

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Bound Compilation of Robert Rauschenberg Interviews, 1985-1987 /
Unidentified / Interview with Robert Rauschenberg / Helsinki Opening, 1987

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HELSINKI. ONE

TRANSCRIBING FROM SIDE B

TAPE 1.D. STOCKHOLM/HELSINKI

(AT A DINNER)

RR: I was just talking about one of the first pieces that I did in Sweden. I restricted myself to two colors, black and white. I used the different colors of the sand and the dirt outside of the museum that I was working in. I picked up a piece of old masonite or something that I put the pieces on and rubbed different kinds of dirt into these two colors of paint. I thought it needed something else. I went into Curating and borrowed a tube of red Windsor Newton which was not from Sweden. I think the red was wrong. The painting was devastating to my hero at that time...Johansson, the poet?...she just told me, he lives in Florida now!

#: Nowadays he lives in Majorca.

RR: Good. I'd hate to have a hero hanging around. Heroes shouldn't live in the neighborhood.

like Rembrandt. Now I don't think all Rembrandts are that great, but he is great. But there is no reason that you really have to fall on your knees simply because it is a Rembrandt. All that mystery that has been built up as we critique alive...the live artists, the alive people living at the same time, we could manufacture communication that might make us all want to live together.

#: I think what Bob is telling us is that he is doing an exhibition all over the world, of his art, starting in Mexico, then Chile, Venezuela, China, Tibet, Tokyo and now it is trying to go someplace else. He transports all the work from each place to the new one. It is a lot of work...about a hundred and ten crates...about thirty thousand pounds of art.

TVP: No, thirteen tons...twenty-six thousand pounds.

HELSINKI OPENING MARCH 7, 1987

RR: In and Out of City Limits. And so I said just go ahead, and use your own work. And it is great. I go to different places and one of the exciting things is to be a photographer or have the photographer...if you have the camera and the film...well then you are looking at every shadow and every crack. Everything is some kind of part. It is good exercise even in painting.

(A QUESTION ABOUT MARCEL DUCHAMP)

Duchamp

He was a good friend. I have great respect for his wit. I am crazy about his wife. I guess one of the best compliments was that after he had been in retirement for how long...twenty or thirty years or something...the first exhibition that he went to was mine in New York. He picked out the pieces that I had made with the box with nails in it and rocks with a glass front, and I was absolutely out of it...he was my hero...he picked it up and shook it. It was called a music box. And he turned to his wife with this rock and stuff and turned it the other way and it played something else. He said, "I think I've heard this song." And that was a great compliment for me...that he was associating it with his works.

Before that Teeny Duchamp would go out and scout. She knew more about what was going on in the art world while he was in this sort of solitary retirement. Most of my artist friends...

That's a difficult question because I was never critical as part of my philosophy. I was never critical of other artists. But there is some art that is going on now that I really have great doubts as to whether I like it. But then, when I do that, you see, my having doubts about that, I wonder if I am not getting so academic by imposing my values on somebody else, that might be dangerous. I might be moving into some kind of new senility.

One of the things that I think changed...two things...that have changed...they are responsible for each other...changed the art world most drastically...one is the availability of exhibiting space, I'm talking about new work, there still could have been a show in Fort Myers Florida or Austin Texas even...and the idea that misinterpretation happened when the big switch from abstract expressionism changed which had all these roots in European concepts. At that point it looked as though Jasper Johns and myself, Jim Dine, Bob ^{HITMAN}Wedman, were all involved in shocking art. And we were absolutely just doing what we do. I don't think that you can put in temporary values like built in humor or chock because those things pass like fashion. It looks new today but... It's the academy. I think something happened to the public at that moment. The financial success of the switchover from European to American was so profitable that everybody assumed that you have to be shocked. It made it impossible for an artist to do something that was new if it was shocking, because it would just be academic. And so I think that somehow it made most of the creative people anemic. I think that there is now an artificial return to something that appears to be classic. For subject matter, the newer artists are painting grotesque, nightmares. And that is sort of where I came in, because I couldn't stand...I'm a realist...and I couldn't stand the surrealists saying that they only painted their dreams. Now if they did that with their eyes closed I might believe it. They'd wake up the next morning and there was a new painting, well okay. I'll buy that. But they didn't. They woke up. They had breakfast. They had cigarettes. They had coffee. They had wives and girlfriends. And then they went to work painting their

dreams.

**: What is your line of tradition?

RR: My line of tradition is that if I am in a working situation...I can't do this in a hotel, although I have done a lot of things in hotels, art and otherwise...when I am going to work I more or less just look around and see what's around me. If I've picked up something, touched something or moved somewhere, then something starts happening.

**: You worked in the '60s in the streets...

RR: I still do, but the part of Florida that I live in doesn't have the urban possibilities for objects. I have to be a little more self-conscious. For years I avoided that. I never wanted to go out looking for something. If you live in New York, or any urban place, everything is always there anyway. However, you make some kind of, not an idea but a something...a presentation of something, taking it out of its natural concept or attitude. Then you have some poetry.

**: What do you think about the gap between art and writing?

RR: I filled it. My teachers...*** He said, his big compliment to me was, because I was having a little trouble working with Merce--I quit right after he fired me, so I went to a benefit for Merce and Young hauled me out to the...because I was having a miserable time--Jasper Johns was sitting at the table, Merce wasn't talking to me, and I was just there to help raise money. John followed me out to the elevator and he said *** there wouldn't necessarily have to be two of us." Most people would sue him, but I thought it was wonderful. I admire him so much and what he was saying was that in the old times we worked like on ecology, he said, it took me years to understand then. You told me you couldn't read books and knew Zen.

Right now I am working with Trisha Brown Dance Company. Our latest collaboration was a thing with Laurie Anderson. Before that I did a big piece with computer controlled changes. With rear projectors and screens. With Laurie I made six different movies and a large sort of pyramidal fabric crystal shape which was for the movies to be projected on. Shifting through all these planes from fabric that was surplus from NASA.

At the Metropolitan Museum there is 112 meters of the continuous painting. Almost twice that much, so I ended it and send a part of it to the Met. They didn't ask the big price, which is to die. It looks good. I didn't like doing this but I had to go through and change the sequence of the panels and the units in order to make it look like itself. I hate that but you have to do it for the Met. Terry put the sound together...was the sound on? Uh-oh. You better call, Terry.

I have done lots of pieces with sound. That have anything other

than Vivaldi or Gregorian chants in the Metropolitan...blasphemy!

TVB: Speaking of Julian Schnabel. What kind of an idea is it that you can steal any way? That someone can walk through a studio and walk out with his idea.

**! I would like to say some words about this exhibition that we have been able to open tonight here in Helsinki. I will tell a little of the history. It is not very long. This exhibition started last spring/summer in the Wetterling Gallery in Stockholm. He suggested that I do a Rauschenberg show here in Helsinki. I was of course very interested because I always felt that from the '60s Bob's art has been very important. Perhaps one of the most important artists of the century. Bjorn Wetterling had been working with RR for a long time. He contacted him and luckily we had the opportunity to have a show here in Helsinki. I would like to express my thanks to Bjorn Wetterling and Bob for this possibility that you afforded me.

RR: I think I'm being upstaged.

! And finally, I would like to make my warmest thanks to you, Mr. Rauschenberg, for the possibility for us. For three reasons; first of all that you made it possible, second that you made the works especially for the show here in Helsinki, third that you yourself came. We are very honored and hope to see you many times at the gallery. This was like a big ray of contemporary art in the United States when you came and you saw how many people were in our gallery tonight. We also have a big man here in Finland. His name is Alvarado. Alvarado's surname is *. Because of that wave, I would like to give you one wave. Because I know that you like flowers Alvarado has made a vase. This is for you and I hope that you have a place in your home or studio for the flower vase.

RR: Thank you. You have been very gracious and I am grateful.

RR: Actually I want to say that Jasper, and Rosenquist and myself always knew how to drinks anyway. We just humored him. I'm just joking.

**! If we are all going to start giving speeches I think it is great. Because, for our American guests, in Finland we have a custom where the person seated to the right of the hostess, gets up and gives the thank you toast for the gathering. But before doing that I want to bring to your attention that as the Ambassador for the United States representing 245 million people, all sorts of people, it's not a very homogeneous group of people as you know in America. We have every type of possible person

that you can think of that lives in this country make up the great country of the United States. When we talk about trying to get our story across to citizens to foreign countries, it is not so easy to say what the US stands for. It is not so easy to explain what an American is, because an American in New York is totally different from an American in South Dakota or Texas or the west coast or wherever. We believe in similar things. We believe in freedom, democracy, human rights and such basic things as we all believe in. But we find that it is very important to get a better understanding across by not having just politicians talk, or people from the university talk, or people from the military talk. I found from talking to Bob tonight, that he very much believes that. As a matter of fact he has a whole activity going along those lines. Why don't we get more dialogue through the arts. Why don't we have people interested in the arts, not only artists themselves, but those people that are interested in art, talking. Because that is a common language that all of us understand. Not just Americans, Finns, Soviets, or French. Everyone understands and has a feeling about the arts that we may find to be a much better way to communicate with each other. I would love to sit down with Bob and have a long discussion about that. Part of my job is to get a better understanding in this country of what the US is all about, and it is not always easy. It is not always simple. If we find that art exchanges, things like this today, make a very great statement about what the US is about and true meanings of the arts. We are delighted that Bob Rauschenberg is here with his art and with his inspiration. I know that it is very difficult to get somebody of his stature, but he is very active doing it. He is all over the place.

RR: You won't find me at home.

#: He mentioned something about starting something out in China. It is fascinating to me. I will stop at that. I am delighted as the official representative of the US here to have him here and very proud to be an American and to view his art. Obviously it is great. Secondly, it is my pleasure to thank our host and hostess for a marvelous dinner, a great party. I am delighted to be included. Here's to both of you and to our guest of honor tonight.

RR: One of the things that I was talking about with the Ambassador was my organization, ROCI, which goes all over the world. ROCI addresses itself more specifically to sensitive areas, not to say third world countries. The Soviet Union and the US are now discussing, like some too frustrated old accountants, how many missiles you can have that will wipe out the world, and how many missiles I can have that will wipe out the world, and they are all going to lie to each other anyway. You can investigate half of my stock but I am going to keep the other half secret. And this is peace talks. And so what we were talking about was that the reason that peace is not popular as an energy is because it is looked at as a lack of war. It is looked at as a void. And peace is the best of life. The other is death. If somehow somebody could present peace as active energy,

that had to be worked at even harder than war, then I think it just might break out all over. It is not a void. A new awareness that peace is much more difficult to accomplish than war. I am so embarrassed because they are just counting each other's deadly weapons and figuring out, very suspiciously, how they can control them. And what one is going to give up and the other. And I do believe, like you said, one of the last and purest communications that the whole world has in common is through art. It doesn't need a translator. Everybody can read it. The intentions cannot be doubted. Most of the fear that we have of each other, and doubts, really come from confusion, misinformation, and suspicions. So that if we knew each other, I don't mean at this table, trust would grow. Or specific arguments, which does not threaten the entire world. We are at a point where somebody has got to get the message through. No offense, but politicians do have a local interest. I think for too many hundreds of years, trouble and fear have been the medium. We said before too, that the only other innocent, not unsophisticated, but innocent medium was sports. Now they have been turned into a political movement and a weapon of sorts. I think it really is up to the artists to be the negotiators for peace
