

Interview of **STANLEY GRINSTEIN**

Co-Founder Gemini G.E.L.

Interview with **KAREN THOMAS**

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KAREN THOMAS: You were saying about Bob's approach ...

STANLEY GRINSTEIN: Well, when he gets into something, all of his intelligence -- which is amazing -- goes into it. He does it *his* way, because what he understood about the world was correct. That's what an artist does, what is inside of *them*. He just happened to have an incredible amount inside of him, and so he would get into it and not worry about the rules. He figured out what would be best for him, to say what he has to say, and it was just always amazing. He wasn't different just to be different; he was different because he *was* different. He said, "How's it going to work for me?" He described once, with photography, he figures how it will work for him -- with just such intelligence, and such amazing thinking, the way he thought. It was just so special.

THOMAS: Did he talk with you about what he wanted to say?

GRINSTEIN: I never got the feeling that he was talking to me particularly about all the insights, about how he was feeling. It was more with Bob about observing what he did, and how he did it, and the more you were around him, the more you saw how amazing it was -- not only what he did, but how he thought. We went to China with him for five weeks, so had that chance to really see him under all kinds of conditions.²

Then he stayed here when he first came out for Gemini, and he was pretty talkative during that time. He wanted me to feel relaxed, I think. I think he wanted me to feel that I knew a little more about *him*. But it was somewhat of what he did back there, and how he functioned, but it wasn't anything about how he thought about making art -- although he was very open about that. One thing is that if something got easy for him, he said, "That's the time to move on." He'd see what challenges -- he'd see what color challenged him. If he wasn't comfortable with the color, he would drop everything else and go to that color.

THOMAS: To work through it?

¹ Incorporating additional Stanley Grinstein comments and additions, recorded 1.25.2012. Additions are underlined.

² SG on (1.25.12): "He was at Gemini first in '67 so that wasn't the first chance but it was certainly my most intimate chance to see that. That was 15 years after he had started at Gemini."

GRINSTEIN: Yes. To work through it. It was amazing. The rest of us go to a comfort level, and he didn't want a comfort level. His comfort level was the new information that came to him in dealing with that, and understanding that, and he just did it constantly in this easy manner, but just a genius of a painter. Of all the artists that had been around -- and I sometimes hate to go on tape for that -- but he was the most amazing of all of them.

THOMAS: You invited him to Gemini after [Josef] Albers and Man Ray?

GRINSTEIN: Yes. He came out roller-skating.

THOMAS: Tell me about that -- because I didn't think he had done that.

GRINSTEIN: Oh, yes. That's one of the places we connected again with him. We'd met him before because he'd been around. We somewhat slightly knew him. Then he came out with his roller-skating group. They were out here at Culver City, at the roller rink that's closed since, I think. He wasn't that good a skater, but he demanded of himself that he learn it, and it was his kind of movement past the Merce Cunningham, whom he'd traveled with. He'd been their artistic set and costume person. But, I think, what did *he* want to do? He didn't want to dance. So he roller-skated.

THOMAS: He was there with the Judson Group.

GRINSTEIN: Well, I wouldn't call it the Judson Group, because the Judson Group I always thought of as the group of dancers who -- they started as -- what's the name of the grocery store they named themselves after? [Grand Union.] But there was Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Deborah Hay, Alex Hay, Steve Paxton -- those were the main ones -- and he was never part of that group. He worked with them and he helped them, but went on his own. He was out dancing. Alex Hay was his assistant, but [Bob] was doing *his* thing; it wasn't Judson. Judson was the church, of course, that allowed them to do a lot of things and a lot of performances.³

THOMAS: He went down to Washington for what was called the "NOW Festival," working with Alice Denney, and they went to this roller-skating rink, and he saw people roller-skating. And he said, "That looks so much fun, I'm going to do something like that." Apparently, he went

³ SG on 1.25.2012. "Judson Group was a place that was a church that they practiced at sometimes but they [also] performed there. It was a church that had a minister that supported the arts and let them put on things. The Grand Union is where this group that was Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Deborah Hay, Alex Hay, Steve Paxton and maybe some others, that was the local grocery store named Grand Union and they had a workshop there in the Grand Union so I don't want to mix the two up. (KT: Is that a Grand Union in New York or in Los Angeles?)

GRINSTEIN: New York. There isn't a Grand Union here. This was all happening in New York and then they even said later on -- Alex Hay was his assistant -- that he was doing his thing, I mean "his" as Bob's. It wasn't Judson. Judson was the church. (KT: Was Alex Hay in the Grand Union?) GRINSTEIN: He was in Grand Union. Bob was never in Grand Union but he was very friendly with all of those people.

back to Brooklyn and took lessons -- because he had never roller skated in his life. Trisha Brown told me that he would show up at her apartment, get off the elevator with his roller skates on, step in, pick her up, and roller-skate her across the room.

GRINSTEIN: It was *his* deal, not hers. He respected her totally, but she moved in her way and he had his way. [Chuckles]

THOMAS: You saw him doing *Pelican* here.

GRINSTEIN: Yes, the whole group. In fact [for] the "wings", they needed some steel that bent. I was in the forklift business so I knew how to get something and I got this steel for him and was able to help a little bit. It was our way of connecting with the art world. "Whatever you want to do, okay, let me hear about it."

So he came out, and we met him, and I think it was during this time that he was out here that Jim Elliott got married, and Claes Oldenburg did this piece, and he gave this cake to everybody, pieces of the cake. Jimmy Elliot was living at the pier in Santa Monica, above the merry-go-round. That was a nice apartment there and Bob visited with them. I think that's where we saw him again because they were giving a party and [we] said, "Would you come out?" and he said yes. I'm not sure if it happened at that moment, or he said, "Come visit me," and we all went back to New York. We kind of "yelled up" to a place on Lafayette, and they answered, and they let us in. It was just the start of the evening for them -- it was probably 10:00, or 11:00, or 12:00 -- and he was just so hospitable and nice. And he said he'd come out.

I always had this theory that because we'd done Albers, that gave the okay. Because Bob gave us the okay once he'd worked here. That's when Jasper came out, and Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenburg, and the whole gang -- Frank Stella. That's when they came out, after Bob did. But Bob, I think, came out because Albers had done the work with us.

THOMAS: Did you have a conversation with Albers about Bob ever?

GRINSTEIN: Well, yes and no. We were part of that situation where they were interviewing for, again, I think, Calvin Tomkins, for a [New Yorker magazine] profile, and went to Albers and said, "Tell us about Bob Rauschenberg. He was your student at Black Mountain," and he said, "I had a lot of students. I don't remember him." And he knew every one, Albers, so that was bullshit. He just didn't want to acknowledge him. He was jealous, I think, and it was such a difference because Bob was the opposite. He said, "I needed him. I went there, and was totally untrained." He said, "I used to just paint out of a can and smear it on the canvas. I didn't know how to do it. I didn't know how. So Albers gave me the discipline." Yet, he jumped out of the windows in Albers' class, when he was in it -- so he wasn't always behaving himself. But he always paid homage to Albers, and Albers didn't even want to know him.

THOMAS: Andy Oates, the man that I told you about who went to Black Mountain with [Bob and Susan Weil], said that in painting class, [Albers] would give them assignments and they would all put their assignments up [on the lip of the blackboard], then Albers would go through and he would knock them all off except for the ones he thought were pretty good. He'd get to

something of Bob's, and he would just knock that off, automatically. He said that at one point Bob had taken some chicken wire and had put leaves and ivy all over it in the shape of a dog, and he was quite pleased with it. He brought it in and Albers just scoffed at it. "Who did that?"

GRINSTEIN: "Do you call that art?"

THOMAS: I thought he was mean spirited.

GRINSTEIN: Well, he was. He was very German, Germanic, and even though he was in the Bauhaus, he wanted it done his way, in lines, and interaction of colors. He was very serious about that. But that was very academic and disciplined, and Bob wasn't. So Bob was always kind of yearning after him to get some approval, and he wasn't going to get any.

THOMAS: Sure. He wasn't going to get any. We all need positive feedback. [SG: Yeah.] Where do you suppose he got that? Certainly, by the time he got here, he got it from you [and Sidney Felsen.]

GRINSTEIN: Well, he didn't get much from us. He gave a lot more than he got. I think you've still got to put it together in some way. There was something about the discipline. He really appreciated it, and he wouldn't have said it if he didn't. He said, "I needed that discipline."

THOMAS: I think the Black Mountain experience, for so many people, including Bob, was such a crucible that I'm always interested in exploring it. It has nothing to do with the fact that I'm from North Carolina. [Laughter]

GRINSTEIN: Is there anyone else who's still alive from that group? Phillip Guston is older and gone.

THOMAS: I spoke to Jack Tworkov's daughter, Hermine. She talked about a birthday present she had from Bob when she was thirteen years old. He had made her a solargram, and presented it to her at her birthday party at Black Mountain. She thought at that time that that was the pinnacle of her life.

GRINSTEIN: Well, it was pretty good. It's funny -- she recognized in him that he was so special and Jack Tworkov always really liked Bob, and approved...

THOMAS: -- and I think an important person to him. Hermine told me, and this was just a nice little window on Bob and Jasper, that her parents were ecumenical Jews and they would celebrate any holiday that came along. It didn't matter what it was. [Chuckles] So when it would come time for Thanksgiving, or Christmas, or Easter, their mother would say to Hermine and her sister, "Okay, who shall we invite?" and they would always say, "Bob and Jasper, Bob and Jasper, Bob and Jasper," because they were so much fun.

GRINSTEIN: Yes. They were the young, fun guys. [Laughter]

THOMAS: So Bob arrives here [in Los Angeles]. When you asked Bob to come out, what was your expectation?

GRINSTEIN: Well, we didn't know. We knew we respected him, and we knew he was a printmaker. Maybe we'd heard stories that he just kind of makes up things as he goes, then he uses this printmaking technique to work out what's in his mind.

It was interesting, because we were going after the older artists. We went after [Edward] Hopper, who was still alive. We were interested in him. And Barnett Newman said yes, [Mark] Rothko said yes. So those two said yes. Mark Tobey said yes, but said he doesn't fly. But they're busy. The older artists are busy. They say yes, but they can't work it in. Bob was younger, and more adventurous, so he said yes, and he came out. So we didn't have a real expectation. But then we found out how Bob Rauschenberg immediately, because when he first comes -- did you talk to Sid Felsen yet?

THOMAS: Not yet.

GRINSTEIN: Because he knows a lot about this story, in a certain way more than I do, although Bob stayed here. But when he first came out, he did what he always does -- which scared us -- of saying, "I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm just not sure." Everything always started that way with him, where Roy Lichtenstein would come out, and everything was worked out. He knew exactly what he was going to do. Bob would say, "I don't know at *all* what I'm going to do." But we knew, after a while, by the second day that things were happening [Laughs] --

So he started off with two things. Number one, he said, "I've always wanted a self-portrait of myself, and I want the self-portrait to be an x-ray." Okay. That's interesting. We had a lot of connections to radiologists, and we got him an x-ray. And they said, boy, number one, there wasn't a machine long enough -- chiropractors had a longer machine, we found out, afterwards, and we could have done it all in one shot --, but Bob kind of liked the idea, anyway, of doing several pieces. I think it ended up three pieces, maybe. They said, "He can't take any more x-rays for quite a while." In those days, they were lethal.

So we got that going. Then he was walking, and there was a little scrap of paper on the ground on the curb. And he picked it up, and it was a kid's drawing of a rocket booster. So he said, "I'm going to call it *Booster + Seven Studies*, because it uses seven pieces. So whatever happens around him, that's what he does. Boy, did I have the example of that in China, but here, his first thing -- so he started pretty quickly. We were thrilled, because we always liked to experiment, and here's this self-portrait. "Well, let's do it." Nobody has ever done that as a print. It was large. We did one of the largest prints ever done at that time. We had a large press. Sid's father-in-law was in that business of making those sorts of machines, so he made a gigantic press for us, and a beautiful one. We still use it.

THOMAS: They have to be so precise, don't they?

GRINSTEIN: Yes, real precise. Really precise. The edge that comes down, and how adjusting the pressure for that, how that works. Then it goes through and pushes the ink in. The precise

part really comes after, when you're running several runs, because everything you do is a new run. If they are doing your eye, they'd have to do five runs of the color.⁴

So you have to register every color; otherwise, it will flop into the other one. That's where the registration becomes difficult. You learn how to pin it, so it won't move, and the paper doesn't stretch too much. You make allowances for that. That's part of the proofing period, to make it acceptable to the artist, and then to run twenty-five of them fairly much that way. Close.

THOMAS: The artist says, "The proof is good," but then does the artist stick around?

GRINSTEIN: No. They do the proofing period, and they sign what we call an RTP – a right to pull, a *bon a tirer* -- an okay. They sign that. Then they all have to be pretty much equivalent to that. Now some artists, like Ellsworth Kelly, they have to be damned exact. With Bob, he likes it if it's a little off.

The famous story in printing, that happened at the ULAE and you probably talked to Bill Goldston, where the stone broke -- that's the tragedy of printing. You've got all this beautiful drawing on it, and it *breaks*. So Bob said, "Fine, let's use it as two parts," and he called it *Accident*. That's how he *dealt* with things.

THOMAS: I can understand the drawing on a rock. However, you're talking about taking an X-ray, and putting *that* on a rock.

GRINSTEIN: We transfer to photography, and then that transfers to what we can transfer to the plate, or whatever, that we can print off of.

THOMAS: So it's a photosensitive [process] – (SG: Yes. Yes.)... You do that with every single image (SG: Yes) that's on the final product.

GRINSTEIN: Yes. It might be interesting for you to talk to Jim Reid, particularly, at Gemini. He'll tell you about that process. Bob used a lot of those processes.

(Side conversation with Ellen Grinstein, daughter of Sidney Grinstein)

GRINSTEIN: So he did *Booster*, and then he did these little studies off of it that were not particularly the skeleton. Other things he felt that related to it. Later on, he went to the first [launch] of the rocket that took a passenger up – (KT: Apollo 11) -- and he just came back. He couldn't believe it. It happened in Florida, where he was, and he came back and did this study --

THOMAS: It's called *Sky Garden*?

⁴ SG on (1.25.2012) "Well to be accurate they'd have to do as many colors as the white, red and the blue. And the whatever else, the eyelashes, not particularly five runs but lots of runs of color."

GRINSTEIN: Yes, and there were twenty-six pieces he did with it. He did the big one, *Sky Garden* of the rocket itself, and he did all these studies of it. And he did twenty-six.

THOMAS: What was his mood about that?

GRINSTEIN: He was just full of excitement. He couldn't believe the feeling of the energy that happens. I've never been to a rocket ship [launch], but he made me enthusiastic to do it. I may go to one. They're going to have the [launches] now with people, right out of here at Vandenburg Air Force Base, right up in Santa Barbara, so we'll get a chance to maybe experience that in a certain way. He just couldn't get the power of it. It just filled him full. He just absorbed it, which is what he does.

THOMAS: It's hope, it's excitement, it's the future. There are so many emotions that come when I watch one, and I'm just watching it on television.

GRINSTEIN: It's like looking at the Grand Canyon in a picture, versus seeing the Grand Canyon. I'm sure at the [launch] it's a totally different thing.

There were a series of things like that. I was having dinner with him one night. Brice [Marden] was there, his assistant, and we went out to this funny place -- Caesar's Palace or something in New York. This restaurant was a hot restaurant. All Roman. *Bonnie and Clyde* had just happened and he was really taken with it, really taken. So I said, "Come on out and do a series of prints." He said, "Yes, I will. Okay. I'll come out." They were practically mad at me here, because they had a schedule going, but I thought anything that Bob does, I want to be [part of it] ... so he came out and did a series of *Bonnie and Clyde*.

THOMAS: Say with *Booster* which was so huge, how did news of the technological advances that happened with that in terms of size and other things -- how did the word get out?

GRINSTEIN: My feeling is that it doesn't get out that way, except through the academic people. It gets out when someone sees it, or hears about it, and knows there's something special. That it's just that special. So that word got out very quickly.

THOMAS: And were they then for sale?

GRINSTEIN: For sale, and sold out immediately. Bob's don't usually sell out immediately. A few of things of his have -- the *L.A. Uncovered* -- but Bob's go slower. Leo Castelli used to say that Jasper sells out immediately, but Bob's, you look around a couple years later, and they're gone. That's exactly what happens. But with the *Booster*, it went.

Word got out but people weren't so interested in the technological part of it. Just the emotion of it, and seeing it as different. It's special. It carries a wall. I should have it up here. I really should. I think it's the greatest print we ever had. I own it, but I never wanted this to look like a sale place for Gemini. I thought that was in bad taste. So we have other artists here, and a couple of Gemini pieces, but very few.

THOMAS: You have a lot of artists coming through and working with Gemini. Does everybody work the same, and work with your team the same way?

GRINSTEIN: No, they all have a different way. The place changes, the personality changes, as every artist comes in. So the *things* are the same, but they use them differently, and the spirit is different. Every artist who comes through, whether it's Bob, whether it's Jasper, it's totally different. Bob wants a party going on all the time; Jasper's private. I don't think he even likes to be around the printers, but it's a collaborative thing; he has no choice. Roy's is worked out and some else isn't. Claes plays around a little more. They each work differently, and it's their personality, all strong personalities. There weren't many women in those days but we went after Georgia O'Keeffe. I met her a couple of times, then I saw her once at the Pasadena Museum and talked to her a little. Then she sent us a note saying, "I don't think I can come out. I'm going blind, and my cat died." [Laughter] So how do you respond that that? Okay. That's the end of that.

But there weren't many women. There were a few. Dorothea Rockburne, who had worked for Bob. It was too bad. The women weren't allowed to be big in the art world. They just weren't taken seriously. That's changed.

THOMAS: I spent some time with Dorothea, and she'd just had a retrospective on Long Island --

GRINSTEIN: Yes. She was a little more competitive. Brice Marden -- I don't know if you've talked to him. (KT: Not yet.) He'll be glad to talk to you, I'm quite sure. He was there. He was Bob's assistant, he was on the inside there.

THOMAS: I spent some time this morning speaking with a man called Mayo Thompson who was an assistant to Bob in the '70s.

GRINSTEIN: Oh, I bet that's where I know him. Yes.

THOMAS: And Bob Petersen worked at Gemini for a while.

GRINSTEIN: [Bob Rauschenberg] met him at Gemini, and they got together at Gemini. And history was made there. [Laughs]

THOMAS: [Laughs] He stole him.

GRINSTEIN: Petersen was a nice, sweet man, very nice man.

THOMAS: It's a fantastic combination of qualities to be able to artistically approach the work, to technically handle the whole process, but then also to work with Bob Rauschenberg, then a Jasper [Johns], and then a Roy [Lichtenstein]. How many artists can work at Gemini at the same time?

GRINSTEIN: Just one at a time. We tried two and it didn't work. Two separate places but they were both there. That's why we can only do maybe five projects a year. But just one. It's a full-

time thing. They take over. Someone like Richard Serra makes the whole place paint. He demands to take over, then makes it so you have to put down cloths everywhere.

He takes over like nobody.

THOMAS: That's fun to have all those different [artists].

GRINSTEIN: Yes. And our printers are artists themselves, most of them, and they're flexible enough to understand and go with the trend. Our theory has always been that it's an artist's workshop, so let them do what they do, and we're there to try to do everything they want to do. In virtually every case, we've been able to do that.

THOMAS: There is no other place -- or is there? -- [that does] what Gemini does?

GRINSTEIN: Well, the ULAE [United Limited Art Editions] is a place that is similar. It's a little smaller, I think, but it's similar. They do some offset techniques and things that are a little different than us, but they're similar. There are a few places -- Crown Point in San Francisco is all etchings. A silk-screen is where the paint goes on *top* of the paper. In lithograph, you're pressing it *into* the paper, and the etching you're cutting up the plate, and the ink's going in there. There are five or ten ways to do etchings. There are as many ways to do lithographs as silk-screens, and there are woodcuts. So all these combinations of these things come out, and you do them.

THOMAS: It does seem to me from what I've read that the pioneering work [in printmaking] took place at Gemini.

GRINSTEIN: We did a lot of it. We pay homage to Tatyana Grosman because she got them to get started. That was what we called a pioneering work, and it was traditional but it was getting them started with the European tradition and culture. She just wanted to get in some business. It was a [printing] press that they found. [Laughter] But she was sharp.

THOMAS: I thought her business acumen was quite terrific, because she would go after people who were already established. That was a very smart thing to do.

GRINSTEIN: They were pretty young, those people, but they were established. All you had to do was go after mostly Leo Castelli people. That was the most part. But there were others who weren't Leo Castelli. Claes Oldenburg wasn't, and Ellsworth wasn't. Some others weren't. Bob used to look up to Joseph Beuys. He used to talk about him a lot. We got connected with him and we tried to do some projects with Beuys because of Bob. [Bob] came back and said, "There's an artist in Europe that's really good."

THOMAS: And did that happen?

GRINSTEIN: [Beuys] didn't work with us. But we got a chance to spend a glorious day in Berlin with him. He didn't speak a word of English, but [Beuys] was the "Pope", and he had this charisma that when he walks into the room, the room changes. You could be this way, and you

know something's happening. It could be a big room with hundreds of people -- he walks in. Some people just have that sort of charisma.

They say there's an electricity you give out. UCLA's studied that. Evidently some people give it off much bigger.

THOMAS: That must have been very exciting.

GRINSTEIN: Bob was that way, but Beuys was the "Pope" is what they called him. Joseph Beuys. Ileana [Sonnabend] was very taken with him always too. Ileana was incredible, quite a woman, an incredible influence. Her husband [Michael Sonnabend] said with most artists, you feel their presence; with Beuys you feel his absence.

THOMAS: Tell me about the China experience.

GRINSTEIN: Well so, on to China. Elyse and I had been to China in 1979, and somewhere along the line, as they were taking the tour with us, they said they invented paper. So our ears perked up. You invented paper? Okay. Where does it come from? And they told us Anhui Province. I think we went to a place and they showed us some handmade paper, and we may have shipped some in. I said, "We've got to get an artist back here, and it's going to be Bob." Because we had taken him to France already, and I think he may have gone to India by that time, because this is '82.

Bob wanted to go to Japan all the time. In fact, I think he went to India instead of Japan. So we had to work both ends to get him excited about it, and to get him allowed to be in. It was a two-year job to get in. We tried everything. They were really closed up at that time. Finally, I was at my barber's -- where everything happens -- and I might have been telling him my troubles, and he said, "Oh, my brother is *the* China expert, and he's at Michigan State. I'll put you in touch with him." Later on, I saw him on CNN as the China guy. I talked to him, he was very nice, and he said, "Well, there are two ways to get in. You can get in through the national government," which I'd been trying to do, "That's one way. Or you can get in through the state provinces, and you're safer there, because if there's a problem nationally, they say, 'You're out. We don't want anyone to come in.' If this happens with a province, they allow it to happen. It's more of a personal thing there."⁵

Okay. Who are the people who are the people with Anhui, and they said, "Maryland. Spiro Agnew." Well, we knew the Maryland Museum. So we got to them, it was a very good museum.

THOMAS: The state of Maryland had a relationship...

⁵ Stanley Grinstein on 1.25.12: "You can get in to the state provinces and you're safer there. There's a problem nationally so you're out. We don't want anyone to come in. This happens with the province. They'd allow it to happen. So they still allow it to happen and it goes with the province. It wasn't just them. It's [that] they allow provinces to make their own interchange and agreements."

GRINSTEIN: ... with the State of Anhui. We was never sure Anhui was the correct place. They mentioned that to us but we were still flying [blind].

So we go to the museum, and they're busy. We said, "Hey, we can do this project. We need you to sponsor it, to put your name on it." It didn't happen for a couple months. Then I'm with someone who knows the Maryland School of Art. She gives me the guy's name, and I get in touch with him, and two things happen. Number one, he's very interested. He says, "Oh, well we'll do it for sure." Second, he's walking through the place, talking to someone, telling them about it, and there's a Chinese student -- older, but she's taking a class there -- and she said, "Do you say Anhui Province? That's our place. We're it." It turned out her husband was this professor who was connected, and we figured he was their KGB/CIA. He was going back and forth, and he was really connected.

We got the okay to go to Anhui Province, and we got a break because the former head of Anhui Province was now the president of China, which is an honorary job. It's a big job but it's honorary. The premier is the job. So we got [permission] to go there. And we say to ourselves, "Okay, how do you get ready for it?" They say there's nothing we can buy there, so we try to get together enough materials -- not paper, but plates, and [materials] to work on, and [tools] to carve everything -- carpentry [tools]—[anything] we could think of, and we sent a couple of crates.

So now we go to China. We arrive in Shanghai, and then Bob immediately starts to travel around. There's a silk place north of there that's famous for their silks, so we knew about that. He may have known about it too. We got him up there, and he went to these stores, and he got Chinese bridal bedspreads. [Chuckles] He bought a bunch of those.

THOMAS: Just responding to the color and the texture and --

GRINSTEIN: Responding, responding to the design. He was wandering around, responding.

Now we start to head toward Anhui, and he picked up a few other things. I forget what they are. There was enough stuff to work with. It's good he picked up some stuff. Our stuff didn't mean anything because, number one, the people wouldn't let us into the paper mill. The Chinese lady just about had a heart attack. She lost face. It insulted her. But they wouldn't let us in. Why won't you let us in? Well, they don't wear a lot of clothes, and they'll be self-conscious. We'll take off our clothes. We don't care. They gave about three excuses, each one we countered.

Well, it turned out they were afraid, particularly [because] we had a Japanese guy with us⁶, that we were going to steal their secret paper. Later on, we showed them a book of Don Saff's that told about paper, and it had all their secrets in it! [Laughter] But they wouldn't let us in. Well, what do we do now? We're there, and we're screwed. So Bob said, "Just a minute." It's typical Bob. I'm moaning and mourning, and he's solving. [If] You're not part of the solution you're

⁶ On 1.25.12 SG identified the "Japanese guy" as Hisachika Takahashi, who worked with RR at 381 Lafayette Street in New York.

part of the problem. Bob always came up with a solution; he was part of the solution. He didn't waste any energy about re-discussing the problem. He said, "Get me the thickest piece of paper that you make and the thinnest piece." Okay. We can do that. So now he had us scurrying. I mean, this was a small village. This is a small village. Number one, they had edges on it, and we couldn't go past the edge of the village.⁷ Our deal was to stay inside the place. Secondly, these farmers would come in, and they would do a double take. [Laughter] What the hell came in from Mars! That was funny. We watched them.

Third, they wouldn't let the children interact with us. They wouldn't let anyone. No one could interact with us. That was the deal. They told them all, "Keep away from these people." And we're in this funny guesthouse. I had a Polaroid camera, and we started to play with the kids. You can't keep kids away. So we broke through immediately, and it was a challenge to us to be bad! [Laughter]

Bob said, "Okay. I want this..." There were all these [books] around. "I want [books], [books] of anything." Some of them were exercise, and we got some of the pieces there. I'll show you. Some of them were tractors. They were everything you do in [books]. Some of them might have even been posters -- but books teaching you about something. "And cut those up -- cut up the bridal bedspread into a circle, go out in the street, they're selling ribbons." We bought the whole thing, a three-year supply of ribbons, right off the street. [Laughter] I couldn't believe it. All this stuff to make collages with. That was his "revenge." So the thick piece was the bottom piece, the thin piece on top, you could see through it, and held it in. It was transparent.

THOMAS: How beautiful.

GRINSTEIN: He saw that immediately. He called it *Seven Characters*. There were seven of us, so we tried not to take it personally. [Laughter] He did variations on each one. The character was a Chinese character that was for health, wealth, happiness -- all these characters -- and we did paper, solid paper, to make that into a papier maché, and add on each piece -- and then he

⁷ SG on 1.25.2012: "There aren't many small villages there, 1.2 billion people, [but it was] a very small village. There's boundaries on each place. And your -- particularly at that time -- your visa was only to be in that area. And the second you stepped out of that area.... We went through that in Russia too. It wasn't what you were ok'd for so none of the bureaucrats would ok you. We found the first time we took a walk outside of the boundary of the village [that] police came up but not even dressed as police and said no you can't come over here. They were watching us continually. It's a small rather intimate village but that was what you were allowed to be in, only that. (KT: Did you feel that that they were looking at you all the time?) GRINSTEIN: Yes but we made it more of a joking challenge. They told us there's ten different agencies that are involved and the most we identified [was] seven of them, never did identify [the others], and they weren't about to tell us who they were. But it was everything from the artist thing to the interpreter to the KGB part, to the CIA part, to the province, to the city, to the national person to the business people. Anything you did, so there was a business person there so there were ten agencies. So we felt that was happening. We didn't pay much attention to it, unless they told us we couldn't come in or something, then we had to pay attention to them. And we tried to figure out the solution."

made, again, an RTP [Right-to-Print] of the seven, and then he had enough material, and he gave them instructions on how to move each one around, so each one would be different.

When we left China, all of us, we were in their hands. Several things happened that I'll tell you about, but we were in their hands to do it correctly and it came through perfectly. I think of the 300-and-something pieces there wasn't one that wasn't satisfactory. It was just amazing. Amazing.

We had to negotiate with them. They had ten different groups with us. We could identify seven of them. There was the artist who was with us who didn't speak any English, -- Mr. Shu. There was the translator, who was from a different group. There was the local city person. There was the province person. There was the national person. There was their CIA person. That was about as far as we got. But there were ten. We couldn't identify all ten and they didn't help us to identify them, particularly. [Laughs]

THOMAS: So Bob had that nice working group that he likes to be with....

GRINSTEIN: Yes. He worked from 3:00 in the afternoon to 3:00 in the morning -- so it changed the whole eating habits, and this guy who was the cook -- Bob had a way of connecting with people. [The cook] said, "I'm going to bring my thing upstairs and make jiaozi for you," which is the dumplings, all night. And he cooked. All night. So people adapted to him.

THOMAS: Wonderful.

GRINSTEIN: Then we brought movies with us; amongst others we brought *The Blues Brothers*. We started to show them and the people in the place are looking "What channel is that? We don't get that channel." They couldn't figure out *The Blues Brothers*. Bob started to show it to some of the officials, like they are going to enjoy it! Bob is naïve about those things, in a lovely way. They were going to enjoy *The Blues Brothers*. Are you out of your mind? So [anyway], we brought this stuff with us.

The paper mill would not stamp our piece. So I'm walking on the street, and they're selling stuff. I said, "What's that?" "That's the paper mill stamp." I said, "I've got to get that one." They said, "Well, let's see." We come the next day, and it's gone. Gone. So there was all that going on. The final day, the paper mill guy shows up, and they put their stamp on everything. They liked the project. We never got into the mill, but they got into us. So that was a final okay. So the Chinese did it, they stamped -- I got a Rauschenberg stamp in Chinese I had made that was stamped on there. So there were about four stamps.

But the way he adapted! Oh then, one of the best parts of the story -- the last day we're in Beijing and we're meeting some of the very high-ups and telling them what the project [was about.] Then *Newsweek* did a thing on him. They interviewed Bob. They had a person in Beijing. So the school wanted us to give a talk of some sort, wanted him to give it, basically, about what was happening.

Abstraction was verboten at that time. It was "dirty." Now it goes the other way. They love abstraction. You can't read anything into it. The stuff that's realistic they don't like. It's funny how it changes. So abstraction was a capitalist plot to disrupt them. So you couldn't do anything abstract.

Anyway, we go to this place, it's very traditional, and Bob loved it. It was a big school, it was the last day of school, and he said, "They're going to go on vacation, and, "The teachers can't pollute them to whatever we say." He always had this reaction to anything that happened. I always said I should have been writing down the things he said. There were gems every day, and I didn't write them down. I didn't do it.

THOMAS: Did you ever see him unhappy?

GRINSTEIN: I saw him object to things. I saw him object when we were raising money for Obama. We raised \$3 million, the artists did, with prints, and Bob wouldn't do it. I said why? Because [Bob had] always done one before. He said, "When I was in Port Arthur, I came close to being a preacher and it was of that church that Obama was going to in Chicago. I think that's a terrible church," and he didn't want to have anything to do with anybody who had anything to do with that church. He had strong opinions, and I guess he got unhappy with things. I never really saw him in what I'd call that sort of -- he expressed himself as disagreeing.

THOMAS: Frank Gehry told me that Bob was very unhappy about

GRINSTEIN: . . . When he did the place [at Gemini]? That's his type of unhappiness. He said, "I can't work in a place that doesn't have straight lines." In Frank's building -- he changed it a little, because the artists studio, the second one we set up there, didn't have straight lines. He said, "I can't work in here." So that's unhappiness, but I wouldn't call it getting mad at someone. It's getting unhappy for what he needs to do his work.

THOMAS: To do his work.

GRINSTEIN: So there's this talk, anyway, at the school [in China.] We get up to do the talk, and I knew I was going to be doing this talk. In fact, it had been arranged, I think, before. In fact it must have, because I brought stuff with me -- slides. So I brought slides of Lichtenstein's bull [*Bull Profile Series*], which he got from Picasso, where he abstracts it in several things, and abstraction was a dirty word. I showed them that abstraction. I wanted to show that it still had content in it. The first one is a bull, and the second one, the tail is gone, and the third one, the leg is removed. By the seventh one, it's all abstract. They were buzzing in the audience. They got it. I figured that was the way to get them.

So now Bob gets up and he gives a nice talk. Now there is also a translator because they speak Mandarin Chinese, and we didn't, so we had a translator.

THOMAS: It would be interesting to translate Bob.

GRINSTEIN: Yes. Well, yes translate his speech. So the first guy gets up and says, "Yeah, you're a big-deal artist, and the state doesn't like that here, to be a successful artist, and you can sell what you have. We can't sell what we have, there's no market here." So Bob says, "Just a minute." This is typical of his answers. The brilliance of them. He says, "When I was starting as an artist, for the first fifteen years, if I gave someone something, they wouldn't take it. The next five years, if I gave it to them, they would take it. Then I started to sell."

So the next guy gets up; they don't let it go. "Yeah, but you make things, and you have places to store them. They give us no place to store them. We can't put them anywhere." Bob said, "You know, I've seen scrolls. It seems to me that you could roll up a scroll under your bed, about ten meters long." So they were thirty feet -- roll them up. If you want to do something, you'll figure out a way to do it. These two brilliant answers, on the spur of the moment, and it was the right thing. It was typical Bob. Just typical of him.

... [Note to Reader: Stanley Grinstein told a related story on 1.25.2012, which follows:]

GRINSTEIN: So we're saying goodbye to all of them and Bob's favorite person by far was this guy Mr. Shu who represented the artists. Bob felt always he's in a profession and his profession is being an artist. And any one else who is an artist is in a wonderful profession and he expects them to act a certain way that professionals do. And he's either proud of them or unhappy with them based on that but he loved Shu and Shu didn't speak a word of English but they got along. So now we go to say goodbye. So my story is [that] Bob presents Mr. Shu [with] a present, which they do in Asia a lot. So what does he give him? At that time, Bob was working with cardboard. Of everything Bob ever did at Gemini or any artist did I'd say, by far the least popular of what any artist did at Gemini I'd say was when Bob did the cardboard. It's like Frank Gehry doing chain link, and corrugated [metal]. What the hell is that? That's common everyday material. What are you using cardboard for? That's not art. So people resigned from buying from Gemini. Now people are understanding Bob's cardboard. So at this time Bob hands Mr. Shu a piece of cardboard. Which isn't popular to begin with anywhere in the world.

Now Bob's theory is that it must come from the country because then they'll understand it some. It's cardboard that came from there. It's a rather small piece, I'd say it's 22 by 30 at the biggest, maybe even smaller, and it's got images on it. I don't even 100% remember. But I think I remember there was a Chinese pig on it and everything written in Chinese. And then something came in it you know. Bob says everything you wear, everything you eat, everything you look at, everything that you're dealing with, the furniture, somewhere came in cardboard. The most common material of our time. But you know we don't use it so leave it to Bob to say I'm going to use it.

He hands him this piece of ragged cardboard that has a pig on it. Well Shu looked stunned. You didn't have to speak Chinese to realize "What the hell is he doing here?" So he's polite. He takes it. He doesn't know what to do. It doesn't mean one thing to him. Bob thinks because it came from China, [and] that's his optimistic soul, that he'll understand it. So anyway here is this piece that looks less than impressive. We leave and then I get word from our interpreter Mr. Shu says is there anyway has it got any value to it. Is there a way you could sell it for him? I said yeah Bob's things are saleable. Not worth as much in '82 as they are now.... (Inaudible) and

cardboard was particularly not very impressive, but yes. So I go to his dealer back in town here, a woman by the name of Margo Leavin, was very hard working dealer and representative. I said Margaret can you sell this. Yeah I can sell it. She finally ends up getting \$10,000 for it. We send it back to him. We get the word back that will support his family and I mean a big family for a minimum of 3 generations. It's what you do. You take the \$10,000 and you buy a truck. Now you rent the truck out. How would that support them? Now you've got a business and you are the only one in the province maybe aside from working the government that owns a truck so it supports you for the next three generations. Bob in his sensitivity, he knows what he's doing. The other guy was in shock but found out very early in the game that it was a pretty good thing to get. And so that was my favorite story. Because I think it's kind of a romantic idea that Bob had that if it's from China that you would understand it intuitively because it came from your country but it's a rather romantic idea, which Bob was.

THOMAS: Was it really...

GRINSTEIN: It was a flat piece of cardboard. [KT: That he had found?] That he had found.

THOMAS: That he hadn't manipulated in any way?

GRINSTEIN: Bob liked found objects. He manipulated it to the extent that that's what he chose. He cut the side out, maybe, of a box that society wanted so he did his own manipulation if you want to call it that. It was just something that interested him. But we used to say to him when he was going around LA, you find all the beautiful things. You know you find the special things. "No, no, I find the regular things." But that's how he functions, the regular every day things. And why that's the really beautiful part of life so this was a good example of that.

THOMAS: Can I ask a question about something that went by? You said that people resigned over the cardboards?

GRINSTEIN: Well we had what we called subscribers that bought mostly one of everything we did at the beginning. It was very cheap. And we had several people drop out and said I don't want that.

THOMAS: That's what I thought you meant but I wanted to clarify.

GRINSTEIN: Actually stopped being subscribers. Not a lot but it's the first time that happened, the only time that happened. It was that controversial, but it would fit in with Bob's thing about the integrity of materials. Then when we went to paper mills you dealt with people making a piece of paper for you. Or you bought it at the paper store in Los Angeles or New York and then you did stuff to it, you printed on it you drew on it. You did stuff to it, but the paper was just a backdrop.

The first paper mill we went to with him in France, the leading one, [delete comment about looking for papers on his desk] he, Bob said I just want to use the paper, integrity of the paper. So he started to pick things out of the paper pulp itself. Not what you do with it, not what you

write on, not what you print on but the paper, the material. That's the way he looks at things, it's not your usual way. Not the usual way.

...

THOMAS: You and Sidney have known Bob since the mid-'60s.

GRINSTEIN: Yes, since '67.

THOMAS: Was there a constancy in that personality?

GRINSTEIN: Yes. Yes. It's kind of like being with someone so much you don't notice the differences. I'm sure he must have changed during that time, but you are seeing him enough that -- it's like seeing someone grow up. You don't notice it, and all of a sudden, there it is. I didn't notice it. Nothing that was obvious -- his likes, his things. Trisha Brown was constant. Merce [Cunningham], of course, and John [Cage].

THOMAS: And he liked L.A. a lot, didn't he?

GRINSTEIN: He loved L.A. He loved it. One of the most successful things he did at Gemini was *L.A. Uncovered*, where it was typical -- again -- David Hockney was the picture of L.A. -- pools, swimming, West Side. Bob goes off, he wants to see the whole city, which most people don't. They don't even think it exists. You go east of the L.A. River -- they don't think it exists east of streets like La Brea, or Western or Vermont. The L.A. River doesn't exist. That's half the city.

So Bob said, "I want to see it all -- all that is Hispanic, the Afro-American part, all the parts." So we got him a policeman -- because he had big camera equipment -- an off-duty policeman. We hired someone to go with him. He went with them, and he took pictures of L.A. He made it all beautiful. He made it all beautiful. Because it is.

THOMAS: It is interesting the way he sees. It's not that he makes it beautiful, but he sees the beauty in it.

GRINSTEIN: As he said, "Well, you find all these great things." "No, I find ordinary things." [Laughs] Do you remember the famous stories about when he was living on Front Street, how he functions?

THOMAS: No.

GRINSTEIN: He and Jasper were living there. It was this poor place, right over the [fish-market.]

THOMAS: Oh, the Fulton Fish Market.

GRINSTEIN: That's right. He said, "You know, everything I would ever need I could --" I forget the words he put it in. "Anything I could ever need is within a block of me. It's all here here." That's the way he felt. Anything around him he would absorb, and became what life's about. He was just amazing that way.⁸

Not that he minded traveling -- because he liked that. He liked to connect with people, and show everyone how much he connected. Oh, the other thing was -- when he would go to a place -- like China -- he would only use Chinese goods. And he said, "They'll understand it for that reason." Well, they understand "flung-ink"⁹ but they didn't understand the way he cut apart the stuff. But his gesture -- it was all Chinese. The paper, the silks ...

THOMAS: That's sensitive, and it's also smart.

GRINSTEIN: Smart. Both.

THOMAS: I was wondering [in] thinking about the photography if you thought his work changed when he had to stop using [other people's photographs] --

GRINSTEIN: Yes and no. There was a flair to it that was kind of this older, European history. You know, it happened because of Gemini.

THOMAS: Tell me.

GRINSTEIN: It happened because of *Hoarfrost*. We used a photograph in that came out of an [advertisement] -- that's what Bob always did. So, all of a sudden, this guy popped up and said, "You used [my photograph], and you broke the copyright."¹⁰ And our attorneys told us, "No, we're clear," because he didn't have a copyright on it, and enough years. The guy was out on every count. But we all didn't want to push him out. He was another artist, so we tried to be

⁸ SG on 1.25.2012. "You know he said everything I need is within a block of me. And everything I'd ever need. He didn't mind traveling. And I believe the reason is it was whole new information, he loved new information so when he'd travel he'd see new information. So it isn't that he minded traveling, he liked it but he didn't like it. He didn't want that to be the issue."

⁹ SG on 1.25.2012. "["Flung ink"] is the Chinese and Japanese way of doing art. Where they fling the ink. It's their most common. That's the Asian way of one of their most popular ways of doing drawing, is flinging. It's kind of like John Cage in [that] it's got chance in it. It's how you fling the ink. It's Jackson Pollack dripping. It's how you do it but they called it over there "flung-ink." That's something the Chinese and the Japanese [do]."

¹⁰ SG on 1.25.2012: "Did he accuse him? I'm not certain of that. I think so cause I knew what I remember [inaudible - him?] saying. It's my copyright on that. And then it turned out it wasn't even close that particularly in those days you had to do something to get a copyright, you had to put a C next to it. You had to label it somewhere. There were about 5 things you had to do. Plus it was about ten years past the statute of limitations but we didn't want him to lose so we made a deal with him because we're nice guys."

sensitive. We gave him, I think, a couple of *Hoarfrosts*. I don't know if there was any money, but we gave him something. Because he had lost -- he was out.

He scared the hell out of Bob. [Bob] said, "I'm going to take my own pictures from now on." He had always taken pictures. So he was in photography.

So he went back to photography, and took all the pictures, like in China. Don Saff had to slog all that camera equipment!

GRINSTEIN: There were a lot of trips up mountains and things.

THOMAS: Photojournalism adds an electricity of the moment.

GRINSTEIN: Yes, more history. It picks up the history. It's in this piece [refers to a *Hoarfrost* hanging in the living room]. There's a lot of photographs, electricity, and history in it. You know, this piece is interesting because it's got a front and a back. You have a choice. You can unhook it over there, on the right side. You can let it hang in the middle. That's one way. Or, if you pin it up, it's very quiet underneath in the back and if you want it to be quiet ... He wanted the viewer -- he was of the Duchampian school. The piece is complete when the viewer has participated, so he loved the viewer being a part of it, always. *Revolvers* -- he wanted them [the viewers] to push it. They could push a button and it would turn these around. The *Hoarfrosts*, [you] walk by to make it move. He wanted the viewer to always be part of it. That was very important.

THOMAS: I'm interested in critics who read Bob's paintings as if they were a book, as if there were a theme. It's my sense -- but you can correct me -- that whether or not Bob had an idea in mind that he was working on, he really wanted the viewer to puzzle it out for themselves --

GRINSTEIN: Absolutely.

THOMAS: That would have delighted him much more than somebody saying, "Well, *Monogram* means this."

GRINSTEIN: This. It isn't "This." His theme -- when you mention that. His theme was his *life*, the way he ran his life. That was his theme, how he approached things. That's all. He certainly enjoyed magazine and newspaper images. He always wanted the television on. Always, the television on. He wanted action around. He wanted -- I was a little bit that way. When I studied I always had the radio on, and I multi-tasked. But he did it to perfection, the way he wanted. He liked things going on. He would pick out out of it what was meaningful to him.

THOMAS: And when he was at Gemini, was there a television on?

GRINSTEIN: Oh, yes. Always on. And people. He wanted people to come through.

THOMAS: He didn't have a problem with people coming in. I saw a photograph of, I think it was, Gregory Peck?

GRINSTEIN: Yes. Bob was doing a project. Gregory Peck wanted to see it. It was a chair [*Borealis Shares*] that he did, and he was putting acid to change the color, and each one was different. Gregory Peck was watching.

People have realized how important they are, and each one is different.

THOMAS: Is [there one] series that Bob did that was near and dear to your heart?

GRINSTEIN: Somehow, *Booster* is, because it was the first one. And the China project, because I went on it.

THOMAS: And the China project was before the day of emails, wasn't it? (SG: Yes.) So this is all phone calls and letters.

GRINSTEIN: Letters and credit cards, which they took. The money I had to arrange was strange. The whole thing was a very strange trip, but it worked out. It worked.

THOMAS: So the *7 Characters* was important to you, too.

GRINSTEIN: Yes, *Hoarfrost* I think was very important. *Hoarfrost* was very interesting, because we had just broken up with Ken Tyler. Well, it started in '66. Then he really left us in '71, but it wasn't completed until '73. He went east in '71 and so we were just on our own, and trying to figure out how to function. We knew the artists, and we had confidence. Ken Tyler wanted us to close down because he wasn't here. If he wasn't here, it was over.

We said no. In fact, we offered to go partners with him in the East. No, he was going to do that on his own. Okay. You're leaving here, you're leaving here.

So we weren't doing that well. I don't know if there was a recession then, too. That's when [Bob] did *Hoarfrost*, and he said, "I'm taking a chance, because these are very much like my unique pieces in scale, and feeling, and everything. It's just too close." But he wanted to give us something good. I remember we went to the Basel Fair, and it was one of the first times -- or only times -- that there had been a buzz about something we did. So *Hoarfrost* was important to me. *Samarkand's* were interesting to me -- because he was coming in to do a project, and, "I don't know what to do."

THOMAS: Were there ever projects where he got halfway through and said, "This isn't going to work?"

GRINSTEIN: There was one project he was never sure of. I forget the name, but it was this printing project. He said "I'm just not sure of that one." It wasn't one of his more important ones. But the *Samarkand's* because he always wanted to visit these special places and that was on a trade route.

[There is a] big arch [in Samarkand, Uzbekistan] and he wanted to see it, so he came back and said, "You know, there's this piece of fabric I bought, and I want to make a sport shirt for me out of it. But if you could get more of it, I would do a project." So, temporarily, we went to a silk place and got some things to get him going, and then we started to nose around. We finally had to go through Armand Hammer whom I knew a little through LA County Museum. I was on the Board with him. But [Hammer] got us in touch with the Moscow people and they got the material for us. So all these things happen in strange ways. He was going to make a sports shirt with it. He liked the material. [Laughter] In China, he had a scarf that was from either Simone Forti or Deborah Hay that he always carried with him. Then all of a sudden he said, "Let's put this in the project," and he had us cut it up and put it in the piece, some of the pieces.

THOMAS: He sent a piece of a painting to everybody in 1975. [*Yule 75*]

GRINSTEIN: Oh, yes, yes. We have a piece of it.

THOMAS: I had said to David Byrne that I thought it was so nice that Bob had sent me mangos at Christmas, and he said, "Don't think you're special. He sends them to everybody." So at the very end of our PBS documentary, I had [the interviewees] talk about what they do with their mangos. But I thought that being so generous with something that is from you ...

GRINSTEIN: Let me give you one of those. They do a show called "Five From Louisiana," [New Orleans Museum of Art, January 28 – March 1977] and it's Bob Rauschenberg, Keith Sonnier, Tina Girouard, Dickie Landry, and Linda Benghli. They're all from Louisiana, most of them Cajun. His [Bob's] family moved to the Cajun area, in Lafayette, and they're good party people. So he goes down there and he makes arrangements. Their big paper is the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. The Sunday *Times-Picayune* has an insert that's a full Rauschenberg. It goes to everyone in New Orleans who signed up for their Sunday paper.

That's the way he thought: Share it with everyone. It's typical of his thinking, too.

THOMAS: How was your sense of how he was able to approach life after his stroke?

GRINSTEIN: Well, he refused to give in to it. Number one, he tried not to think about it.

[Conversation is interrupted.]

THOMAS: I asked you about the stroke.

GRINSTEIN: He didn't ever want to talk about death. When he was getting ill it seemed to me that he made a conscious decision that he was going to do everything he could do, as long as he could do it. He just didn't deal with it. He did what he could do, and he just kept doing things, and he just kept functioning as best he could. He just did that. It was only later that he got really ill and he had the stomach thing. We got him into Cedars, and he got intensive care, and then the rehab there. But he was really ill, so he couldn't really do art during that time.

But he kept his spirits. When you visited him, he was up. He was watching television all day. He kept his spirits. He didn't change much, considering. We were with him -- I think it was the night before he didn't function at all, when we were in Washington, D.C.

THOMAS: Right. I was there.



GRINSTEIN: We had dinner with him the night before. He just looked like he was doing very well. So he was still functioning, doing what he does, talking the way he did, and doing what he could do. So he dealt with the reality of the moment, again.

THOMAS: That was the event at the National Gallery, right? I remember hearing that the gallery had wanted to have it all tables, and Bob would sit next to one of the big donors, and Bob said, "I don't think so."

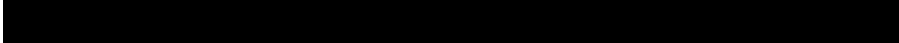
GRINSTEIN: That's not his style.

THOMAS: Let's make it a buffet, and then everybody can sit wherever they want....

GRINSTEIN: He was always three steps ahead. [Laughter] It wasn't casual, it went to his chess game -- he thought that way. He was brilliant, always.



GRINSTEIN: The thing that Bob did here, that I thought I enjoyed the most -- what Gemini did was, all these artists came out, and we did the local artists, too -- Sam Francis, Bob Graham, Joe Goode, Larry Bell, Bruce Nauman, Ed Ruscha. We had five or six artists. But Bob would be staying at the house and we'd have a party for him but particularly when he was staying here to start. I was friends with the younger artists. Because the older artists, again, were fairly set in their ways. The younger artists were glad to have someone around to party for them, and do something. So it was Laddie Dill, Guy Dill, and Chuck Arnoldi, Tom Wudl, Jim Ganzer. I may be leaving someone out. There were like five. Ron Cooper was one. And Bob related to them easily. They were his friends, and that interaction was really interesting. He was just so hospitable to them. That happened a lot with the Gemini artists, but not to the extent that it did with Bob. He just partied with them, and he became part of their group, too.



THOMAS: I remember there was an event in Washington, -- I think it was a ULAE [event] at the Corcoran, and [Bob] and Bill Goldston spoke. There was a party, apparently, afterwards. I'm walking out the door with Bob, and the woman who was in charge of the events was standing there. Bob said to me, "Are you coming over to the party?" The woman looked at him and said, "She's not on the list."

GRINSTEIN: Oh, Jesus. You don't say that to Bob.

THOMAS: And Bob said, "She is now." [Laughter]

GRINSTEIN: He wants his entourage with him, whomever he wants. If you don't, otherwise he won't come.

But again the positive side. He didn't get into an argument with her. He just said, "She is now." That's it. It's over.

THOMAS: What haven't we talked about?

GRINSTEIN: That's a good question. I'm sure you could talk for days about him. I think we've covered the bulk of the essence -- I'm thinking about what sort of person he was -- this incredible mind that was just always working, always coming up with something brilliant. Whether it was what he did and what he said. Just amazing. Just amazing.

THOMAS: Have you ever met anybody like him?

GRINSTEIN: The one I've met who had an even broader life, who was incredible, was Allen Ginsberg. Allen Ginsberg was amazing. But his life even was "out there." It wasn't about art, it was about the world. He was totally amazing. Absolutely. But Bob, of all the artists I met, was the most amazing -- the greatest, if you want to use that word -- but the most amazing, just his thinking process, which was so brilliant. And it was always the right thing. You know, if you're a writer, you're trying to think those things up. They just *flowed* out of him.

THOMAS: It was not something you could see. It's just that his intuition was

GRINSTEIN: His intuition was right-on, always, and I never saw him say something that was stupid, or something way off. It was always something brilliant. How can you do that? How can you bat a thousand?

THOMAS: [Laughter] That's how we're going to stop. That's wonderful.

[End of Interview]

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Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

ADDITIONAL REMARKS FROM STANLEY GRINSTEIN

Note: On January 25, 2012 Karen Thomas spoke with Stanley Grinstein in an extended telephone conversation on Rauschenberg's intelligence and approach to art, Change Inc., Jasper Johns and printmaking.

Stanley Grinstein on Bob Rauschenberg's intelligence and approach to art.

THOMAS: You were beginning to make some comments about Bob's intelligence.

GRINSTEIN: Yes, his approach to life and his approach to gather information and deciding what's meaningful to him is totally unusual to me. It's fabulous. It's the perfect artist's approach. What does it mean to me. What does all this information mean to me. And that's really how he thinks about things.

Now off the record, cause I don't think he'll talk about it much, it could have something to do with his dyslexia. Not that dyslexia is a terrible thing but sometimes it's misunderstood. He just gets information differently. He reads information differently so he's learned to process it by leaving himself open to everything. And that's what he's interested in. He very seldom is going to spend much time asking you about your opinions of things. He's going to try to surround himself with people who he respects totally. So what does he do? He gets into a new thing, roller-skating, and I didn't know that [Trisha Brown] part of the story. I knew my part. He respected and respects Trisha Brown incredibly as much as he does anyone. And she's a dancer so he goes skating down the hall to her and has her help him with it because that's who he wants his advice from. But he just knows how to gather that in the most intelligent way and he just does it intuitively at this stage of his life for a long time. Since he's been an adult. It never changed but he just does it that way and that I don't know how to get that through in a way that's meaningful to the next person. But it's certainly meaningful to me and I think it's meaningful to people who have been around him a long time. That's the way he functions.

THOMAS: To say that he synthesizes the information that comes to him too simplistic?

GRINSTEIN: No he decides what it means to him. It may be very complex. He decides what does it mean to him.

THOMAS: Personalizes it.

GRINSTEIN: Yeah, personalizes it. So when he was doing his photographs he used European magazines and information came through a little differently. When he started to take his own pictures it came through in a more personal way 'cause it's his photographs and he uses them 'cause of color, he uses them because of design, about what makes sense, what's important to him. The place, the more important place in the painting.

I mean he just does those things rather intuitively but he does it under his terms. Because that's really all he's interested in.

THOMAS: Did he ever speak with you when he would choose an image [about] what it meant, what he intended?

GRINSTEIN: No. He did very little of that. He may have spoken to other people but I assume people that work with him in his shop hear that. Probably some of the printers. Jim Reid. I don't know that Jim worked, yeah Jim worked with him a fair amount but Jim wasn't one of the earlier printers. Just remember Bob worked with us [from] 1967 on and Jim's been with us 25 years. So it's a much different period of time.

But there's people around him... David White probably knows that very well. Where those things come through you know, how he makes that choice. I think he does it mostly intuitively. He puts it up there and he looks at it and moves it around, decides not to do it, or to do it a different way. He believes in his intuition. He's very much of *that* so you've got to be very

comfortable in your own skin. And you have a belief in what you're doing and that's how you do it.

I don't think it's a calculated thing. I think it's an intuitive thing with him that the way he functions but the people closer to him probably would have even more to say on that. More meaningful things to say about it.

THOMAS: Is it your sense that most of the artists with whom you worked, or *all* of the artists with whom you worked, were that way? Intuitive?

GRINSTEIN: In much different ways, yes. Yes, the good ones process it through them. What does this all mean to me. And so, otherwise you'd be talked out of it every three seconds. Allen Ginsburg used to say, "First thought best thought." And that's the one uncensored. That's the one uncensored. Then you start to censor it in school. Well if I do it that way someone may not like it. You start to narrow it down in the good artists don't believe in narrowing it down.

They believe in saying what's inside of them and that's a hard thing to do.

Stanley Grinstein on Change, Inc.

GRINSTEIN: Change, Inc. started in New York. Bob had started it for a sensational reason. When you're a young artist you need some money right now. It's a doctor's bill. He didn't particularly want to pay rent. You can find out from Change Inc. what their rules are and were but there were certain things that he didn't want to fund. Maybe not arts materials particularly I don't know. I'm guessing. But I know there are certain things he did [want to fund] 'cause you get into trouble and you need some money for something. And then there was a group that decided is that what they wanted. They started all that in New York. And it was going and it was functioning and it was doing quite well. Now, he's [Bob's] out here, he likes Los Angeles, and we may have been involved and probably were because we were involved with Bob and everything he was doing about having a Change Inc. out here. And so the first one he collaborated with and did a poster and we might even have arranged to print the poster. There are some maybes but we were involved in some way. It was with Ed Ruscha. So they did that and we were probably involved in it in some way. I've got to downplay our part. It was what happened. It never took over here. It never was really successful here. I think Rosamund Felsen was helping with it at one time and trying to get a group together that decided. I may have even been in the group. I don't remember being in the group. Who gets what. It just never really happened here so yes we were involved Change Inc. we were involved with Ed. We were involved with the first poster. And the beginning fundraiser but I can't say it with a proudness except to be proud to be part of it but we didn't do much.

THOMAS: That's all very helpful because he (Ed Ruscha) had characterized it in a different way and I wasn't sure if the genesis of Change had been in California....

GRINSTEIN: Absolutely not.

THOMAS: it is a wonderful..

GRINSTEIN: It was fabulous. It's time, it's always helpful.

THOMAS: It's still going.

GRINSTEIN: Yeah Jasper started one. He's got a Foundation and he probably raises more money than Bob. But he started one. Jasper was a sensational guy. So much different than Bob, a southern gentleman who was very low key. Bob liked people around. Jasper liked ..., I think it was John Cage, I wouldn't swear to it, said you know Bob breathes in and Jasper breathes out. Bob wants to absorb things inside and Jasper wants to be a southern gentleman and do things correctly.

And just a sensation guy and they were very important to each other's careers obviously. And we even took some of the last pictures when they took them together. But when they did break up it was not a real friendly break up. And there was some bitterness somewhere and I wasn't interested in getting into it and what all that was about. But look at when it first started. Leo came up to see Bob and Bob took him to see Jasper right away and Jasper got the first show. Got the first show, 'cause Leo liked Jasper's things or maybe were more ready, I don't know. Whatever. So it was definitely a wonderful team with Merce and John Cage.

THOMAS: Had you met Bob and Jasper when they were together?

GRINSTEIN: No. We met Jasper -- I don't think I met him before he came out here to do a project at Gemini. I think that's the first time. Not much before that he had a show at Virginia Dwan [Gallery] and he had had a show at the Pasadena Museum so he was around and he showed at (Rick Long?) so he was around. He wasn't a sociable person in that sense. He was always polite, very polite but it wasn't sociable. Bob, the second he was around if you were going to be part of his world, you were part of his world. Total different approach to...

THOMAS: Fascinating, isn't it?

GRINSTEIN: Yes well the world is fascinating that way particularly, special people are fascinating. How they deal with it and mainly it's just so many ways to deal with it and the best way is the way it's comfortable for you as long as it isn't hurting anyone. The way that comes naturally to you and it's fascinating.

THOMAS: Would you think it's correct to say that Jasper is the person who first became interested in print making of the two of them?

GRINSTEIN: I wouldn't know if it's correct. Because that would have happened in ULAE (United Limited Art Editions] and that's where they both as far as I knew got into (?) printmaking so by the time we got to them they had already made prints, both of them. And I'm sure they are dated in their catalogue raisoneés and that's when you start the prints sometimes. Not even finished but that information is around. But I just have the feeling it was very much at the same time. They were partners with each other. They certainly saw each other socially all the time and when they went out to Tatyana's I think it probably was together. And then they worked separately, maybe too, but I don't know.

THOMAS: That's where Bob did *Accident*. (SG: Yes.) When I was speaking with Laddie Dill he said that at one point when he had a project, he had been disturbed because something in it broke. And Bob said oh don't worry about it, that often makes it better.

GRINSTEIN: That's right. Now that was Bob's approach to life. Go with what's natural. Go with what happens, go with it, make the best of it. And in printing when that stone broke it was a tragedy because they weren't going to draw another stone usually. It took them days and weeks to draw that stone so it was a tragedy and it was all on stone at that time not on plates. So it was much more difficult to deal with. You know Bob said it's a strange time of life for people at this time of civilization to be scratching on stones. But he loved the idea. It was a natural product and what happens to it is natural and that's why his approach was so successful. He made the best of things.

THOMAS: He said that to you. I had never heard that, that's wonderful.

GRINSTEIN: About this. Yes, he said it's a strange time of civilization to be scratching on a stone. But, but along with it went, "Boy that's exactly what I want to do." I love scratching on a stone; it's a natural product. And it's in the continuum of being an artist. Rembrandt scratched on one, Goya scratched on one. A lot of other special artists scratched on them. Da Vinci maybe. It came from the Bavarian limestone is what you made lithographs with, not etchings.

They're made differently. Woodcuts are made differently. Silk screens are made differently. Lithographs are done on the Bavarian limestone. They take the ink specially and if they're processed correctly the ink sinks into the stone and you can reprint it.

THOMAS: I've been looking at Whistler's lithographs and there's a tenderness about them.

SG: Yeah well because each artist brings their stone to what they are doing and with Whistler's the tenderness was a big part of it. With Bob's it's the environment, just absorbing the environment. And putting it down in some intelligent way but you know we each of our own description of that. And far be it from me to describe what Bob was feeling when he was doing prints. Because he wanted to and he did them very well and he loved experimenting with it. Well part of it. And that's one of the reasons he loved Los Angeles. Los Angeles always an easy place to experiment. We experimented with *Booster* on the first paper of that sort. Cause people, you went to the Flax store wherever it was and you bought 22" by 30" and you said what is the largest paper you've got. Well there's some hand-made papers a few that are bigger but most of them may be 30" by 40" at the biggest. And then we do *Booster* and Gemini talked to the paper manufacturers and they said well we make it in a roll. You can order as long of a roll as you want. The width is decided. It's either 40 inches high or 60 inches high and then you cut it if you want to but it's as long as you want it to be. So no one had ever seemed to ask that question before.

THOMAS: Who from Gemini had those conversations?

GRINSTEIN: Well we were all in on it. The technical guy, but we had printers. All of our printers had gone to print school. Most of them had masters in printing and so you know we were around the print world. And we certainly, as the, let's say the more front office people. Sidney handles now the artists and production. I handle sales and curating but we always knew what the problem was. Hey, we got a thing here that's really big. Where are we going to get the paper to do it? Any one of us could have very easily called the print agent and said hey what's the biggest we can get paper. We even did hand made paper, we did some hand made paper for Richard Serra when it was 20 feet by 21 feet. Unique piece. One of them is ten feet by 11 feet. So you could go in the ways that your instinct told you, that your artist wanted to go in and so you wanted to present that but each place had a different instinct about that. The Gemini instinct was always "it's an artist's work shop" so whatever the artist wants we'll try and do, we'll look into it.

THOMAS: Talk about a helping hand in the very best way.

GRINSTEIN: Well yes, in this case it could be a helping hand. People say to me as an art supporter, as an art groupie, oh you really made some of these things happen. Bull shit. We didn't make anything happen, we were there to help it happen, but in lithography or in printing you are a collaborator. That's one of the reasons I think it was more difficult for Jasper. I don't think he's a natural collaborator. He's not comfortable doing it that way. Bob loves it. He was a natural collaborator; he didn't have to fight it. But Jasper rose above it. He wanted to do prints at that time and he did fabulous ones, but it wasn't because the collaboration part came easily to him. And we got to be around it when they were doing that when they were experimenting. An artist doesn't (inaudible) around. They'll have their assistant around -- no choice, but they don't want people being around when they are experimenting and haven't decided what they want to do and how. And then lithography or printing, you have to be around because you're collaborating with them so you get to see the thought process. You get to see what they're thinking about. They don't always exchange that with you so I can't say what Bob was thinking about during those times by what he asked me. I don't remember him asking me any special probing questions. But when we were in China for instance, he sure wanted some things done and I was the one that was supposed to get them done. That was my job.