

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Smith, Philip / Interview for "To and About Robert Rauschenberg" /
Arts Magazine, 1976

June 5, 1976

Dear Robert Rauschenberg:

I have enclosed the raw tape for your reading. The article,
to be finished in July, out in October, will be first sent
to you for approval.

Regards,

Philip Smith

Robert Rauschenberg
Transcript - Tape I
2/26/76

Philip Smith: I want to ask you about the work of the last five years in which I see dramatic yet subtle changes occurring in the work. In HOARFROST there seemed to be a letting go, the relinquishing of control to the images and their structure and a general acceptance of how things are.

Robert Rauschenberg: I think that started with the difficult time I had using technology. Logically I could see that working with Experiments in Art and Technology and industry and technology there was a lack of conscience, there was no aesthetic there. They were actually in control of a lot of materials, mediums and ideas that ought to be public property and you shouldn't have to wait until the Princess telephone is invented to hide them. All of those pieces were unnaturally but I think naturally cumbersome. There wasn't any back up technology that I had because I am mostly tactile. Every time I tried to do those pieces there were a few that I thought were successful there were many more that just didn't work and they always weighed a half a ton you needed ten people to lift them. They were always fragile. My first real reaction to that, like a reactionary, was in Florida where it was nearly impossible to get any normal or academic materials to work with, which I liked the challenge. I liked very much working on location under the same conditions. Making work under the conditions which exist there. Consciously I tried to figure out what material was the most available and it seemed to me that no matter where I go there are always a bunch of cardboard boxes stacked around somewhere. So the transition actually started with the cardboard boxes. There are a lot of cardboard pieces working with the cardboard pieces they had in order to have their strength to stand, there seemed to be too many corners. You punish yourself by asking yourself more questions than you have, I started worrying about Cubism. And of course there is nothing Cubist, but you can see that if you're working with a bunch of cardboard boxes and you're not very historically inclined that nearly anything can be misread. I was interested in the kind of language there, that the boxes have. If you've ever read a box they say absurd things. Then you combine those things, so most of those pieces are named after what they call themselves, just lined up, one after another. Then there was a problem of storage and warpage. They had to be flat, they took a lot of room and they were irregular in all directions, so there wasn't a flat place. I think that the HOARFROST came from a kind of challenge. It was the closest I could come at that time of presenting an image on as little material as possible. So that unless you see something you almost don't know that it's there. So it had without the bulk and with the responsiveness of its environment carried our common bombardment of images still. It was about their weightlessness it wasn't about practicality but the weightlessness and their response as carriers without having to know where the fuse box is.

PS: There seems that there was an intentional overload of information and you purposely allowed the fuses to blow.

RR: The whole technique is practically a blind one. By the time you've made your fourth turn, the transfers were done on a press called Grasshopper in Florida. The bed prints about six and a half feet by forty some odd inches, so if you do a twenty foot piece, twelve feet by twenty feet, and its all one process, its through the press one time, by the time you have made your fourth fold its nearly impossible to remember what's top, what's bottom, what's front. Those pieces were almost like walking through the woods not knowing what you're going to see next.

PS: What I see in your approach to the boxes and HOARFROST is that of a foreigner from a non linear culture and how he would perceive the information and digest it. In HOARFROST the result was the abundance of images. In the boxes he approached them, not knowing their specific utilitarian function and made them fit his own needs.

RR: Right, you could wear it, you could eat it.

PS: Your perspective seems to be one of amazement with objects and images.

RR: I feel an affinity to objects, I always have. I use it as an anti-ego or styletrip. By having to respect the object which is usually not a new object but one that is carrying its history. To celebrate at the same time that surprise you were talking about if you came into another culture and you didn't know what this was and respect where it had been and what it had been doing. Like when I'm talking to you, I have to know something about you or we can't talk or we're not talking.

PS: In HOARFROST the images were related to those in earlier work but somehow they were set free, as if they were in a zoo and some one turned the key and said 'OK, you're free.' They ran all over the place, the kids were let out of school for the day.

RR: The whole period of what I call the Pedestrian series, which followed the, I can't keep up with the dates, but right after the all reds that Charlene is part of, in order to get out of monochromes, which was a trap which Albers had set for me, by my resistance to him, about making one color work for another, is a form of slavery to me. One of the ideas I had there, to take care of that problem was I was living off of Fulton Street and there were lots of second hand hardware stores or cut rate hardware stores and they had all these paintsthat the labels had come off of. In all these situations, you almost have to make a rule for freedom. So you're always caught somewhere in that trap, nothing is done if you let everything go. You can't have something unless you have some kind of activity, but you have to figure out some structure for that activity, no matter how ridiculous or logical it might be. So I would buy all those paints and I wouldn't allow myself any choice. If I could see what color it was, because the can had been bent, I wouldn't take that. They also fit in with my economical scheme too, because they were very cheap. I would come back and open these cans which was like manufacturing your own Christmas. You would say, 'All right, now I'm going to go get my colors.' But perverse in the sense so that you don't know what they are. Egoless because you're sharing the responsibility of just picking up blindly one can after another. But Christmas like in the sense of that I couldn't wait to get home to see what I had, because all

the packages had been warped. Then you open it up and you have the serious responsibility of not desiring any color that you don't have. That's what I mean by you have the rules. So there was the whole series there that was an attempt to do maybe a seed of HOARFROST in just that planning.

PS: Is there any relationship between HOARFROST and what you did in BED beside their physical structure?

RR: The BED was more of an economical idea. I used to pick up my lumber for stretchers off construction after Con Edison quit on any street which wasn't necessarily the best materials, but that leaves room for the restorers. I had painted on all the towels, the bedsheets and finally got to this old quilt. I approached the material I approached the quilt as though it were an abstraction in itself already. Because at that time I was laying a ground to work on when I got into color from the all blacks and the all whites, I used funny papers for a color ground to try to force myself to get into color, because I wasn't, as I was accused of being, against color. But that was the last thing in the house that could be painted on and it was summer so I didn't need the quilt. You should try to paint on towels. Black and white stripe towels. The paint doesn't stick very well. I was trying to treat it abstractly, as an artist, as material. It wouldn't relinquish its identity nor even share it with me. Finally, I just had to give into it and say, 'Well, I might see you abstractly, but you don't see yourself abstractly, what you need is a pillow.' So then the pillow went in. There was never any idea like doing a bed.

PS: HOARFROST being very tactile in nature goes beyond its construction out of cloth. In a sense its filmic in that there are images in and out of focus which are constantly moving creating a very strong physical attraction to the work.

RR: I wrote about it saying that its either images thawing into view or freezing out of focus. So that no point in the piece is designed to control any other part. Just the exercise of the wind passing is enough to change whatever you're looking at anyway.

PS: There is a statement you made in the film, PAINTERS' PAINTING you were unrolling your CURRENTS print and you were talking about your love for newspaper and how terrific newspaper was and how people have to be out of their minds to throw newspaper out.

RR: It wasn't quite like that. It was like this moment and that moment. Its very difficult if you have a concern for people then you have to have a concern for what's going on in the world. I don't think that its ever been any better and I don't think its ever been any worse. But I know that survival somehow means that you must keep an eye on it. I think one of the most difficult things in the world to do would be to do a fantastic art work that could, if something is great art, well then by the nature of its composition, it immediately, or too quickly becomes beautiful. And that is exactly the opposite of what you're trying to say. You're not trying to say necessarily, at least I'm not, that things are ugly, but I am I think, consistently, involved in evoking other peoples sensibilities. I am not a studio artist, I am flat out

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show minded. What I said about the newspapers is that there was something I thought quite callous going on that by the fact you had paid ten cents for all the news of the day you thought you could wipe your ass on it, or feed it to your cat or forget it. With CURRENTS I tried to take those same discarded news' and displace them, relocate them so that your dime wouldn't amount to a hell.

PS: What type of information or images are so special from newspapers?

RR: Its describing our day. Its a very direct, literal calendar of where you are and where everyone else is.

PS: I wish you wouldn't do this, you keep jumping my questions.

RR: I'm sorry.

PS: I feel in your work very much, I feel a fool actually.

RR: How can I help it, you're asking me.

PS: There seems to be a calendar affect in the work. What seems to be going on is the notation of objects and images that pass through our lives. You are sort of a scribe and by notating this passing and fixing it into some system we can start hanging not only personal memory and personal experience but social experience social memory onto your work. One can come to your work in a personal as well as a social sense.

RR: But don't you think that's what art was in the begining.

PS: Yes,

RR: Did I jump you again

PS: Yes, I think I should go home and let you do the tape.

PS: How has your art changed your life?

RR: The most important reason I'm interested in art is, I know this sounds corny, but it's its power to communicate. I think that concept has been very misused. I mean it very literally in the most direct, simple terms. I feel selfish in the sense of being so interested in art because of that reason. I'm doing it because I'd like to encourage a more flexible reaction, responsible and flexible reaction to the actual moment itself. I think that if I were ever successful, completely successful in my work, then there would be no need for art.

PS: Which leads to another question, how do you think art affects the world at large? Going beyond the galleries, that special, invisible quality that art has?

RR: I'm interested in the at large

PS: It does have a diffusing quality by which it seeps into the culture and changes things.

RR: I would hope that that would be its only job. But to survive in the structure, galleries are necessary and so are museums. OK, say someone buys a painting only for the investment, it might be the possibility

that a stranger would walk past and see what I have intended, or what was intended, not what I intended to be seen and change their mind about something. My work is about wanting to change your mind. Not for the arts sake, not for the sake of that individual piece, but for the sake of the mutual co-existence of the entire environment.

PS: That's like the journey of a thousand miles starting with one step, you start with one person which affects the next and the next and so on. What there a definite transition point in which you started working in paper fabric and clay or was a slow evolution?

RR: That's what I said, it was a hangover from technology. I struggled seriously with technology. One thing that I liked with working with technology was that you brought several professions together. Its another reason I like theatre, its another reason I like print making, because you bring the object itself, has mutual fathers, which is another ego-erasing trick.

PS: Then your involvement with Art and Technology has diffused into your work that you are doing now?

RR: It did, it was just too clumsy for me. I still think that the making of the piece is the most exciting, I always feel extremely let down when I finish something and almost disinterested. But if its a good piece it has aroused my curiosity in the next one.

PS: Is that when your work beccmes serial rather than an individual exploration?

RR: Yes.

PS: How do you think that your involvement with or even just the creation of Experiments in Art and Technology has affected art today?

RR: I think certainly a lot of the interest in video and even something as simple as neon came out of that mutual curiosity that we were all having. It had many more possibilities. The hologram is very new, I'm sure that it has future possibilities that no one has been able to digest yet. That would really be the no object object. E.A.T. was a complete failure because of the terror that industry felt by these foreigners in their midst. And yet industry has tried to continue the interest particularly on the research level which they are completely dependent on because there is a certain point where you dont need anymore money, you dont need anymore pension plans, you don't need anymore golf courses or tennis courts or swimming pools or hifi sets and they don't know what to bribe this curious human being with. That was the most rewarding part, working with the engineers and the scientists and travelling from profession to profession. The work was the trip. We wanted their information at that time. Their access to miraculous materials. Artists were fossilizing going to the art store. It was the same brushes, you want a cheap brush, you want a good brush, you want medium cadmium or deep cadmium.

PS: Even if the whole venture of Art and Technology was a failure it did open up an incredible amount of concerns.

RR: I think we established the problem. We took the problem out of the closet.

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PS: In what way does your interest in printmaking go beyond the mere distribution of the work.

RR: I'll start listening if they turn the tv down. I'm cursed with periphery hearing. I'm near sighted so I guess that's my compensation Ask me again.

PS: When you do a print, the interest is not just the distribution.

RR: No, its this search for the possibility of working more or less in community, encouraging, inviting, the best aspects, most involved aspects of different people to possibly eliminate the idea of the one man football team. Who's got the ball? Nobody's got the ball. What ball?

PS: Great.

RR: And you're still working.

PS: That often seems to be a problem in that the artist is always an individual and is stuck with doing everything themselves.

RR: And their work then becomes a victim of the execution of whatever idea it was that that person had. And weakened or strengthened by the individual talent.

PS: Does the multible reproduction of your work affect its quality. In HOARFROST or the paper pieces their remained a delicacy throughout the series.

RR: Usually, well certainly lately, most of my print work has been unique pieces made in a unique situation all by hand. I'm not interested in the mass distribution except that at a point where you're considered a successful artist, there are a lot of people who could afford a unique print of mine which I have myself made that certainly could not afford a painting. You can see how that can be a problem. Your auction prices are rising and there are still just as many beautiful people that you would like to invite to, you can't say your art, but that you would want to share the world with.

PS: With each piece being unique, what happens when you work in India or Florida or at Gemini, how does that affect you, affect the work you turn out. Do you pick up clues from the environment or just materials? What happens?

RR: More or less.

PS: So in a sense you are totally dependent on the environment.

RR: Yes, I mostly just start off nude. I can't work with preconceptions. Sometimes when I'm in a situation, like mostly a physical, literal situation like on an airplane and you can't get up and start working on an airplane. You better keep your safety belt on there. I'll make sketches of pieces. Those are never done. Even though when I get off the plane and have room enough to work, the fact that I am even attempting to even start that way I know is like sort of a clown's suit that I'm wearing to get myself to work. But I am trusting my immediate response again. It's awfully hard not to make up your

mind. That needs all the attention that you can possibly muster.
To not do something that you know.

PS: Cut it out, you're now on the second page. You have no business
do n. that..

RR: You know I'm near sighted so I couldn't see.

PS:: In the new work you still maintain your aesthetic of the combine.
as your main vehicle for expression. Are you working with different
boundaries or concerns now?

RR: Well, there is one other thing that was both in the printings
and particularly now in the new JAMMERS and very few of those, if
any were shown at Leo's because of limited space and my intoxication of
work, that the spectator has an invitation to touch. It was easy with
the HOARFROST because with those materials you just pass your eyes.
In earlier objects there is this interest in an actual hand touching
and doing something. The pieces in India exercised that very well.
There are maybe six or five or seven holes, you have the invitation
to move a bamboo peg from one place to another proving that it
doesn't make any difference, but you still have a choice. In the
JAMMERS, there are JAMMERS made out of rattan and fabric that work
like that too.

PS: Why were the JAMMERS devoid of any images?

RR: I've nearly always made changes, sometimes exaggerated changes
in the way that I'm working because I'm beginning to feel comfortable
in it. I was beginning to feel comfortable. I wasn't being surprised
myself, as the artist. I would rather keep on a pitch with myself
that when I do a piece I can say, 'You did THAT?'

PS: In JAMMERS was your concern mostly with the material and its
capabilities?

RR: With the HOARFROST I was interested in the confusion of excesses
in imagery. When it became comfortable to work that way, then I was
interested in the leannes of JAMMERS. The flexibility of austerity
without being minimal. Because they're rather opalescent and if I'm
lucky, more decadent. There is a kind of morality that I read in art
like minimal-art, conceptual-art, any of these group-arts that I am
not interested in. I am not interested in the proof because if you
can prove something then you are imposing another restriction on that
individual. Franz Kline once said that one of the most uninteresting
things you can be, is right.

PS: Do have any observations on the purpose or intent of art today
because sometimes it seems awfully useless.

RR: It seems to me that the confusion that is going on now is so
satisfied with itself that that is where the sickness is. The confusion
isn't really authentic, its just persuasive.

PS: Once you said something to the effect of, 'It's very easy to be
good, my work is about what I don't know.'

RR: That's why I like that Franz Kline remark.

PS: Yes, but what is it now that you don't know?

RR: The next piece. But I'm going home now to work again. You're not on any page now are you? I don't want to mess you up.

PS: You've messed me up enough. I also wanted to ask you about the subtleness

RR: You probably made a list of questions just to distract yourself so that we could talk.

PS: Probably.

RR: I hope so, if not I've failed again.

PS: No, you're doing fine. I sense a delicacy in as long as I've know your work which I see as being refined into a very subtle nature.

RR: I think that that is just a continuation of my disgust for force.

PS: There is one image that struck me which is repeated in your autobiographical pieces and another version in HOARFROST of a man with a glider or apparatus attached to his back to enable him to fly.

RR: I have difficulty with images, like I was telling you that I was working with the cardboard boxes and because a cardboard box is a cube I'M thinking, 'Wow, I hope this doesn't look too much like Cubism.' When you use images out of context you have to mix them in some way so that they are neither the literal illustration to remind you where you saw it, nor should they collect themselves in any way to build a pattern or logic. No scheme. So that each image, even though its in a cluster, images may be in a cluster, in the pieces with images, so that it won't tell you something that you already know, nor will it go into fantasy. So it can't be extreme realism nor fantasy.

PS: When you were a little boy what did you want to grow up to be?

RR: I think I had so little confidence, I don't think I even thought about it.

PS: You weren't going to be a fireman were you?

RR: That takes confidence.

PS: Your retrospective that's coming up

RR: I'd like it not to be called a retrospective

PS: Well, the big collection of work

RR: The survey show

PS: The survey show that's coming up soon

RR: At the Smithsonian

PS: How is that going to affect you or your work to see it all

laid out chronologically.

RR: I approach exhibitions when there is a real massing of work, I'm usually there for the hanging, oops, I don't like that one either.

PS: Let's change that

RR: The installation, I've been there for many hangings by the way, in taking even familiar works and using the architecture to change your mind about those works too. With the Smithsonian show and the Modern I want to insist that it doesn't turn into a cataloging of this is the best from this period, this is the best from that period. I install shows so that one is very unsatisfied by just going from label to label. I would like for them to feel restless going from piece to piece.

PS: I feel very strongly that it's important to see both the good work and the bad work, both are equally important. The artist should not be concerned just with providing the public with good work.

RR: I do too. The pieces that don't work are actually the anatomy and muscles of the successful ones. That's why so often a successful piece is a bore.

PS: Do you ever consider your audience when you're working and their reaction to the work?

RR: The only audience that I actually recognize and that I'm curious about are the people that I don't know.

PS: Yes, that's who I'm speaking of. Do you ever concern yourself with them?

RR: I couldn't because then I would be making a generality which the work is against by trying to anticipate a reaction.

PS: Do you ever paint anymore?

RR: Yeah, I'm not against it.

PS: I'm done. Do you want to say anything else.

RR: No, do you?

PS: No, I'm satisfied.

RR: I had a marvelous time.

End of tape

Dear Robert Rauschenberg:

Here is the first rough draft which has been accepted for publication in the March issue of ARTS pending various additions, subtractions and rewrites. As for illustrations I asked the editor if we could include some sexy photos of you to jazz up the article and make it look nice. He agreed but said he had never seen any sexy photographs of Robert Rauschenberg. So with your permission and at your convenience I would like to bring over a fine and reputable photographer to make some. Will call.

With best wishes for a happy birthday,

Philip Smith

Philip Smith

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OLD

It seems that what he is after, his continual struggle, is to find and maintain a continual ever-present, self regulating human aesthetic. A human aesthetic not dependent upon the pontification of established avant garde ideologies but rather a behavior dependent upon and reactive to the real realities of the world, both personal and social. I am stuck at this point between describing a man with a genuine sense of how things are and a body of work which when viewed objectively without its historical attachments speaks in the most simplistic and direct terms about the world.

As blatantly as the work says, "get off your ass", it does so with incredible politeness and gentility which currently seems to be in a state of intense personal as well as representation refinement. Specifically, this state of tender subtleness seems to be in a period of maturation during the last five or six years. Superficially and intrinsically the work remains the same. It is the affect of the intent that is still dramatically yet more masterfully choreographed so as to appear there and not there and still be firmly rooted on each side. More so than ever before the work annotates those seemingly vacant moments in our perceptual operations which strongly yet invisibly alter and effect our decisions, opinions and behavior. What is at work here is not strictly objectness or pictorial representation but a literal flow of perceptual moments or events. Based on this one can not spend too much time in front of or with one of Rauschenberg's pieces, especially the recent work. However, repeated viewing

Rauschenberg 2

yields a continual flow of information much like a radio which is always on.

Even though extremely momentary, the work also functions as a calendar upon which social as well as personal events and memories are fixed. This calendar is not based on any mathematical system of thirty days or twenty four hours but on human myth and practice in the late twentieth century.

My strongest admiration for Rauschenberg is his willingness to provoke as well as accept self challenge. Implicit in the acceptance of this challenge is the risk of failure ~~and~~ and unsuccessful pieces. "The pieces that don't work are actually the anatomy and muscles of the successful ones. That's why so often a successful piece is a bore." A fear of being at ease ~~in~~ with the process and the work itself drives Rauschenberg to always seek what is not known. "I've nearly always made changes, sometimes I exaggerate changes in the way that I am working because I'm beginning to feel comfortable in it. I would rather keep on a pitch with myself that when I do a piece I can say, 'you did THAT!'" It is because of this fundamental and highly personal working requirement that the recent work lovingly incites our staid convictions with such grandeur and humility that we effortlessly fall into awareness of our awkward but human selves.

His assistance in E.A.T.'s founding formalized two major concerns in regard to the production of art, namely, working with the unknown both in materials and concepts and working in community with other artists and the world at large. The undertaking of an assessment of industry and

and technology in terms of aesthetic possibilities, with larger ramifications for practical and, in an indirect sense, political applications to the receiving social system has created attitudes of concern and curiosity not only toward technology but also toward other disciplines and sciences which affect and direct our lives. "Logically I could see from working in E.A.T. and with industry and technology that there was no aesthetic and a resulting lack of conscience. They were in control of a lot of materials, mediums and ideas that ought to be public property long before the Princess telephone is invented." Working with E.A.T raised more questions than it answered. "I struggled seriously with technology. Artists were fossilizing going to the art store. It was the same brushes, you want a cheap brush, you want a good brush, you want medium cadmium or deep cadmium. The most rewarding part of E.A.T was working with the engineers and scientists and travelling from profession to profession. E.A.T was a complete failure because of the terror that industry felt by these foreigners in their midst. And yet industry has tried to continue the interest particularly on the research level which they are completely dependent on because there is a certain point where you don't need anymore money, you don't need anymore pension plans, you don't need anymore golf courses or tennis courts or swimming pools or hifi sets and they don't know what to bribe this curious human being with. We wanted their access to information and miraculous materials."

The first major group of work to emerge from this somewhat

ORACLE
THEATRE WORKS FROM 9 EVENTS
"REVOLVERS"
"CARNAL CLOCKS"
"SOUNDINGS"

disoriented yet refocused sensibility was the cardboard boxes. Rauschenberg's approach to the boxes is that of a foreigner coming from a non-linear, ~~linear~~ non technological culture. This person totally unaware of the defined usage for this object would tailor them to fit his needs. "He could wear them or he could eat them." This non acceptance or reevaluation of culturally defined values, norms and operational procedures is exactly the stance taken by the founders and participants of E.A.T. Industry's attitude was/is that their research and their products are designed to serve a specific need. The alteration of those purposes for individual or aesthetic purposes seems possible only by an outsider acutely aware of other possibilities inherent in all things.

THIS IS WHERE CARDBOARDS STARTED → "My first real reaction was in Florida where it was nearly impossible to get any normal or academic materials to work with. I liked very much the challenge of working on location and making work under existing conditions. Consciously I tried to figure out what material was the most available and it seemed to me that no matter where I go there are always a bunch of cardboard boxes stacked around somewhere. So the transition actually started with the cardboard boxes. All of the cardboard pieces were unnaturally but I think naturally cumbersome. I didn't have any back up technology. A few I thought were successful but there were many more that just didn't work. They were fragile and ~~big~~ (weighed a half a ton and needed ten people to lift them.) There was also a problem of warpage and storage because they had to be flat. ^{OR HUNG.} They

took up a lot of room and were irregular in all directions. In order for the cardboard pieces to have the strength to stand there had to be what seemed to be too many corners. You punish yourself by asking yourself more questions than you have, I started worrying about Cubism. Of course there is nothing Cubist but you can see that if you're working with a bunch of cardboard boxes and you're not very historically inclined then nearly anything can be misread. I was interested in the kind of language that the boxes have. If you have ever read a box, they say absurd things. Then when you

combine those things, most of the pieces are named after what they call themselves, just lined up one after another."

The equilateral respect and acceptance of all inherent properties of both living and inanimate things, as well as ~~their~~ their possibilities for change, is demonstrated in the act of having things, "call themselves." "I feel an affinity to objects, especially not a new object but one that is carrying its history, where it has been and what it has been doing." This affinity creates the necessary space in which images and objects may gather ~~and~~ to combine and form their own social logic which may simultaneously impart mystery as well as truth.

No where in the work of Robert Rauschenberg has there been a more realistic yet totally fantastic portrayal of fragments and icons involved in our individual and collective lives than in the HOARFROST SERIES. With the relinquishing of self control and the complete surrender to the unique personality of each image, from HOARFROST emerges a crystalline and strategic sensibility of our modern times. In a strongly

incestuous modd, HOARFROST uses actual communication fragments simultaneously as subject and object to effect our dislocation in a manufactured reality in part due to "our common bombardment of images." Navigation through this dense yet atmospheric existence relies on ~~refer~~ reference points as transitory as the wind. The random layering of floating imagery coupled with the use of ~~some~~ sheer fabric for their physical support produces an irregular filmic experience based primarily on motion and the clarity or focus of the images.

"I think that the HOARFROST came from a certain challenge. It was the closest I could come at that time of presenting an image on as little material as possible. Unless you see something you almost don't know it's there. Just the exercise of the wind passing is enough to change whatever you're looking at. Without the bulk, but with the responsiveness of it's environment HOARFROST carried our common bombardment of images. It wasn't about their practicality but about their weightlessness and their response as carriers. No point in the piece is designed to control any other part. The whole technique is practically a blind one. The transfers were done on a press called Grasshopper in Florida. The bed prints about six and a half feet by forty inches. If you do a twelve by twenty foot piece and it's all one process, but the time you have made your fourth fold it's nearly impossible to remember what's top, what's bottom, what's front. Those pieces were almost like walking ~~through~~ through the woods not knowing what you're going to see next."

"With the HOARFROST I was interested in the confusion of excesses in imagery. When it became comfortable to work that way, then I was interested in the leanness of HAMMERS. The flexibility of austerity without being minimal."

Part of the magic inherent in the work is its receptivity to the environment of its making. Even though the work may appear in serials each piece really is completely new.

"I can't work with preconceptions. I trust my immediate response, it's awfully hard not to make up your mind. That need all the attention that you can possibly muster, to not do something that you already know." The ability to acknowledge and fully use one's intuitive perceptions of a situation is a risky yet honest commitment to the actuality of events which comprise our lives. This commitment which has been presented in various forms ~~of~~ and degrees of intensity has become in the last few years extreme in its delicacy yet subtle in its powerfulness "which is just a continuation of my disgust for force." The most simplistic yet profound comment that can be made about the work of Robert Rauschenberg is that it is human. Human in the most complete and fundamental sense.

"The most important reason I'm interested in art is, I know this sounds corny, but is its power to communicate. I think that concept has been very misused. I mean it very literally in the most direct, simple terms. I feel selfish in the sense of being so interested in art because of that reason. I'm doing it because I'd like to encourage a more flexible and responsible reaction to the actual moment itself. I think that if I were ever successful, completely successful in my work, then there would be no need for art."

it seems that what he is after, his continual struggle, is to find and maintain a continual ever-present, self regulating human aesthetic. A human aesthetic not dependent upon the pontification of established avant garde ideologies, but rather a behavior dependent upon and reactive to the real realities of the world, both personal and social. I am stuck at this point between describing a man with a genuine sense of how things are and a body of work which when viewed objectively without its historical attachments speaks in the most simplistic and direct terms about the world.

As blatantly as the work incites our sensibilities, it does so with incredible politeness and gentility. This generous and cordial invitation/reception for participation in and of the world has always been, but is more so now, a reflection of an individuals need to confront and at the same time, work with, the world. There seems to be more of a willingness to address oneself in terms of tender subtleness rather than disturbing confrontation, which has caused the impact to become more effective and thereby more far reaching. This invisible and undefineable effect remains immeasurable in its breadth and scope. The implications of the activity of Robert Rauschenberg on the culture has yet to be ascertained.

More so than ever before the work annotates those seemingly vacant moments in our perceptual operations which strongly yet invisibly alter and effect our decisions, opinions and behavior. What is at work here is not strictly objectness or pictorial representation but a literal flow of perceptual moments and events. Simultaneous occurrence; the presence of

all things, of all people in our lives at all times. Human history; the casual notation of the events which pass through our lives and irrevocably intertwine and interconnect us all in various degrees to an invisible yet essential network which produces and maintains humanity; its society, its culture. Even though extremely momentary, the work also functions as a calendar upon which social as well as personal events and memories are fixed. This calendar is not based on any mathematical system of thirty days or twenty four hours, but on human myth and practice in the late twentieth century. It is this source which supplies the work its importance as well as its power and enables it to exist and function in an incredible number of realms. The art of Robert Rauschenberg provides an enormous range of tools with which we may examine, reconstruct and enjoy our activity and movement.

The magic and perpetual applicability of the work to our lives stems from its founding in the concept of change. Its intended result is the subtle transformation of the individual through the creation of yet another point of reference. Only through a flexible framework can one respond to the continual current of events which collectively and individually comprise our lives. "I am, I think, consistently involved in evoking other people's sensibilities. My work is about wanting to change your mind. Not for the arts sake, not for the sake of that individual piece, but for the sake of the mutual co-existence of the entire environment."

The creation and exploration of such an environment

was the fundamental cause for the founding of Experiments in Art and Technology. At some point there was the entrance of information and technology into and around and about our lives. New ideas, energies and materials appeared, completely unknown in the history of the world. And as part of the world, their potential and application needed experimental study and expansion to ends other than those originally specified. Basically the questions raised were; what is this, how does it work and how can it work for us. At the time of E.A.T.'s founding the impact of these new forms was so pervasive and overwhelming that the mere acknowledgement of their presence was an enormous job. Even now in the late seventies our approach to the subject remains somewhat unsophisticated and artless. The beauty and applicability of a new information/technological civilization is first becoming apparent.

Rauschenberg's assistance in E.A.T.'s founding formalized two major concerns in regard to the production of art, namely, working with the unknown both in materials and concepts and working in community with other artists and the world at large. "I struggled seriously with technology. Artists were fossilizing going to the art store. It was the same brushes, you want a cheap brush; you want a good brush, you want medium cadmium or deep cadmium." I think a lot of the interest came out of that mutual curiosity that we were all having; we established the problem. I'm sure that there are future possibilities that no one has been able to digest yet."

The undertaking of an assessment of industry and technology in terms of aesthetic possibilities with larger ramifications for practical and, in an indirect sense, political applications to the receiving social system has created attitudes of concern and curiosity not only toward technology but also toward other disciplines and sciences which affect and direct our lives."Logically I could see from working in E.A.T. and with industry and technology that there was no aesthetic and a resulting lack of conscience. They were in control of a lot of materials, mediums and ideas that ought to be public property long before the princess telephone is invented. E.A.T. was a complete failure because of the terror that industry felt by these foreigners in their midst. The most rewarding part of W.A.T. was working with the engineers and scientists and travelling from profession to profession. Industry has tried to continue the interest, particularly on the research level which they are completely dependent on because there is a certain point where you don't need anymore money, you don't need anymore pension plans, you don't need anymore golf courses or tennis courts or swimming pools or hifi sets and they don't know what to bribe this curious human being with. We wanted their access to information and miraculous materials."

"Access to information and miraculous materials" was an aggressive attempt at working art and aesthetic considerations into the population at large. For the first time there was (and still is) the possibility of having art a part of everyone's

lives from both specific as well as anonymous sources. Much of the ideas, energy and excitement that was generated in connection with E.A.T. has been refined and applied on a smaller scale to his individual work in the last few years. As with E.A.T. Rauschenberg has continued his examination of different materials as well as the "search for the possibility of working more or less in community. Encouraging, inviting, the best aspects, the most involved aspects of different people to possibly eliminate the idea of the one man football team."

Underlying these operational innovations remains his willingness to promote and accept change,

"I've nearly always made changes, sometimes exaggerated changes in the way that I'm working because I'm beginning to feel comfortable in it. Otherwise I'm not being surprised myself, as the artist. I would rather keep on a pitch with myself so that when I do a piece I can say, 'you did THAT!' The pieces that don't work are actually the anatomy and muscles of the successful ones. That's why so often a successful piece is a bore. I can't work with preconceptions. I trust my immediate response. It's awfully hard not to do something that you already know. I am not interested in proof because if you can prove something then you are imposing another restriction on that individual. Franz Kline once said that one of the most uninteresting things you can be is right." This respect for the inherent identity of the art and its making is an integral part of

his approach to his job and responsibility as an artist.

Robert Rauschenberg continues to set and work towards seemingly unattainable and as yet unestablished aesthetic goals. The existence of an artist fully realizing their intention and potential is not only overwhelming and humbling but truly astonishing.

← His prolificness stems from his reaction to and respect for our expansive and bountiful civilization as well as the unique worth and importance of each individual in the creation and advancement of every human community.

It is really not necessary nor very satisfying to specifically list and superficially describe and discuss what works Robert Rauschenberg has presented for public viewing over the last few years. Their range in material and content has been enormous. Some have been more successful than others. Underlying each exploration has been the consistent and honest commitment to the actuality of events and the creation of an art that will not "tell you something that you already know." ↪

His concern with the realities and dimensions of human being in all its aspects from hunger to celestial navigation celebrates and comments on the enormous and continual human drama of which we are all a part.

The most simplistic yet profound comment that can be made about the work of Robert Rauschenberg is that it is human. Human in the most complete and fundamental sense.

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reaction to the actual moment itself.
I think that if I were ever successful,
completely successful in my work, then
there would be no need for art."

Robert Rauschenberg in conversation with the author,
February 26, 1976.

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- JAMMERS

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• BED

• CURRENTS

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