

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Susan Davidson

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Susan Davidson conducted by Sara Sinclair on March 3, 2015, March 31, 2015, and May 5, 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: Susan Davidson

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: March 3, 2015

Q: Today is March 3, 2015. This is Sara Sinclair with Susan Davidson at the [Robert] Rauschenberg Foundation at 381 Lafayette [Street] in New York. So, to begin today I want to start with you and it can just be as simple as where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life.

Davidson: I was born in Houston, Texas, on May 16, 1958, and grew up there. I had an early exposure to art through my mother, who went to work for John de Menil as his private assistant in 1968. Prior to that she had had all kinds of other funny jobs, such as working in television and things like that, so moving into the “arts” seemed rather natural, though at the time I don’t think my mother really understood what she was getting into. I know that John de Menil very much wanted somebody who was French-speaking and my mother, being Scottish, didn’t necessarily speak French, but she soon learned.

Through that professional relationship, I was introduced to the de Menils. At that time I would have been about ten or eleven years of age and occasionally, as mothers encounter family situations, they have to bring their children to work, and that’s how I first met the de Menils and started being around fine art, really as a young person. That became very informative for me; in many ways it’s led me to where I am today.

Q: What did you mean when you said your mom didn't know what she was getting into?

Davidson: At that time the de Menils were very active in the city of Houston and it being the sixties, there were a lot of political tensions. It was a time of activism and the de Menils were really very much at the forefront of that. I think that she didn't—I don't think anybody really was aware of the depth and the long arm of what they were doing and how that would really affect history, at least within the city of Houston.

John de Menil ended up dying of cancer in 1973 and my mother then transitioned into working with Mrs. [Dominique] de Menil and that became a long-lasting relationship until Mrs. de Menil's death in 1997.

Q: What was Houston like at the time?

Davidson: Well, it was quite different than it is today. It was a lot more provincial; still, obviously, it was an oil and gas town. Today, however, I think it's a lot more diversified. I think that was why the de Menils were trying to turn things on the edge in a way.

When I went off to high school, at Lamar High School in Houston, which was at the other end of River Oaks Boulevard, it was literally down the street from where the de Menils lived. As an after-school project, I used to go and work in what was called the "collection room," which in fact was the garage that had been turned into offices. In that area, the print curator and the

collections curator worked, and maybe a collections assistant. I had the physical job of taking the collection, which at that time was probably about ten thousand objects, and making index cards for each object, typing up the data about the work and then dry-mounting small images onto the cards. It was their first cataloguing system. I did this all through high school. So, while I never studied art history in high school because in those days they didn't have that in public schools, and certainly not in Houston, I had this very direct access to the art and to learning about cataloguing and curatorial kinds of endeavors without really realizing it.

Q: Do you remember, was there any work in particular that you encountered in high school that had an impact on you, that you really liked?

Davidson: Yes, well, I was convinced I was going to study African art. That was really what I leaned toward. I didn't really pay a lot of attention to the twentieth-century material. I learned about it and I recognized all the names and I could identify different artists and such, but for some reason I seemed to be much more engaged with objects. When I went off to college I thought that's what I would do, study African art. Actually I should have studied architecture. That was really my first love. That was also something my father very much was keen that I do. I don't know why. He always has bought property throughout his life and my parents had built an apartment complex during their marriage. So, I don't know, maybe he saw it as a way to continue the family interest. But when I got to college I took a couple of architecture courses and—I couldn't draw and I couldn't really do the math so I just kind of moved away from it.

Q: Okay. Did the building, the Menil [Collection, Houston] space, have an impact on you in particular?

Davidson: That was so much later. This was in the seventies. I graduated from high school in 1976 and went off to college that fall.

Q: So, were there particular spaces in Houston that were—?

Davidson: No, not that I recall. It was just at the beginning of an oil boom there and Philip [C.] Johnson was building a lot of skyscrapers although of course he'd had a long history with the de Menils, having built their house in 1949 and then again with the Rothko Chapel [Houston, 1971], which opened probably in 1970 or '71. When I was in college I used to come home for Christmas and I would either guard at the Rothko Chapel, which was incredibly boring because it was generally wintertime and there would be nobody in there so you would just read and then tend to fall asleep because it was very dark; or I sometimes had summer jobs at the Rice [University] Museum [known as the "Barn"] as a guard or front desk person.

Q: I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about your impressions of the artists that you met earlier in your life, so in high school when you first started working at the Menil. Growing up in Houston, which, as you said, at the time was largely an oil town, if you had impressions that the artists represented a different kind of community or—?

Davidson: No, I just wasn't that aware at the time. I was in high school and while I think a lot of that was going around, and perhaps my mother and stepfather were involved in that, it's just not something I really paid any attention to. I was with my friends doing what kids do and this was just an afternoon job. I didn't realize how it was going to significantly change my life. I'm sure I met people, but I just don't have any memories of that.

Q: Okay. So, at what point did you decide that art history was going to be your course of study?

Davidson: Well, I think because I'd had this very direct and early exposure through high school to really high-quality art—not just sort of going to museums, it was a very direct experience—I was inclined toward it—that I thought I needed to walk away from it. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to try architecture. It was also one of the reasons why I wanted to go to a small town and go skiing because that was my great love at the time. So, I spent two years in northern Utah, where they only had one art history professor and I think I was maybe one of three students. So, there wasn't a lot of real involvement with art at that time.

I was still interested in tribal materials so I decided that I would transfer from Utah back east and applied to schools, NYU [New York University] and other places, and I decided to go to George Washington University [GWU, Washington, D.C.]. I transferred there in 1978 and studied art history; they had a very strong art history program. Of course, being in Washington, there were all the museums and the Library of Congress so that was a very enriching time for me and it was during that time, finishing my undergraduate degree, that I moved away from tribal art into more

twentieth century, although the work that I was doing, even in graduate school, was still a kind of marriage of the two.

Q: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about that moving away, about how that—

Davidson: What I realized with the tribal material was that I didn't really want to be a proponent of that professionally. I also saw that it was very archaeologically-based in a way, which was a bit of an irony because by this time I was spending my summers on an excavation outside Rome that Rice University hosted, a Roman villa site. I had this really amazing experience for eight summers, working on the excavation. I wasn't actually doing the digging, I was cataloguing, which made more sense because I'm much more historical-based and object-based as I was saying.

I just kind of morphed, I guess, away from the tribal material. I had a professor, Barbara von Barghahn at GW, who was very interested in patronage, European patronage in the Renaissance, primarily, and at the same time she also had a collection of pre-Columbian and African art. So that informed how I did my graduate studies and what I wrote my thesis on: African Portuguese Ivories, which had been commissioned by the Portuguese royal family after they had first made contact with Sierra Leone in the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century.

Q: You said that part of the reason you moved away from the tribal work was that you didn't like the role that many museums play or how that might play out professionally. Was there a moment when you had that realization that you recall? What led to that?

Davidson: I used to go a lot to the African art museum in Washington; this was when it was still in a townhouse on Capitol Hill. It was actually, I think, even before the Smithsonian took it over [formerly the Museum of African Art, currently the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution]. There was a gentleman, Warren [M.] Robbins, I believe, was the director. I would go to events and look at the shows and such and I don't know, I just didn't cotton to the people in a way. So, I don't think it was a very specific moment, it was just kind of a drifting away. I think the introduction, through my professor and my college roommate, who was also interested in patronage issues—and one of the things that I hadn't harnessed yet in my mind was that the early exposure I'd had through the collection of the de Menils was itself a type of patronage, but just in a twentieth century guise. It just kind of went that way and it kept moving that way.

Q: Okay. So, tell me about what happened after you completed your master's degree.

Davidson: Well, I took four years to do it, which was probably too long, but I was enjoying the academic side of it. I had actually bitten off more than I could chew because I ended up doing a full catalogue raisonné of the Afro-Portuguese Ivories, of which there were about four hundred. Like any person finishing school not really knowing what to do—it's not that I hadn't been working while I was in college; I worked for a corporate art consultant in Washington, Jean Efron, I helped her identify businesses that needed art for their walls and organized framing and installations and things like that—it was a fun job. So, after graduation I returned to Houston and I had to start applying for jobs.

I had had this funny experience with Walter [W.] Hopps [III] while I was still in Washington in graduate school. I had not yet met him, but there was this very complicated project that the de Menils were doing and I knew nothing about it. I had a phone call from my mother one day saying, “Walter would like to speak to you.” I said, “Okay, fine.” She gave me a time and a place that he would telephone me. So, I waited for the call and this is long before cell phones or anything like that so it really had to be orchestrated. I was told to be at Dumbarton Oaks [Washington, D.C.], which is a Byzantine museum, a private collection interestingly enough, in Georgetown, and they have a remarkable photographic library as well as a rare book library. I remember being in the basement area to receive this call and the phone rang. I picked it up and it was Walter. He said, “Okay, this is Walter Hopps.” I said, “Hello.” He said, “I’d like you to go into the photo library and to look for a particular church in a particular region and I’ll call you in three days at this number.” That was it. No reason why he needed this information or anything. And so I went and I spent two or three days looking everywhere and getting quite frustrated because I couldn’t find anything and of course I didn’t want to look bad. When the appointed time came for the second phone call, he rang and I answered it and he said, “And?” I said, “Well, I’m terribly sorry, I haven’t found anything.” “That’s excellent news!” and he hung up the phone. I still didn’t know what it was about and I didn’t know if I had helped him or not and I didn’t really have any further contact with him for maybe another two or three years at that point.

Occasionally when my mother would come to visit me in Washington, he and Caroline Huber, who at that time was not his wife or maybe they were married by then, I don’t recall, but they’d come in this paneled station wagon that Caroline drove and pick my mother up for coffee and I’d

wave from the window and that would be it. But I never met him until I finished graduate school and went back to Houston. Of course, my mother, who was not going to allow me not to work, to sit around and not do anything, she said, “Walter’s working on this show and he’s agreed to let you come and be a curatorial assistant for a couple of months until you figure out what you’re doing.” So that’s actually how I first met him.

Q: And what was that show?

Davidson: The exhibition was on fifty years of American drawing [*Fifty Years of American Drawings 1930–1980*, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1985]. It was an exhibition primarily from the collection of the de Menil holdings, twentieth-century material. I didn’t realize it at the time, but now as I look back on it, it was also an opportunity for Walter to acquire more drawings for the collection. So, the exhibition was made up of what was already there and then other things that he ultimately bought. The show was for the Musée des Beaux Arts in Paris. I went to work for Walter, who really I never saw too much. I think the first time I met him, he said to me, “How late can you stay up?” I thought that was such an odd thing. Little did I know. I said, “Well, I don’t know. Maybe two o’clock,” never having been a late-night studier. I was always somebody who got up early to study for a test rather than to stay up because I’m not really a late-night person. So, I sort of winged it and said, “Oh, maybe 2 A.M.” He goes, “Oh great, that’s another day. If you can stay up until two, you’ll be fine.” And in fact that’s what my life was like for the next eighteen years with him, staying up extremely late, often all night.

At that time Neil Printz was the research curator. Walter had brought him to Houston and he'd been there for maybe two or three, four years at the time. I worked directly with Neil on a daily basis and at night we would encounter Walter and work with him. So that show, that was in January [1985] when I started and I think the show in Paris was maybe in the spring or the summer, I don't really remember, I'd have to look at the dates. I don't know why they were doing the show; it may have had something to do with the fact the de Menils had shown their collection at the Grand Palais [*La Rime et la raison: Les collections Ménil (Houston–New York)*, Galeries national du Grand Palais, Paris, 1984] a year or two before and there was a continuing relationship. I never knew the details for that. I worked on the catalogue and worked on writing the entries and just typical curatorial assistant things.

Q: Can you tell me about how that relationship evolved? So, you came in with the expectation that you'd be helping out on this one show and then the show happens and then?

Davidson: Well I think I mentioned I was quite interested in objects and I'd had a couple of friends in graduate school who had done the Sotheby's course in London. I thought that would be a good next step for me and I got accepted to that program. I was also applying for lots of jobs back on the East Coast because that's where I really wanted to be, I didn't want to stay in Houston. I remember once things got finalized, I went to Walter and said, "My time's up, I'm going to go and do this," and he said, "Don't do that. That's just stupid," or, "That's dumb." "Stay here, we're going to open the museum in two years, and you'll learn a lot more here and you seem to be pretty good so just stay. Don't do that. It's a waste of time and money." And he was right.

From the very beginning, Walter always gave me a lot of latitude in a funny way. I think back on that first summer in '85, I was still involved with the excavation—that was my last season there and that's how I had planned it when I came back to Houston the Christmas before. So, I worked from January to June and then I went to Rome and I probably went to Paris to pack up the show or to see the show. I do remember being there with a colleague, the art handlers, Buck [Oliver Bakke] and Bear [Gary Parsons], so it must have been for the de-install. Walter had had some interest in presenting the exhibition from a museum in Frankfurt [Germany] and he just said, "Oh, why don't you go talk to them?" So, after I finished at the excavation, I rented a car and drove up to Frankfurt, and I went to see Klaus Gallwitz, who was the director of the Städel Museum. It was absolutely insane, this twenty-six-year-old brokering a deal for the exhibition to go to Frankfurt, and it did. Everything went very fast-tracked after that.

Q: Okay. So, if you think about the first—you said that was in what year?

Davidson: That was in 1985.

Q: So for the next say five years, can you think about how your role evolved and how your responsibilities changed?

Davidson: At that point, everything was full steam ahead for the opening of the museum, which was in June of 1987. I was working as a curatorial assistant, Neil was still very much there, and my big role in opening the museum was that Neil and Walter and I together produced four

catalogues for the opening, including working with [Harry N.] Abrams to do a coffee table book of different aspects of the collection with various essays. We did a [John] Chamberlain catalogue [*John Chamberlain: Sculpture, 1970s and 1980s*, 1987] and an Andy Warhol *Shadows* catalogue [*Warhol Shadows*, 1987] and something else, which I don't remember [note: *Ben L. Cullwell: Adrenalin Hour*, 1987]. So, I worked with them on producing the catalogues and preparing these shows.

My main activity in the museum, however, was researching and rewriting all the copy for every artwork that was going on view, which was at that time about six hundred or seven hundred objects. Nobody had ever really systematically looked at it as a whole so it was a lot of research. It was pretty interesting and it cut across from antiquities through tribal through twentieth century, as the collection there does. That suited me so well because I had this kind of broad interest. I had been working with antiquities on the excavation, I had an interest in twentieth century, I had this interest in tribal material, and so it was very well suited for me. I was just really fortunate to be so close, and it was a really exciting and exhausting time.



Dominique de Menil and Susan Davidson,
The Menil Collection, Houston, ca. 1987

I remember when the museum opened we had a very special Surrealist presentation [*Surrealism: Selections from the Menil Collection*, 1987–88]. I remember David Sylvester, the art historian and specialist on [René] Magritte, walking in—he’s also a very strong personality—and finding an incorrect date on one of the labels. He took out a pen and just started marking on the label. It just crushed me, not only because the information was wrong, but it physically was very, very difficult to produce those labels. It was done on a computer in a system, in a language that I didn’t really speak. It was well before Macs. They were all hand-cut and hand-printed and it was very devastating. Everybody talked about it, it was funny.

So, the museum opened and Neil and I started working right away on an exhibition of Andy Warhol *Death and Disasters* paintings [*Andy Warhol: Death and Disasters*, 1988–89], which was great fun, which shouldn’t be fun given the subject matter. But it was a lot of research in terms of source material for Warhol. Warhol had just died, they were just in the middle of setting up the [Andy] Warhol Museum [Pittsburgh] and all the time capsules and things like that hadn’t been opened yet so the research we were doing was very primary and it turned out to be quite important. We did that exhibition in ’88, I guess. Then Neil left, he decided to pursue a PhD and he went East. So that opened up a lot more opportunity for me because even though I was just a curatorial assistant, I was always in the situation where I could kind of define my role as long as I worked hard and kept everything going.

Really until I left in 2002, it was just Walter, myself, and another person, Bertrand Davezac, who was a medievalist and Byzantinist. Bertrand, like Walter, didn’t come to the office every day. So,

it was oddly kind of my—I did so much work and so my role kept evolving in that way—as over the years I had more exposure and experience, I just moved to the next level professionally, never really calculatedly, but it just kind of all evolved very organically in a way.

Q: Okay. So, people definitely link Walter Hopps as a figure in Bob Rauschenberg's story and I'm wondering if you can speak to how you believe his drive, his work, his personality are connected to Bob's career.

Davidson: I think Walter really saw Bob as the epitome of an American artist and I think the variety and the complexity of Bob's work was something that very much appealed to Walter. I just don't think there ever was or can be an artist like Bob. That kind of generosity of spirit, which Walter always talked about with Bob, I think was just very fundamental to how they saw one another. It's funny, sometimes when you're on the ground and you're young, you don't really understand how all the dots connect and I think that was certainly the case with me. I must have known something that was important and relative, but I didn't really understand what I was in the middle of until much later.

It's also interesting that Walter ended up at Menil because the de Menils had this kind of connective relationship with Bob early on as well. So, I think for Walter it was really about ensuring Bob's place not only within the de Menil collection, but—[by the time] he came to Houston it was. Obviously, he'd done the 1976 retrospective at what was then the National Collection of Fine Arts, now the Smithsonian American Art Museum [Washington, D.C., *Robert Rauschenberg*, 1976–77]. So, he had been deeply engaged with Bob and Neil Printz, who he had

brought to Houston from Washington, had also worked with him directly on that show. Walter was the kind of person who, if he liked you and if he thought you were a good worker, he kept you in his coterie. Not only was Neil in Houston, but Deborah Brauer, or at that time Deborah Jensen, and of course, Caroline Huber, his wife, whom he met working on the 1976 retrospective. So, he always kept people dear and close to him and kind of like Bob, he didn't like to be alone, in a funny way.



Walter Hopps and Rauschenberg during the installation of the retrospective exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976. Work in background is *Sor Aqua (Venetian)* (1973). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni, www.gianfrancogorgoni.it

There were many artists that Walter was very committed to, from the great and the well-known to the completely unknown. He was a real believer in the underdog and he had absolutely no monetary interest in the art world at all. I think that was quite rare, as I grew up and saw other activities and encountered other people.

Q: You said that sometimes when you're a young person and you're on the ground you don't make all the connections until later. So, I'm wondering, from your position now, how you

characterize those dots and those connections and what you were actually witnessing and participating in.

Davidson: It was just absolutely remarkable. It was just so present, it was so available, and it was so unencumbered, and there was a significant amount of activity going on, both what the museum was generating and Walter's really deep connections with so many different artists. It was incredibly exciting and you didn't really take it for granted because every day was a different story. You never knew what would come. Walter certainly was the smartest person I've ever met. He could talk about anything, and he did, often at great length, and sometimes you'd have to kind of try to bring it back around. Of course, at this time because Mrs. de Menil had Walter, it freed her in a lot of ways to focus on her human rights activities, which was where her interests were moving more and more. She trusted Walter implicitly. I think in many respects he was sort of the embodiment of her husband, John de Menil, in terms of his vision and his mind and his abilities.

Q: Can you speak a little bit about the impact that the Menil had on the city?

Davidson: I think the impact is still going on and I think the city has always had a kind of push-pull relationship with it. The de Menils were always single-minded and I don't know if that fits always into a civic-minded place, plus they were a lot more liberal in a place that wasn't always liberal. I think building the museum and opening it to the public really changed how people saw them. I think the people of the city of Houston began to understand its significance. Prior to that it had always been kind of a private endeavor and I think it absolutely put Houston on the map in

terms of the art world. It's been a beacon for other private collections going public because it was in fact the very first one to do that.

Q: So, when was the first time that you met Bob then?

Davidson: I was thinking about that this morning on the subway coming down to speak with you. I actually do not remember. I really do not remember, I don't. He must have come to the opening in '87, but I don't remember meeting him. At that point the staff was so exhausted and while we were invited to the festivities, I think not everybody got there. We were very much behind the scenes in those days. Walter probably started talking about doing the early fifties show [*Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., organized by the Menil Collection, Houston, 1991], maybe in '89, '90? So, I guess it would've been during that time period, when we started that research.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

I had decided I needed to do a PhD so I left Houston and the museum to go to the Courtauld [Institute of Art, London] in 1990, I think, and again I did a kind of fluke thing. I wanted to study fifteenth-century Netherlandish panel painting even though I'd been only working in twentieth century and I wanted to do that through the lens of patronage again because that was of great interest to me. So, I worked really hard to get into the Courtauld and to do this PhD program with an extremely difficult professor, Lorne Campbell, who could not understand why I wanted to do this at all. He was a Scottish man who very much lived in the nineteenth century [I think], and he just couldn't understand why somebody who had been working at that time for five or six years wanted to come and do this. We didn't connect at the end of the day despite my determination to do so.

When I moved to London, Neil had already left. I think before I left, Walter and I had started some of the research on the early fifties show and then we'd hired somebody who was doing a master's degree at Rice to work with him. That didn't work very well at the end of the day. So, I went to London to do the PhD and, to earn a little bit of extra money, worked with David Sylvester on the Magritte catalogue raisonné. I did that while I was doing the coursework at the Courtauld. In the summer, I came home and Walter and I started working full-tilt. Maybe that was a year later because the show was in '91. Maybe I came for two summers and we worked on it and then the second summer was when we finished because the show had a preview at the Corcoran and a small brochure was quickly produced while I was in London. That didn't end up being the catalogue, it was really just get it up and get it on the walls. The real serious research went on that next summer when I came home from London.

Q: So, the preview was a year in advance?

Davidson: Well, it must have been in that spring or summer. I remember going to Washington to see the show and really studying all the art and looking at the black paintings [1951–53]. That's when I first started realizing you could read dates in some of the newspaper materials so I started recording all of that. I must have been there for the de-install because I remember taking measurements and that kind of work. Then I would've come back to Houston and we sat down and for the next four months produced the catalogue.



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled [black painting with portal form], 1952–53
Oil and newspaper on canvas
51 1/8 x 54 1/4 inches (129.9 x 137.8 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Promised gift of anonymous donor

Q: Do you remember how the idea for the show was originally conceived or discussed?

Davidson: Walter always had about five or six shows that he wanted to do; things that never had a date attached to them, they were just things he was going to do in his life. That was one of

them. I guess that's the first one that really got done. It was also quite remarkable because Walter was always a very hands-on person, he wasn't actually known as a writer or as a scholar in a way and I think that this show and catalogue really changed that opinion in people's minds.

Q: How so?

Davidson: Well because it was very revelatory material. No one had really ever seen it and at the time we did a lot of very primary research and I think it was very informative for everyone.

Walter, I guess, had a glimpse of the material when he did the '76 retrospective. There were a few bits and bobs in that, but at that time from what Walter recounted and also what I soon encountered myself with Bob, he [Bob] didn't ever really want to talk about that material. So, it took real coaxing on Walter's part to get all of this out of him, but we did it.

I think I played a significant role in that because what I later came to learn was that Bob was a little bit afraid of Walter—in a positive way, not in a negative way. Walter was intense and always asked a lot of questions and I think that Bob didn't always want to deal with that. In fact the first time I remember going to Captiva [Florida] with Walter, we sat for three days with all this material just laid out on the Ping-Pong table, which was what Bob used for a work table. We weren't in the studio, we were in the house, because Bob didn't want to mix that earlier life with his current work and we just sat there for three days. We'd sit, we'd talk, we'd watch television, all these things you would do with Bob, but he didn't want to talk about what was sitting on the table.

Q: Why do you think that was the case?

Davidson: Well again, this is I think, what you learn, later, I don't think it's easy to go back through your life like that. For Bob, personally, it was a very rich time, there was a lot going on, a lot changing and moving quickly in his life, and he was very obviously quite propelled by the art that he was making; but it was also a long time ago. That's the other thing I've learned in life, is that as you start to think back, it's harder and harder to know what you were really thinking and also to remember dates and specifics and Walter needed all that kind of information because we were drilling deep into was this 1951 or 1952? What came first? Sometimes it's hard to remember those kinds of things. So, I think there's a masking, naturally, that one has.

So, they would sit and talk, and we'd sit at the kitchen counter and I had a legal pad on my lap, and I just wrote down everything they said. Through the course of that we started finally getting Bob to look at things and getting more material released. Walter and I went back to Houston and with Don Quaintance, the catalogue designer, we produced the essay and designed the catalogue and put the show together. Even though we'd had this tryout at the Corcoran, showing in Houston was really the big moment.

Q: Okay, so I want to break all of that down a little bit. When you went to Captiva had Bob agreed to do this show or was it still sort of an exploration?

Davidson: That's a really good question. I'm going to assume that he had agreed. I think we went to Captiva in the winter. I think. I just remember it being slightly cold. I must have come

home from London and we'd gone to Captiva and then I went back to London and then the show at the Corcoran happened. So yes, I guess Bob had agreed to do it. One of the things I ultimately learned with Bob was that he really trusted Walter and by turn trusted me. So, he didn't meddle a lot in things. Occasionally he would have a strong opinion about something in preparing the show, but they each respected one another for what they did and I think that's how that show really came about.

Q: In Hopps's intro to that catalogue, he cites several factors that he believed contributed to the loss and destruction of some of that early work. He said that he thought Bob's varied output, his enthusiasm, and proclivity to embrace so many different media, materials, and techniques was uncommon at the time and so it was not understood or valued and that also the tension between images and abstract works may have detracted from the value that was given to the work that Bob was producing at the time because people couldn't—

Davidson: Yes, I think that's absolutely correct.

Q: Do you think that was [what] the exhibit [was] attempting to reframe the thinking around that?

Davidson: No.

Q: Okay.

Davidson: No, and I say that rather emphatically. Walter's intent was to bring the material forward. I think reframing is a more modern [contemporary] concept that goes on and that's just not how Walter thought. He was interested in the material, he knew that it was critical in terms of setting Bob's vocabulary and of course now we would say that's reframing, but at the time Walter just wanted the material. Walter had an amazing thirst for the unknown and that was the scientist in him. So that's really what was propelling it in my opinion.

Q: That's interesting because it sounds like a similar thinking to Bob's.

Davidson: Yes, and they were on the same plane in that regard. They just had a different approach to it. But yes, I do think the fact that Bob started out imagistically and then moved into abstraction, and that was so much what was the tenor of the time in art history [in the early 1950s], and the fact that he was working in so many different materials and things [artworks] just got lost. But what we found had not so much been actually lost as it had just kind of been buried.

Q: I would love it if you could speak as specifically as you can about the process of finding the work.

Davidson: Okay. Well we actually had two tasks: locating what was physically still available and we also went deep into identifying other works that had been lost. We relied quite specifically and fortunately on these photographs that Bob had taken in the early fifties when he was recording his own work. It was both a combination of him recording his own work and his studio's, but it was also his own explorations as a photographer in fine art photography. Those

photographs were really essential to what we were doing because there was a lot of material in them that hadn't been lost and then also you could tell how they [the artworks] changed, particularly with the black paintings, and how Bob was working on them between Black Mountain [College, North Carolina] and New York. So, I guess we saw first these vintage photo sheets and that's how we knew that this material was going to be available to us. We called them vintage because they're these early photographs, but they were printed in the 1980s when Bob had his first photography show at the [Centre Georges] Pompidou [*Rauschenberg Photographie*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1981]. So, all those negatives were printed into these proof sheets and we had 8-by-10 prints made, Bradley [J. Jeffries] arranged for that, and they got shipped to Houston and we just would start combing through them.

Because I had been to the Corcoran and I had looked at a lot of the black paintings and I started to see the layering of them and the way the newspaper was working and the dates of the newspaper, that helped us to begin to date things. Then it was really like a big jigsaw puzzle that just kind of went on. One clue would lead to the next. I think at the time a lot of the work was still with Bob, the physical work, so that made that easy. We started reaching out to and interviewing other people he knew in the fifties. We interviewed lots of people at that time. Walter would have phone interviews and I would be on the other line and I would just handwrite out the conversation and then type it up.

Q: Who were you speaking with?

Davidson: We tried desperately to get Charles Egan and never could, or his wife. We spoke with Nicolas Carone, we spoke with Knox Martin, Cy Twombly, [Susan] Sue Weil [Kirschenbaum]. Those are the ones that come immediately to mind. I still have all these files. Leo Steinberg, we talked a lot with him. We often would talk to Bob. So, ten, eleven, twelve o'clock at night, Walter would call Bob and try to get him to focus on things and help sort through some things. But Bob never said yes, he never said no. Now, as I look back on the work we did and knowing Walter as well as I do, I can see there were occasionally sometimes where maybe Walter was leading Bob into certain decisions.

Q: Do you have any examples of that?

Davidson: I do. I wrote an essay for the San Francisco [Museum of Modern Art] Rauschenberg Research Project a year or two ago and I wrote on *Mother of God* [ca. 1950], which was a Betty Parsons-era painting, and through the research I was conducting for that text I began to realize that maybe some of the things that Walter and Bob were talking about weren't potentially accurate. But I only know that because new research has come along in those twenty years. At the time, and this is always the case with research, you have to accept the state of your research and that's what we were doing then. I just have been fortunate to have a continuous dialogue with the material and having had that experience I'm able to continue to connect other dots as new information comes forward. So that's what I mean when I say that.



Robert Rauschenberg
Mother of God, ca. 1950
Oil, enamel, printed maps, newspaper, and metallic paints
on Masonite
48 x 32 1/8 inches (121.9 x 81.6 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Fractional purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis and
promised gift of an anonymous donor

Q: Okay and for example? So, at the time is there a specific example that you can speak about, how you had limited information then and now you have more?

Davidson: Yes. Specifically, I'm thinking of an artwork called *Man with Two Souls*, which Walter at the time believed was this piece that belonged to Cy Twombly, which is two Chianti bottles with a glass rod separating them encased in plaster. Very unusual work. Because there's a work on the Betty Parsons checklist called *The Man with Two Souls* [1950], Walter made that connection, that the work belonging to Cy was that work on the checklist. I now believe that not to be the case because all the contemporary reviews [of the exhibition] only refer to painting, they don't mention sculpture. I believe that—and this has come forth now in oral histories with Sue and other comments with Bob over the years—there was this glass casting course that they both were taking or participated in [at the Art Students League, New York in 1950], and I think that that work and another work called *Greenhouse* [1950], may have been made during that

moment and be more related to that and is not the work on the Betty Parsons checklist. In which case we still now need to find *The Man with Two Souls*. If in fact it is a painting and not the sculpture that we know now by that title. This is the evolution of research.



Robert Rauschenberg
The Man with Two Souls, 1950
Two green glass wine bottles (one containing a twig, the other an arrowhead) and glass rod mounted in plaster
47 1/4 x 7 7/8 x 5 1/2 inches (120 x 20 x 14 cm)
Private collection, Rome



Robert Rauschenberg
Greenhouse, 1950
Wire mesh, twigs, wire, paint, glass globe, and glass shards
54 x 12 x 12 inches (137.2 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

You have to believe that the work you're doing then is the highest state of your knowledge and it's important to publish it. There are lots of art historians who will wait and wait until they have that definitive answer and I don't think that that does a service to art history because it doesn't get the information out so that other people can build on it. Walter had a real urgency about the fifties material to do that.

Q: That's interesting. I'd be interested in hearing a little bit more about some of those phone calls. What were the goals of the phone calls?

Davidson: Information. Always information. Walter was totally information hungry. He was a whore for it really. First of all he loved talking on the telephone. This was Walter's thing. He would have hours of conversations with people usually late at night. I don't know if it was a way to keep him up and through the night; I don't know what it really was psychologically, but this was how he spent his time.

Q: And he would be asking people about process or dates or materials or?

Davidson: Yes, when we were working on a project. Otherwise in normal Monday through Friday kind of activity, it was usually just getting information about what was going on in the art world and such. He had certain people he'd call regularly. I guess as somebody starts to put together a biography on Walter, that's what they'll talk about, these late-night phone calls. But I was almost always in the room and often on the call, at least when we were working on a project.

Q: Okay, so you spoke about the three days that you spent at Captiva and everything was on the Ping-Pong table. Do you remember some of the stuff that was on the table?

Davidson: Oh yes. At that time, it was probably Xeroxes because we hadn't really gotten access to the vintage photographs. It was just the state of our early research and things that we had found. Neil Printz and Walter had done some preliminary work early on before Neil had left. In

that sense, if Neil left in '88, then they were thinking about the show by then. So, I think that's what it was that we had laid out. I'm not sure Bob ever really looked at that material; I think it just became a kind of jumping-off point for conversations, to talk about what he was doing then and when and with whom and how. That's how I remember the conversations going. We must have gone back after we had gone further with the research. In fact I think we did go back again. I think there were two trips to Captiva before the show opened in Houston. Yes, I'm pretty sure of that.

Q: You said that you felt that Bob was in some ways afraid of Walter and you suggested that maybe it was partly Walter's intensity and his asking questions that Bob didn't want to answer. So, do you remember feeling that Bob became more willing to engage with the project or the process?

Davidson: Yes, I think he saw that it was inevitable; it was going to happen. I don't mean that he was reluctant about it, I just think the train left the station and if he was going to be on it, then he needed to say certain things. I think probably a lot of artists get in that situation. He was always open and generous, but sometimes there were things he just couldn't remember. I don't think he ever led us astray in terms of the information. No, I would say he never did that. I just sometimes think he couldn't remember.

Q: So, then what was his role in helping?

Davidson: Well, as I continued to work with Bob on other projects, he was just really trusting. I had this great experience with John Chamberlain when I did his retrospective at the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum, New York] in 2012 [*John Chamberlain: Choices*]. John used to say, “Well, I’ve done my work, now it’s your turn. You do yours.” And I think fundamentally Bob had that same attitude. He’d done the work and he understood that that’s what a curator did, they edited, they presented, they researched, and he was going to let them do that. Maybe that’s a very old-school attitude. I don’t know how more modern, younger contemporary artists work today, but all the people I’ve worked with, that’s how they’ve looked at it. There’s been this mutual respect for the job that each of us has to do.

Q: Right. That kind of connects to something that I wanted to ask you about later, but maybe I’ll just use this opportunity to ask you about it now. So, in one of the catalogue essays for the retrospective, Charles [F. “Charlie”] Stuckey quotes Bob as saying, “In the first place I don’t like explaining the whys of what I do because I think that robs the unique experiences and eliminates or makes it difficult for somebody to have an independent reaction.” [Note: Charles F. Stuckey, “Rauschenberg’s Everything, Everywhere Era,” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, exh. cat., 1997] So I was curious about the way that a curator tries to find balance between an artist’s sort of rejection of the why and your role in facilitating the way that an audience is going to interact with that work.

Davidson: It’s a really good question. Before I try to answer it, I’d actually like to elaborate a little bit on what Bob was saying there because that’s something I always encountered with him. He never wanted to explain what something meant or how it was made and he was very steadfast

about that because he wanted you, as the viewer, to have your own reaction and engagement. I think that that's something that always set Bob apart as an artist and I think it's something that, as an artist, he went further than any other artist in doing. Just witness the kinds of work he was making and the engagement with the viewer that he was always seeking. So, he was very, very clear about that. Then as a curator I think that's where the kind of sniff test happens between two people, whether he feels that you will abide by that on his behalf; not protect it, that's not the right word. But not violate it. I think that if he sensed that you'd be honest about it, he would let you in. I guess that's the relationship that he and Walter had.

I was just lucky. I was the appendage to Walter. Bob and I had certain of our own affinities that I think drew us to each other and it just kind of continued. But my entrée was really because of Walter. I was also Texan so that appealed to Bob. Bob told me later that he would get angry with Walter because he felt Walter yelled at me too much. It just was a natural growth between Bob and me.

I think when you're a curator you have this great responsibility to educate; that is what you're doing in organizing a show and producing—doing the research and the catalogue and such. But you have to follow the code of the artist and every artist is different. I think that's what the curator must have, that sensibility and it has to be a sensibility, a reverence, and a curiosity without putting yourself in front. Now, there are some curators who do that and they have great names, but I just don't—I think your role is to be the interpreter without overexposing the artist. At the same time, you are exposing the artist. It's a very fine line. It's about sensibilities I guess and I guess this was one of the things that always drew me to Bob and ultimately why I was so

engaged with Chamberlain too, was that they're intuitive artists. The work is very intuitive. I feel as a curator I've been very intuitive. You don't always go just because something says it's that way or this way; you have to follow your gut.

Q: That's interesting, thank you. So back to the fifties.

Davidson: In many respects that was such a blur because it was so bloody intense. It was Walter and Don and me, the three of us, for four months and we had this very intense routine. We would pick Walter up at maybe eight o'clock at night. Walter didn't drive. I mean he did drive, he thought he was a great driver, but he was absolutely a horrible driver and he was always getting in these kind of junior accidents so it was just easier if you picked him up. You'd pick him up, sometimes he'd be at the 7-Eleven on the phone, at the phone booth, sometimes he'd be at home and then you'd have to go in and wait for him to get off the phone. Then we'd go to dinner, generally one of three or four places that he liked to eat, and after dinner we would go back to 1511 [Branard Street], which was where his office was. At Menil the offices for the director, which Walter still was at that time I think, were in little bungalows across the street; they weren't in the main building.

So about ten o'clock we'd show up at 1511 and sit down in his office. It'd take maybe an hour, hour and a half of him rifling through papers and phone calls and mail and stuff before he'd kind of settle down. Generally, we would start with what had happened the night before in terms of the writing. Walter actually didn't write the text, he spoke it, and Don and I transcribed it, and then in the daytime, while Walter was back at his house, Don and I would type it up, rewrite it a

little bit, move things around or whatever. I would probably be dealing with loans and installation issues as well. So, we'd just start with what had been written the night before. Walter went over everything word for word. He was completely methodical in that regard. He was the kind of person who, if you were counting something and you got to thirty-two and you missed a number, you always went back to zero and started over; you didn't go two or three back and start, it always went back to zero. He was extraordinarily methodical. So, it was actually quite painful because by this time, a month into it, you hadn't had much sleep because we were staying up generally until six, seven o'clock in the morning.

Q: I was going to ask when the two of you were sleeping.

Davidson: An early night was maybe getting home at 4 or 5 A.M., but generally I would drive Walter home about six or seven in the morning, the sun up, drop him off and then I'd go home and I would sleep maybe until about eleven or twelve and then come in and try to do all the busywork that needed to be done during the daylight hours. Then I would go home at seven or something and put on more comfortable clothes or whatever for the evening because we'd go through to the next day. This went on seven days a week for four months. It was very intense. It was exhausting, but it was also really quite thrilling because we were uncovering all this material—the three of us were just very deeply engaged in it. Sometimes you'd get really tired and you'd lie down on the floor and try to sleep a little bit. It was hard because Walter was a chain-smoker. I think I'd given up smoking by then. No, actually I hadn't. But I don't think I smoked as much as Walter ever. So that's what we did. We wrote the book and designed it simultaneously.

Q: Right, with Don Quaintance. Can you talk a little bit about the process of working with him?

Davidson: Don and Walter and I were this threesome for that summer, getting that done. It's funny, I don't really remember the design aspect of the book so much. It must not have been electronic at that time, but I don't remember there being mechanical boards. But there must've been. It'd be worth asking Don about that. I actually just can't remember. I do remember we printed the book I think at Meridian in California and I do remember going to the airport to get the advance copy. It was before FedEx. For some reason I was driving the museum van, I have no earthly idea why, but I just remember Don and I being completely exhausted and elated and sort of near tears. Because we knew we were doing something momentous and we were just tired. It had been a real push.

Very close to the end Walter decided that the text needed to be thrown out, it wasn't right. So, we had to start over again and that was just a completely insane thing to do. Walter really had a fear of writing and I think he had this kind of, "oh my god, this is going to be published" kind of thing. If you really look at Walter's career, he has not been an art historian who wrote a lot. His contribution has been through his direct engagement with artists.

Q: And you think it was a fear of the permanence of writing?

Davidson: I don't know. Walter had a lot of suspicions. He was a superstitious person in a funny way. He didn't like to park next to a red car in a parking lot, didn't like rain. He had a lot of superstitions.

Q: Okay. And you connect that to the writing?

Davidson: Yes, I do. He literally did not write it, it was scribed by Don and me. He spoke it. That's generally how he wrote, always, when he did write. With another person and he talking it out.

Q: David [White] said that he'd heard about that evening that Walter decided the essay needed to be scrapped and that Don crawled under the table or—

Davidson: He did and started weeping. I laugh at it now, but it was really intense. It was just traumatic because it was good, what had been done. I don't know if we actually literally threw it out or not, or if it was just a bad night and one needed to start over the next day, but I do remember calling David the next day and saying we had a bad night and this is what happened. David was always the touchstone and anchor for us, as we would find and have questions and things; he was very critical to researching on the side and communicating certain things to Bob. Bob didn't always want to talk to us. At a point it got to be too much for him.

Q: Because he was doing his own work.

Davidson: Yes, absolutely. He was totally engaged in that. This was something that had happened a long time ago for him.

Q: So, if you don't remember if you started it over again—

Davidson: I don't know. I need to ask Don that question.

Q: Because I was going to ask, was what exists very different from what was thrown out that night?

Davidson: I have no memory. I don't know and I should ask Don. I have all my exhibition and research files from the show, but I don't know if Don kept his own. I should ask him. I've never actually asked him that.

Q: Okay. So, I would like to talk about the installation of the show. In Calvin Tomkins's *New Yorker* profile of Hopps, he quotes Hopps expressing admiration for the curator Jermayne MacAgy: "she was also someone who could think about the rhythms of programming—what are the quiet occasions, what are the climaxes, and how within a show you can come up with a kind of visual narrative." [Note: Calvin Tomkins, "A Touch for the Now," *New Yorker*, July 29, 1991] I'm wondering if maybe you can speak about the visual narrative of the early fifties show.

Davidson: I have to really think. I probably should look at installation shots. Walter was big on chronology so my memory is that the show was installed chronologically. I think the visual

punctuation marks that happened had to do with the variety of the work itself. Say for instance, the exhibition would have started with the early Parsons paintings and maybe a couple of photographs and it was installed in the west 80-by-80 gallery at Menil, that at that time was divided into six zones.

Q: I can get the catalogue.

Davidson: No, but the catalogue won't show me the installation shots. I'm trying to remember if we opened up one of the bays so that it was not six zones but five. Something tells me that it was. When you have a tryout, as we did at the Corcoran, you can see your mistakes, and I think we learned from that the kinds of pedestals you needed for certain works and the shirt board collages [*North African Collages*, 1952], we did this large reading table that the works just rested on and you could come up to them and examine them because they were mostly unframed, which was how Bob had made them and they'd just never gotten framed up. I think now some of them have been framed.



David White and Susan Davidson during the installation of *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, 1992

So yes, it was presented chronologically, that I completely remember because Walter was always a chronology freak. It goes back to what I was saying about him with numbers, counting and such. He always started at the beginning or he would do a reverse chronology and start at the end and take you back through. That was kind of his trick. I really should look at photographs because I just don't remember the installation that well.

Q: Okay well, we could come back to this next time.

Davidson: Yes, I think that would be helpful.

Q: Okay, let's do that.

Davidson: That way I can also know if we did five or six rooms. I must have worked with Bear and Buck, who were in the shop building pedestals et cetera, and I was feeding them the dimensions for things. I have a better sense of it when the show traveled than when it was at Houston to be honest with you and I think that's because I was so deeply involved in getting the book done that I just don't have a lot of memory of installing a show. I remember it in Chicago, I remember it in San Francisco, and certainly in New York.

Q: Okay, so do you want to tell me a little bit about it in one of those other cities or should we just return to the subject?

Davidson: Why don't we return to the subject.

Q: Okay. So, let's talk a little bit about the reaction to the show. I was reading some of the reviews and some of the response to the show. Roberta Smith in her *New York Times* review called the show "frequently revelatory." [Note: Roberta Smith, "Art: Robert Rauschenberg, at Home and Abroad," *New York Times*, August 6, 1991] What do you think the show revealed?

Davidson: Well it revealed a kind of process and intellectual thinking of an artist before the bodies of work for which he was well known. So, in that sense it was revelatory. Nobody had really seen it and they didn't quite know what to do with it and I think that most people thought by this time that Bob was purely an imagistic artist and in fact you saw the very deep strain of abstraction that was in the work. Actually, something that I've come to realize more and more [that] is so fundamental to Bob is the whole sense of the element and the object. That was very present. You also saw his abiding interest in photography, something that really nobody had seen.

I think in Houston it got a little bit of a groundswell and then as the show traveled, because it hit in a lot of important art cities, that that's how it continued to grow in interest and in engagement. So much so that in fact [Thomas] Tom Krens saw the show in San Francisco and insisted that it come to New York. It was never planned to come to New York.

Q: So, are you saying that you think that there's a sort of popular consensus that grew?

Davidson: Yes, I do think so. Houston's sophisticated, but it's not like you have people running down there to look at major shows.

Q: Okay. So, is that something you can break down at all? Reactions in different cities?

Davidson: Well, my role was to travel with the show and get it installed. I don't remember press conferences in these cities. You never stayed around to see how the public responded. But it just was one of those funny things that kind of caught on and people were talking about it. I don't know why. Actually, when I think about it, it was probably the first major—well no, there had been in '91, just before that, the silkscreen show at the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Silkscreen Paintings, 1962–64, 1990–91*]. So, from '76 to '91, I don't think Bob had a major museum show. We should double-check that, but my guess is he hadn't.

So, the [1976] retrospective traveled around, it was in Chicago, it was in San Francisco, and Washington and New York, but I don't think that there had been a major show from that time, other than the silkscreen show that Roni Feinstein did at the Whitney. Well, there was his sculpture show that Julia Brown [Turrell] did in Fort Worth [Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas], right before we did the fifties show because I remember going with Walter to look at that [note: *Robert Rauschenberg: Sculpture, 1995*, was on view after *The Early 1950s*]. But that cut across the career. I just think it was a groundswell kind of thing. And it was radical-looking art, from what people knew of Bob.

Q: And so in your words, the conclusions at the end of that groundswell were?

Davidson: I think it just had a huge impact on artists. I still encounter people, art historians and artists, who saw that show and say it was the most important thing they'd ever seen.

Q: And do they say why?

Davidson: They just say it was completely new. I think the inventiveness and the variety of materials, the materiality and the inventiveness of it, I think that's what it was.

Q: A few people said that the work shed light on Rauschenberg's influence on Jasper Johns. Is that something that you—

Davidson: Well, that was never intentional from our point of view. We knew that Bob was the brains behind that duo in a way. It was clear that Bob was the one who was feeding or inspiring Jasper. Over time Bob and Jasper both made that acknowledgment of one another. But I feel like it was definitely motivated by Bob.

Q: Can you say a little bit more about that? You say it was clear, so how was it clear?

Davidson: Well, I think for me, I look at it between the intuitive and the intellect and I see Bob as the intuitive, the maker, the doer, who'll come up with something and just do it, whereas I feel that Johns's work is so much more cerebral and thought through and intellectualized. And while

he may have ideas that he wanted to explore, it just wasn't as instantaneous and therefore it has a different level of gratification to it maybe, for the viewer.

Q: Okay and that Bob may have been like an energy behind a lot of—

Davidson: Yes, and I think Bob was fearless. That certainly was the case if you look at Bob's career. He was always fearless and if things didn't work out, he didn't try to rush them, didn't try to hide them or manipulate how people responded to them. He stood up there and took the heat for them not being good. He definitely did that throughout his whole career. Johns, I feel, has shaped his career whereas I think Bob just had his career. I think that's the difference between them as artists.

Q: Was there a particularly interesting takeaway for you in studying that early work, about the work's implications for later work?

Davidson: For me, it's become the foundation for the way that I look at Bob's work, absolutely. I see how those kernels continue to be planted throughout the entire oeuvre.

Q: Okay, we'll break that down more, later. So, the early fifties show also coincided with the final ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] summation at the National Gallery [of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991] and a few reviews compared and contrasted the work of those two periods. Were you guys aware that those comparisons were being drawn?

Davidson: No. I do think that was one of the reasons why Walter was interested in having the show at the Corcoran because it was on at the same time as the ROCI show and that would be typical of Walter to want to always have this compare and contrast, and to look at the sources like that. It's funny, I feel as we moved on, Walter and I, especially in working on the [1997] retrospective, I think Walter was so wedded to the fifties and early sixties material that he never really looked as closely at the work that Bob was making in those particular moments. I remember having very specific conversations with him about the later material when we did the retrospective. We can get to that later.

Q: Alright. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about, about the early fifties show, that you think is important to?

Davidson: No, no, I think we've covered a lot of it. It was very exciting and we knew we were doing something important. I thought it was fantastic because I'm a real kind of history digger and the photographs really provided that opportunity for us, and still do. I'm always going back to those photographs and looking at them. It was also exciting because new material came forward, artworks, after the show and continues to do so to this day.

Q: After the show?

Davidson: Yes. Because people began to understand—something that they didn't know they had or had forgotten about, things that had gotten lost. I would say a fair amount of material has come forward. That continues to be very satisfying. I was young enough at the time that I didn't

really understand the impact of it. I do now and I certainly see how it has informed a lot of my own thinking.

Q: Okay. So that show finishes and then what were your next encounters with Bob between that and the retrospective? Did you have any?

Davidson: Well, what happened was, as I said, Tom Krens had seen the early fifties show in San Francisco, which was to be the last stop and he really insisted that it come to New York and be at the Guggenheim SoHo [New York]. This was maybe in the winter of '93 [note: the exhibition traveled to the Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 1992–93]. The show must have been traveling then for a year and a half. So, you have this ongoing engagement because you're dealing with each venue and lenders and the kinds of normal things that go on, press material and didactics and all that kind of stuff. Walter and I came to New York to install the show. Tom at that time was already talking about doing a retrospective, but what Walter wanted to do was the next step. He really saw Bob's work in series, which is how Bob made it, and we had already started working on a Combine [1954–64] show, that was what we were going to do next. We were going to apply the same methodology that we had applied to the early fifties show to the Combines. I was pretty deep into that research as, I guess, the fifties show was traveling around and everything, and I remember Walter talking to Tom, saying that's what we were doing next and Tom said no, it's going to be a retrospective.

Q: Why didn't he want to do the Combine show?

Davidson: Because Tom's a big thinker and I think he was always a fan of Bob's and I think he saw that he was the artist that could hold the rotunda in a way and ultimately three other spaces in New York. He was very committed to that. For several years Tom and Walter teased each other back and forth about, "Oh, I'm doing the Combine show." "No, you're doing a retrospective." The retrospective got started in '95. I don't think we were really settled and I know that I was really involved in the Combine show; that ended up happening in a much different way for different reasons, which I can explain to you later.

Q: Okay. Well maybe you can tell me a little bit about that now actually because the retrospective is such a big—

Davidson: Yes. Well the retrospective [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective, 1997–98*], once it was signed on and agreed to, was going to have five venues: New York, Houston, Cologne [Germany], Bilbao [Spain], and finally Los Angeles. To do a show that big through five venues, it's very difficult to hold the loans together and it was mostly a loan show, it wasn't all coming from the artist by any stretch. MoCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] Los Angeles sits on the holdings of the Panza Collection and they have eleven Combines. Paul Schimmel was very focused on the Combines and he very much wanted to have a lot of Combines in the retrospective that he was going to host and we just couldn't deliver that [after four previous venues]. From a strategic, or structural, loans point of view it just wasn't holding up. And also, to be perfectly frank with you, Bob didn't want to do a Combine show with Paul Schimmel. I don't think he was that crazy about him. He knew that Walter and I had been working on it, he was fine with that, but the combination of things—Bob was offended that Paul Schimmel wanted to

turn the retrospective into a Combine show and I think also he was tired of the retrospective. So, before we went to Bilbao, Bob pulled the plug on L.A. as a venue. I remember that very clearly because I was in Houston and I was working on the Cornell/Duchamp exhibition [*Joseph Cornell / Marcel Duchamp . . . in resonance*, 1998–99], I was deep into a catalogue deadline and I had a phone call that said I had to be in New York the next day for a meeting with Bob. And completely exhausted, I got on a plane, came up, and Bob said, “We’re not going to L.A., that’s it. Bilbao will be the last venue.”

Q: And so then, whose job was it to convey that to L.A.?

Davidson: Probably mine. I always got all the shitty jobs. There were certain things in the retrospective that I had to deliver. Walter could be a chicken shit sometimes. Maybe it was easier for me to do it so that once somebody got mad, they could get mad at me, and then finally it would go higher up. I don’t know, but I had a lot of things like that I had to do. But that was really the case. Bob didn’t like Paul Schimmel and I think he was just really mad that the guy wanted to change the show so he just said no. Bob could make very clear decisions like that. And that was it. There was never any going back or re-convincing. That was done.

Q: And you knew that pretty quickly, getting to know Bob?

Davidson: Yes, you did. He always let you do your work and he was very amenable, but when something had gone too far or he didn’t like it, you knew. He was very clear about it. It was never ugly or mean, it was just—

Q: Clear. Okay. So maybe you can just talk to me a little bit about some of the early conversations about the retrospective, the genesis of that.

Davidson: Well, as I said, it really started when we showed the early fifties material in the SoHo space and that looked spectacular there. I remember quite clearly there wasn't enough material to fill the space and so Walter had this idea to bring up, from the Guggenheim's collection, other artists who were working in that time period, just a kind of little coda. People like Conrad Marca-Relli and Ad Reinhardt and such, just to show people what was going on in the New York art world at that time and how Bob was really very different from that because he wasn't an Abstract Expressionist artist. He may have been coming out of that sensibility, but he was just so image-driven, and yet a lot of the work in the fifties is not so much about that, it's about covering up and veiling and reflection and elements, materiality, different materials.

Gosh so that was the winter of '93. I remember because there was a bombing in the World Trade Center and there was a big snowstorm. Tom was very high on the material, he just loved it and he really liked Bob and he wanted to do something really big. I don't know if he ever came to Houston or not. I know Lisa Dennison came to Houston because I remember quite clearly when we opened the Twombly pavilion [Cy Twombly Gallery], Lisa came down, it was a lunch, and she and I were talking, and she just said it's going to be a retrospective, we're not going to do the Combine show. I remember being very disappointed because I loved doing the research and I really liked the Combines and I had things that I had been thinking about that I wanted to get said. So again sometimes you're a little bit naïve and you don't understand the import or the

impact that something is going to have. It was at the opening of the Twombly pavilion, at that lunch, that she said it was now decided and this was going to be the case. That would have been maybe in February of '95. We'd played around for sort of two years. I kept doing the research on the Combines and Tom held to the fact that he wanted to fill the whole rotunda.

Q: So, the research that you were doing on the Combines ultimately ended up being a part of the larger show?

Davidson: Of the retrospective? No, I had to put my pencil down at that point because all of a sudden I had another forty years of work to look at and there was a lot to look at and to think about. I don't think we had more than about ten or twelve Combines anyway in the retrospective.

Q: You were saying that the work that you were doing on the Combines ultimately ended up going on and having another—

Davidson: No, it never went anywhere. I still have all that research and I've never really gone back to it. I had hoped at the time, when Paul Schimmel did do the Combine show, to be more involved in that [*Robert Rauschenberg: Combines, 2005–07*, organized by Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in collaboration with Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, traveled]. He and I had had conversations early on, but then I realized that the timing wasn't right for me and I just needed to hold on to my research and my ideas. I didn't want to give them to him. That was a completely revelatory show and super important and the people who contributed to the catalogue produced a lot of important scholarship. But the things I wanted to

say probably aren't exhibition catalogue-like. Maybe they have to do with something else. They may have to do with how the work is made. So, it's not so much art historical in terms of critical thinking, it's more of a dissection of the materials.

Q: So, when you think about that research now, do you imagine that you would like to do a show? Or do you imagine that you'd like to write the research that you've done?

Davidson: I don't know what I want to do with it. It's funny, we were talking about that the other day, about a small aspect of it, and we were thinking, oh, we could do a light box focus on the Foundation's website, but then Julia [Blaut] quite rightly said to me, "That should be published someplace else. It should be published. It shouldn't just live on a website." So, I don't know. Maybe it's for the catalogue raisonné. I don't know. Yes, it could be a show. It would be a hard show to do because it's hard to get those loans. Making exhibitions today is not easy.

Q: Today, so harder than it was when?

Davidson: Twenty, thirty years ago. Insurance, fragility, politics between institutions. It's hellacious.

Q: How have the politics changed?

Davidson: They're more intense.

Q: More competitive or?

Davidson: More competitive, yes, absolutely more competitive. You need to make the right alignments with people. It's a lot of calling in favors too. But sometimes institutions just can't do that because they have other competing needs. I think that when you do a monographic focused show like what Paul did on the Combines, then you'll get everybody for the most part on board. But if you try to do something else, a fraction, even if it's a small focus, it's just very difficult to do. It requires a lot of planning and convincing before you even send out your formal loan letter. I can see that Tate [Modern, London] and MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York] are going through this now as they're preparing for the survey they're doing [in 2016–17].

Q: So, in 1995 there's the decision that this show is going to happen, it's going to be a retrospective. So, can you maybe talk to me a little bit about some of the early planning, how that started to come together?

Davidson: I think at that moment, once I heard that from Lisa, I just, as I said, put down my pencil. I probably would've reached out to David right away and asked for a copy of the database so that I could start to look through things. I would've started also to make photo books because that's always how you start a project, you start accumulating images in a chronological fashion. I would've started coming to New York pretty regularly, coming here to 381 and working with David going through the registry books and just assembling a lot of visual material. Then Walter and I would have laid all of that out in the curatorial hallway upstairs at Menil because it would be fairly massive [and we needed the space]. You'd kind of start choosing your show that way.

Q: And then you see what you can actually get?

Davidson: We always shoot the moon. One of the things that we did at the time was bring Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, the conservator at Menil [now at the Whitney], into the process because we knew that getting the Combines was going to be complicated. I also started traveling quite a bit to look at Combines and to meet with people and lay the groundwork. I remember Walter always saying it's really a lot easier to travel a Combine than it is a Barnett Newman painting because if something happens to a Combine, it's easy to repair because of all the layering of materials, but it's very hard to fix a monochromatic painting. So that sort of became a little bit of a mantra in trying to convince people to lend. I probably should sit down and think a little bit more about the process. But that's how it would've started.

Q: Were there any particularly tough sells?

Davidson: Oh, yes. Yes, absolutely. Walter and I were doing this for an institution we didn't work for and that was strange and complicated.

Q: What kinds of new challenges did that present?

Davidson: Well, dealing with their internal politics, which we weren't always privy to.

Q: Were there people at the Guggenheim you felt made things more difficult for you because—

Davidson: No, because we were coming from a land where there were no limits. Menil [in those days] never had limits on it. You didn't really do budgets and if you needed a loan at the last minute, if something fell out, you just got it. That's how it always was. That was the difficulty, I guess, that it was a big institutional machine and we just didn't have that. But we didn't worry about it either. We just kept going forward. That's always how Bob thought and functioned anyway. I guess we would've thought that, that was our mission. We had that stamp of approval from Bob and Tom was really engaged in the show too.

Q: Okay, so it's basically a two-year—

Davidson: Yes, I guess it was. Two-and-a-half years.

Q: Do you think of that and break it down into sort of chunks of work?

Davidson: Yes, I do. As I said, I started with the checklist development. I would say it was really the first show that I really managed from start to finish and it had so many different components to it, between developing the checklist, looking at the art, traveling, meeting with people, catalogue authors, catalogue design, and then installation. I'd done a lot of shows at Menil previously and the other big one that I had worked on with Walter and [Dr. William] Bill [A.] Camfield was a Max Ernst exhibition on his Dada and early Surrealist period, which we opened at the Museum of Modern Art. So, I had enough experience to deal with a lot of lenders and to deal with another institution as your opening venue and producing the catalogue and

things like that. That was also a complex cocktail, that show, but that was Bill Camfield's vision and show and I was just the person who made it happen. So, the retrospective, for me, was very much all my bailiwick because Walter had had his aneurysm by this time and he didn't have the same stamina that he'd had previously.

Q: So how did that change his role?

Davidson: Well, he was a lot more advisory, I would say. It was in the early days of his aneurysm too so there was sometimes more confusion or lack of clarity, or ability of clarity, for him.

Q: He was realizing he had new limitations.

Davidson: Yes.

Q: I think that this is a good place to pause because I'd like to start really breaking down the retrospective with fresh energy and sort of do something similar to the way we talked about the early fifties show. And then we'll also talk about other Rauschenberg shows you organized such as [*Robert*] *Rauschenberg, On and Off the Wall*[: *Works from the 80s and the 90s*, Musée d'Art moderne et d'Art contemporain, Nice, France, 2005–06], the *Gluts* [*Robert Rauschenberg: Gluts*, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 2009], and your role as a curatorial advisor to Bob.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2

Interviewee: Susan Davidson

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: March 31, 2015

Q: I'm Sara Sinclair, this is Susan Davidson. It is March 31, 2015. We are at 381 Lafayette in New York. So, in the first interview we wrapped up with you beginning to speak about how the retrospective came to be, and we had just begun to speak about some of the early planning and the early conversations around that. So today we'll pick up where we left off. You had told me that you had reached out to David, that you had started to put together some photo books, that you would have been coming to New York more often to start the preparation towards this exhibition. So maybe you can pick up there.

Davidson: Do you think we sufficiently covered the transition from Walter and I wanting to do the Combines show into the retrospective?

Q: Yes.

Davidson: Okay. So yes, I guess just to recap what you were saying, I would do what I normally would do on preparing for any exhibition, which is developing a checklist that's as large as the universe in a way, sort of everything that you'd ever want to consider. Part of the curatorial work is to examine those works, to begin to understand how they fit into the artist's oeuvre, and then

to begin to hone your selections that tell a particular narrative. I would also say that one of the things that always sticks in my mind is something that Walter drilled into me, which was something he believed in, that every show needed as many dogs as it needed masterpieces. He meant that both literally and figuratively, particularly with Bob's work, because Bob does include a lot of animals in his vocabulary. But what Walter meant by that really was that by choosing works that weren't necessarily always iconic or the most beautiful, that it actually began to show that an artist doesn't every day have great days and that they struggle like any of us in terms of their aesthetic. You would also begin to better contextualize those masterpieces by seeing things that weren't always—I don't want to say the worst examples, but that helped to define works that were quirky or unusual, especially when you're looking holistically and retrospectively. At first, as usual with Walter, I always thought it was sort of wacky. But I began, over my career, to really understand the need for that, that it gives you a benchmark if you will and that that becomes important to telling the story. As I said, in Bob's case it also very much was about dogs because Bob loved his dogs and always had lots and lots of dogs around him and some of them show up in the paintings.

Q: Is that a very unusual belief, this idea of including that sort of mixture?

Davidson: Well, I think every curator has a different approach to how they prepare shows. Some are much more academic in their thinking; others are more visual and they only want the more beautiful examples, the things that shore up what the artist's achievements are. But in fact, an artist's achievement is about the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. So, you really, I think, need to embrace those works that you may not instantly feel comfortable with because

over time they tell you something. They start to reveal other bits about an artist and what their thought process is, and in Bob's case, how he assembles images or not. There are still pictures that we put in the retrospective—not many, but enough—that still make my stomach a bit queasy because I didn't get to that point with them in terms of their aesthetic quality and appreciating them from that level. But I certainly understood how they fit into what Bob was doing.

Q: You used the word narrative in describing some of the early thinking around the show and I'm wondering if there was a specific narrative, a story that you were trying to tell.

Davidson: Well our remit, if you will, was that it be a retrospective, which meant it needed to be chronological in the way that it was presented and we didn't really deviate from that. But following that course, and at that point it was nearly sixty years of work to look at, there were particular narratives or stories that we wanted to tell that explicated how Bob not only fit into art history, but how he also was ahead of art history in a lot of ways, particularly in the fifties and sixties. Then as he came back through the seventies and eighties and picked up a lot of those visual tropes to begin to focus in on them more directly or more singularly, say with the *Cardboards* [1971–72] or with the *Hoarfrosts* [1974–76] or *Jammers* [1975–76], where he was just working with material. Cardboards and fabric are all there in the fifties, especially in the Combines, but he pulls them out and gives a singular focus to them in the decades of the seventies, eighties, and nineties, and that was part of what we wanted to let people know to see, to understand not only his explorations of materials, but to see how inventive he was.

For instance, with the *Cardboards* that start in the seventies, a lot of people may not realize that through his friendship with [Donald] Don Saff, which was beginning around this time with Graphicstudio in Tampa [University of South Florida] when Don was there, Bob made editioned ceramics that look as if they are fabricated from cardboard and you look at one of those today and unless you go and physically ping it, touch it, you don't know that it's ceramic [*Tampa Clay Pieces*, 1972–73]. The idea that he would work across material like that is really indicative of how Bob thought. It was areas like that that we were able to explore. Also bringing in all media was absolutely essential, not just showing paintings and sculpture, but photography, editions, drawings, all media and materials became part of what we were doing. With Bob, that's big— that's big. So, we were fortunate that we had as much space as we needed.



Robert Rauschenberg
Tampa Clay Piece 3, 1972–73
 Fired and glazed ceramic with tape and silkscreened decal
 19 1/2 x 24 x 5 1/2 inches (49.5 x 61 x 14 cm)
 From an edition of 10 Roman numerals and 10 Arabic numerals, published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa

Q: Right. Well that was one question. Did the realization that you needed that much space arise as you were making the selection of the works? Or was it, oh, we want to do this massive thing and we want to do a multi-venue show?

Davidson: That's a good question. It may have been one of those—it may have sort of all developed simultaneously. I do very much remember being at a meeting early on with Bob and Tom Krens and I remember riding up in the taxi, going through that tunnel on Park Avenue with Walter, and as we got to the tunnel we were talking about the catalogue and Walter was going on about how it was going to be two or three volumes because this was how Tom had presented it in the meeting. Of course, I was just cringing because I knew at the end of the day that I was the one who had to do all the work and that all these guys just kind of sit around and think of big ideas and such. I just put my foot down. I said, "Absolutely not, we're not doing a two- or three-volume catalogue. It doesn't need to be that."

As it turned out I think it was 632 pages, it's quite substantial. But it was also at the moment when the Guggenheim was doing those types of books. Every book they turned out was four to six hundred pages so we broke the barrier by going an extra thirty-two pages over. But there is a point when too much is too much and as much as the critical press and the public really responded to the show, there was also the comment that it was too much.

So, as we began to kind of assemble the checklist and also you have to know too, at that time the Guggenheim had a space in SoHo, so they were very keen to use it. It was not so far into their programming there that it was starting to become a hassle for the institution. So, we knew going in we had both spaces. There were crazy things that we wanted to do or Tom wanted to do and lots and lots of money was spent on investigating how to do these things. For instance *The 1/4 Mile* painting [*The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, 1981–98] everyone felt needed to be part of the

exhibition and there were, I don't know, months spent, maybe nearly a year, looking at how to install *The 1/4 Mile* painting in the center of the rotunda, building a scaffold like a Tower of Babel, if you will, and then hanging it off of that and having ramps from the ramp itself, from the Frank Lloyd Wright ramp, onto this scaffold so that you could walk around it. It was completely ludicrous. But there was just a commitment to showing as much as possible and really exploring it in as much depth as one could and at any cost.

Q: Well one of the interesting things about these kinds of conversations is that you can ask people about some of the plans that did not come to be.

Davidson: Yes, true.

Q: That's one really amazing example. Are there any other things that come to mind? Alternative visions for the show?

Davidson: No, I think that was really the big one. Tom always had an interest in utilizing the rotunda of the Frank Lloyd Wright building and ultimately the institution finally got there with the Maurizio Cattelan show [*Maurizio Cattelan: All, 2011–12*], when the artist, who's a sculptor, hung everything from the center of it. But those were three-dimensional works and they hung better in a central space like that. Doing a painting spiral probably wasn't a smart thing. Certainly, that was the most outrageous thought. As I said, it took probably six to nine months before anybody moved off of it. I don't think Bob was ever really that committed to doing it, but he was amused enough by it to let it continue to be part of the dialogue.

Q: So how long were you spending in this stage of selecting the work?

Davidson: Well, as I said earlier when we previously met, it was probably around February of '95 and the show opened in September of '97, so it was two-and-a-half years I guess. I would say really the first year was spent looking, doing the research here, going to the warehouse, looking at works, traveling to key lenders where we knew we were going to have difficulty. We brought Carol Mancusi-Ungaro into our conversations early on and she was then the chief conservator at the Menil Collection, because we knew, in trying to secure certain Combines, that we needed to have an action plan in place for all of that. While the retrospective as a whole didn't have a conservation component, as many shows do today, I think we were among the first people to work with a conservator to try to address issues of packing and transport and installation and things of that nature. At the end of the day I think we used Carol's name more than we actually used her, but it worked.

Q: That ended up being a comfort to the lenders or important to the lenders?

Davidson: Yes, absolutely. Especially more private lenders. Because at that time there were still a number of Combines still in private hands. I made lots of visits to people to look at work, in Europe and on the West Coast and up and down the eastern seaboard. That was really how I was spending my time. I think probably Walter and I were beginning to envision who could write for the catalogue as well. The first year was very much spent in that kind of research period.

Q: Can you speak a little bit about how you started to think about the physical organization of the show?

Davidson: Well the Guggenheim works with models, a scale model. They had maquettes made up of everything that we were ever thinking about on the checklist and when Walter and I would be in New York, we would spend several hours playing in the model. It's like a little dollhouse. A number of museums work this way; it's really the only way you can begin to understand how much material you need. It doesn't really give you a sense of always how you'll hang particular works when they physically come in front of you because there are issues of framing or coloration or things of that nature that don't speak to you when you're just dealing with a color reproduction in a dollhouse format. So, it helps you define how much space you need to tell certain parts of the story. We'd spend a lot of time with the models and you're always moving things in and out and things like that, until you get to the point where you really need to request your loans, so that you can begin to understand how the show will begin to take shape.

Q: How far in advance do you actually want to have all of those pieces?

Davidson: Most museums require nine months in advance to process loans anyway, so you need a year and a half out to know where you're going with it. You may not request every loan at that moment, but within a year certainly you need to have things in people's hands so that they know to reserve them. Because there are always competing exhibitions as well. You always want to go where you think a loan will be easy, but one of the things I've learned over the years is that for

every show you do, every loan you think will be easy becomes difficult, and everything that you thought would be difficult was easy. So, it's funny in that regard.

Q: What were some of the more challenging loans?

Davidson: The most challenging loans really were the technology loans and those works were intended to be displayed in SoHo and they were challenging for two reasons. One, they weren't in great condition and they needed to be upgraded, or migrated technologically. So that required working with a number of the scientists Bob had originally worked with to create them. A number of these larger works are in institutions too and they don't necessarily travel so well, so there was negotiating all of that. I think we got into a really crazy situation with the work *Mud Muse* [1968–71] because while the Moderna Museet [Stockholm], which owns it, had restored it recently, it was a very expensive loan at that time to take. I think it was close to forty thousand dollars just to ship it. Plus, it required a certain level of daily maintenance and this became a breaking point on a budget level. But I was really convinced that it had to be in the show and I pushed really hard and ultimately gave up other things in order to get that. I knew it would be something that was just so completely unusual and fascinating for people. As I think back now—I'm not sure at the time I was fully cognizant of the whole sense of materialness with Bob, but not to have *Mud Muse*, with this vat of mud that percolates and bubbles to a soundtrack, it would've—it ended up being one of the most remarkable works in the exhibition. It really appealed to a lot of people. So, it was worth the effort.



Robert Rauschenberg
Mud Muse, 1968–71
Bentonite mixed with water in aluminum-and-glass vat, with sound-activated compressed-air system and control console
48 x 108 x 144 inches (121.9 x 274.3 x 365.8 cm)
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Gift of the New York Collection
Engineers: Frank LaHaye, Lewis Ellmore, George Carr, Jim Wilkinson, and Carl Adams
Sound artist: Petrie Mason Robie

Q: Was he involved in either the selection of the works or thoughts about installation?

Davidson: No, not at all. No, Bob completely trusted Walter and by extension ultimately learned to trust me. We'd meet with him and show him things, but he didn't really care about it. I wouldn't say he didn't care about it. He was interested in making work in the studio—he had his profession, we had ours. And he never insisted on any work being in or out. That only happened actually when the exhibition moved to what ended up being its final venue in Bilbao [Guggenheim Museum Bilbao].

Walter and I had some struggles in terms of thinking about the placement and how the show divided between two venues. I actually have no memory about how *The 1/4 Mile* painting ended up being shown at Ace Gallery [New York], who came up with that and who brokered it. So that then became a fully stand-alone part of the exhibition that was downtown on the West Side, on

Hudson Street. It looked fantastic there because the spaces were slightly carved up and it created a kind of labyrinth, which was just terrific. And if you didn't see anything else of the exhibition, you got a full measure of it in a way through *The 1/4 Mile* painting.



Rauschenberg's *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) installed at the Ace Gallery, New York, as part of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, 1997. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives. Photo: Ellen Labenski © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

I think that as Walter and I were thinking about how to separate uptown from downtown, the 1071 [Fifth Avenue] building from the SoHo building, it was how to tell the story if a visitor only saw one and not the other. That kind of became our largest challenge. What happens with artists' work is that as they age and become more successful their work generally becomes bigger and the Frank Lloyd Wright building has limitations in terms of heights on the ramp. So, it quickly became evident that the later work would be shown in SoHo, but the question was where do you make that break?

Q: And was that one of the points of discussion or disagreement?

Davidson: No, not really. It just took us a while to get there and then to kind of convince everybody that that was the right breaking or endpoint. There were two issues with that interestingly enough that actually developed between Walter and me, not so much at all with Bob. I think we felt that if we could take it up through the end of the seventies uptown—and of course not only do we have the rotunda, but we have the tower galleries, so we had quite a bit of space—that then we would start downtown with the metal works. So, at that point you were really only looking at twenty years' worth of work, whereas you were sort of looking at thirty or forty years' worth of work uptown.

It's a loft space, the SoHo building, so you came up one side and you turned on a short side, which faced Broadway, and then you have the other long side to go down, to show. It was a handsome amount of space; you could build walls or leave it open, however you wanted to do it. With that ten years' worth of work or fifteen years' worth of work, we only got to turning the corner along Broadway in terms of our first initial selection and maybe a tad into going down the next side. So there all of a sudden was, in the model, this significant amount of space [to fill].

For months Walter and I really had arguments with each other about what to do and how to fill that extra space. Walter was quite keen to show this wonderful print that Bob made, that is maybe sixty feet, maybe longer, and it's based on a series of individual drawings that Bob made called *Studies for Currents* [1970], but then the long piece has a different name [note: *Currents*, 1970]. This was a work from the seventies so it made no sense in that context. We were making periodic visits to Captiva during this time and seeing what Bob was working on in the studio and I was keener to push further with the new work. What I also began to understand is that Walter

didn't have as great of a grasp of the work after he had done the first retrospective in '76. Part of it was because he hadn't seen a lot of it. He wasn't always coming with me to all those warehouse visits. But I was seeing it a lot more and seeing also what Bob was working on in the studio, which was very invigorating, with the *Anagrams* [1995–97] and *Anagrams (A Pun)* [1997–2002] and such, and this return to imagery à la the silkscreen paintings from the sixties.



Robert Rauschenberg
Jones Diner (Anagram), 1995
Inkjet dye transfer on paper
45 3/4 x 31 3/4 inches (116.2 x 80.6 cm)
Private collection

I just felt we had to really blow that out and delve into it deeply because there wasn't going to be a time that we could think of, coming too close upon that, when we'd get to see that material. It was very rich and really interesting, so I really focused and at the end of the day convinced Walter that showing a work from the seventies that was a print had absolutely no relevance to what we needed to show in Soho and that it was better to show Bob as the living artist that he was and really celebrate that. So that's how we used up the rest of that space, by looking in-depth at the *Gluts* [1986–89/1991–94], at the *Urban Bourbons* [1988–96], the *Borealis* [1988–92], the

Night Shades [1991], all of these works and into the more print transfer works that he had started in the early nineties.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, 1997–98. Works shown are *Regular Diary Glut* (1986), *Greek Toy Glut (Neapolitan)* (1987), *Easter Lake (Galvanic Suite)* (1988), *Luxer (Urban Bourbon)* (1988), and *Master Pasture (Urban Bourbon)* (1989) Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Ellen Labenski © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

Q: You spoke a little bit about early conversations about who the appropriate contributors would be for the catalogue, so maybe you can speak a little bit more about how all of that came together.

Davidson: Well it was evident that Walter would write an overarching introduction. Walter was very keen that Charlie Stuckey write and he wrote a great essay. I think Julia Blaut felt that we needed something a little more critical and that's how we chose Rosalind [E.] Krauss. Ruth Fine was brought forward to handle all the prints and she's somebody who had worked with Bob for a long time and knew the work so that made sense. The structure of the catalogue as it was developing was sort of breaking down into not necessarily decades, but areas, bodies of work and concentrations of work, almost by decade but not quite. So, it seemed imperative that we

have short introductions to what those were, these short essays, which were great because they ended up writing the wall text for us, so that was good.

We also invited [Thomas E.] Tom Crow to write an article. That turned out to be a horrible situation. For some reason Bob read that article and I don't know why he read it because Bob didn't tend to read at all and certainly had no interest and never really spent any time reading literature about himself. What Tom Crow wrote in fact was a very valuable bit of scholarship because he basically reviewed the state of the scholarship on Bob and that's something that hadn't been done. From an art historical point of view, it was really quite essential, but I think for Bob, he felt it was too personal or something, or ended up focusing on the negative. Because of course from 1958 on he'd always been referred to as the *enfant terrible* so he felt that that was reinforcing that mindset rather than celebrating the amazing successes that he'd had. That wasn't really the intent of the article, it's just what Bob ended up focusing on and he absolutely refused to have it published. Tom Crow, being a very important and then up-and-coming scholar, and even more eminent now, he was then living in England, and somehow I was the one who was dispatched to inform him that we would not be publishing his article.

Q: And what was his reaction?

Davidson: It was a very difficult trip. I'd never met the man. I flew to London and he was living in Brighton at the time. I went down to Brighton on the train, had tea with him and his family, and then had to just tackle it pretty much head-on because it was better to do it that way I felt. He's a very considered and considerate person, and mild mannered, but firm in his beliefs and

really a terrific and important scholar. He was super disappointed. It was also difficult because Bob was never somebody who wanted to dictate or push agendas in a way and it was seemingly uncharacteristic of him to insist that this couldn't happen. As it was really the only demand he was making of anybody, we couldn't not do it. It turned out that Tom Crow published his article in *Artforum* for the month that aligned with when the exhibition opened so it got published [note: Thomas Crow, "This Is Now: Becoming Robert Rauschenberg," *Artforum*, September 1997]. It was probably the better place for it to be and reached a more democratic audience; you didn't have to necessarily buy the catalogue in order to read it. That was fine [for] Bob, he just didn't want it in the catalogue for the show; it was fine with him that it be published in a periodical.

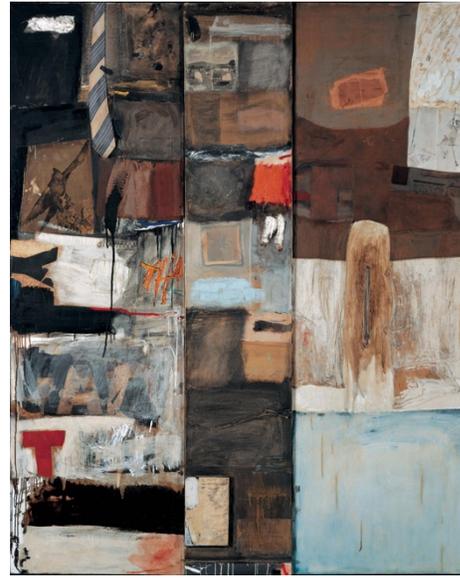
The other really fun part about doing the catalogue was the chronology, which Joan Young started to write. I knew we needed an in-depth chronology and asked Joan, who was an assistant curator at the time at the Guggenheim, to start the research on it, which she did. Then together we shaped it and I spent a lot of time with Don Quaintance, the designer, doing photo research to illustrate it. It's now become a very, very critical document. It's been expanded two times since that publication and now resides on the Foundation's website, and it's quite amazing and very specific. Through that, by doing that research, we learned a lot about the work. My only regret about the chronology in the retrospective catalogue is that the pictures are so small. I don't know why we did that. Maybe because there was just so much we had to get in.

Q: You said that doing the research you made some discoveries about the work. Anything in particular that comes to mind?

Davidson: Well, my focus has always been on the early work in the fifties and through the Combines, and because we were going to do that Combine show I really put a lot of energy into trying to identify which works were in which shows and things of this nature. I think I began to understand better what happened with the *White Paintings* [1951], the first set of *White Paintings*, and where they get reused in Combines. That's an article I'd like to actually write, haven't yet. In fact, we borrowed kind of late in the game a Combine called *Summerstorm* [1959] that belonged to a private collector in Los Angeles. It's a nice, handsome, later Combine, not one of the best, but a very handsome and compelling work, and a nice scale. When it came out of the crate I took one look at it and I realized instantly that the middle panel in it had come from the panel of *Monogram* [1955–59] in its second state, when it had this narrow panel up the back of the goat, which in fact was one of the five-panel *White Paintings* or seven-panel *White Paintings*, I can't remember that right now. If I hadn't done all that research with the chronology, I wouldn't have been able to make those connections as quickly the first time being confronted with it. So, things of that nature. I'm sure there are a lot more; I can't recall every one of them now.



Second state of Rauschenberg's *Monogram* (1955–59; second state 1956–58) in his Pearl Street studio, New York, ca. 1958. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: © 2013 Estate of Rudy Burckhardt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Robert Rauschenberg
Summerstorm, 1959
Combine: oil, graphite, paper, printed reproductions, wood, fabric, necktie, and metal zipper on canvas
79 x 63 x 2 1/2 inches (200.7 x 160 x 6.4 cm)
Michael and Judy Ovitz Collection, Los Angeles

Q: Were there other important members of the team that are overseeing this? It sounds like a massive, massive project.

Davidson: Oh, absolutely. It was massive. David was absolutely critical, the Guggenheim support was phenomenal. I made lifelong friends with Julia Blaut, and her guidance on the complexities of that organization because Walter and I didn't work for them, we worked in Houston for the Menil. Joan, [Elizabeth] Betsy Carpenter, and Don Quaintance, the designer, that became really the core team working very tightly together every day, back and forth. It was a great experience and it was all very positive and everybody became dedicated to it. I think too that when you have somebody like Bob at the top of the pyramid, if you will, who is so open and

generous and enthusiastic and engaged, that filters down. I've worked on many other projects that haven't had that same energy and camaraderie, and it started at the top for sure and everybody really held on to that. It was a very, very positive experience. Really positive.

Q: Okay. Well, I want to talk about the critical response to the show and the popular response to the show, but before I do I just want to ask you more about what you just said, which is that it was a really positive experience. So, for you, what were the greatest lessons that you learned?

Davidson: Well, I think I learned to always be open and to look and to be tolerant. I think I learned this great word, which I subsequently use quite a bit, which is a hiccup. There's a wonderful work that Bob made called *Hiccups* [1978], which is, I don't know, a hundred small 5-by-7 little drawings that are zipped together and you can install it in different ways [note: *Hiccups* contains 97 parts, each 9 x 7 3/4 inches]. One of the things that happens when you're doing a show, there's always crazy things that go on or things you don't expect or people come out of the woodwork or a loan doesn't ship the right way or there's damage, or anyway there's myriad of things that can go wrong. If you just keep your calm and you just look at it as "oh that's just the hiccup of the day" and you look for a quick and viable solution; that has become really how I like to work. Not to get ruffled, not to freak out, there's always a solution, you just have to find it. So that's the hiccup. Today we have a hiccup.



Robert Rauschenberg

Hiccups, 1978

Solvent transfer and fabric with metal zippers on
ninety-seven sheets of handmade paper
9 inches x 63 feet 2 1/2 inches (22.9 x 1926.6 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Gift of the artist in honor of Phyllis Wattis

I did this big show in China about seven or eight years ago on the history of American art and I had two team members, co-curators, with me, and they thought that was so funny [*Art in America: 300 Years of Innovation*, 2007]. In China, we had a lot of hiccups. It's just about staying calm and knowing you'll get through it and you'll find the solutions. You always have to turn it into something that's positive. You don't need to be negative; it's not the end of the world. The other thing I would say, which is something early on my father taught me, was that nobody knows as much as you do anyway so they're not going to know there's something missing. So, your goal, your responsibility is to make it look seamless.

Q: So, let's talk about some of the critical reaction to the show. It seems like there's a real spectrum. You were speaking a little bit earlier to some people saying that there's too much, which seems to echo what people say about Bob's work more generally. But on the other hand Calvin Tomkins wrote, "One of the achievements of Robert Rauschenberg's art is that it makes

criticism irrelevant.” [Note: Calvin Tomkins, “Master of Invention,” *New Yorker*, October 13, 1997]

Davidson: That’s a wonderful statement.

Q: Yes, I thought that was really interesting. Christopher Knight in the *Los Angeles Times*, it’s sort of a long quote, so I’ll read it. But he reviewed the show in a very narrative way and he said, “Part of the story concerns the postwar restlessness of a youthful nation suddenly on the move. Part of it is about a young man in a situation not altogether dissimilar—a painter of voracious appetites, huge ambition and profound spiritual yearning, attempting to find his way. And still another part involves a crisis in visual language, which was inescapable by the 1950s.” [Note: Christopher Knight, “Soaring Like an Eagle,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1998] So I’m just wondering, when you’re curating a show, how much you care about the criticism, how much you’re thinking about the fact that there will be a critical response, positive or negative, as you’re planning a show. What is the relationship between what you do and what they do?

Davidson: I may be alone in this, but I don’t think about it at all. I’m motivated by the artwork that is exciting to me and invigorating to me but you can’t let your enthusiasm govern your choices. You do need to be critical about what you’re doing and mindful of what you’re doing and rigorous about what you’re doing, but that comes from your position as an art historian, not your concern about how people will respond to it. I think that that goes back to that comment of Walter’s about you have to put the dogs in the show.

Again, as I say, I may be alone in this but—education is such a big part of museum activity—I think it’s a bunch of hooley at the end of the day. I do it because I want to learn something and I have this incredible, fortunate opportunity to be so up close and personal with it [the art] in a way that the visitor never gets. I do a lot of it for myself and I know that’s very counterproductive to what working in an institution should be about, but that’s I guess the personal joy of it. If people don’t like it, they have a right not to like it. That’s fine. And if it gets panned, that’s okay too. Of course that stings when it happens because you’re the one who’s making the decisions about what goes on the wall. The artist has already made their decisions, they’ve painted it, and they do require that kind of critical eye. You hope that what you’ve done is well received, but if it’s not, that’s okay.

I think we knew, or I certainly knew, that doing a retrospective with 432 works in three locations in New York City was probably not smart because it was just too much for people. You should be able to do a show in sixty works and tell the same story. But with Bob that’s actually not really possible and I see how Tate and the MoMA, now as they’re preparing for their show in 2016, how they struggle with that. There’s always going to be somebody who hates what you do, especially the public. That’s a great thing. People are free to speak how they think.

What the two quotes that you read, I think, really indicate is that the critics got it. While they may not have embraced what we’re going to call the later work, the work from the seventies on, I remember one comment that Bob would often say, “It takes twenty-five years for the critics to catch up with me.” So he was used to not being instantly appreciated. The work is so advanced and yet it’s so simple, and that’s where it puzzles people and that’s why they sometimes don’t

think it's so good. Because they don't understand the inventiveness of it. But he was fine with it. That's how he'd sort of lived his whole career, which I think is why he was upset about the Tom Crow article oddly. Maybe seeing it in writing, where everybody is saying the same thing, is different from a one-off review here or there. He'd gone through some tough times critically and I know that most of the criticism about the retrospective was about the scale of it, being too much. But the opportunity to see all of that work together was really amazing.

Q: And what about popular, just regular people coming to see the show? Sometimes you hear stories about film directors sneaking into screenings and they want to sit and watch with the regular audience. Is there anything akin to that for you as a curator? Curiosity to see how people engage?

Davidson: I didn't have the opportunity then to do what I often do now. I do sometimes go kind of anonymously to a show I've done and just listen to how people respond to it. Because I wasn't living in New York then, I didn't get to do that. I would say overall the response from the public was quite amazing and I would underscore that by the evening that we did a book signing with Bob of the catalogue and the line reached all the way around the block. Down Eighty-ninth Street, down Madison [Avenue], and back down Eighty-eighth Street. That was sort of unprecedented and I think that speaks to his accessibility and fame and how people wanted to really be next to him in that way.

I remember too when we had the press preview. We did the press preview in two places, first uptown and then put everybody on a bus and took them downtown. Bob, being not ever an early-

morning riser, showed up only for downtown and Walter and I had agreed he would speak uptown and I would speak downtown. I don't remember how I immediately connected with Bob that day, but anyway, we walked in together, and of course he was late as usual. It was like going to a movie premiere with a rock star. The lights went on, everybody was screaming, and he just took my hand and we walked on the stage together, and he couldn't have been more natural and more turned on by it and so present. People responded to it. I had many other opportunities after that with Bob like that. His magnetism was remarkable.

I remember too sometimes here and there, being somewhere and I'd meet somebody and I'd say what I was working on, they would just, "Oh my god, Bob Rauschenberg." People who don't even know about art. So I think the public got it. That kind of everyman, which is something that has always been a part of Bob's art, speaks to them, whether they like art or not.

Q: What were people—in these encounters, what were people most curious about?

Davidson: Oh, of course the goat, *Monogram*, that always fascinates a lot of people. I think that's certainly where most people hang their hat.

Q: Okay, so you said you weren't living in New York. So when did you actually, when was it, okay I'm done, I get to—

Davidson: Oh, with the retrospective? Well, it went on. It came to Houston after it closed in New York and it was in three venues there too. Actually it was in four venues because we used

Richmond Hall on the Menil campus to display the work from the seventies and we put all the technology and performance work at the Contemporary Arts Museum, which had been on the first floor at SoHo, and then *The 1/4 Mile* painting was in Brown Pavilion, Upper Brown Pavilion, at the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts], and we also did the late metal works there. So we had to do that installation, the show there. In some ways you're still always working and negotiating loans because there are people who only want to lend to New York or only want to lend to Houston and so you've got to have all your substitutes lined up and everything, that's just another bucket of work that you have to do. And then there's working on the installation and things of that nature. So it didn't really stop. Of course in Houston we had this huge hiccup with the seizure of the artwork, which is a story I'll get into in a minute. So once you get the show up in New York, you're planning already for Houston, and it went on like that.

Cologne [Museum Ludwig] was going to be after Houston and that was really a complicated installation because it's a very unforgiving building in a way and I didn't have the ability to work in models like I did in New York and Houston. I had to do the whole layout on paper. I'd never done it like that before and that was very difficult. Walter wasn't well around this time so I went to Cologne for the preliminary visits by myself to figure out how to install the show and everything. David may have come with me. In fact I think David did come with me. Another time Walter brought Nancy [Reddin] Kienholz, the widow of [Edward] Ed Kienholz, the artist, with him, and that was good because Nancy spent a lot of time in Germany and Walter just wasn't well at this point and things weren't easy between us. I just had to keep moving and I think he was getting a little tired. While we were doing Cologne, I had to start thinking about

Bilbao. You always had to be one step ahead. It went on for another two or three years, two years after we opened the show in New York.

Q: Okay, so let's talk about Houston, the big hiccup in Houston.

Davidson: What—let me see if I can get this correct. Bob had a dealer, a German dealer, who I think was based in Austin, named Alfred Kren. They had been doing a couple of deals together and something happened. I actually never really learned the full story as to what happened—I think it had to do with payment of the commission or something like that. I wasn't privy to what was going on in Bob's daily business life. I think we were all a little bit surprised—actually let me roll back just a minute. I remember being in New York in April; we were downstairs with Don Quaintance and Walter here at 381, in the kitchen as usual, and we were showing Bob the cover of the catalogue, showing the layouts of how the catalogue would be. A letter arrived for Bob, a registered letter or something, and he just sort of looked at the envelope and tossed it aside. Well it turned out that he'd been doing this, tossing these envelopes aside for some time, and it came to a head when the show opened in Houston. Alfred Kren was trying to sue Bob about this commission and Bob wasn't answering the complaints, which is never a smart thing to do. In Texas there happen to be laws that you can seize people's property if you have a judgment against them. Because Alfred Kren was then based in Austin, after this frustrated year he was having not getting Bob to respond, he went to a judge and got a judgment against Bob, and therefore was able to seize a particular value of property belonging to Bob.

This is another lesson that you learn in life, that you shouldn't always state things, "Collection of the artist," but you may want to consider them as, "Private collection." That [distinction] allowed Alfred Kren to go through the catalogue and target what he thought was the value of his judgment. It was the Friday of the opening and he got a judge, it turned out to be the sheriff, and they arrived at the museum with papers saying that they could seize the artwork to this [stated] value and there was no stopping the situation. It was pretty hair-raising. They literally arrived with a cattle truck to carry—it was during the rodeo in Houston because we opened in February when the rodeo is in town—it was just, it was absolutely insane. I cannot tell you. Everybody was freaking out and going in different directions. Tom Krens was trying to deal with lawyers in New York because they were the organizing institution. But the state law existed and you had to deal with that. The director of the Menil Collection, Paul Winkler, was trying to deal with Menil lawyers to try to see that it wouldn't happen. I was upstairs in my office, which overlooked the director's office in one of the bungalows below, and trying to figure out value [of the artworks against the judgment Kren had]. It was a complete free-for-all.

Bob was nowhere to be found and couldn't say yes or no and at the end of the day we were obligated legally to let the sheriff take the work off the wall. I think that Paul Winkler did get them to agree to wait until after the show opened that evening so that we'd have the opening, nobody would know—everybody was kind of in an embargo on tenterhooks. And then they took it away. The next morning, Walter and I had to rehang the show so that no one would know this had happened, which was a whole scene too. The opening was on a Friday and then that was Saturday morning and I think it was Tuesday afternoon when we got the work back. Paul, with Menil lawyers, was able to go in front of a judge and to prove that these were high-value

artworks that shouldn't be held improperly in storage, and this, that, and the next thing, and put up a bond or whatever on Bob's behalf to get the works back in the exhibition. Texas didn't, at that time, have an anti-seizure law like New York did, where it's against the law to remove artworks on public display if there's a dispute.

Q: That's an interesting law. I wonder what the history is.

Davidson: Oh, it's a very valuable law. It comes in from, there was that [Egon] Schiele case with the Leopold Museum [Vienna] because that I think was also taken from an exhibition at [the Museum of Modern Art] the time. It's a way to protect property and also not to air disputes between people in a forum that's really for the public. After all the dust settled, the registrar at Menil, Julie Bakke, did propose a law to the Texas Legislature and it was passed so they now have an anti-seizure law. But at the time they didn't and Alfred Kren knew this and he also knew that there was a law that allowed him to legally do what he was doing. It was crazy.

I remember going to pick up the work. It wasn't stored in a bank vault or anything like what you would expect for that kind of value and the rarity of the works. They were in an office trailer in a car impoundment lot out on the East Texas Freeway in Houston with a single air-conditioner running for climate control. It was horrible. It was just terrible.

Q: How many pieces approximately?

Davidson: It was maybe twelve or thirteen. *Erased de Kooning Drawing* [1953] was one of them. I do remember when the sheriffs came in to take the things, that was what I was trying to do before they came in, direct them to things that weren't so fragile, that were glazed, and that would still meet the value that they needed. I was also trying not to upset the exhibition too much because we had to paper over the whole thing rather quickly. It was absolutely insane.



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

Q: And you were able to rehang it for the next day.

Davidson: We did. We got up the next morning after having this big blowout party at the Bayou Club in Houston, everybody dancing and rodeoing, it was a great party. Bob seemed totally unaffected by it, although it ended up costing him a lot of money because he had to then hire lawyers in Houston and come for depositions, and this, that, and the next thing. But it ultimately got solved.

Q: Wow, that is a hiccup.

Davidson: That was one of the bigger hiccups.

Q: That's a good one. Okay, anything else that you think is worth speaking about specifically around the Houston installation?

Davidson: No, that colored everything.

Q: So then you moved to Cologne next?

Davidson: We moved to Cologne next.

Q: You said that building was unforgiving. What do you mean by that?

Davidson: Totally unforgiving. Just a hideous, ugly building. On multiple floors and spread out in spaces that become bigger and other spaces that become smaller. This was also the first time that we had to show the whole retrospective in one building. Previously we were having all these relationships with people and could show it everywhere. So, we chose not to show *The 1/4 Mile* painting; that helped. But there were still three or four hundred works and some of these works are quite big and just trying to figure out what was the right flow and everything. So that was complicated.

The install in Cologne several months later was also complicated. I had started working on another project by that time and I was trying to write a chronology for the Cornell-Duchamp project and as I said, Walter wasn't well. He was in Cologne and we stayed at the Dom-Hotel, which was a moment's walk to the museum, but he didn't come very regularly to the museum at all. In fact, I would say maybe twice or three times in a three-week install. He just wasn't super well. So David and I did most of it as we always enjoyed doing together anyway.

In Cologne we had the BMW sponsorship, which was a curveball that got thrown to me close to the end of our preparations for New York. I remember one day being informed that all of a sudden there would be a car in the lobby at SoHo and I was completely against it because it had nothing really—it was a commercial activity that Bob had done [*Art Car-BMW*, 1986]. Over the years BMW has hired artists to paint cars, Bob being one of them, and it took me a while to understand that in fact Tom was already preparing for his motorcycle show and was looking to BMW for sponsorship. These are the kinds of things that you don't always instantly understand, why you're getting pushed one way or the other. I remember writing a very strong letter to Tom insisting that this not be part of the exhibition. So when we showed up in Cologne in Germany with BMW again, the car showed up. In fact the car showed up in Bilbao too, but I was able there to install it completely out of the way so that no one saw it. It didn't have the same presence. It's a nice car. Bob made beautiful black-and-white imagery on it, but it's a painted car, it's not really fine art.



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

From Cologne we moved into Bilbao and that's where, as I said earlier, Bob had very strong opinions about what needed to be shown. He had been in Bilbao the year before for when the building had opened. He was completely in love with the building. We were in fact the second show that they did. So the crew was not as experienced in everything, but of course Bob always had not only David, but Thomas [Buehler] and Lawrence [Voytek] and other people traveling with him, so they knew the work. That knowledge transfer was always able to happen. In Bilbao we brought *The 1/4 Mile* back and we installed that in what's called the Fish Gallery on the first floor, which is now a permanent installation by Richard Serra, but at the time it wasn't and it just fit to a T. Bob made I think three or four new panels for it to bring it up to date.



Installation view, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1998–99. Also pictured is Richard Serra's *Snake (Sugea)* (1994–97). Photo: Erika Barahona Ede © FMGB Guggenheim Bilbao

Actually there's something that I should say that just dawned on me as I was thinking about Bilbao. With each venue Bob did have a new work that he wanted included, work freshly made, and in New York when we opened it was the glassworks that he was working on. They had never been seen before, they're not included in the catalogue. That worked so handsomely because the High Gallery, which is this more rectangular space that exists off the first ramp of the Frank Lloyd Wright building, Walter wanted to install it in black-and-white, in grisaille, across all time periods. So to have glass, which is translucent, it fit very nicely into that theme and that's where we put the glass tires [Untitled (glass tires), 1997] and it looked terrific there with a black-and-white silkscreen—*Barge* [1962–63] was there, but at that time the Guggenheim then concluded their negotiations for purchasing the work with Bilbao and it was only on view for a week and then had to go to the opening of the museum in Bilbao. So that got removed. That was a great disappointment in a way because it's such an amazing painting and it should have been in the retrospective for the whole run in New York. But we papered over that too.

When we opened in Houston Bob had made this fantastic painting for his birthday, which he called *Mirthday Man* [1997]. It's an *Anagram (A Pun)* painting of the series he was working on then and it's a big painting, probably 20 feet across, 10 feet high, maybe a bit larger. It is retrospective in nature too in the sense that it pulls out that X-ray full-body figure of him that first appears in '67 in *Booster*. So that was shown at the Museum of Fine Arts [in Cullinan Hall with the work from the 1990s].



Robert Rauschenberg
Mirthday Man [Anagram (A Pun)], 1997
Inkjet dye and pigment transfer on
polylaminate
123 5/8 x 180 3/4 inches (314 x 459.1 cm)
Collection Faurschou Foundation

In Cologne, because Bob was never crazy about Germany, I don't think we had anything [new] there. But by the time we got to Bilbao, he wanted us to show works that he had actually made based on photographs he'd taken in Bilbao when he'd been there the year before. Wherever he travels, he's photographing, and so he'd taken a lot of photographs of the city and the environs and made a body of paintings around that, in the series he was working on at the time. That was the culmination of the show in Bilbao, these works made in homage to the city in a way. And maybe there were one or two because he'd taken photographs in Cologne and there are pictures that show up in some of the paintings.



Robert Rauschenberg
Bilbao Scraps [Anagram (A Pun)],
1997
Inkjet dye transfer on polylaminate
61 1/4 x 123 5/8 inches (155.6 x
314 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Bob also made a unique work, a sound piece, for the Bilbao presentation, which hung from the third-floor balcony all the way down to the floor of the first floor [*Earth Pull*, 1998]. There were ropes that the public could pull on and there would be sounds and lights that would turn off and on, on the third floor. He donated the work to the museum after the show opened. He had made the decision by that time that we weren't going to go to Los Angeles so that was the end of the show.



Installation views, Rauschenberg's *Earth Pull* (1998) 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: Why did he have more to say about what was going to be included in the Bilbao show?

Davidson: I don't know. He just did. Frank Gehry's always been a friend of his, he just really loved the building, it was really exciting. It was new, it was fresh, and probably that appealed to him. Everything else was kind of standard museum stuff, but this was something new and different and had such potential.

Q: So he was inspired.

Davidson: He was inspired, yes. He made a lot of work for it and he was really keen that it be there. So it was easy, absolutely easy, to accommodate. Why would you say no? It was a good finale. It was a great finale. Going to L.A. at that point would've been a real slog because the loans weren't holding together and you had a curator there who wanted something different anyway. It was the right thing to do. He was right, Bob was always right.

Q: Can you speak about winding down that chapter of work, that chapter of your life?

Davidson: It was big. It was a big carnival for a long time. It was about four years from start to finish. Menil has great holdings of Bob's work and had lent heavily to the retrospective. I think we had maybe eighteen loans in the show and so I asked to be the courier to bring them home from Bilbao; it would allow me to go back there to see the show before it closed. That was a crazy trip home after everything. So it was really a great private moment to be able to go back and see the show without any responsibilities other than to pack it up at the end and truck it to Paris and put it on a freighter to Houston.

That turned out to be a little bit of a disaster also because we were on a 747 cargo flight and traveling with us on the plane were three or four helicopters and when the plane touched down in Houston, one of the helicopters shifted and cut through the skin of the plane and grounded it. I was fortunate. The plane was going on to Mexico City. This was a freighter that traveled daily or every other day from Paris to Miami, to Houston, to Mexico City, and back to Paris. That was its route. We'd already been in Miami, where there were lots of dogs sniffing for drugs. I'd never experienced that before. Then we arrive in Houston and you hear, as the plane's coming in, something shift, and when we get into the hold, you can see this huge gash, and all the other freight going to Mexico City got grounded. I was lucky. I got off the plane at that point. But it had been probably a two-day trip at that point. So that was the end of it all.

Q: A dramatic ending.

Davidson: Yes. Fortunately no one was hurt. The plane was, but— That was kind of scary, to see that kind of gash in a plane. I had never seen helicopters inside planes before either so that was kind of unusual. That would've been in '98, I guess.

Vis-à-vis my work with Bob, that went on hold, I guess. We stayed in touch and things were happening. But it wasn't too much time after that really when Bob asked me to come to work for him as a curatorial advisor. That was in the summer of 2001, so two or three years later.

Q: Okay, so talk to me about that. What was he asking of you?

Davidson: As always, I owe a huge debt to David. We worked so well together and see so eye to eye and I think he felt that things were gearing up with the Guggenheim and with Bob. Tom Krens was working with Frank Gehry to do the Manhattan project, to build a new Guggenheim on the waterfront in Manhattan and had approached Bob to give his archive, to give a set of prints, and a gift of about a hundred artworks. Bob was really, really keen on this. He always wanted a presence in New York and what Tom was offering him was not that kind of stand-alone museum, which for Bob wouldn't be good anyway because he likes to be with people and with fellow artists. So it was a great meeting of minds. I think both of them were quite engaged. So it required, I think, kind of some advanced thinking on what Bob still had in his collection and what made sense to give or to hold back. So I don't know, David maybe asked Bob if I could come and work with him on doing that, and so I did.

I went out to Captiva and David and I started working with Bob directly on setting up this system for everything that he still owned and whether one would keep it or whether one would give it away or one would sell it over time. That's how it got started, and it just continued like that, advising on shows or doing shows or loans, things of that nature. Bigger projects, not the day-to-day stuff.

Q: What was the system?

Davidson: Well we used a word actually that Bob used, called "keeper." We wanted to keep that, it was a keeper, and it wasn't to be sold. We'd go through every series and make our recommendations based on looking at images and things, by this time knowing the work pretty

well, and usually go back to Captiva and meeting with Bob and reviewing everything. He would make changes or adjustments as he wanted to. That system is still in play today for the Foundation and is becoming more and more a critical bit of work that we did twelve years or so ago. It was good that we did it with Bob because it really has his voice in it and not just a curatorial voice.

Q: Is there a distinction that you can explain?

Davidson: Well there are things that he knows about works he made that none of us will ever know, favorites he may have had or particular moments or thoughts that went into works that are sadly now lost. I don't think he would've articulated it anyway. But that I think existed because there were sometimes works I wouldn't necessarily have thought should be keepers, but he had a personal, deeper connective tissue to it.

Q: Were there some that really surprised you?

Davidson: There's so much, it's hard for me to go yes or no especially not having something in front of me to remind me. But no, Bob usually knew what he was doing. No, it usually would make sense. I may not always have agreed, but I didn't need to, it wasn't my place. It was also too about balancing the collection and not knowing, at that time, what we would do with it all.

Q: Did you learn something about his own taste or affection?

Davidson: That's a very good question. I think probably without realizing it, yes. I'm not sure I could fully articulate that. I think when you're around people you pick up things or you learn things that you aren't always instantly able to articulate. I can't think of a particular example right now though.

Q: Okay, so that was your first project as curatorial advisor in 2001. What happens next?

Davidson: Well that project, dividing the collection between “keepers” or not, took a while to do because it was a large amount of work and you needed to think about things and things shift—sometimes things are in a seesaw situation so they move back and forth. Also at that time I had been approached by a publisher in Germany that I knew, Lothar Schirmer, who was interested in doing a photography book with Bob. So I asked Bob if he would be interested in doing that. Because I was starting this process of thinking about the future in a way and also because of my experiences with the retrospective, knowing that Bob was always more interested in what he was doing now rather than what he'd done before, I thought rather than doing a straightforward photo book project, that maybe we should try to do a color photography book. Bob had never actually gone through his color photographs and turned any of those images into fine art.

I was quite keen that we do this because I was also thinking longevity. I was trying to get Bob to think about what of his color photographs, which he didn't start doing until the early eighties or maybe mid-eighties even. It was always in black-and-white until then and it was just always kept as source material. He had turned a number of the black-and-white photographs taken in the

fifties into fine art prints when he had the show in 1980 or '81 at the Pompidou, which was his first solo photography show. So he'd worked in black and white as a fine art, but he hadn't addressed the color photographs so I thought this would be a great project to do. He agreed in principle.

David and I spent, oh my god, so much time. We must have made four or five trips to Captiva over a year or so and we looked at every color slide and tried to make a selection from them. There were maybe thirty or forty books of color slides and each page has twenty on it and there are a hundred pages in each book so we're talking a lot of material and it was obviously too much for Bob to ever cull through. So we got his permission that we would take an initial cull and then print those up and kind of test it that way and see how he responded to it. It seemed like a very logical and normal system from a curatorial point of view. I think from an artist's point of view it actually didn't make any sense and ultimately that's what won out.

David and I spent a lot of time doing this. It was an absolutely fascinating project. We'd sit with a slide projector in this kind of closet down in Captiva, when we should have been out looking at the sun and the beach, going through images and images for days on end. As I said, this went on for about a year and then Peter MacGill, the dealer who has always worked with Bob on his photographs, got engaged and interested too so he kind of inserted his take on what we were doing.

We printed all the images out after maybe about a year or so and they were always sitting on the edge of the kitchen counter and one day finally Bob just kind of let all the images fall off the

counter never to be revived. So that was kind of disappointing, but it was a good lesson too. I saw it as trying to help Bob get to a point about making some decisions about his work and also, I understood the importance of the photography in the work and he certainly treated the black-and-whites as fine art, so why not the color work too? I think it was either too overwhelming or he was uninterested, but it never came to fruition and now we just have all that as source material. That was something I was very devoted to doing, but didn't happen.

Q: I have a couple of questions about that. I'm interested in your spending those days on end looking at the slides. What are you and David talking about?

Davidson: Well I think we were talking a lot about what an amazing eye Bob had and an incredible ability to capture a level of confusion in the everyday and to turn it into something quite pleasing in a way. There are images that instantly just are, "Oh, that's Bob. That's how he looks." It's interesting too because with a lot of photographers you see two or three variants along the same subject and with Bob what was super fascinating was that he had that kind of [Henri] Cartier-Bresson ability of the decisive moment. That's the image and that's the only image that's taken. So there wasn't that variant and that was really interesting. We were just into the images and finding things that looked like what we interpret [as] Bob.

After Bob had his stroke and wasn't able to take images any longer, to click the shutter or the digital or whatever—I don't know if he ever really used [a] digital [camera]—he was giving cameras to his studio assistants and they were all going out taking Bob-type photographs and they're just not the same thing. This is different because these were Bob photographs, but it was

our interpretation of what could become a fine art photograph and not so much what Bob would necessarily have chosen. We were also picking up images used in paintings too, trying to get a number of those. It was more systematic rather than intuitive. It was intuitively based because we know the work well and we knew Bob, but it was a systematic approach to something that is inherently intuitive and I think maybe that's why Bob didn't go forward with it in that way. Now I say to David all the time, "Well, we're still going to do that book on the unknown photographs," despite the fact Bob didn't really sanction it.

Q: You said that you were trying to help Bob to make a decision about some of that work. Can you speak about what you mean?

Davidson: Well, this was a large body of work. Photography has always been central to his practice, it's used not only as source material in a lot of the paintings, but he started out as a photographer and he's a damn good photographer. I didn't want that material just to stay source material, I wanted to elevate it, and obviously Peter MacGill felt the same way. We saw it as having a value art historically. I'm not saying that Bob didn't see that either, it's just that I think he was more engaged in what he was doing in the studio and he didn't want to revisit his photo books.

Q: So choosing work to select in a book would then elevate some of it and give it a greater chance of surviving? Of people revisiting it, of people engaging with it?

Davidson: Right and understanding it and interpreting it in a way. I wasn't looking at it just as a book project. I wanted him to make prints of these images just like he'd done with the early fifties material. They're done in 20-by-16-inch formats. He'd only ever printed two other color projects, the *Chinese Summerhall* [1982] and—actually I think it was just the *Chinese Summerhall*, the only color photographs that he chose as fine art work. [Note: In addition to the 100-foot chromogenic print *Chinese Summerhall*, there are two related portfolios of individual images both titled *Study for Chinese Summerhall*, both 1983, and a series of excerpts from the 100-foot print titled *Studies for Chinese Summerhall*, 1984. In 1987 Rauschenberg completed a series of Polacolor prints.] It was just to try to engage him with a different series—but anyway it didn't happen.



Robert Rauschenberg
Study for Chinese Summerhall (Pink Window), 1983
 Chromogenic print
 40 x 30 inches (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: It's interesting.

Davidson: I don't think it would be a violation to revisit it in my lifetime or David's lifetime. I think Bob was just in the now and that was going too far into the back. I think that's why it fell apart too.

Q: So is that part of the expectation then, if an artist brings someone in to personally advise them, that you are meant to come with these sort of creative ideas and questions about rethinking about the work or is there an expectation that there be that kind of dialogue?

Davidson: I really don't know. I can't answer that. This was the first time I'd ever done it. It came about through us working together and I hope a kind of mutual admiration for one another. I was presented an opportunity to do a photo book, I was just trying to—ultimately David and I did do the book with Schirmer/Mosel [*Robert Rauschenberg: Photographs 1949–1962*, 2011] It came out about two years ago; it took that long. I wasn't interested in it from a commercial point of view at all, it was really from an art historical point of view, and I could see that there was this vast body of work that was still in a kind of raw state, and it seemed to me important to get the artist's take on it rather than to leave it to others later, which inevitably can happen, and it can sometimes not happen properly. So I felt a level of integrity about it, that that was the right thing to do. But it just was sort of an organic thing, I don't think I went into it going, okay, we need to do this or that.

Q: And he probably didn't go into it with an intentional thing either, but it's an interesting idea that maybe an artist would ask someone to come into their fold to stimulate them in a different way.

Davidson: Yes, but I don't think Bob really ever expected not to be around and probably, like all of us, thought, oh, I'll get to that later. I will say that I think Bob was always mindful about his place in art history. He put in place, with the people who worked for him, a very good recordkeeping system. He had a mind for that; he just didn't want to do it himself. But he knew the importance of it. Now, as we begin the archive with the Foundation, we're finding documents and letters and such going back to the sixties and things. Despite how we lost a lot of the material around the early fifties, I think from 1960 forward, he was a lot more engaged with proper recordkeeping. Some artists pass away and you don't even know what their inventory is. That was not the case here. It was all recorded, documented, in a database. He was in good shape in that regard. I just don't think he wanted to—I don't know. I don't really have an answer. I guess one day, if I am able to do this unknown photography book or show or whatever, I'm going to have to put a rationale on it so I do have to think about it. I don't actually believe in posthumous photography so that was probably another reason I was motivated.

Q: Why don't you believe in posthumous photography?

Davidson: Because the artist isn't making those decisions.

Q: Okay. So what were some of the other projects that you were involved in, in that role?

Davidson: The timing starts to get a little bit muddled. In 2002 I leave Menil and come to work for the Guggenheim, and I continued my role with Bob, for sure. I think that was one of the key

things the Guggenheim was interested in bringing me on [for] because I had that connection and Bob was one of Tom Krens's most important artists. The timing is a little bit messed up in my head about all that. I don't have it quite completely straight what projects I was working on just for Bob and other things that were starting to percolate in and around with the Guggenheim.

Q: Did it feel like a big move?

Davidson: Oh yeah. It was a huge move, but it was a complete no-brainer. I've always wanted to live in New York. I'd been in Houston and at Menil for seventeen or eighteen years and it had changed so much after Mrs. de Menil died, and then with Paul leaving and Walter getting sick, it just wasn't the same place. It was time to go on. I have to think about the timing of all that. I know that it was in June of 2002, but I don't know what David and I were working on with Bob at that particular moment when I moved to New York.

Q: When I was reading a little bit about some of the shows that you and David co-curated, and we won't go into this today, but it raised some questions for me, just things I don't know the answers to about more general planning. Is it normally the case that a museum approaches you or an artist and says, "We want to do something with you?" Or is it the other way around? Is that some of what would have been happening with you and Bob at that time?

Davidson: It was mostly the museums coming to Bob or they would come to me. For instance a show that David and I did in Valencia [*Robert Rauschenberg*, Institut Valencia d'Art Modern, Spain, 2005], they came to me and then I went to Bob. Ferrara approached me and then I went to

Bob [*Rauschenberg*, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, Italy, 2004]. There were other shows that David and I did that the museums came to Bob and for a variety of reasons, either they didn't have the budget or the space or whatever, it was easier to do the show based out of the collection here with a few loans so David and I would be hired as guest curators so to speak. So it would work both ways, but it's generally the institution reaching out. That's still the case now.

Certainly one of my goals with the Foundation is to distribute or disseminate or establish Bob as a global artist because he's really the first one who was thinking and working that way and that's from thirty years ago before the word global was—it was international then, it's global now. So I'm keen to make connections with institutions in Korea or China or Australia or whatever to gauge their interest and let them know that the Foundation would be interested. But mostly it's the institution because you need to fit into what their agenda is and what their programming is. Bob had a lot of requests. He was often turning things down.

Q: Were there things that you advised him against?

Davidson: Probably. I'm sure I did.

Q: And that would've been because?

Davidson: The timing wasn't right or it wasn't the right place. He had a pretty good knack for knowing when he wanted to do something or not. Sometimes it was too small or they wouldn't have the right budget or the timing wasn't right or there was a conflict. There are always people—he was approached a lot. A lot.

Q: What kinds of things would he call you to ask about?

Davidson: He didn't call me very often, mostly it was all filtered through David and back that way. He would occasionally just pick up the phone and call and then it was usually something more silly. Or just to say, "Hey, come down to Captiva." There's probably a lot of correspondence—I would write him e-mails or letters about things when I would try to convince him directly to do something rather than relying on David. So a variety of things like that. I know for instance around the Padre Pio commission that Bob had with Renzo Piano and with the Catholic Church, and that was a complicated project [*The Happy Apocalypse*, 1999; originally commissioned for the Padre Pio Pilgrimage Church, San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy]. I remember one time Renzo being in Houston and coming and—because things had gotten tense between Bob and the church and Renzo very much wanted Bob to be there—he reached out to me to try to help interface with Bob. Ultimately when the whole thing was said and done and the piece was rejected by the church and didn't go in and Bob owned it, he wanted, after Walter died I think, to give it to Menil. I wrote and tried to encourage him to do that, that that was a good resting home for it, primarily because Mrs. de Menil was so Catholic and there are not a lot of cultural institutions that have that kind of subtle religious undertone. So while it may never get shown there, it seemed like the right resting home for it. So things like that, placements and occasionally sales. He didn't, at that time, rely on me too much about sales.



Robert Rauschenberg

The Happy Apocalypse [original artwork for Padre Pio Liturgical Hall], 1999

Inkjet pigment transfer, acrylic, and graphite on polylamine

96 x 250 1/16 x 2 inches (243.8 x 635.2 x 5.1 cm)

The Menil Collection, Houston

Gift of the artist in memory of Walter Hopps

Q: Had he, would it have been your job to try to determine the value of something?

Davidson: Certainly David and I were always looking at value and paying attention to that and recording it then. But yes, had he asked me in '98 when he sold all that material to San Francisco [Museum of Modern Art], I wouldn't have agreed to that. I certainly wouldn't have put the *Automobile Tire Print* [1953] and the *Erased de Kooning* in the same institution. They should have been spread around. I think he should have kept *Erased de Kooning Drawing* because now it's in an institution and it's not seen the way that it was when Bob lent it everywhere and it had its own cachet. But I wasn't involved in too many sales. In fact the painting that I spoke of that Bob made for his birthday in 1997, *Mirthday Man*, he sold that, and I was really upset with him about that because that's a masterpiece of his late career and it should be in an institution.

Q: Did you say that?

Davidson: Yes and I told him that often. It made me so angry and to this day I still work on that.

Q: On getting it back into an institution?

Davidson: Getting it to an institution, yes.

Q: Did he say why he disagreed?

Davidson: He needed the money, somebody came forward, they had what seemed like a legitimate offer or solution. At the end of his life I think Bob was interested in selling a lot and he did.

Q: Okay. I think this is a good place to pause. Thank you very much.

Davidson: No, thank you, Sara, this is really enjoyable.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #3

Interviewee: Susan Davidson

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: May 5, 2015

Q: Today is May 5, 2015. This is Sara Sinclair with Susan Davidson at 381 Lafayette in New York City. So today we are going to jump in where we left off last time. We basically got to around 2004. We were talking about the photography and you had had this interest in trying to do something with it while Bob was still alive.

Davidson: Yes.

Q: That's kind of where we wrapped up. So today, I want to start with the shows that you and David White co-curated in Italy. And the first one is *Rauschenberg, 2004*.

Davidson: Right.

Q: So this show included works from 1951 to 2002. I'm just interested in first hearing about how you decided what to include in this particular show.

Davidson: Okay. Well, this exhibition actually turned out to be a very pleasant experience. I think David and I both really enjoyed doing it and it was also a great opportunity for us, having done the retrospective, which was over four hundred works, to try to look at Bob's entire career in a very reduced format, numbers-wise. In the seventies Bob had shown in various spots around

northern Italy and into Tuscany—Florence, Venice, and in Ferrara as well. He'd shown a body of work called the *Early Egyptians* [1973–74] and I think the *Venetians* [1972–73] and *Jammers*, and that body of work had toured Italy in the early seventies. I had a connection in Ferrara. I knew the curator and the director there through another colleague and great friend of mine, Simonetta Fraquelli, and they were keen to do a Rauschenberg show. They had shown Bob in '74, '76—I don't remember the exact date [note: 1975]. They were looking for a little more contemporary program than what they normally do because they show mostly early twentieth-century art. They wanted to revisit Rauschenberg and they reached out to me and I wrote Bob a letter and asked him if he would be interested in doing it and he said, "Sure." So David and I got to work pretty quickly.

It was important for Ferrara to show the whole body of work. They very much wanted a more retrospective approach. So the decisions were governed by their need and the decisions also were governed by the spaces because it's a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century palazzo called the Palazzo dei Diamanti. It's a fantastic building that has these protruded diamond constructions on the exterior. In a typical palazzo floor plan it proceeds room-by-room, you march through it, and I think there were ten rooms along one long side, and then you come out of the building and you go through the courtyard and then you come through two other larger-scaled rooms that then complete the exhibition space. This is the exhibition plan that Ferrara always uses. I've subsequently gone on to do other shows in Ferrara on completely different topics so I know the space there and I know how their programming works and what their requirements are. So we needed to fill all twelve rooms.

This worked very nicely because with Bob working in series we could pretty much take a room and look at a series or bring maybe two series together in a room or something like that. It just ended up working very well for their space and for what they had asked us to do and how Bob's work unfolded over that period of time. It was also important that it be a loan show. We didn't want it to be an exhibition drawn exclusively from Bob's holdings. Some of the shows that David and I have done were assembled that way. But this needed to be a museum-quality show and I think that that's what we put together.

Bob was excited to go back to Italy. He hadn't been shown in Italy in a really long time. What happens in northern Italy is that these smaller towns have great advertising campaigns so people will travel to see them. So while it's certainly not Milan, Venice, or Rome, they do have the ability to draw quite a large visitation. Sadly though at the end of the day—because I think their clientele is more used to early twentieth-century art—the exhibition didn't do so well for the museum. Critically it did quite well. But visitation-wise, it didn't. It didn't.

In putting the show together, David and I felt that it would make sense to have an artwork outside, as you were breaking up the space because of the building. As I said earlier, you came out of a long arm of the palazzo and went through the courtyard. So we chose the *Labyrinth* [*A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth)*, 1994], which is a piece that Bob made—I don't remember the dates, probably in the late nineties—that had first been shown in Venice on an island in the lagoon. It's a series of freestanding Plexiglas or Lexan panels that Bob screened images on and they can be configured in any different way and it becomes a labyrinth in which you, the visitor, walk through and then experience these images. So we thought that that would be a very

handsome and interactive kind of art to put outside because it's a piece that can withstand weather.



A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth) (1994) installed outside of the exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg*, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, Italy, 2004. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Christopher Rauschenberg

So that's what we did and Bob came to the opening and it turned out to be a little bit of a fiasco because for the first time in something like twenty-five years, Ferrara had a snowstorm and it completely shut down the city. Bob in fact was staying in Bologna, which is about forty-five minutes away, because Ferrara is a small town and didn't have the right accommodations for him. So he came early for the press conference and I remember this quite well because as usual things had to work on his time schedule, which meant usually not until late in the afternoon. It hadn't been a big press turnout, but one of the people who was in the press corps was a priest and Bob was a little scared about that because he had been having this odd interaction with the Vatican at this time. He had been commissioned by the Vatican to do a series of windows or a piece for the Padre Pio church that Renzo Piano had designed as a pilgrimage church down in the southern part of Italy I think. For one reason or another, the way that Bob had chosen the imagery and wanted to reproduce God as almighty and all-seeing in this particular commission

was as a radar antenna and the Vatican just couldn't stomach that. There was a lot of back and forth about that and at the end of the day the Vatican refused to accept the artwork. Bob was hugely disappointed because, one, he first of all didn't like being told how to choose his imagery and, two, this was his interpretation within the piece and from an artistic license point of view he certainly should have been free to do what he wanted to. So the fact that a priest showed up for the press conference was not something that Bob was too happy about. In fact now that I think about it, I think the press conference happened a couple of days before because there wasn't a snowstorm that day.

We decided not to keep the fact from Bob—it was hard anyway because the man was dressed with his clerical collar. Bob was just not going to meet with him and somehow we got them together and it turned out that they had met once before in Italy in the early fifties and they both shared a love of jazz and they just got on like a house on fire. It turned out to be a really remarkable interview and everybody was at ease and it just was one of those nice events that turns around in a positive way when you're always kind of scared that your talent is not going to be happy with what's been organized.

Bob loved the show and it was nice too because there were some works that he hadn't seen in a long time that we managed to pull out. It was also great because it was the first time since the retrospective that showed his more current work in a museum context. Bob was always so in love with Italy and it's been such an inspiration in his work from the fifties on that it was just a nice marriage.

Q: Was the fact that it was in Italy or how did that impact the work that you selected, if at all?

Do you consider that you're putting on a show for a largely Italian audience?

Davidson: Well we certainly knew that we had to do a retrospective look. That was essential—it reintroduced Bob to the populace there. Yes, we chose sometimes very Italian-themed works in order to help explicate Bob's career and to also, to show his great engagement with the country. I would really say for such a globally thinking artist at the end of the day Italy was a country that was always first and foremost in Bob's heart and very much shows up throughout the body of work in different ways. So it was a good thing to do. I would love to do another show in Italy. I think we should do something in Rome. I've talked sometimes to the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome to try to do a photography show of Bob's photographs in Italy because I think that's something that would be very interesting for people to see. It was a nice thing.

Can I look at the catalogue? There's a couple of works I don't completely remember. We also had an interview with Mirta [D'Argenzio] and Mario Codognato—the son of one of Bob's early Italian collectors, Attilio Codognato, who is a Venetian collector—and he's now an art historian and perhaps even a museum director. Bob was very fond of both of them, he and his wife, and so they interviewed Bob, which was wonderful, to get his take on and his thoughts on different things in Italy.

Q: Did you find that the Italian, that the interviews were different? The content? Were the interests of the Italian interviewers different than those in the United States?

Davidson: To be honest with you, I can't answer that question. I don't remember. I really do not remember. But I do remember editing the published interview in the catalogue with my Italian colleagues and they were having a very difficult time understanding the way that Bob speaks because Bob has a very unusual way. First of all there are often long pauses between thoughts but at the same time he also makes these incredibly profound statements that require a certain belief on the part of the person he's speaking to because they can seem a little bit random at first until you get into the habit of it. He doesn't always answer a question directly, I guess is the best way to say that.

So I'm just looking through the catalogue because it does really start with some of the early photographs, early fifties material. For instance, we wanted to have this very beautiful shirt board drawing that Bob did in early '52 that has an image of the Mona Lisa in it [Untitled (Mona Lisa), ca. 1952]. So it would really set up right away how Italy was always playing a part visually in Bob's work.



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (Mona Lisa), ca. 1952
Collage: engravings, printed paper, fabric, paper, pencil, foil
paper, and glue on paper
9 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches (24.1 x 19.1 cm)
Collection of Louisa Stude Sarofim

We managed to do quite a good job actually in terms of loans now that I look through it. It's a handsome show I think and it also appropriately hit on all the different materials that Bob was working in. Yes. I think we did a good job. It was nice also to bring in some later work too. The *Apogamy Pods* [1999–2000] and even these *Short Stories* [2000–02] that he was working on and some of the late sculpture—this kind of off series of cast pineapples and apples that Bob was making at that time.

Q: This came up in the interview with Hisachika [Takahashi] because I guess this was a core from the apple tree here.

Davidson: It was. Yes. I think which Bob ate or—

Q: Right.

Davidson: He got into, in this time period, just taking various fruits and either bronzing them or making them in gold or silver—for instance, here’s a pineapple [Untitled (cast pineapple), 2004].



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (cast pineapple), 2004
Silver
9 x 5 x 4 inches (22.9 x 12.7 x 10.2 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

He also did one of Rocky’s eggs because Rocky the turtle somewhere very late in the game laid an egg one day. It completely stunned everyone because we always assumed Rocky was a male and we also didn’t understand how being the only turtle in the house an egg could be laid. Bob was so unbelievably delighted and tickled by it that he instantly cast that in gold. I think a couple more eggs were laid in subsequent years and then sadly soon after Bob died so did Rocky.



Rauschenberg's turtle, Rocky, with her eggs, in his Lafayette Street studio, New York, August 2006

Here was a wonderful *Scenario* work [series 2002–06] called *Catydid Express* [(*Scenario*), 2002] with the images of the shrimp and the bicycles. Yes.



Robert Rauschenberg
Catydid Express (Scenario), 2002
Inkjet pigment transfer, acrylic, and
graphite on poly laminate
85 1/2 x 120 1/2 inches (217.2 x 306.1 cm)
Collection Faurschou Foundation

The show looked really strong there and with the exception of the interview with the Codognatos, I think my text was really a compilation of what had been written in the retrospective with a slight Italian bent. It was just enough to try to get all the loans together.

Q: You've spoken a little bit about how you, for this particular show, wanted to illustrate Bob's use of Italian imagery, but you've also written about how—and I'm going to read this—you wrote that, "Rauschenberg and his art were representative of all things American."

Davidson: Yes.

Q: "Here was an artist whose inspiration came from the very fabric of everyday American life and whose iconography encompassed the dreams and aspirations of every person in the country." So one thing that's been coming up for me in some of these interviews, which I'm starting to be interested in, is this idea, and you've spoken a little bit about this as well, that Bob was a global artist, but he comes up at a time and he's using this American imagery at a time when American cultural exports are more generally on the rise and the world is interested in America. I would just love to hear your thoughts on that.

Davidson: Well, yes. You've hit the nail on the head. He emerges just after the Second World War and the whole sense of consumerism and the victory of what happened—victory may not be the right word—but American art really comes to the fore. This is also why it was so unbelievably important in terms of what happens in American art history because Bob is the first artist since [James McNeill] Whistler to win the grand prize at the Venice Biennale in 1964. Up until then the art world had always—despite what was going on in New York in the fifties with Abstract Expressionism and the awareness of that and its infiltration into Europe, not so much around the globe—particularly through the MoMA's international exhibition, *The New American*

Painting [1958–59]. They did a very important traveling show of Abstract Expressionism in '58. So it's just one of those amazing confluences of time.

Bob always sort of had his finger on the pulse without even really knowing it. I think in many ways it was because of the materials that he was using and the fact that he had this humble approach to a moment of great prosperity and wealth that was starting to happen in the United States and yet he didn't embody it in that way. He chose to be more down to earth about it, if you will, in the sense of the materials that he was using. I think that is what gave him this sense of the everyman that he became, in spite of the fact he was a rising star in the art world. Of course critically he wasn't that, but as we look back that's how we see it. It would have to be the case because he has a retrospective in 1963 as a nearly forty-year-old man and then wins the grand prize in Venice in '64, and these events just really turned the whole sense of what was going to happen in the art world on its edge. It really moved everything from Europe to New York.

So I think that Bob becoming a global artist is something that happens later in a way. But nonetheless he still—not unlike any artist in the fifties—as one always did, you always made that grand tour. Europe was starting to get back on its feet. Ellsworth Kelly did it and Sam Francis. Other artists, maybe a little bit earlier than Bob, were going back to Europe and that's what he did. They [Bob and Cy] went in '52. That's pretty early. Of course Bob had been there before anyway. He started his first artistic training in Paris [in 1948] after spending a couple of semesters at the Kansas City Art Institute. He knew he needed to go to Paris.

Q: Right. So I'm kind of—let's see how clearly I can articulate this.

Davidson: Yes, it's a complex thing to really talk about.

Q: Yes.

Davidson: Because he is and his imagery is very much American. What is interesting, vis-à-vis what we did with the show in Ferrara in trying to bring in the Italian imagery, was to show his engagement with another culture and his reliance on history in a way. I think that is important about Bob because he's somebody who you don't think of as being historically grounded. Yet particularly through the fifties and early sixties, his work was that. That freed him to start traveling more and to make art in other areas and to engage himself with other processes and through the seventies is when he really starts to travel widely and starts to make art in response to that.

Q: Right. That's been another thing that I've been curious about recently and I would love to float this idea by you. I think one possibility that I've been thinking about is there's this moment in New York after people are coming here in the fifties. And there's this rise of energy in the 1950s and 1960s and then something seems to—that seems to disperse somewhat in the 1970s when Bob moves to Captiva. A lot of other artists seem to be leaving the city and so I've kind of wondered if partly his moving and then his desire to travel and many of the places where he traveled, particularly later with ROCI, were sort of an attempt to engage with the raw energy that he couldn't find in the United States anymore.

Davidson: That's highly possible. I think it's a very good theory really and in fact I would even go so far as to say that he couldn't find it in Florida. And one needed to reconnect with the world in a way. I think Bob left New York because he was sort of exhausted by it. He always said, oh, people were breaking up and this, that, and the next thing, and I think he just needed—more space and a different—he needed what I often say, to clear his palate. In fact the work does do that. It goes less image-based and is very kind of minimal. Of course that's also what was going on in the art world at the time. But I do think that, yes, he needed to take inspirations from other parts of the world and that's why he started traveling again. It's also why I think he started photographing again because that coincides around that time. In '79 is when he picks up a camera again and '76, '79, is when he starts really going out [into the world] from what his base is. It's interesting. He's a little bit like a forager. He goes out and then he brings back and squirrels it away and interprets it and reuses it and reinvents it and then goes out again. In a lot of ways that's what the ROCI project was, but before he got to that, he had been working in France. He'd been working in India and yes, I agree with you. I think it was being in Florida. He needed a different sense of—

Q: Stimulation.

Davidson: Not so much stimulation because I think the way that he thought was so profound and complex in a way, but he just needed more material, I would say.

Q: Okay.

Davidson: He'd always been on the street in New York. All that material was on the street and the streets in Captiva just didn't have much on them.

Q: Right.

Davidson: When he first goes there of course he uses the beach as the street and cardboard and the sand that coats the *Early Egyptians* and such. Oh, he'd also been in Israel. That was another foreign travel through the seventies. So I think that's when that really kind of comes forth. But it was embedded from this very early time, I think.



Rauschenberg and studio assistant adhering sand to *Early Egyptian* series (1973–74) on the beach in Captiva, Florida, ca. 1973. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni

Q: I have a couple more questions I want to ask you before we get back to this sort of chronology. Picking up on a couple things you said, you used the word consumerism. And so that's another thing that's interesting. How when Bob was first making work in the 1950s and the 1960s even, I don't think there was really an expectation that people were going to be selling

very much and even if they were it wasn't for a whole lot of money. What do you think the impact was when suddenly there is an art market and suddenly, oh, actually you can make money. Is that something that you can speak to, how that was felt?

Davidson: How Bob responded to that? Well, no, I can't really speak to it because I didn't know him then. I can look at it through a historic lens and I would say that actually Bob didn't sell very well at all. His first show at [Leo] Castelli [New York, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 1958], only one piece sold and it was bought by the dealer. That work now belongs to MoMA as a gift of the dealer. *Bed* [1955], the Combine. Unlike Jasper Johns, whose show had been the month before and was a complete sellout. I think it wasn't until about 1959 when Bob actually sold a painting to a museum. He [previously] had sold a photograph to the Museum of Modern Art very early on in the fifties, the untitled carriage [Untitled (Interior of an Old Carriage), 1949]. And Alan [R.] Solomon, who was the director [note: at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, currently the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York] and was somebody very much on the scene with contemporary art, he was at Ithaca at that time and he bought a Combine of Bob's, I believe called *Migration* [1959]. That was probably '59, so that's the first serious sale that he had. He'd already been producing work for ten years. That's kind of a—



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (Interior of an Old Carriage), 1949
Gelatin silver print
10 1/8 x 9 5/8 inches (25.7 x 24.4 cm) image size
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Nelson A. Rockefeller Fund



Robert Rauschenberg
Migration, 1959
Combine: oil, paper, printed paper, printed reproductions,
photographs, fabric and wood on canvas
50 x 40 inches (127 x 101.6 cm)
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University,
Ithaca, New York
Anonymous gift

Q: Long time.

Davidson: —poor time. Remembering conversations I had with Bob, he remembered it very much as a poor time and talked a lot about the cold-water flats and not having enough money for gasoline. He was one of the few artists who had a car, a station wagon, and so he often could move work for other people and sometimes earned a little bit of money doing that, taking things from downtown uptown to galleries and things like that. I would say he really didn't start earning money until probably late '59, '60, and then it went pretty quickly. Of course it was cemented by winning the Venice Biennale in '64.

I've never actually gone and started to look at it through a financial window to say, oh well, this is the amount of money that he earned in this time. But—just a couple of things I've seen—he certainly seemed to have enough money to buy the silkscreens that made the silkscreen paintings. These were not necessarily cheap. I remember when I was doing research on *Barge* and I found through Gina [Guy]'s help the receipts for all of those and I could see what the prices were. At the same time I remember also seeing checks to the school that his son was going to and so he was obviously earning enough of a living at that time to live fairly well.

Then of course as time went forward, he sold more and more, and I would say even today as we look back on it, almost half or closer to two thirds, just over half of Bob's output is already in the world, in museums or with private collectors. To have sold that much in your lifetime I think is pretty good. Considering also the amount of work he made.

Q: Yes. Okay. Just one final question sort of—

Davidson: But wait. I will say one thing though because I remember when the *Cardboard* show was done at Menil [*Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboards and Related Pieces*, 2007] and then when David and I started showing the *Gluts*, and people kind of caught onto them and Bob would always say, "I'm twenty years ahead of everybody." We were showing work that was twenty- or twenty-five-years old and everybody was just like, oh my god, why didn't I see it? It seemed so fresh to them, but at the time it was being made, he would often say that it wasn't embraced in the same way. He always needed that bit of time.

Q: When you study his work, do you mark his move to Captiva as the beginning of a new era?

Davidson: Oh, absolutely.

Q: Okay. I wondered if you can speak about that transition a little bit more generally. When I was talking to Dorothy Lichtenstein, she said until sometime in the 1960s, she felt like the art world in New York was so small that you could sort of hold it. And then she was like, “Then this one time I went to Captiva and I came back and it was like everything had changed.” I know you’re obviously a lot younger, but with your familiarity with the work and having studied art history, I’m wondering if you have any thoughts on what happens in that moment.

Davidson: I think there are several things that happen. I think there are just more artists who realize—who are people who want to make art and who are able to sell art. I think the whole structure for those artists becomes better defined. There are more galleries. There are more museums that are looking at contemporary art. So the whole infrastructure around what it was to be an artist happened. It took that twenty years, through the fifties and through the middle of the sixties I guess, to really grow that in a way. Up until then everybody else sort of hopped along and either showed in cooperative galleries or maybe they had an uptown gallery like Castelli, but there were only about four dealers at the time and probably as Dorothy said, you could hold the art world in your hand.

It’s also one of the things that somebody once said to me and I think it’s quite accurate. As the art world starts to expand and get bigger, you notice that the artworks get bigger too because now

there are shipping companies with big trucks that can pick up a 20-foot-long painting. You had no way to move that before. As I said earlier, Bob was one of the few artists with a car and he would help people out moving things around town.

Q: Right.

Davidson: I remember when I was working on the text for *Barge* and I had the opportunity to talk to Bob about making it. He always said, “Oh, I made it in a twenty-four-hour period,” and actually to the contrary, I don’t really think that’s true. I do think he worked out a lot of the composition probably in about a six-hour period, which would make sense. Bob always worked very rapidly. But the painting is 32 feet long. That is not something you can put on the roof of your car or put on a subway. So I wanted him to really specifically tell me how he got it to the Jewish Museum [New York; for his retrospective *Robert Rauschenberg*, 1963] from his studio on Broadway.

Q: And what did he say?

Davidson: That he rolled it and threw it in the back of the car and drove it up. Which is why I think that painting is dated ’63. It has a double date, ’62 dash ’63 in his hand on the back and I think it’s because he finished the painting, yes, in that first burst of activity. The next day Mike Wallace and his crew come to film Bob and he demonstrates a little bit more how the work was made for the on-camera, which is very interesting footage. This was in November. His show’s not until March of ’63 and I think the work sits in the studio and right before the exhibition

opens, he has to get it up to the Jewish Museum, he probably does something else, signs it, dates it, rolls it, and takes it up and re-stretches it.

There's a fantastic photograph of that show with *Barge* as the backdrop and pretty much the entire New York art world in front of it, who's come out to celebrate Bob, from Barney [Barnett] Newman through to Bob's immediate artist colleagues. It's a wonderful photograph. It really shows the camaraderie and engagement, and I think there were places to go and places to meet, the Cedar Bar [Cedar Tavern, New York], et cetera, that were gathering holes and exchanges of ideas and by the seventies there were more people and more activities. I think that's just what happened.



Artists and guests in front of Rauschenberg's *Barge* (1962–3) at the opening of *Robert Rauschenberg*, Jewish Museum, New York, 1963. Standing left to right; Sherman Drexler, Claes Oldenburg, Richard Lippold, Merce Cunningham, Robert Murray, Peter Agostini, Edward Higgins, Barnett Newman, Rauschenberg, Perle Fine, Alfred Jensen, Ray Parker, Friedel Dzubas, Ernst van Leyden, Andy Warhol, Marisol, James Rosenquist, John Chamberlain, George Segal; kneeling, left to right; Jon Schueler, Arman, David Slivka, Alfred Leslie, Tania, Frederick Kiesler, Lee Bontecou, Isamu Noguchi, Salvatore Scarpitta, Allan Kaprow. Miscellaneous photographs collection. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Photo: Frank Horvat

Q: I don't know if this is an answerable question, but is the growth of the art world a good thing?

Davidson: Well, I probably am not the right person to answer that question. I would imagine from a commercial point of view, yes. It certainly resulted in a lot of wealth for a lot of people. I

do think that it brought on new kinds of art and new ways to look at art and such, but it does require a lot more energy. I would say even in the time that I've been involved in the art world, it's changed so radically and so it'll just keep going I guess. You long for those quieter, more controlled days when it seemed to really matter to be involved in the art world. Now, it doesn't seem that it matters.

Q: What do you mean?

Davidson: Well, now, it seems so much about social activity. Somebody once said or I read recently that the sign of a good curator is the number of frequent flier miles they have. That just means you're on a plane a lot and maybe you see a lot of art, but I think there's more to weed through and to sort through and to think about and there's very little that actually rises to the top.

Q: Yes, I mean that's another thing that I've been wondering about is that if there's a kind of loss of energy as something expands.

Davidson: Yes, of course there is. It gets heavy under its own weight and so you see artists today—certainly Bob is a huge inspiration to artists who don't even know who he is. That is really quite an interesting phenomenon, that somebody who's not so far gone and is probably maybe a little bit older than their parents even, who had that kind of creative energy and that approach—that anything can happen. That really was Bob's greatest contribution. Anything, anything can be defined art, and he also brought with that this uncanny aesthetic quality. I think a lot of the young artists today who you could point to as being inspired by Bob—I don't think

they have the same aesthetics. There's a kind of general, what I call grunge phenomena that's going on, and Bob didn't really have that. He had always a sense of beauty and I think he held onto that really right through to the end. I think it really defined him.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Davidson: No, you're welcome. I don't know if I said that much about it, but it's a complex and big philosophical question in a lot of ways. Bob was an interesting—yes, somebody should write an essay about it. I'm not sure I'm the right person to do that.

Q: Why?

Davidson: Because I'm not such a critical thinker. I'm more of a historian.

Q: Okay. Somebody else was—who was it? Ealan Wingate maybe? Was talking about something similar to what you just said about the change in the social environment.

Davidson: Yes, really, really affected it.

Q: Yes. He remembered this moment where it went from being just Bob the artist to Bob the center of a kind of entourage and—there were suddenly hangers-on and there's a whole social kind of scene around all of the artists.

Davidson: Yes.

Q: Anyways. Okay, so the next show—*Robert Rauschenberg, On and Off the Wall*. 2005. Let's talk about this.

Davidson: Yes. Did you talk to David about that show? No.

Q: David was interviewed as part of the pilot project. And I don't think they did.

Davidson: Oh. It may be worth going back to—

Q: To talk to him about it?

Davidson: No, no. I'm happy to talk about it. I just would be interested to see his memory because that show is a very good case of how you are given lemons and you make lemonade. This was just a completely crazy series of events, where the museum wanted to do a show on Rauschenberg, and I don't know why—The director of the museum, which is in Nice, Mr. [Gilbert] Perlein, I do remember that. He kept going to Pace Gallery [New York; then PaceWildenstein] and working with them to do the show. He never contacted Bob or David or anything like that and Pace wasn't really bringing the show along or seeding it in any way. They would just take these meetings with this man and then he would go back to France and think he was getting a show and I don't know what transpired, but that went on for maybe two years even, I would think. And then all of a sudden a phone call came one day from someone at Pace saying

oh, can you make us some loans? We have to do this show in four weeks or something. I'm exaggerating.

I just blew a gasket because as a museum curator, you just don't do things like that. And you also don't put together exhibitions in less than six months with a catalogue. So I couldn't understand how this man, who I consequently ended up never liking, was operating in this vacuum. When, had he reached out to David, everything would have—because that's what you normally do and that's how Bob received invitations for exhibitions. People would write to him and he would decide whether he wanted to participate or not and then David—if it was coming with an outside curator—David would work with them and help shape the show and direct knowledge and often make loans but not have to do it for them. And this is what ended up happening.

The guy, he was just such a nimrod. Anyway I just blew a gasket and I said, "Okay, David, this is a bad situation and we need to rescue it." The checklist that Pace had given him made no sense. So again, David and I just sat down, put our heads together for a few minutes, and thought okay—and in all these cases David and I would go and do an advance recon. So I think we went out to Nice for a weekend and saw the space and said, "Okay, why don't we do something with all the metal work?" Having come off the show in Ferrara, we knew we needed to do something different, and we also needed to work where we could get loans very quickly for the most part. So that's what we did. We sat down with the floor plan and did an exhibition. We did all the *Borealis* and the *Urban Bourbons* and the *Gluts* and integrated them, and it was the first time that anybody had actually done a show of this material in a museum context, in a kind of curated

way. It turned out to be absolutely glorious. It looked beautiful and it really told us something about what Bob was doing with the work in metal in the eighties.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: On and Off the Wall, Oeuvres des Années 80 & 90* [Works from the 80's and the 90's], Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (MAMAC), Nice France, 2005. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Muriel Anssens, MAMAC, Nice

We did manage to get a couple of loans, if I remember correctly. That was always my criteria, is that we had to have a catalogue done and we had to have loans from other people. It couldn't just be drawn fully from the Foundation or from Bob's holdings. We included the photography at that time and it turned out to be a very, very handsome show. It opened in the summer so I think we did it in like six months really.

Q: And how involved was the guy?

Davidson: Well, he thought he'd done the whole thing.

Q: Oh.

Davidson: That was what was so annoying. David and I went. We spent two or three weeks installing the show with Thomas. Gilbert Perlein, yes. He did write a text. That was it. Three pages. I gather that the museum in Nice had shown Bob's work or they owned a piece from the late seventies, so they wanted to honor that and they had been showing other artists in and around Bob, like Niki de Saint Phalle and [Jean] Tinguely and such, so it made sense. We invited Barbara Rose to contribute an essay, as I recall here. David and I did the selection. It looked great, it really did. It's a funny museum. It's sort of these kind of octagonal zones that are connected by passageways so you move from one room to the next and we used the *Labyrinth*, which we'd shown in Ferrara. We showed that inside this time and in a little bit more open format. It ended up looking really, really, really well.

Q: How did you come to the decision to focus on the metal?

Davidson: There are kind of practical issues—because we had seen the space so we knew we could kind of tell, back of envelope—oh, you need maybe a hundred works or something. I don't know if that was the real number. You needed some larger-scale work and we knew that we could pull into our own coffers to put something together, which is what we needed because we didn't have enough time to do loans. We had already done—this was 2005?

Q: Yes.

Davidson: I think we had already done this show of *Gluts* in Valencia, maybe the year before. So we were just thinking about the metals a lot. I think that's how it came about.

Q: Right. In the *Gluts* catalogue, it says that the *Gluts* found parallel expression in series of large paintings on metal.

Davidson: So that's how it came about, because Bob was working on each of these series over a period of ten years and the *Gluts* go across that ten-year period. He may be spent only two to three years on the *Urban Bourbons* or the *Borealis* or the *Night Shades*, but it was fun to do. It really did look terrific. Then they decided they needed another venue to share costs. So they tried two or three different places and then at the last minute they hooked up with the ARoS museum in the northern part of Denmark [Aarhus Kunstmuseum] who had bought an *Urban Bourbon* from one of Bob's, what I'm going to call Nordic, dealers [note: *Catch (Urban Bourbon)*, 1993]. He had a series of Nordic dealers in the eighties and nineties. A really handsome piece.



Robert Rauschenberg
Catch (Urban Bourbon), 1993
 Acrylic on mirrored and enameled aluminum
 116 x 193 1/4 inches (294.6 x 490.9 cm)
 ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum Collection

I think the show closed. Anyway David and I went out to Denmark for a weekend to look at their space to figure it out and they were really nice people. We enjoyed working with them, but we got stuck in an ice storm getting to Denmark and we ended up sort of forty hours later—planes,

trains, automobiles—arriving just completely shattered and then had a day in the museum and turned around and came home. It was a crazy weekend. But the show opened there in May because I remember going back for the installation and it was warm, and eating fish on the dock and being in the sun with David and Thomas. Bob didn't come to that opening in Denmark, but he did come to Nice. I remember that. He was also in Ferrara. As I said, in Ferrara we had that crazy snowstorm and it was such a beautiful evening—and Bob was so delighted that evening—because all the Italian women were out in the snowstorm with their umbrellas and their fur coats walking through the *Labyrinth*. Christopher Rauschenberg snapped a number of photographs—it was just such a Rauschenbergian kind of visual moment and Bob was just really delighted by that. It was a lot of fun. It was crazy in Ferrara. He wasn't in such a great mood at the opening in Nice, I remember.

Q: Nice.

Davidson: It was a tough show to do. It's one of the few shows I have ever done where it wasn't always a super pleasant experience.

Q: Because you were more on the defensive or?

Davidson: I think yes. I guess—I just thought this guy was such a drip. The museum was kind of funny and they were just sort of weirdly French. That said, the show looked beautiful.

Q: And why was Bob in less of a celebratory—

Davidson: I don't know. Maybe it had been a long trip and Barbara Rose came, who is an old, old friend, and I think they weren't on the best of terms at that moment. Then there was a dealer there that Bob was having some problems with and was annoying him, I remember, at lunch. He made David get up and tell the man to leave. I sprained an ankle one afternoon. It's just one of those— You know how everything—

Q: Human stuff.

Davidson: Yes. Stuff goes wrong. But the show looked great and we brought together some really beautiful material and it was wonderful that it did go on to Aarhus. We did do another catalogue there. I was now really living in New York. It made those kinds of collaborations between David and me a lot easier.

Q: Sure.

Davidson: I could just pop over from my office after work and we could put together checklists and start working on stuff, and I think both of us really enjoyed doing shows. It's been nice to have these museum platforms to do it in.

Q: So going on from that, the *Gluts* catalogue suggests that an opportunity arose to do an exhibition in Venice.

Davidson: Yes, yes.

Q: And that you and David proposed the *Gluts*.

Davidson: Yes. Absolutely. Yes. Because again knowing the space—I have obviously done a lot of shows at the Peggy Guggenheim. I know their space quite well. It too has that kind of palazzo aspect to it where you go one room to one room. The rooms are quite small and the ceilings are low and so you need small-scale works. I think what ended up being the success with the *Gluts* there was because they were so dimensional, they just kind of came off the wall and you had a very intimate experience with them.



Thomas Buehler, David White, Christopher Rauschenberg, and Susan Davidson in front of *Snow Crab Crystal Glut* (1987), Robert Rauschenberg: *Gluts*, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 2009

I remember everybody at the opening—because it opened the week before at the Biennale—was just completely blown away by the material. They felt they'd never seen it before. I guess they

missed all those [M.] Knoedler [New York] shows where Bob had been, as he had been making them. It was also a very strongly curated presentation in a kind of logical format.

It came about because Bob had died in May of 2008 and I think the Guggenheim wanted to pay homage to Bob and asked me to do something for Venice. At the time I was still holding onto my photography notion. That seemed the right thing to do and I remember three or four months into [planning] it, after David and I had turned the corner and gone down working with the *Gluts*, going back to Nancy [Spector] and saying, well, we're not going to do photography. We're going to do the sculpture show.

I had always wanted to do a sculpture show for the Guggenheim. Early on, before I went to work for the Guggenheim, when I was starting to work with Bob more directly, I had tried to. I'd been down to Captiva and he had this body of sculptural elements that were just sitting in the middle of the floor, and it turned out that they had been all the material from an installation he'd worked on in '62, I think, called *Dylaby* [(*Dynamisch Labyrinth*)] in Amsterdam [Stedelijk Museum, 1962]. That was kind of a walkthrough environment that he did with several other artists, each having a different zone. Niki and Tinguely and Daniel Spoerri and a couple of other people. I gather he had left Amsterdam and Ileana Sonnabend had gathered up the material and held it in a warehouse somewhere and one day, forty years later, just shipped it back to Bob. So knowing how Bob had worked with the *Gluts*, I thought that would be a very interesting thing for him, to take that body of work and add to it. I had proposed that in fact to the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin [in 2001]. So I guess I always had this interest in Bob's sculpture without really connecting the dots until right now. Bob refused to do what I'm going to call the *Dylaby* redo. I

should have known better because he doesn't revisit his work in that way. The work may have a similar vocabulary that runs through it, but he won't redo a series or reconsider. He always wants to do something new and experiment in a different way and explore so I should have known better then.

But anyway—I think having done the show in Nice and Aarhus and also in Valencia, because we'd done a *Gluts* presentation in Valencia in Spain, I think ahead of that, we just knew it was a really terrific body of work.

Q: Yes.

Davidson: So that's how that came about.

Q: Well—

Davidson: And then it kept going.

Q: Right.

Davidson: That was only supposed to be one venue. It ended up being four venues. [Note: traveled to Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland, 2009–10; Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2010; and Villa e Collezione Panza, Varese, Italy, 2010–11]

Q: And was that because it was so successful?

Davidson: Yes, people really liked it. Again the second venue was at the musée Tinguely in Basel and they had, during Bob's lifetime, been nagging him literally to do a Combine show, which is not an easy thing to do. It's not logical, not easy to do because the works are fragile and they're all in museums and people don't want to lend them. And there had just been a big Combine show so it was not ever going to happen. And they wanted to look at Bob and Tinguely's collaborations, which were a fairly limited time period in the early sixties. I think I may have said to David, why don't we try to sell them on the *Gluts* show? And maybe make things a little bit cheaper for Venice because they could share it. This all happened after the show had opened. And so they did. They did agree. The director came to Venice, and David and I went to Basel just after we opened the show. We looked at the space and worked with them about how to do it. Very complicated space. They have sort of a big open thing with these odd partitions and then they did a sort of companion show on the collaborations and they did a very handsome catalogue. We worked with a really strong curator there. That turned out to be a very nice project also, a little complicated because the building was weird and didn't really suit what we wanted to do, but we made it work.

By that time, as could often happen with the calendar at the Guggenheim in Bilbao, they needed a show and because I sit in those calendar meetings I knew the timing could work and I said, why don't we send the *Gluts* because it's packaged and ready to go. We'd need to do a new catalogue and we would need to add probably another ten or fifteen works because the spaces there are so much larger than what we'd been working in, in Venice. So we did and that looked

really dynamite. Very, very beautiful there. Just the idea that Gehry's building is titanium and then all this metal inside and these very baroque walls and these malleable artworks. It was a very strong presentation there.

Then it just was so silly. It was one of those shows that never died and it was very satisfying I think for both David and me because we had always been very committed to that particular body of work. To be able to have done a show that was done quickly and as homage, to have had it have such a strong critical success was wonderful. Again this was one of these things that happened where Italy kind of wakes up and says, "Oh, Rauschenberg's been so important to the country and we should show his work." The Villa Panza and Count [Giuseppe] Panza had been one of Bob's earliest collectors, had bought—I don't know—maybe eleven Combines through Castelli in the mid-sixties. They were starting to do an exhibition program at his villa in Varese and so we went there and took the *Gluts* show. That looked also quite beautiful there because it had this still very baroque feeling, unlike these other palazzos where we had been doing shows that had whitewashed the walls and taken out the fireplaces and everything. This still had a lot of the original ornamentation and the rawness, and the aesthetics of the *Gluts* just worked really, really beautifully in those spaces.

Q: What do the *Gluts* tell us about Bob and his work and his interests? There are a lot of quotes out there about how he loved the world's throwaways, how he was interested in incorporating garbage, and he wanted to reuse materials. What's your take on the *Gluts*?

Davidson: Well, I think what you're saying is absolutely right. I think the great thing about the *Gluts* is that they are un-manipulated in a way. They are simply as found—meaning that Bob didn't paint on them or he didn't rearrange or take the metal object that he found and hammer it and manipulate it in a different way. He simply combined or assembled two or three or four elements into a whole. They really show how the Combines that Bob was doing through the fifties, how they had become a little bit more distilled in a way and become very much more about just those materials and those elements. Whereas in the Combines you see them integrated and mixed in with painting and sometimes they take a foreground and sometimes they're in the background. With the *Gluts* and also with the *Spreads* [1975–83] and *Scales* [1977–81], as they start to incorporate ladders and buckets and things like that; by the time you get to the *Gluts* it's very distilled in that beautiful way that Bob could make art out of things.

It really reinforces that adage of his that he didn't want you to see what was in the museum. He wanted you to see art outside. That you saw as much art being on the street. It just was a matter of what your eye could arrest or pick out in a way and that was one of his strengths as an artist. I think the *Gluts* very much show that. I think they're a really strong body of work.

Q: Obviously you were aware that he had passed away. Did that affect the working process at all in preparing this show?

Davidson: Well it certainly had a sadness to it. And Venice was so close to Bob's heart. He loved Venice. It was just very sad for all of us I think. But Bob's spirit still—he's with me every day. Very much so. Sometimes he flies and sits on your shoulder and tells you something. I think we

were just propelled by that. I think we felt very satisfied that it was so well received. It really did change people's opinions of him and what some people call the late work.

Q: Oh. Okay. So—

Davidson: I don't think I've done a show since then.

Q: No.

Davidson: No. Time to do one.

Q: Yes.

Davidson: We've got the retrospective coming, but that's not David's or my show, but I think now we won't do so much because it's time for other people to bring forth their visions and thoughts about things.

Q: So no shows in your head at the moment?

Davidson: Oh, I do. Yes. I have them. But we don't have a platform for them, I guess, is what I'm saying.

Q: Okay.

Davidson: I don't know. Maybe something will come up.

Q: So I want to speak a little bit about your role here. So you were on the board of the Foundation.

Davidson: Yes.

Q: And what was your role on the board?

Davidson: I was a board member brought on for my curatorial knowledge and art historical knowledge. He started the Foundation in '90 or '91, and as often happens with living people who have Foundations, they have a different agenda during their lifetime and then after the death the board has to take on the responsibilities of the legacy. I had gone to work officially for Bob as a curatorial consultant in 2001 and I knew or I had always been told that I would at some point join the board. Of course that happened in 2009 after Bob had died and we received a notice to attend a meeting in March of 2009 as a board member.

Q: How did this particular Foundation's mission change with Bob's passing?

Davidson: Well, we had the legacy to start to address and also it was very key to Christopher to maintain Bob's philanthropy. Of course none of this really got sorted out until we hired an executive director because the first year or so was—it was just growing pains. It became pretty

clear that you needed somebody who was going to do the day to day work, that it couldn't be the board doing that, which was I think the vision of some of the board members, but that just wasn't practical. I think the biggest challenge we faced was fulfilling Bob's wish of Captiva and what to do with Captiva and to turn it into a residency. It was very valuable property and you have to balance the cost of running a residency versus the value of the property. I think it was one of the greatest achievements we as a board did, was turning that successfully into a residency. And that was very key to Bob.

Q: So how has your role shifted?

Davidson: Well I only left the board in September of last year and that—to resume, I would say, the curatorial advisory role that I had had originally with Bob. The board had grown and matured in a way and while I still think it needs an art historical voice on the board, I wanted and they needed me to focus more broadly on helping to build the legacy. As a board member I couldn't fully do that.

Q: So what is your vision for that?

Davidson: Well, that we do a catalogue raisonné and that we do targeted exhibitions on particular bodies of work. We bring forth the scholarship on works that are already well known and those that aren't. We have the stewardship of the collection that we have in our hands now and whether we continue to hold that or to ultimately sell it or to place it in museums, that's a long process and takes a lot of consideration. Along the way we need to do things with it like conserve it or

use it or photograph it or all these kinds of things that come with collection management and stewardship. So those are the things I'm focused on.

Q: You mentioned two things earlier. You said one of your interests was in promoting an understanding of Bob as a global artist. Can you speak a little bit more about that?

Davidson: Well I think the world we live in today is—it's not international. It's global. I'm sure next year there may be a different word to define it, meaning that the world is so much smaller than it was. We touched on this earlier in our conversation today and again people don't realize that Bob was one of the first people doing this. In the seventies, he was looking to other sources and countries for inspiration and certainly in the last thirty, forty years of his life, that's one of the key things that was propelling him. I want to make sure that people understand he was global before people even understood international.

Q: So positioning him that way historically?

Davidson: It's positioning him that way. To do that we have to show him and we need to show his art in all parts of the world. That said, he will always be heralded as an American artist. I think that that's a very interesting combination, somebody who has this incredible rootedness in America and in an American visual culture, who has such an outward looking perspective. That, I think, is another one of the Foundation's really substantial missions.

Q: You've just said that you think that you will take a step back as far as curating and that you want to allow the next batch of people to start doing that.

Davidson: Yes.

Q: So what is your responsibility or relationship with these next people?

Davidson: Well, it's to impart a knowledge, I think. To light a fire. To share my enthusiasm for the work and to try to make them understand. I think every generation brings a different set of eyes and ears and intellectual process to looking at a body of work or a career of an artist and we need to hear what that is. I think I have a much more formal engagement with Bob's work.

That's also personally how I'm structured, whereas somebody might have a much more critical theory look at it. We need to hear all of that. We need to be as open as Bob was to interpretation and not control how people examine or talk about the work unless they're just flat out wrong, which has happened. There have been, over the years, certain people—certain art historians—whose take is just completely contrary to what Bob was really about and they've tried to build an argument in falsity. I do think we have a certain responsibility without being overly judgmental to ensure that it is honest.

Q: Have there been moments or encounters or discussions that you've had that have made you aware of the next generation's take on the work and how it may be different from your own?

Davidson: No, I think it hasn't come, it hasn't arrived at our doorstep yet. I think we're open to it and we just wait for it. It's interesting now, working with the curators for the survey that Tate and MoMA are going to do. I have the most direct engagement with Tate. People are finally understanding the collaborative nature of Bob's work. They're finally understanding the performative nature of it [even though the '97 retrospective presented this material first in a more integrated manner]. Those are the areas that will be brought forward in that presentation and that's terrific because it hasn't really been seen before or through that lens. So that'll be interesting. Actually if I were to do a show right now of Bob, I think I would do it based on materials.

Q: Okay.

Davidson: And how the materials loop in and out or reappear or something like that, that kind of sense of reused vocabulary through materials. Maybe I'll just write an essay, I don't know. But I do think that that's a really essential aspect to his work that people haven't cottoned onto yet.

Q: Okay.

Davidson: I do hope I do other shows of Bob's. I love making shows so—

Q: Yes. Are there any particular projects or professional engagements that I haven't asked you about that you would like to include?

Davidson: No, I think we've covered the ground. I feel like I have a pretty strong network of museum and commercial associates and I try to always, within context, promote Bob in that way. I see that very much as my role now. I'm sad not to be on the board because I really enjoyed that and it was an interesting growth process for the board and also for me professionally.

Q: What can you no longer—what's the engagement that you're missing?

Davidson: Well, a board has the fiduciary responsibilities and therefore sets policy and so I can only make recommendations. I can't vote anymore.

Q: Okay.

Davidson: So that's what one misses.

Q: Alright. So maybe just a final question. You said that you miss Bob and he still feels like an active friend to you. Maybe you can just say a few words about the kind of friend that he was or the kind of presence that he was in your life.

Davidson: Well, he was—Sorry.

Q: That's okay.

Davidson: I didn't mean to get upset. He was totally evenhanded. He was always funny. He was kind of like a father to me. We shared a lot of things in an odd way. We both have American Indian heritage. We're both a little bit dyslexic and we both love to watch television. I think that when we first met and I think I may have said this earlier, he was so enamored with Walter and so respected him—and Walter and I had one of those healthy push/pull relationships. Walter could be very, very demanding, and sometimes you just let it happen and other times you just had to say, "Okay, enough," and stand up to him. I think that's how we ended up having such a long professional relationship, is because I often stood up to him. Bob told me later that he mistook our quibbling as kind of—he felt sorry for me.

So I think between that and David recognizing that I had—David and I always just got along so well and we have a very similar visual take on things and that really matured when we were doing the retrospective. I think that was how we were able to do all these other shows. I think in his quiet way, David helped convince Bob that I was going to be a good egg for them. I could deliver on some of the longer-term things that needed to happen. I don't know. It was like being brought into a family. So in that sense that's why I say he was a little bit like a father figure because he was at the top of the hierarchy of that family of people who worked for him.

I also had different experiences than the other people who were in either New York or Captiva because I had already gone through a private to public transition, having worked at Menil and having lost its founder when Mrs. de Menil died and seeing those transitions. So I could understand in a way what I think nobody here was willing to think about—what may start happening after Bob died.

Q: Oh, that's interesting.

Davidson: I of course couldn't predict the activity of the trustees and the greed of that, but anyway. I think it helped—and my professional experience has helped start to professionalize how the Foundation functions. That's one of the things I've been very involved with.

Q: Right. Right.

Davidson: Because when somebody passes on with the kind of reputation that Bob had and the responsibility to maintaining what's left and honoring their wishes and promoting their legacy, that requires a lot of experience and forward thinking and a lot of professionalism. I think that was the key thing that I brought and still try to bring.

Q: Right. Yes, that's very interesting. I was involved in this project last year on Exit Art [New York] and it was sort of—it was a study of the final year of Exit Art after—I'm forgetting her name. The founder, the woman passed away [Jeanette Ingberman], and it was asking a lot of the same questions about what happens when you have a founder who is no longer.

Davidson: Yes. Because the vision—you're left in an odd way visionless. With Bob it's different—or with an artist—because the vision exists in the work. But in terms of decision making and such, and of course the mistake everyone makes is, oh well, this is what they would have wanted to do because I knew him. I saw that with Mrs. de Menil dying. At the end of the

day, you don't really know what people want. You may have a good sense of it, but there are so many decisions that people make on the fly or—when you're living and confronted with things, you make decisions based in your knowledge and your judgment, but there are so many different factors that come into how those decisions are made and you can't be in somebody's head. So when they're no longer there—

Q: You have to make decisions differently.

Davidson: Yes. And they have a different responsibility to them. It's quite simple when—like how Bob said, “Oh, we're not going to do that venue,” the fifth venue of the retrospective.

Today, I couldn't make a decision like that, but he could because he was the artist and it was his life and that's what he wanted to do.

Q: Right.

Davidson: So it's really a lot of growing pains when that happens, but particularly for the people who are left.

Q: Right.

Davidson: They have to keep working and yet the work that they have to do is very different from the work that they were doing before.

Q: Right.

Davidson: I feel very lucky that I transitioned through that, but it was also because I have held on professionally to my own curatorial and museum work. And that's informed a lot of how things have been done.

Q: Alright. Well I think I'm finished.

Davidson: Thank you. It's been a wonderful process.

Q: Thank you.

Davidson: I have really enjoyed it.

Q: Me too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]