

## RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Hopps, Walter / Personal Interview, 1991

LET'S DONT GET TOO MUCH INTO INLAUS

**Robert Rauschenberg Interview by Walter Hopps**  
Captiva Island, Florida  
January 18 - 20, 1991  
Notes by Susan Davidson

January 18, 1991

RR: Donald Droll was Best Man at our wedding, which was Sue's choose, not mine. We meet in chorus at Black Mountain. I was the only one who could hit a clear A sharp. Droll was from Grosse Point, Michigan and he had the idea that I was after Sue's money. I choose my sister [Janet] as Sue's Maiden of Honor. We sort of switched roles in that regard. I hung out with Pat [Pearman] until the last minute; I was so nervous. We had strawberries dripped in chocolate. I should not have worn a white suit, but I like white - Sue's parent's objected.

RR: White Paintings were done [completed] when Ellsworth [Kelly] back from France.

WH: Ellsworth had a show at Betty's [Parsons] in ca. 1956. Did you see it?

RR: No. He came to the studio...He was furious that I had stolen his idea. John [Cage] told him where I lived...no one knew.

WH: Were you with [Charles] Egan up till the moment you went to Leo [Castelli]?

RR: When Ellie [Poindexter] sued for the phone bill, I left at that time. Left him [Egan] in '55. **EGAN GALLERY**

WH: So the period between 1955 and 1956, you had no one [gallery representation]?

RR: That's right.

WH: Egan opens in 1946 or '47. I've been in contact with his first wife and we are working on getting to him. She told me that one day, Charlie gathered all his papers up and just set them out on the sidewalk and left them there.

RR: He probably went to Schraft's - his favorite place. He was a sweetheart. There was never anyone at the gallery. First time I saw Kline was there - there was no there and it was getting dark. The images were climbing the wall.

WH: Ever see any Bill de Kooning work there?

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 1

FEB 4 '91 13:03 FROM ROCI/CAPTIVA TO RR NYC PAGE.001

Copyright restrictions apply.  
FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY. DO NOT DUPLICATE OR PUBLISH WITHOUT PERMISSION.  
Contact archives@rauschenbergfoundation.org for reproduction requests

RR: Yes. I knew [Jack] Tworikov. He shared a studio with Bill. [This is in New York City on ~~with 4th Street~~ or 4th Avenue]. I climbed wall and took photographs [of paintings in studio - NB: photographs extant] I remember once Bill would scream at Elaine. Did you know Elaine? "Don't take all my cadmium red!"

WH: Egan was located on 57th Street. George Mellon Poindexter was a patron of Egan's. He bought Klines out of first exhibition there. Artists weren't getting money for sales.

RR: It was Charlie's idea (and its fair too) that if he sold someone else's work then they got the ~~same~~ benefit. It's not a cruel idea.

WH: Did Charlie want money from the Weil's [Sue Weil's parents]

RR: ~~Shakes head~~ Yes. I DIDNT KNOW THEM OR HIM THAT WELL

WH: "Here comes everybody." Weil's had a James Joyce obsession. Had the Weil's bought anything from Charlie?

RR: Charlie was certain Sue was the artist in the family. Don't know if he proposed a financial situation or not. They [Sue's parents] did their best to convince me I was an inferior artist...and I've tried to ~~be~~ that ever since.

BE

*Discussion about RR painting, Barge and that it will go to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., but not before stopping off at the Meyerhoff's in Maryland while ROCI exhibition is on view at NGA.*

WH proposes his idea that he wants to get Minutia out of National Gallery and have it on view - grandly - at the Guggenheim Museum when it re-opens in Fall, 1992. RR ~~loves this idea~~ BUT IT IS TOO FRAGILE TO TRAVEL

RR: Met Jasper [Johns] at Marlboro Book Store with Suzie Gablik. Sari Dienes wanted them to meet. ~~Jasper not interested~~

WH: How long before you went to his studio?

RR: Years later [every thing was years in those days]. The sunlamp I was working with exploded in my eyes. This was on Fulton Street [Studio]. Jasper came over and the door was locked. I couldn't see a thing. Somehow managed to throw the keys out the window and Jasper took me to the hospital. I got a codeine prescription. It was about 2 am and we walked all over looking for a pharmacy opened at that hour. Jasper said "you hang onto this parking meter." So, I just did that. And he went and found the pharmacy. You just cannot forget somebody's kindness because I didn't know anybody.

MAKING BLUE PRINTS



WH: Sari Dienes. Where did you meet her?

RR: I worked as a janitor and artist (in that order) at Stable [Gallery]. I met Suzie Gablik at Black Mountain and met Sari through Suzie. Suzie was about 16 years old at Black Mountain. Francine du Plessix was also there [Black Mountain] - she was the only girl to carry a pocket book to class.

WH: Who did you meet at the [Art Students] League? Knox Martin was one of them.

RR: He was the hero of the whole Art Students League.

WH mentions Jerry Hertowsky. RR doesn't recall him at all and then remembers he was a boyfriend of Sue's and that he sided with Sue at the time of the divorce.

WH: How did Jasper meet Jack Tworokov?

RR: On his own. Who is the most abdominal art critic in America? <sup>ABDOMINAL</sup> Everyone thinks for a minute and makes a few suggestions. When I came back to New York City from North Africa with \$3.00 in my pocket, he was dating my ex-wife. He turns out to be Hilton Kramer. Sue and I still had a beautiful relationship. She was living on Upper East Side. We had moved to 94th [96th] Street, to a ground floor apartment. Sue's mother had had alot of miscarriages and she had didn't like the idea of a fifth floor walk-up.

NEEDS WORK

January 19, 1991

WH opens conversation with RR's time in Kansas City and the window designs he did there.

RR: There was a Frank Lloyd Wright designed department store and I had a friend who was a classmate of mine [at Kansas City Art Institute] who worked there. She was pregnant and was scared that her boss would fire her. Since I needed a job, I told you that I would help her for a few weeks. She was fired anyway after the boss returned and saw my windows.

WH: Didn't you do some with bales of hay and barnyard materials? What else did you use?

RR: I was just trying to protect her for her job while she had her baby. I needed to make enough money to go to France. I also did movies for intermissions. I worked for Nellie Dawn Fashions. You know animated

DONN

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 3



equipment used for Christmas parties. I made the props, such as Donald Duck on a bicycle.

WH: Bob, where was the *Automobile Tire Print* made?

RR: On Fulton Street. ~~John [Cage]~~ I spent three days pasting down type-writer paper. It rained that day and I told John "we still have to go on." The paper got wet. ~~I~~ used library paste to hold to together - 20 feet of paper altogether. It was the same Model A that Cage drove down to Black Mountain.

TYPE WRITER

WH: How did you make the print?

RR: ~~I~~ poured paint on street and drove through it. It was a Sunday. Since it was raining, the paper stuck to the street. Indian Prayer Wheels. The second tire was inked too and we went over the same track. Nobody ever got more out a Model A than that. I had to say to John, "Okay, now try to drive straight!"

JOHN

WH: Did the paint dry quickly?

RR: We took it right back upstairs and tried to repair the library ~~tape~~. I loved the idea. No idea where idea [to make the print] came from. Just something to do. It must have been an eruption in boredom.

PASTED SHEETS

WH: ... Sunday downtown

RR: and I hate Sundays.

WH: Were the *White Paintings* conceived as a set?

RR: I figured 1, 2, 3, could be 4 and the futherest it could go was 7 and from then on I don't even have to do these.

WH: But there was a five panel?

RR: It was painted over. I needed the canvas. [NB: Documented by Fulton Street Studio photograph that this work was painted over as a *Black Painting*. Somewhere along the way, painting lost it's fifth panel and today this work is the four panel *Black Painting*.] NO - DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS

HOW MANY IN PILES



RR: I painted them. Twombly painted them. Brice painted them. Pontus Hulton painted them.

PAINTING THE WHITE

RR: I got bored at Black Mountain. Cy and I painted them there [the first set]. They were set up in the studio and were in the first happening event at Black Mountain, hung in Dining Room.

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

ASK JOHN WHAT HE CALLED IT HISTORICALLY IT BECAME



WH: Was there any projection?

RR: No. I was playing the wax Victrola with the big horn and scratching. Had ~~only~~ one stop watch...from working with John Cage, enough.

WH: When was the next time they [White Paintings] were made?

RR: Wasn't until Pontus [Hulten] wanted to have them [for Moderna Museet exhibition sometime in the 1960s]. So I told him I would send him the measurements and tell him what type paint and that he could paint them himself. He sent all but one back [NB: David White thinks this is might be the single panel *White Painting*]. He wanted to me to sign one that he had done and also another piece I made with Niki [de Saint Phalle] in Sweden as part of the Dialbla exhibition. Niki and I put pellets of paint under the canvas and the dancers did the drawing. [Billy] Kluver and I walked it back more than 20 miles from where Pontus had the party and delivered it to his door. He [Pontus] unrolled it in Los Angeles and asked for my signature. I said only if Niki would also.

DYLABY

WH: The third set was made with Brice [Marden]. FOR CASTELLI SHOW

RR: Guess so. I never wanted them to get dirty. I didn't want their past to be a mark on them.

OR ACE?

WH: What happened to the set made at Black Mountain?

RR: Alot were integrated into my other work.

WH: Which set exists today?

RR: Maybe Brice's - maybe Pontus's. The ambiguity or lack of identity had to be encouraged. Use of thumb print distinguishes them. John [Cage] said about them that if people are sensitive enough then they can tell what time of day they were and there they were.

WH: Clyfford Still came to <sup>CHOOSE</sup> see your show at Betty's.

RR: I had no idea who he was. After <sup>HE</sup> left, I repainted everything.

WH: Not everything. THINKING WHAT EVERY I DID NEXT INTERESTED ME MORE

RR: Close to everything. Don't know how anything survived that encounter.

WH: Ever take any pictures to Betty's before the exhibition?



RR: Don't think so. I had already repainted everything. I brought in a couple of dozen. I left with Boswell [elevator man] a couple dozen, so that he could destroy them. This was after the show?

WH: Who hung the show?

RR: Guess I did.

WH: Anyone help you?

RR: No. Boswell was my favorite person in the building. I loaded up my car when we took down the show. I had this old "Woodie Chevrolet" I couldn't get anymore in. I told Boswell that it's supposed to be art. So lets go to the basement and put them in the furnace. Like the second Arno show.

WH: Did he discourage you?

RR: No. He was my friend.

WH: Were some works left over not hung?

RR: No. Think all were hung.

WH: Any left on racks, say in the back room?

RR: After Betty's show I kept a few, but not enough. Next thing I knew. I came back with *White and Black Paintings*. The first show was completely out of the gallery and not sure if I left anything there. No, all was out. Returned with *Whites and Blacks*.

WH: Were the *Night Blooming Paintings* with the gallery?

RR: No.

~~A SHOW WAS PROPOSED IN CHICAGO  
SOME WERE FOUND IN AARON SISKIND'S  
GARAGE~~

WH: Were they ever shown?

RR: No. They never got to New York except when I painted over them. Hid them at Black Mountain. Turned them over in the gravel, that how they got those pebbles.

WH: One turned up in Chicago.

RR: Aaron Siskind wanted to do a show for me and a show for Cy [Seven Stairs Gallery, 1951]. They must have been stored in Siskind's garage. Siskind transported them to Chicago. Cy's show went up and I didn't hear about *Night Bloomings* for years.

WH: How many did you make?

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 6



**RR:** At least twenty at some point. I painted over them just as fast as I could make them.

**WH:** What happened when you took the *White and Black Paintings* to Betty?

**RR:** My timing wasn't really too good. *Barnie Newman* came in. I drove up [from *Black Mountain*] with 2 *White Paintings* and 2 *Black Paintings* in the "Woodle" and with *Boswell's* help took them up to the Gallery. *Alexander Lieberman* was there.

**WH:** What happened?

**RR:** Nothing I could measure until later. They were going out to dinner. After driving all the way from North Carolina, I felt let down because I was so excited about them. How do all those people know one another? It's like the story of the drunk who is walking down Broadway and he passes all the people coming out of the theater, heading in the other direction. They didn't invite me to dinner. Next I hear Betty is redecorating the gallery and that *Barnie* doesn't like my *White Paintings* and *Ad Reinhardt* doesn't like my *Black Paintings*.

**WH:** How did Betty tell you? Was it over the phone?

**RR:** In person. Very matter of fact. She had a very intimidating voice. I took them all home.

**WH:** What about *Reinhardt*?

**RR:** I don't think he was wrong. He just wasn't right.

**WH:** Was there any re-approachment on *Barnie's* part? He went to your 1963 exhibition at the Jewish Museum. There is a *Glamour Magazine* photo of all the artists in front of *Barge*.

**RR:** After *Barnie* died, *Annalee* called me one day and invited me over personally. She told me she was sure that *Barnie* would like me to have something. We went through his hats. I don't wear them. So I suggested we look at the ties. He was famous for his polka-dot ties. I took the best one.

**RR:** *Barnie* always denied stories about kicking me out of Betty's.

**WH:** He did not attack, but he did not defend. *Sam Kootz* was not in the same building as Betty. [*Julian*] *Levy* moved in a few days later.

**WH:** When was the first time you saw [*Kurt*] *Schwitters's* work?



**RR:** The first time I saw Duchamp was the *Bicycle Wheel* next to a Brancusi at MoMa. Thought that was real art. And I still like bicycles. I like mobility and that wheels can turn. There is a 1924 Picasso collage at MoMA that I really hate - a sandpiece - and I was already sort of famous for my collages. Then I had a thing for Schwitters. So I re-invented collage again. I invented Schwitters. An epigram is Duchamp's phrase how wonderful about American artists, they don't need us. How terrifying it was when they were victimized by it.

January 20, 1991

*WH opens conversation by asking RR about how the Miniature Blueprints (such as the one found on Odalisque) were made.*

**RR:** I photographed the original in black and white and printed it on blueprint paper.

**WH:** How many were made?

**RR:** No. Not many miniatures. It was a most unsuccessful business venture. Vogue gave me 12 pages - it was the Christmas season. I used to go out with Francine [du Plessix]. She wanted me to met her father [Alexander Lieberman]. She thought he would love these [White Paintings].

**WH:** Did he love them?

**RR:** I am not sure. I could do anything I wanted. I was getting paid enormous. I tried. Nothing came out. I tried some miniatures. They didn't work. Hazel [Frieda Larsen], who I studied photography with at Black Mountain. She let me learn. Photography was so much simpler in those days - Time, light and paper.

**WH:** Did you give some little ones [blueprints] away?

**RR:** Yeah. It was Christmas. Most got thrown away.

**RR:** Are you going to put my little *Music Box* in the exhibition? The first time I met Marcel [Duchamp]. It's playing my tune.

**WH:** How many *Music Boxes* did you make?

**RR:** Only two.

**WH:** Bob, what is this sculpture in the Fulton Street studio?

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 8

ALL VERY CONFUSED



TED WITH STRING  
TO A BALSM FRAME

RR: It was paper held together with ~~elastics~~. Blank sheets of paper. I was always tempted to recreate it.

WH: Do you remember where the numbers came from in *Two Two the Lily White* ?

RR: They just came, the numbers.

WH: What does the "Free" mean?

RR: Like hopscotch - home free. It was a fake game.

WH: Bob, what about this painting [Untitled, Hirshhorn Museum] ?

RR: *This is off the record.* Knox [Martin] got them before Betty's exhibition. It was a messy time. I was going through my divorce with Susan and I left a lot of pieces with Knox. He sold them back to me later, but I never got that one.

WH: What is included in the Parsons exhibition?

RR: Maybe it was at Betty's. It looks too fancy to have been in Betty's.

WH: Tell me about this work [DW 50.6]. We only have a snapshot of. There seems to be a version of it reproduced for the announcement of the Parsons exhibition.

RR: Doubt it was at Betty's. I remember two other works with big strokes.

WH: The Museum of Modern Art has the exhibition announcement in their library, but it has a huge "MoMA Library" stamp on it. Could we have it photographed and retouched?

RR: Yes. It was a short lived religious period. Yellow was life.

WH: Bob, do you have any recollection of these works which were in the Parsons exhibition, but are now lost. *Pharaoh*?

RR: No.

WH: *Tide* ?

RR: Sounds like blue and green.

WH: *The Man with Two Souls* ?

RR: No.

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 9



WH: *Mother of God* ?

RR: Had to be a circle. For some strange reason I think that it could be that one [points to *Untitled (Road Map)*].

WH: Bob, tell me about this work [*White Organic Abstraction*]

RR: Surely, it was done around the League. It didn't take me long until I was doing other things in the class [points to *Two Two the Lily White*].

WH: The *Night Blooming Painting* that you still own...

RR: One, I bought back from Knox.

WH: This work, *Untitled [5 White Circles on Black]*, tell me about it.

RR: Yes. It is a *Night Flowering Painting*.

WH: The large *Lead White Painting*, when was that done?

RR: Before the series at Black Mountain. I mostly saw that one as economy. I spent every extra money on that that I had, buying white lead, which was really quite expensive.

WH: You made a *White Painting* with 5 panels.

RR: That was a *White Painting* that got to be the big *Black Painting*. [NB: contact sheets show a 5 panel *Black Painting*, which has now lost one panel and is the 4 panel *Black Painting* in RR collection].

WH: Here are two photographs of paintings with broad black and white strokes. Tell me about these, Bob.

RR: Oh. They were done later on. - probably late 1953. They were never shown. I probably painted over them.

RR: When I moved to Broadway, I took some *Night Blooming* things with me - put black over them. I hesitated about it after I had done it. Maybe they weren't that bad. It was a frustrated afternoon, because I was bored. I don't do boredom very well. Anyway, I ripped off all this paper. I was glad because they were bad. I was right.

WH: Cy has a *Black Painting*.

RR: I don't know what Cy has.

WH: We are looking at the large shiny *Black Painting*, DW 52.1

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 10



?  
RR: I was agitated about losing the White Lead painting. I'd tear up newspaper and try and make a composition. Always had that one [the painting, DW 52.1] myself. I think the 4 panel *Black Painting* [NB: formerly, 5 panel White, then 5 panel Black] was the last of the Black Pieces.

WH: Bob, what was the order in which you made the *Black Paintings*.

RR: All so much at same time. Tended to move ~~from~~ aesthetically from fancy to plain.

WH: We are looking at the 2 panel *Black Painting*, DW 52.4

if you put  
RR: That's *Black Mountain*. Working with just black and white is how I discovered that you ~~can't~~ black over enamel and it cracks like that and the painting looks too late for itself.

WH: Bob, what about the orientation of Dr. Marx's *Black Painting*?

RR: Oh. I prefer it with the solid black at left. I never let my drips go up....Tworkov had a *Black Painting* - Jasper has it now.

WH: Tell me about *Should Love Come First*?

RR: Thought that was John's [Cage], that was painted over.

WH: No, we believe it is the *Black Painting* now in the Kunstmuseum in Basel. Apparently Heiner Friedrich deposited it there.

RR: Don't know anything about that. I must have given some other people favors. I thought if everything was painted black...

WH: Did everything go home with you from Betty's?

RR: Nothing went home. I had enough paintings at home.

WH: What two *Black Paintings* did you drive up from Black Mountain with to show Betty?

RR: This one (DW 52.4) and this one, the three panel matt Black (DW 52.3). I showed that one to Betty.

RR: That one (DW 54.12) was at Betty's. It was painted black then. Jasper wanted it.

WH: What happened to this large *Black Painting* that is in the Fulton Street Studio photographs?



RR: Don't think that exists.

WH: Did some get painted red?

RR: No....<sup>1</sup>Might have,<sup>2</sup>sure.<sup>3</sup>

WALTER ASKED BOB THREE TIMES.  
(IT SEEMED HE WAS GOING TO KEEP ASKING  
TILL BOB GAVE HIM THE ANSWER HE  
WANTED TO HEAR.)

WH: These self-portrait photographs in the Fulton Street Studio...

RR: I was trying to look like Arthur Penn. **TOOK THE PHOTO**

WH: I remember a *Grass Painting*.

RR: You remember correctly. It was not made accidentally. I was frustrated. Everybody in the world but me knew what art was supposed to be, and that it should change everyday. I had bird doves at the time. I knew the mud piece [*Dirt Painting (for John Cage)*] would change. Some of the birds shit on the paper and it started growing. I thought "that's a good idea" I was working as a janitor at Stable Gallery. Eleanor Wade thought she would court the art world (she was the Mary Boone of her day and looked like Joan Crawford). She wanted to start the next "Ninth Street Show" - which eventually became the Stable Gallery. She let me know...fired me as the janitor as I was quitting as the artist.

MUD PIECE

WH: John really would love to have that Dirt piece again.

RR: I'll make him one - and we can show it with ~~the~~ things growing. Problem now is getting the shit of the doves. Probably have to use seagulls now.

WH: Who is Pete? [dedication on the *Pink Clay Painting*].

RR: That's Paul Taylor. Pete is Paul.

WH: This *Gold Leaf Painting* that now belongs to our Trustee, Louisa Sarofim...

RR: That was in a group show. Ellie [Poindexter] she bought it out of it. She took over Charlie's [Egan].

WH: What about the *Tissue Paper Paintings*?

RR: My sense of reason. For each one I did in gold, I did one approximate same size in toilet paper. I was testing the market. I knew this. Gold stays and toilet paper gets thrown away.

WH: I remember seeing a snap shot of the something that looks like the *Tissue Paper Paintings*...

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 12



RR: Yeah, that's it. I found this glass case on Fulton Street. It was freestanding and I crumbled up paper and put it in it. I guess you could say that is the closest thing to the Tissue Paper Paintings.

WH: This looks about ca. 26 x 30 inches.

We are looking at the contact sheet page 103.

RR: That's the Green Piece with growing stuff [in center of contact sheet].

WH: You mean the Grass Painting?

RR: Yes. It was shown at the Stable Gallery. ~~Don't blame me for everything.~~ THIS REMARK IS IN RESPONSE TO WALTERS SUGGESTION THAT R.R. DID ARMAN BEFORE ARMAN DID THEM

WH: Who was Eve Clenden who bequeathed this Gold Leaf Painting to the Guggenheim?

RR: She shopped at Stable. She lived on Central Park South. She was a push over for the gold. She was my rent money - \$15.00 a month at Fulton Street; \$10 in the winter because I had to buy \$5.00 worth of kerosene. I didn't have plumbing, but I had hoses I had to piss out of.

WH: These photographs you took of de Kooning's studio...is that at Black Mountain?

RR: That was on ~~4th Street~~ or 4th Avenue in New York. He was sharing a studio with Tworokov.

WH: Bob, what is this sculpture in this photo. Is this one of yours? [NB: work is similar to rock on bench exhibited at Stable Gallery, however "bench" looks worm eaten and sculpture has a vertical element at right].

RR: Yeah. that's mine. Sue was pregnant. I was into eggs.

WH: These two self-portrait photographs done at Black Mountain...

RR: One is a double exposure -17 minutes long. It was the second time I did it. I used a "postcard" camera, which I still have. I loved that camera. All it was was aperture and slowness of speed.

WH: Tell me about the Stable Gallery exhibition you had with Cy.

RR: Oh. It was strings and rocks and stuff. I did them. Cy and I cleaned out that basement - spent an entire summer with sledge hammers, sweating over the straw-cured hay soaked with horse's urine. The horses stained the floor. It was Cy's idea to whitewash the walls. + USE TERRA COTTA COLER ON THE FLOOR

RR Captiva Interview, Jan. 18-20, 1991

page 13



**RR:** This sculpture [*Nail in Wood Block*] - my revenge for Giacometti. and this one [*Rope in Box*] would could pull string anyway you wanted to and it just looked like string.

**WH:** What about the sculpture Cy owns with the Chianti Bottles? Where did that come from?

**RR:** I drank them. It's a glass column in plaster of paris.

**WH:** Cy recalls that you made this sculpture of the coke bottle crate for him. That he had seen a similar one and asked you to do his.

**RR:** I had an idea. I would doubt it. I never did second version.

**WH:** This sculpture. What is it? [tall, antennaed piece]

**RR:** It's all glass. I got into some glass at my mother-in-law's place on Otter Island. They wiggled. Don't mention that piece.

— END —