

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Bound Compilation of Robert Rauschenberg Interviews, 1985-1987 /
Unidentified / Interview with Robert Rauschenberg and TVB [Terry Van Brunt], undated

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RR, THR

TRANSCRIPTION OF TAPE #3

RR: ...Black Mountain College, North Carolina. But they were taken from the debris in New York, Bob carried it out when he covered the car with the quilt in New York City.

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TVB: But where did the quilt originally come from?

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It came from Dorothea Rockburne.

TVB: Oh really.

RR: That's right, exactly. There wouldn't be one part of her body that wouldn't just be absolutely more exquisite than anybody could compete with. But anyway, you know that USA is really a lousy newspaper.

RR: Well, but they called. And I tried changing the copy, you know, they only had fifteen more minutes and I said, well wait a minute, I'm going back twenty minutes. It wasn't much to say. She wasn't finished yet. Bradley can send her those kind of things. I was really pleased that she asked me...that was a really tough week...it was the same week that Boyce, Georgia and Javits died. And they were all slow deaths. I'm doing the memorial. Oh, I think it suits me. If I'm over it tonight we'll know it's showtime otherwise we'll call it a sampling.

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RR: Okay. Anyway, I've got a date, I thought it was going to be day after tomorrow, on the way back, not day after tomorrow...day after day after tomorrow...on the way back from ** to New York from Washington for the China embassy thing and I was just up there and see what IM Pei was doing...and he made such a BIG deal out of it and even though he talks personally which I also kind of like, don't you?, I have nothing against secretaries but I do have something against people who only let you talk to their secretaries, whether you scream and holler or not. In fact, I often get on the phone to protect my secretary from abuse. And so IM Pei is...I thought we were talking about whether it was between 3:30 and 5...we were talking about what month...well anyway I had to do, I don't have to do, I would love to do, I really do love to do Javits. Even his shortest shortcomings I knew. I went to his house one day for Father's Day and we ended up, we were only outside guests because you know it was Father's Day and Marion thought that Jack would like to have me be there. We ended up the night before the speech that, I can't remember, the Jewish guy who is so articulate that worked at the UN for so many years...before the 7 day war...

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RR: ABA Ebin...boy that's a hard name to remember. You either

remember Aba Ebin or you don't remember the name at all.

##: Well, when you say articulate and Israeli...

RR: He really is! He is gorgeous. I mean the English...you could study English with him. I mean Shakespeare is a slob compared to the way that man can turn a phrase. Anyway, I went in my Levis and at a certain point, particularly where the Javitses live, all those buildings look alike...the doormen look alike...on Park Avenue...it's not any more. They now, well, she lives on 67th Street and something else but at that time I had one of these resistances to like, I was just going to the telephone directory and look it up, well it's probably in the next block wouldn't that be silly looking in a telephone directory? To save face...making an asshole out of yourself because you are afraid to not trust yourself? Anyway, I had walked so long, I was absolutely totally drenched and it was supposed to be an end house and I knew their daughters and sons so I got in there just barely got warm, almost enough to breathe, and Marion comes into the room and says Jack just we're not going to have dinner tonight at home but you have to come with us. I ended up the only totally wet person in Levis, this wasn't that long ago, I mean it's not as if I look cute in Levis, you know, it was too late for that sort of almost...at the Plaza Hotel, surrounded by machine guns, being the most suspicious looking person there. And guess who comes to our table, Aba Ebin, my hero! I used to listen to him for hours on the UN. So I didn't have too much to say, I was just doing the usual expressions...hello, ...what would you say? Just listen,

##:The directions that I got to come out here said...don't speed here.

TVB: You can go 45 here.

##: We have a strip out on the Island like this.

TVB: You can go 45 but if you go 47 they don't like you.

##: We'll go 47 and the hell with them.

RR: So he said, I'm just listening...he said, I have to give this address tomorrow about the Seven Day War, either stop it or intensify it...and he said I can't think, I've got to get away from my ## thoughts. I said, my one remark, they'd never think of looking for you at my place. I was home ten minutes after the whole thing at the Plaza and I got a call and it was somebody asking if I was serious about the fact that he could come. I said, sure! But, I cooked all day...guess what I made...shellfish. I made my specialty, crab gumbo and then SHIT I was feeling...and I thought, Oh my God...Jews don't eat shells! It didn't bother him...he was gorgeous. He absolutely didn't bring me down at all. The house besides his bodyguards, the house was checked out three or four times before he got there and they even changed shifts while he was there. The doorbell rang

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and I wouldn't let anybody but me go down to see who was there. I haven't the slightest idea, it still fascinates me, what in the hell I would have done if it had been something. My father hated me because I wouldn't use guns, so what would I do if this was like the wrong caller?

**: Oh, you'd think of something.

RR: Probably would, probably would. It turned out to be, it was kind of scary, because it turned out to be some of the toughest looking guys I've ever seen in my whole life who were the replacements, I mean I almost got shot letting them in the house, can you imagine if I tried to keep them out? Another time I was in Israel, actually working on an exhibition for the museum, Oh, okay, this is supposed to be the way...we came in, we're all **, on our knees around him, anything. He sits down and says, God if it wasn't for the UN peace would break out anyway. This is where he's coming to my house to relax. Wonderful. He talked about everything, just everything. He just

ted to

relax. But he never...it's not so much WHAT he talked about as HOW he talked about it. Like I said, I mean, compared to Aba Ebin Shakespeare is a pig.

**: Or a shellfish.

RR: Well, he didn't make a scene about that so I didn't. I was in his house, visiting his wife, when he...well, two things happened. One was, it was the first time his daughter had come back from training school and there were cookies on and, this is in Jerusalem, he had never seen his daughter with her not being, not having permission to take her machine off. Within the same week he resigned from the Cabinet. And that's when he went to Cambridge, or someplace like that. I mean he wouldn't have anything to do with, not because his daughter wouldn't take her machine gun off, but it had a lot to do with things like that. It was strange to do artwork over there in the sense that the same people are sort of in power, like Perez, and you have dinner at a private home and all these people would show up and Ebin gave up his office, Golda Meir had decided that she...her son-in-law had convinced her that she was not adequate to run a country. You don't even remember this week?

**: Her son-in-law?

RR: Yes, she must have a daughter if she has a son-in-law, right? And he said that she was just a senile old bitch and she had no right to assume the authority that she was exercising and evidently he said it enough that he convinced her. And she had a nervous breakdown, like because of that. Otherwise, Ingrid Bergman wouldn't have got the role...which wasn't bad, was it? You did see that movie? It was good wasn't it.

RR: Remember when Ingrid Bergman made everybody cut all their hair off, all the women?

RR: You do remember the story don't you? Who was it? Gary Cooper. That sleazy reporter crawling up the mountain with his typewriter. It was probably a lot lighter then. He had another role...he was in Viva Zapata where he was again a sleazy reporter crawling up the mountainside with his typewriter. Once you get a typewriter you are typecast as sleazy.

##: When Richard Widmark kicked that old lady down the stairs, that was...

RR: There weren't enough ladies in town.

##: So Terry, are you going to record all this on the video?

RR: Are you recording?

TVE: Yeah, yeah. I've got the camera.

RR: Ah ha.

TVE: Not all of it...just bits and pieces.

##: Do you do that for every show?

TVE: Most every show. And usually something to do with making some of the pieces that are in the show.

##: Good idea. You know the show that they have for Man of the Year. I thought they ought to do like you are, like document something. I thought it would have been more interesting if they had started like this year and worked on it covering events that happened all through the year, leading up to the time, you know, covering the elections in Manila for example, and things like that. With that in mind. Eventually we're going to do another man of the year ...

RR: And just use the cover story as the excuse of doing it.

##: I'll suggest that if they every do it again.

RR: My jaguar was terrific. It just straightened itself out in the city and just acted very badly. But take it out on the road and after about the first maybe fifty miles, I may be coughing and choking and doing all kinds of things to draw your attention to what may be wrong with it and when you get inside it about...

RR: It was just before the XKE. The hood was long. You know, police would follow me for miles saying we'll fix this guy. I loved that thing because those were the movies I saw. All the expensive cars had long hoods until the Beetle came out and then of course. You used to have what?

##: An MG TD.

RR: Oh yeah. They're great... wooden doors.

RR: Where did you let it go?

**: In Cleveland.

RR: You just sold it to someone else? How much did you get? Couple of thousand dollars? That wasn't bad ten years ago. Was it in great shape?

**: Yeah, it was a great little car.

RR: All kinds of priorities. I was thinking of you and your children. I'm getting in too deep. You didn't know that you had any children. Well, in general... what was that general's name? I really learned my lesson yesterday. I think ***, that one ** is adopted. Only a month old.

RR: I thought of one before and I didn't laugh and then I thought of **** and I did laugh.

TVB: Well, give me one.

RR: Well, to Eric, I said, "Eric, the surveyor, Leif". I said that all of this honest seriousness.

A LOT OF STUFF THAT IS TOO TOUGH TO GET... SEEMS LIKE RR AND TVB TALKING IN A CAR...

RR: ...you should have stopped, gotten your life twisted around, what he **** wants to do. (Laughing) He couldn't deal with it either way, if I was serious he couldn't deal with it and if I wasn't he couldn't deal with it...

TVB: The back window is open too.

RR: Sure, that's where you put your ****.

TVB: Barbara Mann was there? What did you say to her?

RR: Oh, I know what it was... I said, you were cute opening night peeking over like some little **** or something... to see who was sitting in the front row, and whether they had come or not. I said I almost didn't recognize you because I've never seen your whole body. You know, like a little parakeet, picking on its own mirror. I didn't go that far...

TVB: Hello John, Terry Van Brunt.