

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Thomas Buehler

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Thomas Buehler conducted by Sara Sinclair on April 2, 2015 and May 26, 2015. These interviews are 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: Thomas Buehler

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: April 2, 2015

Q: Today is April 2, 2015. This is Sara Sinclair with Thomas Buehler. Thank you for coming today.

Buehler: You're most welcome.

Q: I'd like to start by talking a little bit about you. So if you could begin by telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life, some of your early memories.

Buehler: I was born in Berlin, Germany in 1943. At that time there was no West or East Berlin, so it was still Berlin, Germany. I never met my father, he got lost in the war. He disappeared at some point and so, single mother in Berlin. Then just after the end of the war, my mother took me to friends of hers in Meersburg in southern Germany on the Swiss border. Until '49, until I was six, I was there. Then I came back to Berlin and went to school, regular, and ended in the gymnasium in 1968.

I wanted to be a graphic designer. My mother worked in a publishing company and they had a lot of artists who did their book sleeves and their book covers. I had a little portfolio, drawings that I made and things like that. She said, "Well, I can't decide that really because I don't know

anything about art, but I'll ask professor so-and-so if he wants to see what you're doing."

Professor Borchardt was his name. He also taught at the art academy in Berlin [Academy of Arts]. He said, "Well, come to my studio and bring the little portfolio of things that you did," which I did. I'll never forget. It was like a [Henri] Matisse studio with the flowered sofa and his grandmother was sitting in the corner, and there was a skylight, not leaking—no umbrellas put up—but it was a classic artist's studio in a very nice area of Berlin. Now there was West and East Berlin. In '61 the wall came up so now we have two Berlins, just as a side note. He looked at my portfolio. Didn't say a thing. He said, "Okay, I'll call your mother." Then he called my mother—or saw her when he was up at the publishing company—and she came back and said, "He said you're good. I think you can do this."

I was still too young to go to the art academy because you had to be eighteen. The laws in Germany are really weird. You have to go to school until eighteen and I dropped out in '61. The school is called vocational training for painters and carpenters and things like that and the law required that I go to school. They looked it up and said, "Okay, painter." Painters. These were wall painters. I spent some time there and then it turned out I needed to have an internship in a graphic related business and since my mother was in the publishing business, she got me an internship in a big printing house, the biggest in Berlin. We did everything in-house: rotogravure, offset printing, the whole number. She got me a position there for a year. I started at six in the morning. That meant I had to get up at 4:30, which was convenient because I had a little job on the side bringing bread and milk to people's houses in the morning. So before I went to work, even while I was still in school I did that. I got on my delivery tricycle, went to all the villas and

nice suburbs, and hung the rolls and the milk bottles on the gates. Basically, I've been working since I was ten. From that moment on, I've never not worked.

Then I got into an art academy. Loved the job. It was great and it was fun. It was a time when there were changes in how graphic arts are being handled because there was no photo typesetting at the time. Everything was by hand, typesetting. It just started out. Now you look in museums, machines where you had to turn a wheel to every letter to expose the film, so it was very archaic. I really learned—there were no computers. We had no computers, Mac [Macintosh] was not even invented. I did this full semester, the whole thing.

One of the professors had an advertising agency. They also taught advertising rules and regulations. As a graphic designer you had to take courses in that because they said, you're going to be living in that world at some point. I was a school friend with his son and we were always together. He said, "Well, are you done?" I said, "No, I still have two semesters to go." He said, "Well, do you want a job? I'll hire you right now and you'll have a job when you've got your diploma and all that." So, that's how it happened. I got my diploma and worked the last two semesters already in this agency as a graphic designer.

I was a graphic designer for a while, then I got out of there, had my own studio. It was pretty good. I got awards and things like that. Typography was the hot thing at the time, Swiss typography and things like that. It was interesting. I got pretty good at it and then at some point, in '71—I have to digress a little bit. I had a Dutch friend who was born in Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. I knew him from traveling to Spain and he always told me about the Seychelles islands.

In '71 I read in the paper in Berlin that the Seychelles are getting an airport and they're going to develop their tourism. I said, okay if you want to see the Seychelles the way Theo told you about it, you have to go there now. Before the airport is even started or finished, go. Since I was pretty much fed up with graphic design anyway—I didn't like my clients and the way they said, "Well, I love your design. It's great but my wife thinks it should be this and this should not be red but green," and I was like, have your damn wife design your stationery. So I decided when I came back from the Seychelles I would not be a graphic designer anymore. My girlfriend at the time was also a graphic designer and I gave her my address book and said, "Call all of these guys and tell them I'm not coming back and if they want you as a graphic designer, you've got them. They're your clients."

So it happened. I went to the Seychelles and stayed three months. Paradise. I was the only person—the only person literally on the island. There were locals living there, fishermen and all that. I was on a little outer island and had a little house. Some British teachers had a little government bungalow for their vacation and when they left they said, "Thomas, you can stay." It was two dollars a day including a male caretaker who cooked for you and knew where the fish was and the milk and all that.

I came back from the Seychelles and went back to Berlin. I had a little money left but not much and a sculptor friend of mine—a very good man, he just passed away recently, unfortunately—had a friend in New York and she was also an artist and sculptor. We were both broke. We both decided, we can be broke in New York. Let's go to New York. So we got a cheap flight through Iceland or something like that for six hundred German marks or something and went to New

York. This woman—Hildegard Lutze was her name, but in the art world she was only known as “Lutze.” Everybody knew her. She went to all the parties, all the openings. She was always flamboyantly dressed, a blonde German. She lived on Second Avenue right around the corner. She was in the art world and Andy Warhol would sit in her kitchen and Claes Oldenburg would sit in her kitchen. Everybody. She was a party girl. Gordon Matta-Clark had cut a hole in her wall, which was part of his artwork. He did things like that. We stayed with Lutze. She said, “You guys can stay.” Two rooms extra. She was a night girl. She was up all night and came back in the morning.

A show was supposed to happen about art in Berlin. This all falls into place in some weird ways. A show was sponsored by the Goethe-Institut in New York and it was called *Berlin Now* [1977]. It was Berlin artists showing in New York. There were three venues; one was the New School [New York], I think, one was another venue, and one was the old Denise René gallery [Galerie Denise René, New York] in SoHo on Broome Street. Lutze, because she was connected with all these people in the German Embassy and the Goethe-Institut, got the job to run the gallery in SoHo. But running a gallery meant, of course, be there at ten o’clock in the morning or at eleven. She would stay through Friday or something like that. So it was not her thing. We were staying with her and she said, “Oh, Thomas, they’re delivering some prints this morning. Here’s the key. Just go down there and take the art.” To be honest, until that point, I never thought art needed to be transported. I thought art hung on the walls and I didn’t think about how it gets there. So suddenly I was confronted with trucks and moving men in striped shirts and aprons at the time. This was ’72, I think. I’ll have to look that up.

The company that did all the deliveries was the leading art shipping company in New York, Ollendorff Fine Arts. Mr. Ollendorff came in the morning to supervise his guys. They were really moving men. Today, art handlers are students from Brooklyn and kids. Those guys were union teamsters in uniforms. They did a great job. They delivered the crates and helped install and things like that. Mr. Ollendorff at some point said, “I could use a little help in my shop in art. Do you want the job, young man?” He was Austrian Jew, a really nice man. I said, “Sure.” He said, “Come to the warehouse tomorrow morning. Six o’clock we start.” Again, my luck. Suddenly I had a job in New York. It paid good money. It paid I think twelve dollars an hour and time and a half. I did that for a while, part-time. I learned a lot about the trade. I learned how to make crates and how to be in the truck and deliver art. We went to [Willem] de Kooning’s studio and got sculptures to take back to galleries on Fifty-seventh Street. I had my lunch in the storeroom and looked at famous paintings, like you never get close enough. Suddenly I had a job.

I had a girlfriend in Germany. We lived together. We had a beautiful little studio in Berlin and I was going back and forth between New York and Berlin. She didn’t like the States much and she never came—even after we got married, she never wanted to be here, so she basically stayed there. Then Mr. Ollendorff said, “Oh, you’re going to Germany? There’s this company that we work with and if you want, maybe they have a job for you. Call them up when you’re in Berlin.” Which I did. As it happened they were walking distance from my studio. It was Schier, Otten & Co. Mr. Schier I think or Mr. Otten, one of them, said, “Oh, you’re heaven-sent. We’re just building our new art storage facility right here next to the freight train station. You’ve just come from America and you know how the Americans do this and you worked with Ollendorff. Help



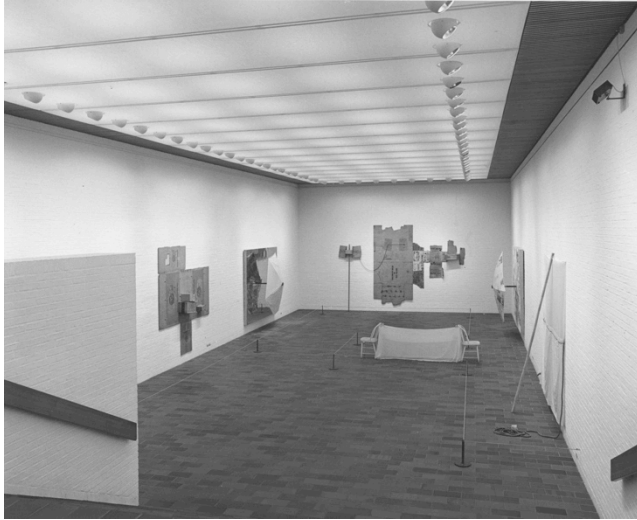
us build the storage facility.” Boom, suddenly, that’s two jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. I’ll cut that short. We’re getting into too much detail, I guess.

Q: No, not at all. Not at all.

Buehler: Through this I met a conservator at the National Gallery Berlin, I forget his name right now but we’ll come back. Suddenly I was involved in making crates for a Cy Twombly retrospective that was supposed to take place at the Whitney [Museum of American Art] here in New York. I did that. It was my first courier trip actually. I went with the crates to the Whitney and helped unpack and install. This overtime led to me working for another art shipping company. I became friends with the owner and suddenly I was his representative in New York. I had a loft in Chinatown. I had a telex machine. People don’t even know what a telex is anymore. In my office every morning at one o’clock it started. When the office started in Berlin, the telex machine started spitting out loan forms and loan agreements and loan lists and things like that.

One of the shows—now we’re nearing ’79—was a show that five European venues wanted to put together, a Rauschenberg retrospective of sorts. I got a loan list ticket through the telex and most of the loans were by Ileana Sonnabend. She had the main collection of Rauschenbergs and all the famous Combines [1954–64] that now are in museums were in her collection. I made an appointment, got my list, and the show [*Rauschenberg: Werke 1950–1980*] was supposed to take place in Berlin. Staatliche Kunsthalle in Berlin, [Städtische Galerie im] Lenbachhaus in Munich, Städel Museum in Frankfurt, Louisiana Museum [of Modern Art] in Humlebaek, Demark, and

Tate Gallery in London. That was the final venue. There were five. They all chipped in the costs, the crating costs.



Installation view, *Rauschenberg: Werke 1950–1980*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark, 1980. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Strüwing Reklamefoto

I had my appointment with Ileana Sonnabend at 420 West Broadway [New York] and the receptionist was a very nice blonde, young woman. Her name was Mimi Thompson. She's now Mrs. Mimi Rosenquist. She was my first contact in the art world in the Rauschenberg realm, apart from the other people I knew. Mimi said, "Well, it'll be a moment. Sit down and have a second and someone will be with you in a moment." So it happened and Ileana looked at me from top to bottom and said, "I don't know you. I don't know your company and what do you want?" I said, "Well, I have this list." I showed her my list. She went through it and said, "I said it before. I don't know you. I don't know your company. My answer would be no." That was not very successful.

My next thing on the list that same day was a visit to Rauschenberg's, 381 Lafayette Street [New York], where we are right now. I rang the bell and a tall young man opened the door, really tall, six-foot-nine. His name is [Charles] Charlie Yoder. You've probably met him. You've probably talked to him.

Q: I haven't yet, no.

Buehler: You most probably will. He opened the door. The first floor—where the gallery and the receptionist are now—was full of crates. They had storage across the street there on Great Jones Street, a garage, and then they had storage all over town with shipping companies.

Rauschenberg's artwork was all over the world. Charlie Yoder and I got along together and I explained to him that I just got kicked out at Ileana Sonnabend's. He said, "Oh yeah, Ileana. I know her well and she knows me well." I said, "You installed these works. You've been at the Smithsonian [American Art Museum, formerly the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.]." He installed works for Rauschenberg. He said, "Yes, yes, sure man." I said, "Well, how about you and I travel with the show and we assure Ileana that her works will be taken care of, she'll get new crates, and everything will be state of the art and the way she wants it?" He said, "Sure." He's a painter and an artist and he used to work for Rauschenberg full time. I asked for a second appointment at Ileana's and got the second appointment and she looked at me and says, "You've got some nerve, young man." I just said, "No, don't you remember?" I said, "Well, there's a new development. I was at Rauschenberg's studio and met Charlie Yoder and he knows the work," and she said, "Oh, yes, Charlie. I know Charlie." I said, "Well, Charlie

has agreed that he and I will travel with the show and we'll supervise the crating and handling of your works personally." She said okay. Boom.

So they had the job. I telex to Berlin that we have additional travel expenses for Charlie, and they did the round with the museum and said okay fine, done. We got the show together, got the bid out for crates and awarded the contract to one company that we knew was good and so that got the show on the road. We traveled to Berlin in '80. Bob came to supervise the installation. It was a complicated venue. It was two stories with a flight of beautiful stairs, but no freight elevator to match so everything had to be carried up and down the stairs. Of course he changed the configuration. Classic Bob Rauschenberg. If you say, "Oh, let's make it red," then he'll say "No, let's make it green." He wanted the chronology reversed. He wanted the older paintings on the second floor and the newer paintings on the first floor and we had just pre-installed everything the other way around. He gave us a hard time, but it worked really well and the show was gorgeous. At the opening night he pulled me over and said, "I think you did that real well. I heard that from other people also. I'm thinking of running this world tour. It's a plan that's not really fixed yet, but can you help running that." I said, "Sure." It was not immediate. I thought it was the Jack Daniel's talking actually. I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to."

The show went until '81 and the Tate Gallery took it back to New York, and I went back to Europe to be with my first wife, Ilona [Tullmin]. We had a house in Ibiza in Spain and had some time off, and a year later somebody contacted me by fax or by letter—I don't recall exactly—saying the world tour is happening. Rauschenberg is looking for you and there's money for you in Frankfurt and a ticket and come back to New York, which I did.

We started preparing the ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] tour from here, 381 Lafayette Street. This was our headquarters. We had crates built again and there were no loans from other lenders. All the works were from Rauschenberg's own collection so there weren't complicated lender negotiations. Bob signed waivers left and right for the insurance, that he wouldn't mind this and that and that, so we had pretty much free hand. Then in '84 we had the first show in Mexico City [*Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI MEXICO*, Museo Rufino Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo Internacional, Mexico City, 1985].



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI MEXICO*, 1985  
Offset lithograph  
34 1/2 x 24 inches (87.6 x 61 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal  
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Q: Okay. Well, let's talk a little bit about the planning that was involved before you start installing. Just tell me what you were doing on a daily basis, what that work involved.

Buehler: Well, it started here. We got loan lists together. Mind you, this was before computers. Just on the edge of computer time. So we had the loan lists typed and then when there were corrections we whited out the page or we cut out something with paper and glued the replacement line over it and made photocopies. Rauschenberg's friend and CPA [certified public accountant] was Rubin [L.] Gorewitz and he kind of ran the office for ROCI. There was a company formed called Cloud Management [International] and Cloud Management did all of the negotiations with the shipping companies, at least they had to sign off on contracts. Rubin Gorewitz was friends with the president of [DB] Schenker USA. This is not insignificant in a weird way. Schenker is a big German company. They're affiliated with the German railway system, and they had an office on the fifty-second floor of the World Trade Center [New York] as Schenker U.S. Art Division. Schenker made all those promises to Rauschenberg, "Oh yeah, we'll take you around the world and you'll get free tickets and we'll get free charter flights." They're huge, they're a gigantic company. They relied on that so we said okay, we don't have to deal with that much. They do all this because they're a big company. Charlie Yoder and I had to go every now and then to their headquarters in the World Trade Center and give them all the lists and all the changes and things like that so they could stay on top and prepare the steps along the way as they evolved. That was a lot of administrative work. That pretty much backfired.

On the first trip to Mexico, we had all the crates built by Crozier [Fine Arts, New York]. It's now a big art shipping company that still exists. We had three, four, five tractor-trailers going out to, I think, Stewart Air Force Base [Newburgh, New York], north of Manhattan somewhere on the other side of the Hudson [River]. It was also a civilian airport, but not of significance. It was an airbase. They said, okay we have a C-130 charter that's a Hercules cargo plane and the crates

need to be there at so-and-so time. We had sent them loan lists and crate lists and dimensions lists ahead of time. We were lining up all the crates on the tarmac, no roof, it was a beautiful day. The plane landed and the guy in big cowboy boots came walking towards us with a British accent. They said, “Oh this is the loadmaster,” and he looked at all the crates and said, “What the hell is this?” We said, “Well that’s the load for Mexico for you.” He said, “It won’t fit.” “What do you mean it won’t fit?” It turned out that Schenker, when they studied the art lists, obviously they didn’t have much experience in art. We had the dimensions for all the crates, but in the art business you always have the height first and then the length and then the width. That’s the rule. We sent them this list and they just cubed it out and said so-and-so many cubic feet, it will fit. But the plane is round and crates are square, so they miscalculated by literally one hundred percent. We were already in the bad by 150 thousand dollars when we landed in Mexico. They turned around and made a second trip. As simple as that.

My wife and I were on the first trip. She had the little dog that we got in India, the Lhasa Apso. We were sleeping in the plane on top of the crates on the way to Mexico with a doggy between us. Charlie Yoder was again involved in the ROCI tour. We were good partners. We worked together really well on the European tour so he got involved again. It was very nice. He was a tall man. Beautiful to work with. When he got married he checked out, said, “I have to be at home more.” I had to get two ladders because six-foot-nine is not easy to replace. I called them Charlie One and Charlie Two.

That was the ROCI tour. It was still without computers. RadioShack had just come out with a little miniature thing that had four lines of eighty characters apiece on the display, but at least it

had a memory. I typed our entire inventory into that little computer and it had a battery-powered printer. So suddenly you had a little office and you could make lists and we could sort things.

Q: All right, well let's talk about ROCI. Let's be really specific. You started talking about Mexico, but let's speak about some of your memories. We can just go down the list. You can say, "Oh I'd like to speak about that installation or I don't remember as much about that installation." Is there anything else that you would like to say about Mexico?

Buehler: Well, it was the first venue. There was no dry run. This was it and it worked really well. I think we were well prepared. You always depend on the crew in the museum and they had a great crew. If I remember there were also people from Bob's studio in Florida who came to help install. It was a beautiful museum, Museo Rufino Tamayo. It was built for the famous painter. There were some issues of course, like everything else. The museum wanted to sponsor their namesake artist so when you got into the museum as per their plan, you see Rufino Tamayo works first. The artistic director of ROCI, a friend of Bob Rauschenberg's, [Donald] Don Saff, he was there most of the time, ahead of time, and also when we were there installing. He did all the dirty work, the discussion and negotiations with the director. They managed to get the Rufino Tamayo to put in another room so when people came into the museum, they saw Rauschenberg with the big show that was advertised.





Installation view, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI MEXICO*, Museo Rufino Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo Internacional, Mexico City, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: You said that you were well prepared so what does that mean? What's all the preparation that needs to happen before you arrive?

Buehler: Well, I'm known to be a true fanatic. The first thing we built was a mobile office and a mobile tool shop. It was a crate about the size of this table here in volume and it opened in the front. It also had a little trap door on the side. It arrived with the crates with something called a J-bar—a Johnson bar. It's a lever that you put under heavy, big crates to get them up and rolling and onto dollies. I had designed this crate so the first thing you do is to get that thing out so you can move crates. Then you open it up in the front and there were dollies in there and there was a little stove and we brought astronaut food, freeze-dried things so we were independent, and there was a toolbox in there of course. There was a little compartment for dogs so there was a little bowl. We were really well prepared. Wherever we went throughout the tour, they always said they'd never seen anything like that. I had all the tools.

Bob was always very generous with all things that we did. I'm more frugal. I've never had much money anyway so I didn't have huge amounts to spend. To suddenly have a Rauschenberg credit card in my pocket was a different ballgame. I called him or his accountant every now and then and said, "Are we over budget? Are we too expensive?" He'd say, "Just do your thing. Don't worry about it. You'll know." It never happened. Even when we built the warehouse—the first warehouse in Manhattan and then the second warehouse now in Mount Vernon [New York]—he was always very generous. "Just do your thing. I worry about the art. You worry about storing it and moving it and things like that." So that went through the show.

There were things that you'd never expect to experience in your life. The next venue after Mexico was Chile. Apart from it still being under the [Augusto] Pinochet government, it was still a dictatorship, and after Rauschenberg had been there and collected photographs and materials and all of that, a major earthquake had hit the museum and the country. It was a really beautiful neoclassical museum [Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago] and had a huge glass dome roof, like a train station. Gorgeous.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI CHILE*, 1985  
Offset lithograph on paperboard  
34 1/2 x 24 inches (87.6 x 61 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal  
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York



Rauschenberg at the Museo Nacional de Bellas  
Artes, Santiago, Chile, for *ROCI CHILE*, 1985.  
Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg  
Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry  
Van Brunt

But the second floor was condemned because of the earthquake and there were cracks in the walls and when you walked on the carpet, little puffs of dust come up from the aftershocks. It was sad in a way. The way socialist countries are set. They are very happy people, Chileans. Chileans are really nice, but they live under this dictatorship so it puts a gray view over the whole happiness. We did have two earthquakes while we were there installing.

Q: Really?

Buehler: We were advised to be in the hotel outside the city that had a generator because usually in earthquakes the power fails and this was a major hotel with their own generator. We saw the lamps shaking. It was at night. I called the museum guard and said, “Go to the first floor and

check on the paintings. Are those paintings still on the wall?” We had installed them in such a way so there were no hooks. It was just neoprene strips and they hang on friction because they were heavy so they would just weigh down, but an earthquake’s a different story. We had him tap, tap, tap. He came back, “*Sí, señor,*” so all was good. I speak Spanish so the Latin American countries were great for me because I could communicate.

Q: Right. How long would you typically have to install the show?

Buehler: It was different. Enough time, most of the time. A week or two. Those museums didn’t have a schedule like MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York] has here or the Guggenheim [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York] where they go bang, bang, bang, back-to-back shows. They have plenty of time between them.

Q: And you guys would normally arrive first?

Buehler: Rauschenberg went there first to look at it and travel, a year before or something like that, and take pictures and gather materials. In Chile he went to copper mines and took copper, went to foundries and smelting companies, and was impressed with that. So the Chile series [*Copperhead / ROCI CHILE*, 1985] are all on copper and gorgeous. Then I would arrive first most of the time and then the trucks would arrive or I would travel with the art in cargo planes.

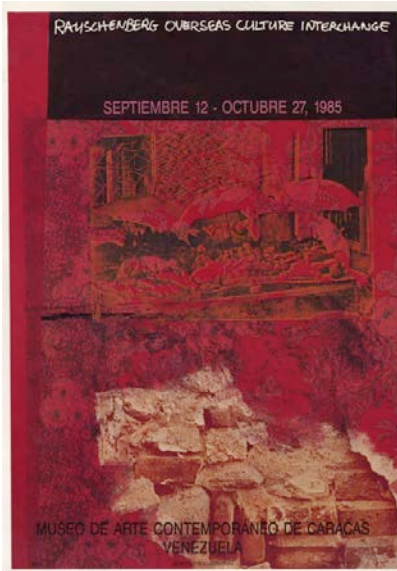


Robert Rauschenberg  
*Copperhead Grande / ROCI CHILE*, 1985  
Acrylic and tarnishes on copper  
91 7/8 x 144 3/4 inches (233.4 x 367.7 cm)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
Gift of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

The next venue after Chile was Venezuela [note: *ROCI VENEZUELA*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas, 1985] and they came up with an idea. They said, well air cargo is really expensive but we have an air force and we can have air force planes bring the art from Chile to Venezuela. I was supposed to have a meeting with a Major so-and-so on the way back from Chile to New York. In Caracas I had the meeting and we discussed the logistics, how we can do this and when and who and where the trucks go. They also had C-130s, cargo planes that load from the back. The back flops down. I said, “So how do we do this? I bring a whole stack of money?” They said they would provide the crew and the plane, but we had to pay for our own jet fuel, which was about forty thousand dollars if I remember correctly. I said, “Well, what do I do? Do we have a wad of money and then pay at the pump or something like that?” He said, “No, no. No cash. You bring cash, we’ll lose the plane and the crew and you and the money.” He was a major or something like that. They didn’t trust their own pilots. They said “No, no. We’ll make an arrangement.” It was a good thing Schenker was well involved in Germany. They contacted Lufthansa and Lufthansa has a station in Lima, Peru I think—or Quito [Ecuador]—and they said okay, that’s the halfway stop. We’ll fuel up there and we’ll pay the Lufthansa agent in Lima.

They had a station there. They pay for the gas and you pay us, so no money changes hands.

That's how we did it.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI VENEZUELA*, 1985  
Offset lithograph  
34 1/2 x 24 inches (87.6 x 61 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal Limited Art  
Editions, West Islip, New York

Q: And the next was China.

Buehler: Well, then Venezuela. One of Schenker's ulterior motives was that they had to develop something they called the climate safe. It was an aluminum safe, humongous and heavy. Very nice workmanship, made in Germany. They were like traveling vaults. Great for the *Mona Lisa* [Leonardo da Vinci, ca. 1503–19] I'm sure and great for classic paintings, but Rauschenberg has works that weigh half a pound, very delicate fabrics—they're called *Hoarfrosts* [1974–76]—and they had those packed in climate safes. They went through a public relations campaign, saying Rauschenberg endorses the climate safe and they wanted to take his picture in front of a museum

and do a video and all that. They were a pain in the butt. They were really awful and they were heavy and they increased our volume of shipping and they were difficult to handle.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Emerald (Hoarfrost)*, 1975  
Solvent transfer on fabric and collage  
92 x 36 inches (233.7 x 91.4 cm)  
Private collection

So we were in Venezuela and they had a great carpentry shop. I became friends with a carpenter while we installed. I forget his name. I said, “Look at these crates. Can you replace those crates with nice wooden crates that you make in your shop, something nice to handle and not *Hoarfrosts* in one crate and this painting and this and that, so we can get rid of those crates?” He said, “Sure, no problem.” So he did that. Before we left he started taking measurements. I called the local representative for Schenker. [William D.] Bill Reynolds was his name. I’ll never forget. An American. I called Bill and I said, “Bill, we’re not using the climate safes anymore. They’re just a pain in the neck and they’re at the loading dock at the museum. You can have them picked up.” That went over so badly that Schenker discontinued the relationship with ROCI and Cloud Management and Rubin Gorewitz and the whole number.

Q: As of that moment?

Buehler: As of that moment basically. So we were coming back to de-install Venezuela and I knew that we needed some help because we had a show in Beijing coming up. Through this German company—just a little sideline—at the time they had an office in New York and I was kind of involved with it. He always wanted to make me the president, but I didn't want to be a president so I said, "I'll help you and I'll work with you, but get somebody else." Through this I had some contacts in New York and one of the biggest companies at the time, especially in overseas shipping, was called Keating fine art shipping [W. R. Keating and Company]. They evolved through different formations into what's now Masterpiece International. A first class company. State of the art. All the art shipping companies in the world model themselves after Masterpiece. The owner of Masterpiece—now Masterpiece and at the time Keating fine art shipping—was David ["Dave"] Epstein. He still is. I called Dave. I had met him. We were not on the friendliest terms because he thought I was working for the competition, which I really wasn't. There was no competition for them. I called Dave and said, "Dave, it takes a lot to ask you this, but I need help. I need big time help. We have five containers," or ten containers, I forget, "of art that I need to get from Venezuela to Beijing within this and that amount of time." He said, "Well, I can help. The problem is, there's a big German industrial fair in Beijing and all Lufthansa planes are really booked solid in that time." It was just before Christmas, so holiday business and all that. He said, "I'll see what I can do and call you back."



He did. He called and said, “I can get one container every day to Frankfurt from Caracas. I can get that container to Beijing. One every day, not more.” We had ten I think. I said, “Okay, we’ll do it.” The timeframe was right. So I was in Caracas. My wife Ilona was in Frankfurt and Charlie Yoder was in Beijing. We did like a relay race. We got it done. I’m still to this day eternally grateful to Dave Epstein. He really saved us. He continued to be our shipping company for the rest of the tour through, then after, China, Japan, and then so on and so on.

China was quite something because it was before the China that’s now. There were no cars in the streets and there were five thousand bicycles at any given time of the day. It was winter and they had open trucks at the airport. When they picked up the cargo from Beijing airport, Lufthansa had open trucks and they threw blankets over the artwork. Unimaginable, even at the time, for U.S. art shipping standards. We got them to the museum, the national gallery of art [National Art Museum of China, Beijing]. Huge, gigantic, and filthy as hell. We got crews together through the museum and through the Ministry of Culture. Mind you, I speak Spanish but I don’t speak Chinese. So they assigned us an interpreter through the Ministry of Culture who was supposed to be with us at all times, but so many things went wrong.

We had limited power supply. It was winter, it got dark early, and we only had so many kilowatt-hours per day. They would look at the meter and just turn off the power when we had reached our quota. Then they would lock the box. It was four in the afternoon. I said, “Where’s the electrician?” He just left. He’s on the bicycle. You see five thousand bicycles and one of them was the electrician. I did that for one day and on the second day I took a little crowbar and broke the thing open and switched on the power and said, “Come on, we can do this.” I think the lock

is still broken to this day because they were really inactive, passive. Of course every time something happened and we wanted to complain, they withdrew the interpreter so we were without a voice. The interpreter just went for lunch or was not there.

Rauschenberg was there, his nephew was there, Bill Goldston from ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York] was there with his younger son, and everybody helped.

Rubin Gorewitz was there to make comments. He was known for his bad jokes. We could have done without him, but he was there as well. It was a huge show. Gigantic.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI CHINA*, 1985  
Offset lithograph on paperboard  
34 3/8 x 24 inches (87.3 x 61 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

The museum was gigantic and Rauschenberg was afraid that it would look empty so he had added umpteen tons of work that we shipped separately from what we had before, just to make sure the shop wouldn't look empty. We had some electric works and some electronic works, twelve TV monitors traveling with us that were running at all times, two stacked together with

either comics or Rauschenberg's travelogues or one part would be his biography. They were hugely popular in China especially, other countries as well, but China especially. We had to lock them up during installation because the crew would just sit and watch TV when we made test runs. We had to put those in a separate room. We had to test them somewhere else.

Then the opening comes up. We had these electric components and we usually tape the cables and the wires to the floor so people wouldn't trip over them. The janitor of the museum came with the interpreter and says, "You know how many people we're going to have at the opening? There's going to be four or five thousand." He said, "You know how the Chinese people walk? A lot of them, they shuffle a little bit." He said, "Those cables are going to be torn in two minutes." He got big rubber mats and we put them over the cables. It didn't look pretty but it did the job and it was packed.

We were working until the last minute. They would—especially in Asia—have this ribbon cutting ceremony. The doors were closed. Rauschenberg was outside with the press and the dignitaries and we were struggling with one semi-round wall. We had to screw a Plexiglas sheet and the wall was such bad quality that the screws kept popping out because the sheet was under tension. So we were still struggling with that, holding this and screwing it, and Rauschenberg sent his nephew in to tell us, "I can't hold the people anymore. I've introduced them to my mother already and my aunt and my sister. We have to come in now." So okay, done. We dragged our tools around the corner, the door opened on the other side, and these four thousand people came gushing in. The place was packed. We had a room about the size of a cubicle where we had our tools and our equipment, no ceiling, just a compartment off the main hallway. We all

collapsed in that room. Done. Then we heard the people passing outside in mass quantities.

There's a video somewhere that shows us passing a bottle of vodka around in that cubicle. We were so exhausted. We didn't see much of that opening day really.



Thomas Buehler in ROCI T-shirt having just completed the installation of *ROCI CHINA*, Beijing, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Then everybody left. Huge success. Every day there were lines of people, four abreast, around the museum to see the show. Gigantic.



Crowds lined up for *ROCI CHINA* opening, National Art Museum of China, Beijing, November 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

Q: Do you remember how people responded? Did you get to see?

Buehler: With disbelief. They had never seen anything like that. Especially artists. I read every now and then still—there's a young woman, a Chinese woman I think, who just wrote something about ROCI in China, and there's another one who wrote about ROCI in Berlin. Especially in China, we made a deep impression on the artists. To this day they still talk about how much Rauschenberg's appearance and his art, and seeing his art, has changed the Chinese art scene.

There was an American journalist [Marlowe Hood]. I think he was the Beijing correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*. He had a small apartment in Beijing and he cleared his apartment and invited young Chinese artists to show their art, a little bit in the style of the Russian artists in Moscow. I think the organization was called Crocodile. They did the same thing, underground art exhibitions, which was not official party. It was all communists. They invited Bob to see the work and he was not very impressed. It was not great art, but they had the spirit at least. They got him a bottle of Jack Daniel's and who knows where they got that. Rauschenberg was there. I think there are even pictures of that meeting with Rauschenberg in Beijing. Then everybody left.

While the Beijing show was up, we were preparing the Tibet show in Lhasa in Tibet. So again the air force flew the art. The woman who had helped organize ROCI China was [Dr.] Chun-Wuei [Su Chien]. Her husband was a medical doctor in Baltimore, Chinese, well connected to the Chinese government and he made the bridge into China. They made this happen. Chun-Wuei was there as Bob's interpreter and also as a liaison to the Chinese officials. We were having the show installed and we knew we had an airplane. I said, "Well, what kind of airplane is it? What

size?” Bob had selected works and television sets and all sorts of things for Tibet and had everything in crates, but we didn’t know how big the plane was. Again, volume. The same question that we had before. Chun-Wuei called the air force contact she had and she came back and said, “Well, it’s three hundred cubic feet or three hundred cubic meters, I don’t know. I have no idea.” I said, “Well, that helps a lot, Chun-Wuei. Now what do we do.” Well, worst case scenario, remembering that crates are big and bulky—a lot of it was sculptural work for Tibet. So how about we unpack all those other crates and just ship them wrapped in blankets, like what we do locally here. Like a sculpture gets wrapped in moving pads and blankets and gets put on the truck. It’s safe if you’re with it and know how to deal with it.



Thomas Buehler and Chun-Wuei Su Chien (center) with Tibetan officials, transporting *ROCI TIBET* exhibition to Lhasa, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

As it happened China had what they called a bumper harvest in those long cabbages, Chinese cabbages. They had so much cabbage that when you went to the city, they had cabbage on the balconies and they had big piles of cabbage with down blankets over them to protect them from the frost. There would be a guard next to it or someone with the party armband who said he was

watching cabbage. I said, “I see all of those blankets on the cabbage there. Those are good and they have down fabrication and they make down jackets and down blankets and comforters. Why don’t you find us a truckload of down blankets and then we’ll wrap the art in that and we’ll be fine, I guess,” which we did.

The truck was not the prettiest, but nice and thick down blankets arrived. And we wrapped everything in those and put the crates in the museum. They had lots of space there. So the truck arrived, an army truck. We put everything on two or three trucks, I don’t remember. We were going out to the airbase and it was an almost identical plane to the C-130 except it was Russian—Antonov [An-12]—but the same loading principle; drop the back, load the art in, boom. It had a cabin with six seats for people to travel with it. So they loaded it up.

To fly to Lhasa, you had to fly to Chengdu in Sichuan in western China, and then you could only fly to Lhasa, at the time, at a certain time of the day in the morning because you literally fly through the mountains. You don’t fly over the mountains, you fly through the valleys, the Himalayas, and there’s a certain time window where you can land in Lhasa because of wind and fog. You lose that and you go back. So we went to Chengdu. We arrived there and Chun-Wuei says, “They’re asking where do you want to stay. Do you want to stay in the hotel or do you want to stay in the airport,” in the barracks or something like that. While they were doing maintenance and things, I said, “Well, I’ll look at the barracks.” We got close and said, “No, hotel.” It was really bad. They took us to the hotel with a mandate to be back at the airport at three o’clock in the morning to be ready for takeoff at first light and make it into Lhasa.

They picked me up at the hotel and there was this long line. We were getting closer to the plane way out on the tarmac. They had armed guards around it. Art was sacred for them, valuable. That was the word, valuable, American. So there were long lines of rickshaws and people with vegetables and fruit and things like that, and there was a scale and the crew of the plane took each crate of fruit and vegetables and weighed it and put it in the plane. I said, "What the hell is going on here?" Well, there was no fruit or vegetables in Lhasa and there was a Chinese garrison there. These guys, the pilot and the copilot and the other officers, were buying this fruit in Chengdu and selling them at maximum profit in Lhasa. Of course, we had tons of space. It was a huge plane. Half the plane was loaded with fruit and vegetables and the other half with Rauschenberg art and materials. Usually the C-130 gets flown with two or three people at the most. They had, I think, thirteen people onboard. I think they all wanted to take a little vacation and go to Lhasa and there was extra room behind the cockpit for all the people sitting on benches, strapped in.

There were also two party officials from Beijing there, civilians. We got into Lhasa. The plane landed and they were opening the back of the plane, and the trucks pulled up and there were all these Tibetans, and women in long aprons and long dresses. They were all standing there. Those two party guys came out to the back of the plane and started yelling at the Tibetans, treating them really bad. We were all just looking at them, thinking something's going on here. I didn't fathom really what was going on.





Unloading crates of Rauschenberg's artworks for *ROCI TIBET*, Lhasa, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Then suddenly those two guys turned pale and beckoned their car that was waiting there already and disappeared. The interpreter came to the plane, "I'm George, I'm the interpreter." He was really nice, Mr. George, and spoke English. I said, "What happened just now?" He said, "Well, my advice for you is, don't overextend yourself with high altitude and just take it easy the first day or two. Don't lift anything, don't get overexcited, and all that. Just adjust to the climate." That's what those guys did. The Tibetans were waiting for them to fade out because they were yelling and pushing and shoving and all that. When they were gone, they spit in their hands, let's load the truck, and they were all happy and did the thing.



Unidentified woman, “Mr. George” (in black hat), Terry Van Brunt, translator, Rauschenberg, and “Jiam Yang,” Lhasa, Tibet, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

It was a long haul to Lhasa from the airport. It was a couple of hours in an open truck and bad roads and I was like, ugh, my god. “Go slow guys. Please. We have fragile art.” Not extremely fragile, not ceramic, but still fragile enough for bad roads like this and bad trucks like that. We made it. It was not a museum. It was called the Tibet Revolution Exhibition Hall [Lhasa] and it was built at the foot of the Potala, the Dalai Lama’s palace on the mountain. There were all these temples around the foot of the Potala and all the Tibetan pilgrims and Buddhists had come to Lhasa to honor the Dalai Lama and Buddha. They go from one temple to the other and turn their prayer wheels and put a little yak butter on their idols and things like that. The Chinese built that exhibition hall right in that path where all the pilgrims went from one temple to the other with the mandate basically for them to go into that exhibition hall where the Chinese explained why Tibet is really Chinese because some Chinese prince married the Tibetan princess in 1400-something. That was their way of explaining history to whoever wanted to know or not to know. Apparently at Bob Rauschenberg’s request, they changed the name of that hall from Revolution Exhibition Hall to Lhasa Art Exhibition Hall and changed the writing on the wall. We couldn’t check that, but Chun-Wuei said “Yes, they changed it.”

We arrived there and it looked pretty bad. We brought our own light system that I had bought previously and they said “Okay, we have paint and all this and what do we do?” I said, “We’ll make a solo gallery out of it.” We had them clean the floors and repaint the walls and we had the lights adjusted. It looked great, looked really nice. And we installed the show.

The exhibition hall was on street-level so two people had special jobs as guards. One was at the door and he was to make sure that the cows didn’t wander into the exhibition. He had a big stick and every time a cow came near, he raised the stick so the cow would shy away and go on its merry way. The other person was in the exhibition hall and she was supposed to prevent the pilgrims from doing what they do in the other temples: smear yak butter on the artwork as a sign of appreciation. They said, “Uh-uh, not on this.” It was great. People came in. It didn’t happen like that. Bob always said literally they had their goats over their shoulders as they came in to look at the art. It was very folksy. Very nice. The show was gorgeous.



Installation view, *ROCI TIBET*,  
Revolutionary Exhibition Hall, Lhasa,  
1985. Photograph Collection. Robert  
Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New  
York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

Q: I have some photos actually, I think that you took, of Tibet.

Buehler: This was George, this is the interpreter. This is Chun-Wuei. This guy here, I forget his name—Jiam Yang [phonetic], something like that—he had a company that gave out licenses for film crews to film on Mount Everest. He was a filthy rich guy because he was corrupt. He was involved also with the Minister of Culture, but he was always with us and with Bob. This is George here. This is the interpreter. This is Jiam Yang again, the same guy. That's Bob in his coyote coat.



Rauschenberg in coyote fur coat, *ROCI TIBET*, Revolutionary Exhibition Hall, Lhasa, Tibet, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

Tibetans found it very funny that somebody would wear the fur on the outside because they wear fur coats and they wear them on the inside. They offered to trade for a yak coat, but Bob liked that coyote coat too much. This is Potala [Palace, Lhasa, Tibet]. This guy's name I don't know. He was very handsome.



Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet, 1985.  
Photograph Collection. Robert  
Rauschenberg Foundation Archives,  
New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

This is the opening ceremony. They had the prayer flags. Bob wanted those. He said they looked so colorful and all that and let's have those. Then he laid them out by color the way he liked them, the way he wanted them strung up, and then of course the Tibetans would come—there's always something—the Tibetans would come and say they have to be in a certain sequence. You can't just sort them by color. They have to be this and that, they represent earth and wind and fire, and they have to be in a certain order to be what they are. Okay. I wrote those comments actually. Here we stayed in the hotel that's now I think a Holiday Inn in Lhasa. At the time it was the only hotel really worth mentioning and it was run by Chinese kids from the village somewhere. No Tibetans were involved. The politicians and the comrades, they always had their meetings in the hotel, which mostly ended by them getting helplessly drunk and getting totally stoned out of their minds. At the hotel we had to say if we wanted to come for dinner or not because they would not cook otherwise, because there were not too many people in the hotel. If we arrived too late we wouldn't get dinner.



Rauschenberg and a Tibetan official at the opening ceremony for *ROCI TIBET*, Revolutionary Exhibition Hall, Lhasa, December 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

One day—how did that play out? It was really funny. We got to the hotel and it was like 7:30 and they said, “Well, the restaurant’s closed. Sorry, the chef just left.” Somebody came through the hallway, one of the communist guys, a Chinese guy, and saw us sitting there. There was an American doctor who spoke Chinese who was also in Tibet. I don’t know why. We were just sitting there with him and this Chinese guy comes through and said, “Why are you sitting here?” “Well, we just got bumped off. We don’t get dinner.” “Stay here,” he said. “You’ll have dinner in one hour.” He sent his driver to his house and cooked dinner for all of us and sent back trays and trays of stuff to have dinner.

Q: Nice. So you said “all of us.” How many people were you and who was part of that group?

Buehler: For the installation it was Bob and Chun-Wuei and Terry Van Brunt who was his assistant at the time and I don’t think Don Saff was there. There weren’t too many Americans then.



Q: How long did you stay in Tibet?

Buehler: Well, I went back to Beijing actually and stayed in Beijing for the duration. Then we took the Beijing show down and then I went back to Lhasa and took that show down. We took it back to combine with the Beijing contingent and then ship it on to Japan.

Q: How did you spend your time when you were in Tibet?

Buehler: Drinking. There's not much you can do. So we hung out. Charlie Yoder was on the way coming but not on the takedown. There was always something to do. Just before, they had had a show for agricultural education and there was a stuffed pig behind the museum lying on its side in the dirt. Bob saw it and said, "Can I have that?" I said, "Sure, I'll ask and see how we do." They said, "Sure, we're throwing it away." It was okay. It was in good condition. A little torn on some parts. We had to make a crate for it and of course there were no materials there. I scrounged from what we had and what they had in the museum and I built a crate and I put that pig in there and we shipped it back to Beijing with us.

So we're shipping back all the art from Beijing to Tokyo and the big drama hits now. Even the Lufthansa offices in Beijing were dirty and that means something because usually everything is really nicely organized. They had cargo straps all over the place and nets here and it didn't look like Lufthansa. Well, it wasn't run by Lufthansa, it was run by China Airlines. So we were loading into a China Airlines plane. We arrived at Narita Airport in Tokyo and I came down the stairs and I looked around and I said, "This is paradise." All these Japanese guys with helmets

and white gloves and their little forklifts were sparkling and all that. Everything was nicely prepped and all the aircraft looked good and the tarmac looked first class. I literally kissed the ground. I went down and kissed the ground in Tokyo.

I looked around saying, “Well, where is the shipping company’s representative?” He was supposed to meet the plane. Nobody was there. It was Friday afternoon. So what do we do now? Japan Airlines, the company that handles the cargo, “Well, we’ll have to get the pallets out from the plane of course and we’ll get them into the customs bound area, then we’ll take it from there, make some phone calls,” which we did. I was so happy there. They strapped each crate to the forklift with two guys left and right holding their little white-gloved hands on them and all that. After China, it was like paradise.

As I had learned by then, Nippon Express was the company that handled this. A big company. One of the biggest. The representative was not there. They called. There was nobody in the office. It was Friday evening by now, five o’clock, six o’clock. So what do we do? Well, there wasn’t much we could do until Monday, so they suggested we go into our hotel and take it from there. I didn’t have a hotel. Nippon Express organized my hotel. I said, “Take me to the arrivals terminal,” to get my passport stamped and all that. They helped—Japan Airlines or whoever handled the airport—they took me there. I was going past this bank of telephones and the only hotel I recognized was the Okura hotel [Hotel Okura, Tokyo], which I knew because Bob always stayed there. It’s one of the five most expensive hotels in the world. It was the only hotel I knew. They had phones there, so I picked up the phone and I got the receptionist. I said, “Well, you don’t know me but you know about Rauschenberg. He’s a very famous artist and he always stays



with you.” She said, “Yes. We know Mr. Rauschenberg.” I said, “Well, I work for him. I need a room and I need a car.” She said, “Okay, we’ll send you a car. It’ll be there within the hour.” Thank you. I went to the meeting point. The driver came, very nice. In Japan they always have white gloves on their chauffeurs. They sent me a nice car. I checked into the Okura hotel late Friday evening. Took a nice bath. Took another bath, went down to the restaurant, had a lot of sushi, a lot of sake. The next time that the time zones matched, I called Bob’s studio in Captiva [Florida]. When Terry said, “Where are you?” I said, “I’m in the Okura Hotel.” Before he said anything, he said, “Check out immediately.” I said, “I don’t know where. I had left this as my contact address. I have to wait for Nippon Express to contact me. I have no other place to go right now. Sorry, I have to stay until Monday,” which I did. It was great. It has a beautiful park and a temple in the back, a Buddhist temple in the park. A gorgeous hotel.

Monday morning, I contacted them. They profusely apologized, from the shipping company. “We don’t know how this happened. A big misunderstanding, we heard the show was canceled.” I said, “What do you mean the show was canceled?” Fujiko Nakaya is a friend of Bob’s, a Japanese artist, video artist. She had been a friend of his since the sixties, seventies. Her father was a very prominent painter and she knew a lot of people and she had arranged for most of it except for one thing that was not considered: the volume of the show. It turned out that they had booked a gallery in a department store for the show, which was way too small for the ROCI inventory that we had. Fujiko apparently had canceled the show and given that information also to the shipping company, except she didn’t tell them the plane was arriving sometime soon. So they didn’t have any information.



Fujiko Nakaya, Rauschenberg, and others at Otsuka Ohmi Ceramics Company, Japan, 1982. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

We had to go through customs and the representative from Nippon Express went with me where the crates are stored and we were checking things off the list, and this and that, and then we get to the crate with the pig. He said, “What’s that?” I said, “Well, that’s something Mr. Rauschenberg acquired in Tibet and we’re just keeping that and send it back to him.” He said, “Open it.” We got some workers and we opened the crate, and they saw this abominably ugly pig in there with sawdust everywhere. He said, “What the hell is this?” I said, “Well, this is something Mr. Rauschenberg got in Tibet.” “Japanese customs cannot see this. It will endanger the entire shipment if this is part of that shipment. I want this on the plane to Los Angeles this evening.” So they took it out. Didn’t even put it on their list, just took it to their customs storage and out.

Then of course customs said, “No, you don’t have a venue. The venue was canceled.” So the shipping company said, “Well, what’s the destination?” I said, “Well, we don’t know yet. We’re finding a new venue.” Then customs said if it’s not artwork and you don’t have an exhibition,

it's cultural goods and it must be merchandise. They wanted a cash bond of six hundred thousand dollars, which of course we didn't have. Nobody had. We agreed that the crates could stay in customs storage for a while and then be transferred to another bonded area in the airport, but it was all very expensive. The airport was like storage space at a premium.

From that moment on I went to Tokyo, I met with Fujiko, and Fujiko and I put a binder together with all the pictures of ROCI and all of the inventory and art we had. She made appointments with everybody and went from one museum to the other. All the big names in Tokyo and they all said, "We'd like to help out, we love Mr. Rauschenberg and love his work, but we're booked for the next five years," like museums are. Fujiko said, "I have one more card. Let's try that." It was a museum just under construction outside of Tokyo in Setagaya [Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo], which is reachable by subway. It was the home of the then prime minister of Japan, a very fancy neighborhood. There was a new museum under construction in a golf course that used to be part of the U.S. garrison. They're building this new museum right in the middle. The director, Mr. [Seiji] Oshima, was a big fan of Rauschenberg's. We got there and he had this office already. It wasn't finished, it was under construction. He looked at the binder and said, "It breaks my heart. I'm a big fan of Rauschenberg, but my board of directors will never allow my first exhibition to be a *gaijin*, a foreigner. It has to be Japanese art. But I will give you the second show, which is in about a year." Well that sounded the closest we had had so far. We said, "Okay, we'll do that."

Well what do we do with the art in the meantime? It couldn't stay at the airport for a year. It was going to kill us. Fujiko of course was well connected and she contacted Mr. [Kohei] Watanabe, who came from a family that had a stone quarry in Utsunomiya—that's 250 kilometers from

Tokyo—250 years old and very famous. The stone is called *Ōya-ishi* and a lot of government buildings and fancy villas are built with it. Sandstone. Very beautiful. Little brown specks in it. They didn't quarry rocks there anymore. He owned golf courses. He owned one of the first cell phone companies in Japan. He was a rich man. Mr. Watanabe said, "I always have art festivals in my quarry in the mountain. Do you want to come and look at it?" I said, "Okay we'll look at it." So we took this car and he took us driving down as if you're driving the Cologne dome. It was huge, gigantic, like a cathedral. Very beautiful, but also water running down the walls because it was so deep down in the mountain. It was really cold, like ten degrees Celsius. So ninety-nine percent humidity, ten degrees Celsius goes with no art insurance really well. He said, "Well, you know I have this pilot project here for the government and I'm storing citrus fruit for Japanese emergencies. I have a big tent over there that's controlling the humidity, which has seventy percent humidity and also a low temperature and you could store your art in there." We got back to Bob. Rubin Gorewitz went back to the insurance. Bob signed a waiver that he would not make any claims based on climate damage. Sure enough Mr. Watanabe's art festival, which was documented and registered, signed the paper as importing the show for the Watanabe *Ōya-ishi* Art Festival, and we got the show in there.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI JAPAN*, 1986  
Offset lithograph  
34 1/2 x 24 inches (87.6 x 61 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Setagaya Art  
Museum, Tokyo

I made the sign of the cross. We left the art behind. I went back to the States. We were coming back a year later and the museum was finished. It was gorgeous. They had a show there. It was all beautiful. The architect of the Setagaya Art Museum was Shōzō Uchii. It was gorgeous. Light floors and beautiful—in the park and all the technical things. The exhibition walls could be configured by running on motors, so there were remote controlled walls that you could configure any which way. Very nice.

We got the things out of the quarry. It was summer in the meantime. Beautiful weather. I'll never forget, the Japanese word is *nihon-bare*. It means beautiful Japanese weather, blue skies, the sun is shining. So we were getting all the art out and the bolts on the crates were rusted and we got things out that we thought were more successful, like the works on paper. Everything was a little buckled and the mats didn't look that great. Since we were not responsible for anybody and Bob said, "See what you can do," we put all the works on paper out in the sun. UV light cures a lot of things. It gets the bugs out of paper and the mold, so it didn't look so bad. Didn't look bad at all

actually. We had a lot of work in ceramic because Bob went to Japan a lot of times and had ceramic works and they were fine. They had no problem with that. We had a great show. It was one of the nicest ones actually. One of the best memories of installing.



Installation view, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI JAPAN*, courtyard of the Setagaya Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1986. Untitled (1985) pictured in foreground. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Why?

Buehler: I don't know. Because things work so well in Japan and the Japanese are nicely crazy. They're absolutely nuts and I love them. I had a hotel room on the fifteenth or eighteenth floor of the Ginza Dai-ichi Hotel [Tokyo], way up, overlooking the Tokyo Bay. You could see Mount Fuji in the background. It was gorgeous. I was there for a long time because the first time I was there with Fujiko, I was there for three months trying to get the show established. The thing is, you couldn't open a window in the hotel. There was some lock but you couldn't open it. I went down to the receptionist and said, "I'm going to be here for quite a while. It would be nice to be able to open a window every now and then and get some nice air and beautiful weather." They said "Okay." They had me sign a waiver that if I committed suicide jumping out of the window

or if I fell out of the window, the hotel would not be held responsible. I said, “Okay, sure.” I signed.

Q: Wow. So that was already a problem for them, then?

Buehler: They came and opened the window and it was very nice. When they opened the window it had a nice view over the Tokyo Bay and over to the mountain.

Q: Sounds very nice.

Buehler: I had work to do every morning, say from nine to eleven or twelve, with Fujiko. Go and do one thing, an appointment the next day with the shipping company. I made a little plan of discovering Tokyo. I was near the Shimbashi Station and the subway line is called the Yamanote Line. It goes in a circle through Tokyo touching pretty much all the corners. I made a plan of going every day one stop further on the Yamanote Line and then I would get out and walk in that neighborhood and have lunch and dinner there and then come back to the hotel. The next morning, I would do some work and do the same thing again. I pretty much got 360 degrees around.

Q: Sounds nice.

Buehler: Yes. I went off and was near the fish markets, the Kiji [Tsukiji] Fish Market. I loved that. It was walking distance from the hotel so I went a lot of times, had sushi. It was great.

Q: Sounds it.

Buehler: It was fun.

Q: I'm interested in the next destination because people have such different memories of how you got the art there. So, I'm hoping you remember.

Buehler: Oh, man. Cuba. Don Saff had, I think, a relative who had contacts through the special interest section of Cuba in Washington. The U.S. had something and Cuba was in the Swiss Embassy, I think. They took care of Cuban interests and Don Saff knew somebody in Washington. So they got this together.

Then of course, the next question was, how do we get everything there? It turned out that at Havana Airport, no runway was big enough for 747s or other big cargo planes and of course the U.S. Air Force was out of the question to Cuba. Then the Cubans said, "We have a shipping line that runs from the Soviet Union at the time, Kamchatka, the peninsula in the Soviet Union, very close to Japan. We have a ship that flies regularly between there and Tokyo. If you agree, we'll put the containers on the ship. It's going to be a four to six week journey." We communicated that to our insurance company and they said absolutely not. Those ships are known to be unreliable and to make stops somewhere and maybe take up other cargo. They always have space—the Cuban economy is down—and they hardly have any cargo to take back, but they



always take up things on the way if they can get it. If they unload the containers somewhere with the art, then we're screwed. So somebody has to go with it. Me.

Now it gets very curious. They had a ship in China—for six months in dry-dock to clean the hull and take the mussels off and repaint—that was just on the way back from China through the Soviet Union where they take diesel because the fuel was cheaper in the Soviet Union than in Japan. They said that the ship would be here soon. Well we were ready. We had everything in order. Everything was de-installed at the museum and loaded at the shipping company. The ship arrived and I said, “I can't believe this.” The ship was named *La Bahía de Cochinos*—the Bay of Pigs. Just like the big battle with the Cubans against the Americans. So that was the first—

Q: Sign?

Buehler: That's a good one. The agent took me to the harbor and the ship was there and they were doing some maintenance and loading things up and down, and there were all these refrigerators and salon style standup hairdryers stacked up at the dock. I said, “I don't get it. What's going on?” Well, let's take care of business first. The insurance agreed if I traveled with it and had an eye on it. And again Rauschenberg signed the waiver as he did every time something was fishy. We were loading the containers, they got me on the ship, and they were showing me my cabin. It was a beautiful cabin. It was the pilot's cabin with the big map chart table, directly over the engine room. It was beautiful. Hot water out of the shower. This is good, no? Nice. So we were loading the art. The insurance requested that nothing be loaded on the deck and all that. So we did that.

On the way, it took forever. It literally took forever. I went up to the bridge at night usually. Again I speak Spanish so I was able to become friends with the first officer and usually when he was on duty I was there, in the daytime. We went on the Pacific [Ocean] and the Pacific did what its name said; it was very peaceful, very nice for that six weeks or four weeks. I forget how much. Beautiful weather. I started a series of drawings and then we crossed the dateline. The drawing was called *Monday Monday* because there were two Mondays in a row.

Two things. Before I went on the ship, the agent said, “Well I can advise you to take some fruit with you. Take a crate of apples or pears or whatever is available and take a case of Coca-Cola with you.” I said, “Okay, sounds like good advice.” As it turned out, fruit and vegetables ran out pretty much after we passed Hawaii or even before that. We didn’t have much fruit and vegetables. They always had pork. They had freezers full of frozen pork, and beans of course, and then they’d fish every couple of days. They’d slow down the engine to four knots and the cook would be on the deck and fish. Sometimes things that were illegal, like big tortoises. But they didn’t care. They had a big tank of Cuban rum on this ship and they said you could trade Coca-Cola because they can make *Cuba Libres* in mass quantities but they don’t have Coca-Cola. I had two cases, small bottles of Coke. So that came in handy. We became friends. There were forty-five in the crew, three shifts.

Q: And they were from?

Buehler: They were all Cuban. They were all in a bad mood in the beginning because they had been in China for six months. Whereas the captains had been flown in and out, the crew was on the ship for six months in Shanghai or somewhere and they wanted to go home. They just wanted to go home. And the secret of the fridges and the salon type hairdryers was that they'd bought all these in Japan. The Japanese don't buy used things. They bought them in scrap yards and things like that and fixed them up to sell in Cuba because they don't have anything like that. The first officer bought a Japanese car for parts. He had a container full of car parts.

Q: Smart.

Buehler: Yep.

Q: Wow. That sounds like a lot of fun.

Buehler: Then we passed Hawaii and of course they couldn't stop in Hawaii because it was American. They wanted to watch American TV over the airwaves. Not digital TV and all that. So they had all these homemade, handmade antennas that they stuck out of their cabin windows and they were always watching grainy pictures of American TV.

Q: Amazing.

Buehler: The ship was really slow. We had a handwritten note from Fidel Castro—a photocopied note on the bridge to ask the comrades to preserve fuel and not go faster than seventeen knots,

which is really slow for a cargo ship that goes twenty. So that's why it took forever. The first fruit and vegetables they had was when we got to the Panama Canal and an agent came alongside with a launch and they hoisted crates of fruit and vegetables because they couldn't load up in Hawaii because it's not allowed for Cuban ships. We finally got to Cuba and it was heartbreaking because all the families were on a long pier saying, "Pablo! Pedro!" It was heartbreaking. Then we got there and the next adventure started.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI CUBA*, Museo Nacional, 1988  
Silkscreen and offset lithography on foil paper  
35 1/2 x 23 3/4 inches (90.2 x 60.3 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal Limited  
Art Editions, West Islip, New York

There were two venues that were scheduled officially. One was the National Museum of Fine Arts [Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana] and then something for a show of Rauschenberg black-and-white photographs and prints in something called Casa de las Américas, America House, [at the Galería Haydée Santamaría, Havana] that was dedicated not only to U.S. America, but to America as Latin Americans see it, as all of America, including north and south; *las*

*Américas*. They were dedicated to poetry and journalism from the Americas and a show of the black-and-white photographs was supposed to be there.

For some reason Bob had seen a little octagonal building around Castillo, if I remember, at the mouth of the harbor, Castillo de la Real Fuerza [Havana], and fell in love with it. “Can I see that from the inside? Do they have shows on the inside?” It was used for storage for old office furniture and refrigerators and stuff like that and it was in pretty bad shape. Bob said, “I want part of the show there.” The ceramic works and things like that. It had raw rock walls. No glass on the windows. Shooting slots. So they said, “Okay, we’ll clean it out and we’ll make it ready for you. We’ll have Plexiglas windows made so the salt spray wouldn’t come in and put little frames in those little slots.” We had meetings and of course Bob wanted certain works installed there and you have to drill holes in the wall and suddenly after it was in bad shape all those years and they had all their furniture stored there, they say, “Well, it’s a landmark and you can’t drill any holes in the walls.” There were thousands of holes from other things that they had hung there, but now suddenly it was something precious. Of course we were all very positive in meetings and all that and so, well, not a problem. We’ll construct something out of two-by-fours and lumber, we’ll use the existing holes to anchor them and then we’ll mount our artwork on that. It sounded great and it was pretty convincing in the meetings. It didn’t work. It didn’t work at all.



Installation view, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI CUBA*, Castillo de la Real Fuerza, Havana, Cuba, 1988. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

They had given us a chaperone—like a guard—and he was there also to make sure we didn't do any damage to the landmark. We thought we had to do something about this. We got to be friends with this guy. He was always sitting there half asleep. "Would you go and get us some water? A couple of bottles of water?" Then we would drill our holes or we'd cough and drill the holes then. It looked great. It looked really, really, really nice. I had saved all the dust that came out from the walls, like what we do here all the time when we install art—we collect the dust that falls down in envelopes under where you're drilling so it doesn't fall on the floor or the carpet. We had all the rock dust collected and when we de-installed the show at the end of the exhibition we mixed that with epoxy and it had exactly the same color and we fixed all the holes. It looked better than before. Charlie Yoder was good at that stuff. It was good. We fixed the walls.

It was a big success. Cuba was great.



Rauschenberg and Thomas Buehler during ROCI Cuba, Havana, 1988. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Do you remember the openings and the audience response?

Buehler: Yes. Openings, well, they are very hazy. I think Bob fell off the stage at the Copacabana.

Q: Somebody remembers that, yes. I think it was Dorothy Lichtenstein remembers that.

Buehler: Yes. Bob fell back off the stage. He was dancing with the dancers on the stage and suddenly, whoops! Bob was down. Artist down! Everything was political. Bob was invited by Fidel Castro to spend the weekend in his country house. Bob and his sister I think got picked up at the hotel with a car with a red flag on it. We had a cameraman. We had Michael Moneagle as a cameraman. He was supposed to go with them and they said, “No, he doesn’t have security clearance for the Castro residence. So we’ll have our own cameraman who was approved and cleared by security and we’ll give you the tapes later on.”

There was a woman at the Ministry of Culture or something. She was our contact. We were almost ready to leave Cuba and I have a message in to her saying, “We still didn’t get the tapes and this is last minute because we’re leaving in a couple of days.” I forget what the time frame was. I said, “Just leave the envelope with the tapes in the hotel for me if I’m not there, don’t let that stop you.” Suddenly she shows up at the hotel, if I remember correctly, and says, “Something happened. The tapes did not get exposed properly and so there’s no footage of Rauschenberg with Castro.” Screwed again. So we left without that.

Now we were leaving Cuba, again on the ship, not the *Bay of Pigs* this time, but the same shipping company, [Empresa de Navegación] Mambisa—the state-run shipping company. It is actually the name of the tribe that got extinct by the Spanish. Right after they discovered Cuba, they killed everybody as soon as they could. They were the Mambisa. The next venue is Berlin and of course Cuba has political relations and public relations with the GDR, the German Democratic Republic, which still existed at the time. We were getting on the good ship *Frank País* to go from Havana to Rostock in East Germany. Maybe about three or four days out of Havana, in the middle of the night, the engine stops. What’s going on? Something happened. I didn’t think much about it—maybe they’re cleaning something. Then my phone rang and the first officer said, “Captain asks you to come to the bridge, please.” So I went up there. He said, “Well, we have an engine problem. We’re going back to Havana and there’s an identical ship in Havana in the port and we’ll try to switch the turbine blades”—or whatever they had that was burned out—“and we’ll then be underway within twenty-four hours.” Fine, do what you need to do.



We're going back at reduced speed, at four knots or something like that, because they only had one engine or one prop running, I don't know what. I forget. We were in Havana and they were really good mechanics, they did what they said they would do; they took the turbine out, took the blade out, and switched it from the other ship. That wasn't due to go out anytime soon so they had time for that. The captain asks me to the bridge again. He said, "I didn't know then, but I know now—I'm declaring general average." It's an insurance term meaning that everybody has to chip into any claim and losses according to the value of their shipment onboard the ship. Of course there was no value higher than ours. I said, "Well I haven't even heard that word." He said, "Well you need to call your insurance agent." I was on the bridge and they got me a phone call on the radio, patching me through to our insurance agent, Michael Fischman here in New York. He said, "I'm not surprised. What's the name of that captain?" I forgot the name. He said, "That captain is known to us, is known to Lloyd's. The ship is known to Lloyd's and to everybody else and they do that stint every now and then to make dollars because they don't have foreign currency. So there's not much we can do. Whatever they need you to sign, sign it."

Q: Wow. Interesting.

Buehler: Of course we were dramatically delayed, which really didn't matter because the show wasn't on for awhile in Berlin. Then this friend of mine who had this shipping company in Berlin—he still has a shipping company—was supposed to send his trucks to Rostock and take the art to his storage in West Berlin before we loaded over to East Berlin. This was eerie, especially for me. I lived in Germany most of my life. I knew what the East German border was. I drove through it many times on the interstate highways, but this was eerie. We had to be

moored outside of Rostock and it was foggy and there were police and navy boats circling our ship and spotlights checking us. They said we don't have a berth in the harbor so we had to wait days—two, three, four, five—which we did. I think it took a couple of days until we got in. This was the time where East Germany already had collapsed de facto. The unit was still East Germany, but I think things were already going down. My friend, Günter Schlien, had managed to get a gate pass before we arrived to get out of the port—the last stamp in it—to be allowed to leave. We loaded his trucks full and I said, “Well, don't we have to get a gate pass?” He said, “I have it already.” “Okay, let's go.” So we left. That was the last we heard.

I went with the trucks to West Berlin. Then later when Bob came to help install the show, I stayed in West Berlin. I had a West Berlin ID card, a German passport but issued in West Berlin, and the East Germans didn't recognize that because they said West Berlin is an independent political unit and you can't have a passport. So I always had to show my ID card.

So, we're going back and forth. In preparation already I went to the museum and took pictures and measurements and prepared this. I always had to exchange money to go into East Berlin. So I was flush with East German money and you couldn't take it out with you. You couldn't do anything with it. So I bought black-and-white 35-millimeter film in mass quantities because all of my friends were artists and photographers. You can always use that. One of the last days, everybody had film already and I had tons of work to do at the shipping company, which was just across from the border control point and I said, “Okay, they have fried chicken in East Berlin.” I'll buy half a dozen fried chickens for the guys in the art shipping company for lunch. So I'm spending all my money on fried chicken. I have two big plastic bags with fried chicken

and I'm going through the checkpoint and he says, "What's in the bags?" I said, "Fried chicken for my colleagues over in West Berlin." "You can't export foodstuffs from the German Democratic Republic." Jeez, what do we do now. "Come on, they're ready for lunch. I just called them," I said. He said, "Okay, come in." We went into this hut. They had a box type of X-ray machine on one of the desks. They had me put the bags with the chickens in the X-ray machine and you saw on the screen these skeletons rotating in front of you. He said, "Okay, go." So they let me export the chickens.

When Bob arrived and we were installing seriously, the Americans were supposed to get through another checkpoint. To facilitate that, Mr. Wolfgang Polak, the head of the Center for Art Exhibitions [in the German Democratic Republic], was assigned to our project. He wrote a letter on the minister's stationery to ask the border forces to allow Mr. Thomas Buehler to cross with the American guests for this project and I had that in a clear-view sleeve. The first time, we went in a little van that they organized to pick up Bob at the hotel and pick me up. The guy at the checkpoint said, "Well, I can't decide that. I have to call my officer." So the guy with the stars on the shoulders came out and said, "Okay." He signed it. Go. We did this the next time, again. Same scenario, same time, same officer, and he comes out again, looks at me—this must have been the second or third time—and he said, "Mr. Buehler, at this point in time, whether you show me this or not doesn't make any difference anyway. Just go." From that day on we were passing back and forth and this was unheard of in East Germany. It didn't happen.

Q: How was the show in Berlin?



Rauschenberg with the banner for *ROCI BERLIN*, Neue Berliner Galerie im Alten Museum, Berlin, 1990. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI BERLIN*, 1990  
Offset lithograph on cardboard  
38 x 24 3/4 (96.5 x 62.9 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Buehler: It was okay. It was not hugely successful from a visitor's point of view, unlike Moscow later on, which was like yay. Really serious.

Q: Less people came?

Buehler: Yes. It wasn't advertised well enough, I guess. I don't know. Bob had the fantasy when it started out that he would have the show simultaneously in East Berlin and West Berlin, as a big connector between East and West. Then Armand Hammer, I think, wrote a letter to Erich Honecker, who was the president [General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany] of East Germany at the time, suggesting that, and they in very classic

typical East German fashion said, “Oh, Mr. Rauschenberg is more than welcome to have a show in the German Democratic Republic,” just totally ignoring the other part.

Q: Right.

Buehler: Then Bob said, “Okay, can we have the microwave link between the two?” Not going to happen. The East Germans are not going to allow you to put a microwave dish on their territory next to the border. So that didn’t happen. It was a great show. It was very nice. Well thought of and the facilities were nice and the museum was very nice.

Q: Okay, so leaving Berlin and going to Malaysia.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI MALAYSIA*, 1990  
Offset lithograph  
34 5/8 x 24 1/4 inches (87.9 x 61.6 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal  
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Buehler: That came up a little bit as a surprise. I thought we were already in Europe and I didn't quite get this, I must say. Did you talk to Don Saff at all or will you talk to him?

Q: He was spoken to before I became involved in the project. So yes.

Buehler: Well, Don and I were always traveling buddies. We went to a lot of places. There was this woman—Janet Echelman. She was an American painter who lived in Bali in Indonesia and apparently through her it appeared that there was an opportunity for us to show work in Indonesia and/or Malaysia. She spoke the language, whatever they speak down there. We met with her at some point going through Singapore, then over to Denpasar [Bali, Indonesia], but that never really happened, mainly because the venue that they suggested was in a beautiful old wooden building that was not made for contemporary art, for Rauschenberg, so that fell apart. Then Janet said, “Well, I also have contacts in Malaysia. How about, since that's in the neighborhood and you are here in the area, why not try and set up meetings with people in Kuala Lumpur?” Okay, fine.

We went to Kuala Lumpur from Denpasar and stayed in the hotel. I think it was 1990. Malaysia that year had “Visit Malaysia Year.” They had a big tourist promotion going on, which they have on right now again by coincidence. The idea was to link that to the Rauschenberg exhibition and get it financed through the monies that were available for things like that—extravaganzas like this. Now I have to get this right. The first meeting that day was with the tourism minister and he was Chinese and his name was **Mr. Lee**. He was very friendly, very noncommittal in a way, and said, “Yes, let's do this.” It was not really great. But our second meeting was with the finance

minister and he was Malay. He was not Chinese. If we had known that—Janet was supposed to know that—the Chinese and the Malays do not get along at all. When we got to the finance minister's office, he just looked at us. We came into his office, we weren't even sitting down, and he looked at the paperwork and said, "Oh, I see you saw Mr. Lee this morning as a first appointment. I would say our appointment is over. Goodbye, gentlemen." Boom. They didn't even offer us a chair. So we were out within a minute or so. We went back to the hotel and Don said, "That's something I had not expected." Janet was not there. She was back in Bali or something like that. She had just set up this meeting. She just should have done it the other way around. It would have been perfectly fine.

Don is very good with words. He is not only a good artist, but also a good writer. The whole day he drafted and wrote a letter of apology to the Malaysian minister and submitted that. His secretary said, "Okay, you'll hear from us. The minister will get back to you." They let us simmer for a couple of days. Sitting in the hotel, nothing. Then suddenly we got word, "Okay, the minister will see you," as if nothing had happened. "Okay, let's talk about this, let's do this." The apology worked. So we got the show. The transport work was with Air Malaysia through Frankfurt, I think. The show was in a former hotel right near the train station that they made into the national gallery of art [Balai Seni Lukis Negara (National Art Gallery), Kuala Lumpur]. Not great. The first floor was okay, but then it was basically hotel rooms, smaller and larger, up three floors.

Bob made beautiful work for that. He had traveled in Malaysia before and had taken beautiful photographs. The art was great. The art was just exceptional. It was just not the audience there

for it. They didn't advertise quite enough. I think in the time we were there—I forget what the timeframe was but that can be reconstructed—we had maybe two thousand visitors. There was the museum of Islamic art [Islamic Arts Museum, Kuala Lumpur] a few blocks down the road and they had during the same time a show of Islamic art that got four million visitors. So something was not right. They were not that interested. I always thought *ROCI MALAYSIA* was nice and it was interesting to be there, but it was not really necessary.

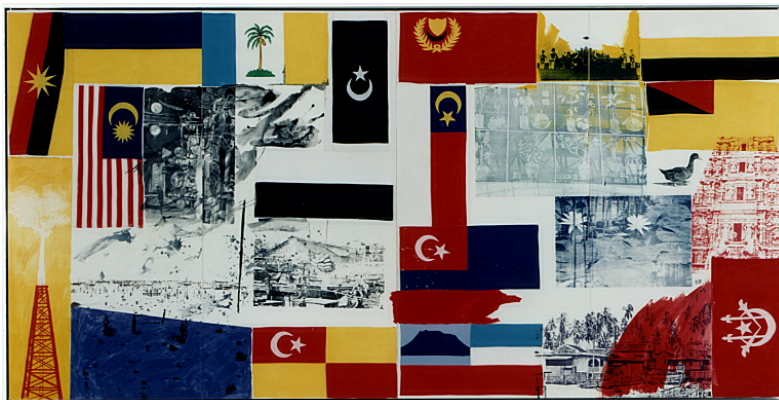
The aforementioned pig from Tibet, which was made into a cast aluminum pig, edition of two, and then buried behind the foundry in California; that was part of the show in Malaysia also. [Note: the cast aluminum pigs were made into two unique sculptures, *Tibetan Miami Glyph* (1987) and *Uptown Pig Pox* (1988); the latter was exhibited in *ROCI MALAYSIA*.] Before the show opened, a representative of the king came to inspect the show and see and make sure everything was alright and it was the first thing he saw as you came in—the pig was right there. He said, “The king cannot be in the presence of a pig. That pink pig has to go up to the third floor,” because it was agreed that Bob and he would only go as far as the second floor of the museum, which was in fact a hotel. Graham Greene, I think, had stayed there when he was living in Malaysia. So we hauled the pig up the stairs.





Robert Rauschenberg  
*Uptown Pig Pox*, 1988  
Cast aluminum, enamel, Lexan and fabric  
36 x 72 1/2 x 22 inches (91.4 x 184.2 x 55.9 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

The tradition was that each country would get a work from the series for their country, for their national museum or collection, or in this case, for the king. Bob had made a huge painting, five, six, or eight panels, stretched around the wall, and the idea was that there would be a curtain in front of it and it would be unveiled at the opening in the king's presence and Bob would be there. They would pull a rope and then the curtain would open, ta-dah! So they looked at that also. If I remember, in the lower right corner was a duck [note: above center in the rightmost panel]. Bob always liked images of ducks and chickens. We were pressed for answers, "Why is there a duck in the painting?" We can't answer that question. They let that fly. That was okay with them, but the pig was impossible. The pig had to go.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Yang Teragong (Malaysian King)*  
*/ ROCI MALAYSIA*, 1990  
Acrylic and collage on plywood  
panels  
99 3/4 x 198 1/2 x 3 inches (253.4  
x 504.2 x 7.6 cm)  
National Visual Arts Gallery,  
Kuala Lumpur  
Gift of the artist

Q: Were there other times when things like that happened along the way?

Buehler: Not in that sense. I think the Chinese wanted to see pictures of everything in advance. Not necessarily the original artwork, but they wanted to see pictures of everything. I'm not sure if things fell by the wayside during that time. Chun-Wuei probably did that, when they said, "No, you can't have this, let's take that. Not really, no." Usually in all the socialist countries, they were suspicious of videotapes and video recordings, of what that is. After I had my computer, my Mac, my theory was, kill them with kindness and with efficiency by having the most precise customs lists, list every screwdriver, every nut and bolt, every videotape with a number and in a box. So when the time came for inspection or somebody showed up and said, "Okay, we want to see videotape this and that," they only had to reach in and say, "Here it is and here's that piece of equipment and here's that." Then they usually got bored after half an hour. "Okay, never mind. We know you've got your stuff together." The advantage was that I could do the lists with the computer.

Cuba was actually the same thing, going back to that. We were on the ship still and they took me over in the launch to the customs office where the art was still on the ship in Havana, and the customs officer said, "Well—" I forget what the issue was. Something was just bureaucracy and they said, "Well the lists have to be sorted by this or they have to be sorted by value and not by registry number." I said, "Give me an outlet and a desk and I'll do that in half an hour." I had my little RadioShack computer and my little portable printer and just changed the sorting and was done. Usually China and the Soviet Union, even East Germany at that time, had the most concern. Propaganda material.

Q: All right, so next we go to Moscow.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Poster for *ROCI USSR*, 1989  
Offset lithograph  
38 3/8 x 25 1/2 inches (97.5 x 64.8 cm)  
Un-numbered edition, published by Universal Limited  
Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Buehler: That was quite something. That was huge. We always got floor plans ahead of time and Don Saff went and I'm not sure even sure if Bob went ahead to Moscow. Of course the art was back in Berlin so we trucked it from Berlin to Moscow.

Q: Did you have to accompany it?

Buehler: It was the same company, Schlien Fine Art Shipping. I was flying there. A little side note: Bob's friends and people from New York wanted to come to Moscow. I'd flown Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, many times because I spent time in India and we always flew through Moscow because it was the cheapest airline at the time. Bob's friends all said, "Oh, we're flying to Zurich

and then we're flying with Swiss Air from Zurich to Moscow." I said, "If you want to have the real Soviet Union feeling experience, you don't fly from Zurich on Swiss Air. You fly from wherever on Aeroflot into Moscow because that's something." I mean, at that time. I haven't flown Aeroflot for a long time, but they were really bad. The food was bad and I had some wild experiences with them, but that's another story. So I recommended that and a lot of them did that. They said, "Well, you're quite right." It was quite something. Something to behold.

The venue in Moscow was huge, like China basically, and Bob pumped art in like crazy. New things came from New York and he made extra work. It was a huge success also. Like in China, the people were so interested, especially young people. It was amazing how much they knew about him considering that they lived in an environment not very generous with information from outside the country. Let's put it that way. They knew exactly where he went to school and paintings that he had and early work. Fantastic.



Rodney "Tup" Schmidt and Thomas Buehler during the installation of *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI USSR*, Central House of Artists, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1989. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Any other memories of your time there?

Buehler: Not really. It was different. It was the last throes of the Soviet Union. We stayed in a huge hotel, us, the crew. Bob stayed in another hotel, I think. We stayed in the Rossiya Hotel [Moscow]. I think it was the biggest hotel in the world at the time. It doesn't exist anymore. They razed it down. It was four street blocks. They had four corners, I think, twelve floors on each, and each floor in each direction—east, west, north, south—had a cafeteria, a little shop where you could buy hard boiled eggs and kefir, things like that. Good stuff. The ground floor was what, in the Eastern Bloc, they called Friendship Stores [in People's Republic of China] or Intershops [in German Democratic Republic], where you can buy foreign goods for hard currency. If you had dollars you could buy Jack Daniel's and things like that. If you didn't, then you didn't.

It was always unpredictable. There was a car that was available for us—it was a little van—and once a week we were allowed to go to what was called a free market where farmers could sell things that they didn't have to sell to the government. Of course prices were high and quality was also good. You could buy flowers from there, things like that. We had the van once a week and we went there to buy things.

Learning from China, we said we were going to have to take our own interpreter with us. We were not going to have that again because none of us spoke Russian. We were going to have our own guy with us. New York is full of Russians. We said, "We'll see if we can find somebody." I put ads in the paper, advertised preferably young artists, Russian speaking, wanted for a project. Quite a few kids sent in their resumes and their pictures and we sent them down to Bob and Bob

said, “This one here.” The guy was named Alex Rudinski. He works at MoMA now as an art preparator and his family is from Odessa [Ukraine]. They live here and there’s a Little Odessa—

Q: In Brooklyn.

Buehler: No, the beach.

Q: I know where you mean. Is it Brighton Beach [New York]?

Buehler: Brighton Beach. Yes. So he showed up and he sent in a picture with one of his paintings that he did and Bob liked him and said, “Okay, this one.” So we had Alex as our interpreter. The first day we get to the hotel—there is a funny story actually. There is a restaurant on top of the Rossiya Hotel and we’re maybe ten or fifteen of us, flexing in and out. There were always people come and visiting and helping or things like that. We were going up to the hotel and the waiters were already there saying, “Americans, dollars, yes, we’ve got it made.” Of course Alex had good connections in Moscow and some of his uncles lived there and some came traveling in from Odessa so he was well connected to the black market, so we had rubles in mass quantities, more than we could ever spend in our lives. We took the waiters to the side, Alex and I, and said, “Okay, we’re going to be here for four or five weeks probably. We’ll come up every day for dinner. We’ll pay you in rubles but we’ll tip you in dollars. You get the drift, no?” So every evening we came back to the hotel and sat at the long dinner table, all of us, all set with bottles of vodka, bottles of cognac, bottles of champagne, and the best caviar and sturgeon and salmon and

all that, for peanuts really. It cost maybe twenty dollars. The way we exchanged on the black market, it bought dollars like nuts. So we had it made.

Q: Sounds pretty nice.

Buehler: Then of course we got further into this. Some is illegal and I cannot have that recorded. The one that was not illegal was that everybody wanted souvenirs from the Soviet Union. Most people wanted army hats—these fur hats with the red star on it. Some people wanted belt buckles. So we got these guys Alex found, who were black market kings. They could get anything and everything. We said, “Okay, we’ll do this, but everything had to be secret,” because of course they wanted dollars as well. We met with them at train stations and things like that and they would call Alex and say, “This is Alex with the rabbit hats and we’ll be at so-and-so station, Revolution Square,” or something like that, “at five o’clock in the afternoon and be there.” And the business was taken care of. They had bags of stuff and we had tons of money.

Bob went over big with the Russian artists. That was so long ago and it’s totally amazing, the things come back. I sometimes look at the ROCI catalogue and things come back.

Q: Okay, so finally you came back to the States.

Buehler: Yes.

Q: How was that after all of the other destinations? Was there a different feeling returning here?

Buehler: Well, some things had happened in the meantime, linked to ROCI to Bob's international ambitions. One was that, shortly after ROCI USSR, Bob made an edition of works from fabric that he had bought in Uzbekistan in Samarkand. Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles] in California made the edition and Bob had bought tons and tons of fabric to take back, but at some point in the middle of the edition they ran out of fabric. I was in Berlin. Bob called me and said, "Well, you're the closest. You're in Berlin already. Go to Uzbekistan. We'll send you money and get as much of the fabric as you can and send it back to L.A."



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Samarkand Stitches III*, 1988  
Sewn fabric and screenprint on fabric  
62 x 41 inches (157.5 x 104.1 cm)  
From an edition of 74 unique variations, produced by  
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

So I called Galina, who was our interpreter in Moscow at the time supplied by the government, and said, "Galina, we're going to Uzbekistan. Get us tickets from Moscow to Samarkand and I'll be there. I'll fly in from East Germany and we're buying fabric." Okay. So, she bought us the domestic tickets because Uzbekistan was still part of the Soviet Union and Bob or Gemini, I



forget which, sent me twenty thousand dollars by Western Union. So I had twenty thousand dollars in cash in my pocket. So I flew to Moscow. Galina met me at the international airport and we got over to the domestic airport. The plane was there. We got on the plane. It was a relatively small plane, two seats on this side and two seats on the other side and an aisle in the middle—or three seats on the other side—and I had a little flask of Jack Daniel's with me. I always take that as a present for somebody or just to have it. We were in the air and the Uzbeks have golden caps on and things like that, the guys across the aisle were drinking something. I said to Galina, "Give them the bottle of Jack Daniel's. Have them pour a couple of shots of Jack Daniel's just to say hi from America." They started saluting me and then the guy came over and said to Galina, "Let me sit with him." We were talking, he asked, "What do you do, why are you coming to Samarkand?" I explained to him what I was doing. I had a little book with swatches of the fabrics that Gemini had sent me of the fabric they wanted. I said, "Well, I'm supposed to buy these fabrics," typical for Samarkand with zigzag lines and things like that. He said, "My brother is director of the state-run silk factory warehouses. I'll get you in touch with him tomorrow. Give me your phone number and let me know which hotel you're staying in. I'll send you a car. We'll pick you up in the morning." Done already. We got to the hotel and Galina looked at me and said, "Can you believe that?"

Sure enough, the next morning, the car came. Very official, a little doily on the back of the seats, flags in front. He took us to the warehouse. He said, "We could also take you to the factory but your visa only allows you to go a certain amount of kilometers out of Samarkand." For some reason you can't go five hundred kilometers without having a proper visa. He said, "But I'll take you to the warehouse and we'll show you that." I got there and they had huge tables and were

rolling out bales of fabric. I showed him my swatch and the storage director said, “Well, this must have been in 1985 because this is not in fashion anymore. We don’t make that fabric, that pattern anymore. We’re doing this and that.” One was called “The Kremlin” and one was called this and that. They were close. It was similar. I said, “Well, it’s not really my job to decide that. I have to get in contact with my boss.” So I got in contact with Bob and he said, “Well, use your own judgment. Take whatever you think is close enough and we’ll do it.” They had told me how many meters they wanted, so we had the quantity, and Bob had a recollection of how much he paid for it when he first bought it. So the bundle of hundred dollar bills changed owners and I got three bales of fabric like this to take back to the hotel. Done. I don’t know who got the twenty thousand dollars, probably between the two brothers. We had the stuff.

We flew back to Moscow, checked it in as luggage. I flew back to Berlin, checked it in as luggage. And when you went from West Berlin to East Berlin there was a shuttle bus going back and forth between East to West and they just put it in the luggage compartment of the bus going through the border between East and West Berlin. Nobody looked at it. They didn’t even open it. They had no dogs or nothing. It must have been my special day. Sure enough, I took a taxi from the bus terminal right to UPS and sent the fabric to Los Angeles. Done.

Q: Pretty amazing.

Buehler: That was pretty wild.

Q: Very serendipitous, what a shot of Jack Daniel’s will do.

Buehler: Well also later on—there's a side story. This woman, Galina, then came to Berlin and wanted to stay with Günter Schlien, the art shipping guy, because her husband was a musician and he wanted to buy guitars in Berlin. It got weirder and weirder and very Russian at some point. I've lost track of all these people. I don't have any contact with anybody. I got postcards from the first officer of the *La Bahía de Cochinos* every now and then after he retired. He said he has a horse ranch in Cuba and come and visit and all that. I didn't do that either.

Then the other thing that also connected was that Bob was invited to participate in a kite project in Japan. The director of the Goethe-Institut or Goethe Haus in Osaka I think at the time, Paul Eubel—passed away just recently—he said he was standing at this window and looking out. It was a beautiful day and there were kites in the sky—we have the catalogue right here. He had the idea of having artists produce kites and fly them for philanthropy. So he got all these artists together, including Bob Rauschenberg and Tom Wesselmann and a lot of Japanese artists to produce kites to be flown at a kite festival in Osaka near a castle, it's called Himeji Castle. It has a beautiful garden around it and of course the kite festival was in cherry blossom time so all the cherry trees were in blossom. We were just dying. It was too beautiful.



Thomas Buehler, Rauschenberg, and John Peet, Art Kite viewing event near Himeji Castle, Japan, 1989. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Bob made two kites. The idea was that he would keep one—and they were big. They were 3-by-5 feet or even bigger than that. We still have one. Bob made two kites with very classic Rauschenberg silkscreens, one in a chair. They were called *Sky House I* [1988] and *Sky House II* [1988]. They were flown. Bob's kites were a little bit heavy because they had too much silkscreen, too much fabric collage on them, but we got some good footage. Terry Van Brunt was Bob's assistant at the time and videographer and he took some good footage. The kite didn't get very high. Terry was lying on his back with a wide-angle lens and it looked like it was way up in the sky, but it wasn't.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sky House II*, 1988  
Kite: paper, silk, and acrylic on Japanese rice paper  
with rattan and strings  
146 7/16 x 97 11/16 inches (372 x 248.1 cm)  
Art Kite Museum, Detmold

The kite festival started. It was a beautiful day, probably April 1st, around this time. *Sakura* is Japanese for cherry blossom. It was *hanami* picnic day. The park was gorgeous. There was a medieval Japanese castle on the hill behind it and all the cherry blossom trees and the Japanese visitors all came and had blue tarps and they were sitting under those trees with bottles of sake and little boilers where they were making hot sake, and with little grills where they were grilling skewers—and the smell—I still have the smell in my nose. The only thing that was missing was wind.

It was still early morning, maybe nine o'clock, ten o'clock, and they had a group of kite flyers from a fishing village in Japan, Hamamatsu. They were famous for kite flying. They were also famous for being a little bit raunchy. The director of the kite festival said, "We'll have to make sure they don't get too much to drink in the morning because they get really wild." There was still no wind. They had big rolls of cable that they had anchored in the ground for the kites to fly

on. It was all prepared, but no wind. There was a big square or maybe a rectangle and the castle was here. We were all sitting around, the trees were around, and there was a big open space in the middle. They started walking around the perimeter of the square, slowly at first, always chanting something. We couldn't understand what it was. Then they were going faster and faster and faster and faster and louder and louder and the chanting got faster until they got to the center of the square and they were almost frantic and had this circle thing and the wind started. So they—

Q: Conjured the wind.

Buehler: They got the wind down. It was a beautiful day. A lot of wind. A lot of kites in the sky and that was it.

Bob of course had the Samarkand fabrics and the kite in the National Gallery [of Art] in Washington [D.C.; for the exhibition *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, 1991] even though the kite was not really part of Washington, it was part of his international doings. It was very nice. It was installed with the full harness of strings under the ceiling of the National Gallery in the big hall and Jack Cowart was the curator at the time, who is now the director of the Lichtenstein Foundation. He has things to say, I'm sure, about Bob and his collaborations.

The National Gallery was great. It was all out and beautiful and of course a great installation and a good crew. Very impressive. They had a woman, Genevra [O.] Higginson, she was the social host of the National Gallery. She arranged for all the banquets and the dinners and the receptions

and the cocktail parties. She was very meticulous. She was feared by vendors and somebody gave us an example and said a vendor delivered brownies and the brownies were triangular and she refused to accept them because she said, “How do people know they’re brownies? Brownies must be square.” She sent them back and had a new shipment of brownies come in for that particular event.

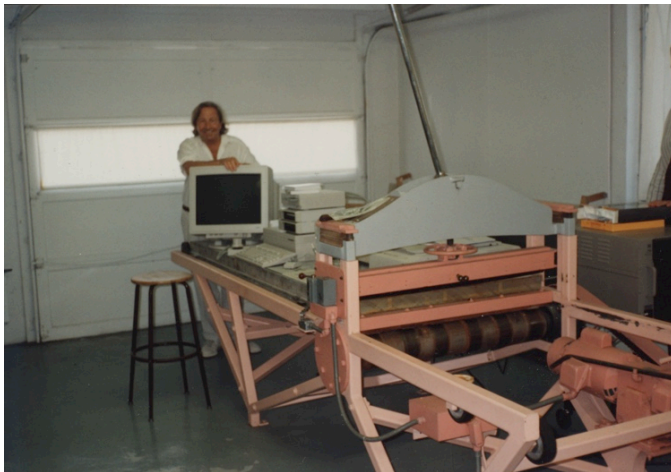


Installation view, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Another impressive thing at the National Gallery is that they have a greenhouse on the premises that's huge, where they grow plants for receptions. So if you have a dinner for five hundred people and Mrs. Higginson wanted white gardenias on the table, they were growing the gardenias to that day, by controlling humidity and temperature, so they have one thousand gardenias that day when she wanted. It's very good.

Q: Beautiful. So I think this is a good place to pause.

Buehler: I've got one more thing to say because that's an important point in this time. In that timeframe Bob switched from silkscreen to digital images and inkjet printers because that was just when it started to become available. Also commercial printers were available. Laurence ["Laury"] Getford, who was Bob's collaborator later on for many years, showed Bob, I think right after the National Gallery, the first Mac computer. He had hired a company in Florida, a company that set up a scanner and a printer and a Mac screen. There's a photograph that exists, I have it, and I'm sure they have it here also, where the Mac sits on an etching press. Bob's looking at that image for the first time and that's when Laury Getford got hired to set this up for Bob. Everything he did until the end is based on that experience in '91 and '92.



Rauschenberg with Mac computer in his print shop, Captiva, Florida, ca. 1991. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

When you look at the work, that's when they start the *Waterworks* [1992–95], that's the first series that they start with that.





Robert Rauschenberg  
*Nectar (Waterworks)*, 1993  
Inkjet dye transfer on paper  
42 x 29 1/2 inches (106.7 x 74.9 cm)  
Private collection

Q: That's interesting to know.

Buehler: It was like the end of ROCI and the beginning of something totally new.

Q: Something else.

Buehler: Always classic Bob. In the seventies he switched from hi-tech works, or what at that time was hi-tech, when he worked with engineers, to cardboard boxes because he said he was so bored with the engineers at some point. Not personally, just his whole concept. He wanted to do something different.

Q: All right. Well thank you so much. This has been really interesting. And we will speak again.

Buehler: All right. We sure will.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2

Interviewee: Thomas Buehler

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: May 26, 2015

Q: So today is May 26, 2015. This is Sara Sinclair with Thomas Buehler meeting for the second time and again at 381 Lafayette [Street].

The last time we spoke, we spoke about your adventures traveling around the world with all of the art for the ROCI tour and we found ourselves back in Washington, D.C. at the end of that conversation. So I was hoping today—

Buehler: This was '91?

Q: Yes. I was hoping today we would pick up there and you would tell me what happens. ROCI ends and what happens next?

Buehler: Well, we were sitting in this house [381 Lafayette Street, New York], in this building in the kitchen, Bob's famous office—the kitchen table—and we were just coming back from Washington. We were sitting there and Bob, in his typical manner, said, “What's your itinerary? What's your schedule now?” In the meantime my first wife and I had built a house in India between the ROCI shows and I had a little money saved because I didn't spend much. I was on

the road most of the time so you don't spend that much money if you have allowance for travel. So I said, "Well, I thought of taking some time off and maybe spending more time in India." Bob looked at me and said, "Would you consider staying on?" I said, "Sure. I'll think about it, you'll think about it, when you're ready, give me a wink." He winked across the kitchen table. So that was my contract right there.

Having traveled a lot, I didn't have a permanent home in New York. A lot of times I stayed here at Lafayette Street or Bob paid for a hotel for me at the hotel Washington Square [Washington Square Hotel]. The next thing that happens—this must have been in '91 or something like that—is that Bennet [H.] Grutman, who was Bob's accountant at the time, CPA, said, "We have to get Bob's things in order. He has storage all over the place and there's storage at Crozier in New Jersey and there's Endicott in New Jersey," and across the street here on Great Jones Street we had a garage. He said, "We're paying too much money over the year for storage so I think we should find something of our own." This was '91, '92 now. So the market was down.

I started looking. I knew an old realtor—I don't know how I knew him. Probably through the accountants or something like that. I met with him and we started scanning the Chelsea area. There were a lot of vacant things in that neighborhood at the time. It was not the greatest neighborhood, a lot of bad things going on in the streets at night. I found this building on West Thirty-eighth Street that I really liked. It was very nice. This must have been in the summer because I used to spend winters in India, so the summer I went scouting for the buildings and found this. The plan was to rent something actually. I left in October like I usually did. When I came back in April—this must have been in '92—there was an envelope on my desk—I had a

desk on the fourth floor here—in Bob’s handwriting with a key in it and the address of 544 West Thirty-eighth Street and a note from Bob saying, “Do your thing.” That was it.

This was a strange building because it was leased to an artist who is still around New York, Mark Kostabi. It was called Kostabi World and he had painted it in big letters on the lot line walls and Kostabi was painted in blue-green on the outside. It used to be a printing company. It had a big freight elevator. That’s what I liked about it: the huge freight elevator, large rooms, high load capacity. Kostabi was out. He didn’t pay the rent so he was evicted during the winter—that all happened while I was away—and the woman who owned the building suddenly decided she wanted to sell. So they bought it. When I came back to New York in April there was a building and a key.

Immediately I took the key, went to Chelsea, opened the door, and I knew the building a little bit. I had been there twice or three times maybe. I knew where the main electric panel was. There was no light working, nothing. The elevator wasn’t working, nothing. I threw the main switch and there were sparks flying everywhere. Oh god, that’s not good. That’s not a good start. There was water on the first floor. I went up the stairs to the roof. The roof was leaking and it was leaking through all the floors because it had been abandoned all through winter. There was snow load and roof damage. As it happened as I walked down West Thirty-eighth Street from Tenth Avenue, I passed a company called Rubbish Removal, Incorporated, whatever. One of these warehouse buildings. I went right back in there and said, “Do you do demolitions? Do you do entire buildings, like demolitions?” “Yeah sure, what do you want?” “Well come down and I’ll show you. It’s down the block.”

He came. He said, “Not a problem. We’ll do that.” I had carte blanche. Bennet said, “Do whatever you need to do. Don’t ask me for this and that.” So the next morning there were five containers in front of the building and a lot of people with sledge hammers and Jamaicans on the roof and Poles in the basement and they took the whole thing apart including the boiler and the whole thing.

This seems to be my luck. I found a great contractor and we had an architect that Bob used in this building [381 Lafayette]. They helped draw up plans and make it legal. We rebuilt the elevator. It was the main expense, the freight elevator. It was very nice; 20-by-8 feet and it went up to the roof even, which seemed to indicate that they aborted some plan to go higher up with the building because why would you have an elevator on the roof.

Then we started collecting art from everywhere. Very unlike what we did later on when we moved to Mount Vernon where everything was really organized. Basically we had to just pick things and say, “Okay, this is a painting and it goes on the third floor, and this is a crate and it stays on the first floor,” just to get some sort of organization. I organized the floors so you’d know where everything is and the works always had registry numbers so that made it relatively easy. It didn’t account for how many parts there were to a piece, but some were up to 350 parts, like *The 1/4 Mile* painting [*The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, 1981–98], which we’ll get to later on because that’s part of the more complicated ones.

There were complications. Should I go into detail like that?

Q: Yes.

Buehler: It was a brick building—a brick facade on a concrete and steel structure like they built most of the time, they make the structure first and then they put brick facade in front of that. We needed to cut a big garage door because there was no driveway big enough for our purposes, so they needed to cut a larger hole in the brick. The engineer came and said, “Come up with me to the third floor.” We looked down and between the wall and the floor there was a gap of two inches. He said, “That wall is not even attached to the building anymore. So if you cut a big hole at the first floor, the whole thing will just come raining down.”

These engineers were great. They came up with something. They welded threaded rods to the steel beams and then they put big washers on from the outside, cast iron stars like you have on old buildings in SoHo. There was a company in New Jersey that still made those. They cast them, custom made, with a thread inside. And then it was okay. So we can hold the wall back and they can put a new lintel on it, a steel lintel, then cut that big opening for the floor.

There was a sub-basement. There was no basement. There was a boiler basement and that was right under where the gate was, now the bigger gate. We had to fill that halfway up with concrete. There was an electric panel, electric supply, and the water meter. That basement was always under water. There was a sump pump that ran night and day. We found out later that next door were the horse stables and they were washing down the horses night and day, and all the water was running into our basement. We were down the grade. It was a way of life. We got the

boiler out and we got a clean sheet of health from the Department of Buildings that there was no oil contamination. So that was good.

Then we moved in floor by floor. In the back of the building, there was a very nice room with big windows looking out at the Hudson River almost. You looked a little past the adjoining buildings. It had a lot of light, a southern view. The insurance man that we dealt with, he came and said, “We have to do something about that. We have to brick that window up or we have to put grills on them or grates or things like that because that’s in the back of the building and there’s a fire escape so that’s the weak point of the building.” Then I thought, okay, it’s such a nice room, we should do something with it. I moved a wall that was not supposed to be there 14 feet in from that window. Suddenly there was a small loft. I thought, well maybe Bob wants to use that for paper storage or as a print shop or whatever. Something. It was on level with the third floor. You could use the freight elevator to get there and it had a back door to the fire escape. We didn’t have any purpose for that really. It had a shower, a sink, and a toilet facility. At some point we were talking about it and I said, “I’m not quite sure what we’ll do with that, but do you have any ideas?” Bob said, “Well, why don’t you move in?” I said, “I hadn’t thought of that, but yes, why not?” So I moved in.

Q: Great.

Buehler: We knew it was living quarters. I built a nice shower cabinet with tiles and I got nice facilities and a sink in the kitchen. There was no sink in the bathroom, but there was a nice



stainless steel sink in the kitchen. I built furniture, a counter, and worktables. I suddenly had a place in New York. It was way out at the time, '92 or '93.

Q: What avenue was it?

Buehler: Eleventh Avenue. Looking at the Javits Center [Jacob K. Javits Convention Center]. Two buildings in from Eleventh Avenue.

Q: You said it was unlike the later move to Mount Vernon because you were gathering art from different places. So where was everything?

Buehler: Well, a lot of things were across the street on the first floor here, but that's not a fancy gallery. It was packed with crates and stuff, a basement full of stuff. And then there was a company in New Jersey called Endicott. They had storage. They were just a regular moving and relocation company, so they could store crated things. Crozier on Twenty-first Street. Crozier Fine Arts, now a big company. It was just starting out with us with ROCI.

Q: Right.

Buehler: I think I mentioned that. We got them—we'd go and buy that big contract—big in those days' terms.

Q: Everything was arriving in different conditions? Some stuff was crated, other stuff wasn't?

Buehler: Yes.

Q: So part of what you were doing was trying to create a system, a uniform system?

Buehler: Well, I had help with Charlie Yoder, who used to be an assistant for Rauschenberg. Then Eric Holt, who also used to be an assistant. They helped with the move. They knew the work really well and I knew the work and so we could concentrate on different things. I had a set of carpenters there and they custom built shelves and racks as the things came in. We had everything there. So now it was here, now what do we do with it? That was the predecessor to what we have in Mount Vernon now, how things are organized by location and third floor, A, B, C, D, things like that. There were no bar codes at the time. We had computers already, but that's about it.

Q: So beyond the registration numbers, was there a system that you were inheriting—a system by which everything was organized?

Buehler: No. Just the registry numbers. We had books that are still upstairs in David [White]'s office and they were all handwritten. I'm not sure. We started computerizing relatively soon. Terry Van Brunt, who was Bob's assistant at the time, hired a woman and she was sitting down in the basement and she transcribed the books into a very primitive filing system. Microsoft File. Basically she just sat there and typed whatever she saw. She didn't think about it—and that still shows today, that she didn't think about it—and so suddenly we had the database. Very crude.

David still used the books actually, until I think 2010 even, as a parallel reality because he felt comfortable with that. If there was correspondence to do with a piece—in museums they call it the object file. Here we never called it that. Now we're using the word because we have more museum people working with us and they are used to those terms. So when there was correspondence for a work or photograph that came in, David would put that in the folder so he knew where to find it. Makes sense.

That migrated slowly from Microsoft File to a very primitive version of FileMaker Pro. I started that. I went to Tekserve on West Nineteenth Street. I was friends with them from the beginning since we had Macs. I said, "Well, do you know somebody who knows Mac and is a little bit bright and can maybe start making a custom made database for us?" He said, "Yes, yes. There's this woman, Marianne Carroll. Give her a call." And that coincided almost with Denise [LeBeau]'s demise, because Bob hired Gina [Guy]. That was in 2000. I'm moving a little bit forward now, but it has to do with what happened back then. Gina and Marianne Carroll hit it off right away. They became the best of friends and they worked together really well and Denise felt so threatened suddenly by the appearance of this new, very intelligent person, that she quit. She didn't even show up for work anymore. One day, where's Denise? Well, not here.

Q: I don't think I've heard about Denise. What did she do before?

Buehler: She later on called herself Assistant Curator because she worked under David. She was David's assistant and they had this tiny little room where Gina is now—not anymore. One of

those tiny rooms, David and Denise were in that. When I first got here, I said, “That can’t happen. David needs to have his own desk and Denise can be in there.” That’s where we created a situation for David to be by himself. Now, of course, everything is different.

Q: Right.

Buehler: That’s how the database evolved. Gina and I got that together with Marianne. There was an IT [information technology] consultant, Jay [Y.] Soodek, and he did the network things.

Q: Right. That’s interesting.

Buehler: We weren’t networked to the warehouse at the time. It was an independent thing or—I forget—floppy disks back and forth or something like that. I don’t know. I don’t remember.

Q: How were your roles divided, you and Gina? Were you doing everything together?

Buehler: No, she was mainly in the office and ran the loan traffic and things like that, and I was in the warehouse and here, and did IT and imaging and all that. I started to create all the paperwork that we still have today, like outgoing receipts. We had never had those. I was working with museums all the time and it was like how can you not have an outgoing receipt? You send artwork out, somebody has to sign for it. So we did all these things and started working with this, me from my practical point of view and her from her past at MoMA. We were a good combination.

Q: Were you also thinking about getting photography done of the work at the time?

Buehler: All of it. We were five people here. When Sachika [Hisachika Takahashi] was still here, it was David, Gina, myself, one assistant—either Michael Moneagle or [Matthew] Matt Magee. There was somebody in between—oh, the Russian dude, Alex Rudinski, who was hired from Moscow.

Q: Oh yes.

Buehler: But he was not here very long. He is at MoMA now. He has a full time position there and is a happy man.

Q: Great.

Buehler: There were five of us here. And then Bob had his crew in Captiva. So we basically ran Rauschenberg's business.

Q: Part of you organizing the warehouse—it was simultaneous that you were updating the database, that you were getting photography done. So all of these things were happening?

Buehler: Yes. Yes. I had a desk here also. I had a desk on the fourth floor.

Q: So those tasks were happening simultaneously?

Buehler: Yes, because it all matched with what I was doing anyway.

Q: Okay. And how involved was Bob in this, if at all?

Buehler: Not much. First of all, I did not go much to Captiva. We went for the ROCI preparations when we met with Jack Cowart before the National Gallery started or many meetings with Don Saff, one or two before the whole thing took off. Other than that, the longest time I've been there was when I had my hip replacement ten years ago and Bob gave me one of his houses to recover in, for Christine [Frohnert] and I to be there. I had a van down there and it was considered my other home. Bob always was very generous. "Can we come down? Sure, you have the Beach House, you have this, have the Weeks House."

But his stance was always—directly through him and also through others like David and the assistants—that he was interested in making art. He was not interested in archiving things. He said, "You can archive when I'm dead. Right now, go to the studio, make a frame." When he passed away his message to his son, to Christopher [Rauschenberg], was get back to work. They asked him, "Do you want Christopher to come?" He said, "No. Just tell him get back to work."

Q: My impression when I come to the warehouse now is it's just so remarkable how much work there is. I'm wondering if you had the opportunity to observe him seeing that, seeing his own—

Buehler: Seeing him work?

Q: Yes.

Buehler: Oh, yes. This was the eighties, nineties. So *Salvage* series [1983–85] paintings were on the docket at the time and there was always something on the table. He always worked flat, not on the wall. Always flat. You'd see him—classic—the way you see him in *Man at Work* [Robert Rauschenberg, *Man at Work*, 1997]. In those movies, he was just splashing paint on it and crawling on the table and having this guy silkscreen.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Wall Rites (Salvage)*, 1984  
Acrylic on canvas  
81 1/2 x 74 1/2 inches (207 x 189.2 cm)  
Private Collection



Rauschenberg working on *Wall Rites (Salvage)* (1984) in his Laika Lane studio, Captiva, Florida, 1984. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

I was there when the BMW art car [*Art Car–BMW*, 1986] was made. I helped put on the hubcaps. It was interesting. It was great. They delivered that car on a flatbed truck. Terry was still assisting at the time. I forget what the model is—I'm not so much into BMWs, but

something snazzy, white, a coupe [BMW 635 CSi]. It was delivered and Bob said, “I want that up in my studio. I don’t want it down here.” The studio was on the second floor. Like all Florida things, you’re not supposed to have anything by the beach down there. There were three palm trees in front of this patio or deck. The rigger said, “Well, the palm trees have to go.” Bob got a landscaper. They dug out the root balls of the palm trees, wrapped them in burlap and keep them wet and laid them to the side, and then there were stanchions made in the studio underneath to support the floor and the shop underneath the BMW, which was supposed to be rigged in there the next day. Terry said, “When?” So Terry said, “Come on, get in. We’ll take a spin.” So we took a spin in the BMW, which had zero miles on it, maybe one mile or two, like when they roll out of the factory. We took a spin up the causeway to Fort Myers [Florida] and back. From then on it was art and it was never driven again. The first times when it was shown it still had the engine in there, then later on they took the engine out. It’s basically just a hull right now because it’s easier to handle, to maneuver.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Art Car-BMW*, 1986  
Silkscreened decals affixed to BMW 635 CSi  
Collection of BMW AG



Q: And what about—not watching him make work itself, but watching him see the warehouse itself and see the amount of work that he produced? Did you ever feel like he was cognizant of that? Did he ever look around and think, “Wow, I’ve really made a lot?”

Buehler: Didn’t somebody comment on that when we were in the warehouse just a couple days ago? When somebody compared him to [Pablo] Picasso and he’d said something like, “Oh, I work much more or I have much more work,” or something like that. Was it [Robert] Petersen?

Q: It was Petersen. So he was aware of his level of production.

Buehler: Yes, but he was not interested in that. Later on, as far as I understood, his dealers and his galleries always said well, you could produce a little less, make yourself a little scarce, but producing less was not his style. He was never interested in the warehouse. He saw the Thirty-eighth Street warehouse when the floor was just cast and the gate was ready and all the walls were painted and he was in town. I called and I said, “Well, do you want to see the warehouse right now? Everything is painted and we’re ready to move in and all that.” He said, “Okay, I’ll come by. I’m going to a party or a dinner tonight.” So he came by. I opened the roll gate for the limo. He came in, rolled down the window, and said, “This looks great. Let’s go.” Then he came later on once and sat in my space upstairs. I remember—everything was improvised. I had a big sheet of glass—something like this but not this big—that I got from somewhere. And I had two red trashcans, new ones, Rubbermaid. They looked very nice, so I used those as the base of this big, thick sheet of glass, and Bob came in and said, “That’s a great Italian design.” Well, the trashcans were left over. He had a Jack and then he left.

Q: So what was the traffic like through that space? Obviously that's where you were shipping materials out of for different—

Buehler: It was significant.

Q: Would other people from the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation come?

Buehler: There was no Foundation at the time.

Q: Oh, sorry. Other staff—other employees of Bob's?

Buehler: Whoever was the first office assistant here would come and get things out, or if I was not available, release things. I was still gone in the winter.

Q: Oh really? Okay.

Buehler: For the first couple of years. Bob always said, "That's fine with me." At some point, I forget what year it was, we always got a Christmas bonus and it was a check, in Bob's handwriting on the envelope it said, "Thanks a lot, but I think you should not be gone primetime so much." That was a point. It was a hint. Okay. Okay. I cut the India stuff down to a couple of weeks and that was fine with him.

Q: So when did you then move from Chelsea to Mount Vernon?

Buehler: That's much later. In the meantime you were interested in installations and things and traffic—

Q: I am, yes, yes.

Buehler: There's something of course in the retrospective. [Note: refers to *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1997–98, traveled to Houston, Cologne, and Bilbao.] Part of that was *The 1/4 Mile* painting. *1/4 Mile* was supposed to go to Bilbao [Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1998–99] and of course it's 350 parts and none of them are crated. [Note: there are 190 numbered parts or segments in *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, several of which contain multiple components, resulting in the estimated 350 parts] There are no crates except for some things that need slat crates. They're just open crates because you can't move things otherwise or store them. So of course head scratching and budgeting. How do we get 350 parts to Bilbao? It had been shown here [Guggenheim Museum at Ace Gallery], it had been shown at Houston [Museum of Fine Arts, 1998] but Bilbao was a different animal.

I was always interested, and still am, in sea freight, which is not very common because art insurers don't like sea freight; the exposure time is too long for risk exposure and things like that. Nobody likes sea freight really. But I know from looking at them a lot and looking at container ships, that there are really first class containers. If they're brand new they're like a house. They have 40-foot or 45-foot containers and they have climate control, they have a graph that shows

exactly what the temperature differences are and humidity. There's a generator attached to them—they're called "refers"—refrigerated containers.

I started playing with that idea. We were close with the Guggenheim at the time and one of the preparators said, "What if we build a container as if it were an art storage room." The containers have nothing in them. They're like stainless steel boxes with no D-rings, nothing. That's it. There are no racks, nothing you put things on, the floors have slots so that refrigerated air can circulate. If you have a stack of frozen chicken there, you want to make sure they don't sit on the ground, they sit on something cool. So they have these T things—one T next to the other—so the air can circulate under the floors and cool or heat it. Whatever you want.

We said, "Well, that should be possible." We started devising a system. The registrar at the Guggenheim at the time was [L.] Lynne Addison and she was very much in favor of that also. Curators didn't seem to have any problems with it so we pursued that idea. I went to Maersk Line, that's a Danish or Scandinavian shipping line. You see their containers all the time, everywhere around the world. And they said yes. I had gone to the insurance first and they said, "Ask for the best class containers, ask for the history of the container, see there hasn't been any dried fish in it before or dangerous chemicals." I went out to the yard in Elizabeth, New Jersey and he said, "I have one here, I can show. It's A class, it's brand new, it's never been anywhere. It just came. And I have another one coming in that's also brand new." I said, "Well, can we book these?" He said, "Yes, sure, we can book these." They have numbers and they're like FedEx, you can look up the history. You can look up where they've been before. So we had that.

The rep from Maersk Line said, “We also have 45-foot containers.” Wow, that’s good, because we never knew exactly how much we need. When you load a truck you know exactly really only at the end when you close the door. A container is the same thing. Forty-five-foot containers sounded like a good thing. I had a friend in Germany who has an art shipping company and I called and said, “Günter, I can get 45-foot containers. Isn’t that great? To truck down from Rotterdam [Netherlands] to Bilbao?” He said, “Stay away from that. The only company that has the trailers for those 45 containers is Maersk Line themselves and they can kill us with the price, because they can dictate the price. Take a 40-foot. I can find trailers for this in mass quantities and if you need another 10 feet, I’ll pay for it.” So I said, “Okay, sounds like a deal.”

We booked the two 40-foot containers and we made a plan. The idea was, you had to return the containers right away. You couldn’t keep them for the duration of the show. Whatever we built in there—a rack system or wall system—had to be collapsible, had to be numbered so part A to part B and dot to dot and circle to circle so you can take this apart later on, put it in storage, and when the containers come back for the return you put this thing together again. So the fabricators, the preparators at Guggenheim were great. The carpenters they had were great. We had the containers delivered to our warehouse at Thirty-eighth Street one at a time. We built—when you build sheetrock walls, you build a frame and then the sheetrock goes in front. So they did the same thing; they built the frame and they put it up. I invented something—one of my million-dollar inventions—a hook system, a toggle bolt that you can put in the T on the floor so we could strap webbing over things and secure them because everything had to be securely secured. A truck is one thing, but a ship for four weeks, you want to make sure nothing shakes loose and it’s all really tight, tight, tight. So we had fun. We had a shop there and the carpenters

came and truckloads of 2-by-4s were delivered and we loaded *The 1/4 Mile* into two 40-foot containers and when we closed the last door of the second container it was loaded to the end.

Q: Perfect.

Buehler: It was great. A lot of fun. Then they were shipped to Bilbao. The crew there, as was here at the Guggenheim, was great. When they opened the containers they said, “This is so great.” We had fun doing it and I saw the show in Bilbao and it was great.



Installation view, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1998–99. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Erika Barahona Ede © FMGB Guggenheim Bilbao

Q: Who else was helping you load up those containers?

Buehler: The Guggenheim preparators.

Q: On this end in Chelsea?

Buehler: Yes. We had the entire Guggenheim crew and carpenters and all sorts of things.

Q: Wow, so a team of how many people?

Buehler: Eight, I think.

Q: And how long did it take you?

Buehler: Well, we knew what we were doing. We had plans, so it took a day to install the racks that we had prefabricated when the containers were delivered. We were probably done in two days.

Q: And a good celebration when you closed the door?

Buehler: Yes, it was good. Actually we knew which container they were going to open first because it was prescribed, open this one first, so we wrote, "Hello, Bilbao!" When they opened the doors they saw that. On the way back, the Bilbao guys wrote, "Hello, New York!" And again, we opened the containers here.

Q: Great.

Buehler: We installed the entire show in Bilbao and Bob was there most of the time. He was not there the first three weeks when we started unloading trucks and flying things in. Then came the

big surprise. Bob called—he had just received the Emperor’s Art Prize in Japan, Praemium Imperiale, and he was at a big dinner and he sat at dinner with his friend Fujiko Nakaya, who was an E.A.T. [Experiments in Art and Technology] founding member and video artist and very well-known, and her father was a well-known personality in Japan. They were sitting at the dinner table together—and this was just before the retrospectives. We were already in Bilbao installing. Bob came up with the idea that she should make a piece for his opening. She makes fog sculptures. He thought she should make a dedicated piece for the Bilbao Guggenheim, for his opening. So Bob called me and said, “We need to install a piece for Fujiko.” We had three or four weeks before the opening. Fujiko was on her way. Her equipment would come from Switzerland. So in addition to installing *The 1/4 Mile*, installing the retrospective, suddenly we had yet another totally unknown project. It worked well.



Fujiko Nakaya  
*Fog Sculpture #08025 (F.O.G.)*, 1998  
 Water fog generated by one thousand fog  
 nozzles and high-pressure pump motor system  
 Dimensions variable  
 Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa  
 Gift of Robert Rauschenberg

Q: Yes?

Buehler: Yes, it worked really well. Bob donated that. He paid for the whole thing. He donated that to the Guggenheim. It’s still installed and runs really well. A couple of years later I was



there when the piece was running and there was no indicator that Bob Rauschenberg donated that and initiated that, and I spoke to Susan Davidson and she said, “That’s not possible.” She said, “Next time I’m in Bilbao I’m going to bring that up.” Sure enough, now they have a plaque, the title and artist, Fujiko Nakaya, donated by Robert Rauschenberg.

Q: Nice. So some of the other pieces that I’ve heard were tricky, *Labyrinth* in Ferrara [Italy, 2004]. Can you—

Buehler: Ferrara, yes, and in Venice [Italy, 1996].

Q: Yes. Can you speak about those installations?

Buehler: Oh, yes. Well, it’s called *A Quake in Paradise* actually. The title is *A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth)* [1994]. Bob always liked a series, *Labyrinth*. Which came first, Ferrara or Venice, do you know?

Q: I think Ferrara.

Buehler: Yes. Beautiful. Palazzo dei Diamanti [Ferrara]. Nice old town. Beautiful old city, great food, and Emilia-Romagna. Great—the best—I’ll start with the food?

Q: Sure.

[Laughter]

Buehler: Something called *cappellacci*, it's a little tortellini filled with pumpkin. You can either have it with a meat sauce, a bolognese sauce, or you can have sage butter. It's like liquid butter with sage leaves and the sage leaves become crispy when they fry up in the butter. I could have had that every day. Every day.

Q: Sounds good.

Buehler: Ferrara itself was very nice. Old town. The city center was closed to automobiles. The mayor goes to work on a bicycle. It's very much a bicycle culture. To install was great. They installed outside in the courtyard, in the park, outside the palazzo, which was really old. They built a podium. Actually it was not on the floor. They built it 2 feet up so it wouldn't be sitting near water if it rained. It was waterproof. The artwork is sheets of Plexiglas, some transparent, some not transparent, with silkscreen on it and you can put them in either X configuration or T or both of them or L. It is site-specific. Whatever was good. Bob and David usually made little sketches where Bob thought where he wanted that, and David translated that into what I would understand and then I would translate it into what the technicians would understand. It kind of trickled down. We have those on record so we can recreate those for each venue.

The big surprise was that it was a big, big, big opening. A lot of people came. Half of Milan was there and the Prada family and royalty and Bob's friends and he spent a lot of time in Italy in those galleries. It snowed like crazy. Christine was there also and it snowed so much that as we walked to the opening from the hotel, we had to roll up our pants because it was so much snow.

It looked gorgeous. It looked just fantastic. Christopher Rauschenberg was there and he photographed all the virgin snow. It was just gorgeous. Unusual.



Installation view, *A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth)* (1994) in Robert Rauschenberg, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, Italy, 2004. Photo: Christopher Rauschenberg

Ferrara has a castle in the center and our hotel was right next to it actually and I don't know if there was any festive season—I forget—but they had a roundabout built up in the square in front of the castle and it was cobblestone. One morning we came out of the hotel and there was a dense fog and this gaudy colored tent with a roundabout in it, with the castle behind it, and we all just died. It doesn't get better than that.

The other event with *Labyrinth* was on the Isle Lazzaro degli Armeni [Monastero Mechitarista dell'Isola di San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice, 1996]. There was an Armenian woman who ran an organization called Art for the World. She had that contact to the Armenians on the island in Venice and Bob agreed to have a show there together with his partner and friend at the time, Darryl [R. Pottorf]. They made prints together and they were shown [*Quattro Mani* series, 1996/1998–99].



Robert Rauschenberg and Darryl R. Pottorf  
*Quattro Mani IV*, 1996  
Inkjet dye transfer on paper and toner on  
Lexan  
61 x 121 inches (154.9 x 307.3 cm)  
Private collection

It's not so much an exhibition space inside. It was more like a gallery, a good size but not huge. The main attraction was *Labyrinth* on an octagonal dock jutting out into the water. Of course when *Labyrinth* was installed—and there's a lot of pictures that Bob took in Venice with gondolas and those poles with the red and white stripes. So you look through all this Plexiglas and then you see a boat going through the Plexiglas. Life. It was magic. Absolute magic.



Installation view, *A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth)* (1994) in Robert Rauschenberg, Monastero Mechitarista dell'Isola di San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice, Italy, 1996. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Was it difficult to install—were you installing from the water? How did you do that?

Buehler: Well, everything was from the water. Things were in crates and crates got delivered. Of course they were not an art institution so they were not prepared for formal installation. We were not prepared to do a formal installation. So we got the crates delivered, got the panels taken out, got the crates taken away again by cargo boats. That's what they do all the time; they have a crane and they put things to shore. Normally you lay these things out. You stand them against the wall and you pick which goes together, they all have numbers, and there are certain sets of screws and fasteners that you have to put together. There was not that kind of room. Bob was there and we decided—and he approved—to lay those out on the floor, on the ground, under the trees, in the grass. That's what we did and he picked the sequence and then we started putting them together. It was great.

We would go to work everyday by boat. Our hotel was La Fenice in Venice proper and we had to take the *vaporetto* every day. La Fenice was great. Bob stayed there when he won the Venice Biennale, when he won the prize in the sixties [note: Rauschenberg won the International Grand Prize in Painting at the 32nd Venice Biennale in 1964]. They remembered that. The monastery or Art for the World had made reservations for the Rauschenberg crew so they knew who we were when we checked in. They had a little desk in the lobby and open was a paper from 1964 with a picture of Bob and a guest book and people were writing comments. It was like a welcome back for Bob Rauschenberg, even though he didn't stay there. He stayed at the deluxe hotel, the Bauer Hotel.

It was great because people didn't even come that much to see the show, I don't think, but the monastery was open every day between two and five o'clock, and the boats could dock there and

people came ashore and saw the gardens, beautiful gardens, with flowers everywhere and roses. The biggest rosemary bush I've ever seen in my life. It had a 6-inch diameter trunk that grew up against a wall. Wild rosemary. You could smell it already 10 feet away. They made a rose liquor from the roses they grew there. I bought a couple of bottles. They were very friendly. They invited us to have lunch with them every day and one of the monks cooked and we had a long table and we would sit there with them. It was delicious food.

Q: How long were you there for?

Buehler: Probably three weeks.

Q: Sounds very nice.

Buehler: I usually go back to take the show down—that's actually the better part because there's not so much time pressure except when you have ships booked or flights booked. But towards the opening is when the pressure is there and the press needs to be there the day before so you're not really ready but you have to look like you're ready. Bob didn't like people to see artwork when it was on the floor or not assembled. He always thought it was disillusioning. Let's put something together for the press so they can see it and they have something to photograph.

Q: Right. I was talking to Gina and she said that I should also ask you about the *Gluts* tour [*Glut* series, 1986–89/1991–94; *Robert Rauschenberg: Gluts* traveled through Europe, 2009–11]. She

said that there were lots of logistical issues on the *Gluts* tour. What were some of those challenges? [Laughs]

Buehler: It goes on and on and on.

Q: Why?

Buehler: Some are huge. Gas station parts or airplane parts and things like that. A lot of times, especially in Europe, people are not ready for that. The technician says, “What the hell? And I have to wear white gloves to install these things?” Much earlier in the European retrospective in Munich at Lenbachhaus [*Rauschenberg: Werke 1950–1980*, 1981]—at the time they had really old-style guards in uniforms with hats, military type of guards with brass buttons and all. We were carrying the pieces of *Sor Aqua (Venetian)* [1973]—Rauschenberg’s—and it has an old bathtub and then a piece of scrap metal hangs over it and it’s filled with water and it’s very dramatic when it’s installed. But of course when you carry the bathtub with white gloves—this really old, old man looked at me and he said in German, “That’s the end. The emperor’s new clothes. That’s it, that’s it. I’ve seen everything.”



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sor Aqua (Venetian)*, 1973  
Water-filled bathtub, wood, metal, rope, and glass jug  
98 x 120 x 41 inches (248.9 x 304.8 x 104.1 cm)  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
Gift of the Caroline Wiess Law Foundation

Well [*Gluts*] they're challenging. They're really big and you have to make up a sequence how to get those things on the wall. Now we know, but some of the works were new at the time and so how do we do this? Do we do the bottom part first? No, then you step on the bottom part when you install the top part. Some need to be assembled. Some have been made just for fun maybe and not thinking, "Okay, you have to handle those. You have to put them in the museum and you have to put them in a crate and it has to be repeated over and over again." Sometimes the rivets would come out and so I had a full set of riveting tools with me to make sure we can keep track of what was happening. It looked worse from the outside actually. I would think Gina would say something like that because, oh my god, she always looks at the pictures mainly.

Q: So now there's a system that you can employ for future installations, but it was a lot of problem solving as you were going?

Buehler: It's always like that on site.



You refine things with time. For the show we had in Naples [Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, 2008–09], the *Cardboards* [1971–72] and other things that was called *Robert Rauschenberg: Travelling '70–'76* [originated at Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal, 2007–08], Mirta [d'Argenzio], there were all these *Hoarfrosts* and they all had basically the same presence. There was this long hallway where David said, "It'd be nice if we could install those here." Just a week before we took off, I had bought a laser level, something you put on a tripod and it gives you a perfect, level line, wherever you project it on the wall. It goes around the corner if you need to. So I said, "David, if we can agree that they all install at the same height, I can draw a laser line at that height and we'll have those installed in five minutes." He said, "Let's see that," and so we made the laser line and literally in half an hour we had twenty *Hoarfrosts* installed just with two push-pins along that line. No measuring, no calculating. Those things you learn by experience. I always picked things up from people I worked with in museums abroad and other places. I always look at their tools and how they make things. You always learn something.

Q: Little tricks.

Buehler: Next step, you already have another one in your book. Japan was good in that way.

Q: Yes? What did you learn in Japan?

Buehler: Their efficient procedure for doing things. So precise. It's hard to describe. It's very hard to describe. For example we'd have foam bars that we use for bumpers on the paintings like you see when you install things in the warehouse. I get on the truck in Japan, one of the big shipping companies, and I thought, I don't believe my eyes. They had a whole bin, a big cardboard box full of little pillows. Little square pillows. They were all from fabric remnants and they had little flower patterns on them and stripes. They must have had one of their girls make them for them. That's so great. It's so Japanese. Then also here in the States—most everywhere—when they tie crates on the truck they have webbing, sometimes with buckles that you turn and crank it up. In Japan they had foot-wide pieces of long fabric, cotton or something like that, that they had in bins. It's very strong—the proverbial escape from prison when they take the bed sheet and make a rope out of it?

Q: Yes.

Buehler: That's exactly what they did. They had these very good long pieces of fabric with a wide width. When it's a fragile painting you give it a nice cummerbund or you tie it up to a rope and crank it up. Things like that. It's like procedure and inventiveness and not insisting always it has to be this and that. Being open to the next thing.

Q: Susan Davidson told me a story about the retrospective installation in Houston [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* traveled to the Menil Collection, Contemporary Arts Museum, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in 1998] where—I don't remember the man's name—but there was a man who said that Rauschenberg owed him money.

Buehler: Alfred Kren.

Q: And you had to quickly de-install some of the work.

Buehler: Well, we were done installing. I was in the hotel. It was a Friday—it's of significance why this was a Friday. I was in the hotel. Bob was on the way to Lafayette [Louisiana] to see his family. Don Saff was somewhere also in the car. I was in the hotel. Friday morning. We're done installing. Oh great, weekend coming up. The opening was maybe on Sunday, something like that. I forget. I know it was Friday because—I'll tell you in a moment.

The registrar called me—Julie Bakke—and said, “Thomas, you have to come here right away. The police are here and the sheriff is here and the marshal and they want to confiscate art.” My hotel wasn't very far so I jumped in a taxi, got to the Menil. The road was blocked on both sides with police cars with their lights flashing. There was a horse trailer in front of the Menil hooked up to a pickup truck. I had an ID card from Menil so they let me in.

Alfred Kren claimed that Bob owed him five million dollars or something like that. He had a company in Texas—Austin Art Consortium—and so he had Texas jurisdiction and he was waiting for Bob's show to come to Texas to make his move. He found a judge that gave an order to confiscate artwork in the value he owed. They had a list: *Erased de Kooning Drawing* [1953], *White Painting* [1951], all the things that they wanted.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953  
Traces of ink and crayon on paper, with mat and hand-  
lettered label in ink, in gold-leafed frame  
25 1/4 x 21 3/4 x 1/2 inches (64.1 x 55.2 x 1.3 cm)  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
Purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis

This is why it's significant it's a Friday. The judge signed that thing on Friday morning and went to play golf. He was not available for comment and the sheriff said, "I have a court order. I have the judge's order. There's nothing I can do." They were there with working gloves. The registrar and I said, "You cannot touch artwork with those gloves. No way. We will not allow that. You have to really manhandle us if you do that." The sheriff was okay basically. They agreed that they would put stickers on the back of the pieces that they claimed. I don't know what you call that. In Germany you call it *coo-coo*. The marshal comes and you haven't paid your car and they put a sticker on it that says now it's government property, something like that. They basically did that. You understand, the show was not open yet. We had some time still until the opening. I'd have to look that up on the calendar when exactly it was. We were able to delay until Monday and then there was a court order that said "Okay, the works can stay there, but they cannot be moved from the Menil without further doings." I think it was settled out of court later on, Bob and Kren settled. I don't know. It's kept away from the general public.

Q: Susan remembers some of the work being taken away for at least a day or two.

Buehler: Yes. I didn't go over that. The registrar and the art handlers of the Menil went. I'm sure *Erased de Kooning* went and probably the single-panel *White Painting* went and things like that. *Untitled (Night Blooming)* [ca. 1951] I think went. They had a very precise list. Kren was not Bob's dealer, but was sort of Bob's dealer so he knew the prices and values.

Q: He knew what to ask for.

Buehler: Sure. It's like the Indians always—when they raided cattle from the ranchers in the early days, they only took so much that the rancher wouldn't really notice. Always coyotes and mountain lions and all that, so there's always two percent waste and the Indians said, "Okay, we'll stay in that range. We don't take more than that—" So he did the same thing.

Q: Are there any other specific pieces or installations that you would like to speak about?

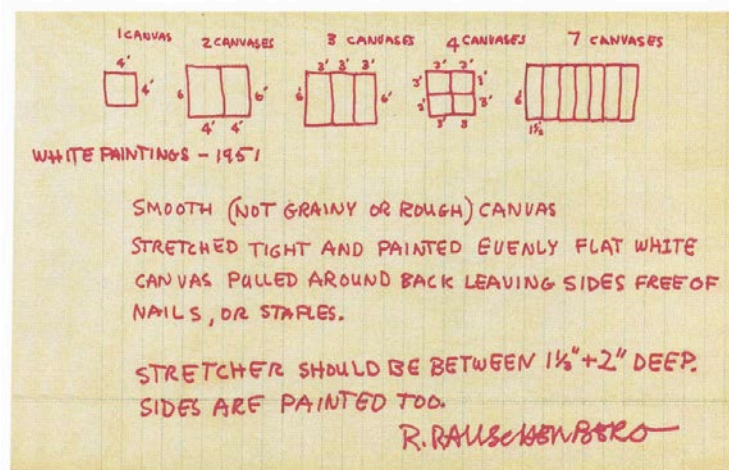
Buehler: This always gets edited later on, right?

Q: Yes.

Buehler: There's the *White Painting* that I recovered. Long story.

Q: Okay.

Buehler: It starts in 1960-something when Bob just made the *White Paintings* [1951] and Pontus Hultén was with the Swedish galleries [Moderna Museet, Stockholm]. It later became the Centre Pompidou [Paris; Hultén later became founding director of the Pompidou], but he was a friend and he organized exhibitions and curated exhibitions in Sweden. Through [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver, he told Bob that they wanted to have a show of *White Paintings* in Sweden, but they had a very limited budget. He asked Bob what to do. Bob said, “Why don’t you make your own? I’ll send you the instructions. I’ll send you the measurements, the thread count of the canvas and the kind of paint that you use, and staple it on the back, don’t staple it on the side, and paint.” He gave very explicit instructions for a two-panel *White Painting*—which happened. Klüver made this and the show happened. [Note: *Den inre och den yttre rymden: En utställning rörande en universell konst*, 1965–66, Moderna Museet, Stockholm]



Rauschenberg’s instructions for *White Paintings*, 1965. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection

Bob’s instructions were, destroy the painting after the show’s over because it’s not a real Rauschenberg, it’s just that I gave you permission to make a facsimile, and the rule is still only

one of each can exist. Only one seven-panel, only one four-panel, only one three-panel, whatever. That was Bob's rule. There can't be two two-panel paintings, so destroy those. So now it goes the sixties, the seventies, the eighties, and every other year there is correspondence going back and forth between Bob, or Bob's office, or even David probably, and Pontus Hultén.

We were having a show in Paris and just before that, David got a request from a museum in Denmark for an image of the two-panel *White Painting* because they're going to have that in their show. David said, "Wait a minute. We didn't lend anything to the museum in Denmark." So he got back to them and said, "Well, who's the lender on this?" They said, "Well, it's the divorced Mrs. Hultén [Anna-Lena Wibom]." I don't know what her name is anymore. And so apparently Pontus, when they got divorced, said to his wife—soon to be ex-wife—you can have the Rauschenberg and she said, "Oh yes, thank you, honey."

Q: Cheeky.

Buehler: Yes. So correspondence went back and forth with her and David and Bob's office and Bradley [J. Jeffries]. She was very sweet. She agreed, she said, "I realize that." Here's the letter that Bob sent to Pontus at the time. Here's Billy Klüver's letter and faxes; they were all there. She said, "Okay. Fine, how do we do this?" I was in Paris installing the show at the [Musée] Maillol [2002]. Bob called and said, "Well you're the closest and arrange for that painting to be either sent to you to Paris. Do something. I want the painting back or I want it gone."

I called a shipping company that I knew in Stockholm and they said, “Oh yeah, we know her. She’s a client of ours, she has storage with us, and obviously she has an art collection; she was married to a famous curator for many years.” I said, “Can you go and pick up the painting from her and take it to your warehouse and destroy it and make a roll and send me the stretcher and the canvas FedEx through Paris?” Okay. Not an hour later he calls me back and says, “I talked to my boss and we’re an art shipping company and it’s not our reputation to destroy art. We can’t do that. Very sorry. We’ll pick it up from her, we’ll take it to our warehouse, but that’s all we can do.” She had agreed to release it.

So what do I do? I got on a plane from Frankfurt to Paris, from Paris to Stockholm, and there at 11:30 in the morning they picked me up at the airport. Their storage was right around from the arrivals area. I had my trusted little knife that I still have, always have, and they had the painting out of the crate in two panels. They had a photographer there and somebody else—a notary public or something like that. I started cutting up the two panels and they had a shredder outside for mulch or something, so we put all the stretchers in the mulcher and I cut two pieces of letter size canvas out of that and said, “Okay, I’ll take those with me as proof that I have it.”

Q: Wow.

Buehler: By one o’clock I was on the plane again back to Paris. By evening I was back in Paris.

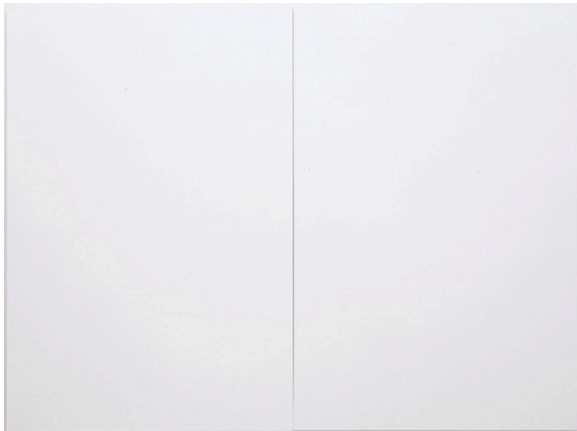
Q: Do you know how she was convinced to give up the work?



Buehler: Well, there was correspondence from the onset that this was not a Rauschenberg.

Q: Okay. So she just needed to see that?

Buehler: Out of these two pieces that I had, I made proper proportions two panels, like the two-panel *White Painting*, and put it between two sheets of glass and gave it to David White for his birthday and he still has it on his wall.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*White Painting* [two panel], 1951  
Oil on canvas  
72 x 96 inches (182.9 x 243.8 cm) overall  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

[Laughter]

Q: Funny.

Buehler: Yes.

Q: It must have been a funny moment for you to be slashing that up. Were you laughing?

Buehler: Yes. They weren't. They said, take pictures. We want to make sure we don't get sued for this. Their lawyer had prepared something I had to sign. That was one of the more obscure things.

Q: Yes. So I wanted to talk to you about the search for and the creation of the new space in Mount Vernon, but before we get to that, is there anything else? Any other travel or—

Buehler: I'm not sure. I forget sometimes. Did we talk about Samarkand?

Q: Yes, we did.

Buehler: Okay. We did. That sounds—okay.

Q: Yes. So let's talk about finding Mount Vernon. Why was it determined that you were going to move again?

Buehler: The market. It was 2005 and the market was way up and we got calls—even I got calls. I don't know how people get my number. People would call and say, we're interested in 544 West Thirty-eighth Street, who can I talk to? I always said, talk to Bennet Grutman. He's the only guy.

Q: What is the space now?

Buehler: They're tearing it down I think, just now.

Q: Who bought it and for what?

Buehler: Well, it's with a chronology because it's part of that.

Q: Okay.

Buehler: Christine—my wife now—was about to move to New York. I had sold the house that I had in India together with my first wife and we split the profit from that, so I had a little money and I thought, okay, I live in New York. I want a boat. I live in New York and we're surrounded by water. Islands everywhere. I want a boat. So I started looking for a boat and had certain ideas. I didn't want a fast boat. I like trucks. I didn't want a race-car, I wanted a truck. I wanted an inboard diesel because I read up and I know diesel engines are very economical, plus I wanted a boat that's not longer than 21 feet because the freight elevator that went to the roof in the warehouse at Thirty-eighth Street was 21 feet long. I thought if I keep the boat in the warehouse in the winter and have to move it out of the way for some reason, for a big operation, I'll just put it in the elevator, get it up to the roof, and it's out of the way. That was the criteria and this boat came up by searching the Internet and asking around.

I found a dealer in Maine and I said, "Well, I'd be happy to buy and I'll take a delivery in November." He said, "You'll take delivery in November? Nobody does that because people want their boats in the spring time." I said, "Well, I have a place for it." So he said, "I'll bring it to

you.” He gave me a great price including the trailer and the whole number. He brought it—backed it into the warehouse—all the way from Maine. I gave him the check. Done.

Christine in the meantime is still in Cologne. She is also into boats—with her friends, they rented boats in Ireland, those longboats to go cruising canals. She said, “Oh we bought a boat.” She goes and gets a license. In Germany you have to have a license to operate boats. She got a license and practiced on the Rhine River. She has the official international never-ending boat license. She’s captain.

Now we have the boat. Where do we keep it? A friend of hers who is a registrar at MoMA said, “Well, have you ever heard of City Island [Bronx, New York]?” City what? Never heard of it. We were in the subway and we saw the subway map and there was City Island, but obviously there’s no subway going there. It ends in Pelham Bay Park [Bronx, New York], but you see City Island on the subway map. That’s interesting. We should go there. So we said, “Okay, next weekend we’ll go.”

Christine came from Europe. We took our bicycles on the 6 train and went to Pelham Bay Park and bicycled to City Island and went into every marina to ask for a place. We didn’t have the boat yet but we had a picture of the boat. Long story short, after we had the boat, we spent weekends on the boat and then looked around. This is really nice. We could live here.

So we’re now at Memorial Day 2005—just last weekend was our tenth anniversary—and we found the house. The woman who owned the house lived in a house on the beach and this house

that we own now is five houses in from the beach. Christine was back in Germany. I made an appointment with her the Tuesday after Memorial Day—like today exactly ten years ago—and she showed me the house. It was a beautiful day and I was looking out in the garden, a nice garden and flowers everywhere and from the bedroom upstairs I looked into the neighbor's garden. They have Tibetan prayer flags lined up. No rednecks, nice neighbors, and I knew the other neighbor already because she was a nurse and she had taken care of her mother who passed away—that's why the house was for sale. She was very nice. Georgine, my mother's second name actually. All those things come together. It's weird. I'll come to the warehouse in a moment.

Q: That's fine.

Buehler: We were walking down and she said, "Come down to my house and we'll sit and tell me what you're doing." There was no realtor involved. She had it advertised in the *New York Times* and the local paper and there was no realtor. We were halfway down the block and she said, "Now, what do you do? What do you do for a living?" I know Rauschenberg is famous in the art world, but regular people don't know him really. He's not a household name like Picasso or Warhol. I said, "I work for this American painter and I help organize his collection and things like that." She says, "Oh really? Who's the artist? I'd be interested." I said, "Well, it's Robert Rauschenberg." She said, "You're kidding me." She's a retired art teacher and Rauschenberg was her favorite subject all her professional life, for her students. So basically we had the house already and we weren't even there yet.

Without going into too much detail, Bob helped me buy the house cash. Their daughter had just come back from Spain and they had an apartment that they wanted to buy for her and they needed the money. They said, “Whoever pays fastest gets the house. Even though we like you, but we need the money.” I called Bob first and he said, “How much do you need? Call Bennet.” So I got a check for the house.

Q: What you needed.

Buehler: I got a mortgage and paid him back. So having said that, Bennet sells Thirty-eighth Street. It was a good thing we just bought a house because I lived there for twelve years. Christine loved it. We had dinner on the roof deck in the evenings looking at the Hudson River. One year there were Fourth of July fireworks on the Hudson, so we were sitting right under the fireworks. I said “Well okay, it doesn’t faze me that much because we just bought a house.”

They got, I don’t know, millions and millions of dollars. I don’t know the number. It doesn’t matter really. A major profit. Bennet, of course, being an accountant says, “Okay, here’s the thing. Something’s called the 1031 tax exchange and you don’t pay capital gains tax when you reinvest profits from real estate in New York state within six months—a new real estate project. Go.” I started looking in Westchester County. I also knew a realtor there. Immediately Bob Crozier calls me from Crozier Fine Arts Shipping, who has street blocks in Jersey City, and says, “Oh I hear you are looking for storage. I have lots of storage in Jersey City.” I say, “Bob, I live in Westchester County. Not going to happen.” So I look at New Rochelle, Yonkers. I went once to Mount Vernon. I wasn’t so crazy about it. I’d been there before because *The 1/4 Mile* had

Plexiglas components and there was a big fabricator there. So years and years ago I'd been there and was familiar with where it was. That's why I wasn't so crazy about it.

New Rochelle is really nice. Fifteen thousand square feet in a semi-residential area. A big bonus was that next door was a wholesale Spanish wine importer. Tempranillo. When you buy red wine, look on the label. Most of them are Tempranillo. The company is called that. It's not just the variety. I became friends with him already because I went there all the time looking at the thing and taking measurements and thinking about how where can we make a loading dock and this and that.

Now already two months have passed from the six months after the sale. Bennet calls me and says, "Well, they're not getting off the pot. They don't have their paperwork ready and they're dragging their feet and we need to move on. Do you have plan B?" Plan B would be Mount Vernon. Bennet said, "Then Mount Vernon it is. Right now." I literally made a U-turn and went back to Mount Vernon. There was a guy involved—I forget his name now—he was a contractor but also a mediator and he found a general contractor in Mount Vernon or in Yonkers next door. These people were great; they had their paperwork together, they were eager to sell, they were closing down, and huge. Twice the size of New Rochelle. I thought, oh my god, what are we going to do with that? So we'll take it.

Again a great general contractor. Demolition, there's a junkyard next door to the warehouse. He called them up and said, "Mike Bass, can you send a crew over? We need full demolition," which they did. You've seen it. There's not an old wire in the building, there's not an old pipe in

the building. We gutted the whole thing—new roof, new facade. We were able to build a garage onto it. Where the loading dock is now, that was a parking lot before. But we needed an enclosed loading dock. That's standard in my industry at least. Finally after a lot of back and forth, the city allowed us, said, "Okay, plant a couple of trees and you can enclose that."

So, we got it done in the remaining five months that we had. It's called substantial completion. It doesn't have to be painted, you don't have to move in, but the major money tickets have to be done; like the generator has to be there and the wiring, the climate control. That was the thing we were pushing for, and we got it done. Got it done.

We emptied the whole thing, really gutted it. I overlaid the floor plans of Thirty-eighth Street to the floor plans of this just to see what the ratio is of space that we had and I knew how much space we needed for the paintings that we had on Thirty-eighth Street with crates. Then I made a little foam core model and for the first meeting with the architects I walked in with a foam core model, "Okay, here's the new warehouse." And that's how it is. With some minor changes that were not legal and something that we changed later on because we wanted different access to different rooms—now the photo room is much bigger than it was supposed to be, which is nice—and things like that. So that's how Mount Vernon came into existence.

Q: How long did it take to actually move the materials in?

Buehler: I think four months. About 150 truckloads. I contracted Boxart, my favorite crating company, the art moving company. We use them all the time, we've used them before and I will



use them until the end of time. They're just so good. There was a guy working there at the time, he was a cousin of one of the directors of Boxart, Allan Brough, and so we both put our heads together and we said, "Okay, we have a lot of stuff." We knew we had about five thousand objects to move, including things in flat files. We also moved things that were at Lafayette Street here that we took there and there were some things in Captiva that needed to come, but right now the problem at hand was what was at Thirty-eighth Street because we had to vacate that.

We identified two trucks and painted the outlines of the boxes—like the square footage of each truck—on the floor at the warehouse in Thirty-eighth Street. Then we had a crew come one day, pack things, load them into those pre-painted squares—big squares, the trucks were 102 inches by 40 feet. So we knew already what to put on the truck when it showed up. We didn't have to scratch our heads, "Oh no, what goes in here?" We knew exactly what was on there. Had the paperwork ready for it, had receipts. The barcode system was in place with Marianne Carroll. She helped to put that together. In three months we got things loaded in.

Q: Wow. And is it a very different system at Mount Vernon than it had been in—

Buehler: Yes.

Q: Yes? What did you change and why?

Buehler: Well, the more you work with Bob's objects, you find again how different they are. *The 1/4 Mile* consists of everything, including *Gluts*. There's panels, there's painting, there's

sculpture. How many there are. Before that we never tracked exactly where each piece was. I can afford now to put a panel in room 3 and put a bucket that's attached to it in room 2 and have those two locations—because each of these parts has their own identity now. It used to be that if the work consisted of three parts, it would say that in the database, but it didn't say which. You would look at the picture and maybe find out what the third part is or maybe it's just a stick or maybe just a piece of fabric. Now that they all have their own identity, you can track them. That's the big difference.

Q: Okay. And Bob saw the new space?

Buehler: No.

Q: Never?

Buehler: No. I sent pictures. They sent him that and he always liked it.

Q: When did you go down to Captiva with your hip replacement?

Buehler: It must have been 2004.

Q: And you said that's the longest time you spent there, so what was that time like?

Buehler: It was like six weeks. When was Ferrara?

Q: Ferrara? [2004]

Buehler: Because I think I had to go to de-install Ferrara after the hip.

Q: Oh yeah?

Buehler: I'm almost sure. You can reconstruct that because I knew I had to be in Ferrara at the certain time and Dr. [John B.] Fenning was Bob's friend and Bob's surgeon.

Q: You had to heal.

Buehler: And he did surgery on me.

Q: So you had the surgery in New York or in Florida?

Buehler: No, in Florida, in Fort Myers. Dr. Fenning operated on me with his crew. Lee Memorial Hospital gave us a room with a Murphy bed and Christine could spend the first week with me after the surgery. Dr. Fenning would come in the morning, knock on the door at five o'clock in the morning and say, "Camp Buehler, wake up!"

Q: And how did you spend your time in Captiva?

Buehler: I scanned 35-millimeter negatives into the database, about four thousand of them. And I had therapy. There was a visiting nurse who came twice a week and I had the Weeks House, which was just gorgeous on the bay side. There were osprey nests and pelicans sitting on the poles and it was just to die for. There was a wooden deck outside so the nurses took me out there and moved my legs. Darryl's brother Kevin [Pottorf] lived there and there was a TV in the house but I'm not a big TV person. I don't watch TV much. So Kevin said, "Oh, we have to repair the TV." I said, "I don't like the TV." Look at all the clouds and the birds and all that. I had a little transistor radio or my phone had a radio in it so I put that on the paper cup so the acoustics would be a little bit better and I listened to NPR [National Public Radio]. Never bored.

Q: Did you spend much time with Bob?

Buehler: Yes, on and off.

Q: How would you spend your time together?

Buehler: It was always the same. He would invite people and there was a lot of drinking, a lot of eating going on, and cooking and storytelling, and people would come to visit. He'd call over and say, "Come over, we'll have company, join us." He always liked people around.

Q: Did you get to know him in a different way spending time there or did you feel like you already knew him pretty well?

Buehler: Well, when you travel in China and Tibet together and Russia, you get to know each other pretty well.

Q: Do you have a favorite memory of traveling with him?

Buehler: They were all good. They were all great.

Q: So many.

Buehler: Yes.

Q: Yes.

Buehler: Tibet was special because he was like a kid in a candy store. People who have turquoise earrings and wear their coats—as I said before, they were crazy about him and said they wanted his coyote fur coat that he was wearing, the fur to the outside. They thought it was totally nuts because you wear the fur to the inside to keep you warm. They wanted to buy it from him or trade for a yak coat. He said no.

Q: Not interested.

Buehler: Cuba was great. He liked to be in Cuba. Maybe because that's his climate, Florida climate.

Q: I'm ready for some of that right now. I love to be near the water.

Buehler: I'm sure.

Q: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you think you'd like to speak about?

Because I've covered the things that I had outlined.

Buehler: If these are the last words, I'll say the one thing I remember vividly was, one of the first times I was here at 381 and we were sitting in the kitchen—I'm not sure if I have the right names—but there were people sitting around the kitchen table and for sure there was Roy Lichtenstein, for sure there was Cy Twombly, for sure there was Chuck Close, and I think James Rosenquist, and Robert Rauschenberg, and me. It doesn't get better than that. God.

Q: So you love artists?

Buehler: Yes.

Q: Why? What about?

Buehler: I like inventiveness. I'm a graphic designer really. I did a lot of printmaking and drawing myself and I still make objects. I always have and I always will probably. It's just a more interesting group of people. I like engineers sometimes, but okay.

Q: Do you think that there's anything that you learned from Rauschenberg that helped you to do the work that you do?

Buehler: I think he even is quoted for this sometimes. What stayed with me and will stay with me the rest of my life is—let's celebrate the differences. Let's celebrate that we're all different and we all can learn from each other, and just looking at each other we can learn from each other, and not celebrate that we're all the same—all McDonald's all over the world, the same food everywhere. Let's celebrate how they stamp their corn and make *chapatis* out of it. How different and how wonderful the world is because we're so different. That's his appreciation of the world. I think that's—

Q: That's what lasts?

Buehler: That's what stays with me forever.

Q: Well, thank you so much.

Buehler: It was my pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]