or carvings of things.

**Well, I mean, the Maria Creek one is huge, too, isn't it, in terms of just the variety of pieces that you had to do?**

Yes. The Maria Creek was –

**Mar-i-a Creek, is it?**

– just after Tamworth. I went to Tamworth for eight weeks. In the beginning they said, 'They want you to do this, this and this,' and I said, 'Okay, I'll do this, this and this, then. What if I do this?' And they said, 'Ooh.' So one day I did something that I wanted to do and they came along with all their council committee and they looked at me and they said, 'You do whatever you like and we'll come back in a few weeks and have a look,' so I did whatever *I* liked and I did all these – – –. A condition of me working there was that I could talk to any passers-by if I wished to, so that I could get information from the community as to what they would like. So as I was carving these things, it was on a walkway which people from the suburbs walked through the sporting fields, over the footbridge, through the park, past me, into town. And then, in the evening, they did the reverse – they walked past me back home. So many, many people would come past. And I'd be working and I could still talk while I'm working, and if someone was really interesting I'd stop and drain a bit of information out of them and, you know, people would talk about, I don't know, the wood ducks which were on the river, or the fact that there was this particular bird there or

that lizard went over there, or this historical bit of information and, you know, there were builders who would come. And the chaps – I met a friend who I still am on good terms with there who was a builder, so there's a builder's hammer and, you know, stuff like that.

**So it really is truly a community thing.**

Yes. There was a big flood, so in the pond there is the roof of a house sticking out (laughs) sort of like that!

**Silvio, at the end of 1990 – and it seems to have been like a tremendous period: I mean, you're happy when you talk about it, even – you did an interview for a little Anglican Youth newsletter called *The Voice*. You talked to a young man called Michael Bleby, and you talked about things like experiencing the peace of the spirit – and this young man had written the 'Spirit' with a capital 'S' – to create things, of believing that, you know, your gift was God-given, and you tried to be worthy of it. Now, when did –**

How did that come about?

**– yes; when – where's the place of religion?**

I was in a non-religious house. My parents really didn't give a fart about God or anything like that. At one stage they decided they would become Baha'is because there were some Baha'is that they were cultivating so they wished to get in with the community so they became Baha'is, and therefore I had to become a Baha'i so I had to study all about Baha'is. And I appeared to do things, but I don't do what my parents want me to do. So I learned a little bit about the Baha'i faith, but I'm not really interested in faith at all. When I married, and when we were living in Millswood – my wife has got very strong religious beliefs; she's Anglican – and I wanted my family to have a solid foundation, and I knew that if only my wife went to church, I didn't, it wouldn't be there. I went along thinking, 'Mm, I should do something.' One day the priest came along for a visit, and I said, 'Ah! Here you are, here I am, I'm yours,' and I went along to church and I actually found that in God there is something very important for me. There's something – there's a strength which I find there which can get me through the bad things, which has helped me deal

with all the bad things. I've been not very regular lately because of an incident in our church where a particular group of people alienated and drove out the two priests in that church over money issues. I really am in two minds about going to church still with those people. There are some people at the church who are really lovely, and these other people – can't stand the sight of them. Can't believe that they can call themselves Christians and then behave in that manner. Anyway. I'm working around it.

The thing I've come to understand is that the ability to create an art work is something which you can't control, it comes from within you. How it comes from within *me*, I don't understand. I believe that it's a gift which I've been given and I've been given it by God, because I can't think of any other thing it could have come from, and the strength I find in that conviction helps with what I do. I'm not an Anglican that an Anglican priest would be proud of. I believe in a slightly different God than what they tell us to believe in. I believe – no, I won't go into that.

**But, I mean, you – when you say 'a slightly different God', I think the word 'spirit' is quite significant here. I mean, you're not modelling yourself on Christ.**

I believe that – Anglican people say there's one God, right, and that God is Christ the Son, Christ the Father, Christ the Holy Ghost. God. All three, the only God. The Mohammedans believe that Allah is the only God, and someone else believes that that's the only God as well and that everyone else is wrong. My good friend from high school, who lives in Kilkenny, became a fundamentalist from the Vogue Theatre, and the only God was his God, and unless you went there and spoke in tongues you weren't really Christian at all – you couldn't be, because you didn't speak in tongues. And all of that, I feel, is probably people taking the actual essence of what Jesus spoke and adjusting it to suit themselves. And people have interpreted and adjusted. What I feel is that there's one God, and that many people call that God by many different names. If a person who is a headhunter in the New Guinea jungles lives a spiritual life in his community, right? – he only goes and eats his neighbour on special

occasions, but lives according to his tribal mores and is an upstanding person in that tribe – I think they are equally as spiritual as an Aboriginal who lives in the desert at Ayers Rock and feels that spiritual something which is there, which I've felt, and I've felt it in other places. People relate to that other something – it doesn't matter what people, wherever they are in the world they relate to that – and what I relate to is that part of God. Now –

**The intangible.**

– I'm not a Baha'i, I don't believe what they believe, but I believe in God and I believe that I would prefer to treat other people the way I would like them to treat me, wherever I am in the world, and I treat people that way. And I relate to anyone with a spiritual conviction in that same way: that their conviction is equally as valid as mine. So I don't care if you don't believe in speaking in tongues or if you have to wear a veil or any of that. I think that's all a lot of window-dressing. The essential, honest message is truth that we carry – (tape ends)

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE B: TAPE 4 SIDE A

[that we carry] with us, and I try and express that message in what I do. So I would be quite happy to make a Buddhist statue or another religious work, because I feel it's still the same God.

**When did you do the first Virgin and Child, because that's very much a human figure? And you also did a little boy, a little Down's boy, for Ashford House.**

Ashford House, yes, that was a commission. The principal of the school approached me. They had – oh, *The Advertiser* Open-Air Art Exhibition ended – there were too many competing art exhibitions: Victor Harbor, Port Adelaide, whatever; the number of people coming just faded away – *The Advertiser* had an amount of funding built up over the years to run that exhibition. When they finished they decided that they would commission certain people who had been exhibiting with *The Advertiser* to produce some works of art which they would

donate to various organisations. I did a fountain for Townsend House; I did a piece for Ashford. They –

**That's got the –**

– they were both funded –

**– that's got the little boy, hasn't it, the little – – –.**

– yes, Robbie, whose father is a politician who manages to put his feet in his mouth very regularly. We won't go into that. Robbie's a lovely lad. Robbie came here, he stood up there in front of this rock, and I drew Robbie into the rock while he was standing there, and then I decorated the rock with the sorts of animals I thought Robbie would like. So there's a cockie, and he's actually feeding him a biscuit, and there's a kangaroo and possum on the back, various other things.

**I've only seen a photograph of it, but it's very, very nice; it's very appealing.**

Well, it was done for retarded kids, who I thought would relate to something simple and relate to one of theirs. And apparently they do.

**Now, your Virgin and – and it's very realistic – your Virgin and Child that I'm thinking of, that's the one at Henley: now, that's got some of those lovely long, smooth, abstract lines.**

Well, it comes out of – now, that was a – what would you call it? A collaboration with Rick Bzowy, who is an architect, who had an office in Kent Town, and Berin Bern and Jan Aspinal, the stained glass workers, and there was going to be someone else but they pulled out. We were in on the ground floor of the construction of the church. I can't remember what the selection process was: I think the church people approached me and wanted me on it. We would go to Rick Bzowy's office and we would draw and talk, and I thought, 'Wouldn't the building look great if it had a skylight right through the middle,' and the next time we'd go there was a skylight right through the middle of the building and it was Rick Bzowy's idea. And I mentioned something else and that was in there too, and it was Rick Bzowy's idea. And I said, 'I think you

build your building, and when you've built it I'll come in and I'll put my stuff in.'

**That's that lovely – I'm waving my hands in the air as I do the shape, and of course most standing Madonnas are that shape: what is it?**

There was a lovely happenstance happened. I had a vague idea of what Jan was doing with the design, because I went around to their studio and had a look what's happening, and the shapes which I'd incorporated into the granite shelf for the candles I wanted them to relate to the figure, so the lines that follow around that shelf pick up into the figure, so I come back and the figure sort of twists up out of this granite, so she's actually rising up out of the granite.

**And the folds of the gown.**

And there was a drill hole in the bottom of the block, and to cover that drill hole I inlaid this little piece of granite, and the little piece of granite I inlaid over the drill hole exactly picked up the shape of a curve in the glass on the blue veil that was behind, and I just sort of, 'Wow!'

**Meant.**

Yes.

**Mm, do you ever get that – well, do you ever get that feeling – you're talking about being a spiritual person, believing that you are, in fact, possessed in a sense to create these things? Do you have that feeling, that it all just (clicks fingers) clicks in and it's meant –**

That's right.

**– to happen?**

Yes, that happens, yes.

**You say – – –.**

I walk in the quarry and they call to me (in ghostly voice), 'Silvio! I'm under here! Here I am!'

**'Let me out!'**

And I look there and there's this piece of rock with a wombat in it or something.

**Yes. Well, you certainly made great strides with the success of your *Wombats*, because if the Canberra wombat wasn't a great success, certainly there was success for you subsequently, *Wombats*.**

It's down at Woodstock; it's in about seven other places around the country.

**It won you the prize at Alice Springs: was that the same wombat? You went – you took to Darwin –**

Same one –

**– with the wombat, yes.**

– same one, same one.

**You were also selling internationally, too, by this stage, by the –**

I have got and exhibition in –

**– late '90s, early '90s.**

– Paris – not Paris, Brussels – opening shortly.

**But you've had pieces shown in Paris –**

Yes.

**– before. You haven't gone over with them?**

Yes –

**Oh, you do?**

– I went there for the show, yes.

**Yes.**

It was in Woolloomooloo Restaurant in Paris.

**Woolloomooloo Restaurant! (laughs) I don't believe it!**

They have fashion parades and all sorts of stuff there – Kate Moss and all those people go there.

**So – and was it Australian fauna and flora that – – –?**

Australian fauna, yes.

**And how was it received?**

I sold enough to cover the travel costs.

**And, what, a mixture of wood pieces and stone pieces and – – –?**

There were some silver jewellery pieces, small bronzes and some animals about, yes, up to about that big.

**Yes, you'd be limited –**

Carrying them.

**– to a certain extent.**

My wife carried some, I carried some and the two kids carried some. So that trip was '93, that was when we went with the two youngsters.

**How did, though, how did you come to get an invitation to exhibit in Paris?**

Lorna Devermes, Devermes, who married Laszlo Devermes, came to Australia to visit their – his brother or her brother – her brother, who lived in Queenscliff, and I exhibited at Queenscliff in a gallery with a chap who I no longer exhibit with, for personal reasons. She bought a little duck, about two inches long – second one, the one in the middle – for sixty dollars. Went home, thinking, 'Oh, isn't it wonderful!'

**That's a little bronze piece.**

Little bronze, yes. Two years later she came back, visited her brother in Brisbane, or some relative, came to Adelaide and said, 'We want to visit this sculptor who make the duck,' and bought a couple of substantial pieces to take home.

**Australian creatures again?**

Yes; I think one was a platypus and another one was a little wombat or something. She is Australian. And badgered me to come and show in *Paris*. And eventually we thought, 'Well, Nat's mother will pay the fare for the two

kids, because she's taken the two older ones and can't hack that again,' and we managed somehow to save enough money and we went.

**And was that a good time?**

It was great, yes. I re-established a bond with my two younger children, which I had sort of been pushing away for a long time. I was coming to realise that family's a very precious thing, and –

**That's for sure.**

– we're very precious to each other now, which is wonderful.

**And what about when you go to Alice Springs and Darwin, because you've been there fairly regularly?**

Well, I go to – I went to Alice Springs – I actually went to Ayers Rock because they had an artist-in-residence program, which is you come and exhibit, you work in their hotel gallery, and you work there for two weeks or four weeks. I think I did that three times. And I just sent the wombat to Alice Springs for the competition, and was chosen as the winner.

**They loved it, yes. Is there a different response to your creatures in the North, at Alice Springs.**

They stand guards next to my creatures to stop people touching them, and they put signs on, 'Don't touch,' and I welcome *everyone* to run their hands lovingly over them. If you don't, I've failed.

**Yes; I told you there was a big 'Do not touch' on the lovely big timber koala in Greenhill Gallery.**

It's in the shed now, I'm making the mould.

**Oh, right! (laughs) But, in terms of – I mean, response from different communities of people, does it vary to your work?**

Well, people – people relate to the world in different ways. Some people talk about the world; some people look at things, right? They only want to look – they don't want to touch, they don't want to talk, they just want to look. And some people touch. I love the ones who touch.

**They touch more in Alice Springs and Darwin, or – – –?**

Well, they touch, some touch, some look, some talk.

**Now, when you were in Alice Springs, did many Aboriginal people come to those exhibitions?**

A couple of times I spoke to Aboriginal people. I was trying to negotiate that I would go and work at Ayers Rock with some of the Aboriginal carvers, but, you know, it all takes time and they're off on some corroboree or something, and unless you speak to the people, and unless the people who come in you *know* are the ones you need to speak to, it just doesn't happen and it didn't happen.

**So – we'll talk about this next time, because we're moving towards the end of this session – but you didn't get any response from Aboriginal people to your work in Alice Springs? It was interesting?**

They like, they like what I do. They see – they look at it and say, 'Bilby,' you know. 'Have you got a name for the bilby?' And they go, 'That's him!'

**Do you think they appreciate that in fact that it is coming from your soul?**

Yes, they see. They see more than it's just a piece of wood; they see that it's – there's something, there's essence of something there. Yes, they really relate to that, yes.

**Okay. Just – – –.**

When I go to Darwin I go there for a couple of reasons. The main one is that there's big barramundi up there. I go to a gallery in Darwin where the woman, you know, she gives you a hard time when you show there. She likes to use your money for interest-free loans for a while, and eventually you get paid and you get paid whatever you've sold while you're there, but once you've gone, you know, you're out of sight, out of mind. So I go there because I take my boat. Exhibition's three and a half weeks; I lob up, I put the stuff in the gallery, I do a radio interview, I talk to people, I go bush for three weeks and I go fishing.

**Where do you go bush?**

Corroboree Billabong, Arnhem Land – I've been right out the other side of Arnhem Land.

**We'll talk about places next time, if you don't mind, because that intrigues me. And we will stop here because it's quarter past six. And we'll stop virtually at the tale of the whale, and we'll talk about the whale next time.**

Okay.

**Thanks, Silvio. (break in recording)**

**Identification: this is session number three with Silvio Apponyi, and it is Monday, March the 27th, 2000, and we are once more at Sturtbrae. End of identification.**

**Okay. Silvio, we got as far, really, as about end of 1984-5, something like that, last time.**

Somewhere round, yes.

**We were about to talk about the whale, the whale of a tale.**

The whale of a tale, yes.

**Yes, and I would like you, if you would, tell me the story behind the Victor Harbor *Whale tail*.**

Okay. In Victor Harbor there's a land agent who has an office on the Mall in Victor Harbor, who's a very pushy, mover-shaker type of person, who makes dollies for a hobby. Her – she's on a committee that decided that Victor Harbor now needs something fabulous, because they have – I don't know, what? – three hundred thousand visitors in the summer and thirty thousand in the winter. And – lo and behold! – the whales have turned up and they have four hundred thousand visitors in the winter, and they think (in high voice), 'What a godsend! What a blessing! What do we do to keep them coming?' And so they got a committee together and the committee contacted me *via* this woman whose name escapes me, and they asked me to come up with a whale. And I suggested a whale out of granite, with the head emerging out of the square and that would have weighed in the order of sixty tonnes and created a few problems to get a ninety tonne block of granite out of the ground. And so I thought maybe if I

made the tail it might only weigh about seven tonnes in granite and it'd be fragile, so what if I made it in bronze? So I made a model and submitted it and they said, 'Ooh, yeah.' And so off I went to make a whale tail.

**So it represents the whale diving down, doesn't it?**

Diving, yes. I mean, the tail emerging from the water is the image that would be most familiar, I think, with people, and it's the strongest click – you know, you can click on a whale tail and everyone knows what it is.

**Wasn't there some talk of – haven't you done the other bit, of him coming up, somewhere else?**

There was some talk of that, but that hasn't happened, no. And at the angle that he'd be going, the other bit is about forty feet down in the ground.

**That's right. But I thought there was a suggestion that you might do one of the whale breaching.**

Well, that was the head that I was considering, but that didn't happen; the tail happened instead. And the thing about the tail coming out of the water that impressed me was the way the water sort of laps and falls off the end, that little bit of water that was sticking to the skin. And so I designed a fountain that had water sort of falling off it. (laughs) Somewhat reminiscent of that. I don't think it quite captures that same quality, but nevertheless – – –.

**If you were ever to be able to have the opportunity to do the head, do you have a location in mind for it?**

Somewhere on the coast of New South Wales, maybe.

**That's what I'm getting at, really, the idea of actually having it plunge down at Victor Harbor and come up somewhere else – – –.**

Maybe come up in China! (laughter) H'mm – – –. The squeaking's my boots on the floor, actually.

**We've also got a blowfly, I think. Okay, were there any dramas or traumas about the creation of the *Whale tail*.**

Ooohh! How many would you like to hear about?

**Some of them.**

Okay. We had a deadline. With these projects there's always a deadline. There's the deadline and then there's the project; there's not the project and then there's a deadline. So off you go – you work like a madman and you say, 'Oh, yes, I can do it by then,' when in reality any sane person would know that it would take three times as long as they want it to be done in. I mean, you might even have a life in the meanwhile. However, I went and made and, in the paddock over the creek, there is still two-thirds of the whale tail plaster mock-up sitting there. The other third's in the rubbish dump at the quarry, and the other two-thirds will follow one day. The Council were very happy with the model I made. They came and had a look at it and then I made moulds of it and went to a foundry in Victoria to have it cast.

When I originally decided to do the whale tail and chose a foundry, I inquired as to casting prices from Artworks In Bronze – that was about thirty-seven thousand dollars; I went to Meridian Foundry and that was fifty thousand dollars; and I went to Victor Kalinowski and he said he could do it for twenty thousand dollars, and I thought, 'They've got a small budget and they'd probably prefer it cost twenty thousand rather than fifty thousand,' and I very foolishly ignored the maxim that you take: you get three quotes and you pick the middle one, not the cheapest and not the most expensive. And Victor Kalinowski promised faithfully that he would put in a larger kiln and put in a larger crucible so he could melt a bigger lump of metal and cast bigger sections in his bigger moulds – none of which eventuated. Victor said he could do it in three months and cast it in eleven pieces and, after six months, he still had not finished casting all the pieces – there were in the order of thirty-seven pieces. By the time I finished I thought there were something like fifty pieces. I had to actually go to Melbourne and force him to re-cast several pieces, and had to physically panel beat all these bits of metal into shape, weld it all together, and I did that in five weeks. And in those five weeks I think I probably had about forty hours' sleep. By the time I finished I'd only punched Victor in the head once and I'm still talking to him now, but I would never have him cast anyone –

my worst enemy's work, let alone mine. Victor's philosophy is that if he promises you a hundred per cent, well, you should be really happy if you get thirty per cent and forty per cent would be an astounding success rate. And if I promise someone a hundred per cent I try and give them a hundred and twenty, just for a laugh. So you can see there might be a few problems develop between the two of us, yes.

**(laughs) I'm just going to stop (break in recording) – – – counter reading, but never mind; we'll just work without a counter reading, I don't care.**

Fair enough.

**Exactly. Must keep on watching it. Okay. You appear to be tired in anticipation of driving to New South Wales.**

Well, I've had a weekend fishing, and this was with the fishing club, and they like to live life hard. They go and surf fish – there's a range of ages, you see. There are the young sons of some of the members who come along on these trips, they'll go surf fishing for mulloway – and they actually caught a couple of, like, twenty-five pounders – and they come in at one or two in the morning. And we try and go to bed at nine thirty, but no-one gets any sleep until two in the morning and then you wake up at six in the morning to go fishing. The joy of going fishing on these trips is that any thought of work totally disappears. I didn't think of anything apart from whether a fish would bite for two days, and that, even though you're physically tired, you're not mentally worn out. So you have a physically demanding, mental rest. (laughs)

**It would have to be a full weekend for you, anyway. What – I'm not going to go year by year by year through your work, but I am going to ask you what have been your most loved pieces in the last – say, in the last years of this decade?**

Most loved pieces.

**Mm, the ones that you most enjoyed doing or that you're most proud of, or that meant the most to you. Because you've been prolific in this last few years.**

In 1987 I came to a point where the abstract pieces I'd been doing and the realistic pieces I've been doing, instead of being side by side came together; and there's now an abstract composition within the realistic pieces. So the compositional element is the most important. And up on the mantelpiece over there there's a couple of bull seals looking at each other. The one on the left is the wooden original and the one on the right is a bronze of it, the artist's proof. That represented the pinnacle of what I'd been able to achieve at that time. I felt that was the best thing that I'd done in my life up until that time. So I kept it. Then, occasionally, in between that, I'll do a piece which I'm really pleased with and by now I've done many. I don't have a particular one that leaps out, really. But the one I try and be most fond of is the one that I'm doing at any one time, because once I've done it I've learned as much from doing it as I'm going to and then I have to let it go, so I can't be so fond of any one thing that I can't let it go.

**How did you feel, for example, doing the work for Spring Hill, which was really a real estate development, in many respects? And I know you tackled a horse's head there and you said earlier that – – –.**

Oh, there's a funny story about the horse's head. Do you want to hear the funny story?

**Yes, I do.**

The Spring Hill development was – I think it was an art in public places thing, where a number of artists were chosen – well, submitted work, and a team was chosen. They were Rick Martin, Silvio Apponyi and Martin Corbin. Martin Corbin was going to carve a TV screen, some steps, various other things of that order. He did a fence line running through the park. The fence line is shadows of the fence cut into the pathways – I showed him how to do that, the odd fence post to establish the lines between the fences. There was supposed to be difference coloured grasses' shadows running across the lawns as well, but it all sort of grows together very quickly and disappears. And there was a big redgum log lying there. And I thought, 'Oh, I'll have a go at that,' and this was about

eight days before I had an operation for – well, anyway, spurs in the right shoulder socket – sub-achromial space decompression, I think the technical name is – which meant that I had about, oh, twenty degrees of movement in my right shoulder. I managed to carve that horse's head in about four days, I think, mostly using an electric grinding attachment with very little hammering (laughs), and most of that with the left hand, not the right. The idea was that there should be some historical connection with the site and its history, so there could have been a horseman swimming a swollen creek there, so that's what the horse's head is. Imagine it swimming a swollen creek. And – – –.

**Well, it's stretched out, isn't it, yes.**

Yes. And the funny story is that, at that site, there was a huge amount of pilferage with people coming and stealing the pot plants that had been pulled out of their pot and stuck in the ground by the landscapers, so they put on a nightwatchman. And one night the nightwatchman saw these two cars go up and meet at the top of the hill, and he thought (whispering), 'I'll get you bastards!' So he sneaks around the side of the hill with his big, powerful torch, and he jumps up over the hill and shines his torch, and he sees two stark naked people making love sitting on the horse. (laughs loudly) The whole site was laughing their heads off for days after that one!

**I wonder he – it's a pity he didn't ask them why they chose that particular place.**

Oh, I think they just took off like a shot – they didn't want to be caught! (laughs)

**Well, you know it's had some uses.**

It certainly has, yes.

**Well, I could enumerate many, many of these, but I was going to ask you also about other collaborative experiences, because I remember when we were talking before doing the recording you gave me an instance of a less than successful one in relation to a sundial creation.**

Oh, yes; that was – h'mm, that was Mount Tomah, the sundial of – no; there were two I did.

**Prior to – – –.**

Actually, I did a number of sundials with Adelaide – what do they call themselves? Sundials Australia. John Ward and Margaret Folkard [?]. These are two people who worked at the Weapons Research at Salisbury. They have incredible ability to make things that measure in large numbers of zeroes after the decimal point. They have absolute total lack of making things easy on the eye. They create their sundials by looking through every historical book of sundials they can find and making one they've chosen out of that book. The collaboration I did with them – I did, I think, about three or four projects with them over a number of years before they finally drove me insane. The biggest one was the Kingston project, which has an analemmatic sundial. An analemmatic sundial is – well, the one we did at Kingston is a large granite slab which has a figure of eight carved into it, and the shape of the hours (sound of car starting) – that's the painter leaving, that noise – is – – –. There's a mathematical relationship between the position you stand – there's a calendar carved around the figure of eight – if you stand on the date carved on the figure of eight, your shadow will cast to the hour stele or whatever-you-call-it stones, and if you actually held up a wire and cast a perfect narrow shadow it would be accurate to within two or three minutes. The width of the person makes it more within twenty minutes, but nevertheless, mathematically –

**Have to be a thin person. The thinner the more accurate! (laughs)**

– yes. Mathematically, it is a very accurate sundial, which is what their ability is. But to make it look interesting, that's my job. So I took that on with them. Then, after that one, I did another sundial on the top of a hill in Mount Annan Botanic Gardens, which is near Campbelltown in New South Wales. That had hexagonal basalt crystals which came from Mount Tomah and also from a quarry up near Gosford, somewhere up that way.

**You went and unearthed them, or – – –?**

They had already stockpiled a few (tape ends) –

END OF TAPE 4 SIDE A: TAPE 4 SIDE B

[They had already stockpiled a few] and when we ran out I had to go and get some more. That was a day trip to go from Mount Annan to Gosford and back again to get these extra crystals.

**How big are they?**

Oh, they can be a hundred feet long but, you know, they usually crack and so you end up with sections a foot to ten foot long.

**A crystal, one hundred feet long?**

Yes, it's a volcanic basalt crystal.

**Well, I'm allowed to look surprised because one doesn't normally think of crystals in these dimensions.**

They're – there's a formation of similar crystals called 'the organ pipes' in Tasmania, you bang them and they ring and they're a cliff face or something, a hundred feet or so high. Anyway, these interesting-shaped rocks formed our markers for the Mount Annan sundial, and it has the same figure of eight carved in the slab and you stand on it and it casts the exact time. The Mount Tomah Botanic Garden and the Mount Annan Botanic Garden are all run by the Sydney Botanic Garden. John Ward and Margaret Folkard had some contact with the boss of the Botanical Garden in Sydney and he wanted a sundial made for Mount Tomah as well. The design was supposed to be something to do with flowers and something new, so they didn't want an old one reproduced. So John and Margaret came to me and asked me what idea I could come up with, so I thought, 'Their sundials are usually balls where they have an arrow through it casting a shadow on a half-circle in the lower half, so really you don't need the upper half; it's just casting shadows over the dial and making it useless at certain parts of the day.'

**Did they do the one in Government House grounds?**

Yes.

**Because you did the base for that, didn't you?**

Yes. It was one of our – – –.

**That's the one Dame Roma gave to the grounds when she lived there.**

The – so I came up with this idea of an open bowl sundial, the design for which I carved arms out of a bit of, I don't know, red cedar or something, and gave a mock-up to Sundials Australia to take to the chap in the Botanic Gardens, and he approved it but he wanted the arms to be slightly more flowerlike. So I carved a full-scale mock-up of one of the arms with sections that came off so that he could cast all the ribs at the various angles that they had to be, so some were longer and some were shorter. So I made the actual pattern for the sundial. So I designed the original, made the alterations and made the pattern for the whole thing. Then – John and Margaret sort of work at their own speed, they work when they feel like working and when a job has to be done, well, if they don't feel like doing it, well, then, it just has to wait a bit longer. Many people are like that, myself included at times. The problem was that I had another commission coming up and I had to be working on that from a certain date, and I explained this to them and said they had to get their part of the job done before that time so that I could assist with assembling the final sundial. And because they sat on their hands, the time came along when I could no longer work with them because I had other commitments. They got their tits in a tangle about that and decided that I no longer wished to be involved with it, and when the unveiling came I was busy working on another job – I can't remember what it was, the timelines all disappear off in the many other things. I couldn't go to Mount Tomah for the unveiling; they printed a little leaflet, or the Botanic Gardens did, and Sundials Australia claimed that they designed it, created it, did the whole lot, and made no mention of me apart from the fact that I carved something in it. And I got most upset with them about this, and they still can't understand why I got so upset that they didn't acknowledge my artistic input

into this thing. And I have terminated all involvement with these people since then, even though they have asked me on a number of occasions. Do not want to deal with idiots any more.

**You've probably done enough sundials anyway. Why did you go to Asia? What was the first – what was the impetus to start teaching and exhibiting in Asia?**

I met a woman called Susan Wraite, who came to Adelaide to do a woodcarving demonstration-workshop for the South Australian Wood Group, of which I was a member at the time. I had been carving small frogs and things for a while, but not really as a major focus of what I do, and after I went to her workshop and saw the sorts of things she was doing and realised that they were influenced very heavily by Japanese art and Japanese *netsuke* in particular, I started reading about these things and felt a huge affinity with Japanese works of this nature. I don't know –

**These are the little –**

They were little carvings, yes.

**– tiny – that were part of the swordbelts and things, weren't they?**

They were the toggle which supported your tobacco pouch or writing case or whatever you wanted to. The Japanese wore a *kimono*. The business class of Japan at the time, in the Edo period, were the wealthy merchants – they had a lot of money but no power. The *samurai* class had all the power but no money. So if a wealthy merchant got a bit above his class a *samurai* would just knock his head off. So that's quite a powerful (laughs) inducement to do what you're told. The *samurai* said to the merchant class, 'You will not upset us poor *samurai* with your display of wealth, so you will wear a black *kimono* and not display your wealth extravagantly.' The wealthy classes were most upset by this, because if you've got a bit of money you really want to show it off, don't you. So peasants had been wearing in their *kimono* a bone, a knucklebone, or a root or a stone they'd found on a beach, or some small thing, and you put a couple of holes in it and you put a string through the holes and you suspend your purse.

So you push the toggle up through your sash, your *obi*, and your pocket hangs beneath, because a *kimono* has no pockets – there's a small pocket in the sleeve, but that's it, so if you want to carry anything it's difficult. And the biggest push for the design of *kimonos* came when Europeans came to Japan because they brought tobacco, and many Japanese took up smoking and you needed a tobacco pouch so you could carry your pipe and tobacco and all the rest of that claptrap. So the *netsuke* began to become more decorative and that's gone exponentially onwards, and it appeals to me in some ways.

The Japanese have a different emphasis, they love a very intricately decorated surface. They will put all the focus on the minutest surface decorations. Many of the Japanese *netsuke* produced now, the contemporary ones, are focused on the surface decoration and not on the composition, and I've focused mine on the other way round. I like the composition, and I like to do realistically-proportioned and realistically-carved animals, whereas the Japanese *netsuke* tradition is that the subject matter should be humorous, grotesque, misshapen, various other things like that. It has to be pleasant to hold, it has to stand by itself and it has to be a beautiful thing.

**These are some of the little creatures that you've carved out of ivory nut, example of the – – –.**

Yes, that's right. I don't use ivory nut so much any more because it's got a hollow inside. You don't know what shape the hollow is. You'll be three-quarters of the way through something which is just starting to come together and you find a bloody great hole in the wrong place. So – – –.

**But you wouldn't ever carve in real ivory, would you?**

No, no. I've got a couple of bits that I was given over the years; they're still sitting there. I might carve something in one for myself one day. I have been carving deer antler recently, which is very nice to work with, and every year they throw their antlers off so I don't feel bad about that.

**Unlike tusks. Exactly. But you taught in Malaysia, didn't you, and exhibited in KL.**

Well, because I was interested in Japan and things Asian – Chinese art doesn't have that same sort of bond. I mean, I don't – I've found very little Chinese art which I've really liked. I found a piece of jade in a gallery once which really appealed to me, but not much. There's a whole different sort of feeling to it. Because I like it, and because I was interested in learning more about it, the best way to do that is to actually go there and try and see the stuff in the country of its origin. And – well, I was starting to be a bit more, well, well-known and getting a bit more money, so the possibility of travel occasionally was there and so I travelled. We had a group exhibition in Malaysia. There were eight artists involved in that. This was organised by Helen (pause) – her name will come again – she is doing a diploma in – an honours in Asian art or something – what's her damn name? [Stacey]

**I think she appears (telephone starts ringing) in the material about – there's a very nice red-covered booklet, I think, about this particular excursion. We'll pick it up later. Do you want to answer that?**

Someone's coming. (telephone stops ringing)

**Go on. So you – a group of you – – –.**

So a group of us went to Malaysia. Before that exhibition I had actually been twice to Japan with Russell Pick [?] to have an exhibition. The first time we went with Basil Hadley [?], the second time I think it was just the two of us. I started to meet Japanese people and meet a bit of Japanese culture and realise how much I really feel an affinity with it. I like the contrast of the stunningly beautiful with the absolutely loathsome little odd bit that pops up every now and then in life over there. And, you know, in Asia you come across a beautiful scene and there's this horrible stench of pollution coming from the drains!

**Do you like the wood – the wooden gates, the carving – what do they call them? the *torii* gates that –**

*Torii*?

**– the *torii* gates, and do you like that kind of statement?**

I guess the emphasis is more on the smaller things. I mean, I like the way a torii stands in the landscape. If I were a painter I'd probably paint them, but I relate to it in a different way.

**Anything else about Japanese culture as such that appeals to you?**

I'm learning Japanese at uni now, so – Adelaide Uni – so that I can actually talk on a deeper level about art with the Japanese artists I'm going to visit and who I have known for a number of years.

**And the response to your art there is good?**

Well, each time I've gone – I think I've had five exhibitions there now – each time I go I sell a little bit better. I've usually made enough so I come back with money in my pocket. I don't take large works, because the costs of getting them there, the costs of transporting them in Japan and the general costs of everything are horrendous, so – – –.

**Is there a pattern to what people buy? Do they buy some things more than others?**

Well, most of the works I do are Australian-based, so – – –.

**But is there a particular creature that they buy before another?**

Yes, well, some of the Japanese creatures they would buy before some of the Australian ones. They like rabbits, chickens (laughs), things like that, rather than possums or kangaroos. So I really need to do some more world sort of work rather than just Australian-focused. And I need to do an exhibition of work which is focused towards Japan. The last time I went I had more birds in it – I had a *tzuru*, which is the Japanese brolga – they all disappeared like a flash.

**What about fish? They rather like fish, too, don't they – they appear in their designs?**

They like fish the way they like fish, not necessarily the way I do them.

**Exactly. You did some sketches: they were on display at the – – –.**

Yes. The sketches came about because – well, I'll go back to that exhibition in Malaysia. We exhibited in the Petronas Gallery in the old Petronas Building, and we had quite a bit of time because we were there for four weeks.

**This is in KL, isn't it?**

In Kuala Lumpur. And we visited – I don't know, thirty or so galleries and art spaces and artists, and all sorts of things like that. And something which really struck me was that there was no stone carving. There are now some stone pieces in KL but they have been done by foreigners who come, do them there and leave them there. The indigenous Kuala Lumpur artists are welding sculptures out of rusty iron, which rusts very quickly in the hot climate; there are no bronze casting facilities. The wood carvings they do are very primitive and reflect the fact that the carvers live very close to their neighbours – they can't make a lot of noise because the neighbours complain. (pause)

The type of carving they do is not really in depth, there's no – there's an *Orang Asli* tribe which does woodcarving of forest spirits, demons and very weird and wonderful things, but there's no cross-fertilisation, I suppose you'd say, between that sort of carving and modern day artists. There's been a painter who went to Malaysia and taught a group of Malaysian painters how to paint sort of in a more modern style and idiom, and I thought, 'Why don't I go there and teach them how to get a piece of wood and a mallet and make something three-dimensional rather than put marks on a stick?' Bit arrogant of me, maybe, but I thought – – –. Anyway, and one reason why I wanted to do this was when I was learning and when I was working at Tillett's the foreman there was very protective of his little bit of knowledge and would not let me see what he was doing when he was carving, and that sort of feeling is very strong in Malaysia, and I really hated that. So I thought, 'Well, I now know how to make a piece of stone stand up and talk, and I can do the same with a piece of wood, so – and I don't feel threatened by someone else being able to do it as well as me, so I'll go and maybe give them a grounding in it, show them how to make a tool to

carve stone, what tools you can get locally, what tools you can apply to that process and just show them the basics.'

**So who paid for that?**

The Australian High Commission in Malaysia funded me with – originally they promised me five thousand and something happened and it was cut back to four thousand, but I still went because I wanted to go. Had to pay my own air fare out of that but I got a reduced air fare through Malaysian Airlines, and the Yayasan Kasinian Perak in Ipoh – that's the arts organisation, which has two arms: one arm is they give cheap interest loans to women in the villages in the north country, similar to the Bangladeshi scheme. The women get a loan to set up a small pottery or buy a motorcycle, tricycle motorcycle, so they can take their goods from the little village into the nearest town and actually bring some money back to the village so their standard of living gets lifted up quite substantially. So that organisation, the Yayasan Kasinian Perak, has those two arms: one arm is interested in fostering traditional Malaysian crafts – and these are Muslim crafts, it's a Muslim organisation – and the other is they're interested in fostering the arts in general and – well, mainly Muslim arts, but they will help other artists as well. So there is some small assistance for Asian artists as in Chinese artists, Indian artists. I mean, there's quite a mix of races in Malaysia. The government funds any Muslim project one hundred per cent; any other project you have to raise the money yourself.

**Okay. So what did *you* learn from the Asian experience?**

What did I learn?

**You were talking about what you would like in what you wanted to impart. What did *you* learn?**

I learned that there's some beautiful marble in the Ipoh area, and also on an idyllic little island off the coast, tourist diving resort – I can't remember the name of the place, didn't quite get that far. I managed to carve one piece out of Ipoh marble in Gopeng, and when I finished the first carving workshops I went back to the quarry to get some more stone, and was looking in particular for a

piece of black marble which one of the students had carved – the quarry had delivered some pieces of stone to the school where I was teaching. The only place I could find one of these bits of black marble is down in the bottom of the quarry, so I was carrying forty kilo of marble up out of the pit and slipped and went arse over head. As I fell, I threw the marble away, fell, landed and the marble hit another piece and bounced back and landed on my right wrist, broke the wrist and cut the tendon, the main tendon up to the thumb. That was quite a traumatic happening in the life of Silvio Apponyi. For the next six months I was unable to work. I had to cancel the carving workshop, the second one. Fortunately, I had finished a piece the day before which I delivered to the Yayasan – they exhibited that piece in the exhibition which happened a week later.

**What was it?**

An abstract piece. I'll show you a photo in here in a minute. The thought processes which happened in that time have changed the way I look at what I do and why I do it quite a bit. I think – I mean, it's not going to show up immediately, but there will be a strong change in the emphasis of what I do.

**As a result of that accident?**

As a result of thinking. I've – well, before that happened, I had actually achieved a reasonable sort of place in art in Adelaide and even in Australia, which meant that there is a hell of a lot of pressure. You have to promise to deliver things by a certain date, you know. People are always at you and at you – they want something so you have to do it. And I've just bowed to all this pressure and tried to produce what they wanted in the time they wanted it by. And virtually been working myself into the grave trying to do this. And I've always tried to do it at the cheapest possible price, because I've always been poor and haven't been able to comprehend that someone *would* pay what something was worth rather than what *I* thought it was worth. And so, because I couldn't work for six months, and because people who were pushing, pushing to have a certain thing done by a certain date, when they realised that it was

impossible that that could happen they said, ‘Oh, that’s all right, we’ll wait.’ And I realised that you don’t have to work seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year; you can actually take some time off and people will wait. You know, they can grumble but stuff ’em, they can wait.

**Was this all part of that re-thinking about yourself that you –**

Yes.

**– mentioned before? You said it was about five years ago that you started to re-evaluate, come to terms –**

Well –

**– with yourself, or develop a greater sense of self-esteem.**

– h’mm. I’ve always felt as if I were a worthless sort of person. I think the fact that my mother rejected me and took my sister to Germany with her when she left my father and not me must have found a very dark hole within me somewhere.

**Oh, also being put in foster homes and –**

Oh, well.

**– *et cetera*.**

I found out about another one I was in recently. (laughs) Didn’t even know about it. I’d forgotten all about it. The – – –.

**But finding that people would, indeed, wait for Silvio Apponyi must have been gratifying.**

Yes. Well, that was just another reinforcing of the fact that I can do something which very few people can do. I’ve taught myself to work in a material, granite, which very few other artists are crazy enough to even think of, and I’ve always tried to put some honesty in what I do and some respect for the material and the people who actually end up with what I produce. The fact that people do want what I produce means that they must respect it in some manner, and so they must respect me in some manner as well, and so therefore I can’t be a totally

worthless, useless person. So I must have some small bit of self-esteem allowed to me. So – – –.

**But one has to work this out for oneself, doesn't one?**

Yes. And I've actually gone a little bit too far the other way with this last exhibition I've had, so now my ego will have to get squashed back into its box again for a while.

**How do you mean?**

Well, when I delivered this last exhibition of work, which opened on the 27th of February 2000 –

**To Greenhill Gallery?**

– at Greenhill Gallery – – –. What I do, when I have got an exhibition of work together – I might have twenty works. There might be two or three from a previous exhibition in the same exhibition, so I've got a baseline for a price, and I know that's been this price and that's been that price, so I draw a gradient between the two and then I fit whatever's in the exhibition how it fits in between those things. So I've got some baseline to establish a price. And I usually talk with the gallery owner, because they might think that I'm either too low or too high with my estimation. This particular time, I went around with Russell Starke, and he was in a bit of a hurry and I was extremely tired, and he said, 'This thing should be twelve thousand,' and I would have thought maybe five or six would be adequate – – –.

**I know your lovely lizard birdbath was eight, and I really wanted that. (laughs)**

Well, I thought that one wasn't too badly-priced. The green granite lizard, I thought that was probably well over what it should have been.

**The green granite lizard.**

That'll win a …..

**What was that? How much was that?**

Six thousand dollars. I probably would have been more along the lines of four if I'd put it on, but – – –.

**The koala was about eight, wasn't it – – –?**

No, the koala was ten. I decided that price before I went there, so I was happy with that.

**Oh, that was wonderful.**

There was a bit of a saga with that. Do you want to hear the saga with the koala?

**Yes.**

The koala was glued up out of eighteen planks of jarrah.

**Eighteen planks of jarrah?**

Yes, about a metre long by whatever.

**But they're hollow, aren't they? I think I – – –.**

Well, the planks aren't hollow; the planks are –

**No; but the actual form –**

Yes, I'll get there.

**– has a – – –.**

I'll get there. Years ago I carved the large wooden piece in one piece and put it in a gallery and it cracked to buggery, so now I laminate the larger pieces, include a couple of joints which will come apart and there's a special cloth I put in there. When I've nearly carved it, I split it apart, hollow it all out and glue it back together.

**Can't see any of this.**

It's not to be seen, it's to preserve the life span of the carving.

**I'm saying when I look at the koala I can't for the life of me see that it consists of eight planks of anything.**

Well, you're looking at it as a lovely thing, and I'm looking at it as a piece of wood which has to have a life expectancy so that if someone loves it it won't fall to bits on them.

**But I can't see where the bits join.**

Well, I can show you if you want, but I've already packed it in the car to take it to Sydney. I can show you on another one. The reason I hollow it out is when I was in Germany I wandered around a few old German churches and saw the religious statues are all hollow, they're about an inch thick. You only look at them from the front, and all the back's all hollowed out so the statue can wobble a little bit – as it moves in the wet and dry it doesn't crack to pieces. And in the wood group people would turn wooden bowls and they'd warp slightly but they wouldn't crack, and those two things, the religious statues and the bowls (tape ends) – – –.

END OF TAPE 4 SIDE B: TAPE 5 SIDE A

[and those two things, the religious statues and the bowls] sort of was what clicked, and I realised that if I put that joint in, carved it, hollowed it out and glued it back together, there'd be a joint but it would only be a joint. There wouldn't be big cracks in it. With the koala I did that same process – carved it, split it apart – I had a couple of bits break here and there along the way, it's been known to happen – and glued it all back together, took it to the gallery and, because my apprentice was a bit slow with sanding it and because I had a whole exhibition to get together rather than just do one piece at a time, that piece then got to sit in a corner for a while and got finished at the last minute. Five minutes before I finished the piece, my apprentice was helping me oil it – one of my apprentices; I've got about four of them who come at odd times to help – and I put it on a flat table to oil the back, and then I bolted a couple of, or clamped a couple of bearers with some blanket over it to lay it on its back to oil its feet, and this person then, when I wasn't looking, turned it around on its toes on the bits of wood. And I turned around, and 'What are you doing?', and of

course he’s already knocked two toes off. This is five minutes before we’re delivering the whole lot to the gallery. So we did a very quick repair job, drilled it out and put dowels in and glued the toes back on, and took it to the gallery. And someone saw it and thought, ‘Isn’t it wonderful!’ and bought it, and then put a sign on it: ‘Do not touch’. Now, ‘This is mine and no-one else is going to touch it!’. And that really upsets me, that sort of thinking. I hate going into a national gallery with guards there that stop you touching a beautiful piece of sculpture, because that’s what my work’s all about.

**It certainly was a big, red sign.**

So –

**Beautiful piece, though.**

– I was a bit off-side with these people, and I realised that I would have to go and get the mould done of it very quickly, because once they had it in their possession they’d never part with it to have a mould made, would they? So I went off and made the mould, and they had a hysterical attack. That’s the *least* of what they – – –. Anyway, Russell and I decided we’d give them their money back because they were so upset at the thought of their virginal koala having a mould made of it. And I made the mould, and I brought the koala back to the gallery, and they said, ‘Yes, it’s still beautiful,’ and they took it home and they looked at it with a microscope and they found where the bloody apprentice had broken the two toes off and decided that must have happened when I made the mould so they brought it back. Bloody arseholes.

**So it’s not sold.**

So it’s not sold, no. So what I’m going to do now is I’m – I haven’t had time to do it today, but I’ll carve –

**It was twenty thousand, that one?**

– ten thousand, yes –

**Ten thousand, oh.**

– I will carve two new toes and I will join them right up close to hand, and I will put two new toes on properly so that no-one will ever be able to complain about the toes. And they have missed out on their chance, so (blows 'raspberry').

**(laughter) I'm sure that there'll be another opportunity for somebody else.**

Yes. And in many ways I'm really glad that they will not possess it, because I hope that whoever does will pat it and have a dog piddle on it or – and treat it as something real and not something that you put on a shelf and look at.

**The other things, too, is the obsession with perfection, the incapacity to tolerate a glitch of any description, too, I suppose.**

Yes. I mean, my son has just tried to burn the house down. He had a candle in his bedroom and went off to take his girlfriend home, and two in the morning the smoke alarms go. We come out, the place is on fire. (laughs) I put out the fire with the doona and got burned on my wrist and on my arm. A painting by Leon Pericles was hanging above his bed and that's now got a hole burned in it. The painting means a lot to me personally because it's of the ….. border store up in the border of Arnhem Land on the East Alligator River. When I bought that painting I was up there fishing and I fell into the East Alligator River with the crocodiles and survived (laughs), and in the painting there's a little sign with a crocodile and a little sign underneath 'Do not swim'. So I bought the painting for that reason. Now, this painting's all blackened and it's got a hole burned in the 'Do not swim' sign (laughs), of all things! So we'll take it to the Art Lab and get it all fixed up. I wouldn't want another painting painted, because that painting is the one that means something to me. So it still means something to me, even if it's got a hole burned in it and it's been repaired, you know? Doesn't have to be perfect. I'm not perfect: look, I've got scars and crap all over me, and I'm the least perfect person that I've come across.

**I remember John Dowie telling me with great delight about looking at some Michelangelo works in Italy and discovering little flaws and – oh, one particular one where he says that he started to work round one way and then, when he got round the other way it –**

Didn't quite meet.

**– doesn’t match up –**

(laughs) Eh! (tone suggests shrug)

**– and he was just thrilled (laughs) to see that. And, you know, said that this wonderful moment of communication with some – and he said, you know, ‘Not wishing to be arrogant and make comparisons between the two, but this moment of understanding you, too, had your problems’! (laughs)**

Oh, yes. I read a book written about Michelangelo by some author, and he makes creating sculpture appear to be some mystical process. I know what it is to create sculpture. I know that it’s a physical, mental struggle. I know it’s not some mystical process. I mean, there is some thing that happens that makes a work of art a work of art, rather than a would-be or, you know, it didn’t quite make it, or – there’s a difference and it’s a *huge* difference between the one that doesn’t quite get there and the one that does. But it’s not a mystical process. You know, there’s not all this hi-falutin’ tripe in there. I know – I *know* – the reality of the process. And reading that book about, you know – I can’t remember the title of it: everyone’s read it –

**Oh, *The agony and the ecstasy*?**

– that’s the one, yes. It’s all exaggerated crap, you know – some romantic novel.

***Gone with the marble.***

Yes.

**Just stop here; I’ll just change the tape. (break in recording) It just has to be – just has to be the right touch. Okay? (squeaking sound) (sighs) That’s a big sigh. This is tape six in the series with Silvio Apponyi, recording on the 27th of March, year 2000, and I’m – we’ll just take this a little bit further. I want to go back to the collaboration issue, because you’ve told a couple of stories where the collaboration has been less than you might have desired.**

I have done a couple that worked well.

**But I thought we might move on to the Colebrook memorial project, because that’s rather special, isn’t it? Do you think it’s rather special?**

It is, yes.

**Okay, would you like to tell me about that one?**

Um – – –.

**Definitely a collaborative exercise.**

Over a number of years I had been going up to the Blackwood High School on their annual careers night; I'd show a few photos of what I'd been about, and if there were students of the high school who were interested in the arts – whatever arts – they'd come and talk to me and I'd try and give them a bit of advice and help. Mainly I'd tell them, 'Try and get some profession, some career, some job skills that'll support you, in an allied field, so that you can actually work, get a living, get an income, support a wife, husband, whatever and be able to exist still in an arts atmosphere – it doesn't have to be what you want to do. If you want to be a painter, go and work in advertising or something so that you've got some toe in the arts.' I mean, I did tombstones for fifteen years – it was the least artistic environment you could imagine, but I learned how to work stone in a way that no-one else I know does. Anyway, one of the group, the [Blackwood] Reconciliation Group, saw the works that I had in those careers days, and said, 'He's the one we want,' and so they came and saw me.

They originally wanted to have a statue of an Aboriginal mother, seated on a park bench with a couple of plaques around it, and they had a budget of, I don't know, ten thousand dollars or something in mind. And I said, 'Aboriginal Reconciliation is something which is happening now, and you want to make a national monument. What you're proposing is not a national monument, it has not got the power to focus anything just on this one little thing.' I said, 'First you have to come up with something that makes an impact and then raise the money for it, because if you've got something that *does* make an impact then people will organise money for it – that's the way things happen. So I took their original idea and went off and did a few drawings and sketches and Mike Brown, who was the organiser, he'd go and do a few sketches of my sketches and show them to other people, and they'd do a few sketches of my sketches of

the other sketches of someone else's sketches, and the whole thing sort of grew. It was a big collaboration.

**How many Aboriginal artists were involved?**

There were two Aboriginal painters involved in the beginning: one of them was Kunyi McInerney, who I don't get on with at all; and the other was June Pole – Jane Pole, who's her sister, half-sister, and she's really nice, I get on with her quite well, although I don't have much to do with her. And the other Aboriginal artist who was involved in that was Sheree Rankine, who I get on really well with. She has got very good skills as an artist as far as drawing, and her ideas are pretty terrific, but she's had no training as an artist at all, so – – –.

**Does she sculpt?**

She wants to, but she's had no experience in sculpting. And so, as part of the process of doing the Colebrook memorial, these three artists were involved. With Kunyi and June, the – no, it's Kunyi and Jane – they did a lot of drawings. I'd suggested a few things that they could draw and – – –.

**Just let it come up. Okay, away you go. These two artists – – –.**

We wanted to have Aboriginal artists involved in the process so we had to find things for them to do. I mean, it's a three-dimensional project – you have to get something and create something in three dimensions – so painters are not really going to be much help. To get them involved, we got – I made a few suggestions to the committee about what sorts of things they could do drawings of so there were images going out around for people to become interested in, and various poses for the grieving mother and various ways of representing various things were all talked about. So, I mean, it's not all my idea. It's not anyone's idea – it was a collaboration of many people contributing, and then I would adjust it around to the sorts of things that I do and the ideas that people came up with I fitted to the sort of thing that I do.

**So it's evolved in stages, hasn't it? What was the first part?**

The first stage was the *Fountain of tears*: it's a group of boulders around a pond. There are some boulders standing in the pond which have had Aboriginal faces carved on them. There are six faces there: the first one was Major Sumner, Muriel Olsen, George Tongerie, Yvonne – she was the last one – Doris Kartinyeri and the young one with the tears falling on her face, I can't remember her name just now[6]. She was – – –.

**Not Mavis Scales?**

(pause) No. It might come. She was the daughter of one of the people on the committee, she's an Aboriginal girl who's been adopted, and she's got foetal alcohol syndrome so she's not really the full quid. When she was posing I'd ask her to be serious for a minute and she'd go '(whinnying sound)'. It was a bit difficult working with her. Each of the faces was carved over a four day period with that person sitting there in front of me.

**So you carved them straight onto the stone?**

Straight into the stone, yes. Big clouds of dust from the angle grinder and all the grinding bits.

**No sketches first?**

Well, what's the point of doing a sketch and interpreting real life and then trying to interpret real life from the sketch into the stone? I just have you sit there and then I carve what I see.

**It is pretty amazing, though, that you don't mould, even, to get a likeness and then sort of copy it into the stone.**

Well, I'm getting better. (laughs)

**Because, I mean, stone is so unforgiving. I mean, I would have thought that there's not much room for mistakes.**

Well, you don't make them. (laughter)

**As you mould in!**

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[6] Lola Myers. SA

I do.  I do, I make mistakes.

**You squash it.**

I make her nose a little bit too small or a bit too big, or whatever.  I mean – – –.

**Too big's not a problem, but you go too small, once you've got too small you've had it!**

The important thing is not to get a clinical likeness, because a clinical likeness is not a likeness, it's a photo.  The important thing is to reach inside that person and pull out the essence.

**So what were you pulling out of the young girl who had foetal alcohol syndrome?**

Well, I couldn't find something to pull out, so I had to try and make a bit of maturity appear there and pull that out.  So I tried to pull out the possibility of what she might become rather than what she was.

**Well, what was lost, I suppose, through her mother's –**

Yes.

**– suffering.  (sighs)**

We don't know if she actually had any connection to Colebrook at all, we don't know.  No-one knows.  Her parents' records are not available to her foster parents.

**The fountain was the first stage.  Then was a next stage.**

So there was originally the intention that there would be three stages:  the first stage was the *Fountain of tears*, the *Coolamon*, which is the child's bassinet with the water falling out, the mother's tears falling across the faces of two young mothers and the grandparents.  The father is usually a white person who was either having an affair with an Aboriginal girl or raped a girl or – who knows what the relationships were?  The sorts of relationships Aboriginal women had with white men were as varied as any sort of relationship in white society.  The idea was the *Fountain of tears*, the *Grieving mother* and a group

of children. The fountain stands on the site of Colebrook Home. When we dug there there were bricks coming out of the ground, so – – –. And some of the kids who were in Colebrook Home remember exactly where the house was, so we put the fountain – plonk! – right in the middle of the foundation. When I – I mean, I've lived here for eleven years now and I've been walking the kids to Blackwood High School for over a number of years – they've all left and gone to uni – the site had always had a sort of vaguely inimical feeling to me. I'd never walked into that site. I mean, there's no fence saying you can't go in. I've always felt as if there were some air of (pause) don't know what, so I've always felt as if it wasn't a place that was welcoming. When I went to visit Ayers Rock I felt as if there was a very powerful spirituality there in the air, and even more so at the Olgas, and maybe what happened at Colebrook has that same atmosphere. I don't know what it is. I have some small connection with the other side of it all, because I think artists have to be able to connect with more than the physical that's around them, they have to be able to relate to the spiritual side as well. Maybe that helps me feel it, I don't know.

I feel that what I've done on the Colebrook site has broken through that badness that was in the air there, that I've made Colebrook now a site of healing, a place where the unhappiness is going away. I see it in the people who come, I mean, the Aboriginal people who've been there, who've seen what's happened, they've gone through their lives full of agony. I mean, I've had the same crap with my parents, that these people have had crap with society and what the government's done to them, and for me personally doing Colebrook has been as big a healing process for me, for what's happened to me, as it has been for them. So I've tried to put some of that coming to completeness, that being happy with oneself again, into what's there – even though it's very sad, there's another side to it as well, that there's hope that something's happening, that healing is what it's about. And there are – well, nearly every time you go past there's someone in there looking at it, which is – for me, it's a tremendous joy.

**You don't remember the house?**

No, no. Because we didn't live here when it was there. We were way up the other end of town and didn't ever have much to do with this side.

**I can remember being driven past it on a Sunday, because, as you say, as a suburban child you very rarely – because there's, you know, we're going back over forty years – you didn't see [Aboriginal?] children, and I was driven past almost to see these kids – they'd sit on the fence, you see, and wave to the cars as we were going past.**

I've seen a lot of the photos of, you know, of the kids up there.

**But anyway, so it was a really strong personal experience as well –**

Yes.

**– that particular project. Is the third stage going to happen?**

They, the Reconciliation group, have pretty well run out of puff with it all. I think if the third stage happens it'll be someone else takes it up and continues with it. I'm quite happy to have a break from it all. It's pretty emotionally draining. It's – I've tried to do it for as low a price, so that it would happen, as possible which means that, for two years, I've earned bugger all.

**It's a big work.**

And financially we've been pretty well pressed by it all.

**But you're – you've got a possum that's going down on the –**

Yes, the –

**– Torrens, what's it called? Tidli –**

*Pilta wodli*.

**– Tittle –?**

*Pilta wodli*, or something like that.

**Starts with a 't', doesn't it? I thought it started with a 't'. Doesn't matter. We'll establish – we'll clear that up.**

The Adelaide City Council has seen what I've done at Colebrook, and they're doing a small Aboriginal memorial to the Lutheran school which was in the golf course area bounded by the railway line, the Adelaide Gaol and the Torrens and the Weir, sort of in that triangle there. The memorial consists of some boulders with plaques and granite photographs, so photographic etchings onto granite plaques.

**Which you did?**

I'm organising it all this time, rather than going through another person.

**And the possum – did you do the possum specially, or is it one of your possums that you've got?**

It's one that I've got, which they're going to try and raise the money for. There's a budget of ten thousand dollars for organising all the boulders and the plaques and the landscaping and whatever, and it'll just about cover that.

**Bronze possum or granite possum?**

It'll be a bronze possum. There's a possum house, right, the *pilta wodli*[7] – I haven't got it in the memory right yet. The Aboriginal name of that area where the Lutheran school was – the Lutheran pastors wrote down the Kaurna language so that they could teach the Bible to the Aborigines in their own language, and that was the area where that happened, so the Lutheran pastors who were there, their photos are on the memorial. There's a photograph of a letter written by one of the Aboriginal children asking for more toys from England, and there's a photo of a couple of corroborees and one of the Aboriginal characters, Captain Jack or whatever his name was. As an extra part to that, there's a possibility of one of my possums, the one that lives in this ceiling (laughs), being immortalised on one of the granite boulders next to the tree trunk which is coming from the creek up Black Hill, with the possum house. So when I leave here tonight, at about seven o'clock, I drive from here to Black Hill Quarry, drive out on Jim Havelberg's [?] farm, drive into the creek

[7] *Pilta* = possum, *wodli* = house. SA

bed, spray paint on the tree in the creek where I want it cut off, the people in the quarry are going to come down with a big loader machine and lift it out of the creek, carry it up to the quarry and put it on the pile of boulders so it all comes down at once for the project. It's lovely what people will do when they believe in you and believe in what you're doing. The farmer, Jim Havelberg, and his wife, Frances, are donating the tree. Garnet's going to organise someone to do it, you know, at rock-bottom price so that it all gets done.

**And is the possum – what's the possum's pose? Is it a scratching possum, or a – – –.**

He's standing on three feet and his back leg's scratching behind his ear – I can show you the wax if you want.

**Yes. So he's a dynamic fellow. Okay, well, that's – also there's a connection too, in a sense, with the Colebrook story, because those children who were at that school were later taken off and were some of the first to occupy the what is now known as the Destitute Asylum, or what became the Destitute Asylum and so on. So there's part of a – – –.**

I don't know if I explained before: when they approached me to do Colebrook, I felt that it was something that I had a great affinity with. I felt it was something that I really wanted to be a part of. I probably would have done it for next to nothing, just to be a part of it. I mean, in reality, I've got a family to support so I can't do that, so the next best thing was to be chosen and be able to do it, you know, as much as I could for as little as possible.

**Yes, but it's also because you have got family and because you value it, that's also part of the passion in this respect, isn't it?**

Well, I feel Aborigines are just starting to come out of all that dark times where they've been treated as crap. I was doing a project up at Cleland Wildlife Centre recently – I was drawing images of goannas and footprints and stuff in the restaurant floor – and the carpenter who was working there was going on about Aborigines, how they get everything for nothing and how, you know, (in frantic voice) 'They get all this stuff given to 'em – we have to work!' And I said, 'All right, just take this premise, okay? I'll bring an Aborigine along, he

gets your job and you get the job the Aborigine hasn't got and you have to live like the Aborigine and he gets what you got.' 'Aw, no; no, no, that's no good.' No, you think about the life that you've got, you know, you can do whatever you want, basically, and an Aborigine can't because people like you – and the way I used to treat them, too – don't allow them any possibility of what we've got. And I don't want that to happen and I want to do something about that.

I want to try and make (pause) – I guess really what I'm trying to do is the respect which I've found for myself through what I do, I want to help them to find that self-respect which is the inner strength that makes you able to survive the bad things of life. You can get through what you wouldn't otherwise because you've got an inner strength that'll carry you through. I mean, religion for me has been a crutch and a source of inner strength as well. Well, many Aborigines hate religion because of what happened to them in those religious homes that they were brought up in. Religion is separate from what people who practise so-and-so religion actually do to people. I mean, the basic religious structure is something which is for good. People are not necessarily going to be for good, you know – they may say that's what they're doing, but you have to accept that people are fallible, some people are wonderful and some are bloody horrible, and that's life. You just have to get over it and get on with life. And, you know, I try and do what little I can to make the world a better place, because I've had enough of it (laughs) being a horrible place – I don't want to foster that at all.

**Just taking up, too, the notion of family. I mean, anybody who hears this tape will hear your family in the background. You are very much a man who is working and living in the midst of other people who are dear to you. Silvio, apart from you suffering various frustrations through finding the means to actually feed them, clothe them all and so forth, what sort of an impact have they had on you – (tape ends)**

END OF TAPE 5 SIDE A: TAPE 5 SIDE B

**– as an artist?**

Well, when they were younger I was frustrated because I had to earn a living and support them, and now that I'm older I realise what a precious gift they are, the fact that I have a family. And the fact that you have to struggle to support them is irrelevant to the fact that they're there, you know? They bear no responsibility to me. I've brought them here, my wife and I have brought them into the world, you nurture them as best you can and then you give them a kick in the arse and send them out into the world. And you can't suffocate a child and try and make it be what you want it to be. A child wants to be what it wants to be.

**Do any of them want to be like you?**

My oldest daughter would probably like to be an artist, but she doesn't have the talent – well, she hasn't shown that she has the talent. Her leanings are in a different way. She's a health inspector in Port Lincoln. She's been making some sculptures out of *papier mâché* because her dad's an artist so she thinks maybe she should. My second – she's now twenty-seven, I think. Second daughter's twenty-six; she went to uni and did architecture, graduated with honours, she's now working for a landscape architect, so her career's not actually progressing because she can't count that towards her three months or three years' experience in architecture. But she gets on reasonably well with him, and it's a job, and they're damn hard to come by in that field, so she's happy enough. She also designs clothing with clear, see-through plastic panels, for lesbians and gays and bisexuals and (laughs) whatever! Her two best friends are a gay couple, a couple of lesbians. She's been living with a boy for – well, she's been going out with him for a number of years, since he was in high school and she was at uni. He's a DJ at the Proscenium Club, I think it is – he's got one of those mohawk haircuts, you know, black shaved sides, studs everywhere, stud out of his bottom lip – he stabbed her in the gum, so he got a shorter one. He's actually, beneath all the black crap, actually quite a decent (laughs) sort of young lad! And I have high hopes that one day he might realise that you don't have to be as wacko and still be real. I went through that stage,

so maybe he will – anyway, I live in hope. The third son – the third child is the son, he's now twenty-two. He's been going out with a Vietnamese girl who was in his industrial design class at high school – at uni, rather. In second year of their three year or four year course, they finally got together and they've been together ever since. We have high hopes that they may marry. She's got talents in areas that he's weak, and he's got talents in areas that she's weak; they're really head-over-heels in love and we hope that all works out.

**And the baby?**

And – no, she's definitely not a baby. I upset my wife to a great extent by saying that someone who is in the process of possibly having a baby is no longer a baby.

**Is she?**

No. I mean, she's conducting activities that may lead to this! (laughter)

**Right! Is she artistic?**

She's doing science, organic science at Adelaide University, and she comes home and prattles off these chemical formulae about how, you know, amines and all these these all work together and give you chlorhexawaddlypoffadene, or something. Walks around with chemical formulae stuck in the transparent tops of her sandals. Not artistically bent at all. My son, Aladar, is as talented creatively as I ever was at his age. His leanings are not towards sculpture but towards design, and he would love to be a computer games designer or design things with a computer. I mean, his three-dimensional computer art skills are very good.

**So it's up to you and Natalija – let's get back to Natalija, because we said before that she is beginning to paint again.**

She's been meeting with her three art school painter friends ever since art school, and they meet some of their other old friends but basically the four of them have been good friends ever since art school.

**Does she paint mostly water colours? I know I've seen – oh, that's an oil, yes.**

She has been painting water colours because they're cheap, because if you ruin one it's just a piece of paper which is, you know, it's only five dollars instead of fifty bucks for a canvas. I've always felt that she had a lot of talent but she doesn't have the commitment, she doesn't have the drive, the fire in her belly, to do it.

**But she was doing all sorts of other things, including running for the Democratic Party.**

Yes, she did that. My father did that, she's done that.

**Your father did it?**

Yes, he ran for the Social Democrats, I think it was, before they were the Democrats.

**I wouldn't have guessed that that sort of thing would have been – – –.**

No, my father was all sorts of things.

**I mean, I know that they got interested in the Baha'is, but – no, I see. That wasn't as a result of him, though, that Natalija – – –.**

No, no, no; she's always felt that the Democrats probably espoused more the values that she feels, so –

**I was reading her –**

– she was –

**– platform, and –**

– she was very much into that.

**– she cites a range of concerns.**

She's very much interested in education – public education, not paid school education. So St Peter's doesn't interest her at all, or any of those sorts of schools. We could never afford it, and our kids have done pretty well. So her focus has been hundred per cent on the kids. When we married she decided –

we had an agreement that she was going to be home and look after the kids, and it was my job to provide.

**Did you intend to have four children, as many children, or did they just – – –?**

We had two children and we'd pretty well decided that that'll do us, and then one of our friends had a daughter, Kisan [Lamshed], and I looked at this girl and she was so gorgeous, I said, 'Come on, Nat, let's have another one!' And that was Aladar. Because the doctor wouldn't give me the snip until the baby was likely to survive we slipped up and had another one and that was Margit. (interviewer laughs) And then I told him I'd punch his head in (laughs) if he didn't give me a vasectomy immediately!

**Doesn't seem to have sapped your virility in any other way, though.**

No, I don't think so, no.

**And that's the other thing, too – we haven't actually talked about just how extraordinarily physical your work is when you hack out lumps of stone, you work in the open air often.**

Yes, well, when I did the thing up at Tamworth, I did the best piece there – when they had floods I was standing on two pallets, working in the rain, so – – –.

**But you did the same sort of thing at Maria Creek, didn't you? Weren't there flood waters lapping round your ankles?**

(laughs) Flood and tempest seems to follow me, yes. The rain and the hail had raised Maria Creek until there was about three inches of island left sticking out of the water with me working on it. (laughs) They brought a forty-four gallon drum full of mallee roots to keep me from freezing to death while I was doing the two abstract waves at each end.

**How long did you work on that one?**

I think it was about seventeen weeks at Maria Creek.

**Do you – do people put you up when you go – – –?**

I stayed for two weeks in Kingston and then I was home for two weeks. Each time I stayed with a different family, so I guess I was boarded for the period that I was there.

**Do your family trail around and inspect and admire all your works now as a brilliant Australian?**

Yes but, you know, it's just what Dad does. It's no special thing.

**That's interesting. Do they have favourites?**

Some of them have. My oldest girl, Anele, she's mad keen – every time she comes home she wants photographs of whatever I've been doing, and I'm – been very lax, I haven't had time to take photographs of anything so I haven't got any to give her.

**What do you like to touch most, the wooden ones or the stone ones?**

I try and make whatever I do attractive to touch, so I touch them all. I like – I mean, wood for me is the material that is the most sensuous to touch because it's not cold – I mean, wood has a warmth of appearance and a warmth when you touch it that no other material I work in has – bronze is cold and granite's cold – and I'm basically a wood carver at heart.

**Are you going to do more people now? Because the Colebrook project, which is probably *the* most recent extended piece of work, is people. And I'm just wondering whether – – –.**

Well, when I was stuck in the house for six months, grumpy and making life miserable for people around me, I decided that I would go fishing more often again, that I would get a model in and do people, as in portraits or female nudes or whatever. I built some turntables to get a model in five years ago and I haven't had time to get one in, and this year I am going to get a model in, come hell or high water. I've thought that I would move away from animals a bit and go more into people, but commitments are still there to be done, and until I've worked through them I can't really take the time to do what I want to do.

**And I suppose it's like a story that – again – Dowie tells about old Septimus Power having a show at the Royal Society and he said to John, 'Oh, what do**

**you think?' and ….. ….. ….. found some that weren't horses and which he did, actually, quite like and said, 'Oh, I particularly like these.' And he said, 'Oh,' he said, 'yeah, but horses sell.' (laughter) I suppose that's the dilemma you're in – you've now got such a profound reputation for being able to create such wonderful, you know, portrayals of –**

Well –

**– Australian animals, in particular.**

– some of what I put into the animals I do are the emotions which people express, and rather than put human emotions into an animal I want to show human emotions in a human being.

**Well, you have been tentatively moving in that direction on occasions, and I mean I suppose religious sculpture gives you some – almost like –**

Sure.

**– an acceptable avenue for you to be moving in that direction. It's, 'Oh, if you really insist on having a Madonna I'll do a Madonna, or if you really want a Christ I'll do a Christ.'**

I do a number of religious works. I had an experience in our church recently where a number of so-called Christian people in our church behaved in a way which I couldn't comprehend that a Christian could towards our priest who they didn't like, and virtually forced him and his assistant out of our church. And I've withdrawn, really, from our church because of that. I just couldn't look at some of them any more. People are far deeper than they appear, and some people show much more than they wish to show. When I did the six faces for Colebrook, one person I really felt so drawn to because of what I could see within her – we're still good friends. Another one I was very hesitant about doing but I had to do it because of political considerations at the time. And what I saw in those people – I mean, I'm looking at them all day for four days, I see right into their guts, I see what's in their head, I see things they don't want me to see and I see things I don't want to see sometimes too, and it's difficult not to show in the carving those things which I see. I mean, some things I want

to show, and they wouldn't be at all happy with what I'd shown. If you pose for me you can't hide. You can't hide (laughs) because I can see it.

**I'm just going to make a noise here, because there's a – it was a particular Christ, and I was confused because I think the description said that it was done for a crucifix –**

No, it wasn't.

**– but he has his arms ….. …..**

It's the welcoming Christ –

**That's right, he's a –**

– it's at St Mary's Church –

**– that's right.**

– down here, down South Road.

**But he's long and thin and his gown is just flowing out a little bit at the bottom.**

They put him on a cross, but he's meant to stand. He's welcoming you to him the way I felt welcomed.

**So he has been put on a cross?**

Yes; the original one, the priest put him on a cross. But he didn't want a crucifix, he didn't want a Christ who was (squeaking noise) – – –. He wanted – I mean, the priest there was a little bit odd, let's face it (laughs), and that – there were two cast, one which is at St Mary's and another one which is at the seminary or – there's some religious college, they have a religious exhibition once a year, it was in the last one – I left it there since then.

**And that's a bronze, is it?**

Yes. Seven hundred[8] high, six hundred high.

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[8] Millimetres. SA

**I thought the shape of that was very interesting because it didn't have any of the roundness of the abstracts. It was sort of long and gauntish and almost a bit medieval-looking.**

It's different to what I do because that one was modelled in wax –

**I read that.**

– not carved. And I can make a carving do what I want and I can't necessarily make a modelled piece do exactly what I want, so it has a different feeling to it.

**Is that something that you might do more of in future?**

No.

**You're not going to model –**

No.

**– you're not going to fiddle around with wax and so on?**

I'll work with plaster, where I model it up and then carve it back. My mind works taking little bits off; it doesn't work putting little bits on.

**We talked about that earlier.**

Yes.

**Okay, Silvio, one last thing to go: going through your boxes of papers – and, I mean, we could go on and on – but there's a wonderful poem here, *Eternal memory, for Silvio Apponyi*, written for you; and this other, very short, one from Erica Jolly, about your seals.**

(pause, rustle of paper) Oh, this was written by …..'s husband.

**….. ….. stop now, because ….. ….. ….. Okay. It's an indication, though, of the sort of effect you do have on people.**

I'm very happy that I cause that reaction in people, yes.

**Well, it's been a privilege meeting you and talking with you, too. I'm quite sure that there are lots of things I should have explored with you and perhaps if, when you look at the transcript, we might go into some other things, but thank you very much.**

Pleasure.

TAPE ENDS.