

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Kaufman, Jason / Interview with Robert Rauschenberg / Art Newspaper, 1997

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JASON EDWARD KAUFMAN

951 P01

AUG 18 '97 02:24

FAX TRANSMISSION

THE ART NEWSPAPER
104 MAUXHURST AVE.
WEEHAWKEN, NJ 07087
201.617.5509
FAX: 201.617.5509

To: Robert Rauschenberg
c/o Bradley Jeffries

Date: August 18, 1997

Fax #: 941.472.5447

Pages: 4, including this cover sheet.

From: Jason Edward Kaufman
Chief Correspondent, N.A.

Subject: Interview revisions

COMMENTS:

Dear Bob Rauschenberg,

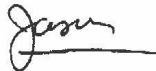
Thank you for telephoning from Los Angeles last week during this extremely busy time for you. It was a great pleasure speaking with you, as you have a handle on many of the tough questions. I would be delighted if we could sometime continue our talk, perhaps in person.

As promised, I have transcribed some of our discussion and am sending the text for your review. The Art Newspaper is laying out the September issue, which leaves about three days to convey any changes you require. I can be reached either by telephone or fax at (201) 617-5509.

If I don't speak with you beforehand, best of luck in putting the final touches on the show.

Sincerely,

Jason



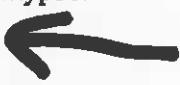
Bob's changes
Faxed to Jason
8/18/97 (MONDAY)
PAM

THANK YOU I THINK THIS IS GOOD
WE'LL TALK AGAIN SOON
BOB

First, can you describe the piece you are doing for Renzo Piano's cathedral near Rome?

SOON
BOB

It's in the asymmetrical arch that is 45-feet high and 150-feet wide. The subject matter is supposed to be the Apocalypse, which is certainly a very rich abstraction. But because it is a place of healing, they want the artwork to be uplifting. I had to question the Franciscan leader, Are you reading the same book I am? That is the major problem now: how to paint a positive Apocalypse. ~~I find the whole thing quite horrifying.~~

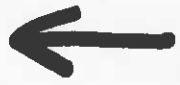


According to some accounts, as an adolescent you wanted to be a minister. Are you still a religious person?

I gave that up because of the assumption that the world was evil, and I didn't think that it was a good investment to give up your life on the earth for something quite as vague as Paradise. Just in case! Also, I don't like the idea of any spiritual activity being controlled by fear.

I understand that for a commission from Mercedes Benz for Potsdamer Platz in Berlin you're installing a lifesize bicycle with applied neon lights hovering over a reflecting pool, something from the series you showed at Knoedler's last year.

YOU BEGAN IN A EXHIBITION AT KNOEDLER'S 2 YEARS AGO



I like bikes and use them often in compositions, and I enjoy the visual wonders of neon with it's unapologetic aggression....I'm also working on a mural for the new music hall in Seattle. It's going to be about 10-feet high and 60-feet long, in the lobby, but visible from the street through the glass. I thought I would make the theme as musically as possible about Seattle itself. I was just up there photographing profusely both on-site and all over Seattle....So while I'm busy putting the Guggenheim [show] together, I'm dealing with all these side projects.

Walter Hopps tells me you've been thinking about making a sound piece.

I still am. It was going to be the piece for the atrium of the [Guggenheim] show. But I haven't evolved it yet....Talk about painting yourself in the corner, I painted myself out of the dome! By the time I had completed the technology for the audience to trigger the piece, it was so small there was nothing to see. And I refused to build an idol to stare at that wasn't part of the work's functioning. I had lots of ideas about the sounds, mostly from real life: like what people don't say and do say in elevators in different parts of the country. Another idea was a minute and a half or two minutes of the voices of the most important people in the world globally....But I really haven't had the time to do the piece that I wanted to do.

Collage has played an important part in your art. Can you discuss this aspect of your work?

Well, I've done just as many things without it. But I think collage itself, and the activity of making collage, is the most direct way that you can relate diverse elements rather than their going through the transition of a translation. That's what I like about using real objects, as opposed to something like them -- like a painted image or a photograph. I like the directness, and the fact that it's not

being soiled or diluted by my interpretation of it.

I imagine that why you've worked with found objects, something very much associated with Dada and with Duchamp, whom you came to know.

I was in an exhibit of "the object in art" ["Art and the Found Object" organised by the American Federation of Arts in New York in 1960] and he was in the same show. He had the Bottle Rack there. His sister had thrown the original out, so he called his friend Man Ray to get another. Man Ray couldn't remember which bottle rack was the original so he sent him six or eight, and they figured out which one it was because it was well recorded. I was having dinner with the guy who was putting the show together and he just happened to remark that all the pieces in the exhibition were for sale. So I jumped to it and said, What about the Bottle Rack? And he said, Yeah, that's for sale. And I said, How much is it? And he said, That's three dollars. So I bought it of course.

[In 1960] Marcel and Teeny came to deliver a Green Box [Box-in-a -Valise] to Jasper Johns, who was living in the same building as I was. Jasper and I were the first artists he went out to see when he was in that semi-retirement legend. When he gave the box to Jasper, he said, Don't you want me to autograph it? And Jasper said, Well, of course, if you would. And so he did. I understood the influence of the readymade on art history probably more than Duchamp, so I had been confused about whether to ask about the Bottle Rack. So I turned to Teeny and I said, I have the Bottle Rack, and I've been staying up at night knowing that you were coming trying to decide whether it would be ethical or an insult to ask him to sign it. And Teeny said, Oh, don't be silly Bob. He'll sign anything. And he signed it, in French. So I have the most original Bottle Rack -- the one next to the one that was thrown out by his sister.

What do you mean you understood the influence of the readymade better than Duchamp?

He didn't have to understand all the repercussions. It's only with a historical evaluation that one measures what the repercussions were after the event has taken place. But his job was a lot purer than that. He just did it.

What was the art world like back then?

Most of my best friends were American painters. Franz [Kline] and Barney Newman were my favorite ones. And Bill [DeKooning] I always loved. I knew [Jack] Tworkov very well personally. And I knew [Ad] Reinhardt, and I met [Jackson] Pollock. It was an amazing time, a kind of education and possibility that doesn't exist anymore. There were only five galleries in those days, and the artists really depended on each other socially, psychologically, and even critically. It's impossible now. Business sure screwed up the art world universally, didn't it? It made paying the rent easier, but the rent was cheaper then, too.

Another constant in your work has been the use of photography. Why do you take pictures?

It's a lot of things. One, it's a discipline. It's an excuse to look deliberately, contemplatively, at every shadow or every crack on the wall, or everything that's too Baroque and confusing to see at



once. I guess the closest I come to anything like notebook sketches, to making studies, is taking photographs. The reason that I started using found photographs early on was because I couldn't go everywhere. And now I've worked my life in such a way that I've already nearly been everywhere, so I don't have to have a secondhand viewpoint....For the last thirty years or so I've mostly depended on my own personal observation and trusted it to be general enough to expose the obvious.

But photographic images function in my work as every other material. I respond to the materials....I'm not the kind of artist who has an idea before I have something in hand. I'm already touching something before there's an idea....The only time that I have drawings that are before-the-piece is when I have some architectural or physical construction that is necessary to be able to complete the piece. To "execute a preconceived image" would ruin my pleasure and excitement. It would spoil the adventure, because then I'm just a laborer.

Do you watch much t.v.?

I keep it on all the time. It's just another window with an unknown subject. I think of it as a piece of nature. No, I don't think it has an impact on society any more detrimental than life itself. Any window you look out can. It depends on the view. It's your attitude about it.

Some critics say that your collage effect suggests overabundance. Do you wish to convey that there's an overwhelming amount of information out there?

I like to draw attention to it. And that the world is a lot richer than we can comprehend, and a lot more varied and surprising than could be believed.

But do you feel, nevertheless, that through your life you've found a way of looking at the world, a way of approaching the world, ~~that you'd like to teach other people?~~



Probably openmindedly, if that's possible. And with as much pleasure as you can tolerate.

Interview by Jason Edward Kaufman

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To: Robert Rauschenberg
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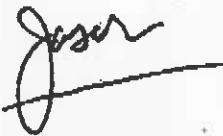
Thanks again for the interview from Los Angeles, and also for taking a look at the transcript. It will be published in the September issue of The Art Newspaper.

Our French edition will run a longer version of the interview on a two-page spread with color illustrations. I thought you would want to review this text as well, though it's pretty much the same. There are a few days before it has to be ready.

I can be reached either by telephone or fax at (201) 617-5509. I look forward to meeting you in New York.

Sincerely,

Jason



Robert Rauschenberg

P.O. Box 54, Captiva, Florida 33924

Sept. 2, 1997

FAX TO ...

**Jason Kaufman
The Art Newspaper
Weehawken, NJ**

Dear Jason,

Bob has made some changes, edits in the text. Four pages enclosed.

Cordially,



Ms. Bradley Jeffries
Assistant to Robert Rauschenberg

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Bob Rauschenberg interview for Le Journal des Arts, Paris, October 1997.

First, can you describe the piece you are doing for Renzo Piano's cathedral near Rome?

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According to some accounts, as an adolescent you wanted to be a minister. Are you still a religious person?

I gave that up because of the assumption that the world was evil, and I didn't think that it was a good investment to give up your life on the earth for something quite as vague as Paradise. Just in case! Also, I don't like the idea of any spiritual activity being controlled by fear.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell disavowed Christianity for the same reason. Any religion that has a notion of Hell as cruel as Christianity's was not for him. I understand that for a commission from Mercedes Benz for Potsdamer Platz in Berlin you're installing a lifesize bicycle with applied neon lights hovering over a reflecting pool, something from the series you showed at Knoedler's last year in 1993. A MORE STRUCTURAL SCULPTURE OF BIKES FOR OUTDOORS

I like bikes and use them often in compositions, and I enjoy the visual wonders of neon with it's unapologetic aggression....I'm also working on a mural for the new music hall in Seattle. It's going to be about 10-feet high and 60-feet long, in the lobby, but visible from the street through the glass. I thought I would make the theme as musically as possible about Seattle itself. I was just up there photographing profusely both on-site and all over Seattle....So while I'm busy putting the Guggenheim [show] together, I'm dealing with all these side projects.

Walter Hopps tells me you've been thinking about making a sound piece.

I still am. It was going to be the piece for the atrium of the [Guggenheim] show. But I haven't evolved it yet. In fact, I got it completely finished but I realised there wasn't anything to see. Talk about painting yourself in the corner, I painted myself out of the dome! By the time I had completed the technology for the audience to trigger the piece by their actions, it was so small there was nothing to see. And I refused to build an idol to stare at when it wasn't part of the work's functioning.

What kind of sounds were you thinking of using?

I had lots of ideas about the sounds, mostly from real life. Like what people don't say and do say in elevators in different parts of the country. It was going to be totally candid. Another idea was a minute and a half or two minutes of the voices of the most important people in the world globally. I was going to work with the U.N. to get those sounds. But the historical elements and the

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physical problems organising the Guggenheim show have taken so much of my time that I really haven't had any time to do the piece that I wanted to do for the atrium. I will do something, or I won't do something. One or the other. **ACTUALLY I AM PRESENTING MY NEW**

Collage has played an important part in your art. Can you discuss this aspect of your work?

GLASSWORK
SCULPTURES
IN THE
ATRIUM

Well, I've done just as many things without it. But I think collage itself, and the activity of making collage, is the most direct way that you can relate diverse elements rather than their going through the transition of a translation. That's what I like about using real objects, as opposed to something like them -- like a painted image or a photograph. I like the directness, and the fact that it's not being soiled or diluted by my interpretation of it.

I AM WORKING ON MY
SOUND FOR
"THE 1/4 MIU
OR 2 FURLON
PIECE"
NOW.

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SIGNIFICANCES

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Are you a realist? That is, do you feel that your work is representative of something that is collectively seen by people, or is it more of a personal internal vision?

I think it's totally outside of me and I'm just the collector of information, the artist making the presentation. I think the ~~biggest~~ surprise is "the fact." I'm anti-interpretive.

Do you mean you want viewers to interpret your as they would any other part of the world, or is your style intended to elicit a particular state of looking?

Not a particular state of looking at all. I think of it as an invitation to draw upon your own unique personal differences. ~~I think~~ it should be done as personally as possible. I mean nothing means something per se as a limitation. That's one of the quarrels I have with most criticism, that it enforces in black and white a restriction on the experiences that one should be having open-mindedly. It fixes it. It stops it from having any psychological or philosophical dimension. Once it gets in writing, that's what it is. It becomes a static work.

Yet in selecting and juxtaposing your imagery -- as in selecting a composition with a camera -- you're directing people to think about certain things.

But always I have in mind more a sense of inclusion rather than eliminating things. In most cases what I'm ~~directing them to be concerned~~ about is right in front of them anyway. I'm just

(4)

underlining it. AND PUTTING IT IN A DIFFERENT NON-LOGICAL SITUATION FOR RECONSIDERATION

Do you watch much t.v.?

I keep it on all the time. It's just another window with an unknown subject. I think of it as a piece of nature. No, I don't think it has an impact on society any more detrimental than life itself. ^{or} Any window you look out can. It depends on the view. It's your attitude about it.

Some critics say that your collage effect suggests overabundance. Do you wish to convey that there's an overwhelming amount of information out there?

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Interview by Jason Edward Kaufman