

JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: STANISLAUS RAPOTEC

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JAMES GLEESON: Stan, could you begin by telling us exactly when you were born and where?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I was born in Trieste.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: The year was thousand nine hundred thirteen.

JAMES GLEESON: Thirteen?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Thirteen.

JAMES GLEESON: And the exact date?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Trieste at that time—

JAMES GLEESON: What was the exact date of your birthday?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Fourth of October.

JAMES GLEESON: Fourth of October.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes. Trieste at that time was still part of Austrian-Hungarian Empire. As you know, there was World War No 1 starting one year later. In thousand nine hundred eighteen my parents went to the part of Yugoslavia called Slovenia, which is west-north part of Yugoslavia. About two millions of Slovenians are living there.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: The capital of that country is Ljubljana. So we settled down in Ljubljana. I got through my primary and secondary education there.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Ljubljana, of course, is—at least it was at that time—rather a very smallish town with no more than 70,000 people there. But they had a permanent opera house. I mean, a permanent opera company which was performing throughout the year with 70,000 people.

JAMES GLEESON: Goodness.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Plus a drama theatre we got functioning the same way. The town is baroque one.

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JAMES GLEESON: I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Very similar to the Salzburg in Austria.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Has the same sort of castle in the middle of the town and so on. One of the conductors of the opera house, of all things, was Mahler in thousand nine hundred eleven.

JAMES GLEESON: Mahler?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Mahler was conducting in the opera house in Ljubljana. So the place was culturally, I would say, quite up and so on, has quite a rich tradition being perhaps—as far as the position is concerned—between Vienna and Venice and such places. No wonder, I should say so. So I was brought up there in that place. My university studies, I went through them in Zagreb, which is neighbouring province, capital of the neighbouring province, Croatia.

JAMES GLEESON: What did you study at the university, Stan?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: You will be surprised. I studied economics.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I'm in the same level when it comes to art as Kandinsky. He was an economist too and he dropped economy for art. But during my studies there of course I was flirting very much with arts and parallel, yes, I was studying also history of art at the university. That was year '93. No, no, sorry, thousand nine hundred thirty-three. My studies were going on up till nearly forties, you see, so I studied for a long time due mostly to students politics. I was involved in student unions and I was secretary-general of interuniversity union of Yugoslav students, and as such I was representing the union also in international organisations of students which took a lot of time, of course. So I was a little bit late with my finishing of the studies. It didn't do me very much harm, my delay. So from that point up till the start of World War II there were only two years left, during which time I started my career in National Bank of Yugoslavia.

JAMES GLEESON: In Zagreb?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: In Split in Dalmatia, in Dalmatia.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: In '41 they mobilised me and it was January, I believe. In April, Germans attacked Yugoslavia, so the war started there. After a few weeks, of course, us Yugoslav Army collapsed.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: We were occupied by Germans and Italians. I joined straightaway underground and that underground organisation send me after a few weeks already to the Middle East. So, you know, a special mission to contact

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our own government which was already in exile, plus allied authorities including headquarter in Cairo. So I had to cross about 11 borders to come there.

JAMES GLEESON: You went by land?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I went by land, yes, via Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Syria, and so I arrived to Palestine, settled down for a while in Jerusalem and then off I went to Cairo, where I arrived in August '41. Yes. So talking about Jerusalem and Palestine and countries in Middle East, of course you can imagine what sort of impact they made on me being still a young man just out of school, full up of stories from Bible and from history. By the way, I had some jolly good teachers in history, so all those stories about the events which happened there were still pretty vivid in my mind,

JAMES GLEESON: In your mind, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So I still remember when I arrived in Jerusalem. How would I say? I was simply trembling of excitement. Since that day I got some (inaudible) I stayed for seven more years in that part of the world, you see, off and on in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and so on. So I was somehow going through two dramas, you see. One was the war itself and the other one was the reliving of history. So many important things, of course, so many important events happened there in that part of the world that one gets excited, interested and sometimes quite emotionally upset practically every day, you see. Every day you finish in yet another place where something important happened. So I must say that stay in those countries in that part of the world made a great impact on me. So don't forget that during my stay in Egypt I had to go down to Luxor too, and that places, so I had to deal with the problems of religions. In Jerusalem especially I had plenty of opportunities to study them there and, of course, during my stay in Egypt, especially in South Egypt, I got fascinated with Egyptian mythology, plus history generally. Then don't forget that during my stay there I spent a lot of time in deserts like Sinai Desert or North African deserts near Tobruk, yes, where I had plenty of time to think, meditate and so on about present and past events and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, were you painting at all at that time, or drawing?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I was all the time painting but I must say that that work was rather always on a very small scale because we were moving all the time and there was no opportunity to put an easel up or to bring in a big board on which I'm painting today. So it was all rather in form of sketches and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Was it fairly realistic representational work at that time?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: It was still rather realistic, I must say, yes. Of course, on the way out I spent many a month in Istanbul in Constantinople where I had opportunity to study more closely design and art, you see. Also I had a marvellous opportunity to stop in Central Anatolia in what is called early Christian places in (inaudible) and (inaudible) which are also very fascinating. They were to me. I should say all those things little by little rather produced an impact on me and are still stored at the back of my mine here forever, I believe.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

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STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: And which are still are inspiration and a source for my ideas, in spite of my abstract expressionism in which I am involved from the last 20 years or so.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, what art school did you go to?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I didn't go to any art school.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, didn't you?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: No, I'm the sort of fellow who somehow avoided those art schools. My art school was really, oh well, really my travels and visits to places like Venice, Vienna, Prague, Warsaw, Istanbul, and then south of Egypt, Luxor, Aswan, plus archaeology, yes, in Palestine and in Egypt again and so on visiting monasteries, visiting churches and of course then studying a little bit. As I said before, I did quite a little bit of study of history of art.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: But I was never a member of any school or so on, no.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. What made you come to Australia, and when did you come?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: To Australia in '48. The war stopped at '45.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I stayed for three more years in Egypt, in British Army. In '48 they said to me, 'Well, it's about the time we demobilise you'.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: And 'Would you kindly tell us where would you like to go?'. So I said, 'Well, if you wouldn't mind, I would like to go to England'. Well they say, 'You better think about that one because they are pretty crowded there and you would have difficulties to find a job there and so on'. In time I got a letter from a good friend of mine who was with me in army during the Middle East, a Scotsman, and he gave me a very good advice. He said, 'Don't come here. Even me, you know, I can't find a job. I had to re-join army again and become active officer now. But please take my advice and go down under to Australia. I was there', he said, 'as a student and I can help you with some addresses', because he was here on a sort of a exchange between the student and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: During his stay here in Australia he was visiting all the states, Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, and he was staying with families, you see. That was the arrangement of that exchange. So he had many of those addresses still with him and he sent me 150 of them.

JAMES GLEESON: Goodness.

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STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: He said, 'Stan, if you go there, any of those addresses which I am sending you will be I am sure of help to you'. So I finished in South Australia. I finished there mostly because after a short study of the map of Australia I found out a lot of lakes just north of Adelaide, you see, quite big lakes, Eyre lakes and so on, which on the map were painted in a beautiful blue. So I thought it would be a jolly good idea to go to Adelaide and to settle down, so that the weekend will be spent on the beautiful shores of those lakes.

JAMES GLEESON: You were in for a surprise!

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: To my amazement and disappointment I found on the very first weekend in Adelaide that there is no water in those lakes at all. So nevertheless I was very happy in Adelaide and I started to study again my economics there. I was working there in a timber yard, and beside that I started to paint and I had my first exhibition there straightaway in '53.

JAMES GLEESON: What gallery was that, Stan?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That was the Art Society Gallery. Where I am now? In Adelaide. Yes, I contacted one of those families and I must say they looked after me very well for many a year and we are still good friends. I believe that they never forgive me that I left Adelaide, which I did in '55, going for a holiday in Sydney.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: To visit some friends here and to spend a few weeks. So that holiday is still lasting somehow. I am still in Sydney. I never went back to Adelaide. In next few years I married a lovely girl. That was '61. In the same year I won the Blake Prize.

JAMES GLEESON: The Blake, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Blake Prize. In the same year I won also the *Daily Mirror*, how they call it, Waratah?

JAMES GLEESON: Waratah Festival Prize.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes. I won the prize on that painting which you showed me before, *Experiencing spring*.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah, yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That got the prize. I still remember Daniel Thomas was one of the judges beside Asher Joel and such people there and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: The one that won the Blake, was that *Meditation on Good Friday*?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That was *Meditation on Good Friday*, which is now at Macquarie University, I think, in the library there.

JAMES GLEESON: You mentioned that there was some difficulty in those days about the church accepting abstract work.

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STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Well, yes, there was to start with quite a bit of controversy going on. I still remember that the same year, or immediately year after, there was a bishop's conference in Sydney. Eric Smith, John Coburn, myself and a few others were asked to submit those paintings to a college, university college, Sydney University College. I was told that bishops were discussing the suitability of abstract art, especially in churches or in religion generally.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So I believe also that the Tasmanian bishop—I forgot his name, I think it's O'Brien or something like that—he proved to be very liberal and he appealed to the rest of the bishops that they should leave artists at peace and let them express they would like to express themselves.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Religion there or no. So but I would like to connect that controversy now and that event with my abstract painting winning Blake Prize in '61 with another event which happened about 12 years later in no lesser place than Vatican.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So Pope Paul VI decided that it's about the time the church establishes a stronger link between artists and church, and he ordered somehow a collection of paintings, works of art, which are dealing with the problems of religion in some way.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: He gave the so-called bourgeois apartment in Vatican which is around Sistine Chapel and below us the gallery. So during the last ten years of his pontificate he collected quite a number of those paintings. In '73, in June, and I think the date was 23rd of June, he personally opened that gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: You were there?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: In no less a place than Sistine Chapel in presence of millions of cardinals, bishops, and to that opening were invited all the artists who were present in Rome and who contributed to the collection. Amongst Australian artists Justin O'Brien who was present, Ray Crooke who wasn't present, and myself who was at that time in Rome too. To my amazement and surprise I got very fascinated and quite emotional about that, I found my painting hanging in room No 53, which is right beneath the altar of Sistine Chapel. The painting was hanging on the extension of the wall on which Michelangelo painted his *Last Judgement*.

JAMES GLEESON: Goodness me.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So I said, 'Gosh, how fascinating to see your painting witnessing all of a sudden such important events which for sure happened there around that particular room and around Sistine Chapel and so on.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: As a matter of fact, every conclave is really held there.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I believe all those cardinals are really living in those little rooms and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: You can imagine what sort of things the painting is witnessing today.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Stan, what is the title of your painting in the Vatican.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I beg your pardon?

JAMES GLEESON: What is the title of your painting in the Vatican?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: The title of the painting is *Corpus Christi in Seville*. It belongs to that series of my paintings which was painted after my visit to Spain. I got again very impressed there by cathedrals and by rituals, especially during the time of so-called fiestas in Spain. Don't forget that Easter time and Corpus Christi day, which is later on in June, are the most important religious event. Not only the most important but also the most colourful ones, accompanied usually with quite a lot of other—how should I call them?—performances in that particular city like Seville, Granada, Toledo. Each of them has a fiesta at that time which, of course, because of the atmosphere which they create and spectacle which they create produce also a very great impact on any outsider who happens to be there, and you can imagine how that worked on me.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So I quickly got to work on ideas connected and paintings connected with that type of experiences. So therefore I called quite a few of my paintings experiences in a particular place, you see, experience in Seville, experience in Granada, or I'm giving them a more definite title. *Corpus Christi in Seville*, or *Corpus Christi in Granada*, and sometimes emphasising that particular event was also a high mass or a procession or something (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Which of course causes quite a little bit of a problem to people who are sometimes looking at my painting and trying to see in them a procession or a high mass celebrated.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, when did you have your first show in Sydney, one-man show?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: The first show in Sydney, I think it was in Terry Clune Gallery in Potts Point.

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JAMES GLEESON: Macleay Street, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Then the next one was in Macquarie Galleries. One of the most successful one was at Hungry Horse Gallery, and another good one was later on at David Jones Gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: From the beginning in Sydney your work was abstract expressionist, was it?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: In Sydney all the time abstract expressionist. I thought it's about the time to introduce a little bit of change into my work, because I was trying to escape from old established styles. Let's call them styles of painting, yes. I believe I got very impressed again by both European and American abstract expressionist movement.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: But all the time I was also trying to escape from established patterns there, you see. I do hope that by now I introduced a few, may I call them personal contributions to the forms which are used in my abstract expressionistic work. So I do hope it's that way, but it is for other people to find out and say that I'm right.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Stan, we have three major works of yours in the Australian National Gallery collection. *The awesome Yorkminster* is one, the other is *Experience in the far west* and the third one is *Poseidon*.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That's correct.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, of those which would be the earliest, *The Experience in the Far West*?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: The earliest is *Experience in the Far West* and, you might be interested, it was selected by Sir Russell Drysdale. So was the next one, *The awesome Yorkminster*. That was from David Jones exhibition. The third one I believe was selected by the architects who were responsible for the new embassy in Washington. I believe so, I'm not too sure. By the way, *Yorkminster* was hanging for many years in Australian Embassy in Moscow. One of the ambassadors there told me, which really pleased me a lot, that it created quite a lot of interest by Russian artists who visited the embassy and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Stan, *Experience in the Far West*, how did that come about? Did you travel in the Far West?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Oh, that was another thing in my life which fascinated me a lot, was travelling around Australia. Further back I was more interested in the country and people, let's call them characters—well, to me. I developed a liking for that sort of the country. I must say I used to travel quite a lot in South Australia, north up to Flinders Ranges. I know very well my outback in New South Wales. The same is with Queensland, north and west too. So I would say I have quite a few experiences there, especially so because one of my brother-in-laws was a grazier with many relatives all around the country. So I had plenty of excuses to visit those parts of the world and stay there for quite a long time. So I

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know very well the country itself, as I know the people too. I have many, many friends all around the country in Australia.

JAMES GLEESON: So you've painted a series of pictures?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I painted a series of pictures on my experiences especially in outback, yes. That trip, for instance, from Cobar via Wilcannia to Broken Hill and then to Adelaide, they were especially interesting to me, and produced yet another great impact on me.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, when was this picture painted? Can you remember the date? I know we bought it in '63.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Well, they were mostly painted between sixties, early sixties.

JAMES GLEESON: Early sixties.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: All of them the early sixties. *The Yorkminster* was painted in '65, I believe, after my return from England of course.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So my visit in England and Scotland was again based on cathedrals.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So I travelled around that lovely country picking up my cathedrals, staying there for a week or so, having a good go on them as far as the history is concerned, architecture is concerned. Beside that, of course, I had plenty of opportunities to explore those lovely old towns which are usually around the cathedrals especially in York and especially so in Lincoln and so is the case with Winchester and Salisbury and so on. So again and again the impact of those visits was tremendous and I couldn't resist to start a series of painting which had cathedrals as subject, in spite of my abstract expressionism.

JAMES GLEESON: Where did you exhibit there, Stan? Was that at (inaudible)?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Cathedrals were exhibited in David Jones.

JAMES GLEESON: David Jones.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: And they were exhibited of course in Melbourne in South Yarra Gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: There's no note on where we acquired it from, except that we got it in 1967.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes. I think, James, I will supply you with these notes so that you can have full record of what was going on with me and with my work during the last 20, 30 thirty years here.

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JAMES GLEESON: Now, I remember *Poseidon* was also part of a series in which you (inaudible) the Greek gods, the different characters?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes. On my return from my trip to England and Scotland—that was '64, I returned in '65—on my return I stopped again in Greece and I stopped in Middle East country to revisit my old favourite places there. So what I couldn't have done before on my previous visits in Greece, for instance, I did what was my one of my great desires, was to visit the area of Mount Olympus.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That has a link with my teacher of history during my secondary education who was non-stop telling us, re-telling us, those lovely stories out of Greek mythology, you see; quarrelling of the gods, intermarrying of them and so on and so on. So that Mount Olympus was always somehow a fascinating mountain to me which I wanted to visit at one stage, what I did in '65. You wouldn't believe, I arrived there at the foot of Mount Olympus when a really good storm developed. So I could see Zeus.

JAMES GLEESON: With his thunderbolt.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes, in company of the other gods there having a good quarrel. So I got somehow idea for my next series of paintings there, right there on the spot. So I said, 'Why not to dedicate one to Greek mythology?' and use that subject as excuse for my painting.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So there is a number of my works which belong to that series which carries the names of Greek gods or anything connected with Greek mythology.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, when you work, do you start with a drawing, or do you work directly on to the painting?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: No, I never start with any drawings, with any sketches.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: My painting has to be started straight on.

JAMES GLEESON: On to the work.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes. The reason being because with any drawings or with too many sketches I usually lose the interest, number one. Number two, I believe that I lose on degree of spontaneity when it comes to work. You could be most contentious if you bring yourself to a board without any preliminary studies or preliminary sketches or drawings. Plus to that I should say I would—but that's only me, you know, James, that I do not think about that subject.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course.

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STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Or about that composition.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Or about the colour scheme which I will apply. And about a lot of other problems which are involved in a painting, well before and for a pretty long time. So I usually paint in, shall I call this bouts? Yes, in bouts.

JAMES GLEESON: Bouts, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: In bouts, yes?

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, you were talking about working up to a group of paintings at a time, and then them all pouring out in a bout of painting. But you have it in your mind what you're going to do long before you come to the painting?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Oh yes, oh yes. Don't forget, to start with, that I store in behind of my mind all those events, experiences, all those impacts about which we were talking before.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: One is, of course, collecting them and storing them. So when I decide on a series of paintings I usually take quite a bit of time, several months to concentrate on them, to think about them, to do all the planning, to fix all the preparations. The preparations, or better to say under preparations, I also understand that I must put my own life, you see, everyday life under control somehow. My place must be tidied up. My bills must be paid. Letters must be answered and all this sort of things must be put in order before I am able to start the painting. My mind must be completely free of any interferences of any outside problems which might interfere later or interfere during my painting.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Plus to that I started my work at night time usually.

JAMES GLEESON: Do you?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: After 9 o'clock when the family went to bed. Nobody telephoned any more and no friends were likely to call in any more. So I needed that peaceful time between nine and three o'clock in the morning. Painting had to be put down, yes, without any sketches and drawings 100 per cent spontaneously. Whatever developed after that first touch with brush was developing somehow in my suitcase as simple as that, as spontaneous beautifully flowing way.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I believe that engagement of your subconscious helped a lot that way, and I still believe that whatever is done with the guide of your subconscious will be automatically good, fluent and in relatively good order already.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I understand that.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So you can see perhaps in my painting that they heavily depend on that quality.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Let's call it that way. You might be interested that there are very, very few paintings which I reject or throw away because they are not good. I believe mostly thanks to that help or leaning totally on your sub-consciousness when you are working.

JAMES GLEESON: Your inner thing, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes. So therefore I prefer not to be interfered by any sketches or drawings, looking at them, what next, and so on. No.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, when you paint, it's all done at the one time. You don't go back after a few weeks and touch it again.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: No! No! No, no, no, no, no! It is all done in no more than two hours. If I can't finish a painting in two hours time, there is no painting for me. I must say they usually work out well that way for me, see. As soon as I start to think too much about them during the painting, yes, and trying to rearrange certain things or introduce something extra there, then something goes wrong and that's the end of that painting. But I must say it doesn't happen very often, you see, because I see to it that when I start up painting I am fully concentrated and that I have somehow, I would say, even an image of that future painting in my mind somehow.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes. And it's built on your experience.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That's correct.

JAMES GLEESON: All that (inaudible) experiences of a life time come pouring out.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That's correct. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Therefore, I feel a terrific vacuum as soon as I pour out all those things which I had in mind into my painting. The vacuum after I finished the painting is quite somehow, may I say even annoying and embarrassing sometime, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Because you got out of you, I simply believe, a part of your heart and with it a part of your mind too, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, a word about medium. You always work in PVA or acrylics?

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STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Oh, I used to work in oil too, but I dropped oil in fifties already.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I think my exhibition in Adelaide was still in oil. But since '56, '57, I'm non-stop on acrylic.

JAMES GLEESON: Acrylic. You find that absolutely sympathetic to the speed at which you work?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I found out that acrylic is serving me and giving some qualities which I couldn't get out of oil, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I wouldn't like to degrade oil but it is as simple as that. Acrylic is offering some fresh technical, I should say technical quality or qualities which are connected with technique, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: You see. I could never get that lovely flow out of a paint if I would paint in oil, for instance, you see, what I could very easily get out with acrylic.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, you work nearly always on hardboard?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I work on hardboard. The reason for that is of course that acrylic wouldn't stand a vertical position of my board or a canvas, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So I paint everything—

JAMES GLEESON: Horizontally?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: On a board horizontally.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah, I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Another reason would be that I need, or better to say my painting depend, they depend a lot on washes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I'm really flooding my board with a wash before I start. I paint all the time wet, on wet.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah, I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: It must be wet all during those two, three hours when I am painting, so you can imagine how quick I must be in my decisions.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes. Otherwise if it starts to dry and so on produces the havoc and loses a lot of those fine qualities which are so open and responsible for a good painting. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So the flow of the paint is all the time very important to me. So therefore I must be quick and I work that way, of course.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it a gesso ground that you work on?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I always paint on a hardboard which is prepared with gesso. I put three, four coats of gesso, which is always much, much better ground than let's say white paint or any undercoats which are recommended by some teachers. I don't know why. But gesso, especially the American gesso, Liquitex, is a superb material, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: On which I heavily depend now.

JAMES GLEESON: So it's Liquitex gesso.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: That you ground.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: By the way, I'm using also boards now for my drawings which I introduced in last few years, you see. So I draw on boards which is prepared with gesso rather than on paper. I get out some lovely qualities that way too for my drawings.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, when the painting is finished and dry, do you coat it, put a surface on it at all to protect it, or do you leave it just as it is?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I prefer to leave them as they are. I don't think they really need any varnishing. Because any varnish, even if it is a matt varnish, will produce some sort of reflections, in case you will hang that painting in a place opposite of a window or any light objects there and so on. Plus to that, yes, and without varnish painting retains a lovely chalky, matt, opaque surface.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: What I do very often, at least once per year, I wash my paintings.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, what, with just water?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: To get rid of dust which collects, you see. It depends, it could be varnished. Of course, if any cleaning involved, you would have to give it to a restorer and he would have to remove varnish and so on and a lot of things could happen that way.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: My way you get rid of dirt, especially dust, with simply putting a painting which is executed in acrylic into garden and I hose it with the garden hose.

JAMES GLEESON: Really?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Yes, and get straight away a fresh look. You get rid of dust, if there is any there, especially let's say any dirt besides dust which is a little bit more difficult to remove.

JAMES GLEESON: Like grease?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: You can still do it with a bit of sponge. You can apply even soap to get rid of it and so on. Nothing will happen. The older is acrylic painting the harder it is and the more waterproof it is. Beside that, if you would like to varnish such a painting, you would have to do it after quite a few weeks of time, you see. Preferably six, eight weeks after that acrylic dried totally, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: But I take it that of the three we've got, none were ever varnished?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: None was varnished. I don't think anybody needs to varnish them.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I think they would be much better off that way. But the curators should be instructed somehow, especially by old practitioners as I am, that paintings could be safely washed as simple as that with hose, hosing it with the garden hose. I did it once in Perth, by the way, Perth National Gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I notice my painting there got very dirty and I suggested to them that we should wash them straightaway in the court of the gallery there. So they panicked when I suggested that.

JAMES GLEESON: It sounds (inaudible).

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: And wouldn't allow me to do such a thing. They said, 'Oh ho, painting is not yours anymore, so we must be very careful about this. Oh, no, no, no'. So I said, 'All right, what can I do?'. But a few weeks later I came back and curator wasn't there and I asked another young man there to show me my paintings because I would like to check something and so on. I would like to check it in daylight there out in the court of the gallery. So when they brought the painting there and removed themselves inside the building, I got my garden hose there and quickly washed my painting. It was dry in a few minutes, straightaway, and I didn't tell them anything about that, but they noticed the painting looks much fresher now. So I remember that a year or two later I informed the curator and suggested to him that in future any acrylic painting could be washed.

JAMES GLEESON: Safely washed.

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STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Cleaned that way, safely. By the way, it will help them a lot, you see, because dust is quite an enemy of paint, you see. The other one who was objecting very much to such cleaning was—who was the man who was responsible for laboratory in—

JAMES GLEESON: Brustead?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Brustead, yes. He wouldn't let me do. Well, I said, 'Then if you wouldn't let me do, at least let me show how to clean that dirty spot here'. So I got to the water and a bit of soap and I cleaned that out, and after a few minutes I showed him, you see. 'But how did you do it'? 'I did it with water. I told you before and I suggested to you before that you should have done it with simply hosing it, you see, but you wouldn't'. He didn't do it then later on. He wouldn't.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, you always work with the panel flat on the ground?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I always work on my panel horizontally on two short legs, you see, with support.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes,

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: You see. So you can imagine I must be for two hours with my back down.

JAMES GLEESON: Bent over.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Which isn't such a easy thing for a man in my age. But perhaps it's a good exercise too because my back is in somehow perfect order. You never know, it could be because of that.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, obviously on those big scales you use big brushes, broad brushes?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Oh, my brushes could be anything from one inch to six, seven inches.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah ha.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Even eight inches.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I have a quite a collection of brushes which, by the way, all of them must be old, worn out brushes. I would never touch a new brush. Before I do I prefer to get brushes from, let's say, house painters and so on, which are already worn out.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: And then I clean them properly and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

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STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: And using for my own painting. You see, because I found out that a new brush, for instance, is too flexible again you see. I need a particular degree of flexibility, you see. Not that one which is so soft.

JAMES GLEESON: Something I was going to ask you. Stan, when you're preparing to paint and you've thought it out in your mind and you've got it all, do you prepare the colours in advance so that they're already available for you?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: No, no, no, no, no. The colours are brought out, of course a few basic colours which I'm going to use in my painting, they are all there ready to be used, yes. But I'm not mixing each colour which I will use especially and so on. I just get with my brush into the box where a particular colour is and the same brush with already one colour on I pushed into another colour to get the sort of mixture which will come out through millions of little accidents when you are making your stroke and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: So the chance element does play a part in it?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: There you are.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: There you are. That's yet another thing which helps a lot in paintings because you get a sort of pleasant surprise when you see the result.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: It's not so accidental, you know, because the accident is planned really.

JAMES GLEESON: It's controlled.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: It's controlled, you see. But fascinating colour mixtures and tones of colours come out that way. By the way, it also depends how much water I have on that brush already, you see, because my stroke must be somehow going on in a very smooth and fluent way, yes? I can get that fluency and smoothness of the movement only if I have enough water on brush already, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Yes, I see.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So what I usually do is I make sure that brush is first of all wet. Then I go for my paint and then I put brush and paint again into the water, you see. Plus to that don't forget that board is already flooded with a wash.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So it is flooding and flooding and water all along, you see, all the time. The control of this things, yes, the control of qualities which could be obtained that way is quite a fascinating experience in itself, you see, and quite thrilling to me. Painting that way is I would say quite a thrilling experience to me, you see, because so many things happen during my stroke

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making there and so on. To control them, and my boards are not small, you know, it's usually six foot by four foot six, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So you have to control quite an area in a very short time and quite a strain on your mind, I should say.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Concentration, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Concentration, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Stan, I think that covers it very well, unless you've got something else you'd like to add to the tape.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Well, at the moment not, except to remind you that it's not very long ago I had an exhibition at Holdsworth Gallery, went off very well. I'm very sorry you didn't see it.

JAMES GLEESON: No, I missed that.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: But you better get Nancy Borlase criticism, you will be very pleased.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I read that, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: You will be very pleased to see the result of that exhibition, which was the biggest one I ever had, I think. Mrs Scheinberg got me all the rooms at my disposal during my preparations or not (inaudible). As I was half way through finishing my painting for that exhibition she notified me that after all we agreed that I will have all three rooms, not only one. So I had to alter my plans and to start work on my ideas for another ten paintings at least and so on, and what I did in a relatively short time. Because of the pressure spontaneity worked in a much better way, you know. I think I work very well under pressure somehow. I found out in my life that whatever you are doing under pressure it somehow comes out better. As simple as that, comes out better for me. It works that way.

JAMES GLEESON: Maybe all that pressure builds up and it comes out in a great release?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Could be very easy. Could be very easy. Could be very easy.

JAMES GLEESON: Thank you very much, Stan.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Pleasure.

JAMES GLEESON: Stan, something else has come up. When you came to Sydney you settled, I believe, in Victoria Street. Is that right?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: At the very start I settled down, do you remember that Phillip Street Studio which Sheila MacDonald (inaudible). I had a studio there for

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quite a while. I was painting happily there but later on I shifted down to Victoria Street, No 44 I still remember. Little by little I obtained there. I started with one room. Then I got two and three and finally I finished with the whole house, which was shared at one stage by John Passmore, Bob Hughes, Leonard Hessing and John Olsen.

JAMES GLEESON: Goodness.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: They all had for a short time studios in my house there. But at that time, and that was '59 or early sixties when I arrived to Victoria Street.

JAMES GLEESON: Who else was living there?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Sali Herman was already there. Russell Drysdale was brought to that district by me. I got him a flat there right away which was owned by Mrs Clune, by the way.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah yes, yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Then John Olsen, Billy Rowels, Peter Upward, Clem Meadmore, and on top of that Laurie Thomas was just around the corner.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: So you can imagine what sort of life was going on there all the time.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Exchange of ideas, exchange of visits, exchange of gossips, plotting.

JAMES GLEESON: This was in the sixties?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: That was early sixties, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Early sixties, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Artists prospered slowly. They moved to more, let's say, more well doing suburbs like Vaucluse, (inaudible) or Paddington became more fashionable. Leonard Hessing moved there. Russell Drysdale, Russell Drysdale, where he went?

JAMES GLEESON: Rose Bay, was it?

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: He went down to (inaudible) to Bouddi Farm from there. Sali Herman went to Avalon.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: John Olsen went to Watson's Bay. Billy Rowels went to Paddington, Leonard Hessing to Paddington, Meadmore to United States,

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Upward to London. That was the end of Victoria Street. No worry, but it was a fascinating period I believe in, let's call it history of art in Sydney, and that period of early sixties was quite important, I should say. A very lively one, and a lot of jolly good exhibitions went on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: I believe some sort of revival of arts altogether as far as even Australia is concerned, you see. Of course, it was also the start of the confrontation with Antipodeans down in Melbourne.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: You might remember that manifesto they issued.

JAMES GLEESON: That's right.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: It was mostly against the movements which flourished in Victoria Street at that time, you see. How they came to reach that manifesto I would never understand really. How a group of artists could bring themselves to the point to dictate to the rest of the artist what to paint and how to paint, I really can't follow that one, you see. I can't. They managed to say as much in that manifesto, you know. So that was in short the story of Victoria Street, yes, which I must emphasise and repeat once more, I believe it was a very important era as far as the art is concerned in Australia, especially Sydney.

JAMES GLEESON: Thank you very much, Stan.

STANISLAUS RAPOTEC: Pleasure.