

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Anne Livet

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Anne Livet conducted by Sara Sinclair on October 15 and November 18, 2014. This interview is 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: Anne Livet

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: October 15, 2014

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with Anne Livet. It is October 15, 2014 and we are sitting in the beautiful chapel at 381 Lafayette. So to begin, if I could just ask you to tell me a little bit about you, about where you come from, and a little bit about your early life.

Livet: My parents were Texans and I was born in Fort Worth, but my parents had moved to Jackson, Mississippi, where I spent the first ten years of my life, with my brother who was born fourteen months later. We lived in the country on ten acres of land and each of us had a pony and complete freedom. This is how we spent the war years and the years afterward. It was pretty wonderful. [Laughs] In 1950 my parents separated and we moved back to Fort Worth with our mother, but about a year later they reconciled however. Our father joined us in Fort Worth where my brother and I attended public school. But when I turned fifteen my mother sent me away to boarding school, the Madeira School in Virginia. Afterwards I went to Wellesley [College, Massachusetts] but after a couple of years and by then thoroughly sick of girls' schools, I decided to transfer to the University of Texas. After a year there, having by then done almost everything my mother wished including making my debut, I decided to go to France. Despite my later career, I did not major in art; I majored in English and French literature. I loved French literature and was dying to learn to speak French and had just turned twenty-one so no one could really stop me.

Through a friend who had been the year before, I applied to a family in Paris. But they already had a boarder and couldn't take me. They recommended the Saint-Maurice family—Minerva Saint-Maurice and her husband. She was Mexican and he was French and they had been great friends of Francis Picabia and were huge collectors of his late works. Their enormous apartment located in the 16ème arrondissement at 121 bis Rue de la Pompe was filled with drawings and paintings by Francis Picabia. To help educate me, Madame Saint-Maurice gave me a book on French art with a chapter on Picabia and I started learning more about that era. But I didn't really get involved until much later. Throughout my early life, before I knew anything, I recognized that some people were special and I needed to pay attention. Mme. Saint-Maurice was one of those people and through her, Picabia.

I met my first husband in Paris in a bohemian bar a writer friend from the University of Texas had told me about. Alain had just hitchhiked from Morocco to Paris after a long trip around the world. I fell like a ton of bricks. After a stint living with him in his native Switzerland, we came to the United States, married, and had a child and then when our marriage was floundering in Texas, I moved back with him to Geneva and lived there for a number of years during the sixties. By 1971 my marriage was no longer working, so my son and I moved back to Fort Worth.

This would have been in spring 1971. In the fall I enrolled at Texas Christian University [TCU, Fort Worth] as an undergraduate went back to school to get my bachelor's [degree]. In December of that year my mother died tragically and unexpectedly. I continued living with my father and after graduating enrolled in a master's program in French literature. TCU at the time had some

extraordinary professors, one of whom, Dr. Walton Rocky Rothrock's wife, Ilse Rothrock, was the librarian at the Kimbell Art Museum [Fort Worth], which had just opened. Working with my French professors I became very interested in semiotics so after getting my master's and after completing my thesis I decided to get a doctorate in English literature.

Many of the professors in the English department disappointed me. They seemed isolated and hermetic and even a little crazy. Their attitude to life convinced me I didn't want to be a professor. I just couldn't deal with the insularity and longed to be in something mainstream.

I had found an incorrect translation in a key sonnet of the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé and I took it to my professor and entreated, "Shouldn't it be published someplace that this inaccuracy is in a translation of one of his most important poems and it's the translation most commonly used?" He looked up and said in a voice heavy with boredom, "Oh you could probably get it in something called *Scribes and Scribbles*." I had never heard of that publication and I remember thinking, "No, I want something bigger than this" [laughs]. I told Dr. Rothrock that I wanted a job, a real job in the real world. And he said, "Well, there's a new director of the Fort Worth Art Museum," which is what it was called then, it's now called the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. "He's supposed to be really dynamic. His name is Richard Koshalek and they are looking for someone to do part time PR [public relations]. So you could do that and continue your doctorate studies and see what happens." Never mind that I had never worked before, knew nothing about art, and even less about public relations, I felt my stomach clench and I thought how great this would be. I wanted the job so much. I knew it would be my way out of oblivion and into the mainstream. I sent Mr. Koshalek an application letter and my resume, such as it was.

Then I called all my mother's society friends and got them to write [laughs] letters of recommendation for me, recommendations for somebody who had zero qualifications.

Around that time a friend of mine, an old, old friend—someone who was one of the reasons I transferred to the University of Texas. This was Dave Hickey, who had been an editor at *Art in America* but when he showed up in Fort Worth, he was almost derelict. His wife had left him; Brian O'Doherty, the editor of *Art in America*, had fired him for being cocky and probably for doing a lot of cocaine and the cockiness was probably the result of the cocaine. Anyway Dave had returned to Fort Worth and although pretty down on his luck, he was still, since the day I met him in the fifties, one of the most brilliant people I've ever known. He stayed at the little house I had rented near TCU where I had written my thesis using in fact the format he had suggested. That day as I called all my mother's friends, he paced around chain smoking, eyeing me ironically as I telephoned Ruth Carter Johnson and Anne [Valliant Burnett] Tandy asking for letters of recommendation. I can still see him walking towards me, a cigarette between his long, elegant fingers and a quizzical expression on his face. "Well, a letter from me might not hurt darlin'." I stared up at him disheveled and dusty with cigarette ashes and thought, "You? You just lost your job. You have no income and even worse, you have lost you marriage."

[Laughter]

Livet: "You may be smart but you're not successful." I didn't say any of this out loud but he looked so forlorn that I had a feeling he'd read my mind. Seeing him with that hangdog look, I couldn't turn him down and thought maybe I'd let him write something and just not send it. I

watched Dave lumber over to the little table that held my typewriter and clumsily sit down, but without hesitation, start typing. When he finished, he read it again quickly then handed it to me. The letter he had whacked out in minutes was beyond anything I could have imagined. I used to carry it around with me in my wallet and read it every time I began doubting myself. Unfortunately I eventually lost it. In the letter he described someone with unique qualifications and abilities. He turned me, someone who had absolutely no work experience and who knew nothing about art, into someone unique that they would be lucky to hire.

Q: And what did he say?

Livet: Of course I've memorized parts of the letter. The way it started was, "I'd like to recommend to you a not-easily discouraged young lady of whose organizational skills I am quite frankly in awe. She's been incredibly helpful to me over the years in matters that have often been of some delicacy." Later in the letter he had this great way of describing me: "She's got an unusual and valuable quality—'social fluidity.' She can literally go anywhere and meet anyone without ever being condescending or overly ingratiating." Basically that letter got me the job. As it turned out Richard Koshalek had worked at the National Endowment for the Arts with Brian O'Doherty while he was editor of *Art in America*. And after Brian fired Dave he walked into Richard's office and said, "I've just fired the best writer in America." Richard remembered that and when I met him at a museum opening I went to with the Rothrocks, he said, "Anne, I think we're going to work this out. I got a letter from Dave Hickey about you and a letter from Dave Hickey means a lot." My parents had never approved of Dave and this showed me that their way was not [laughs] necessarily the path that I should take and that I could trust my own judgment

about people. Dave eventually got his act together. While he was still living in Fort Worth, I tapped him to write the essay for the Ruscha catalogue for my retrospective on Ed's work and he wrote a brilliant essay called "Available Light" [in Anne Livet, *The Works of Edward Ruscha*, 1982]. After that he wrote a couple of critically acclaimed books: *Air Guitar*[: *Essays on Art and Democracy*, 1997] and *The Invisible Dragon*[: *Four Essays on Beauty*, 1993] that helped him win the MacArthur prize. He and I are still very close friends. Anyway that's how I got to the museum and the day I walked into it I knew that this was the career I wanted to pursue.

Q: So let me ask you a couple questions.

Livet: Okay.

Q: One, how did you know? What was this desire that you had? How did you know that that was the place you should be?

Livet: Well, my first day on the job and knowing nothing, Richard walked into my office and handed me a list of things that he wanted me to do. It was a long list and I had no idea how I was going to accomplish any of them. I had to write a press release on three shows by totally different artists, two of which he'd inherited from his predecessor. One was a Stephen Antonakos neon show on the outside of the building. I think that was Richard's idea. He's always liked to do things on the outsides of buildings. One was a Brice Marden drawing show and one was a Roy De Forest show. Even I, in my ignorance, could see that these two artists were total opposites. I had to write press releases on all three and I had no help from anyone at the museum so I just



stayed on the phone that whole weekend talking to Dave Hickey, Dr. Rothrock, anyone who might have ideas. I went to the library in the museum and looked up all the artists and in the end I looked at old press releases and I wrote three essays. I left them in Richard's box and when he handed them back to me he had only added one comma. He said, "Now we want to get these out to the national press too." Suddenly I was writing to *Time* and *Newsweek* and not *Scribbles and Scribes*. [Laughs] I was working a mimeograph machine to try to do this. This was a long time ago. It was 1974 I think. But I got them all out but when I picked up the paper on Sunday morning, there was nothing about those shows in there. [Laughs] But to answer the question, it was the real excitement of being in a place that considered itself very mainstream and worthy of national attention. It was the possibility of meeting great artists in the flesh and knowing who they are and writing about them. Before I had wanted to meet writers so this was just a continuation of that and I was extremely excited.

I finished the semester for my doctorate, but I never went back. [Laughs] I did not become a professor of English literature. To solve the situation with the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, Richard and I decided to take the art critic to lunch. In those days a lot of local people including media people were suspicious of people with national ambition and they hated change. Contemporary art was hard for them and this critic was a bitter, sad person, who later killed herself. But we took her to lunch and on a tour of the museum and tried to win her over. "From now on," Richard said, "Let's send her press releases by messenger and follow up with a million phone calls and keep in closer touch going forward." He never once blamed me for her lack of response.

So I learned how to do public relations and also how to produce the monthly calendar of events, but I was very ambitious and I wanted more. Richard was an incredible mentor. Regularly he would convene us for brainstorming sessions. We would sit around a table and just throw out ideas. No one had done that with me before and I started clipping things from newspapers and magazines so I would have something to bring to these meetings. One day he said, “That’s fabulous! Anne, you’re so creative.” No idea was a bad idea; it was just another idea. His curator, Jay Belloli was a very sweet guy and he was also supportive of my ambition. The girls that had been in the position before were not willing to work like Richard wanted you to work. I had a little boy at home. When Richard would say, “Can you work late?” I would go home and have dinner with my son and come back and work late. This happened all the time but I had this sense that this job was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I wanted to give it everything I had.

Before I knew anything about art, on my first day, Richard and Jay were trying to find a neon guy to install that Antonakos piece and I knew a friend who had a neon company so I spoke up and they hired my friend. And then I knew somebody else for another project and Richard starting saying, “Anne knows everyone. She’s indispensable.” And I wanted to be that until I could learn more about contemporary art and performing art. Soon Richard began talking to me about when he was at the Walker [Art Center, Minneapolis] and about the legendary [Suzanne] Sue Weil who ran an estimable performing arts program there. Later when I was working on my book on dance I did an interview and she told me about bringing choreographers and musicians to the Walker—all seminal sixties figures. So I decided I wanted to bring choreographers to Fort Worth. I wasn’t quite ready to get into the art part yet, but I determined to sneak into it. In those days you could get National Endowment grants for all kinds of things. So I wrote all these grants

asking to bring Twyla Tharp and Merce Cunningham and Trisha Brown to Fort Worth. I don't know whether it affected anything, but at the Endowment, those were the days of the legendary Nancy Hanks who was born in Fort Worth. Whether she had influence or not, I got all my grants. I think we brainstormed those people and Richard knew a little bit more than I did and I eventually found my way. And so they came. Twyla Tharp came and I was so scared that my little fledgling performing arts program was not going to attract anybody from Fort Worth, Texas, so I stayed on the phone. I made my son and his entire scout troop—

[Laughter]

Livet: —go to everything and I called every friend of my mother's and all of them just had to go, so we did have an audience.

It was during that time that I came up with an idea to do a pamphlet, a journal called the *Performing Arts Quarterly* that I thought I should commission essays for. I thought that if I distributed that around Fort Worth people would understand what this radical choreography was about. So these were not very well-attended [laughs], these lectures, but we tape-recorded them and then transcribed them and they became the basis for something that became my dance book [*Contemporary Dance*, 1978]. Richard wanted me to include Clive Barnes, who was anathema to most contemporary dancers, but Richard thought we had to have him because he was the dance critic for the *New York Times*. We brought two or three other critics down and again I recruited my son's scout troop and friends of my parents. After all the critics' talks, I went to New York and interviewed the choreographers in a hotel room and we transcribed all of that. What

happened next was that Richard had chosen a very important graphic designer, Massimo Vignelli, who recently died, to do our graphics.

So I went to New York and sat with Massimo for a week while he read the essays and then designed the book. He really had a sensitivity and perceptiveness for a field that wasn't his. He loved and respected Trisha the most. Massimo really got her. He was intrigued by the depth of intelligence in Trisha's work and interested in her evolution out of being a Merce Cunningham dancer and her relationship with the chance and indeterminacy theories of John Cage and how much that influenced her generation of choreographers. I studied and worked hard to be able to edit this book. And of course I knew about Rauschenberg's collaborations.

So I do not remember exactly how I met Bob. Our first show at the museum was called *The Great American Rodeo* [1976]. At the time the museum was located directly across from the Will Rogers Coliseum where the huge, popular, indoor rodeo took place. To commemorate this event, Richard organized a rodeo-themed show. I can't find that catalogue. I'm going to give another look. My books are kind of scattered around. [Laughs] But I don't think he was in that show though.

Q: He was.

Livet: He was?

Q: He was.

Livet: Okay, then that's how we met. He was in *The Great American Rodeo*, okay. I couldn't remember it because I also commissioned a work by him that the museum bought but that was later.

Q: Yes. Well, before you continue, a couple questions about what you've been speaking about.

Livet: Okay.

Q: You mentioned a local critic in Fort Worth—you were saying that you were holding these events and trying to get a local audience involved. Maybe you could speak a little bit about the tension between trying to reach both the local and the national audience.

Livet: Well, especially in 1974. Richard and Jay organized a biennial show with a ton of Texas artists and a prominent museum director, James Demetrian from the Des Moines [Art Center] contemporary museum, as judge because they thought this would be an outreach to the community. And the only thing that that particular critic would talk about was the nudity in the show. Don't forget that I had lived in Paris and to me it seemed a completely weird thing to focus on because there's been nudity in art forever. But she just wasn't going to be that supportive. Eventually, after she died, it changed a little bit but I think the problem for Richard at the time was that it would come too late and he had wanted to move fast and furious. We ended up working with Janet Kutner at the *Dallas Morning News* who was intelligent, sophisticated, and incredibly supportive.

One innovation of Richard's was that he quit doing catalogues. Instead he would do these big advertisements in the newspaper about our shows. Richard had one creative idea after another and it was very exciting to me. For example the Museum of Modern Art [MoMA, New York] International Council came to Fort Worth at the time that Trisha was down there for her performance—I got Trisha to do *Sticks* [1973], a piece where the dancers lie on the floor in a line and pass the stick down without touching anything or anyone. It is an arduous piece and requires athleticism and rhythm. The International Council was visibly shocked and this was a sophisticated audience. Imagine what the Fort Worth audience thought. This was radical dance and don't forget that Merce doing similar work played to many empty houses forever. So Trisha did as well. None of them expected to have sell-out enthusiastic crowds but Trisha might have logically harbored some hopes for MoMA's International Council.

My dance book took several years and didn't get published until '79. Harry Abrams, who had sold [Harry N.] Abrams [Inc.] and started Abbeville [Publishing Group] needed a book and I had almost a complete book designed by Massimo Vignelli and he took it. Of course he didn't pay a penny and he didn't pay anybody to edit it. I edited it with Jay sitting at his dining room table. But I was willing to do anything to get it done.

Let me back up a little bit. Let's go back to Bob. I think I met Bob and my memories of him start when I had this idea. As I told you, this was a time when you could just come up with any idea you wanted and get a grant for it. I had an idea that I wanted to do a collaborative work with Bob

and a musician and choreographer that Bob respected and that turned out to be Viola Farber, a talented former Merce Cunningham dancer.

I'd also by that time read a lot about his collaborations with Merce and his work at Black Mountain College [North Carolina] and so I was getting to know these people Bob had collaborated with or known. David Tudor had come to Fort Worth with Merce Cunningham's company when I had presented them at the Convention Center and I got to know David Tudor and I cannot tell you how charming and interesting he and Merce and all of them were. They were oenophiles, they were mushroom gatherers, they had such extended cultural knowledge about so many things that I became a sponge around them soaking up all I could. David Tudor and I became fast friends. At a liquor store in Fort Worth, King's, which still exists, he found a bottle of Chateau d'Yquem from some amazing year for only fifteen dollars. He bought a case. It was around then that I started thinking about David and Viola and Bob collaborating. At Bob's invitation, Richard and I went to Captiva and Bob had also invited Viola Farber down. Arriving late at night we knocked on the door of the house and nobody [laughs] came to the door but we could hear all this laughter.

Someone eventually let us in and we found them in the kitchen, stoned and drunk and laughing. [Laughs] They hadn't seen each other for years and they were having so much fun and then here we came. But we stayed several days and conceptualized our project and that's, I think, when I really started getting to know Bob. We were both Texans see, with a similar sense of humor and a real ability to detect a phony and in those days I could almost match him drink to drink.

Q: Tell me about those first conversations. What did you say to Bob? How did you propose the project?

Livet: Before going to Florida I had spoken to a woman named Patsy Swank who was at Channel Thirteen in Dallas and introduced me to a producer who's on the video who was the one that we worked with, but Patsy embraced the idea and she loved Bob Rauschenberg and thought that maybe Channel Thirteen should produce it and air it. That was the idea, of a video collaboration that would be aired on television. I was trying to reach more audiences with work that was kind of hard to understand. So I said, "I think it would just be so great to have something that people can see on television," thinking that this was going to get a large audience. [Laughs] It was a very, very abstract piece. Let me put it that way. But beautiful dancing. And it was a first for Channel Thirteen I think, to do something like that, and it got the museum's name out there too. I didn't really go into the details with Bob about what they were thinking about doing. I figured that they would figure it out. I didn't have a plan in mind. I just wanted to arrange the opportunity.

They came to Dallas at Christmastime, the Christmas after the board fired Richard Koshalek, my great mentor. [Note: December 1976] So it was a very sad time for me and Richard was still living in Fort Worth. I rented a house in Dallas because I had no budget for a hotel and we put them all up in this house. Since it was Christmas, I got a Christmas tree. And I bought presents for everyone that I put under the tree. I tried, I wanted it to be [laughs], I was at Neiman Marcus and I bought these things and I picked a black wrapping paper because I thought it would be more modern and different. Bob and co. worked like troopers, but problems ensued because the



music director for Viola Farber was Alvin Lucier. And there was no room for Alvin Lucier and his kind of music in this video. So I said, “How are you going to do this, Bob?” and Bob said, “I’m just not going to put him in it.” Eventually Alvin Lucier left and he is not in the video.

But they got it done and I went every single day and I would come home very late at night.

When you were with Bob there was a lot of drinking and late dinners because he came alive at night and wanted to drink and talk all night. I can remember driving back, oh my god, I don’t know, really, really late but I had to get up the next day and get my little boy off to school and all of that stuff. However I felt like it was important—what we were doing—which was mainstreaming contemporary dance in Texas and I was so impressed by all of their professionalism, by how they would do it over and over again until they got it right but not try to do it too many times, less it go stale.

Bob had never done this and he was looking behind the camera for the first time. It was an amazing experience. It really was.

Q: I wanted to ask you about that. This is the first time that he worked with video.

Livet: Yes, yes.

Q: So what are your memories of observing him trying to figure out working with a new medium? And why did he want to get rid of Alvin Lucier?

Livet: Well, Bob was the least hokey person in terms of—he wasn't going to be new age-y or weird and I don't want to be quoted as saying that Alvin Lucier was hokey—

Q: What do you mean?

Livet: Well, he wanted to light a candle and have the smoke go up and play this kind of music around it, the antithesis of Bob Rauschenberg's aesthetic. He might do something crazy like put a parachute on someone or do something like that, but it was all very straightforward and it was about the subject matter, it wasn't irrelevant to it. And David Tudor—they'd all known each other at Black Mountain—could do this incredible music. So it was about coexisting, which is really what it was always about, with the Grand Union, with the Judson [Memorial] Church [New York] performances, that was basically what it was about. [Note: Rauschenberg was associated with the Judson Dance Theater.] You had the music here, you had the choreography here, and you had the sets here and that was just the way it was. One did not accompany the other—that was the radical invention—but to co-exist they had to relate to each other and Lucier was light years away from Bob's aesthetic.

Okay, so Bob did not do hokey. He would not want to do hokey shots, zoom in close-ups or speed up and slow down or anything like that. He wasn't going to fool with it like that. He really wanted her to dance and he had made beautiful, simple, colored leotards. His concept was a series of repetitions. I don't even think he thought that out in advance, but that's what he did. So anything that would be, as I said, too arty and less true he would avoid. He was not going to explore video in a way that would play with the weird fringes of it. That wasn't his style.

Q: So other than buying everyone Christmas presents—

Livet: Well, I left them under the tree being too shy to bring them out. One night David Tudor looked over at me and said, “Anne, what are those strange black wrapped packages under the Christmas tree?” And I said, “They’re your presents.”

[Laughter]

Livet: So we had Christmas presents.

Q: What else did you feel you had to do to prepare for them coming, if anything?

Livet: Well, I was there every day. Listen, he had everybody in Chanel Thirteen eating out of the palm of his hand. He was so charming. Everybody was excited and everybody wanted to meet him. Bob was the type of person—this is one of I think his many, many great qualities—who had no hierarchies in terms of people. He was as nice to the person sweeping the floor and as curious about him as he was to the head of the station. This meant of course that he could corrupt the office manager to go get him whatever he wanted, usually a drink, even if it wasn’t allowed. There was always someone that would [laughs] help him out. And he was charming and he was curious about them and he made friends. And Patsy Swank didn’t care what he did because she adored him. Patsy took a chance with us and she was rather legendary at Channel Thirteen.

Now whether the museum thought I was crazy or not is a whole other story.

[Laughter]

Livet: That's another chapter. But let me go back a little bit because I just don't want to leave anything out. Let me bring in one other person that I met who is another life changer and also a real helpful person to me, Leo Castelli. Richard and Jay and I came to New York to interview contemporary choreographers for my performing arts program. I had been promoted to Director of Performing Arts and I wanted to have a diverse and original program, bringing innovative groups to Fort Worth. While we were there, we went into Leo Castelli's legendary gallery at 420 West Broadway and I remember I had this idea for a poster about contemporary dance. My idea had been to get Mick Jagger or somebody like that to say, "I love contemporary dance," or whatever we were doing and that way the rest of the people in Fort Worth would see that it was a cool, hip thing to do. And Leo immediately said, "I can get that for you. Don't worry, I will get that for you." [Laughs] Ultimately he didn't get Mick Jagger to be on my poster but it didn't matter because by then we had become friends. But Leo never met a young woman [laughs] he didn't like a lot, but not always in a lecherous way—he simply loved the company of women.

When Leo came down for the opening of this mammoth Dan Flavin show that the museum had organized, showing his drawings the first year and then the fluorescents, he called me to arrange his hotel accommodations. [Note: *Dan Flavin: Installations in Fluorescent Light, 1972–1975, 1975–76* and *Dan Flavin: Drawings, Diagrams and Prints, 1972–1975, 1976*] He told me he was traveling with Brooke Hayward and on the phone he said, "Anne, it's Leo. Could you get the

room in a nice hotel, if you don't mind? And would you get a room for Brooke Hayward, too, next door, if you don't mind, so we can, um, chat." [Laughs] So of course I got the message and booked connecting rooms.

This was such an exciting time in my life. Richard Koshalek would let his staff do anything they wanted to do if he liked the idea. So while still doing PR, I developed a large and exciting performing arts program bringing Merce Cunningham, Twyla Tharp, Trisha Brown, and others to Fort Worth, while trying to come up with more ideas and find the money to fund them.

One day while reading *Vogue* I came across an article by Barbara Rose on Frank Stella's relief paintings and they looked so gorgeous that I said to Richard, who was sitting across from me at this long conference table where we always sat and talked, "Can I do a show of Frank Stella's relief paintings?" and he said, "Yes, you can and we can get you a grant for that," and we sat there and wrote the National Endowment grant right there and in an instant I became a curator. Richard was the most amazing mentor to me but he probably moved too fast for the trustees because they, in 1976, after two years on the job, during which we accomplished so much, they fired him.

When he took over the museum job there was a fifty thousand dollar deficit, which in a land of [laughs] very wealthy people doesn't seem that much. But in those days fifty thousand dollars was a bigger deficit than it would be today. Richard worked hard to get it paid off, but he wasn't successful. I think he went too fast and that irritated some people because he wasn't good at bringing along people that didn't want to go fast.

Q: By “fast” you mean he just had too many things on the go all the time?

Livet: He wanted to make the museum the most noticed museum in the country and he succeeded in only two years. Working for Richard transformed my life and I’m still extremely fond of this man and I think he’s done great things. He and Pontus Hulten founded MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] and after Pontus Hulten left, Richard built it up. Recently he became director of the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.] but quit because they didn’t want to do the Frank Gehry bubble project, an innovative way to expand the museum in the summer when they have the most visitors. Richard always comes up with really huge ideas. In the case of Fort Worth, maybe the trustees felt that he didn’t take enough time to talk to them about some of the things that he was doing or maybe they felt he didn’t consider them part of his team. I don’t know exactly, but when they fired him it came as a total shock—to him, to me, to all of us. I felt like my burgeoning career in the art world was over. I had received the grant for the Frank Stella show, which was scheduled for 1978. And I had just applied for a grant to do a major Ed Ruscha retrospective, the artist’s first. When I applied for that grant for some prescient reason Richard told me to sign a certain place so that if I was no longer at the museum, the grant would stay with me.

The problem for me was that I had grown up with and known and liked most of the trustees. So I had to walk a difficult line. But in the end, they picked Jay Belloli to succeed Richard, so that became a fairly smooth transition. The Stella show was a breakthrough for me because it received reviews in *Newsweek* and *Time* [laughs] not *Scribbles and Scribes*! Even Hilton

Kramer, of all people, named it Best Show of the Year in his *New York Times* article. And of course because of his conservative views, he was another critic like Clive Barnes who was hated by artists. But when he read the article, Stella just shrugged and said, “Well, a guy can change his mind.” That show established my reputation in the art world, something for which I continue to be grateful to this day.

But organizing the show had presented difficulties. I had obtained a grant from Philip Morris for fifteen thousand dollars, but because Jasper Johns had just received a grant of a hundred thousand dollars for his show at the Metropolitan Museum [note: *Jasper Johns*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1977], Frank turned the grant down. I had to take this news to the chairman of the board, Richard Tucker. I told him about Frank’s turning down Philip Morris’s offer and he was not pleased. One of the trustees voted to cancel the show. When I heard this, I called him and told him to give me a little time to work something out. Making it up as I went along, I said I had some powerful connections in New York that wanted this show to happen so please let me see if I could turn it around. He said, “Okay, but we have to have that money.” I immediately called Leo Castelli who was one of Frank’s dealers. Leo advised arranging a lunch with the head of the art program at Philip Morris and Odile Jacobs, my contact there. Leo made a reservation at Les Pleiades and I decided to wear a pale pink satin blouse with my pantsuit, so they wouldn’t think I was a toughie. After a lengthy discussion I told them, “If this show gets canceled you’ve got egg all over your face. Frank is insulted at the amount of money you are offering and because of that he does not want your name in the catalogue.” And they said, “Well, what are we going to do?” and I suddenly blurted out, “If I were you I would make an anonymous grant to the museum right now.” “Oh what a brilliant idea!” said Leo. “Oh,

this is it! We must do it. We're doing it, aren't we? We're going to do it. Let's have a glass of champagne and all agree." And that's what they did. And this is what saved it. It literally saved it. I told Bob all these stories because he just lapped them up. He couldn't get over it, "Why would Frank turn the money down?"

It was around this time that Bob Rauschenberg and I started hanging out together more frequently. Essentially I became part of the entourage. Bob had begun lobbying in Washington to get Congress to change the laws so that artists could deduct their donations to museums and so forth. This law still hasn't passed but he was working on that and I would often go with him. Essentially anytime he asked me to go someplace I'd jump on a plane and meet him there. But I'd always pay my own way and not ask the museum to pay unless there was museum business to discuss.

Once on a flight with Bob to Washington, D.C. I was reading an introductory essay I had prepared for the Stella catalogue. It was introductory because Frank wanted the art historian Philip Leider to write the essay. Frank was not a very easy person. He had his own ideas and since this was his first major museum show outside of New York, he wouldn't budge. So I had written an introductory essay with Jay's help and let Philip Leider's be the main essay. But before getting on the plane I had gotten a message that Frank Stella wanted me to call him and I told Bob, I said, "I'm a little worried he didn't like the essay," and Bob said, "Oh, that's terrible. You made this show happen for him." And sure enough when I did call him, he said, "We've got to talk. This can't go in the catalogue. Only Leider's essay." Well he had his own vision. So I



ended up writing a very short little introduction just to get my name in there since I had pulled off getting the show done.

Later when I did the writing for *Brazos River* [1976], Bob read my essay, looked at me and said, “Perfect.” Bob wasn’t the control freak Stella was and he liked his friends to be successful and get the spotlight. If it had been terrible or maudlin or something like that he would have spoken up. But if the writing was clear and correct and got the job done, that was fine. These incidences sort of happened back-to-back and really pointed out the differences between the two artists. I still respect and admire Frank Stella and his show was pivotal for my career but they’re very different people. Frank let me do the show and he wanted me to get it funded and circulate it but he did not want me to have any creative input. Bob on the other hand would make paintings with a room full of people and ask for their input. “What color should I put here?” And if someone said yellow or whatever, he would try it. Frank had never had a major show outside of New York or Europe and Bob was the type of person that wanted to be out of New York—working as hard on a little community college show in Florida as he would for a MoMA show. He was just so democratic. Therefore because the museum had the famous deficit, I circulated the show to about ten museums, one being Jackson, Mississippi, where I grew up. I learned a lot from that which is that if an artist wants to have a vibrant secondary market, he needs to get his work shown out of New York. An example of this was that, when we opened the show the most expensive work was one of the *Exotic Bird* pieces [1976 series], which was valued at around thirty-five thousand dollars, but by the end of the tour the same work was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Q: So talk to me a little bit more about that realization that actually you needed to get out of New York.

Livet: Not me, not me.

Q: Not you, but work.

Livet: Well, there are some fine regional museums in the country and we were a regional museum. Despite that, Richard taught me to have the same standards that one would have at a major museum in a big city. He thought it wrong to dumb things down because your audience isn't as sophisticated as audiences in bigger cities. He didn't believe in condescending to people. We both felt it was very important to educate people. Of course this was before the Internet and there was less information. Often now when I'm in Fort Worth—and I'm in Fort Worth a lot because my husband lives there, we were married about seven years ago—old friends from my museum days such as the former head of the ballet say, “Oh my god, you brought Merce Cunningham to the Fort Worth Convention Center!” But at the time nobody in Fort Worth really knew who Merce Cunningham was. So I felt it was important to educate the community about what they were getting, to realize that they were part of history being made and to realize how lucky they were to have these great museums, the Kimbell Art Museum being one, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art being another, and then—what was then the Fort Worth Art Museum. And Richard felt that way too. He was so ambitious that he wanted to do so much so fast and he wanted to change the way things were done. And Bob was somebody that liked to get challenged in similar ways.

Q: Okay, I have a couple questions.

Livet: Okay.

Q: How did things change for you after the Frank Stella show?

Livet: Well, I became more known. And also around the same time my dance book was published. I was starting to see a bright future for me as a curator and as a writer, but right around the time that the show opened, the board fired Jay Belloli and I heard a rumor that I might be next. So I thought I had to resign because I didn't want to be fired by people that I'd grown up with. And they fired a trustee who had been very helpful to us too. And I was, well, devastated, but anyway I ultimately resigned. Then someone named [Stephen] Steve Reichard, who had been coming to Fort Worth a lot trying to get us to show some artists he was working for, invited me to the Hamptons [New York] for a weekend. I flew up and had to tell him that I'd resigned from the museum, but he gave me a party for my dance book. And I went out to the Hamptons and Hilton Kramer's article was in the paper and I stayed with him and his friends, the choreographer Jane Comfort and her husband, the entire summer. Brought my son up as well. I was the worst guest, but we're still best friends [laughs] in the world. And by the end of the summer Steve and I decided to start our company, Livet Reichard [Company], an arts management and events company, which I still run.

I'm getting a little ahead because I have to back up here again. How much time do we have? Because I have a major story to tell you. I'm going to tell you all my stories.

Q: We have an hour.

Livet: I have another hour?

Q: Yes.

Livet: Okay. So when Jay and I were working on the Stella show, we decided to commission a Rauschenberg work. That was another time I went to Captiva—I think Jay did too—and we talked to him. I said that I really wanted something that was Texas-oriented and no museum in Texas owned his work and we had a small number of dollars we could commit. Bob said it was fine, “Don’t worry about it,” and he did a piece called *Whistle Stop* [(*Spread*) 1977], which is at the museum and often on view now, with a little train light (“RR”—either railroad or Robert Rauschenberg) that goes on and off. It’s a gorgeous piece—more like a Combine.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Whistle Stop (Spread)*, 1977  
Solvent transfer, fabric and paper collage,  
screen doors, and train signal light on wood  
support  
84 x 180 x 9 inches (213.4 x 457.2 x 22.9 cm)  
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth Museum  
purchase and commission  
The Benjamin J. Tiller Memorial Trust

I invited Bob to come so we could have a party in his honor with the work up. The woman that got fired from the trustees, Carol McKay was her name, offered to have a party at her ranch and this was welcome since some of the trustees were just not interested in giving a party. They said he drank too much or he this or he that. I didn't want Bob to ever know that either, that they would say that. So when Carol McKay came to my rescue and offered to give a party out on her ranch I was thrilled.

Also the mayor, who was a dynamic Democrat and a good friend of Carol's, came to the museum and made Bob an honorary citizen and we drank champagne. On the bus I served snacks and drinks. The sky was overcast and when I mentioned that to Bob apologetically he said that was the way he remembered Texas. At the ranch in Lipan, we had *cabritas* [goat] roasted on the open spit and mariachis played and all of us danced. The mayor flew in on a helicopter and gave Bob the key to the city. I did everything I could to make the night special because I was so grateful to him for giving the museum such an amazing piece at such a great price. I think we paid one hundred fifty thousand dollars, something like that. The piece has got to be worth a lot of money today.

Now the story is not over and I don't think you know this story or where I'm going with it. Then it is time to get back on the buses. There are three buses and there are no cell phones. And I have a date with some guy that's a lawyer or something and we stop in Granbury, Texas, which is where ironically my husband has a farm [laughs] right now. We stop in Granbury, which in those days was dry and very, very redneck with very conservative values. A lot of people got off the bus to go to the bathroom and Bob went as well but there was a line at the bathroom so Bob went

around behind the bus and ended up just peeing on the tire behind the bus. But when he did that he was immediately surrounded by Texas Rangers with drawn guns.

Q: Wow. [Laughs]

Livet: It made it into *The [Andy] Warhol Diaries* [1989] by the way [laughs], this whole little incident. And I am like, what in the name of god is going on? I go to get off the bus and there are Texas Rangers with their guns drawn. They take him to the jail in Granbury.

Q: Wow.

Livet: To the Granbury jail and I refuse to let the bus go back to Fort Worth. The other two buses go. And there are people on the bus that really did not want to sit there but I didn't give a shit. His mother was furious with him and I heard his sister Janet [Begneaud] and his mother asking, "What if this gets in the newspaper that he was going to the bathroom? They're going to talk about his exposing himself and maybe being homosexual," or something like that. It went on and on. Finally I got this boyfriend/lawyer/date of mine to persuade the police to let him get off the bus so he could go call [William E.] Bill McKay, who'd given the party. And he was successful and that's how Bill McKay pulled up laughing his head off thinking the whole thing hilarious. He knew all the Texas Rangers and made sure they thought it as funny as he did.

Apparently in the jail they asked Bob to empty his pockets. Bob always stashed his lucky pieces in his pockets—seashells, bones, feathers, keys, and so on. As he took them out emptying these

[laughs] weird things on the table, they reached to take the key to the city off him. “What’s that?” they said. “It’s the key to the city of Fort Worth.” And they said, “Well, take it off,” and Bob said, “Why? Does it open the jail?”

[Laughter]

Livet: So when Bill McKay arrives and they release him, the jail people say, “He’s been perfectly nice but those people on the bus are whom we really should have arrested.” We get him and we get back to Fort Worth and he’s staying at a hotel in the country a bit. The next day I’m in a state of panic because I hadn’t had much sleep. A friend of mine, Mary T. Ard was giving a luncheon, a brunch, and I didn’t want Bob to oversleep and Bob was notoriously late, everywhere. So I went to the motel and [Robert] Bob Petersen, Rauschenberg’s lover, opened the door and said, “Oh, Anne, you’d better come in and give Bob a big hug.” Apparently his mother had gone in there that morning and woke him up and sat on the edge of the bed and said, “Milton, you listen to me. If one word of this arrest gets to,” where were they going? Lafayette [Louisiana]. “—to Lafayette or Port Arthur [Texas], I’m never traveling with you again,” [laughs]. So I went in and sat down and looked at him with the covers drawn over his head [laughs] and he was scrunched down in the bed and I said, “Bob, what’s the matter?” and he said, “Don’t let my mother in here again.” [Laughs] So we pulled ourselves together and got dressed and I drove us over to Mary T. Ard’s house.

I knew the house very well because I had known the daughter of the owner, Gwen. Her father Ted Weiner was very ahead of his time and he had a beautiful sculpture garden out there, but

Mary T. had the house. And she had Warhol's *Elvis Presley* installed just inside the door. Once she opened the door with Bob—a bit nervous because he's been a bad boy who got arrested and whose mother was truly mad and he's just nervous about getting in—but Mary T. was just fabulous. She put her arms around him and she said, "Oh my god, I heard what happened to you last night. It's happened to four men that are here today." She said, "You can't pee anywhere anymore, can you?" [Laughs] So he was just totally relaxed and we had a great brunch, which was lots and lots of fun.

This goes on a little bit longer because it was a crazy, crazy day. I had this yellow station wagon and I'm driving all of them—Bob, Bob Petersen, Bob's mother Dora [C. Rauschenberg, née Matson] and his sister Janet, trying to get him to the airport. Another thing Bob had done was to invite all of the workers at the museum who were not invited to the party out on the McKay ranch to come to the airport to say goodbye to him. That was very typical of Bob, to spot the really interesting and promising people and somehow find a way to include them. He did this all the time, insisting that his staff—most of whom were artists—be invited to whatever party he was invited to. And a lot of those artists/staff people grew into full-blown careers later on. So I was driving them to the airport when my car broke down. Ultimately as we stood on the side of the highway without the benefit of cell phones, I flagged down a pick-up truck and watched them drive away, his mother sitting in the back with his sister and Bob and Petersen stuffed into the cab. I didn't make it to the airport to see them off, but according to some of the people that were there, when Bob arrived and saw these young people that he liked so much, he said, waving his AmEx [American Express] card, "I'll buy you tickets to anyplace in the world as long as it's not Port Arthur, Texas." [Laughs]



Warhol heard about the Granbury arrest and he wrote about it in a section of the *Diaries* where he says, “I just heard this terrible thing that happened to Bob, that he got arrested for urinating in public in Texas and I’ve been thinking about that all day. What if I had to go now? Where would I go? Would I get arrested? Would I go to jail too?”

Q: So let’s rewind a tiny bit. I want to ask you a couple more questions about *Brazos River*.

Livet: Okay.

Q: I read the essay that you wrote.

Livet: Okay, that’s the one Bob approved, I think. Okay.

Q: So I read that—

Livet: I don’t think I have a copy of that anywhere.

Q: I can send it to you if you want—

Livet: I’d love that, I’d love to have a copy.

Q: They have it here at the Foundation.

Livet: They do? Okay, I'd love it.

Q: Sure. Okay, great.

Livet: I don't think they have the video though, do they?

Q: I haven't yet found the video.

Livet: Okay, well I have that, I'll bring that the next time I see you and I'll also—you have a copy of my dance book?

Q: They have it upstairs in the library.

Livet: They do, okay.

Q: Okay. You wrote that you were able to observe this high degree of cooperation.

Livet: That's right.

Q: Do you remember any examples of that, of watching the three of them work?

Livet: It was more of an intuitive thing, I think. I just feel like it was a collaboration that had started a long time before that piece because Viola was a leading dancer for Merce and Bob did sets and stuff for Merce for a long time and he loved dancers. And David Tudor did sound. But Viola did not go to Black Mountain, I don't think. I think it started because Bob wanted Viola because he loved her as a dancer. I don't think that she was as dense a choreographer as Trisha. And Trisha's a much more cerebral person. I think maybe if you had to compare them as dancers, Viola might have been the better dancer, but I think Bob, what he was really interested in was the way she moved. He loved dancers; he really, really did. And I think in terms of shaping the piece—the piece doesn't have a whole lot of shape. It sort of just goes and goes and goes. In retrospect I might have liked it to have more shape or be a little more salable for the mass market. But this is what they wanted to do and I felt like they should be able to do it. They really supported each other and I respected that. However we did have that issue with Alvin Lucier.

Ultimately Alvin Lucier disappeared but Viola stayed which was probably difficult for her since he was her primary musical collaborator. I think that Bob instinctively knew he'd like whatever David Tudor did since they were together at Black Mountain College. And I think all of them felt that way. Eventually Viola came to see that anything that Alvin Lucier was thinking about doing would be enormously disruptive to what the collaborative effort should be, that it was like putting your own artwork in the middle of another piece and your artwork didn't have anything to do with the other piece, didn't come out of it, didn't relate to it. It was not about juxtaposition, which can sometimes work, where there's a relationship. Their aesthetics were too different, his contribution would have seemed hokey to them.

That was the essential struggle and I was very impressed that Bob didn't give up and I was reassured that they stayed with what they had. But it taught me a lot. I learned that you have to stand up for yourself and you can't agree to something that's just anathema to your vision. So it was difficult for me because you see, I didn't think that Viola was going to bring Alvin Lucier into it because I'd made it really clear to her that David would be involved and that Bob was in charge. Anyway they all had a certain aesthetic affinity, it's hard to pinpoint what it was, but an example is that David Tudor's music—however abstract or avant-garde—could also be witty and inventive and collaborative. There's a wonderful story that Merce Cunningham told me. At Black Mountain which they all attended, David was known as a great concert pianist who never played the piano and one night Merce asked him to play the piano as accompaniment to one of Merce's pieces. And after the piece was over, Merce said to David, "You didn't play the piano, David. I wanted you to." And David said, "Oh, I played the piano." "But I didn't hear it," Merce said. "Maybe that's because I played it upside down."

[Laughter]

Livet: I don't know how to pinpoint it, but that is Bob Rauschenberg to a tee. They were so compatible in that kind of thinking. Viola maybe a little bit less because she had Alvin Lucier, but not really. She knew what he wanted to do and what he wanted to accomplish and he wanted it to be straightforward: her moving, doing her piece, simple costumes in candy colors, and the sound. And he wanted to interfere with that as little as possible.

Q: Why do you think he loved dancers as much as he did?

Livet: Well, he had a very sensitive eye for beauty and movement. I think another side of him would have loved them because they were young and their careers were short and because they didn't make any money but they were great artists as well. I think it was a very radical time for dance and I think when he met John Cage and Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain and saw what dance could be and how extreme it could be and how music didn't have to accompany dance, music could coincide with dance. It could also not be music. It could be some sort of sound. It could be nothing and call it music. I am referring of course to the famous piece of John Cage's about silence where the tape recorder was turned on in a room without ostensible sound but picked up all kinds of sounds. John Cage and Merce taught Bob a ton and their philosophies had a lot to do with his becoming the kind of artist he was destined to become. They say that at Black Mountain he had—I don't think he had a car, but he had some kind of a cart and he would just go all over the campus picking up stuff and putting it in the cart and then later he'd figure out what he was going to do with it. His meeting with John Cage and Merce gave him permission to be the kind of artist that he could envision becoming. He saw that his instincts were in fact the instincts of an artist and I'm really fascinated by how artists become artists.

There are just many occasions—I've known several artists that were sick because they had some kind of childhood disease, encephalitis or something like that, and they had to stay in bed for a good long while. Keith Sonnier is one. During his convalescence his mother brought him books on architecture and other books and he'd push her to bring even more. Once well, he started building sets and that germination period of illness turned him into an artist.

Bob once told me this story about when he was in the Navy, during the war and his fleet docked in San Diego. I don't know whether anybody else has told you this story or not, I don't know whether he just told it to me but I think it's in the repertoire. [Laughs] They docked in San Diego. Now all his life he had drawn—all kinds of things. But that skill was never valued in his family so he didn't think of it as anything of worth. But he drew really well. Especially bugs, but everything, really. Everything. And when they got off the ship in San Diego, they visited a museum where there was a Thomas Gainsborough show. And when he walked in and pondered the paintings he suddenly told himself, "I could do that." He knew he could do that. In that instance, he knew that he could be an artist. Of course he didn't want to be that kind of an artist, but his own artist and it would take him a while to figure that out. I think this is such a moving story about the gifts we are given and their value and how we have to utilize them in different ways if we really want to be original.

In talking about his career in the Navy, he also told crazy stories about being on the ship and monitoring the psychiatric ward. Because that duty was all night and besides he identified with these people. Can you imagine Bob in the Navy, having to behave himself? And obey orders? I can't even fathom it. [Note: Rauschenberg was stationed at Camp Pendleton, San Diego, working as a neuropsychiatric technician in the Navy Hospital Corps. Livet refers to a visit to the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California, where Rauschenberg sees Thomas Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy* (1770) and Thomas Lawrence's *Sarah Barrett Moulton: Pinkie* (1794).]

[Laughter]

Q: Right.

Livet: This is a man who would go to private dinner parties and bring twenty people with him. But he was not being rude—he hated being alone and he hated leaving people out. I think being able to operate like that was very liberating for him.

Q: Did you have conversations with him about dance?

Livet: About dance?

Q: Yes.

Livet: Yes, oh yes. That era for all the arts was so fertile. Merce had opened all these doors for dance, Bob and Jasper and others had shown infinite possibilities for making art and John Cage showed that music could be any sound and it didn't have to be an accompaniment or have a melody. Bob toured with the Cunningham dance group. They toured Europe together and he would constantly make little trinkets to give away to the dancers. He wasn't as interested in classical dance and classical ballet per se although he would never have been anything but nice to anybody that was doing that. I think he felt that the idea that you could still be a beautiful dancer and be doing a piece that was more like an artwork than a dance was very interesting to him. However you still had to train as a dancer and you still had to dance every day, you still had

to do what dancers do, work on the barre—whatever. That impressed him but he was not interested in doing that himself. He was interested in choreographing pieces and in turning them into works of art.

He loved movement and the constraints of dance interested him because he could break out of those constraints. And that inspired him a lot. At least that's the impression I got. I'm sure he was a handful in many ways when he was working with Merce and on the road with him because he would be mischievous. They had that breakup when it was announced that Bob was the nominated American artist in 1964 at the Venice Biennale. [Note: Rauschenberg received the International Grand Prize in Painting at the 1964 Venice Biennale.] I wasn't there but there was a rupture, which really hurt him in a big way because he couldn't understand it, he couldn't understand how Merce could have let him go. What did he do? And I've never really understood all the trappings of that either. But I do know that many years later when Merce was performing for the first time on Broadway, I was staying at Bob's and we were going and [laughs] he brought up the tutus and stuff that he had made as costumes and he had put Merce in [laughs]. Bright pink and tied tin cans to him.

[Laughter]

Livet: And I thought, was this a little bit payback time? [Laughs] And Merce is like, "Pink? Pink?" And Bob said, "Yes, but I've got you this tail of tin cans." So I always wondered about that. But the piece was fantastic. [Note: Merce Cunningham, *Travelogue*, 1977]



Dancers held a special place in his heart. He always told me that he never wrote on an artwork he gave a dancer, “To Amy” or to whomever because he knew— “They’d try to sell it the next day,” he said, and the dedication would cheapen the work.

Q: Sweet.

Livet: He was so okay with that. He would have given them cash if he’d had it.

Q: Okay, so you said you are very interested in how people come to be the artists that they are.

Livet: Or just come to know that they’re artists. Not artists like every other artist that’s come before them but through some impetus that comes out of them, they make art, and it’s their art.

Q: Is that something that you had conversations with Bob about?

Livet: Probably, but it was more about his trajectory. He went to the Art Students League [New York] after the war when he decided to seriously try to be an artist. I don’t know but I could imagine he was resting on his drawing skills and not his innovativeness when he was there. Then he heard about Black Mountain College, which became a transformative experience for him. It was there that he was able to figure out that he didn’t have to be like everybody else and he could do the kinds of things that he felt that he had to do. It was also at Black Mountain where he saw the way all the arts—performing and visual—could work together and feed off each other. I saw that amazing show that the Menil [Collection, Houston] did on the *White Paintings* [1951] where

they included all the early work [note: *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, 1991–92]—the shirt boxes for example, the cardboards in the shirts, which he used to make collages from when he was in Italy one summer with Cy Twombly [note: *North African Collage* series, 1952]. I mean those were just amazing. And around then he made the *White Paintings* and the black paintings [1951–53] at Black Mountain and other radical inventions after, in New York, when he erased the de Kooning drawing [*Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953]. And then he made the first Combines [1954–64]. What an exciting time for him to be finally figuring out that he wasn't just a draftsman or a copier but a real artist who could make crazy new things like Merce and John and break all kinds of boundaries.

Q: I think he started the black paintings at Black Mountain—

Livet: I do too. And he worked in a very smart way. I have not known many people as smart as he was. Bob was brilliant like a fox. He did not act it. He didn't show off and try to be clever. He was just absolutely street smart, instinctive, and wise, and I watched him countless times bring a kind of clarity to the making of art, which he liked to make as a group. [Laughs] It was like, "Oh sure, I could do this." You'd be in a room and he had the big printing press, the roller thing that did the transfers, and something would be on the wall, the canvas or whatever it was, and he'd go through a drawer of cutouts and he'd say, "Which one would you think, Anne?" and I'd pick one out and I'm like, I'm making his artwork. [Laughs] Or, "What color would you do here?" "So what about yellow?" "Yellow, let's try it." It was that. And I think that experience—he soaked everything into it so that there were no mistakes. It either worked or it didn't work. But you can incorporate mistakes and make it work—a Cageian philosophy. And Bob liked that challenge.

And that is also why he liked dance. Things had to be fluid in choreography and interactive and collaborative and that was precisely what Bob liked in making art. The idea of an artist alone in a room was anathema to him. Collaboration was a key element in understanding the artistic process of Bob.

That was one reason he sparked to the dance world when the Judson Church hosted such amazing dance groups such as the Grand Union, with Steve Paxton, Trisha, Yvonne Rainer and others. There was a lot of improvisation in the dance of that time. It was similar to Second City for comedy, but it was dance. You might throw a shoe on the floor and someone would have to decide whether to pick it up, kick it, or ignore it, but that action became part of the dance. His art-making process was very, very much like that. Of course he drove it and he would know how he would incorporate others' contribution, but it was very out of Cage and completely inclusive and everybody in the room could have an opinion, as long as they weren't officious, snooty, showing off, or obnoxious.

[Laughter]

Livet: They could be obnoxious, but they had to be it in a cool way. And he loved that interaction. Bob did not like to be alone at all so he had to figure out a way to make art where he was never alone.

Q: Why do you think he didn't like being alone?

Livet: I think he was haunted by demons. He was probably afraid of the existential things that we all are. And he was sensitive and scared. Maybe that's why he drank so much, why he couldn't be alone. He would have trouble in the morning when he woke up and morning was often early afternoon. When he appeared in the sunny pristine kitchen around noon or early afternoon he always seemed frightened and apologetic, as if he'd had horrible dreams. I don't know what he dreamt. We never talked about dreams, but I think he was profoundly afraid of something. His father had been a very tough, strict man who died before I met Bob but his mother lived forever. Bob should have lived forever. Dora was a very nice lady but just prim and proper. The family member he was the closest to was his sister, Janet, who's great, and her child [Richard "Rick" Byron Begneaud, Jr.].

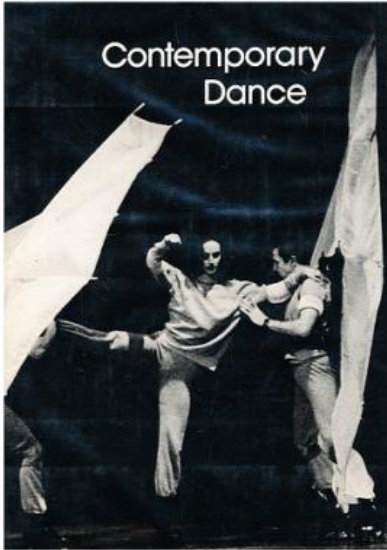
I believe Bob was a lovely, talented boy that no one could accept for who he was and that they tried to pigeonhole him. You know that famous story about going into biology class at the University of Texas where he had decided to try and become a veterinarian? [Note: Rauschenberg went to University of Texas at Austin to study pharmacology.] However when he was called upon to cut up a cat or a frog or whatever, he quit. He knew instinctively I think, that he needed discipline. And I think he went into the Navy for that and of course he's always said that [Josef] Albers gave him discipline. So I think he respected that and sought that out. I've never seen anybody work harder than Bob, more fluidly or more constantly. He worked all the time. One time he told me, "I don't play," and everything that he did, even if it started as play, became work. So this project in Dallas was work for him and it was intense work and he learned a lot and he made certain choices in it and it became very much his thing. But he had to work to

get the station to do what he wanted to do. He had to work to get Alvin Lucier off the project. He had to work to—you see what I mean? And he did it laughing his head off, but it was work.

Q: You wrote something else about that process. You wrote that—and I’m quoting you—he wanted the dancers “to appear to the audience as beautiful ‘stars’; yet on occasion he stresses the effort and perspiration that must be expended to produce the movements they engage in.” You wrote, his “attitude of inclusiveness creates situations in which both the stage magic and reality of human effort can coexist.” [Note: Anne Livet, “Brazos River: A Video Collaboration,” unpublished catalogue, Robert Rauschenberg Archives, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation]

Livet: That’s true. He did not want to dress anything up so that it was not what it actually was. In this piece you can hear people exerting themselves, their breaths and their gasps and their sighs of fatigue. He was also interested in that as a part of the process of the piece. For him dance wasn’t make-believe. Movement, the way muscles worked, fascinated him. And it’s like, I just thought of this, but it’s a bit of an analogy like Leonardo da Vinci going to those autopsies so he could see what the muscles looked like underneath the skin. And I think Bob would understand that. He would not like to do an autopsy on anybody because he was sensitive, but he would understand that, that this is a real human body up there doing amazing movements. I think that the other thing that really got to him about dance is how much work it was and how hard it was to soar in the sky like that. I think he really respected that physical effort and I think he loved that. Maybe that’s why he had the parachute on in the piece with Carolyn Brown that is on the cover of my dance book where he is also wearing roller skates [Rauschenberg, *Pelican*, 1963].

[Laughs]



Cover of *Contemporary Dance: An Anthology of Lectures, Interviews, and Essays with many of the most important contemporary American choreographers, scholars and critics*, by Anne Livet. New York: Abbeville Press, 1978. Detail, photograph by Elisabeth Loewenstein Novick of Alex Hay, Rauschenberg, and Carolyn Brown in *Pelican* (1963), First New First New York Theater Rally, former CBS studio, Broadway and Eighty-first Street, May 1965

Q: Right.

Livet: He would not take away the gigantic effort of dance. He would not try to edit that out. He could have. But he wouldn't do that.

Q: Well, that reminded me of the famous quote that you also cite in your essay about how he wanted to work in the gap between art and life.

Livet: That was his famous, famous trope, yes.

Q: That's one example of observing that. Are there any other examples?

Livet: Well, I think what's interesting is that his drawers in the studio were filled with clippings and photographs and fabrics and mundane objects and all sorts of everyday things that he used at random in his art. When I used to visit him I would always call ahead and ask what I could bring and one time he said he would love some pure white beach umbrellas. Oh my god, I was on the phone for weeks calling information in every town in the country until I found the umbrella man on Fifty-seventh Street and was able to send two gorgeous white umbrellas down to Captiva to shade his mother Dora from the sun. When I arrived a few weeks later I could not spy the umbrellas and finally I asked him about them. He took my hand and, roaring with laughter, led me into one of his studios where I saw my umbrellas affixed to a huge canvas already incorporated into art. Oh my god, the gap between art and life. He and all of us who knew him lived [laughs] in the gap between art and life, his—all day.

There is something interesting that is a possible origin of this statement. He was dyslexic and once I said to him, "Is that why your text is always upside down or inside out?" [Laughs] And he said, "Probably." But I think he wanted—without being sentimental because he was not sentimental like that—he wanted say some of the Combines that remind me of Texas for example or *Whistle Stop*—he wanted them to exist as if they were still on the side of the road or the porch or wherever they had been and let you make a connection, but he didn't want to manipulate your connection much. Because once you start manipulating somebody it starts to get sentimental and he would avoid that. What did he tell me?

He didn't like angles. He liked things pretty much like you see it. He liked the juxtapositions between objects mediated perhaps by a little paint. I think that he never, not since the very

beginning when he did black paintings, stood in front of a canvas with a paintbrush. But he could paint. He might put a dollop—some color on something—or paint a section or something, but he wasn't a painter per se. And I think when you see the works that he made when he and Cy were in Italy and they didn't have any money, that he used found objects such as the cardboards from the shirts that came back from the dry cleaners as canvases for all those everyday things he glued to them, those incredible little treasures.

His collages were not surrealistic like [Joseph] Cornell's, nor were they cerebral like [Kurt] Schwitters's. But he respected both of those artists. His were really objects he thought were attractive or lucky or sentimental. The other thing, of course, if you've read Leo Steinberg's great quote, with that fine essay of his, where he talks about the fact that Rauschenberg got rid of the horizon line, he turned art on its side, so there's no top and no bottom, no left and no right. There's no torso, there's no horizon line. And he also turned it, I think, inside out, with these layers of meaning and often nostalgia. Bob really loved life and this is the way life is. It doesn't have a solidity; it doesn't fulfill our expectations. But he loved the juxtapositions and the things in them. That's where he got his energy. He did not get his energy alone having thoughts, standing alone in the studio. That was so not him. I think he drew inspiration from his surroundings and his memories but it could be from anybody, it didn't matter. It could be from somebody that he met at a gasoline station. It really didn't matter. He was not hierarchical about that. But look at his art and the objects he used. They're not precious things necessarily and they are never doctored. Also he felt that people, everybody, had the ability to inspire you in some way if you gave them a chance. [Laughs]



Q: So he must have constantly been on the cusp of new ideas and realizations if he was always inspired by what was going on around him.

Livet: Well, he worked all the time. He made new works every single day of his life and he left a huge body of work. He was also excited in the studio. I think he was so lucky in that excitement because he never got blocked, ever. And I think that he kind of knew, once he found his path, he just went for it. Now there are better pieces and lesser pieces in all of that, but because he didn't dwell on that issue, I don't think that he ever stopped working. I have done a bit of writing and I am critical of every word and it stops me. Bob was very lucky that he didn't tend to edit himself. I envied him that.

Q: Okay. You mentioned that he was given the key to the city.

Livet: [Laughs] And made an honorary citizen.

Q: Was that a fun moment for him?

Livet: Oh yes, he was validated by Texas finally because until then no museum had ever bought a work of his. He wasn't that famous in the state. He'd had maybe a show in Houston or something like that. Yes, he was thrilled. I killed the fatted calf, I killed the goat.

[Laughter]

Livet: Yes, he loved it and he loved that mayor and he loved the Texas bigness of the mayor, flying in on a helicopter to make him an honorary citizen. He loved all of that, yes, he really did because he was a Texan.

Q: So let's talk a little bit about ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange]. Maybe we'll just talk a little bit about how he first came to you with that idea.

Livet: Well, it was after I'd left the museum and he had started talking about wanting to do a show that would go around the world and he would collaborate with people in all parts of the world. It was that year before I did Livet Reichard and it was after I'd left the museum, so I had a little time on my hands and an office in Fort Worth and so I naively tried to get museums to say that they would be interested in taking such a show. The idea was that he would go to exotic places that had never had contact with contemporary art such as Sri Lanka or China or wherever, and he would collaborate with people there and then have the show and the show would just get more and more things included in it and so forth. And we talked about it and I tried really hard to help him and then—it was a question of, it was a big job. And [Donald] Don Saff ended up really doing it and that was fine. But I think that it was more than I could have handled. I thought that I could. I toured the Stella show and so forth. This was a bit much.

But then we worked on things like getting the works indemnified so that there wouldn't be these huge insurance problems. I met with some people at the National Endowment about that. I corresponded with a museum in India and in Sri Lanka. I worked on it for about a year but I can't say that I made that significant a contribution. We brainstormed it and I thought it was very

important that he would collaborate with young artists in each country so they got a sense of what an American artist was like and what it was like to make contemporary art and that he could leave something behind. That was what Bob wanted.

Q: Okay. And what do you think was motivating his desire to do this?

Livet: Whatever he was doing was not big enough. He needed the whole world. He almost went bankrupt doing it. Somebody told me that Jasper said, “I can’t believe Bob spent all his money doing this.” [Laughs]. He couldn’t imagine it. But I think Bob loved the experience. I took a group to China when he had his show there. And they were all supposed to pay money and it was hopefully going to get them to give money. As it was, they paid a little bit, but not much. Still we took a great group including a crazy posse of Brazilians and a major collector. It was a lot of fun. And we went to his opening in Beijing. I think he was the first contemporary American artist shown in Beijing since the Cultural Revolution and we went to the opening, which was fabulous and of course including some collaborative works with local artists.

Most of the art world disliked Bob’s populism—the way he’d show up at an event with ten of his assistants to get them noticed but some of his assistants like Brice Marden and Al Taylor, to name a couple, went on to major recognition. And the world tour, ROCI—named for his turtle—which at every stop included a collaboration with local artists, was filled with his populism and wanting to take art—serious art—everywhere in the world. For the China opening, which I think was the first stop [note: China was the fourth ROCI country], I had arranged our tour through the curator of Chinese painting from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who accompanied us. We

brought a chef out of hiding in Beijing, because they were in hiding because it was still the Cultural Revolution. And he cooked a Peking duck dinner for Bob at a restaurant that they opened for us. It was great. It was a fantastic trip.

Q: What else do you remember about that trip?

Livet: Well, I didn't see that much of him. I saw him in Beijing and at that dinner he was adorable, just adorable. He was so excited that we were there and he was so excited about being in China and even more excited about the people he was working with. I just remember him telling stories. He loved to tell stories about how complicated it was to get the installation up. You ask for an extension cord and they bring you a rope and [laughs] various things like that, challenges along those lines. But I think he had to do the tour for the same reason he had to collaborate with dancers. He was the most inclusive of artists and he wanted to include the world. I don't know much about the art he made during this time and whether it was great or not, but it was the proliferation of everything he believed about making art.



Rauschenberg in China, likely at a dinner for ROCI CHINA, Beijing, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

I don't necessarily think that it was the best thing he could have done for himself. I'm not wise enough to know that. But I think that for him at the time, he needed more of the world and he wanted it and it was exciting to him. It took its toll, it took its toll, but he recovered from it and he made his money back and didn't have to sell anything and bought more. [Laughs] You have to hand it to somebody like that—that no obstacle is too great.

Q: And what excited you about it when he first—?

Livet: Well, if I had been able to get some of the museums really interested in doing it—but I didn't ask Bob to send me to India so that I could meet with the museum director to get it signed and that's what it ultimately took. I think Don Saff literally devoted several years to going all over the world trying to close these deals. But we'd had a little traction and I had worked to get the works he wanted to send indemnified. I would have probably thrown myself into it and done more and it would have evolved more, but I was in Fort Worth working from an office there, not in Captiva and it just wasn't going to happen. But I have a lot of respect for Bob's pulling it off and doing it.

Q: Yes. Do you remember when he realized that he would fund himself? Was that a conversation that you were involved in?

Livet: Well, he would have liked to have raised the money, I am sure. I was not involved when he made the decision to fund it himself. We were still trying to get endowment money and

various kinds of corporate or foundation money. I tried a lot of corporations and things like that but I had no luck. And in the end Bob did it alone. And it did almost bankrupt him.

[Laughter]

Livet: Did you ever meet him?

Q: No, no, unfortunately I did not.

Livet: You didn't?

Q: No.

Livet: You would have liked him a lot. He really would, he would have liked you.

Q: Thank you. [Laughs]

Livet: He would have. He liked people in general but he paid special attention to people who weren't famous but helped get the job done, like you are doing. After I met him, I was invited to come to his retrospective that Walter Hopps did at the Museum of Modern Art [*Robert Rauschenberg*, 1977; originated at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976–77]. He had a party after the opening on the ferryboat, first on the dock and then on a tour around the city on the boat. All the jaded New Yorkers that I was just getting

to know left after the cocktails on the dock because they didn't want to get stuck on the boat. I stayed. [Laughs] And it was just great. But that was Bob, encompassing the entire island of Manhattan into his opening. The whole island. He was insatiable and had gargantuan appetites for making a huge statement. His birthday, weirdly enough, is October 22, which doesn't explain his personality. And I believe in horoscopes. [Laughs]

Q: What sign should he have been?

Livet: Well, he was a Libra and a Scorpio. I think he should have been a Leo. [Laughs]

Q: I have a sister that's a Leo so I know what that means.

[Laughter]

Livet: I will tell you another little anecdote. I used to try to think of presents to take him when I was invited to Captiva and it was really hard, but I would just work on them like crazy. So I asked him one time what he would like and he said, "I would like two white beach umbrellas, pure white. My mother will only sit under a beach umbrella and I can't stand looking at the colors or patterns of the ones she brings." Well, there was no internet. I started calling everyplace to try to find them. I called information in New York a hundred times. Finally I found a place called Uncle Sam's Umbrellas on Fifty-seventh Street. I think it might still be there. And they had white beach umbrellas. I sent them right down to Captiva with a thank you note for his hospitality. The next time I went down, I said, "Where are the white beach umbrellas I sent for

your mother and sister to sit under?” He just looked at me. “Well, wait till you come to my show.” I don’t remember where the show was but I went to the opening and they were included in two paintings [laughs] wide open. He’d just put them in the paintings the minute he opened them, I suspect. I was actually flattered that my exhaustive search had been deemed worthy of inclusion in an artwork.

He was such an inclusive and fun person. Really, really fun and he liked fun people and he liked to have fun and he liked to laugh at the problems of the day. And there were tons of them and he would get hysterical. We would be solving them as we went along, you know, and he would find that funny. He was a great inspiration. He made making art look easy. But his work ethic was extraordinary.

[END OF SESSION]



Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2

Interviewee: Anne Livet

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: November 18, 2014

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with Anne Livet and Melissa Lieu. It is November 18, 2014, and again we are sitting in the chapel at the Rauschenberg Foundation. This is session number two with Anne. To begin, there were a number of really fascinating things that came up in our first session and a few things that I wanted to return to. You spoke about your time in Fort Worth and I was wondering if you remember more specifically the commissioning of the two works that Bob did for Fort Worth. Before *Whistle Stop* was commissioned, there was *Rodeo Palace* [(*Spread*), 1976] commissioned for *The Great American Rodeo* show. I don't know if you remember, but if you do, it would be great to hear more about what was requested from him.

Livet: Well, I'm a little bit fuzzy on *Rodeo Palace* because I wasn't a curator then. I was in charge of public relations and I'd just barely started. It was one of the first shows that we did. Maybe I'd been there a year, maybe not even a year, but I wasn't a curator and so it was Jay Belloli who would be worth talking to if you wanted to—I've lost track of where he is, but he's in California someplace. Anyway, he was the curator and he would have been more involved with the commissioning process. My guess is that there weren't a lot of instructions. What I can tell you is about the show and the impetus of the show.

The museums in Fort Worth are located on a big lawn. It's right in front of something called the Will Rogers Memorial Center, with a statue of Will Rogers on a horse in front. It's an Art Deco

coliseum—and it was billed as the largest indoor rodeo in the country when it was built. They still hold an annual rodeo there. But there were also three major museums on this lawn—the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art [now American Art], the recently opened Kimbell Art Museum of ancient European art, and the Fort Worth Art Museum—now the Modern—which was about contemporary art. So the idea was to take something that was right in the backyard of the museum—an idea of Richard Koshalek’s—and do a show based on the great American rodeo.

Of course they thought about Bob immediately because he was a great artist but also from Texas and they also had a huge Red Grooms piece. He basically redid the rodeo and he did real faces of real people in the rodeo. They had a Terry Allen piece. Terry Allen is another Texan from Lubbock, another good friend of mine and the great photographer, Garry Winogrand, who did a series of photographs of all the people at the rodeo.

At any rate, Bob, to my knowledge, just made a big Combine piece that had his notions of what rodeo would be like and I would imagine that he just did pretty much what he wanted to. They told him probably the whole idea of the concept. I don’t remember him coming there before. I remember him coming later, but not for this, and this is the area where I’m the fuzziest, and I don’t know why, but I can’t even remember what the piece looked like.

Q: I have the catalogue.

Livet: Do you have the piece? That might juggle my—

Q: Yes, let's take a look. It's this one.

Livet: Joe Zucker did something. Garry—there's Garry. Look at young Bob. Andy Mann, I think he did the music part. George Green was a Dallas artist, Ed Blackburn was a Fort Worth artist. They were trying to include more people. There's Terry. There it is. Oh you had it marked and I'm going all over. Oh now I remember it. Now I do remember it. It would have been so smart to buy this. Well, I think he probably revisited the Combine format throughout his life or his career. It never was something that was one movement and stopped, but this was after he had moved on to many other—the Combines were much earlier than this. There's a horse and three doors, oh and this pillow. I remember that, too.



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: Do you?

Livet: Yes, I do. I remember the pillow. My guess on this would be that Bob just followed his instincts and tried to recall certain things. The way he would usually work would be to rifle through drawers of clippings that the studio assistants had clipped and he would shuffle through them until he found something that rang a bell with him. I love the fact that he made what he would call a palace and he created a kind of house with doors. It's just full of Texas iconography, this piece is. The doors are not from Texas probably, but they look like they could be. Something that he might have seen growing up. And the horse and the bucket, like a horse might eat oats out of the bucket. This is all like—could be right out of one of those early Larry McMurtry movies. Larry McMurtry is—taught in Fort Worth at TCU, so it could have been from *Hud* [1963] or any of those early movies or just Bob's childhood.

I remember the piece being a big hit and people liking it, but once again, I don't know why we didn't buy it—or maybe it wasn't for sale. I don't really know. It looks like they're also screwdrivers or something. Not screwdrivers, wrenches or something similar, and mushrooms. Oh my. But it's a great piece. There's another horse. No, that's a shoe. A tennis shoe. Looks like a horse's nose. I'm not seeing very well. Is this a bug? Look at that.

Q: It looks like a spider.

Livet: It does and that is sort of perfect for Bob to put that in there because he was obsessed with bugs and things growing up and it's almost like he just juggled these things from his memory and put them all together to make something.

But this was not the only commission for the museum. Later we commissioned him to do *Whistle Stop* and he had the commission to do the Viola Faber piece, which he named *Brazos River*, a famous river in Texas that has had a series of dams along it. Possum Kingdom Lake is the result of a dam, as is Granbury, and this damming has caused a lot of problems for water shortages and things like that. So John Graves—another Fort Worth writer wrote a book called *Goodbye to a River* [1960], where he traveled the length of the Brazos, before Bob's piece, camping out. And it's rich with folklore of the Comanches and everybody that lived along it. All these artists share a similar awareness of Texas culture and the disappearance of Texas culture that is included in the disappearance of a river, but I don't think Bob was particularly sentimental in that way. He definitely could be sentimental, but he was—I don't think he was somebody that would want to go back to the Texas of that time, but I think there had to be a certain nostalgia for it because he grew up at a time when Texas was not a huge sprawling chain of cities with surrounding suburbs encroaching and encompassing ranch lands. I bet Port Arthur was small when he grew up. And it was before all those freeways and all of that development. So he must have been speaking to houses that were out in the country that had faded wallpaper and rickety doors that would swing back and forth and screen doors that banged in the wind. It's a beautiful piece. I wonder where it is. Is it here?

Q: It's in a private collection.

Livet: They sold it.

Q: Someone bought it, yes.

Livet: Well that's good. Hopefully it will go to a museum, where it should.

Q: So what about the commissioning of *Whistle Stop (Spread)*? Do you remember that?

Livet: I think that Richard had gone by then and Jay was the director and I remember saying to Jay, we really should commission a piece and get a Rauschenberg into this collection. There's not one in any museum in Texas and let's do it before Dallas does it. I probably didn't say that, but—

Q: Thought that?

Livet: Something like that. I said, we've really been working with him and we've all grown so close to him. I think I probably called him and just said, "We'd really like to get a work of yours for the museum. We'd like to commission a really beautiful work here." And I don't think that I would have said—because I just wouldn't have done that—"I'd like it to be like a Combine," or something like that. Now that I look back on it, I was taking a little bit of a chance because he could have made another work—he was working on a series I think, just beginning it. It was not a series I loved.

He had just finished *Hoarfrost* [1974–76] and *Jammers* [1975–76], fabulous series but those were over, and he had started on these—they were more hard painted pieces that had a lot of objects but they weren't the layered pieces of the Combines and I would have not—we got the

piece that I think was the right one there and I think it probably was commissioned without my saying anything. Jay might have said something but I don't remember this, that we would really like it to be a Combine or something like that. The Combines seemed to me the most "Texas" of his pieces and they're also the most "New York." Isn't that weird? There's so much Texas iconography in so many of the Combines. Not all of them, but some of them. And they're also so full of New York iconography; faded billboards and things that are blowing in the streets and all of that. The signs and newspapers and all of that are pervasive. And they don't feel like California or even Florida much. I feel like there's a sensibility that is a Texas sensibility, but there were a lot of available things in New York City that gave it some meat, made it less nostalgic. *Whistle Stop*, however, does seem slightly nostalgic as a piece, like it could be a memory.

I keep bringing these people like McMurtry and John Graves up, but there's a reason: they were not that far apart in age. In fact, I bet John Graves is about Rauschenberg's age and I bet McMurtry is too.

Anyway, McMurtry tells about witnessing one of the last cattle drives when he was growing up in Carson in north central Texas, a long, legendary event which lasted only twenty years. And it came through Fort Worth along the Chisholm Trail. McMurtry remembers seeing the cattle drive going and then afterwards hearing a train coming along the tracks and just wondering if the train was going where the cattle were going and this whole idea of travel. So in *Whistle Stop* he puts that little light—there's a light that goes on and off and although there's not really a whistle—but the light blinks on and off like a train light. It evokes that kind of nostalgia and I think in those

days, young men in their bedrooms in those faraway towns would hear a train going by and think, I want to be on that train one day. I want to get out of here, I want to be on that train.

I saw *Whistle Stop* not too long ago. It really is beautiful. I am so happy they have it on view.

Bob did a good job and I think he wanted to do a good job for us because he liked us and I think that can make a difference. He liked us, we trusted him, and I think he wanted it to be good, and it was.

Q: Did he speak about the fact that he dedicated it to his father?

Livet: No and I'd forgotten that. Completely forgot that. My word, I really did. I forgot that. No, he didn't. That's interesting. It makes it even more interesting, that there was a sentiment and a nostalgia going through because I never got the impression that he got along very well with his father.

Q: Right. Did he speak about the work?

Livet: He wasn't like that. He wasn't. He was a very smart guy, super smart, but it was a different intelligence than an analytical intelligence. He would talk in—how do you describe it? I said to him, "It's so interesting that the door is open." And he said, "But don't doors do that? Why would I lock the door? Wouldn't it be weird for me to lock the door or glue it shut?" Not that he said any of those things, but that's kind of the way he would talk, so that you had to kind of defer meaning in different ways. And I think that the people who wrote best about him didn't



try that approach, but they set back and let the work kind of talk to them. Like Leo Steinberg saying that Bob turned art on its side and upside down so that there was no longer a top and a bottom or a left and a right or a horizon line showing a top and a bottom. And even with the most abstract sculptures, there was until then a top and bottom, left and right. It's an abstract sculpture of a tree or a silhouette or a horizon line in a painting. And he got rid of all that and he turned it backwards and forwards too.

I think that was one of his greatest contributions, but there were many. You asked me the last time about dance and his love of dance and I think that dance freed him probably to really investigate space in his work.

Q: I did want to speak a little bit more about *Brazos River*. It was a collaboration and I've now seen some of Viola's memories of it. Were you ever aware of her biography, *The Prickly Rose* [2006]?

Livet: No. *The Prickly Rose*, no, that's funny.

Q: Yes. Written by her ex-husband [Jeff Slayton] I believe. Her perspective on *Brazos River* was that—she had some conflicted feelings about Bob's editing.

Livet: I'm sure.

Q: Because she felt that the editing took attention away from the choreography. This is a quote, “She felt the editing made—everything became like a collage,” and she felt that Rauschenberg and Dan Parr thrust her into a male chauvinist’s world. She was upset about Bob titling the piece. Were you aware that she was having that experience at the time?

Livet: No, no, I wasn’t. I was aware of the tension with Alvin Lucier, her creative director, her music director. I don’t know how to address that. I think that part of it was the time and there were a lot of women at the time that were looking for situations. He was the least chauvinistic person I ever knew in my entire life. I mean, really. This didn’t even—it wasn’t even part of his makeup. He wanted everybody around him to succeed and because he was such a giant, many people didn’t succeed in a big way until they died or he died, but nobody really wanted to leave and not work for him.

Another choreographer, Trisha Brown—and I wouldn’t want Viola’s husband to hear me say this, but Trisha was a genius choreographer. Viola was not. Viola was a great dancer and I think Bob knew that. And he loved her as a dancer when she danced for Merce Cunningham, but he had to somehow shape this piece. It has the least shape. That may be a fault for television that it just seems to go on, but he had to—in my opinion, through his edits and looking at it—I haven’t looked at it in a long time and I probably should. I thought he let the dance be front and center. I thought he gave that the starring role. He didn’t try to introduce weird elements, that I recall, to this, and the music was the same thing. In those days music co-existed with dance. It didn’t accompany it yet. That was an old-fashioned usage. So David’s music was co-existing. He had

done music for Merce Cunningham for years. He is another one of the least chauvinistic people you ever knew.

I don't know why she would have felt—maybe she wanted it to make her more famous or make her have more acclaim. It didn't have that much attention. It was shown on Channel Thirteen in Dallas, but it wasn't shown in movie houses all over the United States. I didn't know that and I don't think she made that clear—I don't remember. I don't remember there being tension when they were in Fort Worth. I don't remember that. Read that quote again to me, please, because that's such an odd thing. Let's just put it this way. He didn't put his sets in there. He didn't go in there and make a big Rauschenberg and put in objects—which he had done with Merce and did with the work that's on the cover of my dance book, *Pelican*. He didn't—he put Merce in tin cans and a pink tutu on Broadway. Not a tutu, a pink leotard. His best collaborative work came later with Trisha Brown. After I wrote my book *Contemporary Dance*, Trisha called me to ask what she should do with her company and I said she should form a board of directors and I suggested Bob Rauschenberg as chairman and he had known her during her Judson years and before that with Merce and he accepted and their extraordinary collaborations began.

Q: What was the name of that piece where he put him in the pink? Do you remember?

Livet: It's whatever was the main Broadway piece that Bob did the sets for. I can't remember.

Q: I'll look it up. Okay. [*Travelogue*]

Livet: In the piece with Viola the leotards were very simple but in beautiful colors and so egalitarian I would have to disagree with her.

Q: Alright.

Livet: I would have to disagree with her. So Trisha, who—really the saddest thing in the world is that you can't talk to Trisha.

Q: Yes.

Livet: Because if this had happened five years ago you still could have, but I don't know—and you could certainly call her and ask if there's any way—she's in San Antonio. She's in a wheelchair and I don't know whether she—what her memories are.

Q: I think it's no longer possible.

Livet: I think so too. But Trisha's choreography was much more dense and controlled than Viola's and there were these quirky movements that she did and it was closest to Merce in terms of the rigor behind it; mathematical rigor, repetitions, all kinds of things. And the way they moved and so forth. And Bob introduced many things in hers. Somebody should look at all these videos—because I think they have them—at Trisha Brown, of the collaborations with Bob. They were an amazing duo and did go on to fame and all kinds of things. So I think it has more to do with Viola than it does Bob being a chauvinist.

Q: Okay.

Livet: Okay.

Q: Here are some images—

Livet: And I'm not sure anybody, any choreographer—Merce or Trisha or anybody—could have done something at that time for Channel Thirteen when it was so alien to the people that were watching it in Fort Worth and had it make them famous. But maybe in later years it could have been recontextualized, but perhaps Viola died too soon for that. I don't know.

These are from where? From Bob?

Q: [Robert] Bob Petersen's photos.

Livet: Oh archives. *Brazos River*. Oh there we are! Look at the costumes!



Still from *Brazos River* (1976), choreographed by Viola Farber. Set and costumes by Rauschenberg, with electronic score by David Tudor. Produced for television by the Fort Worth Art Museum and KERA Channel 13, aired 1977

My take on it was that he let her dance be front and center. The bodies moved and it was a great tribute to her as a dancer. Maybe he sensed that her particular kind of choreography wasn't strong enough to be on a par with Trisha's or Merce's. So he just filled the screen with dance and movement. I don't want to hurt her husband's feelings or anything like that because Bob chose her to collaborate with because he had such respect for her as a dancer. But the interactions he had with Trisha or Merce are not evident in this piece. There is no set for example, no set that changes and becomes part of the choreography.

I don't know whether Carolyn Brown ever choreographed, but she was also a magnificent dancer and she was confident enough as a woman and as a dancer to let Bob or Merce—

Q: Use her gifts.

Livet: Yes, use her gifts, exactly, and she allowed it and did not feel that threatened. On the cover of my book, *Contemporary Dance*, there is a photograph of Bob wearing a kind of kite and holding Carolyn Brown wearing a kite as well. She could make the segue. Bob was not a

chauvinist. He fought against categories and saw women as equals. And he saw experimentation with one's sexuality as a great byproduct of the sixties revolution. But he didn't want to be categorized and he would never have categorized anyone else. What I think happened is that he recognized Viola's limitations, her insecurities. Carolyn Brown allowed herself to become part of an artwork that Bob was making. Viola may have resisted that. But Viola was a great dancer and made some amazing pieces. It's too bad this collaboration didn't turn out as well as we all hoped.

I don't know whether I talked to you about this last time—but this conversation just made me think of it. I'm getting in dangerous territory, but I'm going to try to say it the way that it was. Bob and his generation of gay men—for them being able to be gay wasn't a definition, it was a liberation. It was a liberation of emotion and love and whatever you felt, so that you didn't—it didn't exclude going back and being with a woman if you wanted to. It was not like it became a couple of generations later when there was a lot of anger—and in that era Bob was so supportive of AIDS and fought against all of the stigmas associated with being gay—but his feeling was that you should not be categorized by what you chose to do sexually. You should be categorized by who you were and occasionally you might do this and sometimes you might do that. And you should have the freedom for this experimentation. This stance irritated a lot of gay men who wanted him to feel more strongly about being gay. But he liked being open and resisted categories and Merce and John Cage were a little bit like that too. I knew them less well but I think they might have felt the same way. I think there were a lot of people in that generation that felt that—and he would never—Bob would never have been comfortable just being surrounded by men, ever. There are lots of gay men that much prefer just to be surrounded by gay men. This

is not a judgment. You have the right to do whatever you want to do. A lot of gay women prefer to be with just women. But he was not like that.

So therefore, back to—what made me think of it goes back to Viola. He thought women should do whatever they were capable of doing. He was all for that and success and getting behind them. So without having read *Prickly Rose*, I resist any labeling of Bob Rauschenberg as sexist. He gave Viola an opportunity and because it didn't turn out as she anticipated, she reverted to the sexism accusation. But Bob was so far from a sexist. He lived his life pretty much as he wanted to live it and wanted others to do the same as long as they didn't hurt anyone.

Q: Yes. And what you just said segues into something else that I wanted to speak about. I interviewed John Giorno—

Livet: Smart guy.

Q: —a couple of weeks ago and he was really speaking about some of what you just said. That Bob's generation, they were what they were and they celebrated their own lives, but he felt like he was the next generation—

Livet: He was.

Q: —and it became a more political act for him personally to be gay.



Livet: Yes.

Q: And to be an advocate for rights.

Livet: Right.

Q: And so he spoke about how in a sense he felt like he was reacting to Bob's generation because they weren't as vocal and so he felt like he needed to be much more vocal. There were a couple of things that you said in our last interview and a couple of things that John Giorno said too that made me wonder about what it was like for Bob to have come from a Texan, Christian upbringing and to come to a place where yes, he lived his life happily and he celebrated his life. I wonder if you think there was a difficult transition somewhere in the middle, where he felt he needed to—

Livet: I'm sure there was. I'm sure there was. I'm trying to remember when his father died. It was way before I met him, but I wonder if it was before or after he married [Susan] Sue Weil, and I wonder if it was—I was just trying to get my handle on that a little bit.

Q: It was after.

Livet: He died after. [Note: Rauschenberg and Weil married in 1950 and divorced in 1952.

Rauschenberg's father died in 1963.]

Q: Yes, and I don't remember the exact year.

Livet: I think there's also the possibility that Bob didn't know whether he—a lot of men in those days, there was less awareness for a longer period of time, so he might not have known. He met Sue and he was protective of her. He wanted her to be—he always liked the underdog, he really did. Both were struggling—and Bob was so—can you imagine Bob being taught by Albers? It's just beyond anything I can imagine and he was always gracious about it.

But I can see them—I have an image in my head because I was told this, that he and Sue would take that cart around and just pick up junk and I can just see Bob doing the same thing there that he would do in the studio with a painting. He'd say, “Sue, what do you think? What should we get next?” And letting her go get it. And I think they just had a lot of fun and I think that they were young and when you're young you have a big libido and one thing led to another and then she got pregnant and they stayed friends his entire life. And I've met her many times and she's just a really nice, wonderful person.

Q: She's wonderful.

Livet: And they raised a great son who didn't try to be like Bob and he's just one of the least avaricious people you ever met and just a genuinely nice person. So that says something and he never denied that, but I think Bob evolved into other things and I don't know when it started. I know that he took that long trip with Cy Twombly to Italy. I think that was before he got together with Jasper. I think it was just an evolution and I think it was an evolution sexually and

an evolution as an artist, almost at the same time. But I can't tell you. I never asked him any of those questions so—not that he wouldn't have told me, but he would have been slightly offended I think. He didn't really like that kind of probing. It was a little bit bad taste. And he didn't ask you questions like that. If I had shown up at his house and I was with a woman, we would have just gone on as if nothing had happened. It was not like, oh my god, did you see Anne? She's got a girlfriend now. It just was more about the freedom to marry or sleep with anybody you wanted to.

That was the sixties kind of attitude toward it and that's why he had really close friends that were straight and close friends that weren't straight and he didn't like—he probably wasn't too crazy about—totally faggy men because he said something one time about an over-effeminate choreographer as being too faggy. In other words if your personality became your shtick too much, I think that would drive him crazy, but he was great friends with divinely eccentric people but they usually dodged categories—I met Buckminster Fuller with Bob. Bob had lots of interesting people in his life. I just don't think he was a judgmental person in that way. He evolved into primarily being with men and some of the men he was with, I think he might have been better off staying with [laughs], Bob Petersen being one of the best. He was really, really good for Bob, I think, and a nice person and after the breakup they stayed friends. But I think he bored Bob. Sometimes he could get involved with—the worst people probably because he thought they could save him from himself. Terry [Van Brunt] was the meanest of the relationships and he tried to control Bob and for a while it worked I guess. It got Bob to not drink so much and that was a positive thing, but he was so mean-spirited and nobody liked him and nobody liked him being with Bob. I didn't.

Q: Why do you think Bob liked him?

Livet: Maybe Bob felt he needed rescuing or something or maybe he was just—he was a good-looking guy. So oh. He didn't have a sense of humor, he didn't have a sense of joy, and Bob had all of that in spades. He had his demons and I think Terry tried to fix that in some capacity, but it wasn't—Bob Petersen was just a really sweet guy and he was—I don't know, maybe Bob got tired of him. Who knows. I don't know. He met Terry someplace and he went in that direction and Terry really wanted to control. I'm trying to remember what it was. What big project that Terry had in mind that they were doing. It might have been the beginning of the world tour that they were doing. It might have been the beginning of the world tour of the—

Q: Of ROCI?

Livet: —of ROCI. After the breakup Terry sued him. It was horrible. He sued him, he wanted money, he wanted—he was just a bitter guy and Bob I think was well aware of the fact that he made a mistake there. The good—the best memories I have with Bob is when he was with Bob Petersen. And then he was with Darryl [R. Pottorf] after Bob Petersen, who was a breath of fresh air after—I mean after Terry. He was a breath of fresh air. But Darryl's got his flaws too. I wish that Bob had found somebody that was more on his level or something like that, but you never know. Whoever he would be with, he would have to have someone that was willing to do his life because that was the way it was going to have to be.

Q: Right.

Livet: I never felt that Bob Petersen tried to compete with Bob Rauschenberg. His art was very different from his. He made these calendars. And I felt with Darryl there was just a lot of trying to make his work too similar to Bob's. Trisha Brown one time—I don't think she'd care if I said this but—is Darryl going to read this history?

Q: I don't know, but you can always change your mind later and say, scratch that from the record.

Livet: Well I don't care I guess. Trisha said—we were in Louisiana. Bob had a show in Baton Rouge [*Robert Rauschenberg: Scenarios and Short Stories*, Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum, University of Louisiana, Lafayette, 2005]. This was about ten years ago. I was with my now husband and Bob had not met him before so it was a nice evening, but Darryl showed Trisha some work he'd done and she said abruptly, "Darryl, why don't you make your own work?" I said, Trisha, you didn't actually say this. She said, "I did." There you go. Trisha and Bob were pretty much co-equal in most ways and they made great collaborations. She wasn't threatened by him and he respected her and there was no—she rose to whatever challenge he presented and he did the same. So maybe this whole thing is circling around back to collaboration and what that means. And if Viola said what she did about chauvinism I think it has more to do with her insecurities than it does with anything Bob did.

Q: Okay. Last time we spoke you told me this great story about Bob needing to pee and getting off the—

Livet: Oh!

[Laughter]

Q: And you spoke about his mom and his sister's presence there. I was wondering if you have any other memories of him interacting with his mother or his sister.

Livet: Well, he loved his sister. She was his little sister and she was pretty and cute and very down to earth and just this very nice person. His mother was the opposite of Bob on just about every level but he had a huge respect and affection for her—and I also met her sister, in Houston somewhere along the line. The thing about it is, if you became friends with Bob you tended to travel with him. He would just say, "I'm going here. Why don't you come?" And you'd go and you'd just have the time of your life. So I went a lot of places with him especially in the early days.

Anyway I remember on the bus in Fort Worth his sister and his mother being a little nervous that there would be something negative that the press would make of his arrest in Granbury—maybe worried that the press would leap to conclusions and say instead of peeing on the bus, he'd exposed himself. They were a little bit nervous about that and I was too, a little bit, because the press can be so mean. But his mother was kind of a puritan. She didn't drink, she didn't approve

of it, and she didn't smoke. Of course not. She was a proper Southern lady. She knew her son was famous and that made her very happy, and he was very, very good to her and she traveled the world to go to his openings. His mother made the classic mistake of wishing that she could change him without realizing that if you change one side of a person, you risk changing the other side that you like. She wished he'd been a more respectable artist or person who never upset the status quo. After the bus incident in Granbury, she chewed him out that next morning, not being aware that his uninhibitedness was part and parcel of his being a great artist. It was the way he had to become, to be free to be who he was, and I don't think she probably ever really realized that. But I think she loved him and was proud of him.

Ask Janet about the trip. She thought it was hilarious because everything kept happening. I would have loved to have known his father. I think his father was who Bob rebelled against. Was his father a doctor?

Q: No.

Livet: What did he do? I can't remember.

Q: I think he was like—

Livet: A businessman?

Q: Oh gosh, I've forgotten. [Note: Ernest Rauschenberg was an employee of Gulf State Utilities, a light and power company.]

Livet: I know that he was not brought up in an artistic family and I told you that he made drawings like crazy and they were never valued, so that he never thought that making drawings were important. He really loved animals. So he had—is Rocky still alive? The turtle?

Q: No.

Livet: He did die. I heard he died. But you would go to a party here and you would go into that bathroom and all of a sudden it would be like, somebody's—oh the turtle's looking right at me.

[Laughter]

Livet: But he loved animals, so when he was little he loved animals and I'm sure he had turtles and birds and fish and everything that you can imagine. So that's why they decided he should become a veterinarian and then the famous story that he couldn't dissect a cat. So I don't know what happened because Bob didn't speak to me much about him. I just see his father pushing him in pragmatic directions, which were—

Q: Yes, the impression that I have from what I've read is that his father was a very traditional manly-man who was a fisherman and a hunter and worked with his hands in a mechanical way. He was, yes, maybe a different man in that respect.



Livet: I think there was probably that, and I think that Bob was a sensitive and probably somewhat lonely little boy. But I don't ever remember him talking about it, except talking about his drawing and his telling me those stories. Just that—and then joining the Navy during the Second World War to basically get out of Port Arthur, knowing he couldn't become a veterinarian because he couldn't cut up an animal. And then joining the Navy and volunteering for the psychiatric ward so he wouldn't have to sleep at night.

Q: Do you remember anything else that he said about his time there?

Livet: Yes, he would entertain them. He would jump up and down on the cots and they would talk and do things, sing or whatever. He liked them. He was with his people. He had more in common with him than he did with other people. What an extraordinary person Bob was. He shed his inhibitions—if he ever had any—as soon as he left home. The Navy helped him realize he could be an artist and thank god he never saw combat or anything like that. I think he joined late in the war. He was not—

Q: He [was drafted] in 1944.

Livet: Normandy invasion was '45. June 6, 1945 [note: 1944]. So he was probably—but I don't think he saw combat. I don't think he did. He was in the Navy. I think he was looking for—well first of all, the traveling would have been a motive for that. Getting out of the house and family

and all that and somehow trying to figure out who he was and what he was going to be. By the end of his time in the Navy, I think he had pretty much decided he was going to be an artist.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So should we talk about his sensitivity now?

Livet: We can. I'm trying to think of examples. He could get his feelings hurt, but he wasn't insecure about his art or anything like that. He might not like for somebody to—criticism much, but he felt that went with the territory. He had this whole thing with his mother being mad at him. I'm sure that just went right back to childhood when he did something and she was like, why can't you just be like everybody else? Well if he had been like everybody else, she wouldn't have had the life she had with him. Her attitude, I think, really hurt his feelings, but he moved past it.

I told you that all the workers at the museum had gone to the airport to see him off because they hadn't been invited to the party on the ranch. Apparently when they found him, he was walking around the airport holding his American Express card saying, "You want to go someplace? We can go anyplace in the world you want to go to, as long as it's not Lafayette, Louisiana, or Port Arthur, Texas." He was so generous and always for the little person and he did not like to see people left out.

I'm trying to think of an example. Well one sort of famous one is, there was—I believe there was a reception—it was for when he was trying to get the money together with [Theodore W.] Ted Kheel and a bunch of people for ROCI and there was supposed to be some big announcement at the United Nations and someone was supposed to give this huge amount of money—if I remember correctly. I need to ask David [White] because he might remember better than I do. And Bob was so crestfallen it didn't happen. He was crying and crying and crying in public, in front of a ton of people and a lot of people were very upset about that and angry with him, but none of his friends were. I wasn't. I just thought that he was—that he cried very easily and he was just deeply, deeply hurt and deeply offended.

Q: Why were people upset with him for crying?

Livet: Some of his team felt he should have held it together better because there were a lot of important people there and he risked alienating them. Bob, however, didn't do very well with that kind of strategy. He was always himself no matter who he was around.

Another time on the occasion of a fundraiser at his house in New York for Trisha Brown and her company, Bob had much too much to drink. I wasn't there, but I heard that he had miles too much to drink and god knows what he did because he could drink too much and cry or do or say whatever he wanted to. But there were some very straight people who had joined Trisha's board and they were offended and at board meetings afterward would go on and on saying, "That was the most offensive behavior they had ever witnessed," and so on. Klaus Kertess and I would try to explain, "You don't understand. You're dealing with a great artist. You shouldn't give it any

importance. He didn't hurt anybody." But that one board member would never let it go. I'm sure today if Bob's name comes up he tells that story and it's so beside the point of who he was.

So there were people that he could offend really profoundly from being too drunk or for being too emotional or for being any number of things. And you either were on the bus or you weren't on the bus. The people that really knew him well and loved him just accepted that as part of the way he was. But we also knew him as a profoundly generous, intelligent, creative, inclusive person who had changed each of our lives profoundly for the better. Bob, like many artists, had spent his entire life fleeing the bourgeois and bourgeois attitudes. Once he made it to New York and discovered a different world and the freedom of the art world, he could relax and really become himself. But from time to time the bourgeois would rear their ugly heads and when they did it would really get to him.

And he was so generous. Oh my god. One time I came over to the house to a party and he had just finished a painting for Gordon Matta-Clark. He said, "Does this look cheerful to you, Anne?" I said, "It's red. That's pretty cheerful." And he said, "It's got to look cheerful because he's really sick. I want to cheer him up." He was unbelievably generous. I know so many examples of his generosity—because my business essentially is to raise money.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Just the Thought (Spread)*, 1978  
Solvent transfer on fabric collaged to wooden panel  
26 x 36 1/2 inches (66 x 92.7 cm)  
Gift to Gordon Matta-Clark

In 1987 my partner Steve Reichard and I embarked on a long involved project called Art Against AIDS for the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) which took place initially in New York then in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, and so forth. These involved large art sales. My recollection is Bob might have given a significant work to every single one of them.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Wrap-Up (Galvanic Suite)*, 1988  
Acrylic on galvanized steel  
48 3/4 x 36 3/4 inches (123.8 x 93.3 cm)  
Donated to Art Against AIDS Benefit, San Francisco



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (From the *Bleacher Series*), 1989  
Manipulated black-and-white Polaroid photographs on aluminum  
45 1/2 x 55 inches (115.6 x 139.7 cm)  
Donated to Art Against AIDS Benefit, New York



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Capitol Gains (Borealis)*, 1990  
Acrylic and tarnishes on brass  
25 x 36 3/4 inches (63.5 x 93.3 cm)  
Donated to Art Against AIDS Benefit,  
Washington, D.C.

Because the actress Elizabeth Taylor, along with Dr. Mathilde Krim were the founders of amFAR, she came to many of these events as did Bob and he got to know her. He was just crazy about Elizabeth and she him. In San Francisco, where the reception was held at Dodie Rosekrans's house, Bob donated a beautiful painting, which we sold. But he also brought Elizabeth Taylor a painting that he had painted purple because he'd heard it was her favorite color [Untitled, 1990].



Rauschenberg and Elizabeth Taylor, Art Against AIDS event, San Francisco, 1989. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Ray "Scotty" Morris, courtesy of amFAR



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled, 1990  
Acrylic, fabric collage and pencil on  
wood panel  
38 1/2 x 24 inches (97.8 x 61 cm)  
Private collection

Q: It's something that I wanted to speak with you about.

Livet: Good.

Q: Did you have discussions with him about the kind of work that he would give to different fundraising events?

Livet: No.

Q: You've spoken about his generosity. If it's something that can be articulated—what do you think motivated his generosity or his philanthropy?

Livet: He was just a generous person and he got great pleasure out of giving things. He cared deeply about certain social causes. When AIDS happened and my partner [Stephen Reichard] died of AIDS, and Bob of course knew that, but a lot of his friends died of AIDS. A lot of artists that he cared for like Robert Mapplethorpe and many, many others. So he was obviously going to be the frontrunner of that. He donated work to benefit the environment or women's rights and for Planned Parenthood. He was the one I could always go to if I was really stuck and just didn't know what I was going to do, I could call him and say, "I hate to ask you this, but—" And he would do it. He was unbelievably generous. And not just with causes, but with people as well.

Q: I'd like to speak to you a little bit more about the early days of fundraising for AIDS.

Livet: As I said earlier, Elizabeth Taylor and Dr. Mathilde Krim decided together to form amfAR because they felt that two married, prominent women organizing an AIDS organization would help to legitimize and mainstream the AIDS issue, which at the time carried a stigma. You may remember that Ronald Reagan famously said, “Why don’t you put them all on an island and it’ll go away?”

So in 1987 when we organized the first Art Against AIDS, it was not the first big fundraiser. The year before, Nathan Kolodner, who later died of AIDS and who worked for the eminent art dealer André Emmerich, had organized a big auction for the Gay Men’s Health Crisis. But people from amfAR came to Steve and me and wanted to do a fundraiser as well, and we went back and forth and ultimately decided to do a sale, not an auction, because we thought that we could get better work. I spoke to Leo Castelli about it and he suggested that he and I have lunch and that we involve Robert Rosenblum. We met at Leo’s favorite restaurant, Da Silvano [New York], and brainstormed a fantastic list of artists to include. Then I formed a dealer’s committee but we ultimately decided that we should include every artist and every gallery in New York that wanted to be involved and over eight hundred artists and eighty galleries wanted to. Any artist that didn’t have gallery representation could participate if they were practicing artists and we arranged that they be shown at someone’s gallery. Bob of course immediately agreed to give something extraordinary [*Trilogy from the Bellini Series*, 1987]. Leo Castelli sold his piece and some others right away and brought a check for five hundred thousand dollars to give to Elizabeth Taylor at the reception at Sotheby’s.





Robert Rauschenberg  
*Trilogy from the Bellini Series*, 1987  
Photogravure with monotype and hand additions  
One of three unique editions published by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York  
Donated to Art Against AIDS Benefit, Leo Castelli, New York

Everyone felt an obligation to help because AIDS was decimating the art world and it was not hard to raise money in the art world for AIDS because the artists are so generous. However it was difficult to get mainstream America behind that effort. The most difficult one I did was in Japan. Oh my god that was almost impossible.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Carp Scoop (Waterworks)*, 1993  
Inkjet dye transfer on paper  
29 1/2 x 37 3/4 inches (74.9 x 95.9 cm)  
Donated to amfAR, Japan

Q: Really?

Livet: Yes because they were so—and that was several years later, they were so not—

Q: Because they were in denial?

Livet: They were in denial, they were embarrassed by it, they didn't want to know—they didn't want it to be suspected that they would have anything to do with that. They are just so straight. A lot of people at that time in particular were. Then we got some fabulous people involved. Well the night of event, we didn't make much money because it was just too difficult, but the night of the event a brilliant female impersonator named Miwa [Akihiro Maruyama] performed. This kind of female impersonator in Japan is considered an artist and he was fabulously dressed in a dramatic Issey Miyake gown and spoke movingly to the audience before starting the performance. I looked around and people were wiping tears away so he was speaking about AIDS and about how we have to quit denying it, people are dying, and about how this is a wonderful thing to do and then sang this incredible song. So I think we broke through, but people didn't feel like they had to give a bunch of money to it. We made a little bit, but not what we wanted to.

In Switzerland it was a little bit the same way. Nobody knew that Thomas Ammann would die of AIDS two years later. Nobody knew he was sick. It was something to be ashamed of and that from Bob's perspective would have been an idiotic thing to do.

He gave to, oh my god, all kinds of things. And I've told you before that he could give a masterpiece for some small tiny thing or he could do an amazing show for a community college.

He was not an elitist. Bob's working ethic was legendary. He worked all the time and one show led to another to another to another. He was one of the most fertile artists I've ever been around. Watching him, it looked so easy and fun to do what he did, which is probably why so many people copied him. But if the process looked easy, coming up with the ideas was not and Bob invented so many new ways to make art.

Q: Of course.

Livet: But I think Bob had a lot of trouble in the night. I think demons came out then, which is why he didn't like to go to sleep. He slept very late. Mornings and things like that were, I think, hard on him and I don't know what the demons were, but they were there and I think that was probably a large reason for his drinking. But I definitely don't think he had to drink to make art.

Q: Right.

Livet: I really don't think that. He made art all the time. I think he drank to chase demons.

Q: Yes. A lot of people speak about his drinking. What was he like when he drank?

Livet: Well, he could be a lot of fun.

[Laughter]

Livet: It was better early on than it was later, but he could be a lot of fun or he could just be so sentimental he'd burst into tears, cry his eyes out because of something. He was so not judgmental so if you had been drinking with him, as I did on many occasions, and you woke up with a splitting headache and horrible hangover and thought, what did I do? What did I say? He was like, "Come on back over!" He never passed judgment on you if you were tipsy—only for things you might have done sober that he didn't approve of.

When I first knew him, he handled alcohol a lot better than he did obviously as he got older, but he did pretty much wake up, have a drink, and drink all day until he went to sleep at night. Then when he was with Terry, Terry tried to get him to just drink wine. There's a wonderful interview with Charlie Rose who asked him about his drinking. "Was it a big struggle for you?" he asked. And Bob said, "Still is." And Charlie Rose asked more questions about it and Bob answered them until suddenly Bob looked at him and he said, "Can we talk about something else?" Remember that? So cool. He didn't like to dwell on his struggles but I think he also suspected some schadenfreude on Charlie Rose's past as well. I never asked him why he drank. I never would do that.

Q: No, no.

Livet: Bob rarely lost his temper, but could get cranky if people got on his nerves with too many probing questions. He was the consummate professional and he taught me a lot. I told you about that trip to Texas to unveil *Whistle Stop*. Well to add to the story, as they were leaving Captiva to

travel to Texas, there was a bomb scare on the causeway that went from Captiva to Fort Myers where the airport was located and the causeway had been closed. But canceling the trip was never an option so he rented a motorboat and he and his mother and sister and Bob Petersen motored across and made the flight.

Q: Right. There's always a creative solution.

Livet: Yes. He had to get there. He would just get there and Trisha was the same way. I think I told you, when we were promoting the dance book, an interviewer didn't show up. And she said, "Well, let's call them. Let's find out where they are and we'll go to them." Possibly they became so professional and took charge of their lives because early on, there weren't many opportunities, and they realized that you had to make the most of the ones you got.

Q: I've heard that. I've heard that even if he was really, really drunk or really out of it, if he needed to be on for something, he could just totally switch it.

Livet: Absolutely. And if he needed to finish a work, he'd get it finished, he would do the interview, make the appointment.

Q: I wanted to talk to you about your trips to Washington. What was he advocating for on those trips? I know he made a number of trips over the years to lobby for different causes.

Livet: My understanding of this, and I may be wrong, but what I recall is that when Richard Nixon gave his papers to the Library of Congress [Washington, D.C.], he donated them in a way that allowed him to get huge tax donations and it made Congress furious. So they passed a law that no longer allowed a tax deduction for donating an archive or an artwork or a manuscript to a not-for-profit. Only the paper or materials used to make the artwork or manuscript would be tax deductible. So that's how they got back at Richard Nixon, but Bob felt strongly that artists who give art all the time to causes or who might like to donate to museums should be allowed to take a tax deduction for the value of the work.

Despite lobbying from a lot of artists, that law has never changed, but it still floats around Congress hoping for passage. However I went with him just because it was fun to be around him. I was a little groupie in-tow, but it was really fun in Washington. I got to go to the White House. At a party at a Senator's house I met [Edward M.] Ted Kennedy, who tried to pick me up. It was so exciting.

[Laughter]

Livet: "Hey, you cute little thing. You have a husband anywhere around here?" Bob told this story over and over and over again during the years. It was a lot of fun but Bob felt very strongly about it and he spent a lot of time trying to get it done but it never has passed. I think there could be a way to do it, even if it only came part way, even if you had to take an estimate from an auction house because they give lower estimates than galleries give, but I'm not sure the galleries would like that. So it's complicated.

Q: Right. What about other trips? You said that, if you could, if Bob invited you to you go, you'd be there.

Livet: Almost always, I'd get on a plane and go.

Q: What are some of the other trips that you took together?

Livet: We went to California a lot. Once he had a big show—there were three Ace Galleries at the time. One in Los Angeles, one in Seattle, and one in Vancouver, I think. Doug Christmas was his dealer at the time and Bob actually made some fabulous invitations for them. You see them at art fairs now being sold for fairly high prices.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Ace Poster*, 1977  
Offset lithograph  
71 1/4 x 50 3/4 inches (181 x 128.9 cm)

Through Bob I got to know [Sidney B.] Sid Felsen and Stanley and Elyse Grinstein who owned Gemini Graphic [Editions Limited (G.E.L.), Los Angeles]. I watched him make prints at Gemini, which was as much fun as watching him make paintings. The process was very akin to the way he made his paintings and he loved doing it. Bob's generosity made him notorious for showing up at a dinner party with an entourage. I was part of that, which is why I had so much fun. We went to Mr. Chow's and I got to know the glamorous Tina Chow and her beautiful sister Adelle Lutz who worked at the time as a waitress there. Once the Grinsteins gave a huge party and I met tons of people—artists, actors, collectors. It was fabulous.

On one trip to a museum show in Vancouver, the director began talking about the installation as if he was the artist. [Note: Vancouver Art Gallery, *Robert Rauschenberg: Works from Captiva*, 1978] He went on and on saying, "The way I do installations," and, "My vision for the exhibition," and so on. Bob shot his eyes around at me and said, "Somehow I thought I was the artist. Where'd I get that idea, Anne?" Everyone laughed but he wasn't kidding and if you knew him well, you could almost predict what his reaction would be.

So in the end he completely changed the installation. The director had laid it out for months in a certain way that, he convinced himself, was smarter than Bob. But Bob remained firmly in control and got his way. It was not Bob's style to plan this thing out four months in advance. Instead he wanted to let the works come to life in the space.

I think that's one of the reasons that he got along so well with the legendary curator Walter Hopps, who worked beautifully with Bob. Walter was known for being a genius at installing



shows, and he and Bob would sit in the gallery with the work and talk about it and think about how the show should flow and it would be a back and forth as with Trisha. Bob respected Walter a lot because he thought that Walter really was a kind of artist. He knew how to put up work where you would get the most out of the work in the space. And so, once again, when Bob was with someone he could go nose to nose with, he would have a real collaboration. So I don't want to put Viola Farber down at all, but with Trisha, I think Bob found a real collaborator and—the two of them had such a good run and I think both learned equal amounts from each other. Bob made such amazing sets for her brilliant dances.

I'm going to give you another example of Bob's generosity. Shortly after Robert Mapplethorpe died we organized a fundraising event for Dr. Jerome Groopman's AIDS lab at Harvard [Medical School, Boston] where he had treated Robert until he died. At the event Dr. Groopman was going to speak about his work and we were going to try to raise money at the lecture. And Bob arrived and went to the bar to get a drink but they just had wine, which he didn't like much. He gave me a forlorn look and said, "No Jack, Anne?" I immediately got money out of my purse and sent my staff to find a liquor store and buy a bottle of Jack Daniel's, telling them to hurry back. When they returned and we made the drink, I was about to take it to him in the auditorium but Helen Marden, an old friend of his, said, "Let me take it to him. It'll remind him of our days at Max's Kansas City [New York] when I waitressed there." So she sauntered down and handed it to him and a few minutes later I heard this roar of applause, and I went in and found that Bob had just raised his hand and pledged three hundred fifty thousand dollars.

Bob loved Robert and he felt strongly about finding a cure for AIDS but he wasn't oblivious to the fact that Helen and I had gone out of our way to get him what he wanted. Moments like that were so frequent. You just didn't know what you were going to come home and tell after you had spent an evening with him.

[Laughter]

Q: Right. And you worked in this neighborhood for a while.

Livet: Yes.

Q: Would you see him in those last few years of his life since he lived so close?

Livet: I saw him less and I don't really even know why. Years ago I used to stay at his house on Lafayette when I came to New York. And I lived on Lafayette Street twice. I lived below him in SoHo and then for about three years in NoHo. I no longer traveled with him much or hung out at his house a lot, but if I saw him out in the neighborhood or at an opening, we'd always talk. I think it's because I was living in New York by then. Also my partner Steve had died and I was running my company on my own and really busy. I'm trying to remember the last time I saw him and I think it was at the Miami Basel Art Fair. I was walking with some friends and I looked in a room where there was a dinner and Bob was sitting next to Ingrid Sischy in a wheelchair, and I went in and I threw my arms around him and I gave him a great big kiss. Somebody told me later how much it meant to him seeing me that night. So no, I didn't hang out as much, but I did go

every time he had an opening. If Bob was in town, I went. So did Keith Sonnier and other friends. We had to go and be supportive and so forth.

Q: Where would you stay when you were a guest in this place?

Livet: Upstairs. Sachika [Hisachika Takahashi] would bring me breakfast in bed. [Laughs]

Q: I interviewed him. That was a lot of fun as well.

Livet: Oh, I bet that was fun. How's he doing?

Q: He's doing well.

Livet: Good. Good.

Q: He's got a show that he's working towards in Europe this year.

Livet: Oh good.

Q: Yes.

Livet: Excellent. And you've talked to—I guess you've talked to all of the people that worked here at one point or another.

Q: Not yet. Not yet. We're getting there. We're going to be taking a trip down to Florida to interview some people who worked at Captiva.

Livet: Oh good. Good.

Q: We are going to California. So I'll check the name that you suggested—the woman that you suggested I speak with, who you said moved to L.A.

Lieu: When you were talking about Mr. Chow's.

Livet: Mr. Chow's? Oh, Bonnie Lutz. Oh yes. Her name is—she likes to be called Adelle now. She's an artist. Adelle Lutz and she—yes, she was around a lot in the beginning with Bob and she would have some great stories out there. So you've talked to Sid Felsen, people like that?

Q: Yes.

Livet: He was always—they would know a lot.

Q: Yes, his was one of the first interviews that was done. Okay, so just maybe two more questions.

Livet: Sure.

Q: You knew Bob for a long time and one thing that we're interested in thinking about in anybody's life is the trajectory of one's life. With respect to his life as an artist and as somebody who was increasingly known, how do you think he dealt with his own success and celebrity? Do you think his sense of purpose or what he believed his job was changed as his influence expanded?

Livet: No, I don't. I don't think his celebrity or any of that affected his art. He enjoyed being well-known, but it didn't go to his head. Essentially he was a humble person. I think every day he got up and started over again. I think he was always a little frightened. He was very courageous and took enormous chances in his life. But I believe many courageous people have enormous fears to overcome. This is probably the reason he hated being alone. But I don't think it was his reason for making art. I think it was what he had to overcome to make art. Maybe that is why he usually worked with people around. People interested him a lot. He was as interested in meeting new people as he was in meeting a celebrity and that's why he did that world tour—to go to all those different countries and work with all those kids in all those countries to make art together. He wanted those that had few opportunities to have access to what he had to give. Whether they knew who he was or not. He always sought out the little person and included them. And he fed on everything that was around him and I think the arc of his life was that he got to make art his entire life and he invented so many new series and investigated so many different art forms and enriched his art through the collaborations. I just wish his health hadn't failed him towards the end. I think that was hard.

I heard a story and I don't know whether it's true or not—and you could be able to corroborate and I shouldn't really tell a story that I heard but that I wasn't there for, but if it's true it validates everything I've been saying about his bravery. I heard that when he was on his deathbed and the doctors told him there wasn't anything else they could do, he said, "Well then, disconnect me." This came from someone who was very afraid of dying and that fear probably consumed him his whole life, but if he had the guts to do that— [Cries] He was a really, really great man.

Of course people love to criticize somebody's drinking but Bob never hurt anybody but himself. I just wish he had lived longer. I wish he had lived into his nineties as his mother and his aunt did. But you know, he really lived. Wouldn't you have loved to have his life? If I could have had one day making art like he did, I would have pretty much felt my life complete.

What's your other question?

Q: Just if there's anything else that I haven't asked you about that you wanted to speak about.

Livet: I haven't spoken in a very linear way and I haven't really looked at any of my diaries—not diaries, but journals—from back then to kind of kick my imagination. I'm sorry that I—I thought I would have. I bet if I could talk to Jay Belloli or any of those people, they would tell me exactly when I met Bob and I cannot remember.

Q: No, you're wonderful and you've shared so much of value.

Livet: Well he was a really great—one of the really great people that I was lucky enough to know in my life. Just the other day I wrote a letter to Bill Goldston at ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions] graphics where Bob made so many prints. I wanted him to donate a print by Bob to the auction we do at this film festival we do in Fort Worth and I said, “Okay Bill, this is Texas to Oklahoma, but I need a favor. My husband has this film festival, we do this auction, and I need you to give me a Rauschenberg print.” I said, “You understand that Bob liked me, liked Fort Worth, has a work in the museum here, and he was a Texan. And I think he would want you to do this.” I got the work and my husband ended up buying it [*Test Stone 2 (Booster Study)*, 1967].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Test Stone 3 (Booster Study)*, 1967  
 Lithograph  
 23 x 31 inches (58.4 x 78.7 cm)  
 From an edition of 71, published by  
 Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: Oh wow, that’s amazing.

Livet: Yes. I know. The artist Mel Kendrick was staying with us and he said to my husband, “I saw that print and it was wonderful and it’s from one of the great times in his life and I just want to say this right now. He was a great artist and he was better than Jasper. Because,” he said, “Jasper just makes one painting every once in a while. Bob made millions of paintings every day

of his life and never quit.” And my husband was just beaming. I felt like I was sort of channeling Bob in that whole transaction because he did meet—he actually did meet Johnny [John E. Langdon] and he liked him. And Bill wrote back when I told him that Johnny bought it, he wrote a little “XX.” It was nice.

Q: That’s so sweet.

Livet: If I think of anything else, I’ll tell you. There are so many memories and he so enriched my life but one of the best things he did for me was just like me and laugh at my jokes and want to be around me and trust me and essentially befriend me.

Q: Well, this has been really wonderful. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]