

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Mary Lynn Kotz

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Mary Lynn Kotz conducted by Mary Marshall Clark on July 16, 2015 and July 15, 2016. These interviews are part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Mary Lynn Kotz

Location: Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: July 16, 2015

Q: This is Mary Marshall Clark. Today is July 16, 2015. I am so lucky to be in the beautiful home of the beautiful Mary Lynn Kotz and [Nathan K.] Nick Kotz and with [Timothy D.] Tim Chapin, her remarkable, productive assistant. So let's get started. You said you wanted to get started with saying how you met Bob.

Kotz: Yes. Well, it starts in 1962 and that's really a backstory. We were in Des Moines, Iowa freezing in December. Des Moines goes to the west coast of Florida and Pulitzer Prize winner J. N. "Ding" Darling, for whom the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island, Florida was named. He had been a leading advocate for nature conservation, was the cartoonist for the *Des Moines Register*, where my husband Nick was a political reporter. Especially for Midwesterners, Sanibel was a destination vacation. So the Darling family members and many others were in Sanibel and the sister island, Captiva [Florida]. We flew down, rented a car, took the ferry across the bay. We had our little toddler with us and it was so beautiful, we just thought it would be great. That night the frost came and it was the coldest night in Sanibel/Captiva history. We spent a good deal of time trying to keep warm, but we got in our car and drove down to the end of the island to a small colony of very unpretentious one-story wooden rental houses. It was just enchanting. I felt that it was like a heavenly landscape with the tall casuarina trees forming a natural arbor over the single north-south road. They were very willowy and were called Australian pines. Jack Kotz, in his father's arms, walked onto the white

beach with many tiny pebbles and shells, and we dipped our toes into the Gulf of Mexico. And I said, “We’ve got to come back here.”

Two years later we were in Washington, D.C. Nick was off covering the presidential campaign and I found a new life here. In 1970 he had written a book called *Let Them Eat Promises: The Politics of Hunger in America* [1969]. He was invited by Margaret Mead and other people to speak. He spoke at a meeting in 1981, at Naples, Florida, and just for fun, we drove back to see if the charm of Sanibel/Captiva still was there. It was. There was a photography gallery in Sanibel and a woman named Bradley [J.] Jeffries was the proprietor [The Photographers’ Gallery]. She was from Iowa, well Kentucky originally, but had been a journalist in Iowa. She and her husband [Emil Fray], a photographer, owned the shop and there were some fantastic photographs on the wall. I said, “Who is that photographer?” “Robert Rauschenberg,” she said. I said, “Oh, really?” She said, “He lives here, right down the road.” I was very interested. I called my editor, Milton Esterow at *Artnews*, and said, “I’m on Captiva Island for ten days and Robert Rauschenberg lives here. Would you like to have an interview?” He said, “Certainly, if you can get one.”

Well, I couldn’t. I went through his chain of command and he wasn’t giving any interviews that month. That was 1981. In 1982 we came back and rented a house on the beach from our friend Suzanne Weil, then producer of the *American Masters* TV series. I called again and said I would like to interview Mr. Rauschenberg for *Artnews* magazine. His assistant, Terry Van Brunt, checked with the boss and said, “But you have to do it today. You have to go to Edison Community College [Fort Myers, Florida] and see his new work.” [Note: *The First Footage of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, 1982] I learned that Rauschenberg had donated a big exhibition

room to the Edison Community College art department so that he could see his paintings on the wall as someone in a gallery or museum would see them. Because he works on a table.

I speak of him in the present because he's present with me every day. I became kind of another appendage. [Laughs] I was just there.

Bob came to the phone: "The gallery closes at five o'clock and the work comes down tomorrow. After you've seen it, I've got company for dinner, so come on down after that." I'm a fellow night owl, so I went down at ten o'clock and Dorothy and Roy Lichtenstein had just left. They had bought a piece of property nearby. So I took our car and drove down, and he was there with Bradley Jeffries, now his secretary, and with Terry Van Brunt, his assistant. So we settled in. He had just made a big batch of gumbo. I tasted it and he, of course, offered me a drink. I don't know what I was drinking, but I shared a little drink with him. I had done my homework, by the way. I read *Off the Wall* [*Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time*, 1980 by Calvin Tomkins] and everything I could read about him beforehand so that I would have a line of questioning. And so I told him, "I want you to know that when I read that you had grown up in the South and went to the Church of Christ"—in Port Arthur on the Gulf of Mexico, the part of Texas that was more South than West—I said, "I had grown up in the South as well." I grew up in a Southern Baptist family that was so strict and so religious. A lot of our friends went to the Church of Christ in our little town. The only difference between our church and the Church of Christ was that they did not have a musical instrument. Of course my mother was a musician, so we never went to their church.

So he got started talking about the Church of Christ and how he had wanted to be a preacher. I said, “Well, tell me about that. Who influenced you?” He said, “Well, I was miserable in Port Arthur, Texas. I really had high respect for our pastor because he was a good leader of young people and he was *somebody*. I’d never been anywhere. I had never done anything. I looked up to him and he was really quite inspiring, so that’s how I decided that I was going to be a preacher.” Then he gave the famous line. He said, “But after I got older in high school, I discovered that I was good at dancing and I liked to dance, and I was in plays and things like that.” He said, “My mother was not happy with it, but I said okay, if I have to give up dancing, I’m not going to be a preacher.” So he had an uncle or some relative who was a pharmacist and because young Milton Ernest Rauschenberg was interested in that particular field, he went off to the University of Texas [at Austin] after he graduated high school.



Rauschenberg, Thomas Jefferson High School, Port Arthur, Texas, ca. 1943. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

I later interviewed all his high school teachers, by the way, and his classmates who still lived in Port Arthur. The teachers all said they *knew* that he was special, that he was going to be something—they didn’t know what. But at the University of Texas, he was kind of overwhelmed

and he was eligible for the draft. So he didn't finish his freshman year. He came home and enlisted in the navy. So that was the next chapter.



Rauschenberg in his U.S. Navy uniform, San Diego, California, ca. 1944. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

He never went overseas. He was a neuropsychiatric technician. He told me that's when he developed his hatred of war because he saw, not on the battlefield—he was first put in charge of the corpses. The body bags were what he had to deal with. Then his next assignment was as a neuropsychiatric technician. He saw all of these boys whose brains had been blown out and who were not just physically torn up, but they were permanently lost. And he just kept saying, "What a loss, what a loss, what a loss."

Q: So was all this in your first exchange with him? He sat down and told you for that article these stories?

Kotz: He told me so much once we got going. But we had this very long conversation and I will have to go back and check that— Do we have a transcript of that first interview? I will have to check that. It was twenty years ago, Mary Marshall.

Q: No, I know. I'm just curious about how it seems you established a relationship of great rapport instantly.

Kotz: Indeed. And it kept going and going and going. He was always surrounded by people and he did collaborations. He loved that better than anything. We're talking 1982 and he had this project in which he was trying to get into China to do some things. I remember he told me that. He loves collaboration. He talked about that and all the people. Then I finally said, "Where do you go when you want to be alone?" He said, "Well, I go to my Fish House." Then I said, "Your Fish House? You like fishing?" I said, "I do too. I love to fish!" I said, "My mama took me fishing on every creek and lake in Mississippi and finally my daddy had to—" Anyway, that's another story. That's my story. My daddy had to have a pond dug to keep her at home because she was a horse-woman and she'd take off down the countryside on her fast horse. [Laughs]



Rauschenberg in Captiva, Florida, 1978. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Attributed to Billy Klüver



Rauschenberg in front of the Fish House, Captiva, Florida, 1979. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

So we talked about fishing for a while. And he said, “I’m proud of that Fish House.” He said, “I saved it. They were going to destroy it and build a big old thing, big old condominium of some kind there.” He said, “I saved it, I bought it because it belonged to Ding Darling. And he was the naturalist who started down here.” I said, “Oh! I’ll have to tell my husband because he has been with the *Des Moines Register* for a long time. He had met Mr. Darling, after he was much older. And we’ve got some of his famous political cartoons.” Bob said, “Where’s your husband?” I said, “He’s over at Sunset Captiva [a beach rental]. He’s sound asleep.” He said, “Well, let’s go wake him up. I’m going to take him to the Fish House.” I said, “Okay, but you’ve got to drive in front of me, because I don’t know how to find it.” And he said, “All right.”

I got there and Nick, whose lights turn off at nine o’clock, mine turn *on* at eleven-thirty—I said, “Come on now, *right now*. You’ve got to do this.” Nick said, “If it were anything but work, I would not do it. But it’s your story, so I will get up.” He and Bob later became close friends. It was just enchanting.

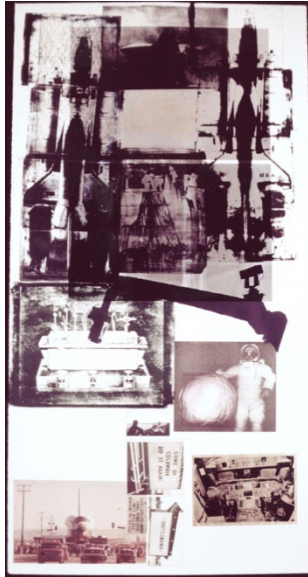
We took our rented car and followed Bob and Terry Van Brunt down a little secluded dirt road to a small white house standing out in the water on the bay side of Captiva. We walked out across a long walkway of wooden planks to a very neat two-room house surrounded by a wooden deck with rails. “Here’s where I fish and watch alligators swim,” he said.

Bob told me a funny story. I asked, “Oh, is this your guest house?” He said, “Well, I’ve had one person stay here.” And it was that American Indian Movement leader—Russell Means. Bob said, “I think I’m about twenty-five percent Cherokee. And I thought I am for anything that the Indian Nation wanted to do to improve their lives and so I invited him to come down here because he had been on the lam from the law.” Bob said, “But when he got here, I had everything quiet and ready for him to come and rest and do his writing or whatever he was doing.” He said, “The first thing he asked was, ‘Where is the telephone?’” And Bob said, “The telephone? There is no telephone here.” The man was very upset. He said, “Well, I can’t work without a telephone.” Bob said, “That’s the last time I had anybody out here.”

I asked, “Do you get ideas for art out here?” He said, “Well, I come out and I look at the stars at night and it is a place for me to rest or invent my mind.” I said, “And where?” And he said, “The energy, the air— It just flows right through me here. And I feel refreshed.”

I took scribble notes too. And then he started talking about space travel. He looked out at the night sky and he said, “I’ve been to Cape Canaveral [Florida] and I am very excited about the possibility of exploration in space because it will give mankind— It will give mankind a project

that is not war, that is not destructive, that is not anything.” I said, “Where—” He said, “Maybe we can learn something from out there. We don’t know what’s out there. Maybe we can learn.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Hot Shot, 1983
Lithograph with collage
81 x 42 inches (205.7 x 106.7 cm)
From an edition of 29, published by Universal
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York
This print contains images of a space shuttle and
an astronaut in honor of the 1982 launch of
Columbia from Cape Canaveral.

I said, “Bob, you are so creative and so inventive. Where do you think it comes from, this energy that comes to you here?” We were looking out at the stars at that moment. He said, “I don’t know,” he paused. “Maybe from out there.” By that time it was just about daylight. He and Nick got to talking and after, on the way back, Terry Van Brunt was riding with us, and he said afterward, “You do not know how special this was. Bob never invites anybody to see the Fish House.”

But what had happened before that— My heart still belongs to Jackson Pollock. I mean I get a real thrill seeing Jackson Pollock’s work. I’ll tell you that part of my history later. Until that point, Rauschenberg’s work had always been too busy for me. I never stopped to study it; it had

been too crowded with real objects and loud colors. So when I later asked him many of his influences and he told me lots of stories about [Willem “Bill”] de Kooning and [John] Cage and [Merce] Cunningham and he told me his whole life, really, during this twenty years.

It was after I went to see *The 1/4 Mile [or 2 Furlong] Piece* [1981–98] in its first showing on a wall: I sat there, took notes, studied it, talked into my recorder—and I got it! I saw what he was trying to tell us. It was about the time of the president’s State of the Union speech and so I titled it, “Robert Rauschenberg’s State of the Universe Message” [*Artnews*, February 1983]. I was just blown away at that point because I had not appreciated the complex patterning in his work. Well, I got to see all of his past work or photographs of the art in the archives. I got to know all of those people who were around him. I just kind of stuck around. I got to know all of his staff and they became comfortable with me.

I used to live in Japan and so the first trip I took to see him on his ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] exploration was in 1986, in *ROCI JAPAN* [Setagaya Museum of Art, Tokyo]. The staff people were laughing at me because I was talking to the walls into a microphone in the gallery. Pens and paper were not allowed. They were laughing at me because I was talking to the art, but I was recording what I was seeing in words so that I knew I would remember it. When I went back to the hotel where they were all staying, Bob and Terry’s rooms were just down the hall. I chose to stay on the hall where he was, hoping that I could spend some time with him. I heard him say to Terry, “Shh, let’s go by her door. We don’t want her to hear anything. We don’t want her to see us.”



Mary Lynn Kotz, Rauschenberg, and others at the opening of *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI JAPAN*, Setagaya Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1986. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

I was there and I went to see some Japanese friends and introduced my friend [Sandra] Sandy [Mori] to Bob. My lone American friend from college who had stayed in Tokyo and married a Japanese man. At that time Sandra Mori was the fashion editor for the *Japan Times*, one of the English language newspapers, and was also an “ambassador” for the Japan Trade Association. She was a good friend of Issey Miyake and Issey had made a sweater for Bob there. She had become a journalist herself. What surprised me at that conversation was that Bob and Sandy just picked up banter. Bob and Issey and Sandy and I, but I just was a fly on the wall again because they were having this marvelous, joking conversation. I was once again in the loop, but still an outsider, observing.

When the *Artnews* article finally came out with Bob on the cover and he saw that I was a serious presence, whether or not the New York art history academy or the critics knew who I was. I was outside the art critics’ circle. So that actually gave me an edge with him. Because I’m not an art historian, I did so much research on the book. I read every word I could find that had been

written about twentieth-century art. I still had a stack pass at the Library of Congress [Washington, D.C.] because of a project I had done for the curator's office in the White House. I read all the references to Bob in magazines and newspapers while in the Library of Congress stacks. So I was there studying the critics and the feature articles. I had a good friend who was a member of the U.S. Senate who checked out Library of Congress books for me, so I brought the books home, read them, took notes, and created the bibliography. Then I found the dissertations and I ordered and paid for 161 dissertations. By that time, David White was so very helpful; he found me every catalogue that was in the New York archive. And I would go up there and I had to have someone helping me. I went through all his clipping files and found what I was looking for. I had them translated from the various languages—it was a journey. It really was.

During that time—after the first edition of my book came out—I had a great publicist, she had been my publicist for *Upstairs at the White House*[: *My Life with the First Ladies*, 1973] and she had moved to [Harry N.] Abrams [New York] by that time. They had set up a [book] tour for me with every Rauschenberg exhibition; “have slides, will travel,” as I said to you. So I would crank up and go around the country. I had such a wonderful time. I spent about a year in Los Angeles interviewing everybody and studying the collections. I just had so many adventures.

There was a movie producer who met me in his warehouse, way out, who had bought *Rodeo Palace* [1976], one of the first *Spreads* [1975–83]. Norman [M.] Lear had bought it from him soon after. Well, I had known Norman Lear because he and friends of mine [James A. “Jim” Autry and Bill Moyers] had started People for the American Way and I'm a member of the Claremont Graduate University [California] Arts and Humanities board of advisors. One of the

Claremont graduates heard me speak to the Cosmos Club [Washington, D.C.] and told the president of Claremont Graduate University that I would be a good person for their advisory board. Dr. John [David] Maguire, on business in Washington, came to my office and I was flattered to be asked. He was a Southerner, originally from Alabama, as well. He asked me if I would consider being on the board. I said, “Well, it sounds very exciting, tell me more about the board. Who’s on it?” He said, “Well, the chairman of the board is from Mississippi also. His name is Jim Autry.” I said, “Jim Autry is one of my best friends. He was my editor when I was the editorial page editor of my college newspaper. I’ve known Jim Autry forever!” And he was so surprised. And Jim Autry was so surprised, but he’d not thought of either me or Nick as an advisor. When he got out of the air force as a pilot, I was working as news bureau editor for *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine, which is published in Des Moines. I recommended him for a job at *Better Homes and Gardens* and he became editor in chief and head of the whole schmegeggy. I don’t know what that word means, but I like to say it.



Robert Rauschenberg
Rodeo Palace (Spread), 1976
 Solvent transfer, pencil, and ink on fabric and cardboard, with wood doors, fabric, metal, rope, and pillow, mounted on foam core and redwood
 144 x 192 x 5 1/2 inches (365.8 x 487.7 x 14 cm)
 Collection of Lyn and Norman Lear, Los Angeles

Q: It sounds wonderful.

[Laughter]

Q: I'm going to start using it. And I will attribute you.

Kotz: Okay. Well, I don't know—I make up adjectives. Because there was a long time when I had this head cracked open and I couldn't see to read and I couldn't see in my hospital room to watch television. All I could do was memorize all the doctors, their names, and where they were from and so forth. But I have a history and the history was that Jim Autry was just astonished that he had found me. Dr. Maguire has retired now. Jim Autry called me and said, "John Maguire didn't even know about your involvement with music." He said, "Of course you'd be good on the board." And so I was.

Q: That's right. So in this—you've given me so much—

Kotz: Oh, but I have to tell you the whole Norman Lear story.

Q: Sure.

Kotz: Okay. So Norman Lear bought *Rodeo Palace*. I knew Norman from *People for the American Way*. He invited me with Bob Rauschenberg, while I was in L.A. lecturing on Bob, and, by this time, his assistant Darryl [R. Pottorf], to his house for dinner, together with Robert

Graham—a contemporary, but very realistic, sculptor from Los Angeles, married to Anjelica Huston, the movie star, daughter of the famous director John Huston.

Q: So they invited you to dinner?

Kotz: They invited us to dinner, Nick and me and Bob and Darryl—I tried to make conversation with Graham and Huston, but Rauschenberg and Graham did not exchange one word nor even a glance all during dinner. We wondered if there had been unpleasant previous encounters or mutual non-admiration as artists. Never found it out. So we were sitting there and when Norman's wife Lyn [Lear, née Davis] came in, she brought all her new little white puppies with her. I was holding a puppy and it crawled and I was wearing my new emerald green suede pants suit. The little puppy was up on my shoulder and just peed all over my jacket. But anyway, at that point, Robert Graham and his wife left abruptly after dinner because Norman had thought he would entertain us with the movie about Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo, but, as it turned out, not a very interesting movie [*Vincent and Theo*, 1990]. Bob Rauschenberg fell asleep and so did Nick Kotz. So Norman and I were watching the movie together. And Darryl was otherwise— But immediately afterwards, Bob Rauschenberg brought himself awake and said exactly what he knew about Vincent van Gogh. He talked about his brushwork, his colors, his great— And he said, “And he'd never sold anything. What a loss.”

Q: That's an amazing story. Did he ever talk to you about other artists who inspired him?

Kotz: Yes. He told me about how he had never been anywhere, never done anything. At another point, I'll tell you more about this story of his hitchhiking up and down the California coast when he was stationed there. He was just wild about de Kooning and he had funny, funny stories because after he and [Susan] Sue [Weil] separated, Bob went back to Black Mountain [College, North Carolina] and then he came back to New York because he wanted to be with Christopher [Rauschenberg]. I'll tell you more about that personally as well. Bob told me this funny story about how de Kooning let him sleep on his and Elaine [de Kooning]'s model platform until he could find himself a place, which he did. At the de Kooning studio, which he shared with his wife, the model's stand or table was separated from the artists' living space only by a thin curtain. Bob told me he would lie there at night and "be treated to" their fierce arguments. One fight was so eloquent that Elaine de Kooning stormed out in the middle of the night.

As Bob told it, "About a week later, there was a knock on the door one night. I was lying on the modeling table and Elaine came in, very quiet, and said, 'Bill I'm in the middle of a painting—and I need some alizarin red,'"—Bob pronounced it "alissareid"—"Would you happen to have a tube?" She didn't leave. But I did. I found an empty industrial warehouse building way down at the old industrial section for fifteen dollars a month. It didn't have heat or running water but I had a place to make art." Bob said he had one of the first lofts in New York. And he had funny stories to tell about living in the loft.

But he said, "De Kooning and [Jack] Tworkov and these people who were so magical, I'd never seen anything like that. He was just absolutely beyond imagination." Later on, I asked him, "They were your heroes?" "Oh yes." I said, "How did you have the courage to go against them?"

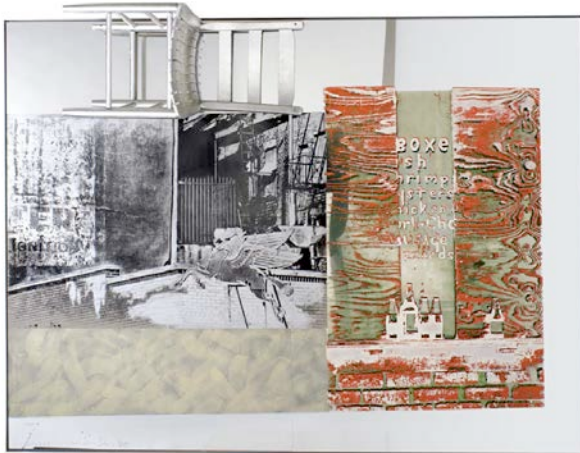
And change the whole way art could be looked at, off the wall and into the room with the viewer?” He said, “It didn’t take courage at all. I came from nowhere, I had nothing, I had nothing to lose.” He said, “But I had to use whatever I found.”

Q: Brilliant. I was about to ask you about how you think he used his early life experience, where he was not exposed to anything. What role, what place did that have in his imagination?

Kotz: Forever.

Q: Could you tell me more about that?

Kotz: I’ll take you on a trip. I think that all of Rauschenberg’s work was autobiography. I’ll take you on a tour of *Pegasits* [/ *ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works)*, 1990], which Nick and I bought for our fortieth wedding anniversary from the *ROCI USA* series [1990–91]. It’s right behind you on the wall and if we went up there, you can see how he has used chairs in just about everything. The chairs are ubiquitous—and they’re the chairs of his mama’s kitchen. There were three of them. They lived in this little shotgun house. Do you know what a shotgun house is?



Robert Rauschenberg
Pegasits / ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works), 1990
Acrylic, fire wax, and chair on stainless steel
72 3/4 x 96 3/4 x 17 1/2 inches (184.8 x 245.7 x 44.5 cm)
From an edition of 22, produced by Saff Tech Arts,
Oxford, Maryland

Q: You can shoot from the front door through to the back door.

Kotz: You got it.

Q: I'm Southern.

Kotz: [Laughs] They lived in this little shotgun house and they were very, very, very poor. He said his daddy had a third grade education and that was it. And then he talked about how when he got out of the navy, he came home, and they had moved away. They had moved to Louisiana and he couldn't find anybody in Port Arthur who knew where they were. He finally found them. So you see that menu over there? The menu is from a little Louisiana café. I don't think it was from Captiva, I think it was strictly from somewhere in or around Lafayette, Louisiana [note: Rauschenberg photographed the image in Fort Myers].



Robert Rauschenberg
Fort Myers, Florida, 1979
 Gelatin silver print
 19 x 13 inches (48.3 x 33 cm)

Then the encaustic imprint of the menu was something that he and [Donald] Don Saff had worked out together, but also the waxwork was a bit of a nod to Jasper [“Jap”] Johns. That is what he really liked— When Jasper Johns was working with him, Bob said, “It just looked like it was so rich and good, and I could almost taste it. So I asked him if I could just paint one of the stripes on his flag, the flag that he was working on. So while he was gone, I painted one of the white stripes a bright blue.” He said, “Jap didn’t care anything about it. In fact, he was mad.” Later on, I’ll tell you what Bob told me about that relationship.

So in everything he has painted, he knows exactly where it came from, image or object. And he doesn’t forget. He doesn’t want us to know, he wants us to be involved in it. He said, “I don’t want to spend my time going around telling what this object or anything means to me.” But I have seen him in the studio when he would be looking for something to put on one of his grids and what he would ask for. He would say, “Get me that picture of that yellow flower from— from Los Angeles. And then bring me the—” He knew where everything was. He had this great

storage of fabric. It was huge, huge and wonderful. He loved cloth. That's where *Jammers* [1975–76] came from.



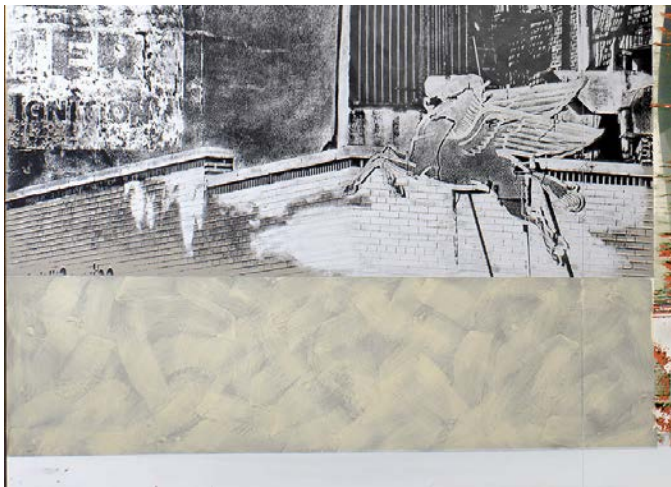
Robert Rauschenberg
Mirage (Jammer), 1975
Sewn fabric
80 x 69 inches (203.2 x 175.3 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

When he was in India and he said, “I was in that factory working with dirt.” He said, “It was very good, but it was hurting my back, what I was doing.” He said, “The poverty in India just grabbed me here.” I said, “Did it? “Did the poverty grab you?” He said, “Oh, the little children, they were begging on the street, it was very, very sad. But the one thing is, if they had one rag, that rag would be pink and silk. They would wash it out and spread it out to dry over their things.” That's where *Jammers* came from. “One rag,” is what he said.

Q: He was remarkably open to his environment, everywhere he went.

Kotz: Everywhere he went. He took everything in. With his eyes, his nose, especially in India, and the feel of surfaces to his touch. And he remembered where it all came from. In the black-

and-white montage back there [in *Pegasits*], the word is “ignition” on the left side, which is a word he had used in igniting his own passions and he hoped to ignite his viewers’. His passions were many and not just visual. But they always wound up in his visual work, tied together by a time in a series.



Robert Rauschenberg
Pegasits / ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works),
 1990 (detail)

This was *ROCI USA*. Of course he wanted a mirrored image, he likes you to be a part of it. I’m afraid when we had the flood from the air conditioning, twice, that the people who were cleaning the floor put an elbow into it or something, backed into it, because there’s one spot, a smudge that I see every time I look at it. Okay. So “ignition”—that’s what he wants to happen. What is the whole series called? *ROCI USA [Wax Fire Works]*. That’s what he was using as his theme for this series. The title of this is *Pegasits*. He and I exchanged puns and wordplay all the time, that was just— Then I’ll tell you about the way I figured out the mural behind me and I’ll tell you later about how that got over here. How we were able to quite fortunately get it down—with a crane, into this apartment. The Mobil oil sign with flying horse on the left side of *Pegasits* was a reference to Port Arthur, Texas and the oil refineries and the cross-hatching at the bottom of the

piece, as Tim was pointing out, down in the hand-painted addition at the bottom, was also a friendly nod at Jasper. Jane Livingston got them back together, so they didn't hate each other forever.

Q: Really? I can't wait to hear that story.

Kotz: Anyway, I'll tell you about that. Do you know Jane?

Q: No.

Kotz: Jane was the chief curator at the Corcoran [Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.]. And she and her entire team marched out when [Senator] Jesse [Alexander] Helms [Jr.] closed down the Corcoran because of the Mapplethorpe exhibition— [note: referring to *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*, 1989]

Q: Yes. I did know, yes.

Kotz: Okay. And so then of course, the Mobil oil was from Port Arthur and Pegasus in this painting looks like it was flying away from Port Arthur. But that was something that you saw all of the time, the symbol of the odiferous oil refineries in his hometown. And of course, the chair, which shows up in so many of his works, is like the three in Dora Rauschenberg [née Dora Carolina Matson]'s kitchen. This particular one comes from what was Timmy's Nook, a favorite old haunt of ours in Captiva, where fishermen and yacht people sat together in the stone crab

season, or for grouper sandwiches. When Timmy’s was torn down, Bob bought every one of the chairs. He told me once that he loves old chairs because each one has a history. He said he wondered who all had sat there and what they were all about. So he chose this particular one from his collection, “So I could invite Pegasus to have a seat if he would happen to fly by.”

The wall on the top left side of *Pegasits* and the New York steps in the old tenement, is the kind of building he lived in and used as a studio in his early New York days after his divorce. He said the only time he could take a shower is when he would go to somebody’s party; he would excuse himself and go into the bathroom and take a shower because there was not only no hot water, there was no water in the building. There was a pump outside that you could get water to wash your brushes with and things like that. But he was so happy that he had a studio. Then he took on Jasper as an assistant, and they shared a studio. [Note: Rauschenberg moved into the building where Johns had his studio, 278 Pearl Street, in September 1955. Rauschenberg had his own studio on the top floor, one flight above Johns.] I don’t know how it slipped into— But the relationship was just that in the beginning and they had eight years together. I’ll tell you what he told me about that later as well.



Robert Rauschenberg
New York City, 1981
 Gelatin silver print
 13 x 19 inches (33 x 48.3 cm)

Q: Okay.

Kotz: So that is *Pegasits*. But as I said, all of his work is autobiography. He doesn't want to tell you about it, but—

Q: He wanted to show it to you.

Kotz: Well, he didn't show me that. I knew when we got that, I saw that, and I said, "Uh-huh, uh-huh," and he said, "Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm." [Laughs] I got him. I got Bob. I understood him. I had so many views about him from all the research I had done and all of it that wound up in this—if this had been a hundred thousand words, it would have been—you would have had to put legs on it.

So this is *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, the new edition [2004].

Q: I now have an image of the book walking across the room—

Kotz: Exactly.

Q: —in pure Rauschenberg style.

Kotz: Exactly. I have three more things that were gifts he gave me over the years.

Q: What are those?

Kotz: One is just as you come in, a silkscreen. At the farm, I have something that is an original blue *Waterworks* [*Guests (Waterworks)*, 1995] that he sent me in 1995 when my brother was dying. The man came from FedEx with a big tube just as I was coming back from sending his body to the crematorium. I opened it up and it just said, “Love, Bob.” It looked like it belonged beside Jack [Kotz]’s large photograph of a side of a grey barn door. I’ve hung the *Waterworks* image between Jack and an Andy Warhol, a pink cow. I hope you’ll come to the farm.

Q: That sounds lovely.

Kotz: A Warhol cow. It is between a Warhol cow and a Jack Kotz portrait of a Mississippi barn door and weathered wall. The door is totally at an angle, it’s hanging off; it’s really quite a beautiful piece. Next time I’m at the farm, I will photograph the image for you.

All of his work was in series. He just couldn’t do one thing at a time. I know there was stuff when he was on the road and he didn’t have anything to make art with, he would send all his shirts to the laundry wherever he was in the hotel and then he would bring back and make little collages of the tickets and everything on the cardboard that the shirts were folded around [note: *North African Collages*, ca. 1952]. The imperative to make art was just with him at all times.

There was a big exhibition, it was so interesting, a one-man show of early Jasper Johns at the National Gallery of Art. The brightly colored, predominantly red, wide-format oils that were up were so Rauschenbergian! I knew whose body parts were in those. Bob had told me. Several had casts of various male parts as three-dimensional additions to the paintings.

[Laughter]

Kotz: But this Jasper Johns show was so Rauschenberg! You could see the great influence. The end of the show was a gray painting with a string and the string was coming down from a figurative painting. I don't remember what it was. But it was gray and it was so different from all the Rauschenberg work that I said, "Aha," I knew what happened there. I looked at the date and sure enough, it was the date that Bob had thrown all of his screens out of the window and took off with Cage and Cunningham, and of course [Steve] Paxton, for Japan. I didn't get to talk to Paxton either. Paxton lives in Vermont. Did you—Steve Paxton? He was a principal dancer who went with Bob from Cunningham to the whole Judson [Memorial] Church period. Trisha Brown was my new best friend too.

Q: Really?

Kotz: Yes. Oh god, this was his family! They all gathered around Bob; they were protective of him because he had such horrible stage fright.

Q: Tell me about that. You mentioned that and I wasn't aware.

Kotz: Sue told me he was so nervous, in the early days when he would have a show, even if it was jointly with her own works, he would have to go into the restroom and throw up. He was so very nervous about that. All of his other friends realized that he would not go to an opening unless he was surrounded by his posse. At that point, he would usually be drunk as a lord. He was a maintenance alcoholic—and his binge-drinking had to do only with going downtown naked or something. He didn't want his fear of rejection or derision to be confirmed. He and Elizabeth Taylor would go together to Betty Ford's, California. He would come back sober with much more clarity and focus.

He did love to collect movie stars and celebrities. I introduced him to Don Gummer and his wife, Meryl Streep, who then showed up, they were suddenly on the invitation list at all the showings. Don had been greatly influenced by him, but he was working in metal and making images of boxes at the time. Meryl and I were interested in the building of a women's history museum here [which is still hoped for in Alexandria, Virginia]. Their daughter was a teenager at the time. At one of Bob's openings at PaceWildenstein [New York], her daughter was calling Meryl about every fifteen minutes about something. This great actress is a very open and warm human being, too. And when I met Elizabeth Taylor here, when she was married to [Senator] John [William] Warner, she was warm and open too. But they had all been down to Captiva and Patricia Neal and all the people— He loved movie stars. I don't know, I guess it made him feel that maybe he had arrived. I had never seen him that drunk unless it was an opening. He had one here after the ROCI show [*Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, 1991] at the National Gallery of Art

[Washington, D.C.] and the reviewer at the *Washington Post*, who did not know pediddly-squat about anything—

Q: [Laughs] I like your frankness.

Kotz: Well, Nick was on the *Post*. I knew this man. I had helped him so much on many stories about people I had written about, Georgia O’Keeffe, for one. He asked me about Rauschenberg. At first he said he didn’t know anything about him. I tried to tell him about ROCI, but it was not installed in the National Gallery of Art in the way [J.] Carter Brown, the director, had promised him. Bob was told he would have the whole museum’s East Building but they chose the worst place in the world for their twentieth-century collection because it is all jammed up together underground. And I saw ROCI when it was in Cuba, with each piece on a separate wall. Quite a difference.

Q: Wow!

Kotz: And he was—have you talked to Don Saff by any chance?

Q: Oh yes.

Kotz: So I hope he told you, step by step, how he engineered the different third-world countries for ROCI.

Q: I didn't interview him personally. Somebody else did.

Kotz: And so in Cuba, the greatest friend of preservation is poverty because when the Russians came in—entering Havana from the airport looked like the outskirts of Moscow, which I've seen, with these tall ugly buildings— But in downtown Havana, the architecture was so glorious. The beautiful old street called the Malecón stood along the waterfront with the ornate architecture from its colonial past still intact and preserved. In the old mansions there was laundry hanging out the windows, evidence they were now multi-family houses. In Cuba, there was not any white paint. We had to fly from Miami to go through Mexico to get to Havana, and we had to arrive at like 3:30 in the morning. We had a plane full of white paint because Bob insisted that the walls be white. The next morning, they went down to paint the walls—no paint. The people were so happy to discover white paint that they absconded with it. All of the white paint in China and in Cuba was going—the lead in the paint was going into munitions in Russia. But anyway, they finally recovered the white paint for *ROCI CUBA* [Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Castillo de la Real Fuerza, and Casa de las Américas, Galería Haydée Santamaría, Havana, 1988].

Fidel Castro was so hoping that this show could be like the Ping-Pong tournament that opened China for [Richard M.] Nixon. Even though Ronald Reagan was president when we came to Cuba, Rauschenberg was, like me, a very, very liberal Democrat. He had put a lot of money into [Edward M. "Ted"] Teddy Kennedy's presidential campaign right at that point. So *ROCI* was not a good political choice for poor Fidel. Nick had my best interests at heart. When I called him, I said, "Nick, I've got to write this for the *Washington Post*, I absolutely have got to write it.

Nobody knows that this is going on.” Nick said, “No, you’ve got a deadline. You’ve got to keep this for your book. Do not stop to write anything for the *Washington Post*.” So the only national reporting of *ROCI CUBA* was by a woman named Helen [L. Kohen], who was the art editor of the *Miami Herald* at the time, and she and I were wandering around taking notes everywhere. I used to wear a black armband for the 26th of July when I was in love with Fidel the Revolutionary, along with Senator John F. Kennedy and several other people; Paul Newman and James Dean included. But never mind.

Q: Of course!

[Laughter]

Kotz: And J. D. Salinger— That’s me though, that’s not Bob. Anyway, back to Cuba now. Fidel had emptied all of the national museums so that each *ROCI* piece could have incredible wall space. It was the most astonishing thing I had ever seen because I had been to Cuba during [James Earl] Jimmy Carter [Jr.], the other little window of opportunity in 1977. I had traveled with the Women’s Press Club of Washington, D.C. We were invited to look at Cuba’s educational system and the medical system, which were quite successful under the Communist dictatorship. So I was reporting on that at the time, but soon thereafter Cuba was closed down to us thereafter and closed down again after ’86. So being in Cuba twice, ten years apart, I had seen those museums before and the Museum of the Revolution and they were historic, but filled with Castro’s Revolution and its “glorious patriotic” outcome. The museums of Cuba were filled—and beautifully hung—with Bob Rauschenberg paintings and prints.



Installation view, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI CUBA*, Casa de las Américas, Galería Haydée Santamaría, Havana, 1988. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

ROCI CUBA was a remarkable showing of remarkable pieces that you could stand in front of and really study, and see where he had used the vivid colors of Cuba and the sensitivity of the photographs he had made of the workmen all around the country. And of course, there were the artworks from other ROCI countries as well. ROCI was like a visual chain letter, a traveling art show. It was just remarkable. And I was so angry when I came back to the States to see it all jammed together below ground at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. And Rauschenberg was so upset with the review that he didn't even want to come to the party there, after the ROCI opening.

Q: Right.

Kotz: The terrible review that Paul Richard wrote; I've kept a copy of it ["Silk Sheets and Neon Bicycles," *Washington Post*, May 12, 1991]. But the installation itself had crammed in all of ROCI, where the energy of it just clashed with each other, each painting, each sculpture. And

that show was a real eye-opener for me as to the real art and skill of a curator when it comes to placement and space.

Q: Right. It needed the space.

Kotz: It needed the space.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we're back on. It's still the 16th and we just took a lunch break. So you were talking about Merce.

Kotz: It was in New York at a fundraiser for the Cunningham Dance Company, honoring Bob's costume designs for Cunningham's performances over the years. Merce Cunningham was in his wheelchair at that time and Rauschenberg was in his wheelchair. They were sitting at the top of the ramp of a studio space that the Merce Cunningham Company had.

Q: I know it.

Kotz: Yes, so we went to a dinner there. So at the point where people started coming up the ramp, Rauschenberg, of course, was not the first one there, but he was being honored. Merce was already there in his chair and so Bob was rolled up and they sat side by side, and the two of them were receiving. We were all standing there watching them welcome the followers. I was standing

beside Nan Rosenthal when Jasper Johns came in. He reached over and hugged Merce and said a few words to him, and then he reached over and kissed Bob. Nan and I both just started weeping and we hugged each other!

Q: Oh my goodness. And what year was this roughly?

Kotz: Do you remember that— It was 2006. It was not too long after he had had the fall and the stroke and was paralyzed. But it wasn't 2008, toward the end, when he was really in bad shape. It was just a beautiful moment, when everybody realized that they made up and it was okay. It just touched my heart, because neither of them will talk about their breakup. I don't know if Jasper has shared that story to anybody else after Bob's death. They will not talk about what caused their famous separation.

Another moment, flying back through history with the dates, Bob was vertical, and it was the opening of his [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum, New York] retrospective [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, traveled] at the Menil Collection in Houston in 1998, which was hung in two or three buildings, an extra building that is now part of the compound [note: Contemporary Arts Museum and Museum of Fine Arts were the additional venues for the Houston presentation]. I was standing there looking at the art and Bob came in with Miss Dora and her sister, both of whom were in wheelchairs, and he was pushing them down the hall. I said hello and followed along and he introduced me to his aunt. I had already met his mother. She was such an authentic person, Dora Rauschenberg. She was the one who— He had a picture of a nude, you heard the nude that he had painted when he was in the navy, and she painted pink

panties and a bra on it. She was painting her own paintings and signing them, Rauschenberg.

[Laughs]

It's interesting, because there is a painting of Bob that was from the Black Mountain days that we assumed was a self-portrait, but could not verify it. He said that it was a self-portrait and he didn't know where it was now. When I was reading Susan [Weil's oral history], she said that she painted a portrait of him. I would just like to find out— It's in my book, but I don't know where or when—



Robert Rauschenberg
Self-Portrait, ca. 1948
Current location unknown

The whole time I was interviewing with my tape recorder, one of the longest and best interviews was with Bill Goldston. The only time I have ever been on Long Island [New York] was when I got myself up to West Islip on the train and I came back on the train, and he sat in his car and talked with me after I had toured the ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions] studio. And of course you know the history with Bob and the whole printmaking immersion— He didn't want to “paint on rocks,” and—

Q: Right.

Kotz: There were two women who were his mother figures, his professional mentors. One was Ileana [Sonnabend], who was probably closer to his age. But the other was the founder of ULAE. Tanya Grosman. Tatyana Grosman.

He wept. Bob wept when he talked about Tanya and what she had meant to him and how she taught him. She had died before I came into his life. But he was very emotional when he talked about people he really loved. He did not talk about Jasper Johns in that way. He talked about Cy [Twombly]—

Q: He did talk about Cy in that way?

Kotz: He did. Yes. It was very interesting, because we were at Gagosian. It was works from his collection [*The Private Collection of Robert Rauschenberg*, Gagosian Gallery, Madison Avenue, New York, 2011] and someone gave a party in the restaurant afterwards. I had stood in high heels at the opening and wanted to sit down. I didn't feel like I wanted to see who was there. But I didn't want to work the party. And there was a nice sofa.

Q: Could you say more about that?

[Laughter]

Kotz: You have to case the joint and see who's there. If there is anybody worth talking to, then you stand and drink a glass of champagne and talk. But I sat down beside Sue Weil—a really lovely human being—because she invited me to sit there. And two or three people came up to me who hadn't met me, and so I said, "Hi, I'm Mary Lynn Kotz, I'm Bob Rauschenberg's biographer." This man leaned over and said to me, "Oh, you must know Cy Twombly then." I said, "Well, I've not met him, but I certainly know who he was." Sue Weil—who had a bit of champagne herself by that time—said, "Cy Twombly! That's the man who took my husband away from me!" That's the first time I had ever heard her make that statement. But Bob spoke quite fondly about Cy. He told me that Cy had spells of depression after Cy was married and while he was living in Italy, and would want to see Bob. Bob said, "Cy just froze up and couldn't paint." So Bob set him up in Captiva and gave him simple assignments to print on his Untitled Press. He said, "After a while he would shake out of it and go back to Europe 'til the next time."

Q: I think we could consider some of those things now. His relationship with Jasper, his relationship with Sue, some of his relationships, yes.

Kotz: Right. He met Jasper in a bookstore. Jasper was much younger; he was about twenty-four. Bob was—he really was very sad about the divorce and really wanted to be a good father. They had a colicky baby and he wouldn't stop crying unless they got in the car and drove around. Dorothea Rockburne was a sixteen-year-old at Black Mountain, and after Sue and the baby stayed in New York, Bob drove back to Black Mountain. Cy and Dorothea and Bob ran around together. Cy was younger as well. So they were all just having a great time running around North

Carolina together. You've heard the story about Dorothea's quilt. Actually, he told me that. He was cold in New York and he needed a quilt and she gave one to him. Later he used it to keep his engine warm.

So what Sue had told me was that her mother was just livid when she found out about Bob and Cy Twombly. Sue had walked in on them. She had the baby and a sweet marriage already, and they were very, very happy together. And all of a sudden there was Cy Twombly in her house in her bed, and she did not appreciate that at all. She told her mother and her mother was very, very, very adamant about, "You have to divorce him now. You have to divorce him." Sue told me, "I did not want to divorce him. I didn't know what to do. Bob cried and cried. He begged me not to leave him. But my mother had been so angry about it and said that I had to come home and take care of my own baby and cross this man out of my life." Sue was so very sad when she told me that story. I do have that on tape in my Sue Weil interview.

After he had had an exhibition along with Roy Lichtenstein in the van Gogh museum in Arles [France; *38 Graphic Works from 1965–1989 by Roy Lichtenstein & Robert Rauschenberg from the Collection of Leo Castelli*, Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Palais de Luppé, 1990], he and his assistant Darryl had to take an early morning train to get to the airport near Nice. Nick said, "Well, why don't you spend the night with us and we'll drive you to the airport." So they rode up with us and spent two nights with us in Cap d'Antibes [France]. For several summers, during the month of July, we had been renting from a widowed lady, a wonderful old house with a beautiful, beautiful walled garden and pool, and with all the owner's stuff in it. It was Villa Gaïole, a historic house in Cap d'Antibes. It had begun as an eleventh-century olive mill. In the

seventeenth century, the first minister of agriculture for the French Republic had lived there and then it was a great den or haven for the French Résistance during World War II. There was martyrdom in the house and around it, noted by plaques on the wall overlooking the garden.

It was so beautiful with purple bougainvillea climbing the side-walls, and trumpet-vines with orange-red blossoms on a trellis sheltering a tiny back porch. It was about four stories high, altered by whoever lived there in whatever century. Bob thought it was the funniest house he'd ever seen. Afterwards, he would say, "There were steps going up and then coming down, and they went nowhere." There were stairs going up and coming down and they went nowhere because people had added on rooms in century after century after century as to whatever they were doing.

As it turned out, our landlady's New York daughter was married to a man who was on the board of the International Center for Photography [New York]. So we got to know them as well when Bob was chosen in 1987 as their honoree of the year, at a dinner there.

In Villa Gaïole Bob was assigned to the third floor for his two nights and our bedroom was on the second floor. The ground floor held the kitchen and dining room, and then it went out—the house was just wonderful. The first floor was the parlor with faded Asian art objects and soft sofas with an adjacent sunroom. There were just mysteries to this house and there were ancient rugs and vases. Their son, Michele, was a photographer and Michele's room was upstairs. He was in his early twenties at the time and he was off studying somewhere. His bedroom was the big attic room, where Bob and Darryl spent the night. There was lots of stuff in the boy's

collection over the years. Our landlady, Madame Detay, had a grand piano on the first floor. The family had lost their fortune in Vietnam, which explained the number of Asian artifacts around. It reminded me of our Virginia farmhouse in a way, because it was quite eclectic and interesting.

Bob decided to play a piano duet with me in the parlor, because he liked to make interesting creations à la John Cage. He sat beside me on the treble side of the keyboard and we created dissonant melodies together in various rhythms. He was not a musician, but he had an ear. He always wanted me to sing for him, which I did quite often. Yes. It has been a while. But Rauschenberg and I used to do stuff like that all the time. We had a great evening.

That night we had dinner and then the next day we had a seafood lunch outdoors in the town square of Old Antibes. Afterwards we drove him to the airport for an evening plane. It was just such a fun visit with the four of us. That morning he said he had stayed up all night because, he said, “It has been years and years since I’ve stayed in somebody’s home, somebody who actually lived there.” He said, “I went around and I just picked up every object and I looked at it, and I wondered who had set it there or what this was or who had played with it. It was the most interesting place I’ve ever been.”

That night before supper, we went out to the second-floor balcony, looking out across the water at the lights of Cannes, because our house was right across, diagonally, from the Hôtel du Cap. We didn’t speak French, but Nick is very smart. He had gone over to the concierge and said, “Would you be my concierge? I’m going to be here for a month.” He said, “Certainly, m’sieu’.” So he got the *International Herald Tribune* for us every day and made recommendations and

dinner reservations from Nice to St. Tropez and found us a French tutor. [Laughs] So Bob was just such fun there. We went out on the second-floor balcony and we were watching the sunset over the Baie des Anges between Cannes and Juan-les-Pins and our place. From our balcony we could look out at the sunset over the water and see the lights of Cannes and the lights of the hill as they came on. So he started singing. “I feel like music,” he said. What was that tune, “dumdumdumdum,” he hummed. It was Judy Garland. “—about the glittering lights.” And I started singing, “The night grows bitter, the stars have lost their glitter,” and he was absolutely rapt!

Q: Sing a little more. But take your hand off your mike.

Kotz: Okay.

The night grows bitter, the stars have lost their glitter,
The wind blows colder and suddenly you're older.
And all because of the man that got away.
No more his eager call, the writing's on the wall
The dreams you dreamed have all, gone astray
The man that won you has gone off and undone you
That great beginning has seen its final ending
Don't know what happened, it's all a waiting game
No more that old time thrill, for you've been through the mill
And never a new love will be the same.

Good riddance, goodbye!

Every trick of his you're on to

But fools will be fools, so where's he gone to?

The wind blows colder and suddenly you're older;

There's just no let-up, the live long night and day.

Ever since this world began, there is nothing sadder than

A one-man woman looking for the man that got away

The man that got away.

Q: Bravo! I can see now why he wanted you to sing.

Kotz: He had this bar in his new house in Captiva. His new house was really a showplace and it was— But in his old house, he was much more comfortable. It was a little scruffy beach house and then he had an old rickety studio just out the back door. Finally, Darryl Pottorf, who had dreams of being an architect, designed and built him this concrete and marble palace, which also turned out to be very dangerous for somebody of a certain age, who could slip on the marble floor and fall down and crack his head open. But he had his own little kitchen in the great room where his recent huge art works could be displayed. On a wall behind his bar was a keyboard.

That's where he composed the music for Laurie Anderson to perform and for Trisha Brown, who was complaining that she had gotten too old to walk on the wall. He said, "Well, turn around backwards." So he wrote and Trisha danced the entire new dance, "If You Could See Me Now," as a solo with her back to the audience [note: *If you couldn't see me*, 1994]. So he was playing

for me back in Captiva and recording. I don't know—he probably erased them. But he had a bar counter with barstools like a long L and he would stand behind the bar, the bartender and chef, he would do everything and Darryl would be at his side helping him, being his sous-chef. He was a real gourmet cook and his platters were works of art. After France he asked me to stand on the bar and sing for him, which I did, several times.

[Laughter]

Kotz: But he always had the television on, wherever he was working or while he was cooking. Did anybody tell you about *The Young and the Restless*? That was his religion. He loved *The Young and the Restless*. He liked the production values and he liked everything, but he also got caught up in the story. He also liked *The Simpsons*. [Laughs] But he had the news and other programs going on at the same time with two or three television sets around, and that was what stimulated him. What inspires artists? I know a young woman who's become a major poet. After she finished work with me, she would go out to a bar, and until about 3:30 in the morning. She would be inspired by the ambience of the bar and she would drink red wine and write poetry. So who knows? I have to have total, total, total quiet. But anyway, that's the story of Bob and Captiva and the new house.



Exterior of Rauschenberg's new Captiva Drive studio, Captiva, Florida, ca. 1993. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Let's see, at the new studio, he did a lot of entertaining. Oh, one time he took us with him to Fort Myers because he had dinner afterwards for Liza Minnelli. So he was talking about Judy Garland and all of that, and after the show, it was Liza Minnelli talking about Liza Minnelli. So that was just fine. He asked her if she knew that song. I didn't dare sing that song, for heaven's sake, in a public place.

[Laughter]

Kotz: But anyway, those were just little close encounters of the Rauschenbergian kind.

Q: Well, that's just marvelous. I asked you a question over lunch, I wish I had put it on the record, which was just at that time in his life, you got to know him.

Kotz: Yes.

Q: It's not the easiest time in his life. How did you get him to trust you? How did you build that relationship?

Kotz: I just hung around like a piece of—like a shadow. He knew that he couldn't get rid of me. I just showed up. It turned out that John Cage loved me and so did Dorothy and Roy. But see, I'd interviewed all these people and they had gotten to know me, that I was real. So no matter when he had an opening or what, I was there. I spent the year of 1984 in New York City, four days a week. I had hitchhiked and borrowed friends' sofas all the way from above the fish market down at the World Trade Center to up to a big apartment on East Eighty-second Street, and it was just a hassle to get all the way down to NoHo from anywhere. So I rented a room. There's a group of theater people who operate B&Bs, and you have to pass their muster to be able to spend the night in their homes when they're touring or whatever. This woman who had been a Broadway star and was now a teacher, a lovely woman, a widow, had an extra bedroom and that was mine. She was quite delighted that I didn't want her to make breakfast for me, that I could scrounge for my own. It was right across the street from the Second Avenue Deli and it was also right across the street from St. Mark's [Church in-the-Bowery]. So it was a wonderful place to be shagging around New York and I felt so safe down there. It was just mine. Somebody from 381 [Lafayette Street] would always walk me back if I was there working really late. So that's where I stayed and I spent an awful lot of time in museums and in the museum libraries and studied Bob's original thirty-four cantos of Dante's *Inferno*, his series of transfer drawings that illustrates the thirty-four cantos of Dante's *Inferno* [*Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, 1958–60]—oh my god!



Robert Rauschenberg
Canto XXIV: Circle Eight, Bologna 7, The Thieves
from the series *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, 1959–60
Solvent transfer with gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper
14 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches (36.8 x 29.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Given anonymously

Q: Oh, talk to me about the *Inferno*. That's just astonishing work.

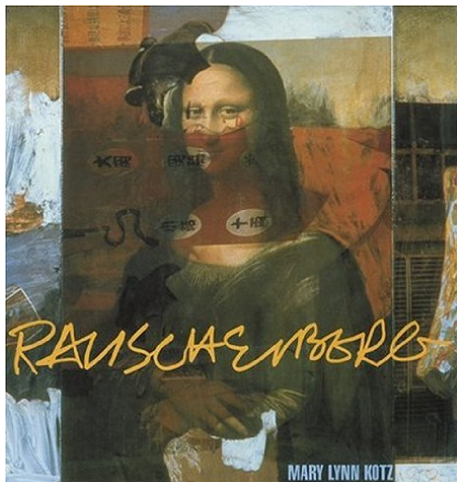
Kotz: Absolutely! And he had a translator who was Michael Sonnabend, a Dante scholar. So he translated it for him and helped him understand what each line meant and Rauschenberg worked on it panel by panel for two years. He had to keep in mind the progress of the story, and what the *Inferno* meant to him, and what the steps were for getting out of Hell, so to speak. He was quite proud of it and explained it all to me. A young man who had helped me down at the Smithsonian American Art Museum before the new one was built, had shown me that original big manuscript written by an art historian, Dore Ashton, and it's about this long. A young man who was an intern there sneaked in there and made a photocopy of it for me because— He's now an art museum director down somewhere in the South. But he was an intern then and was just a friend of a family from somewhere else who we had promised to take care of when he came to

Washington. He did that, so I have it. I would like to show it to you sometime. It's in my paper files.

Q: Yes, it would be great.

Kotz: But anyway, that's where it is. Bob talked me through it as well. I don't know where that part of it is. You see, everything before the new edition, all the research was in the 1980s.

I had gleaned a new bevy of information for the 2004 edition.



Cover of *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*
by Mary Lynn Kotz, 1990; revised
edition 2004

Eric Himmel from Abrams called me again, after I had fallen and I was in the hospital in Florida when he called and said, "I'm ready for the new chapter." I said, "Well, I'm flat on my back with all my bones broken, so—" Anyway—

Q: I wanted to follow up on a couple of other things and ask you a couple of questions about the book itself. But before we do, you had mentioned that you'd like to go back this afternoon and talk a bit about Bob's relationship with Christopher.

Kotz: Bob's relationship with Christopher. That memorable first night when I spent the night in Captiva. I asked him about his son. He said, "We were just shocked and disappointed. Here he was going to be majoring in physics, going to be the first scientist in the family. And then he went to Reed College in [Portland] Oregon. He decided he wanted to go there and the next thing I knew, he wanted to be an artist." He said, "Come in here." He took me into his bedroom, in which there was a narrow, single bed. On the tall chest of drawers in the corner—it's a very small house up on stilts on the beach—and there was a framed black-and-white photograph of a light bulb. I said, "Oh, is that your Black Mountain light bulb?" He said, "No, it's Christopher's and he had never known that I photographed a light bulb." I said, "Well, you know what? That is a sign that he's got art in his genes somewhere." And then he made a joke about genes. [Laughs]



left:
Robert Rauschenberg
Ceiling + Light Bulb, 1950
Gelatin silver print

right:
Christopher Rauschenberg
Untitled, 1974
Gelatin silver print

So that was Christopher. But he said, “We are so proud of him. But he had to go and be an artist, oh!” [Laughs]

Q: Did he ever talk about Christopher’s early years?

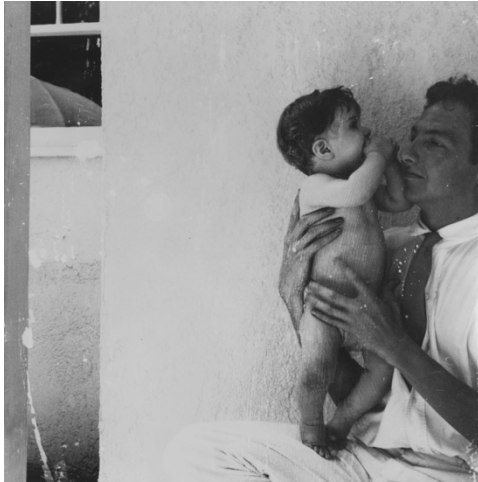
Kotz: Oh yes.

Q: Give me a feeling for how he talked about him.

Kotz: Well, he said, “Christopher was a colicky baby and we had to get in the car and drive him all over New York and then we had to drive him all over Black Mountain, all over North Carolina. And he just would not stop crying until he had the motion of the car.” When they moved back to New York and Sue left him, that was just so terribly sad for Bob. He would go back, hold him, call him ’Topher and then later he took off with Cy to Italy. But they ran out of Cy’s money and he had to go to North Africa to find work so he could get back home.

[Laughter]

Kotz: But he’s inventive with all kinds of—he never was afraid to work at menial jobs. That’s how he did that. So he then came back and by that time Christopher was a toddler and was walking around. So he would bring Christopher up to his studio and give him some things to paint with. And he would paint with him. He said, “We would take him up over New York.” He said “we” would take him. So he and Sue were still co-parenting at that time.



Christopher and Robert Rauschenberg, 1952. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Susan Weil

Q: She speaks very affectionately about him and how he always sent her something on her birthday and his birthday.

Kotz: Oh he did. And three dozen roses on each wedding anniversary.

Q: Yes.

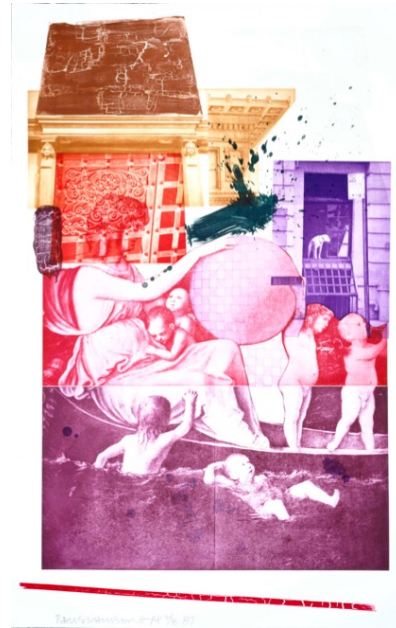
Kotz: The week he had made the final decision in 2008, he called her and he said, “I love you, Sue, I always will.” That moved me so much. Bradley didn’t know anything about how to get him into a hospital when he was here. Bill Goldston and [Sidney B.] Sid Felsen had the show of Bob’s works on paper up at the National Gallery of Art with [Charles] Charlie Ritchie. I went with Bob and Sid around to see it the day before the show opened, and that’s when he was— [*Let the World In: Prints by Robert Rauschenberg from the National Gallery and Related Collections*, 2007–08].

Once I see the list of images and the images, I can tell you what Bob said to me about them. But I didn't have notes to write it down on, so that's why I have to have Sid with me to remind me of that last day when Rauschenberg was able to go around in a wheelchair. Chris had not come to that, but the gallery had planned a big private dinner, a big deal for collectors and trustees of the National Gallery. Bob went through it with Sid and me the afternoon before. Did Sid tell you about that? It was quite moving.

Bob took a long time on the *Stoned Moon* series [1969–70]. There was something he showed me once that I never could track down again, a poem he had written while lying in the swamp, watching the Apollo 11 go up. It's interesting because I know how that came about and that's because Nixon was going to cut out NASA entirely. I happened to know the guy who was John F. Kennedy's public information director for NASA. He put out that he knew he had to keep the space heroes' images up before the public. So he called a competition for artists. His name was Julian [W.] Scheer and later he helped us fight off Disney in Virginia. That's another Mary Lynn story. But he looked at the images and they talked about the printing of that and the *Stoned Moon* series and what it meant to him.



Robert Rauschenberg
Sky Garden (Stoned Moon), 1969
Lithograph and screenprint
89 1/4 x 42 inches (226.7 x 106.7 cm)
From an edition of 35, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

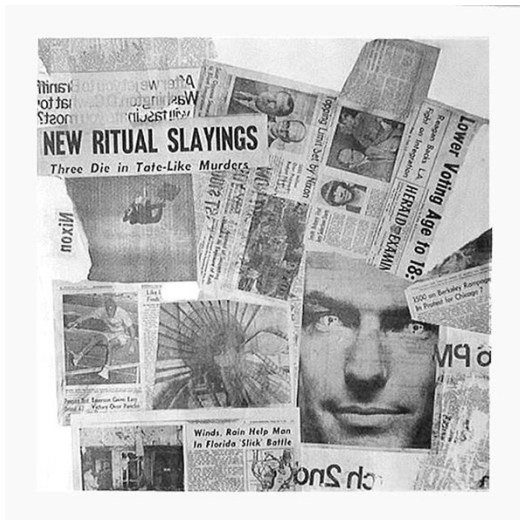


Robert Rauschenberg
Bellini #2, 1987
Intaglio
58 7/8 x 37 1/4 inches (149.5 x 94.6 cm)
From an edition of 48, published by Universal
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Then we walked around the other rooms and he talked about each work—the *Bellini* series [1986–89], I remember, in which he said he worked so hard to produce the exact shade of a rosy-peach pink that Giovanni Bellini had produced in the fifteenth century. And with Bob’s penchant for double entendres, he also made a wink to one of his favorite drinks, a fresh peach juice and champagne concoction at Harry’s Bar in Venice, named a Bellini for the lovely pink color of the mixture.

In the prints and photographs section of the gallery, the entrance of the exhibition, was our last stop. His earliest collages with images clipped from the news of the day and glued onto a piece

of white paper or cardboard, were just to our left—they would have been the first you saw if you came in the door. “I’d forgotten about this one,” he told me, pointing out a small photo of a 1960s baseball game. “I went to that game,” he said, “Not something I did very often.” Bob always kept up with the news of the day, political and otherwise, and kept it to recycle into his art. That is, news stories and headlines that meant something to him— On a wall to the right, he pointed to examples of a 1970 series called *Currents*. *Currents* was really powerful. It took a hard look at this country and also the world. With headlines and political stories about war and space travel and social justice, that he made into collages, and enlarged into black-and-white prints. He was proud of the impact *Currents* had made.



Robert Rauschenberg
Features (from Currents) 62, 1970
 Screenprint
 40 x 40 inches (101.6 x 101.6 cm)
 From an edition of 50, published by
 Dayton’s Gallery 12 and Castelli Graphics;
 produced by Styria Studio, New York

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: We’re coming back on now.

Kotz: I told Bob that I had been invited to Fort Myers to see Darryl's work and Bob said, "Can you please somehow tell him he is talented on his own? He's very talented. But tell him to stop painting like me!" That was, I think, maybe at the heart of it; Darryl didn't think he got enough recognition for what he was doing. He actually stopped being Bob's studio assistant and moved into his own house and had his own studio, and was very happy with his partner, Mark Pace.

But it was the last time many of us saw Bob. After we had gone through the exhibition preview, he had dinner in the hotel with Sid and Joni [Moisant Weyl]. After dinner they had left and his nurse got him into the bed and had given him his go-to-bed pills. He choked on one of the pills, but she did not hear him. She was not the regular nurse. And he just was choking and choking and choking. By the time they called Bradley, Bradley called 9-1-1 and got him into an emergency room at G.W. [George Washington University Hospital, Washington, D.C.]. I wished Bradley had called me for assistance because our internist is head of medicine at G.W. and I could have called him and Bob would have received much better care and placed him into a nicer room. But Bradley didn't think of me as a D.C. resident. She'd only known me in Florida and New York. But when he didn't show up at his opening reception nor the private dinner the next evening, one by one, we learned what had happened. The next morning I drove over to the hospital to see him and he was alone in this little teeny, tiny room. It wasn't like what he had been accustomed to in his ever more frequent hospital stays. I went in to see him and I told him about a good review of his new show in New York and I read it to him, a review that had just arrived in *Artnews*. He grinned, "Huh, that's nice." He liked that. Then Darryl came to the door and he was just blathering. He was absolutely blathering. He said, "Bob, you've got to get up now. I've called a medevac. You're going back home to your own doctor." So Bob said, "Well, I

guess I'm leaving now." I said, "Bye, Bob." I said, "See you later, Bob. I'll be down," and he said, "I love you," to me.

Q: What a beautiful thing.

Kotz: That was the last time I heard his voice.

Q: Maybe he knew.

Kotz: I think he did. Of course, when he went back home, there was just so little left of life in him that they—the hospital down there is not somewhere I would want to be medevac-lifted to. That's the one thing about being at the very tip end of Captiva Island. We had a hurricane evacuation when we were there and we had to get out in a big hurry. Of course there was—was it Hurricane Charley [2004], I think, that he sat through because he was in his wheelchair and he wanted to—do you know this story? Oh. He had built the new studio so it would be hurricane-proof. If he wanted to go, he would be taken away in a hurricane. Well, he wasn't taken away, but he couldn't get off the island. He had to be evacuated by helicopter. The county charged him fifteen thousand dollars for that trip. It was a fine for not getting off the island too. The people, including Bradley, who didn't like the beautiful Australian pines, said that it was the casuarina trees in the roads that had come down and that we didn't need to have them there. They took all our casuarina trees that were our hideaway and that was kind of the end for us. That and all the hideous new McMansions.

The next time I went down there—weeks later, was for a memorial service. He had said to the doctor, “Okay, am I going to get any better?” He had a feeding tube, a breathing tube, and other tubes. The doctor said, “I’m afraid not. I’m afraid you’ll have to think up the ideas and have your people work them out for you.” He said to the doctor, “Then I don’t want a life like that, thank you.” He said, “It’s bad enough being paralyzed and it’s bad enough having to have somebody take care of your every function. But I do not want to have that life.” So he called his nearest and dearest, including Christopher, who I think had plane trouble; I don’t think he could get there to stand beside his bed and hold him.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: I think I have to leave in a few minutes, to catch the train, sadly.

Kotz: Okay. Listen, y’all don’t rush off in the heat of the day!

Q: My Southern friend here. But I want to thank you for your generosity. And I want to hear a lot more about the book. I’m interested in how you structured it, why you began where you began. Maybe you could just end with that story, why you began with ROCI.

Kotz: Every now and then I will give a talk in Asheville [North Carolina] at the Black Mountain College Museum and Art Center. There is a big show and a big write-up in the *New York Times* about [Raymond E.] Ray Johnson’s show and about Black Mountain, and there’s a picture of Bob there. The museum board members were so thrilled about that because they’ve been so

hopeful that we could get good press—I'm trying to keep that alive. But also, for the oral history, did anyone tell you about the young British man who had gone around and had video interviews with a lot of people who came to the reunion of Black Mountain; I don't know whether it was the hundredth or the seventy-fifth, or what. Bob chose not to go. I don't think he wanted anybody to see him in a wheelchair. But there were lots of stories about him and Black Mountain, and there are wonderful ghost stories.

Q: It's a charmed place.

Kotz: Oh, isn't it?

Q: Charmed place.

Kotz: I was pushing for this very wealthy man who owned the small college down there to just really restore it and keep it, harbor the buildings and preserve them. But he didn't want to. He liked it as a boy's camp. So thank you very much.

Q: Thank you!

Kotz: I want you to come back when you've got longer to stay.

Q: Yes. [Laughs]

Kotz: And that is followed by, “Here’s your hat, what’s your hurry?”

[Laughter]

Q: Well, it’s just been a tremendous pleasure. Thank you for helping so much to prepare the day, and sending me those great directions and everything. It’s just been a great pleasure. I wish everyone I interviewed was just like you.

Kotz: Well, I have enjoyed it. I have really enjoyed it.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2

Interviewee: Mary Lynn Kotz

Location: Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: July 15, 2016

Q: This is Mary Marshall Clark with the wonderful Mary Lynn Kotz and Tim Chapin. Today is the 15th of June 2016. We're about to start session two. We were going to start with that story about [Thomas] Tom Krens.

Kotz: Tom Krens was the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It was the evening after the opening of the Rauschenberg retrospective exhibition that took place all over New York because his body of work was just too huge for the museum itself [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Guggenheim Museum SoHo, and Guggenheim Museum at Ace Gallery, New York, 1997–98]. It was either the after opening party or it was the night-after dinner party. But it was a very auspicious gathering of the New York sponsors and collectors and movers and shakers. It was in the Upper East Side apartment of [Arnold] Arne and [Mildred] Milly Glimcher who, of course, were his dealers at PaceWildenstein.

There were toasts from everybody. I remember one from Jean Stein vanden Heuvel, who was looking beautiful that night, and another from various collectors and friends and so forth. Into the gathering came Tom Krens, who was notable for his mode of transportation, which was his motorcycle. He came steaming in on his motorcycle wearing his black leather jacket and his

motorcycle cap and his goggles. He came in just in time to deliver his toast in which he said, “There will be two artists remembered for the twentieth century, the two artists who changed the course of art history. For the first half, it will be Pablo Picasso. For the second half, it will be Robert Rauschenberg.”

Q: Beautiful, beautiful.

Kotz: I thought it was—

Q: Yes.

Kotz: But that was too bad that I didn’t get it in—maybe I’ll get it in the—[laughs] in the new chapter.

Q: Yes. What was it like to be there at that moment in time?

Kotz: I was excited, thrilled. Knew I was in a very wonderful company of some of the greatest creative minds in America because during the time I spent with Rauschenberg—from the time I first interviewed him in 1981. It was just a delight to meet his world. The other artists who knew him—I interviewed those who had been influenced by him—the one that I most remember was a wonderful day I spent with Dorothy and Roy Lichtenstein, in his studio, in which he had a ladder downstairs. There was kind of a balcony-sitting room overlooking the immensely high-ceiling studio. Roy was standing high up on a ladder with a gigantic painting on which there was an

immense brush stroke coming down. When I arrived, he came up to us and was talking about Rauschenberg in the early days and how, he said, “We were sitting around, we were educated on the G.I. Bill [Servicemen’s Readjustment Act]. But we were ‘starving artists’ in New York. Anybody who had fifteen cents to buy a beer, we all shared that beer.” I heard that over and over, that kind of story.

But he said, “We were all working on something to try to portray where we are now in this society. We all had come back from wartime and saw the great booming commercialism and consumerism of American society. “Then,” Roy said, “Bob showed me a painting that he was working on. He had sold nothing at that time, but he was already becoming the talk of New York.” He said, “He had used comic strips across the front of it.” The title was *Collection*, 1954[1955]. I actually saw that painting in the flesh when I was doing the research for the book. There was the Sunday funny paper with the comic strip torn into readable scraps, showing in several spots in the background of a very colorful oil painting. I’m sorry, I forget the exact quote that he thought was so appropriate on the comic strip. It could have been something from either Smokey Stover or Snuffy Smith or Jiggs and Maggie.



Robert Rauschenberg
Collection, 1954/1955
Combine: oil, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, wood, metal, and mirror on three canvas panels
80 x 96 x 3 1/2 inches (203.2 x 243.8 x 8.9 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Gift of Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson

[Laughter]

Kotz: You can tell my generation, can't you?

[Laughter]

Kotz: Roy said, "When I saw that comic strip and what it was saying about America right now," he said, "I thought, yes, that's what I want to do." He said, "And I went out and started painting Mickey Mouse."

Q: That's incredible.

Kotz: That was one.

Q: Did he talk about how Rauschenberg influenced him?

Kotz: Oh yes and—

Q: What did he say?

Kotz: Indeed. He said, “He was two steps ahead of all of us. He just influenced everything I did. We all shared our work at the time and we critiqued each other, but we all were influenced by everything anybody did.” It was interesting to me—and I’m departing from Roy just a minute—

Q: Sure.

Kotz: —to talk about Jasper Johns and Warhol because I was looking at—the National Gallery of Art did a huge retrospective of the first decade of Jasper Johns’s career [*Jasper Johns: An Allegory of Painting, 1955–1965*, 2007]. It was in a wonderful catalogue, widely touted retrospective. I knew those paintings because I know Bob told me how much that he would get in there and they would paint on the same canvas together and just have a whole bunch of fun. In the National Gallery of Art Jasper Johns retrospective there was one in which there were casts of various body parts. Bob had told me which were his [laughs]. But those paintings did not look like Jasper Johns. They looked like Robert Rauschenberg. Most of them were great big canvases that were red with stuff in them and letters of the alphabet hanging about. I kept saying to my husband, “I know this one.” I didn’t know the painting itself, but I knew what Bob was working on at the time and how he and Jasper were painting with each other.

Of course the funniest story was—I'm sure it's been printed over and over again—was how when Jasper was working with encaustic, painting American flags, Bob said that the—it was so beautiful, the waxwork. He said it looked like it was just edible. He said, “Jasper, please let me paint one of your stripes. I just want to dip the brush in that.” Jasper gave him the brush and Bob painted a wide red line across the white stripe. Or was it blue? Bob was laughing about that.

Anyway, but in that Johns retrospective the very last picture before was painted in shades of grey background and a string coming down and one quiet object [Johns, *Fool's House*, 1962]. But it was so different from the others. That was after their—it was when they were about to break off their relationship, just after that.

Q: Yes.

Kotz: I said this is the progression of when the break created Jasper Johns, really. Bob told me about—

Q: Say more about what you mean by that.

Kotz: Pardon?

Q: The break made Jasper Johns, you said.

Kotz: Yes because Bob was such an overpowering influence on everybody he met. He really picked up Jasper Johns when he went into that bookstore where Jasper Johns was working. They were both from the South, they were both poor. Jasper really wanted to be an artist and Bob was already an artist. He was starving and Jasper was starving. Bob had found really the first loft because he had grown up poor and he didn't mind living in less than habitable surroundings—and he liked to pick up stuff on the street to make art with because he couldn't afford any other art materials. And so he invited Jasper to come and share a studio with him. They shared a studio for quite some time before they started sharing each other's lives. [Note: Rauschenberg moved his studio to 278 Pearl Street in September 1955 one floor above where Johns already had his own studio.]

It was his influence—Bob would never tell me and would never tell anybody else what their breakup was about. Bob said he was moving out and took all of his screens and threw them out the window into a big trash can to destroy them. The screens, with which he made his famous silkscreen paintings. “I'm leaving,” he said. He took off for this around-the-world trip with Merce Cunningham and John Cage. He made little bitty things, because he couldn't stop making art. He made little works along the way, everywhere they stopped for a performance. Of course his stage sets were made with his sculptures from every country in the world, found in junkyards or along the streets. Many years later after Jane Livingston, director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, with the—in 1976 had seated them together in a booth at the Corcoran for Walter Hopps's show [*Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976–77]—he and Jasper made friends again.

Bob told me that Jasper called him one day many years later and said, “I keep my work stored in a bank vault, an old bank downtown. I want you to meet me there. I want to show you something.” He met Bob at the bank and he opened a vault and there were those same silkscreens. Bob said, “I threw those damn things away!” Jasper said, “I went down and got them out of the bin.” He said, “I knew they’d be worth something someday.” Bob said, “Yes, I knew he was wanting something from me and that’s why he did that. I forgot what he was wanting something from me, but he was teasing.”

[Note from narrator: John Cage and Bob gave me the story of the 1964 Venice Biennale and it occurred during a performance of the Cunningham Dance Company at La Fenice opera house [Teatro La Fenice] after which Bob says he was mis-quoted in an Italian newspaper saying that the Cunningham Dance Company was his greatest canvas, which was really hurtful to his dear friends Cage and Cunningham. The wound, however, was healed after Bob’s statement to each of them.]

But, back to Jasper, they never talked publicly about what the breakup was. I’m not sure, but Bob talked very fondly about going down to—I’ve been down there—Edisto Island, off of the coast of South Carolina, where Jasper grew up with his aunts. Jasper’s aunts went to Brenau University in Gainesville, Georgia. That’s where Bob kept his paintings stored, up on a wall. Leo Castelli built a museum there. I went down and lectured there on contemporary Southern artists who were influenced by the great Southern writers, and portraying the south as a land unto itself, but in a distinct twenty-first-century approach.

But the reason Jasper Johns had sent his work down there was that those two aunts, who had graduated from Brenau, had raised him and put him through school. Leo was telling me that story.

Q: Did you ever talk to Leo directly about Bob's influence on other artists?

Kotz: Oh indeed.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about what he thought about that?

Kotz: Oh, he said he would put out a very new piece of work or a body of work and the other artists of his time would take it as a seed for what they were doing and run with it. I spent a lot of time talking with him over the years. Leo was with us in the South of France. The Rauschenberg troupe stayed at the Baumanière in Les Baux-de-Provence. It was nice. The interview with Ileana Sonnabend was wonderful. She and Bob were so close to each other. I'll give you parenthetical expressions along the way because my mind jumps from why they were close to each other, which is a quality that Bob had that I noticed. There were certain people with whom he communicated. It was almost an extrasensory kind of thing. Trisha Brown was one. Watching them work together was so astonishing. It was that he really appreciated somebody who had the skills and the training in a totally different area from his own. But he immediately could sense that person's real worth. I could immediately tell when he was employing empathy because he had to. I could tell that he just politely cut his time with somebody who was not on that deep

level with him. It didn't matter if that person were the waiter or the shopkeeper, he had just a way of knowing who somebody was—I hate to use the word real because we're all real—

[Laughter]

Kotz: —but somebody who had some kind of human spirit and especially those with whom he collaborated and influenced in his own world of art, that he had some way of sensing that they were of worth.

It was just so incredible to work—and that was one thing. John Cage loved him so much. It was a—John Cage became my friend and Merce Cunningham also because I was always the fly on the wall. I just went wherever Bob did and he finally assumed that I was there and I was going to be part of it and there was just no—and then finally he started inviting me to everything because he saw that I wasn't intruding.

[Laughter]

Kotz: Especially after the first version of the book was read to him, he—Darryl told me that he cried and he cried and he cried going through it. When he really discovered that I didn't trash him, then Nick and I were his friends for life. Of course after that I saw him frequently because I was lecturing at every opening that he had all over, really all over the country. I was just part of the entourage. And the Harry Abrams company was quite pleased with the fact that that was—that the museums were ordering copies of our book.

Q: In terms of doing the research, I want to—we'll bracket for a moment the question of influence because I think we can come back to it.

Kotz: Correct.

Q: But I'm really interested in your process, your researching the book. It's so well-researched, you have so much source material. How much time did that take? How did you do it? How did you think about it?

Kotz: It took a long, long time. But I am a researcher. I have often laughed and said I'd rather do research than write and so—well it goes back to my first book. It was called *Upstairs at the White House* [1973] and it was a bestseller. I got a call from the man named Milton Esterow, who was the publisher of *Artnews*. I had been doing freelance writing and mainly after we moved to D.C., writing stories about how the congressional families lived in Washington. Feature writing was my thing. Politics was not my bailiwick. So I had a call from Milton Esterow. He found me in our home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He said, "I've read your book. I love the way you write. I love the book. I'd like for you to write for my magazine." I said, "Well, thank you very much. I'm flattered, but I don't know if you could afford me." He said, "Why, I didn't realize you were that famous." I said, "I'm not, that was my first book." I said, "I don't know art history and I don't know the jargon. You'd have to pay for an art historical education." I said, "There are some works of art: such as Jackson Pollock, I'm quite passionate about, I just respond to them. But I have no idea why." He said to me, "A good reporter can cover anything."

I was doing a story for *Vogue* magazine on Joan Mondale, who Carter had appointed as his “ambassador to the arts.” I was going on a trip with her as the only reporter, to the state arts commissions, to see what the states were doing out there. Because of course New York and Washington think that “out there” is *out there*. I remember the *New Yorker* cover. When I asked him if he’d like for me to piggyback on that trip, he said sure. This is for *Artnews* [Kotz, “Washington’s Joan of Art,” September 1978]. When we got out to Santa Fe, Joan said that she was so thrilled. She said, “I have an audience with Georgia O’Keeffe!” Joan Mondale was very expressive. She said, “I have an audience with Georgia O’Keeffe! She said I could have tea with her, thirty minutes.” So we drove all the way from Santa Fe to her home in Abiquiú [New Mexico], just with her Secret Serviceman and the driver, who was Secret Service as well, and her executive assistant Bess Abell.

After her thirty minutes with the legend, she came back to the car and said, “She is just wonderful!” She said, “She’s very much with it and she is so funny.” She said, “And she is going to be ninety in November. But she is losing her eyesight.” I thought ding-ding-ding. I called Milton Esterow. “Okay, I’m doing this story for you on Joan Mondale.” And I said, “But she had this interview with Georgia O’Keeffe.” I said, “Would you like to have a story on Georgia O’Keeffe if I could get it?” He said, “If you could get a story on Georgia O’Keeffe, I would stop the presses.” [Kotz, “A Day with Georgia O’Keeffe,” *Artnews*, December 1977]

Q: Good.

Kotz: That's how I started writing for *Artnews*. I wrote O'Keeffe in April asking for an interview and referred to Joan Mondale's visit. She granted me thirty minutes for six months later in October. After I spent that day with Georgia O'Keeffe, I started writing for *Artnews* forever. She bumped Joan Mondale. Her story was cover one month and Joan waited to appear in the next issue. The following period of writing for *Artnews*, I had lots and lots of cover stories and stories that were not cover stories.

Q: You did tell me that story, yes.

Kotz: Yes, that I did the story on Rauschenberg and that became the cover story. The cover story became the foundation for the book. But back to the research: I made friends with his staff. Once Bob had agreed to let us use all of his art and his personal pictures as well, I had the introduction to and the access to all of his Rolodex as well. David White, his archivist and curator, who is one of the grandest people I have ever known, became my friend and was just so helpful to me in making those introductions.

The interviews were wonderful and I think one of the best interviews in my mind, because there was such a response, was with John Cage in his apartment. My first book had come from my experience in the curator's office in the White House during the [Lyndon B.] Johnson and Nixon administrations, in which I had created the first ever bibliography of the presidency on film because film was such an educational experience—I'd grown up watching newsreels before the main feature in the movie theater—newsreels and so forth. But it didn't occur to anybody that motion picture film was also an archival medium. So I had done that research and having had

that, I had a stack pass—which no longer is available because of thefts—to the Library of Congress [Washington, D.C.]. I was able to go into the stacks and once I went through their catalogue and looked up Rauschenberg and I saw what was there—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay, we took a brief break and now we're back on. We're talking about the Library of Congress and finding the Rauschenberg bibliography, yes.

Kotz: I had a stack pass. I first said to myself, in order to find out where Rauschenberg fits into art history of the twentieth century, I have to read art history of the twentieth century, which I did. One of the—and I was delighted to then discover that my buddies the Abstract Expressionists, for some reason who touched my imagination or my soul, were his teachers. I thought okay, he's got that background. Then I learned about Black Mountain College. And then I went to Black Mountain College because I wanted to walk through it. Bob told me I should. He said, "You need to get down there." Then every other book or magazine that mentioned Rauschenberg—and of course my initial guide, before I did the interview, was *Off the Wall*.

Q: Of course.

Kotz: That gave me enough material on Rauschenberg so that I could walk in and talk to him about his wanting to be a preacher, why he wanted to be a preacher—and I let him know that I knew all about Church of Christ because my family was Southern Baptist.

We talked until—it was after three in the morning when he took me to wake up Nick. He made me go get Nick. Of course he and Nick later became good friends. I was exactly at the age of his little sister, Janet. But I had a brother ten years older as well. So the relationship was almost identical. Our relationship as it developed, I think maybe he saw me as like Janet, as somebody younger and worthy of teasing. He was always doing these funny put-downs and teasing. Of course at that point, as I told you, I was interviewing everybody in the country on David White's Rolodex. It was wonderful. But at first there I was in the Library of Congress with every scrap of magazine, newspaper, all of the reviews. We have paper copies of everything I photocopied in my files. Last time did I show you my files that marvelous Tim Chapin has catalogued?

Q: No.

Kotz: The other thing that I did was to go to the National Gallery of Art and to MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York], to their archives, and studied what they had. I don't remember if I went to the—I think I was intimidated by the Metropolitan [Museum of Art, the Met, New York], but I did go to MoMA and the National Gallery of Art and to the Smithsonian and museums all over the country—MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] and LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] and SFMOMA [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art] among them.

So that's in the Library of Congress. I would go to the microfiche and the—well I guess it was the microfilm—

[INTERRUPTION]

Kotz: Every little scrap of information that I had, I tried to track down more. I went all over the country interviewing collectors and museum directors, curators. Some were very forthcoming and helpful, especially at MOCA in Los Angeles. I serendipitously arrived at the same time that Count Giuseppe Panza was sending his collection of Combines [1954–64] over to MOCA. Bob arrived and I walked around the Combines with him and he identified all the—the man in the white suit on that one [Untitled, ca. 1954, sometimes referred to as “man with white shoes”]. It was a very, very special thing because he just doesn’t ever tell you what’s in the work and here he was doing so, getting re-acquainted with his early creation.



Robert Rauschenberg
 Untitled, ca. 1954
 Combine: oil, pencil, crayon, paper, canvas, fabric, newspaper, photographs, wood, glass, mirror, tin, cork, and found painting with pair of painted leather shoes, dried grass, and Dominique hen on wood structure mounted on five casters
 86 1/2 x 37 x 26 1/4 inches (219.7 x 94 x 66.7 cm)
 The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
 The Panza Collection

Q: What did he say?

Kotz: Well, there were some scribbles on white note paper on that Combine. I asked him, “Well, is that Cy Twombly?” He said, “I don’t know. I don’t know which one is Christopher’s and which one is Cy Twombly’s at this point.” I think he was pulling my leg. There was a big photograph, black-and-white, a close-up of a face, obviously Jasper Johns. That one had been—later on, I discovered—torn off the collage while the work was on exhibition there. A careful photocopy of the original was placed there by the museum’s restoration team.

There was also the little picture of Christopher at the top. Bob talked about the day in the park that they went back to the same spot where he and Sue used to go when she was very pregnant with Christopher. He has that marvelous photograph of her underneath the tree. He spoke fondly of all of his—and he gave me stories in various parts of his life with everybody, which was a great part of the research itself. But the research in the libraries was what I felt I had to do in order to be a book that would be taken seriously and I enjoyed doing it. It certainly has had a life. It’s still in print. In compiling the research, the other thing I did was to try to find as many dissertations as I could. So I went to the collection of PhD dissertations at the University of Michigan. It was 161 dissertations that I read. There must be more now.

Q: God.

Kotz: I bought them. You had to—

[Laughter]

Kotz: —so they are in the archives. But there was so little that was intelligible, so little that was valuable in that academic art-speak. The same thing with the catalogues. I finally spent a year in New York, four days a week, because commuting back and forth had become hazardous and I ran out of friends with couches to sleep on. So I simply took a little B&B [bed and breakfast] on Second Avenue, right across from St. Mark's. For four days, I stayed with a retired actress who was very happy that I didn't want her to make me breakfast. It was right across the street from the Second Avenue Deli. I spent that time in the studio and then in New York with Rauschenberg's New York. But then more time in the studio, I started reading and studying all the catalogues stored in 381, from all the exhibitions. Finding material from the clipping service, reviews of exhibitions, et cetera. It was just an invaluable period of study.

I became very distressed about art-speak. That's why *Artnews* was so anti-art-speak and that I had become a crusader about—because all of the—for *Artnews* I always say before the interview, “I am not an art critic. I am not an art historian as such. I am a journalist and I do thorough research. Every word that you say, every quote that you will give me, you will be asked by the publisher to verify it.” I introduced myself with those words to everyone I interviewed for the book. One hundred percent of the people say, “Good! I cannot understand—” or, “I hate the way art history in catalogues is written.” This is kind of an aside, but I now have a crusade on writing about art in language that people can relate to. Every collector, every other artist I spoke with waxed eloquent about the way art is not written. I think that if I have made some contribution to the body of work, I think that may be—

Q: Well, this is really interesting. I interviewed Calvin Tomkins and I'm curious about what you think about how *Off the Wall* was written.

Kotz: I loved it.

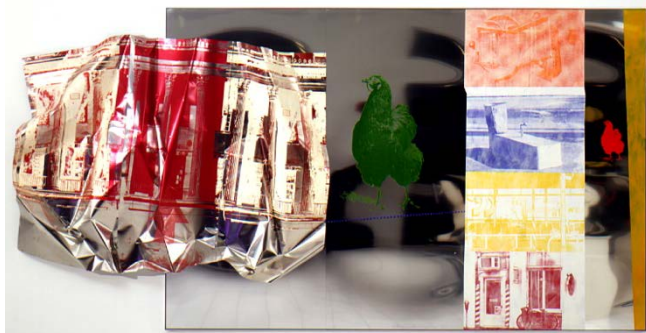
Q: [Laughs] That's what I thought you would say.

Kotz: I loved it. That was what—I said, “Yes.” I wanted to write in essence *Off the Wall* with more detail and illustrations and bring it up to date. What's so interesting, with my second edition which came out at the time of the big Met show of the—I believe it was of the Combines only [*Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005–06; Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, revised and reprinted 2004]—but anyway, I wanted to interview Calvin Tomkins for my second edition. Well he made a second edition of his own book and [laughs] he was in one part of the gallery signing books and I was in another part of the gallery signing books. So I really have not said anything except “How do you do?” to Calvin Tomkins.

Q: I want to ask you a question—or make a statement and then ask a question—because in the end of our interview, he told me that watching Bob work, being a fly on the wall, which he also described being for three or four years, that he absorbed something of Bob's openness and creativity that made him the writer that he is.

Kotz: I had the same experience with this. Bob Rauschenberg and maybe this—I was in the studio. I watched him—I was with him so very much and I saw the great collaborator and the great creator—he was like a sponge, absorbing and recycling what he saw around him. Not only photographically—he was a photographic genius for heaven’s sake—but what he saw in just little tiny details—it was his photographic eye, I think, that perhaps gave him a sense of a detail that he wanted to put somewhere. One time when I was in his studio, I was watching him make a painting from the series in which he was recycling a lot of the silkscreens that he had made from the ROCI trip, into some more contemporary photographic and other screens—and then pouring a hot liquid kind of paint, “fire wax,” over it afterwards [*Wax Fire Works*, 1990–91]. He was putting this image here, that image there. Then he would stand back and finally he would say to his studio assistant, “Bring me that yellow flower from China. You know the one, Darryl. The one that—” da-da-da-da-da-da-da. So Darryl went into the back of the studio and found this screen with the yellow flower. They’d put it down and there was suddenly a yellow flower on this steel background. You could see, it just made the painting, not a patchwork quilt, but a work of art. I said, “Bob! How in the world did you know to do that?” He was cross. He said, “I’ve been doing this for forty-three years and if I don’t know by now, I’d get out of the business.”

[Laughs] And so, stupid question. That’s the kind of thing he’s—



Robert Rauschenberg
Washington's Golden Egg / ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works), 1990
 Acrylic, enamel, and fire wax on mirrored aluminum and stainless steel
 96 3/4 x 189 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches (245.7 x 481.3 x 34.3 cm)
 Private collection

[Laughter]

Q: Looking back, it's a hard question, but how did being that close to him, watching his rhythm, affect your thinking and feeling about how to produce this book?

Kotz: I felt always and even to this day that no words can really describe that man's genius in so many ways. It was not just his eye. It was his language. He could make a triple entendre pun out of the English language. Even though he declared he was dyslexic and didn't like to read and write, he could quote a poem from Black Mountain days. It had to be an abstract poem—that would bring him to where he was. One of the things that I thought was so thrilling was to see the excitement in his human soul as well as his artistic soul, touched him, touched his heart, and made him want to give of himself.

One of the things that I really was touched by was how he was moved by the trip to the moon. I talked to him about that. I had learned because a dear friend of ours was trying to save NASA from Nixon, who was trying to erase everything that Kennedy and Johnson had done. He had been brought in by Kennedy to set up the public information/public relations for this new agency—the late Julian Scheer. He had said that they had already cut back 300,000 scientists and engineers from NASA as the first step to getting rid of it.

To save NASA, he invited artists from all over the country to come down to Cape Canaveral and record the spaceflight. Well Rauschenberg, who was such a progressive liberal thinker and

contributor to political causes and to— But I am so committed to the causes of helping unfortunate people and saving the earth and trying to keep a sense of humanity in our culture. Bob and I were just together, emotionally and psychologically, on so many subjects. He knew so much more about so many things than I did and his memory was extraordinary. The thing that was so clear to me was that I didn't want to write pages of praise.

[Laughter]

Kotz: So how do you create a persona on paper who is so huge and so beyond anybody you—? My older brother was a genius, my younger brother was a genius. Two different kinds. My older brother was just superbly creative, a lot like Bob. He also in later life descended into alcoholism and the whole thing kind of sputtered out. The thing about Bob is that the alcohol did not squelch his creativity. I've known others like that too, writers who can—

Q: That's why you called him a maintenance alcoholic?

Kotz: Yes.

Q: Were you around him at any point in which he decided he wanted to stop using alcohol or wanted to rehab?

Kotz: Yes, yes, yes. Nick and I were astonished at the difference.

Q: What was the difference?

Kotz: His clarity, his clarity of thinking, his clarity of talking. He didn't have that little giggle.

He was—

Q: Do you mean he was more clear after he was—?

Kotz: More clear when he was sober.

Q: When he stopped—when he was sober, yes.

Kotz: But he had all of his crew—who would drink with him. And many became alcoholics themselves. He survived them all, in terms of being able to keep his creative focus going.

It was his creative imperative that I was struck by and they all were struck by. I can't tell you the joy I got from seeing his output, from wherever. I think I told you, until I saw his first portion of *The 1/4 Mile* piece and spent a day with it at Edison Community College, to me, Rauschenberg, was too busy; he had too much stuff in his work. I really liked, as I said before, Jackson Pollock's work. I still love Jackson Pollock and I still respond viscerally to Jackson Pollock paintings. But Rauschenberg takes study. The study is what makes it great because Rauschenberg is a storyteller. He's a storyteller, he is a poet for people who learn with the eyes—he is a humanist. He's someone who has a mission. He is like a missionary for his worldview. He's like a missionary for his feeling for the common man and woman.

He was just superbly kind and generous to everybody, to causes, and I think his philanthropy was—his philanthropy was so focused on helping people less fortunate that he didn't leave much direction as to his legacy. Dorothy has really done a wonderful job creating Roy's legacy. And the Warhol Foundation for Andy. That legacy is so important. And yet Rauschenberg's influence on all of those people requires more attention. That's why I'm so glad that finally they are incorporating his legacy into his philanthropy. But I think that this project that you are directing, and creating and collecting, is going to be important in doing that.

Q: Great.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: We're re-starting. So we're talking about—

Kotz: We're talking about ROCI and that is when I began working. ROCI had already begun and was already in exhibition. But it was still going from one country to the other. I had lived in Japan. I'd gone to college in Japan and dear friends are still there. My first ROCI exhibition was *ROCI JAPAN*. I believe it was in 1986 *ROCI JAPAN* exhibition.

So I just up and flew to Japan and made my arrangements with the Rauschenberg people that I would be there. I was going to stay in the same hotel. I was going to do this, that, and the other, and I was going to be part of it. Rauschenberg and Terry Van Brunt were already checked into

the hotel when I got there. Because I speak Japanese, I was able to find where he was—be on the same floor with him so that maybe I could come in and talk with him. I was going into my room as he and Terry were coming down the hall, going down of course to the bar. I turned around to say hello and Bob said to Terry, “Look straight ahead. We’re not seeing anybody here.” [Laughs] I thought okay, I am a part of this and I am sticking here and I’m doing the same thing.

I went to the pre-opening in Setagaya and I took a tape recorder and I was describing in detail every work of art in the exhibition. His New York staff was there, who were hilarious and they were laughing that “Mary Lynn is talking to the pictures!” [Laughs] But it was because I really was studying the work. Having lived in Japan and recognizing the cultural icons that he had somehow incorporated along with just the little, everyday items. The wonderful fish, the great fish images, were always flown from the tops of houses in March and they were symbols of Boys’ Day, which was in March. But now it is politically-correctly called Children’s Day. But anyway, these giant cloth fish would be filled with air as they go on the house-tops to catch the March winds. And then of course, just the smaller prints incorporating some of his photography and the other objects. I was just really having a wonderful time. I would go to his press conference and I would sit there and take notes. And of course, he would speak and then there would be the questions and it would be translated into Japanese. And so I would get it in both languages [laughs].



Robert Rauschenberg
Fish Park / ROCI JAPAN, 1984
Acrylic and fabric collage on canvas
78 1/2 x 220 1/4 x 5 inches (199.4 x 559.4 x
12.7 cm)
Collection of Hiroshima City Museum of
Contemporary Art, Japan

I was in with his crew, but not quite yet in with him at the level that I wanted to be. But I just pretended that I was, so there! So that was kind of the way our relationship developed. From that point to the next time, I had spent a lot of time back in Captiva. He was always in residence in February. As I told you, we'd been going to that part of the world for a long time. I knew that there was a house we could rent that we liked. We went there and we'd pack up our office in the trunk of our car and drive down to Florida.

I was there, working with him. I had my assistant, Katie [E. Robinson], there. Someone had a friend who had a house on Sanibel and Katie and I stayed in her house. I was in that community with him. Sometimes I was in the studio, sometimes I'd have supper with him at Timmy's Nook. Sometimes I would—but he was always surrounded by a crowd. He was never, ever, ever alone, which I thought was very interesting.

Q: You said in your book, “There were moments where we felt like Marco Polo. The most frightening part of being there, despite surveillance, was isolation.”

Kotz: I think that was really what he felt. He wanted to “introduce the world to itself.” I cannot tell you how important Don Saff was to him. Don was an artist. But more than that, Don was an engineer who could visualize how he and Bob could work together. He was one of those essential collaborators.



Donald Saff and Rauschenberg in the Yellow Mountains, Anhui, China, 1982. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Going into these countries was his—in China that was really how he felt. But he really wanted to introduce the world to itself. He had done some projects for the United Nations and had felt that world peace was up to the artists. So if he could go into a country and work with the artists and artisans and show them what could be done with their materials and their heritage—it was his influence in China and in Cuba and in Russia that—just like Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns and the others got it, he—when you put out something new to an artist, they can either fly with it or reject it. And those who got it—look at the art from China now, Ai Weiwei. And the art is coming out of Cuba, new art from Cuba, that—I was there for the Cuba ROCI exhibition and it was astonishing. But that was—did I tell you about that?

Q: No, we'll talk about that this afternoon.

Kotz: Okay.

Q: Right after lunch.

Kotz: Good. Slowly, slowly—it took about three months for Bob to really bring me in, from his point of view, to the inner circle. The people who surrounded him—they were like the palace guard. They were very protective of him and therefore protective of their own positions in his entourage. He was a world-famous artist and they had a job to keep him in enough isolation. But finally I was able to just blend in and be part of the entourage with my tape recorder and my notebooks. It was a tremendous journey, just a—and I saw—I guess as I'm repeating myself—I saw probably the most complex man with the upbringing of a serious Christian from a little Southern town with a—he says his father was alcoholic. I do know that his father beat him and that his mother spanked him a lot too, he said. In that gorgeous series he made, called *Ruminations*, he has one called “Big Bully and Little Bully” [*Big and Little Bullys (Ruminations)*, 1999]. Little Bully was his mother and Big Bully of course was his father. The father never went to the church and the mother was deeply involved in it. His mother was a very strong-spirited individual. She told him—I'll tell you more about that.



Robert Rauschenberg
Big and Little Bulllys (Ruminations), 1999
 Intaglio
 45 x 57 inches (114.3 x 144.8 cm)
 From an edition of 46, published by
 Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip,
 New York

But right now, we're on ROCI. The Chinese lady who was their translator, their artist Chun-Wuei Su Chien. Yes, okay. She is since—like many of the people I interviewed—deceased. But she became my friend and a really, really good source, telling me how he interacted with the Chinese people and how—the province where the paper mill was, was a province that has some big army installation that probably has nuclear missiles aimed at us. But anyway, getting into that province—I discovered exactly ten years later, when I spent six weeks in China, that one of the most famous places in China is Huangshan, the Yellow Mountains. It too is in Anhui Province. In 1992 our little group of ten people was not able to get in even though we had the entire document from the Ministry of Culture in Beijing. In China one thing that you discover is the most important person in the world is the person who takes your ticket. Your fate is in the hands of the person on the spot because it doesn't matter to them [laughs] what kind of national entrée you are bringing.

So there we were in 1992 and I was so amused by going through the same exclusion experience as they had. I think they had to spend two weeks in the same little hotel just outside the province

that we were in—before we could get cleared to go through. But it was Bob’s own eyes opening up to a different culture, that he wanted to have communication with the artists. Rauschenberg had traveled throughout China in summer 1982 and collaborated with the Anhui Jingxian Xuan Paper Mill on the *7 Characters* editions [1982]. I think, quite frankly, that his work at that paper mill—and they finally, finally, finally let him work with them, because they were so afraid he would steal their technique of making paper [laughs]. They were so isolated from the rest of the world at that time. I think that is just about one of the most beautiful things he has ever made, is those wonderful paper—and he worked so hard intellectually with the scholars to select the perfect Chinese character for each and then to find the perfect image that would be offbeat—yes, Rauschenbergian—but which would illustrate that word and its kind of cosmic meaning. That whole process, I think, really illustrated the breadth and depth of his passion and his talent. It was just—and in such a wonderful, quiet way, like he started out with the *White Paintings* [1951].



Robert Rauschenberg
Individual (from *7 Characters*), 1982
 Silk, ribbon, paper, paper-pulp relief, ink, and
 gold leaf on handmade Xuan paper, with
 mirror, framed in a Plexiglas box
 43 x 31 x 2 1/2 inches (109.2 x 78.7 x 6.4 cm)
 From an edition of 70 unique variations,
 published by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: Oh, that’s beautiful. I hadn’t even thought of that. It was kind of a return.

Kotz: Yes. And things did return. He referred later in life back to himself.

Q: Well, you said in the book that—somehow you connected it with ROCI, that as he got older, he returned to his own autobiographical existence, that he was searching somehow.

Kotz: Absolutely. Listen, he—people ask him what he meant by this or that: “Where did this come from?” He said, “Oh, I just liked it.” Wrong. Every single image that he chose was his own—his autobiography is his entire body of work. He knows where it came from, where he found it, he knows what it means to him, in his own history. He knows what it means to—every single item was not randomly collected. Rauschenberg coined the phrase “random order” in a photo-and-text collage for *Location* magazine [Spring 1963]. But it wasn’t random. He chose every single artifact, every single thing that had some meaning in his own personal history or that he wanted to share, that—people have argued with me about this. They said, “Oh no, there’s no way he could have done that.” Wrong. I saw that and I knew that. I knew more about his personal history because I had been to Port Arthur. I had walked around in his footsteps. I had interviewed people. I talked to his mama. I certainly had talked a lot with his sister. She is terrific. Her memory of Bob and her memory of her family is very different from his memory of his family, ten years prior to her birth, which was interesting to me because I had read her oral history. She had shared it with me.

Q: Oh, that’s nice.

Kotz: It was.

Q: That's very nice, yes. It was a wonderful interview.

Kotz: I thought it was wonderful. She is so great.

Q: It's a wonderful interview.

[Laughter]

Kotz: She was great. But she and I do have a lot in common. She's a very successful "bidness woman," as we say. B-I-D-N-E-S-S. Bidness woman.

Q: I know that word.

Kotz: [Laughs] Okay.

Q: Remember, I am Southern.

Kotz: That's right.

[Laughter]

Kotz: Bidness woman. So anyway—

Q: Oh, that's just marvelous.

Kotz: And I think that if you would like to ascend to the ninth floor, perhaps we could get some, as we say in the South, “sumpin’ t’eat.”

Q: Sumpin’ t’eat sounds perfect.

Kotz: Sumpin’ t’eat.

Q: Beautiful

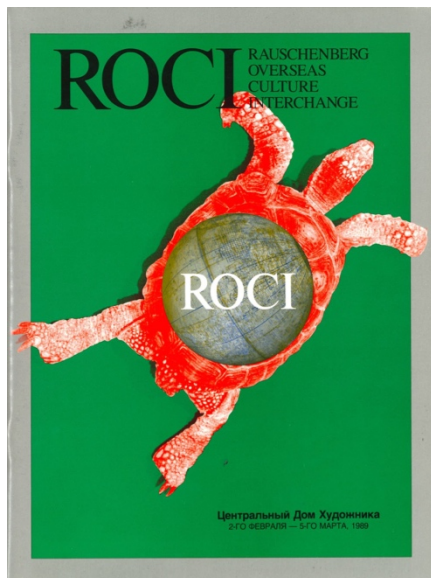
Kotz: Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay, this is the afternoon session two with Mary Lynn Kotz.

Kotz: I was telling you about ROCI Moscow [*Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI USSR*, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1989]. Rocky was the name of his pet turtle, who inhabited his New York home/studio/archives. So he gave the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange—ROCI, to be pronounced “rocky.” And the turtle was the symbol of the creation of

the world in some cultures and the turtle, in myth, was holding up the world. The earth was riding on the back of a turtle and so in ROCI Moscow—and every country—the little catalogue was printed in that country's language. A great poet or writer from that country was asked to write the essay. In Russia, the essayist was Yevgeny [A.] Yevtushenko, the great Russian poet who was quite fluent in English. When they got there, he and Rauschenberg became quite good friends immediately. This happened with the writers in every country actually. So Octavio Paz from Mexico—the great poets or novelists from all the ROCI countries. It was a wonderful shared cultural experience that was essential to the ROCI progress.



Cover of *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI USSR* exhibition brochure, 1989. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

So anyway, in Russia, as in China and in Cuba, there were just certain things which the ROCI crew needed. For the Trisha Brown Dance Company, there was an outdoor piece of choreography which was quite wonderful, but which depended upon lights that were big and battery-powered. [Note: *Astral Convertible*, 1989, previewed at the Cultural Palace, Moscow as

part of *ROCI USSR*, 1989]. They assumed that they would have big batteries to do that. In Moscow, no batteries. No outdoor lights. So Rauschenberg said, “Let us find someplace where you can get hundreds of small batteries and bring them in and put them together to provide these lights for the dance company.” So they did—the ROCI crew and the Tretyakov crew—and they went all the way—Moscow’s a pretty big place—way out to the outlying manufacturing district. They loaded up the trunk of a car—the Russian car that they were being driven around in—with so many batteries that the back of it was hanging down very low and kind of bumping over the road. They got back and he and his staff engineered a way that they could use those batteries to light up the Trisha Brown performance.

The opening of the show at the Tretyakov, it was so incredibly jammed that people couldn’t get in. I saw the videotapes of it. There were like three miles of lines waiting to come in and see the first showing of non-Soviet art. Perhaps there had been underground showings at some point or other and people knew that there was something out there. But it was not just an artistic phenomenon. It was a sociological phenomenon. There were literally three miles of people every day waiting to see it. But of course the Russians are used to standing in lines [laughs] all the time so it wasn’t like it would have been here. I think there would have been riots here. But it was such an incredible eye-opener for Russia.



Installation view, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI USSR*, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1989. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Well one of the side effects of this is that Yevtushenko and Rauschenberg became good buddies. One of the things that they shared was an affinity for vodka. Much later of course after Rauschenberg had left us, Yevtushenko was being honored in Washington, given a special medal by the American-Russian Cultural Cooperation Foundation. The chairman was a former congressman, James [W. “Jim”] Symington from Missouri. He had spent a lot of time in Russia and so we were invited. We were partners with the Symingtons out in Virginia on various historic preservation projects.

We were also on that guest list because Jim Symington wanted Washington’s support. My husband is a well-known journalist. We went to the dinner at the Russian embassy to meet Yevtushenko. At the reception afterwards, I came up to Yevtushenko and said, “I’m wondering if you remember the artist Robert Rauschenberg who was there.” He said, “Do I remember him!” When I quote somebody, it is as I remember it. But in essence he was saying, “I remember him.” He told the funniest story about Rauschenberg wanting to eat a certain kind of Russian food that he had heard about. He wanted to get out of the formal business of the reception, so the two of

them stole away in Yevtushenko's little car. They were going to kind of an out-of-the-way place that American visitors were not permitted to go to. He said, "I can't take you past this security." Rauschenberg said, "Turn around. Go down another street." And then Rauschenberg said, "I'll ride in the trunk!"

[Laughter]

Kotz: So he had this little car and Rauschenberg, who was not a small man, wound himself up in the trunk and as they went past the security guards [laughs], there was Yevtushenko driving Bob Rauschenberg—

[Laughter]

Kotz: —back to where they could find the best vodka and the best caviar, which was always pretty good up there.

Q: That's a beautiful story. Thank you. It's a beautiful story.

Kotz: I hope that all of those videos are now back in the possession of the Foundation because they are priceless. They are priceless. In ROCI China, we have a translation of the press coverage there—have I told you that yet?

Q: No. You mentioned that they did it, but that's all.

Kotz: Yes. Well they—I have copies of those English translations. The superlatives were extraordinary. The surprises were extraordinary.

Q: What do you mean by surprises?

Kotz: The surprises that the reports in the Chinese media—and various portions of it—about the quality of the show and how it was different—they really got it. Especially the artists got it. After the show was over, there was a Chinese artists' bulletin that came out: “Art in China is now defined as before Rauschenberg and after Rauschenberg.”

Q: How did that play out in Russia?

Kotz: Well look at the new Russian artists who are showing here now and look at the Chinese artists who are showing here. Same way with Cuba. I will tell you more about Cuba. ROCI was operated like a chain letter in which you would make art, pick up art, leave art in that country, and take art to the next country—and what Rauschenberg loved about it was going out into the country, working with not just the artists or the writers, but with just people who were doing stuff that was interesting too, that was not done in Port Arthur, Texas or New York City or France, all the places he had known. But with ordinary people who were doing their work in their own way or people who had never seen Americans before.

He went into two areas: one in Malaysia, the jungles of Malaysia, and one along the Amazon [River], way back in the jungles on the Amazon, where he worked with people and made art from the work of honest-to-goodness headhunters—who are still practicing. That was an experience that he cherished—and was happy to have survived. But it was again being the cultural ambassador that he was, was important to him. In each country, what was so remarkable is that the government would open up its national museum and give him as much space as he wanted in there. Of course you've heard and read about the government in Chile at the time. There were sad stories that he went and listened to by the families of the *desaparecidos*, the “disappeared” ones. He did that wonderful sculpture, a standing sculpture shaped as a cross, covered with a priest's vestment that was just incredible [*Altar Peace Chile / ROCI CHILE*, 1985]. That really touched his heart. The only place of refuge was in a church.



Robert Rauschenberg
Altar Peace Chile / ROCI CHILE, 1985
 Acrylic and fabric on aluminum construction,
 with electric light
 79 1/2 x 44 5/8 x 15 1/4 inches (201.9 x 113.3
 x 38.7 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

The places where he could speak with the political left, he joined with those people. In the places where he couldn't be, his art spoke for him. The artists got it and [snaps fingers] ran with it.

Q: I have a question, which is a kind of preliminary background question about his idea, his passion to do ROCI. Somewhere in the book, you mention that he gave up on the politicians, that he has a very liberal—

Kotz: He said that.

Q: That was in the early eighties so I'm wondering—he moved down to Captiva in '72 [note: 1970]. So that's one issue. And then he was, I guess, staying in touch with world affairs as they developed.

Kotz: Oh indeed.

Q: That was part of the Iran crisis time.

Kotz: Yes, he kept up and there was—like some people have to work with—I have to drive, for example, with classical music going on or else I just get completely unnerved by everything around me. But I focus on the road if I have Chopin, for some reason. Other people have certain outside stimuli in which they can work. Rauschenberg could only work if he had—during the daytime anything he was doing—and at night and in the studio, he had the television set going all the time. I'm sure everybody's told you about the times that his world stopped because he had to

watch *The Young and the Restless*. [Laughs] I was there and watched *Young and the Restless* with him.

Q: Did he feel young and restless himself [laughs]?

Kotz: Oh sure! He said, “That’s me, that’s me.”

[Laughter]

Kotz: And they had to tape it for him if he was going into somewhere where he would miss it. But he was really, really politically “left-liberal” and concerned about the future of our planet—he had done the first Earth Day poster [1970]. In all of the concerns of the earth and of its needy people, he was very involved. It seemed to him like it was just impossible to get anything done through government channels. He did a lot of political fundraising by making art for Democratic candidates. He gave \$400,000 for Senator Ted Kennedy during his 1980 presidential campaign. He certainly did for [William J.] Bill Clinton and also designed a poster for Hillary Rodham Clinton’s senate campaign in 2000.



Robert Rauschenberg
 Earth Day Poster, April 22, 1970, 1970
 Offset lithograph
 33 3/4 x 25 1/4 inches (85.7 x 64.1 cm)



Robert Rauschenberg
 Hillary Rodham Clinton Campaign Print, 2000
 Pigmented inkjet print
 36 1/2 x 27 1/4 inches (92.7 x 69.2 cm)
 From an edition of 100, published by the Hillary
 Rodham Clinton Campaign, produced by Universal
 Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

We were with him the night in Captiva, talking about politics—he came over to our house for supper. He prided himself on making the best gumbo in the history of the world—after all, he honed his taste buds in Louisiana and Port Arthur. Our son, Jack, prided himself on making the best gumbo in the world. So Darryl and one other of the staff brought Bob in his wheelchair. They lifted Bob up the steps to the house we were renting and he partook of Jack’s gumbo. We turned on the television to see this candidate Barack Obama’s Iowa speech, which of course was—it was really transcendent. Rauschenberg, who had raised all this money for Hillary at the time said, “I think this man would make a great president!” He was really tuned into that, listened to every single word. I’m pretty sure he, during the general election, must have given some money to Obama’s campaign.

Q: That is fascinating. I'm interested again in where he was politically when he was formulating ROCI and imagining what it could achieve that typical politicians couldn't.

Kotz: He was introducing it at the United Nations. He had done some UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] projects before. He had had some art in the Art in Embassies program, which was started by John Brademas and the late Lee Kimche McGrath. He was a committed liberal progressive voter and fundraiser for those who were of—I have to tell you—our persuasion. That is one of the things that we had in common. We knew what was going on in politics and wanted to do something about it by investigative reporting on our part or by trying to get some laws passed on his part. There was all kind of lobbying done by the people—[Theodore W.] Ted Kheel, the people who were involved in his support group, his philanthropic support group—Ted Kheel being one that I do recall. But there were many other people who would take him to Washington. One of the great things that I remember was when [Robert] Bork was being nominated for the Supreme Court, Bob Rauschenberg went to Washington to testify against Bork, representing artists' rights [1987]. We have his testimony on file.

Q: I remember it very well. I watched some of the testimony.

Kotz: Yes, well, he was right in there and in anything else that needed a liberal voice. During the Clinton White House, when of course he was awarded the medal for the arts, it was a great big party [note: Rauschenberg awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1993]. He was having a good

time. He was also there when Roy got that. I know I was there for that too. Yes, he was there
[note: Lichtenstein awarded the medal in 1995].

Q: Could I ask another question? It's kind of an—not to make a pun—an off the wall kind of
question.

Kotz: Yes, okay.

[Laughter]

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: I'm wondering how Bob saw himself as an American and I'm wondering how his Native
[American] heritage contributed to his self-understanding.

Kotz: He was very proud of his Native heritage, as am I of mine. We both were deeply proud of
it but have not—I don't remember his being active about anything except having—occasionally
he would connect with some Native American support group and sometimes have a connection
or a meeting with a chief of some kind.

Q: How do you see its influence in his art?

Kotz: He honored it in his art with his—and it shows up in imagery occasionally.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Well, I was thinking also of his fidelity to the land and his connection to the land.

Kotz: Oh! The earth.

Q: The earth.

Kotz: His connection to the earth was so great, as was his connection to the sea, to water, to the Gulf. That was his—it was kind of interesting. I read a recent study about people who live near water live longer and are less anxious than people who live in cities and even in—Bob would not come to see us out in the Virginia Piedmont—at the first ridge of the Blue Ridge. But we were high on a hill, looking out and up at our Bull Run Mountain. But he wouldn't come to see us at our farm. He said, "No, seen enough farms in my life. Don't want to do it. And I just don't like mountains." [Laughs] And yet he has climbed mountains in his life and enjoyed it.

Q: We had talked this morning a bit about how he was so drawn to collaboration and the Rauschenberg Foundation and our project has documented that so well in the 1960s. I wanted to ask you to maybe frame ROCI as another kind of collaboration.

Kotz: It was total collaboration. Donald Saff, from Graphicstudio [University of South Florida, Tampa], who is himself a genius. I'm calling these people geniuses because they are. Or is it genii? Geniuses.

[Laughter]

Q: Genii [laughs].

Kotz: Because they are and I am not. But one can tell. One can tell when somebody has that brush of whatever it takes to lift them so high above society's norm and to make them artistic or a nuclear physicist or any other ability way above the crowd. He recognized that, I told you. And ROCI, Donald Saff set up the program. In many of these places they allowed him in only because he didn't have a penny of funding from the United States government. Don and his team set up the whole project. Bob would get into the country and then tell his hosts who were setting up his introductions and itinerary, that he wanted to meet and see ordinary working people. They always wanted to set him up to see their famous places, which was fine and he acknowledged that by every now and then slipping one iconic image into one of his paintings. But he would go into the interior of a country and want to meet with people who were not affiliated with the artistic community.



Rauschenberg taking photographs in Venezuela in preparation for his Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) tour, June 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

He wanted to see the native culture visually as it was being—the way people were living. He would collect souvenirs of the oddest kinds—a scrap of woven cloth here or a piece of twisted metal there. Anything he saw that he thought [snaps fingers], “That is an interesting piece. Let’s see what we can do with it.”

He always came back with a huge collection of stuff that he could use later on. For example in India, he came back with loads and loads of silk because he said to me, “You would see someone in India who had only one rag to their name and yet it was beautiful and pink and silk.” That was why he made art with that silk. He made the *Jammers*. But he came home with bolts of that beautiful silk material in all colors that he would use wherever he thought needed a patch of silk or even a fold of some kind or another. He loved beautiful fabrics.

He told me that he got his uncanny ability to put things together from his mother, “She could put down a pattern on a piece of cloth and never waste an inch!” That was what he grew up with. You waste not, want not. I was younger than he, but he was of my brother’s generation so we grew up with those same rural values. You don’t throw things away. You find a way to use them. When I was growing up, you could go down a Mississippi country road and see somebody’s shack. That shack could have maybe an old crank washing machine on the front porch or it could have an automobile tire on the ground. And somebody would have planted petunias inside the automobile tire. It was that kind of saving things that people had used up—was in his psyche. It was one of the things that he chose, in ROCI, to do and find images and objects—

Q: Did he go to rural areas in each country as far as he could?

Kotz: Yes, yes.

Q: So the rural was another major theme in ROCI.

Kotz: Yes. Indeed. He did. In Cuba, he and Terry had a big open-top jeep. And they just took off and drove all over Cuba. I went to the exhibition in ROCI Cuba. I know that Fidel Castro must have thought that giving this project a royal welcome might be a way—like the Ping Pong tournament that opened China to the U.S.—that Cuba could open up trade with the United States. I had been to Cuba in 1977, in the blink of an eye that Jimmy Carter tried to open up relations. I was on a trip with the Washington Women’s [National] Press Club, which has now been absorbed into the National Press Club [laughs]. I discovered that poverty is the friend of

preservation—because when the Russians came into Cuba they built new, tall, and utterly devoid of charm buildings on the outskirts of Havana with no thought of aesthetics. But in Havana the old architecture is so glorious. Nobody bothered to tear it down. The old mansions that were behind the main waterfront, the Malecón, the old mansions were there with laundry hanging out their windows—they were now multi-family dwellings because the poverty in Havana was just absolutely evident.

In '77 when we were there, we were simply mobbed everywhere we went because people were saying, “*Estados Unidos? Estados Unidos?*” United States, United States? Ten years later, with ROCI, it was that same atmosphere. Nothing had progressed except in the old museum of the arts, which had been an art school, and a beautiful garden around it, there were cattle grazing; they still were grazing. The windows were broken, but there were artists still in that building, in '86, trying to work on painting, on the wall [laughs]. Of course the miracle of the 1950s automobiles was very striking—Bob loved that, the fact that the Cuban people had kept something going. They didn't waste an old car. They fixed it. That was one of his joys in Cuba.

But the thing that Fidel Castro did was—I'd been there in '77 and I had visited those state museums. They were all filled with the history of the Revolution and also with current propaganda. But it was—each one was emptied for ROCI. All of the museums were emptied so that Rauschenberg and this show could have plenty of space. I never saw the ROCI show looking so wonderful as it did in Havana because each painting, each piece of sculpture, occupied its own space. It was on its own wall, where you could actually see the magnificence of each image and

could focus on one painting at a time. That's the way the video I saw of the Venezuelan museum was as well. I've not seen anything that beautiful.

We went to the same places where I had been ten years before, to the Tropicana night club in Havana. We were invited there to see the 1930s musical and dance shows that were still tourist attractions. Bob wasn't much interested in that. He was interested in the fact that he and Fidel were such great buddies. There was—

Q: Did he ever talk about their conversations?

Kotz: Oh yes.

Q: Tell me some stories.

Kotz: Okay. He said [laughs]—I'm paraphrasing everybody. But he said when he went over to work, Fidel invited him down to his beach house for dinner. They got talking about food. Fidel prided himself on his being a chef and so did Bob. They exchanged recipes and talked about cooking. Each really bragging. Then they talked about fishing. They both liked to fish—and tell fish stories. And Bob said they became the greatest of pals. I'm sure a lot of—what do they drink in Cuba? Cuba Libre [laughs]—no, it was—oh there was a drink that was a big drink in—a rum drink. It was a Cuban rum drink made famous by Ernest Hemingway—the mojito. But anyway, they were drinking and so forth. Bob was hosted by Fidel's Minister of Culture. She was probably one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. Fluent in English; just terrifically

fluent in “Rauschenberg.” Fidel might have been trying to get them together. It just appeared that way. Certainly anybody could tell that that’s exactly what she wanted—at first. But still, they soon found out that his studio assistant/companion was there every moment. And so—

[Laughter]

Q: His AC [assistant/companion].

Kotz: Yes.

Q: Wow. These are beautiful stories.

Kotz: And so there was more to the memory. I’ll—

Q: You raised the issue that Bob invited Fidel to Captiva. Can you tell us about that?

Kotz: I forgot to say that, but he did. I think that Fidel was still really hoping that grand exhibition would do what Obama has tried to do now—break down barriers. It was quite interesting. But what he didn’t realize that Bob’s politics and support, although very liberal, had very little traction with the administration in Washington. Ronald Reagan was president of the United States and Rauschenberg had no interest in or influence on anything having to do with Ronald Reagan so that was that, I think. So that was Cuba, yes.

Q: What are the other ROCI countries that you went to?

Kotz: Cuba was the last one and—I went to China afterwards. Japan was my first one to visit. Mexico was the first one on the tour. I didn't get to go to Mexico, but I did go to Japan. What were the other—? [Note: The ROCI tour traveled to Mexico (1985), Chile (1985), Venezuela (1985), China (1985), Tibet (1985), Japan (1986), Cuba (1988), USSR (1989), Berlin (1990), and Malaysia (1990).] My immersion in ROCI was the thousands of feet of videos that Terry Van Brunt had made of Bob's every step in those countries. Driving through the countryside, photographing life as only he could see the images. I spent a long time studying those videos—and felt as if I had been on every inch of the journey. They were played simultaneously in the exhibitions at the national museums of the art made in each country. The planning and execution of the various ROCI itineraries were carried out by the great visionary genius, Donald Saff of Graphicstudio, at the University of South Florida. He is a true polymath.

Oh, would that I had been to all the countries. Tibet! Oh my lord, he loved Tibet. I had been to Nepal in 1966 and met quite a few Tibetans there, and knew it had a lot of Tibetan connections and refugees. Bob loved Tibet and was really proud of the pride of the Tibetans, who were at that point not as under the thumb of China as they are now. They had their own culture, which had nothing to do with the culture of mainland China.

Q: Right.

Kotz: I did not go to Tibet. But again I saw every one of—I studied very carefully those videos that Terry Van Brunt had made. Every step that Bob had taken, they were following him. I wish I could have gone to some of the countries. The people who did go—the person who went to every one was Thomas Buehler. Has he been interviewed?

Q: Yes.

Kotz: Okay, I'm glad! But he was there and the installation staff. How about the people who were with him then—?

Q: What you were saying before is that Bob saw himself as an ambassador.

Kotz: He really did.

Q: But define what that means. I think I'm getting the sense that he really saw himself that way—that the politicians were not able to open up conversations across borders.

Kotz: Absolutely. He felt that art talks to the heart, especially when people see recognizable images of their own country in the country's colors, for example, alongside those of other countries from other parts of the world. As he said, "I want ROCI to introduce the world to itself."

Q: So tell me about his whole vision, his integrated vision of what different countries would learn about each other through his art and exhibition.

Kotz: That is exactly—you've just stated it. That is exactly what he wanted to do. What he really wanted was to go into Third World countries and let them know that they were being heard in other worlds. He was really—I don't know how far out of Moscow he was able to get. I don't remember his being in Leningrad [Saint Petersburg]. But it was because the show was called ROCI Moscow. His vision was that the politicians, who he said can't seem to get organized to wage peace, should let the artists communicate with the peoples of the world. He really did want the artists in the countries he visited to be the artists and speak through their work—as the artists in the United States did. A lot of those Third World artists saw those doors opened, as I told you, and were able to use their own talent with their own vision.

That was good. But he just said he wanted to “introduce the world to itself.” It was a gigantic global vision. It cost twelve million dollars of his own money because the big backer dropped out at the very last minute because the man said that he wanted to own the art. He wanted to own the art when it emerged from his travels. Whether he wanted one work from each piece or more, he withdrew his support. When he made that demand and Bob refused, Bob was just broken-hearted. He was in New York about to present this trip to the United Nations and it was announced in a ceremony at the UN headquarters on December 13, 1984. He was up all night, drinking and crying. When he went to the opening, he was not really articulate, which was not a good thing. He just told everybody, “We're going to do it. I'm going to do it with my own money.” And so he did.

Q: Beautiful.

Kotz: What next?

Q: Let's take a break.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: This is still part of session two with Mary Lynn Kotz. All through today and all through all of our conversations, your relationship with Bob shines through, meaning that it's something very special. One thing you said to me is, "I want to convey my relationship with the Rauschenberg I knew." I'm wondering what caused you to fall in love with his art and with him.

Kotz: The first time that I sat in front of his first showing of *The 1/4 Mile* piece, I started studying it image-by-image and piece-by-piece. Of course he worked at a table so before he would send his work out to his galleries in New York or even to museums—he would like to see them hung vertically on the wall. So he worked in his studio on this 15-foot table. He then installed his art at the Edison Community College in Fort Myers. It was closing that very day, this first exhibition of *The 1/4 Mile* and he said, "Go over there and see that and I will talk to you tonight." So I drove across the Sanibel Causeway to the college—and studied it, panel-by-panel and image-by-image. I studied it from left to right. From the left I began with his interplanetary photographs from the huge satellite telescopes, of our solar system. There were so many images

on a dark blue, night-blue background, of Saturn and its many rings pieced together. I was not expecting that much beauty! It was the most beautiful wall I had ever seen. I thought, that is wonderful!



Robert Rauschenberg
The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece, 1981–98 (detail)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

I moved through the walls of the entire work, from the various Rauschenberg styles and periods, with the actual chair in something and then the actual tire in another thing. I didn't know anything really about his work except what I had done in preparation for the interview. Then I saw the *Cardboards* [1971–72]. I saw what he was about. He was showing us—he was like a—he was doing, shall we say, a giant selfie of the world. He was telling us, “This is the world you live in.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Pilgrim, 1960
Combine: oil, graphite, paper, printed paper,
and fabric on canvas with painted wood chair
79 1/4 x 53 7/8 x 18 5/8 inches (201.3 x 136.8
x 47.3 cm)
Private collection



Robert Rauschenberg
First Landing Jump, 1961
Combine: oil, cloth, metal, leather, electric fixture,
and cable on composition board with automobile tire
and wood plank
89 1/8 x 72 x 8 7/8 inches (226.4 x 182.9 x 22.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Philip Johnson



Robert Rauschenberg
National Spinning / Red / Spring (Cardboard), 1971
Cardboard and string
100 x 98 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches (254 x 250.2 x 21.6 cm)
The Menil Collection, Houston
Purchase, with funds contributed by the Brown Foundation,
Inc., and the following Menil Board of Trustees: Louisa
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The title of my piece when I wrote it was, “Rauschenberg’s State of the Universe Message.” It was a cover story for *Artnews* in 1982. In 1984 I had an offer from a publisher to write a book. They said, “How long would it take?” I said, “Oh about a year to do my final research.” I said, “I had a terrific interview with Rauschenberg about his life and his ideas and it lasted all night long.” And so I would start with that and then I need about a year to do the art historical research.

Six years later— I had had no concept as to the vast body of work Bob Rauschenberg had made. But I needed that time, to sit and study. And as for people who want to know what the images mean, he doesn’t care. He wants *you* to bring yourself into it. He wants to involve the viewer. Maybe, just maybe, he says the viewer might learn something about the world around them. His vision is so egalitarian that a piece of cardboard is equal to a stained-glass window in a cathedral for example. It was his concept of society, that he manages with his imperative—to create a visual sermon, if I could call it that—which is what he wanted to do when he was a boy. Despite the fact that he became un-churched, he never lost his Judeo-Christian values. He never lost the Ten Commandments. He never lost the Sermon on the Mount. He never lost all of that because it was part of his being. What he did was to turn his back on hypocrisy because that was what a lot of the fundamentalist religions had become. He never lost that deep concept of a higher calling. “You can’t go to Heaven unless you go my way,” he’d paraphrase the new fundamentalists and evangelicals.

[Laughter]

Kotz: Which is kind of like ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria]. And so he had become that person. As I got to know him better and watch him work and watch how he worked, and as I said, listened to the language, he was so poetic in his language, and so unusually so. Going back to Black Mountain and all of the poetry that he learned and everything else he learned, he just soaked up knowledge wherever he went.

His world, after he came back from the navy, became broader and broader and broader and broader and broader. One thing that I learned was from a young man who was doing a thesis on homosexual American artists, Jonathan Katz. Bob was of a generation that—and he said to me, “I don’t want to be categorized. I have made love to some of the most beautiful women in the world—and also some of the most beautiful men.” He laughed and laughed. He said, “Love does not have a gender.” And of course [laughs]—he was really bristling about this guy who was trying to get hold of him. Mr. Katz tried to get hold of me, to ask Bob to talk to him. I said, “He ain’t talking. Sorry.” As Bob grew older, there were fewer and fewer women in his life. But he said of Jean Stein, who was present at many of his openings and private New York parties in his honor, he said, “There, she’s my girl. She was one of my girlfriends.” Then he said of two other people—oh, Deborah Hay, the dancer. I saw them dancing together. She is teaching in Texas. She showed up in Houston for his retrospective at the Menil and there was so much feeling between them as they danced, danced very close together, that it was so obvious that they had been very, very close during the early Judson Church days and all of that. But she is a wonderful woman. And he was—it was as if he left our world and the world of the opening and the world of his entourage and even his family and went into another realm, another world with just two

people—it was just— My husband and I watched them dance together. Deborah’s head in Bob’s chest, his arm tight around her. Nick said, “They have danced before.” It was obvious that they really cared for each other.

He cared so much for Trisha Brown and the way they worked together, I’ve never seen that kind of communication happen so fast. She would come up with a concept of what she’d like to do and he would start sketching while they talked. Within an hour, they had put together—with her knowing what Bob could do for her and his knowing what he could do for her company of dancers. It was the same way with Cage and Cunningham. They had a wonderful time together. They were ten years on the road and he would talk about—and Cage, John Cage—my word, that was the most— That was the most wonderful afternoon. One of these days I’ll probably write about it because I have the transcript in there of my interview with him.

Q: That would be a wonderful addition to the project, to your transcript, if you want to pin that transcript to this.

Kotz: Well, I could—

Q: Or at least part of the story.

Kotz: Yes, it would be. At some point, I will. It was—in fact, it was a part of his—what he was telling me about Black Mountain and about the Cedar Tavern [New York] and about the things that were so wonderful and in their relationship that—he said one thing like—John Cage was so

eloquent! One thing he said was, “I have been studying Buddhism for years. And Bob *lived it* and lives it without ever having studied.” That’s one thing that I was—you can’t put into words, but you can do that. That was such a wonderful time for him and to get out to see the world through those experiences, the tactile and—oh the funny—he would laugh about John Cage driving the car through the French countryside while playing chess and searching for mushrooms on the roadside. Playing chess in the front seat and searching for mushrooms as they would go along the road. [Laughs] It was evidently such a hilarious time for Bob, that he remembered details about each city’s performance and where he had to scrounge for the impromptu stage sets.

The dancers in the Cunningham company were also wonderful. They loved him, as they told me. They loved Bob and they loved the costumes that he made for them. I may have told you this last time. One of the most poignant experiences in this whole twenty-year adventure with Bob Rauschenberg and as I told you after he discovered that I hadn’t trashed him, he became a close friend with my husband and me. The memory that is so poignant was when the Cunningham Dance Company did a fundraising dinner in New York, to which I was invited, because the Cunningham dancers were on a program, modeling all of the costumes that Bob had designed for the company. It was out in the Cunningham practice space—down on the Lower West Side, down on the Hudson River area where those big buildings—Merce had a kind of studio and then an exhibition or rehearsal hall there in a former industrial building. There was a wide concrete ramp, all the way up from the street into the building because it had been an industrial building at one time.

The crowd gathered inside the building. Up the ramp came Bob in his wheelchair and Merce Cunningham in his wheelchair. At the top of the ramp, they sat side by side, greeting people as they came in. Jasper Johns came in. I was standing beside Nan Rosenthal who had been head of twentieth-century art at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Nan had not wished to speak to me about Bob because she said she was “doing the book” on Rauschenberg. Shortly after that, she had a terrible accident and when she recovered she went to work for the Metropolitan in New York. We were standing there together in a group watching Bob and Merce greet the incoming guests. Jasper Johns came in gave Merce Cunningham a hug and kissed Bob. Nan and I looked at each other and we were both crying. And we just hugged each other [laughs]. It was so touching.

There was a photograph in the *New York Times* about the evening, just with the wheelchairs. When Sue Weil was in a wheelchair at the opening of the—there was Bob and Sue and Merce rolling around the Met in the *Combines* show, when they—and that was very moving, yes. I may have told you this.

Q: We love a story twice told, so just go ahead.

Kotz: Okay. So when the Guggenheim retrospective exhibition moved down to Houston and was on exhibition there at the Menil, we all went down. I was lecturing on Bob down there as well. When I went in to take a look at it—it was in several different venues. Bob was in one of the buildings, also taking a look at the work. I walked down the hall to say hello. He was pushing two wheelchairs, one with his mother and the other for her sister. He introduced me. I’d met his

mother once, but he introduced me again. He was pushing the two of them, I was walking along beside him and I said to Miss Dora, “Well, what do you think of this exhibition?” She said, “I think—” This is what people were always asking her. She said, “I think it’s wonderful that he can make art out of just about anything.” That was all she had to say to me, and she was talking to her sister. Bob was kind of talking to all three of us as we were walking along slowly. All of a sudden Miss Dora said, “Milton! Milton, look! There comes Janet!” [Laughs] I loved it—

Q: Yes.

Kotz: —that she never would give up the name that she had given him.

[Laughter]

Kotz: But he was always so good and so sweet to his mother. He was really good to his little sister. I think because I’m Janet’s age and because I was maybe like her that he saw me as that for a while at first. But afterwards, he visited us—Nick and I used to—we found a house on Cap d’Antibes that we rented one year—it was wonderful—with a pool and a wonderful garden and a backyard. Our landlady would leave for the month of July and rent it out to Americans because they had—the French family had lost their fortune in Vietnam. She would go to stay with her mother in a little crowded apartment in Nice. We were there the summer that there was an exhibition of Bob and Roy Lichtenstein, a joint exhibition in the Van Gogh museum at Arles.

Q: I know the museum, but I have to look up the exact title.

Kotz: But anyway, on the way back, they were going to have to spend the night in the airport in Nice. We were much closer to Nice than Arles was, so I said, “Why don’t you spend the night at our place?” So he and Darryl rode with us to spend the night at our house in Cap d’Antibes. Madame Detay had a M-size Steinway, very nice, in her parlor. We had more fun—he and I played duets late at night. Bob was loving creating music on the keyboard that he had in his Captiva kitchen and here we were on a grand piano bench, just doing great things. He would start with abstract chords and rhythms at the right side and I’d find a key within, to add a melodic line and pound out the bass to his beat. Just after that. This house, Villa Gaïole, was a historic house. It started as an eleventh-century olive mill and then in the eighteenth century was one of the famous historic sites along the French Riviera, Cote d’Azur, after the Revolution. The minister of agriculture for the Republic had lived and held office there. On one side of the house, a plaque honored the past residents. During World War II it had been a hideout for officers of the Résistance who had fled Paris. They were martyred there. It had been added onto generation after generation so that there were odd entrances. There were several staircases for the three floors. In the morning Bob said, “I had never been in a house like this in my life. They have steps going up and steps going down and you don’t know where or why. They’re just steps going up and steps going down and go nowhere.”

He spent the night on the third floor. Our bedrooms were on the second floor and he and Darryl were up above the third floor. He said, “I was up all night long because it’s the first time in I don’t know when—that I’ve slept in somebody’s house—” The third floor was their—now-adult son Michele’s room. It was where he had lived. Bob said, “I just looked and looked and looked

and picked up and studied every object and little piece in this room.” He said, “I just wondered who this was and where it came from and what they did with it.” This is an example of Rauschenberg’s interest in other people’s old possessions. People’s chairs. He once told me that he liked chairs because when he would find an old chair that looked particularly interesting to him, he would sit there and imagine who had sat in this chair—and when. It was his interest in human beings—as well as his love for dogs—but it was—

Q: There’s also an interest in autobiography. The autobiography of a room, of a chair, of an object.

Kotz: Exactly. That’s what he—well, of a biography. Coming from him, it wouldn’t be auto—

Q: No, but he’s interested in the history—

Kotz: The history.

Q: —the life history of those objects.

Kotz: The life history of objects, exactly, just as he, in his art, gives you his own life history as a jigsaw puzzle. Well, if I could just write my memories, I would call it “Rauschenberg and Me.” Not even for publication. But this is something that I feel so privileged in my lifetime to have had this opportunity, to learn so much about this world, Rauschenberg’s world and Rauschenberg’s people, but mainly his art and his person. It is such a complexity, but that

continues at the very end—like for the King of Siam—“is a puzzlement.” [Laughs] But I think all of our lives are a puzzlement, don’t you?

Q: Absolutely. Moving parts.

Kotz: Moving parts. It gave me a feeling of connectedness with the visual world around me that was deeper than I had when I was just talking to artists and writing about their art, quoting them. That’s what I’m hoping that others will do: write about art and artists as though you were writing about a human being and make the words understandable to human beings who might want to look at it and, “What am I looking at?” “What is this artist saying to me?” You have to write it in words that they understand and not in art-speak.

Q: Beautiful, Mary Lynn.

Kotz: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Mary Marshall Clark and Mary Lynn Kotz, still on session two. We had a brief break. Mary Lynn, you thought it was important to talk a little bit about some of his other collaborators. We talked about ROCI, but you wanted to talk about how some of the people that he knew and worked closely, saw him and how he saw them.

Kotz: Absolutely. Collaboration really was his modus operandi. When he would work with someone with another expertise, he would respect and learn from them, as they would learn from him, and they would communicate in a way that was very exciting to watch. Working with Sid Felsen for example, at Gemini G.E.L. [Los Angeles] and his whole crew. It was like inventing the electric light bulb, but with all these people doing it. It was like an electric light bulb was going off over everybody's head [laughs] while they were collaborating. It was a wonderful thing to watch. He had such a close, personal relationship with his collaborators, with [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver, with Bill Goldston with whom he shared an Oklahoma-Texas background—they came out of the army on the G.I. Bill. Bill Goldston learned how to do prints. But they spoke the same language. They were—

Q: They were from the same region, right?

Kotz: They were from the same region and there is kind of a Southern, Southwestern patois that you don't—there was a kind of a special communication that these two homeboys had with each other. They worked very, very closely together. Bob spread around his printmaking projects. There were things that—or his collaborative projects with Graphicstudio, with Gemini. Oh my word, with Don Saff and his collaboration. They did the most interesting three-dimensional work with Bob's ideas from a one-dimensional sketch.



Robert Rauschenberg
Tampa Clay Piece 3, 1972–73
Fired and glazed ceramic with tape and
silkscreened decal
19 1/2 x 24 x 5 1/2 inches (49.5 x 61 x 14 cm)
From an edition of 10 Roman numerals and 10
Arabic numerals, published by Graphicstudio,
University of South Florida, Tampa

When they talked together, they could—he would talk with engineers and physicists to translate sketches into sculptural objects in different metals and colors for Graphicstudio limited editions. But his collaborators were always—well, of course with Cage and Cunningham and the dancing and all of those particular projects. The lighting. Merce said Bob was the best lighting director in all of theater. He seemed as if he felt he couldn't produce alone the magic that he did, gathering inspiration and a like-minded objective, with his collaborators.

He felt an equality—well, as I said before, he felt there was an equality in objects, there was an equality in human beings, there was an equality in plants and living beings on the earth. He was in no sense hierarchical. But what, I think, about the collaborative—now this is just my opinion, but he felt a security in stepping over a new threshold artistically with a collaborator who could execute, or help him execute, what it was he was thinking about. They could do so with a common understanding of each other and each other's techniques and approaches. I'd love to have that kind of collaboration with someone. Well I kind of have it with my husband. We edit each other [laughs].

Q: Yes.

Kotz: It was just a marvel to watch how an idea could blossom through a conversation. Oh my, with Trisha Brown: I observed them working together. She would tell Bob what she wanted to do and he would sit there and sketch it. I would be at 381 Lafayette, sitting around a table behind them. I was sitting on a high stool, watching them work together at the table beside his kitchen door, with the light from the window behind them. Not getting in their way, but watching them collaborate. Their creative exchanges seemed almost electric! The excitement in their language, in the tones of their voices, as they came up with this new idea and how it was going to look and how it would work, how she could move in that or how the light would touch her.



Trisha Brown, Larry Wright, and Rauschenberg working on costumes for Brown's *Set and Reset* (1983), Larry B. Wright Art Productions, New York, 1983. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

As I said, Merce Cunningham also told me that Bob Rauschenberg was the “best lighting designer in all of theater. There has never been anybody quite that good with lighting.”

Q: Beautiful. All that creativity and yet undergirded by some bravery, has reminded me of the story you told about Tom Krens, talking about after World War II there was a sea change.

Kotz: Yes.

Q: Tell me that story.

Kotz: Well, it was—as I think I told you earlier, Tom Krens had announced that there were two artists who would be remembered from the twentieth century, “Picasso for the first half, Rauschenberg for the second.” After World War II the artist who changed the course of art history was Bob Rauschenberg. It was so interesting to see, as I was going along, researching in the library, in 381, and interviewing just about everyone who would talk to me, the effect of his work and his ideas on other people. Yet, at the same time, he told me—and I had known all about Black Mountain and how much the Abstract Expressionists, who came down there to work, were his teachers—oh, he admired them so much. And so I asked him, Bob, how—okay, here it is, in this new thing you were trying to do. How is it that you, in essence, what you were doing—was thumbing your nose at the masters, was it not? “How did you have the courage to go against these great idols of yours?” He said, “That’s easy. I came from nowhere. I had nothing. And I had nothing to lose.”

The courage appeared in many areas of his life. Going before Congress, taking on the ambitious ROCI with his own money—and for many years before. His courage in World War II, in the navy, was just that: he told them that he wanted to serve his country so badly, but in the navy,

and he did not want to kill people. So they gave him the body bags. Of course, I wrote about this. This is how he became fiercely anti-war. But he was able—he was very patriotic, Bob Rauschenberg.

Q: Well, he would have to be to start a big global project like that.

Kotz: Of course.

Q: Right.

Kotz: He was so proud to be an American over there, doing this introduction. He was kind of the one-man UN of art—but anyway, he had courage. Whether it was liberating a frog in a biology class [laughs] or whether it was going against the Abstract Expressionists or whether it was making a tire encircle a stuffed goat—I once asked him about what was it about the tires, that they rolled along in so many of his paintings. He said, “Well, that was the only way you could get out of Texas: you had to have wheels.” [Laughs] But then he said, “I like the circular shape and I like the texture of tires.” He said, “If you’ll look, I like to use double images.” One image on part of the painting and one part on another. “And I like to use circles quite often. And what better circle than an automobile tire?” [Laughs] He—

Q: Well, the wheel is kind of the engine of civilization [laughs].

Kotz: Truly, truly. But he reinvented [laughs] that tool. But it was now an object in art and it was—understood. And of course, chairs and ladders. Those were objects that—tires and wooden chairs and ladders, common objects in Port Arthur, Texas, in a home that had very little money and yet had a young boy who did have promise.

Q: Thank you so much. Incredible.

Kotz: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Kotz: I want to say that I do agree with Tom Krens. That Rauschenberg did change the course of art history. I really would like to see, in this project, an incredible array of the interviews. I'm only honored to be just a part of a great collection of interviews about the life and work of Rauschenberg. But I would like to see, from this project, a wider understanding of his legacy. Because I think that he was so busy with wanting his legacy to be philanthropic that his role in art history must be told, in its vast creative detail. His personal legacy, of course, was philanthropic and it continues through his Foundation. But that his place in art history be accurately portrayed in the future. That is, I hope, one achievement of the oral history project.

Q: I thank you so much for helping us do that, and especially your thoughts on collaboration, which are so direct because you were there for a good bit of it and interviewed people so extensively. So, thank you, especially for that.

Kotz: Thank you. It was a pleasure and you are a great woman.

Q: Oh, you're a great woman too!

[Laughter]

Q: It's been a great pleasure. All right, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]