

Stories Project. ACC 54.
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

Frances Hynes is an artist. She received her master's degree from New York University (NYU). While at NYU, she participated in a Robert Rauschenberg choreographed performance, *Outskirts*, at the Loeb Student Center on March 7, 1957. The performance was part of an event entitled *Body*, coordinated by Hynes's professor, art historian, Irving Sandler.

Transcription of phone interview with Frances Hynes conducted by David White, Senior Curator, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, on July 8, 2020. Reviewed and edited by the speakers November 2020.

Frances Hynes [FH]: My name is Frances Hynes, and I'm an artist, a painter. And I live in the house I grew up in, which is in Queens, New York. My first real introduction to the New York art world, I guess, was in college. I went to St. John's University [Queens, New York]. Then I went to NYU [New York University] for my master's. And Irving Sandler was a really wonderful teacher (at NYU) and sent us to a lot of galleries and different events in the city. And sometime after that (1976–78), I was selected to have a studio at PS1, which is now PS1 MoMA [Queens, New York]. At that time, it was called the Institute for Art and Urban Resources. And then it was PS1, I think they called it PS1 Contemporary Arts Center. And now it's PS1 MoMA. And I was part of the National Studio Program. And actually, at that time, Susan Weil had a studio there, and she was at one point married to Robert Rauschenberg and they had son, who I met, Christopher [Rauschenberg].

And, I think we both had two years at PS1, and then with a group of other artists, most of them had been at PS1, we started a new group that we called Independent Studios 1, and it was right in the same Long Island City neighborhood. And that existed for thirty-eight years until 2016, when the building was sold. And we got a very ambitious landlord who wanted to make the building updated, and very slick. Let's put it that way. It had been one of these old lofts that nothing was ever done to. Anyway, he wanted all the artists out.

So, right about that time, I had bought the house that I grew up in. My dad had passed away and I'm here now. And I'm happy to say I was able to make a studio here for myself, so I didn't need to commute anymore. And I don't need to worry about high rents in Long Island City and other places where artists are. So, that's a little background.

David White [DW]: That's a wonderful story.

FH: And I was always, I must say I was very lucky from the beginning. There was a gallery called Poindexter, in uptown Manhattan, and she [Elinor Poindexter] showed [Willem] de Kooning, [Richard] Diebenkorn, [Robert] De Niro and, oh, I can't remember who else. She had worked for Charles [Egan], I forgot his last name. He had a gallery, and she worked there and then formed her own, Poindexter Gallery. I might think of his name, but I can't right now. And then . . .

DW: Is that Charlie Egan?

FH: Yes, Charlie Egan.

DW: Right.

FH: She had worked for Egan, and he ended up in Rome, I think. So Elinor Poindexter showed my work and when she retired, she recommended my work to Terry Dintenfass. Dintenfass showed a lot of American artists, [Arthur] Dove and oh, I can't think of who else. [Robert] Gwathmey. Sidney Goodman was one of her favorites. But she had the Arthur Dove estate, and I saw some wonderful works when I was there. And she showed my work until about 1995 when she retired. And I started showing with June Kelly Gallery in SoHo, and now I'm working more with Phyllis Stigliano Art Projects, and a gallery up in Maine [Elizabeth Moss Galleries]. And let's see what else . . .

DW: That's a very, very nice history.

FH: Thank you. And I've also done a lot of teaching. I did a lot of visiting artist stuff out of state, and overseas: Illinois, Michigan, Finland, Ireland, Memphis, Tennessee, etc. And also a good part of the time I taught at LaGuardia Community College in Queens. So, I'm Queens-based. I've always been based in Queens.

DW: Well, tell me about Irving Sandler's class.

FH: All right. So, yes, that was 1967. When I finished at St. John's (1966) I worked teaching in the NYC School System (which was very, very difficult) just long enough to save enough money to go back to NYU and get a master's.

FH: So, I was in Sandler's class called "Art Since 1945." I had a lot of good teachers there. They had a lot of good painters teaching there at that time. I remember a class with Fred Mitchell as well. He passed away recently, and he had a studio on Coenties Slip [New York]. He used to invite us there. It was demolished, and now it's all kinds of high rise, corporate stuff.

DW: But a very important address for a lot of important artists.

FH: Yes, it was, and I think he had three floors in a loft building. He used to give parties and they were always amazing and interesting. He'd have models and dancers, and there would be people drawing, and he was a great person. And never pushed himself at all, but a really, really fine artist and under known. I wish he had more recognition, Fred Mitchell.

But about Irving Sandler's class, okay. It was a small class. I remember it was only about twelve people, and we sat at these long tables, or maybe two long tables put together, maybe six people on each side. And Sandler was just so excited about everything that was going on in New York: Tenth Street galleries and oh, the people that he mentioned, John Giorno, and Al Held, and Les Levine. I'd forgotten about him until you mentioned him. And I'm probably forgetting lots of others too, but it was very much a class where he sent you out there to shows or even took you to different places, to meet artists. I remember he sent us to Al Held's loft to see a painting that was

too big to get out of the loft. And he sent us to Park Place Gallery on LaGuardia Place. I think I saw [Mark] di Suvero's work there and [Ronald] Bladen's, etc.

So, the class was very exciting. I looked forward to it. And at some point, he started telling us about this Robert Rauschenberg performance (*Outskirts*) that was going to happen (at Loeb Student Center) and he asked us if anyone would like to volunteer to be part of the performance. [Robert Rauschenberg, *Outskirts*, Body, Loeb Student Center, New York University, March 7, 1967. Performance series organized by Jon Gibson, sponsored by the N.Y.U. Education Department. Coordinated by Irving Sandler. Set included projection of Rauschenberg's film *Canoe* (1966).]



Photo reproduction of a poster, showing John Giorno, Les Levine, and Robert Rauschenberg, for Three Events, an evening of performances including Rauschenberg's *Outskirts* (1967), at the Loeb Student Center, New York University, March 1967. Robert Rauschenberg papers. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Creator: Les Levine.

So, I was interested and excited, and I remember the rehearsal. We were all under these sheets, and the review mentioned, (Phyllis Stigliano told me about the Perrault review in the *Village Voice* [John Perrault, "No Boundaries," *Village Voice* (New York), March 16, 1967, pp. 10–11.]) that our heads were sticking out of the sheets. And I only vaguely remembered that after she said that. I do remember being under the sheet. And I remember at the rehearsal, Rauschenberg came over to me and he said, "Be much more fluid, like the water, or like the waves." I think I was a little too stiff.

DW: This is he, Bob Rauschenberg, you're saying?

FH: Yes, Bob Rauschenberg. Yes. I remember he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "Try to be more fluid, more rhythmical." So, I tried that, and right now I'm dancing around the room, because I'm better at this now than I was then. (Tai Chi practice.) All right, so that was the rehearsal. And then there was a performance. I only remember one rehearsal. And at the performance, I remember more than one sheet, maybe three of them. And then, of course, I'm

part of this, so I don't have a sense of the whole. I do remember a balcony with people looking down. And Rauschenberg may have been on the balcony projecting the film?

DW: Right.

FH: And then I guess the audience participated too. (Everyone was just part of the whole.) So, I wonder how many people had a sense of the whole thing. There was a balcony, as I recall, with people up on the balcony. I hope I'm remembering this right. And I remember something being projected on these sheets, and I do have a vague memory of a canoe image at some point, that I got a glimpse of.

DW: I think Rauschenberg, interestingly enough, did not do a lot of film work, considering how adventuresome he was in every aspect of creativity. But there is a film called *Canoe* (1966), which was a found film, which he altered by editing. And so, I'm sure that that must've been the film.

FH: I guess it was (*Canoe*). Yes. And now, I read on your website (Rauschenberg Foundation) about all these famous dancers, like Trisha Brown, and I don't remember who else, I know the names now, but I don't think I had ever heard of them then. And I don't even remember Irving Sandler telling us anything about them. And they performed in *Outskirts*. I knew Rauschenberg, of course, I knew his work and I admired his work. Oh, and this is another little aside I forgot. I was in the Art in Embassies Program early on (in the 1970's).

DW: Yeah.

FH: And now I'm included in it again, they just contacted me and asked me if they could borrow a couple of things. (Three paintings are going to Belgrade.) But, back in time, at some point they (Art in Embassies) had an anniversary celebration for the program in Washington. And I went down for it, and Rauschenberg was . . . I think he was the keynote speaker. So, I briefly met him there.

DW: Well, I know he was involved with that program, and that he lent works to various embassies around the world. And then he also did a poster.

FH: Oh, did he?

DW: . . . or a print for the Art in Embassies program.



Robert Rauschenberg
Domicile (Art in Embassies), 1996
Lithograph
41 x 27 1/8 inches (104.1 x 68.9 cm)
From an edition of 50, published by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, for the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies, Washington, D.C.
Printed by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip
RRF 96.E011

FH: Oh, okay. I didn't know that, or I forgot it. So, yes, that was the second time that I met him. And then actually something else . . . go ahead.

DW: Not to interrupt, but I'm just wondering how Irving Sandler . . . It's interesting that he was able to invite people to participate.

FH: You mean, from the class?

DW: Right, because you had contact with Rauschenberg, and Rauschenberg said, "fine," or it was something that was just a surprise to Rauschenberg and the more the merrier?

FH: Yes. I think they did need more people, maybe Sandler was told to recruit people? And when I think of my role, I always thought of it as insignificant, underneath the sheet. Phyllis (Stigliano) said to me, "Maybe there are photographs of you." And I said, "Phyllis, I doubt it. I was under the sheet." But she thought it was very important. I really don't know, maybe Sandler and Rauschenberg planned to use students in the performance from the beginning?

DW: Well, interesting that you think of it as insignificant, at the same time Rauschenberg . . .

FH: I don't mean his performance. I mean my part in it.

DW: Right, I understand that. But I think that the fact that he is giving you specific directions on how to be moving under the sheet, so considering it insignificant . . .

FH: Yeah, that's interesting. Of course, I'm sure he thought every part was important.

DW: Movement, so . . .

FH: It was, yes. I think he paid close attention to what was happening and you know, what he would like to happen. So . . .

DW: I may be misquoting him, but he said something like, “I tend to see everything.”

FH: Oh really? Oh. He was an amazing innovative artist, departing from traditional media.

DW: The more I hear about him his remark carries through to no matter what he was involved with.

FH: And here’s one other thing I just remembered, not directly related to that, but at some point when we were at the studios (Independent Studios), it must’ve been the eighties, Susan Weil did a set design for . . . I know it was at the Joyce Theater. I think he (Rauschenberg) had something to do with that. You know, they had a good relationship until he died, but you know . . .

DW: Very much so. They were divorced early on but they stayed lifelong friends for sure.

FH: Yes, they did.

DW: I don’t know anything about that Sue Weil set at the Joyce, but that’d be interesting to follow up on that.

FH: Yeah. I don’t know if he had anything to do with it or maybe it was somebody like Trisha Brown. I remember it was a dance performance and that Susan Weil did the sets and of course I went and enjoyed it and that’s that.

DW: I’ll have to look at it for sure. This is wonderfully informative about a performance that I was unfamiliar with.

FH: Well, thank you. I’m glad I could add any small thing to the archives.

DW: It’s much appreciated this whole series of what we call “Stories,” which are people’s recollections about specific events, such as exactly what you’ve been speaking of. So, it’s just what we’re looking for and thank you very, very much.

FH: Oh, you’re very welcome. And I may remember more if I do, I’ll email you.

DW: Well, that’s the way it works. We’ll send a transcript of this recorded conversation. And then if you have things that you wish you had not said, that can be deleted, if you want to add things, you’re certainly welcome to do that.

FH: All right, thanks David. What’s interesting to me about my own head when I talk to somebody like you or talk to Phyllis, is that things that you forgot come back.

DW: Isn't that interesting how that works?

FH: Yeah. It's like a little jog to memory. I think my mind is pretty good, but we can't possibly remember everything.

DW: Right. The fact that you say you're not sure if your heads were through the sheets or not. You would think you would, but then decades go past and it is hard to remember.

FH: I kind of remember being under the sheet and holding it, not tight, but kind of holding it and there must have been people holding or placed in the other three corners. And you had to like bend down and stand up. And I think Phyllis said, "The article says we were crawling around on the floor." Well, I think sometimes you went down on your knees and maybe crawled for a little while and then you stood up, if you can visualize, to make the sheet kind of move.

DW: Sure.

FH: Yes. And I don't know, I'm wondering now, is there someone under there, like maybe a dancer who was really a dancer, trained as a dancer, kind of guiding us. That I do not remember. Were we told to wear light or dark clothes or jeans, I don't remember?

DW: Well, it's interesting that that cast included Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer.

FH: And you know, now I know of those names, but at that time I don't even remember Irving Sandler mentioning them, although he may have, and it didn't mean anything to me. They must've been very young. Am I right?

DW: Sure, yes indeed.

FH: Yeah. Maybe not much older than I was.

DW: Well, this is wonderful. So, I thank you.

FH: Well thank you. I enjoyed remembering all this.

Addition from Frances Hynes via email, November 1, 2020:

This 1967 Performance choreographed by Robert Rauschenberg was called '*OUTSKIRTS*'. I've always thought of myself on the 'outskirts' of the NY Art World, never part of it. I went to galleries regularly and kept up with the latest trends, went to talks and panel discussions, but I always sat in the back and just listened. I always felt on the edge, doing my own thing. And at some point I titled one of my paintings 'Outskirts.'

Addition from Frances Hynes via email, November 2, 2020:

I remember a flyer to announce *OUTSKIRTS* and I think I kept one for a while, but I don't seem to have it anymore. I vaguely remember that it had the names of the dancers on it. And there was the John Perrault review in the *Village Voice*.

I also remembered that Elinor Poindexter, who was my first art dealer had a piece by Robert Rauschenberg. As I recall it was gold leaf and framed in a deep box. It was maybe 14" or 16" square. Ellie told me that he told her that it would always at least be worth the price of the gold. And she laughed. (Ellie Poindexter was great fun and a wonderful story teller.) (Actually it's an idea that has always stayed with me, and I have a vision of the piece.)



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (*Gold Painting*), ca. 1953
Gold leaf and collage on fabric
16 3/4 x 16 1/2 x 3 3/4 inches (42.5 x 41.9 x 9.5 cm)
Private collection
RRF 53.025