

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Tracy, Robert / Questions for "Designing for Dance" / French Vogue,
1991-1992

Robert Rauschenberg

P.O. Box 54, Captiva, Florida 33924

MAY 12, 1992

FAX TO ...

ROBERT TRACY
c/o FRENCH VOGUE
NYC
#212-387-7608

DEAR MR. TRACY,


MR. RAUSCHENBERG ADVISES HE WILL ATTEMPT TO ANSWER YOUR SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS RE "DESIGNING FOR DANCE" ON HIS RETURN FROM CALIFORNIA AFTER MAY 21st. HE REALIZES YOU HAVE A JUNE DEADLINE.

MEANWHILE, A CORRECTION IS NEEDED IN QUESTION #9 OF THE PREVIOUSLY RESPONSES:

REGARDING "NOCTURNE," IT SHOULD READ "ARTISTICALLY I HAD AN INFATUATION TOO LATELY WITH HOLBEIN." (THAT NAME WILL REPLACE "VERMEER.")

THANK YOU.

CORDIALLY,


MS. BRADLEY JEFFRIES
ASSISTANT TO
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

*Will do when
back fr. travel -
? deadline
#9 → lounge Venice to Holbein?
Holbein*

DATE: 24 February 1992

TO : Bradlee Jeffries

FROM: Robert Tracy

RE : Expanding questions for Bob Rauschenberg - Designing for Dance

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As per our telephone conversation, here are the expanded questions for Bob Rauschenberg:

1. How did you begin designing for dance?
2. The one-line answers (from question #9) of specific dances you designed seemed to work the best. Could you also comment on:
 - "Changeling"
 - "Crises"
 - "Cross Currents"
 - "Field Dances"
 - "Labyrinthian Dances"
 - "Nightwandering"
 - "Rune"
 - "Spring Weather and People"
 - "Travelogue" — *James W. Merce*
 - "Winterbranch"
 - "Three Epitaphs"
 - "Astral Convertible"
 - "Foray Foret"
3. Would you agree with Merce that collaboration (dance, music, art) is a certain kind of anarchy where artists are free to work together?

I return to Paris until the beginning of April. When I receive the storyboards with Bob's statements I will fax them to you so that he can approve them for publication.

Thank you again.

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The following questions have been answered by Bob Rauschenberg.

1. What is the importance of a collaboration between a visual artist and a performing artist?

You need to see what you watch.

2. Jasper Johns said that you influenced ideas about how a dance should be lit. Were you always interested in using a "painter's" lighting (washing a dance with light) rather than a theatrical lighting where in most cases it wasn't possible to see the dancers clearly and where the colors of the costumes were usually changed by that particular kind of lighting?

I began working as an "un-volunteer" for the Merce Cunningham Company because no matter how subtly I dyed the leotards for the bodies, the mood of the movements was controlled by disastrous contrasts of lighting.

In New London, CT., I found out that John and Merce had decided I would do the lighting. All of the lighting technicians loved the fact that I could be so effectual so I was an enemy in the camp of freeing the lighting.

Depending on the size of the stage I broke the lighting down into basically nine pools. Merce was dealing shortly with spontaneous changeable choreography.

3. Weren't you able to extend the possibilities of this "painter's" lighting in your most recent dance *Forest-Foray* which is really a dance of moving color? Of course the costumes were gold and silver, luminescent so there is that aspect of lighting to the dance but wasn't there also a moving light on a scrim or as Trisha said, "projected light which is fractured by templates?"

Yes.

4. I didn't get to see *Astral Convertible II* (A.C. II) but was the difference between that and *A.C. I* really the space of the National Gallery's lobby - an open space and a proscenium stage? How did the "light towers" function differently in those two different spaces? And was the open space at the National Gallery more free for the operation of the "towers"?

Being able to function within the space, urban or internal, made a difference in the atmosphere of the performance.

5. Did you want the visual images in *Glacial-Decoy* to act as a mobile decor? Essentially, wouldn't that be like your photomontages in motion?

The choreography of Glacial-Decoy was planned mostly in the wings of the stage. I wanted the set to move with the choreography. So the mobilized set could follow the dancers while they moved, possibly showing where they were hiding.

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(cont.)

6. 'Set and Reset' has been called the collaborative event of the Eighties. Did you want the images in 'Set and Reset' to be more motion than say, 'Glacial-Decoy' which is perhaps why there is projected film rather than photographs? Also, when you hoisted the sculpture (like a spaceship) above the dancers' heads was this process of making the decor more mobile - live for the participants of the theatre?

In respect to the functional space that dancers have to fly up from, but to make a particular atmosphere for a specific piece, I chose to fly what could be assumed as a set in the sky above, leaving the dancers room to move.

7. The younger artists designing for dance say when they begin they have to think about you and Noguchi. Noguchi says designing for dance is about space. For his first dance he created a rope - nothing else. He says, 'It is not the rope that is the sculpture but the space it creates that is the sculpture.' Would you agree that the excitement for a visual artist once they move to the dance-theatre is space?

Merce Cunningham quit working for Martha Graham because of a Noguchi mask that he couldn't breathe in. It's space and breath.

8. What about your first design for the dance 'Minutiae' (in collaboration with Merce and John) which was a free-standing sculpture around, through and possibly under which the dancers could move? Did Merce drop some clue or ask for certain elements? Did you see your collaborations as an expression of your own - from your own point of view?

I attempted, unsuccessfully, to design a set that would float on helium balloons, but I was disappointed in helium. So I started a sculpture apparatus that would let the dancers do something. The closest collaboration I had with Merce, from his response, was stick drawings of what the dance was.

9. Merce told me he was so impressed with the way you were able to leave the space mobile in 'Antic Meet,' 'Aeon,' 'Nocturnes,' and especially 'Story.' Was this intentional?

*'Aeon': I began the dance with an explosion behind a scrim.
'Antic Meet': I moved everything out of the way before it got in the way, but indulged in sentimental attachments Merce had and the dance implied.
'Nocturne': Artistically I had an infatuation with van Dyke's Watercolors. I costumed the dancers in the spirit of unfinished drawings.
'Story' was an obstacle for both dancers and for me. Every set for every performance had to be completely different. We were on the road and I'm a good garbage man, but some of those cities were awesomely clean.*

11. Did you think 'Summerspace' was traditional decor and costumes, especially for 1958?

I wanted to work with the dancers and the movement as camouflage, as they moved you could see them, but if they stopped, you couldn't.

15. Was it because of Marcel Duchamp that you became interested in designing for dance?

No.

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(cont.)

15. Do you see your work in dance as a major part of your trajectory as an artist? Where would you like to take the dance space into the 21st Century?

Yes I do. And I'll Continue.

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Robert Rauschenberg

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**RR RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM ROBERT TRACY FOR PARIS
VOGUE ARTICLE "DESIGNING FOR DANCE"
DECEMBER 4, 1991**

QUESTION #1. YOU NEED TO SEE WHAT YOU WATCH.

QUESTION #2. I BEGAN WORKING AS AN "UN-VOLUNTEER" FOR THE MERCE CUNNINGHAM COMPANY BECAUSE NO MATTER HOW SUBTLY I DYED THE LEOTARDS FOR THE BODIES, THE MOOD OF THE MOVEMENTS WAS CONTROLLED BY DISASTROUS CONTRASTS OF LIGHTING.

IN NEW LONDON, CT., I FOUND OUT THAT JOHN AND MERCE HAD DECIDED I WOULD DO THE LIGHTING. ALL OF THE LIGHTING TECHNICIANS LOVED THE FACT THAT I COULD BE SO EFFECTUAL. SO I WAS AN ENEMY IN THE CAMP OF FREEING THE LIGHTING.

DEPENDING ON THE SIZE OF THE STAGE I BROKE THE LIGHTING DOWN INTO BASICALLY NINE POOLS. MERCE WAS DEALING SHORTLY WITH SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTARY CHOREOGRAPHY.

QUESTION #4. BEING ABLE TO FUNCTION WITHIN THE SPACE, URBAN OR INTERNAL, MADE A DIFFERENCE IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE PERFORMANCE.

QUESTION #5. THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF **GLACIAL DECOY** WAS PLANNED MOSTLY IN THE WINGS OF THE STAGE. I WANTED THE SET TO MOVE WITH THE CHOREOGRAPHY. SO THE MOBILIZED SET COULD FOLLOW THE DANCERS WHILE THEY MOVED, POSSIBLY SHOWING WHERE THEY WERE HIDING.

(more)

Robert Rauschenberg

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QUESTION #6. IN RESPECT TO THE FUNCTIONAL SPACE THAT DANCERS HAVE TO FLY UP FROM, BUT TO MAKE A PARTICULAR ATMOSPHERE FOR A SPECIFIC PIECE, I CHOSE TO FLY WHAT COULD BE ASSUMED AS A SET IN THE SKY ABOVE, LEAVING THE DANCERS ROOM TO MOVE.

QUESTION #7. MERCE CUNNINGHAM QUIT WORKING FOR MARTHA GRAHAM BECAUSE OF A NOGUCHI MASK THAT HE COULDN'T BREATHE IN. IT'S SPACE AND BREATH.

QUESTION #8. I ATTEMPTED, UNSUCCESSFULLY, TO DESIGN A SET THAT WOULD FLOAT ON HELIUM BALLOONS, BUT I WAS DISAPPOINTED IN HELIUM. SO I STARTED A SCULPTURE APPARATUS THAT WOULD LET THE DANCERS DO SOMETHING. THE CLOSEST COLLABORATION I HAD WITH MERCE, FROM HIS RESPONSE, WAS STICK DRAWINGS OF WHAT THE DANCE WAS.

QUESTION #9. "AEON": I BEGAN THE DANCE WITH AN EXPLOSION BEHIND A SCRIM.

"ANTIC MEET": I MOVED EVERYTHING OUT OF THE WAY BEFORE IT GOT IN THE WAY, BUT INDULGED IN SENTIMENTAL ATTACHMENTS MERCE HAD AND THE DANCE IMPLIED.

"NOCTURNE": ARTISTICALLY I HAD AN INFATUATION TOO LATELY WITH VERMEER. I COSTUMED THE DANCERS IN SUPPORTS THAT WOULD ALLOW IT.

"STORY" WAS AN OBSTACLE FOR BOTH THE DANCERS AND ME. EVERY SET FOR EVERY PERFORMANCE HAD TO BE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. WE WERE ON THE ROAD AND I'M A GOOD GARBAGE MAN, BUT SOME OF THOSE CITIES WERE AWFULLY CLEAN.

QUESTION #11. I WANTED TO WORK WITH THE DANCERS AND THE MOVEMENT AS CAMOUFLAGE. AS THEY MOVED YOU COULD SEE THEM, BUT IF THEY STOPPED, YOU COULDN'T.

(more)

? spell
Holbein
→

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QUESTION #13. NO

QUESTION #15. YES I DO. AND I'LL CONTINUE.

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FOR: **Bradlee Jeffries**
 FROM: **Robert Tracy, via Trisha Brown**
 RE: **Questions for Bob Rauschenberg - Designing for Dance**

- =====
1. What is the importance of a collaboration between a visual artist and a performing artist?
 2. Jasper Johns said that you influenced ideas about how a dance should be lit. Were you always interested in using a "painter's" lighting (washing a dance with light) rather than a theatrical lighting where in most cases it wasn't possible to see the dancers clearly and where the colors of the costumes were usually changed by that particular kind of lighting?
 - 1 X 3. Weren't you able to extend the possibilities of this "painter's" lighting in your most recent dance "Forêt-Foray" which is really a dance of moving color? Of course the costumes were gold and silver, luminescent so there is that aspect of lighting to the dance but wasn't there also a moving light on a scrim or as Trisha said, "projected light which is fractured by templates?" *templates?*
 4. I didn't get to see "Astral Convertible II" (A.C. II) but was the difference between that and "A.C. I" really the space of the National Gallery's lobby - an open space and a proscenium stage? How did the "light towers" function differently in those two different spaces? And was the open space at the National Gallery more free for the operation of the "towers"?
 5. Did you want the visual images in "Glacial-Decoy" to act as a mobile decor? Essentially, wouldn't that be like your photo-montages in motion?
 6. "Set and Reset" has been called the collaborative event of the Eighties. Did you want the images in "Set and Reset" to be more motional than say, "Glacial-Decoy" which is perhaps why there is projected film rather than photographs? Also, when you hoisted the sculpture (like a spaceship) above the dancers' heads was this process of making the decor more mobile - live for the participants of the theatre?
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8. What about your first design for the dance "Minutiae" (in collaboration with Merce and John) which was a free-standing sculpture around, through and possibly under which the dancers could move? Did Merce drop some clue or ask for certain elements? Did you see your collaborations as an expression of your own - from your own point of view?
9. Merce told me he was so impressed with the way you were able to leave the space mobile in "Antic Meet," "Aeon," "Nocturnal," and especially "Story." Was this intentional? (Any comments on the specific dances would be greatly appreciated).
- ~~10.~~ With Cunningham did your attitude toward space change by the time of "Travelogue" in 1977?
11. Did you think "Summerspace" was traditional decor and costumes, especially for 1958?
- ~~12.~~ Did a lot of your influential ideas in designing for dance come out of the process of working?
13. Was it because of Marcel Duchamp that you became interested in designing for dance?
- ~~14.~~ Do you remember any of the dances you designed for Paul Taylor? What about "4 Epitaphs" (now called "3 Epitaphs")? Where did the progressive hood fit into the scheme of the design and the lighting of the dance?
15. Do you see your work in dance as a major part of your trajectory as an artist? Where would you like to take the dance space into the 21st century?