

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Irving Blum

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2014

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Irving Blum conducted by Sara Sinclair on October 16, 2014. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Irving Blum

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: October 16, 2014

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with Irving Blum. It is October 16, 2014 and I am at Mr. Blum's residence in New York City.

Blum: Right.

Q: You have done a couple of oral history interviews before, so you understand we normally begin by asking you a little bit about your early life. So if you could just talk me through where you're from?

Blum: I got out of the Air Force in the middle fifties and came to New York and worked for Knoll, the furniture house, and I was with Knoll for two years. And the incredible thing about Knoll then, is that the showroom was right at Fifty-seventh [Street] and Madison [Avenue] in a building right at that intersection, which meant that all the galleries—virtually all the galleries in New York, there was no such thing as SoHo, there was no such thing as Chelsea—all of the galleries in New York were on the Upper East Side and most of them around where I was working. For example, Betty Parsons [Gallery], Kootz [Gallery], Sidney Janis [Gallery], [Pierre] Matisse [Gallery], on and on and on. They were many, centrally located. So it made it very easy to visit. What I started doing early on, almost from the beginning, was I gave up my lunch hour

and went to the galleries and met people in the art world that way, and met people in the art world in the Knoll showroom as well, and really enjoyed it.

After a couple of years Hans Knoll, the director of the furniture showroom, died. He was killed in an automobile crash in Havana, Cuba. Strange. He was down there looking for business, pre-Castro. And as a result a lot of the energy that the company had somehow drained off and I stopped having a good time in the way that I did for the prior two years and by then I was incredibly involved in the art world. All of my friends—at the end of that two-year period, all of my friends were somehow in the art world, artists or dealers; [Richard] Dick Bellamy of the Green Gallery; David Herbert, who worked for Betty Parsons; Leo Castelli of course. I got to know him very, very well, at about the same time as he was doing his gallery and he was a mentor to me. Really always generous with his time. I really adored him.

I decided that I wanted to do a gallery. I had very little money. I knew I couldn't do it in New York. And I missed the weather in California and without Hans Knoll, I thought the company wouldn't grow in the way that I hoped that it might and so I left for Los Angeles and looked around.

There weren't so many galleries at that time. There were a handful, but the most interesting gallery by far for me—because it was the most daring and they took the most chances—was the Ferus [Gallery, Los Angeles]. The Ferus was started a few months before I got to California by Walter [C.] Hopps and [Edward] Ed Kienholz, and I arranged to meet Walter and we spoke and I told him I was very interested in doing a gallery and he said, "Kienholz is now interested in

going back to his studio. He's bored in the gallery. You might talk to him." And I talked to Ed. We went to Barney's Beanery and he told me he was interested in selling his share of the gallery and I told him I was interested in buying it and I said, "What sort of money are we talking about?" He said five hundred dollars. I said—I felt I could do that and I gave him five hundred dollars and Walter and I were in business together. It was that thin, if you can imagine.

I told a friend of mine what I had done, somebody in L.A. And he said, "Irving, you overpaid." Which turned out to be almost true. They were in a terrible space, a really confused space on La Cienega Boulevard and I found a very—

[INTERRUPTION]

Blum: So what were we talking about? The Ferus and—

Q: And overpaying.

Blum: I found a new space, low rent, seventy dollars a month. Rents were very cheap and we moved from where Ferus was originally, across the street to a small space but a very, very attractive space and we were off.

Q: Okay. So I want to rewind a tiny bit. You just spoke about Leo Castelli being an important mentor to you and in the interview that you gave to the Smithsonian [Institution's Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.], you spoke about that three-year period in New York when

you were working at Knoll and you were visiting these galleries. You said that you learned a lot from visits to museums and to galleries. You said you educated your eye at the Sidney Janis Gallery.

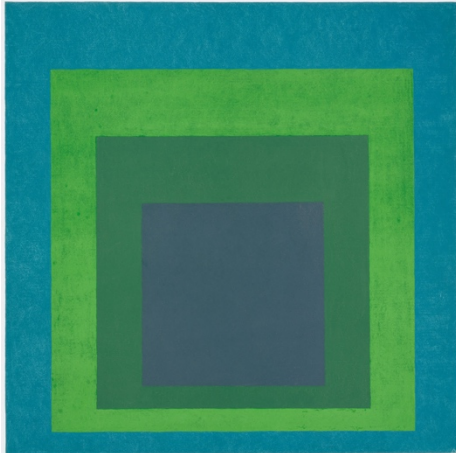
Blum: Right.

Q: I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about what you remember learning from different people.

Blum: Well, it was a slow start of course. The start, I imagine, could have taken another shape, but the start pretty much was when I was working for Knoll, Mrs. Knoll, Florence Knoll, came in to see me and she said, “Hey. Every time I walk by your desk, I see gallery brochures. Are you interested in the art world?” I said, “Very much.” She said, “Maybe you can help me.” I said, “Of course. How? What can I do?” And she said, “I’m doing a big job for Connecticut General Life Insurance [Company], doing their executive offices, and I need paintings.” And I said, “Well, I’d be happy to help you,” and she said, “Well, to begin, I need something roughly 24-by-24. Green has got to be the dominant color.”

So that’s how I started. I went to see Sidney. I told him I worked for Mrs. Knoll. He knew Hans Knoll and I said, “She’s looking for a square painting, green as the predominant color.” He said, “Just a minute.” He went into his storage area and I peeked in behind him and the storage area was like Aladdin’s cave. It had [Piet] Mondrian and [Hans] Arp and [Constantin] Brancusi, [Alberto] Giacometti. Astonishing material, all of which I began to sort out for myself. Sidney

came running back to see me with a [Josef] Albers. I took it to Mrs. Knoll and she loved it. She said, “This is genius.” And then I kept buying Albers for her, red, yellow, blue. A little bigger, a little smaller, but I got to know Albers really well and finally took what little information I had and went to L.A.



Josef Albers  
*Homage to the Square: Soft Spoken*, 1969  
Oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches (121.9 x 121.9 cm)  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Gift of the artist, 1972

Q: What was Albers like? We have other people participating in this project who were students of Albers, they've been recently interviewed; [Susan] Sue Weil [Kirschenbaum], who was Rauschenberg's wife, and Rauschenberg of course was a student of Albers. We have people speaking to what he was like as a teacher, but I'm wondering if you could—

Blum: I have no idea. I have no idea because I never met him.

Q: Oh, you didn't.

Blum: No. I always bought these paintings that he would leave with Sidney and I never got to

meet him. Unhappily. He was at Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] I think teaching, not too far away, but he seldom came into the city.

Q: Talk to me a little bit more about Leo Castelli's role as a mentor. What are some of the memorable things that—

Blum: Leo Castelli had several things going for him. Number one, his relationship with artists. He lived in the Hamptons. He lived, I think, in a little house that was owned by [Willem "Bill"] de Kooning for a while. He knew Bill really, really well and he got to meet that whole community of Long Island artists and he was very involved in the art world. He was married to Ileana [Castelli, née Schapira, later Sonnabend] at the time. Shortly after that they divorced, but they were both absolutely mesmerized by the art world.

When Leo did his gallery, he put together a group including Bob [Rauschenberg] and Jasper [Johns] and maybe one or two people you haven't heard of; Lee Bontecou, [Edward] Ed Higgins, the sculptor, worked in plaster and metal. He was interesting but never went the distance in a way that Bob did and Jasper did.

I remember coming to New York and seeing Leo and I told him—this must have been 1958. Could have been '57, as early as '57. I rather think it was '58 and I said to him, "The artists in California are very, very interested in Jasper. Can we do something? Can I show him in California?" And Leo said, "Oh my dear. Not possible. He supports this enterprise virtually single-handedly. We can sell Jasper and he doesn't do that much work." "However," Leo said—



and I'll never forget this—"Here's his telephone number. Call him. Maybe something will work."

So I called him immediately. Jasper said, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm at Leo's gallery," and he said, "Well come down. I'm on Houston Street." And I went down to Houston Street to his studio and he had just begun making—and he had several examples of—his sculpture; *Light Bulb* [1960], *Flashlight* [1960], Savarin coffee can with brushes [*Painted Bronze*, 1960]. And as I went into the studio, I walked by a little [Kurt] Schwitters, which he had traded for after a time and I said, "Jasper, I've got a great idea," and he said, "What's your idea?" I said, "I'll show your sculpture in California along with Schwitters's collage," and he said, "I like that, but where will you get the Schwitters?" and I said, "An expatriate lady from Germany lives in Pasadena and she came with a bag full of Schwitters and I'm sure I can borrow them." He said, "Well, if you can borrow them, I'll send you my sculpture." And he did. We had that show in 1960 [*Jasper Johns–Kurt Schwitters*] and it was due to Castelli's generosity. He was always really generous and I adored him for it. He was very important to me and very important to my career in California.



Jasper Johns  
*Painted Bronze*, 1960  
 Oil on bronze  
 5 1/2 x 8 x 4 3/4 inches (14 x 20.3 x 12 cm)  
 Museum Ludwig, Cologne  
 Ludwig Donation

Q: What did you learn from him?

Blum: Just to be relaxed with the unfamiliar, which was a vital lesson, and he taught me that, really and truly. He said, “Don’t be frightened by what you don’t understand. If it somehow has another kind of eloquence, go for it.” And that was a very important lesson. Stood me in good stead.

Q: Do you remember the first time you saw Rauschenberg’s work?

Blum: Bob showed with Virginia Dwan, otherwise I would have taken him on, but he was already locked into Virginia and from a very early moment as I recall. So I didn’t have a working relationship with him, but I had a friendly relationship with him. When I came to New York I would try to take him to lunch along with some other people and I would often go to the studio on Lafayette [Street] later [note: Rauschenberg moved into this building in fall 1966], and we would spend time. I really enjoyed his peculiar viewpoint.

Q: What were visits to the studio at Lafayette like?

Blum: They were virtually always chaotic; people cooking, people sitting around eating, people working downstairs in the studio, people wrapping, people shipping. There were always people. It was like Times Square. It was always tumult, absolute tumult. And Bob of course adored it. He would thrive in exactly that kind of atmosphere. So it was always busy. It was hard to get his

total attention because there was always so much going on, but I very much enjoyed the time we spent together.

Q: Do you think you remember the first time you actually met him?

Blum: No, I don't.

Q: Do you remember what you thought of the first work you saw at the Dwan Gallery [Los Angeles]? It was probably a Combine show.

Blum: I saw—as a matter of fact I bought a kind of self-portrait, Bob as a kind of dandy in one photograph—a self-portrait Combine [Untitled, ca. 1954]. I don't remember exactly the title, but I bought it and sold it to a client of mine in California called [Edwin] Ed Janss [Jr.], who put a great, great collection together. So I was absolutely familiar with the work, with the Combines. I thought the Combines were really radical and I thought they were very important, but they were pretty much spoken for, either here in New York or through clients of Virginia. But I did get that one great one and sold it to Mr. Janss.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled, ca. 1954  
Combine: oil, pencil, crayon, paper, canvas, fabric,  
newspaper, photographs, wood, glass, mirror, tin,  
cork, and found painting with pair of painted leather  
shoes, dried grass, and Dominique hen on wood  
structure mounted on five casters  
86 1/2 x 37 x 26 1/4 inches (219.7 x 94 x 66.7 cm)  
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
The Panza Collection

Q: Did you buy it with him in mind or did you—

Blum: No, although it was much easier, then, to buy with somebody in mind because there weren't so many people. You're talking about all together about six collectors that I was doing business with. So I knew very much their collections and I knew very much their interests and I would very much buy with somebody in mind, but if I loved something and had nobody in mind it didn't stop me. I would just go ahead and do it. Like Andy Warhol's [*Campbell's*] *Soup Cans* [1962]. I didn't have anybody in mind for that. Just me.



Installation view, Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, 1962. Photo: Seymour Rosen. © SPACES—Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments

Q: Right. So in the oral history interview that you did with MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York, Oral History Program, 2011], you said that you had a drink with Henry [T.] Hopkins in 1959 and Henry said, “Let me tell you about the art world.” He said, “It’s become like music. There’s one kind of dominant style, it’s international, it’s in Italy, it’s in France, it’s everywhere. Abstract Expressionism.” And you thought, “Of course he’s right,” and shortly after that everything changed.

Blum: Yes. Well shortly after that, I appointed three people—I had really no money and I appointed three people in New York that I was certain frequented artist’s studios. Henry Geldzahler was one, Dick Bellamy—whose gallery I really liked—was another. It’s called the Green Gallery and I very much admired his taste. And [William C.] Bill Seitz, who was the curator then at the Museum of Modern Art. They all went to studios and shortly before I would arrive in New York, when I was still in L.A., I would call them or write to them and get a list of people they thought—not such a long list, but a list of the most interesting people they had visited during the year that I hadn’t been in New York. I would compare all three lists and any name that appeared on more than one list was somebody I called. And Andy was on Dick

Bellamy's list and Henry Geldzahler's list. So I called him. This is 1961. I went to see him and there were these big, unfinished cartoon paintings that I couldn't make head or tail of. I just thought they were strange and I looked at them and I didn't make a connection. No connection. I thought they were kind of bizarre.

Well I cut my teeth on second generation and first generation Abstract Expressionism, as you just stated, and these were so afield from that, that I had no notion about them, but I really enjoyed the visit. I enjoyed talking to him and I stayed for quite a while and then I told him that I would think about his paintings. He was grateful and I left and I had occasion six months later—this is towards the end of '61, the beginning of '62—maybe the end of '61, I had occasion to come again to New York, something I didn't ordinarily do—my trip was paid for by this collector, Ed Janss, who was looking at a Giacometti and wanted my opinion. I told him I knew something about Giacometti. I knew very little, but in any case, it worked. I got to New York and saw the Giacometti. I liked it a lot and he bought it and he went on to Europe, paid my fare back to L.A., and I had a few days in New York.

So I went to see Leo in a way that I always did and Ivan Karp showed me a viewer that I looked into and there were these cartoons, and I said to Ivan, "Andy Warhol." He said, "No. A guy by the name of [Roy] Lichtenstein, lives in New Jersey." And I looked harder at them and they were easier for me. They were easier because of the black outline. And I made a kind of [Fernand] Léger connection and I just said, "I'm going to show these." And I said to Ivan, "I want to show them," and he said, "We're planning an exhibit." And Roy always remembered that I was enthusiastic right from the beginning, so he was always very generous to me.

Then I ran out of the gallery and called Andy, and Andy said, “Come on over.” As I walked down a corridor to get where he was in the parlor room, there were three *Soup Cans* on the floor leaning up against the wall and one photograph of Marilyn Monroe torn out of a magazine like *Photoplay*, which he had pinned to the wall, and these three *Soup Cans*. Finally I walk back and he was there and I said to him, “Hey. There are three *Soup Cans* on the floor.” He said, “Yep.” I said, “Why three? Seems redundant.” He said, “I’m going to paint thirty-two.” I said, “You’re kidding.” He said, “Not at all. I’m going to paint thirty-two.” I said, “Why?” He said, “Well, there are thirty-two varieties and in twenty years there’ll be fifty and I thought I would do them all. In any case that’s the idea.”

I said, “Do you have a gallery? Did you find a gallery since I was here last?” He said, “No, I have no gallery,” and I said, “What about showing them in L.A.?” And he thought, he hesitated—I could see he was thinking, well he did them in New York, his friends were there, one thing or another—and I took his arm and I said, “Andy, movie stars come into the gallery.” He loved that. He said, “Wow! Let’s do it!” That was it. That began my relationship with him.

In July of 1962 I showed all of the *Soup Cans*. Thirty-two paintings. I sold four or five, then had the idea of buying them and keeping them as a set, since that’s what they were, and Andy liked the idea. So I called the three or four people, including Dennis Hopper, that I sold individual paintings to and I was able to keep them all. I paid Andy one thousand dollars over a year and secured them.

Q: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions. You said that when you first looked at Warhol's work, you were looking to have a feeling of some kind of connection. I don't know if it's possible to describe that, that process of looking at a new work and the feeling that you're looking for. What is that?

Blum: Well there are no guidelines. That's the thing to remember. There are absolutely no guidelines and you have to ask yourself how radical—are these really radical in some way? Well, the answer is yes, really radical enough for you to embrace them? Generally no, but in this case, yes. It's just an instinct because there's no history. You simply don't know. But you can be put off. There's no formula. There is no formula. The only formula is everything you've seen is your history, but that's no formula.

Q: Do you think that you came to trust your own instincts early?

Blum: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Blum: Yes. I did trust my instinct. Bill Seitz, who worked at MoMA, was a friend of mine and he said, "You have to come and see the *Sixteen Americans* show [1959–60]. Richard Diebenkorn from the West Coast, Jay DeFeo was in that show, along with Bob and Jasper, Frank Stella. I was in New York, looked at the show, walked into the Stella room and confronted these black



pictures, black striped paintings, and I remember saying to myself, this artist has absolutely nowhere to go. They're so reductive. How does he reduce them further? He can't. There's no way. And I walked out of the room without even thinking about them again until I came to New York later, went to see Leo, saw a silver painting, notched, and the minute I saw the notches, I realized shape and I took him on and I had three shows by Frank at the Ferus.

Q: The other thing that I wanted to ask, going back to that moment with Henry Hopkins, I know you didn't represent Rauschenberg, but if you could think about his role in that moment—

Blum: His role in that moment?

Q: His role in moving away from Abstract Expressionism.

Blum: Yes. Well there were several doors out of first generation, Pop being I think the major door, but assemblage was a big deal. I showed Bruce Conner for example and he was an assemblage artist. And Bob absolutely—I looked at a lot of work in that style and Bob was absolutely head and shoulders above anyone and I knew that. I knew that. And whether you liked the style or not had nothing to do with it. You had to deal with it. It was an issue and he made it relevant. He really did. I think that's quite astonishing. Like [Claes] Oldenburg in soft sculpture, like Frank in shape, like Andy in Pop. But at a certain moment, the styles didn't exist. They didn't exist until the artists willed them to exist and you have no way to prepare for that. All you can bring is your intuition. That's all you can bring to bear.

It's quite complicated, I think. I'm very interested in people's opinion of [Jeff] Koons today. A lot of people kind of hate it and a lot of people love it and a lot of people are on the fence. There are no guarantees. Time is the clarifier and in twenty years we'll know exactly about Koons. For the moment, it's still evolving.

Q: I wanted to ask you about time and since you just mentioned it, I'll ask you about that now, with respect to Rauschenberg in particular. What you were just saying; you assess work when it's being made, you assess it five years later, ten years later. So from today what's the long view of the work that you first encountered at the Dwan Gallery?



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg*,  
Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, March  
1962. Photograph Collection. Robert  
Rauschenberg Foundation Archives,  
New York. Photo: I. Serisawa

Blum: Well, the long view, insofar as you can know it, is that, as I say, they were radical and influential. You can't have a long view until a certain amount of time has passed and I don't think there's been enough time for that moment. And whether or not artists will refer to what Bob did and extend it in some new way—which is what I think will happen because I think it's very ripe—you can't say. There are no absolutes. You can't absolutely know. All you can say is

the work is as radical as I think it is and I think this will happen and I'll put my money down. In the event that it does happen, it's a winner.

Q: Who do you see as his successors?

Blum: Oddly, I think [Robert] Gober might possibly be somebody that Bob would enjoy. He does surrounds and very big installations, so I think he might be one. I'm sure there are others. Dan Colen might be an artist that greatly admires Rauschenberg and who is influenced by him, but there'll be others. There'll be others. You have to give it time. It's maybe still too soon.

Q: That's interesting. At what point can you—do you say it's not too soon to say?

Blum: It varies. That's all I can tell you. It varies. No absolutes.

Q: In anything.

Blum: Right.

[Laughter]

Q: Do you remember the group exhibition at Ferus in 1964 [*A View of NY Painting Including Major Works by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, and Larry Poons*]? I have this listing from the [Robert Rauschenberg]

Foundation. It's the one that's squared off there. It's just a tiny bit of information that may trigger your memory somewhat.

Blum: Yes. That was a group show that I did and I can remember that it was about really laying down an attitude of mine and the attitude of mine, I remember very clearly, was that I didn't want the gallery to be considered a West Coast gallery, to be considered provincial. Well we represented all these artists from L.A.—John Altoon, Billy Al Bengston, [Robert] Bob Irwin, [Edward] Ed Ruscha—we had fifteen West Coast artists, but I was determined, almost from the beginning, to add people from New York. After all I had a New York experience, I saw a great deal of what was going on here, and I wanted the gallery to extend beyond the West Coast. And so that show with those people is an example of what I was trying to do.

Q: And how was it received?

Blum: How was it received? Moderately well. The artists on the West Coast, they had their own egos. They didn't think it was so red-hot, but there were clients of mine who did and I sold. I did business. In any case I staked out a certain territory with that show and the West Coast people were—the L.A. people were kind of intolerant, but you can understand it. It was their turf.

Q: Sure and they were threatened by the New York artists?

Blum: Yes, they were.

Q: Did anyone express that directly?

Blum: Yes. Oh yes, Bengston quit the gallery at a certain moment.

Q: Really? Wow.

Blum: Yes. Oh, they expressed it. Yes.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Blum: I don't think so [laughs].

Q: No? All right [laughs].

Blum: I think you have enough [laughs].

Q: What was the difference in your audiences in L.A. and New York?

Blum: Well, the main gallery strength then, as well as now I think, is here in New York. And so I sold things to West Coast people, but I had to extend my audience. There weren't that many people. And so, I looked to Europe. There were German collectors who bought Pop art. Loved it, way before anybody in America virtually, except for the Sculls, Mrs. [Emily Hall] Tremaine, a

guy called Leon Kraushar. Those were three of Leo's most important clients. In any case it wasn't as thrilling as I thought it should have been.

Q: What part wasn't as thrilling?

Blum: Exhibiting—

Q: Bringing New Yorkers to L.A.?

Blum: Exactly.

Q: And is that partly because there wasn't a large enough group of collectors to—

Blum: Yes. Yes, exactly. Just a handful and they divided their time however. It was very, very thin. Very thin. It's still thin on the West Coast, but better.

Q: So what caused you to finally move back to New York?

Blum: Just that. The fact that the people on the West Coast seemed to be kind of pedaling in place and the artists here seemed to be moving in kind of really radical directions. I thought the audience was finally international, but passed through New York, for example, in a way that they didn't, then, pass through L.A. There's more of that now, but so my moving to New York was in search of a bigger audience.

Q: So tell me about the process of opening BlumHelman [Gallery, New York].

Blum: Well, I met [Joseph] Joe [Helman] and we had done business together. He had a gallery in St. Louis. And we met on Madison Avenue and he said he was planning to do a gallery and I said I was planning to do one as well and he said, “Well, why don’t we do it together?” I thought that was a good idea—he had a certain strength and I had a certain strength—and we did. That was it.

Q: Opening this new venture, did it have a different mission than you had had at Ferus?

Blum: It had a somewhat different mission because both of us had the history of working with East Coast artists. I started with Frank the same time Leo did. I started with Roy the same time Leo did. I started with Andy before Leo. Then [Donald] Judd, [Dan] Flavin, [Carl] Andre. We knew those people and we wanted to exhibit them further. We wanted to do what we could do on their behalf. So we were locked pretty much into that point of view.

Q: Let’s talk about Rauschenberg’s show at BlumHelman. He had, I think, three shows in your New York spaces and one in L.A.

Blum: Yes. Right.

Q: So there was [*Robert Rauschenberg:*] *Works on Paper: 1970–1983* [New York, 1987],

[*Robert Rauschenberg:*] *The Gluts* in 1987 [Santa Monica, California], and then [*Robert Rauschenberg:*] *The Glut Series* in 1988 [New York].



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Glut Series*, BlumHelman Gallery, New York, 1988

Blum: Right.

Q: What do you remember about—?

Blum: Well, I most of all thought that Bob was remarkable and he was very buoyant always. Always had kind of a wonderful, wonderful humor and I really enjoyed our conversations—when we could get them on a certain tack—so that I could follow what he was suggesting, which wasn't always. He was very funny. I remember he gave [Douglas] Doug Christmas a show in California and I don't know exactly when, but Doug sold work and never paid him, never paid him, never paid him. And finally he got really angry—I've never seen Bob angry—and took him to court and he won a big settlement and the judge insisted that it be paid by a certain time. I said to Bob, "Wow. And what happened then?" And Bob said, "I gave him another show. Why not?"



[Laughs] That was typical Bob. Everybody adored him. The guy was intensely interesting even when he was pickled, which was often [laughs].

I went down to Captiva [Florida] and spent time with him. Three days. I remember waking up in the morning rather late, walking into the kitchen, and he'd hand me a glass of Jim Beam and grapefruit juice. I could hardly deal with it [laughs]. Boy, he loved the odd drink, but people know that about him.

Q: Yes. His bourbon. So do you remember, were you around, in the space, when those shows were being installed?

Blum: Yes.

Q: What was he like? Was he very involved?

Blum: Yes. He was involved until you had a better idea. He would always listen. The guy was always agreeable, in a way that some of the artists aren't. For me he was always a joy to—we had a lot of lunches in California, over and beyond the fact that I did very few shows, he showed with Virginia. I couldn't really penetrate in a way that I would have liked, but he came often to work at Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles] and to make prints and whenever he was in town we would connect and really have a lovely time. He was so much fun to be with. So thanks to Gemini, I saw more of him than I would have ordinarily.

Q: You said you couldn't penetrate in the way you would have liked. You would have liked to have represented him?

Blum: Yes.

Q: Is that a conversation you ever had with him?

Blum: Yes. Yes. His response was always, "If and when the boat sinks, we'll talk." I knew that it would take a long time if ever. I didn't care. I did care, but I didn't. I mean I really enjoyed him.

Q: One other thing that caught my eye in one of the interviews that I read, you spoke about Bob Irwin as an artist, who was especially interested in changing the nature of how people think about painting.

Blum: Yes.

Q: I was wondering if you could speak about Rauschenberg in that way. Do you think that he was self-conscious about his work in that kind of way?

Blum: I don't really know. We didn't talk so much about that. I don't really have a memory of his consciously wanting to change what there was, but he certainly did. That goes without saying. I don't know that he ever voiced the desire to do that, no.

Q: What else do you remember about your time in Captiva? Who else was around when you were there?

Blum: Well, Jackie [Blum] and I went, and his friend was there [Darryl R. Pottorf].

Well the drill was you got up late, you had a big drink, you had scrambled eggs, spent a little time on the beach, and while you were on the beach Bob was in the studio making work, doing whatever, sending stuff out, sending packs of prints to different places. Always engaged in the life of being an artist.

Q: Do you have any other memories about encounters with Bob?

Blum: No, just exactly what I've told you and I'm sorry I didn't get to spend more time with him. I would have liked that. He was a hell of a person and a hell of an artist.

Q: Well, thank you very much. Thanks for your time.

Blum: Oh, you're more than welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]