



---

## Yale University Library Digital Collections

<b>Title</b>	[Transcript of interview of Naum Gabo by Gunnar Jespersen]
<b>Creator</b>	Gabo, Naum, 1890-1977, Jespersen, Gunnar
<b>Date</b>	Undated
<b>Rights</b>	The use of this image may be subject to the copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) or to site license or other rights management terms and conditions. The person using the image is liable for any infringement.
<b>Container information</b>	Box 12   Folder Jespersen, Gunnar
<b>Generated</b>	2021-02-22 07:37:17 UTC
<b>Terms of Use</b>	<a href="https://guides.library.yale.edu/about/policies/access">https://guides.library.yale.edu/about/policies/access</a>
<b>View in DL</b>	<a href="https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2055173">https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2055173</a>

---

Conversation with  
Søren Jørgensen, Danish art  
critic

I am asking Naum Gabo, what he and his pupils worked with in the workshop.

We made sculptures for festivals held for the revolution and all kinds of national celebrations. We decorated streets, marked places and squares. Many of the sculptures were made of wood and were of course only meant to be temporary works of art. I often wish today that some of them still existed. But they have been destroyed.

Some of my sculptures have been destroyed in quite a different way. They were destroyed by my family. During the revolution my family had escaped together with the White Army. But when conditions were normal again, they returned. In Stalin's time my family destroyed the sculptures I had left behind. They were burnt, because one was afraid of arrest. I understand them. Three of my friends from the constructivist movement were shot.

How did your artist-comrads get on?

Most of them emigrated, but not all of them. In 1927 I met Malevitch in Germany. He said, that he would return home, because his family was in Russia and because he had received some alarming letters. He told me frankly that he returned home in order to die. He left his works and his manuscripts with Hans von Riesen in Bremen. Those are the ones we can look at today at the Stedelijk Museum and at many other museums.

→ Do you think this published in Danish could do anybody harm over there? Probably not, but if you prefer to alter or strike out please do so.

Ah.

↓ I think this is just  
marvellous but don't correct it  
if you feel like it

"One has to improve ones ideas" he says. "This is why I go around for a long time dreaming about a new thing. Perhaps in the end it will have the right appearance. But once I start working on a sculpture it must not take too long. Of course I realize, that a constructivist sculpture cannot be accomplished in the twinkling of an eye. But it has to go fast, so that my vision of the sculpture does not disappear. Therefore it has to go down on paper as quickly as possible.

When a composer composes a sonata, he first hears it inside him and when I make a sculpture it first appears in my mind's eye as a complete picture. Afterwards I make the details. When it comes to details one begins to choose.

As a sculpture is a three-dimensional object I make many sketches in order to work on it from all possible angles. The sketches are made into some very fragile models of paper, carton and plastic, 10 - 20 cm high. The idea is, that my basic vision is closely adhered to and that the models contain the details. Afterwards I make the sculpture in its full size, but every sculpture has certain limitations, a limited space, which it must not surpass. If I shall say how big this space should be I always ask my intuition. Every sculpture requires a certain kind of space and hard and fast rules cannot be given in advance. But it is like that: Whilst a naturalistic artist has a definite shape to turn to, a constructivist has to rely on his inner visions. May I tell you a story? When Solomon R. Guggenheim had bought "Linear Construction number one", the architect Frank Lloyd Wright came along. He picked up the sculpture with his hands, lifted it up, turned it around in the air and said: "the ellipse is wrong".

I got quite angry about the treatment he had given my sculpture and said very quietly: "I make my own rules". This made an impression on Wright. This was how he worked himself. But we don't of course work like mathematicians, because we know, that rules can kill the movement of the ellipse. This is why I fight against the ordinary rules and norms. Everybody must make his own rules." Naum Gabo says that he does not believe in beauty in the ordinary sense of the word.

"I believe in a certain co-ordination of shapes, the relations of which appear in harmony with the surrounding world. Such coordinations can be found in many things, even in the simplest objects which surround us. For example in a beautifully shaped glass or bottle.

If my sculptures give people a feeling of having received an answer or a solution or a feeling of satisfaction, I feel that my efforts are justified. Then I feel that I have made a contribution towards enriching human existence. My sculptural aim is to arrive at an organism which nature could have created, but for one reason or other did not.

- 2 -

"But how did it all start, where did the sculptures come from?"  
"This is not difficult to answer. All art is influenced by the time we live in and I grew up in a time, when one realized that we are not just placed upon this earth, but are in the centre of a mysterious universe. 50 years ago, when air travel had just begun and the conquest of space had just commenced, the problem did not stand out as clearly. But I felt that I could not remain neutral. It pressed in on me from all sides. Afterwards one has to remember that Einstein was not the only one who thought of it - science was engrossed in it and one could not avoid being influenced by the technical development. Straight from the beginning I have tried to express space with my sculpture. Space has become an experience, an expression of myself in my work."