

RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Sidney B. Felsen

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sidney B. Felsen conducted by James McElhinney on November 9, 2013 and December 13, 2013. This interview is part of the 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.

Transcriber: 3PM

Session #1

Interviewee: Sidney B. Felsen

Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: James McElhinney

Date: November 9, 2013

Q: This is James McElhinney speaking with Sidney Felsen on Saturday the—

Felsen: Ninth.

Q: —ninth of November—thanks—2013.

Nice to meet you. This is a terrific opportunity to continue the conversation about your work with Bob Rauschenberg. And this is a marvelous room. I think we should probably say we're in the Veterans Room at the Seventh—

Felsen: Regiment.

Q: —Regiment Armory on Park Avenue in Manhattan.

Felsen: And Bob was a veteran.

Q: Bob was a veteran.

Felsen: And I'm a veteran.

Q: But he was Navy, right?

Felsen: Yes, I was in the Army.

Q: So just a little context, where did you grow up and—

Felsen: I was born in Chicago. And when I was a young boy, eight years old, my family started going to Los Angeles every summer. So we did it for, I think, six years in a row and we all fell in love with Los Angeles. So in 1939, when I was fourteen years old, we moved to Los Angeles. So I've grown up here, the rest of my life, in Los Angeles.

Q: And you were in the Army?

Felsen: I was in the Army Air Corps. At that time, the Air Corps was part of the Army, before it became a separate service. I was in the service for thirty-three months, thirty-one months in Europe. When I came home I was twenty-one years old. I started going to college then.

Q: And you attended a college or—

Felsen: University of Southern California.

Q: Right, University of Southern California.

Felsen: I majored in accounting [laughs] and graduated.

Q: When was the first time you were mindful of being in the presence of a work of art?

Felsen: Well, it's a story. You want to hear the story? [Laughs]

Q: Sure.

Felsen: I had zero interest in art all through high school and college. I was afraid of it really, because I didn't know or understand anything about it. But I had a girlfriend at that time—after I was out of college—and her family was collecting art. I would go to their apartment. I liked her, and I liked her family, and I didn't understand why they liked these terrible things on the wall. [Laughs] They were very abstract. They were, like, Jackson Pollock or [Willem] de Kooning or something. But it got my curiosity. Because why did these really nice, good people—why were they interested in this? So I started reading about art. Then I started going to art galleries. Then I took a painting class. Then I decided I wanted to go to art school but I was already out of college and I had an accounting office. So at nighttime and on weekends I started going to art school and I went for fifteen years. I started with painting, drawing, sculpture, the usual routines. But I found ceramics and the wheel-throwing and the porcelain. I fell in love with that so I did that for many, many years.

Q: But you didn't have a *Blue Boy* moment? [Note: Refers to Thomas Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy* (1770), the first original oil painting that Rauschenberg saw at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California]

Felsen: No, not at all. I didn't even go to the Huntington. No, mine was more, really, just looking at contemporary art. I went into contemporary art galleries in Los Angeles. We're talking about, probably 1953 or something like that, '54. It was a totally different world then. The art world was minuscule compared to what it has become now, whether it's artists, schools, galleries, collectors. It was all very minimal compared to now. But I think my interest was just more generally—all of a sudden the idea that I wanted to paint. I didn't feel I was "an artist" like a practicing artist. I wanted to paint for fun and that's really what happened.

Q: How did you come to be in a position to organize Gemini [Graphic Editions Limited]?

Felsen: Well, what happened was, by being around art schools all the time, my life was becoming more and more directed into and immersed in the art scene in Los Angeles. And a lot of my friends were painters or just collectors. I had some art galleries as clients and this one gallery was importing prints from Europe. They were bringing [Pablo] Picasso and [Marc] Chagall and [Joan] Miró. And I had a close friend from college days who—he and his wife were collecting art and one day I just said to him, "Why don't we

start a workshop in Los Angeles? It would be fun. We'd get to know the artists and we'd build a collection of prints for ourselves." So his answer was, "I don't know anything about it. But if you want to, do it and I'll support you." And I didn't know anything about it. [Laughs]

So we needed to have a printer but we agreed we would start a print studio. We found a printer named [Kenneth E.] Ken Tyler and he had a going shop that was a shop-for-hire, contract printer. You're an artist. You'd take your work to him. He prints it for you, charges you a fee, and hands it to you. We wanted to become a publishing house, meaning we invite the artists to come to work with us. We own the art. We pay the artist a royalty. We pay all the expenses of the project.

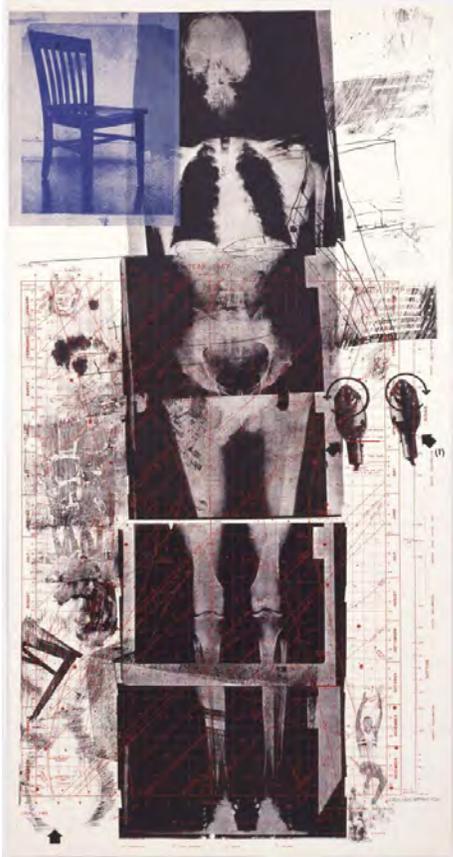
So we started out in January and February of 1966. Josef Albers was the first artist that worked with us and he did a project called *White Line Squares* [1966]. Then Man Ray came to Los Angeles because he had a retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art] and he stayed at my partner's house so we got to be friendly with him. He came in the studio and was hanging around. He did three prints, two on Plexiglas and one on paper.

We were chasing the Abstract Expressionists. We thought, go for the old timers. So we went to see Edward Hopper and Hans Hofmann and de Kooning and [Mark] Rothko. Nothing came out of it, really. But in those days, from probably three or four years earlier, where Bob Rauschenberg used to come to Los Angeles for—I think he had a

show at the Dwan Gallery [Los Angeles] in the early sixties [*Robert Rauschenberg*, 1962]. Then he did a program of rollerskating with a parachute called *Pelican* [1963] in Culver City [note: Rauschenberg performed the work as part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art–sponsored event Five Choreographers in Three Dance Concerts, Rollerdrome, Culver City, California, April 20, 1966]. We got to know Bob a little bit and so we asked him if he would come and do a project with us and he said yes. So in February of 1967, I pick him up at the airport. I said, “Do you have any idea what you would like to do?” And he said, “Well, I’m thinking about doing a self-portrait of inner man.” “Okay,” I say to myself, “what does that mean? I don’t know.” So, anyway, I didn’t ask him what it meant. I left him off at his hotel.

I picked him up in the morning and he said, “Do you have any friends that are X-ray doctors?” It just so happened that probably my closest friend from high school was an X-ray doctor so I took him to the doctor. Bob wanted to do an X-ray of his body and he wanted one plate—6 feet—of his whole body. We found out there is no such thing in the United States—except that Eastman Kodak in Rochester had a six-foot machine. But all X-ray machines are one-foot. He didn’t want to go back to Rochester so he had his body X-rayed in the six plates and he developed a print called *Booster* [1967], which was really his skeleton, so to speak. It was 6 feet tall and 3 feet wide. And it became, and still is, a classic in the print world. If you ask people what are some of the most important prints done in the United States in the last fifty or sixty years, everybody would include *Booster*. That was Bob’s beginning at Gemini. He did a series called *Booster* and *7 Studies* [1967]. And, typical of him, *Booster* was the main image and then he took seven

different pieces of *Booster* and put it on seven different plates and they were called *Test Stone 1, 2, 3, and 4*. So that became his first series at Gemini.



Robert Rauschenberg
Booster, 1967
Lithograph and screenprint on paper
72 x 35 1/2 inches (182.9 x 90.2 cm)
From an edition of 38, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg
Test Stone 3 (Booster Study), 1967
Lithograph
23 x 31 inches (58.4 x 78.7 cm)
From an edition of 71, published by Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: When he arrived in Los Angeles, what was your encounter like with him? What was he wearing? Did he arrive in a limo loaded with dogs or—

[Laughter]

Felsen: No, honestly, I don't remember what he was wearing. [Laughs] But for later in this talk, he had the greatest wardrobe I've ever seen. Well, first of all, very friendly immediately. I pick him up. It was just Bob and me. He didn't have an entourage. I picked him up at the airport. I don't know how he got to the airport. Very friendly—well, immediately won the hearts of everybody in the workshop. I mean, that's something about Bob that he was able to translate his openness and his respect for everybody else. So he immediately was revered and cherished in the workshop.

Q: So his interactions with all of the printers and all of the people working under your control was very cordial and informal and—

Felsen: Yes, you immediately start to—maybe you don't love him in the first moment, but you certainly like him. He made people feel part of his project almost from day one—that they were really involved in and a part of his project. You know, what we do at Gemini is collaboration. Gemini has a team of very high-skilled printers and so the idea is it's a collaboration between an artist, who does all the imagery creating, and the printers who have the knowledge of what the processes will do. Generally speaking, the printers know more about printing than the artists do and so it's the collaboration of these two working together, hand-in-hand. And it's very fruitful.

I was thinking about this this morning, as far as collaboration. [Takes out notes.] You know, what I said was [reading] it's concentrated, it's demanding, it's dynamic. It's

handholding, it's high energy, it's learning. It's long hours, it's passionate, soul-searching. It's a try, try, and try. That was one of my thoughts.

The other thing I said was [reading] Bob was a super collaborator. He made everyone feel important. He made everyone feel they were an important part in the making of his art. He made everyone feel they were trusted. Everyone was happy. It's a serious time and an important time that needed serious concentration. But he made it fun to do. Everyone was totally involved. There was excitement, electricity.

With Bob, a lot of times you'd work twenty-four hours around the clock, where he would stay up for twenty-four hours and our printers would, say, work ten or twelve hours and rest for a while. We'd rotate the printers in and out. It was a magical time.

Q: When he was working on *Booster*, how long did he stay in Los Angeles?

Felsen: I'd say seven to ten days. And he works every day, weekends. You work all the way through.

Q: So was he in a hotel? Was he—

Felsen: Yes. Well, Los Angeles—we'd always say to an artist, "Where do you want to stay?" And Bob always wanted to stay at the Chateau Marmont, which is very glamorous. It's a hotel that—the rockers all stayed there, and—

Q: John Belushi died there. Yes.

Felsen: Right. And movie stars would stay there. But it was a most unusual place. Where you'd walk in. You'd go to the registration counter. You'd get in an elevator. You'd go up to your room. You never saw anybody! I've been there a hundred times, taking artists in and out. And you'd see them sometimes down around the desk and all that but the halls were always empty. It was very quiet. And it was the "in" place in Los Angeles. Bob loved it there.

Q: It still has that reputation, I guess, as a—

Felsen: Yes, no doubt.

Q: So you would have printers working around the clock in shifts with him?

Felsen: Yes.

Q: So his—

Felsen: So again, during this time what we're talking about, we call it a "proofing session," meaning that it's experimental. The artist—he or she is trying to accomplish what they want to accomplish. In our program, the idea is you try and you try to find it,

the artist says, “Yes! That’s what I want.” Then he or she signs it RTP, which means Right To Print. Or the French call it “bon à tirer.” It’s like a license to us to go make an edition. When the artist is there, they make the first impression, and then we take that and—I think, *Booster*, there’s thirty-eight examples of it. So we printed thirty-eight prints. Printing in a shop like ours, it’s color by color. It’s not any kind of a chemistry formula. So if it’s a six-color print, that means the paper goes through the press six times and each time a different color goes onto it. And again, at that time, *Booster* was believed to be—and we still think it was the largest hand-printed print made up to that time. It was 6 feet vertical and 3 feet horizontal. And in those days, prints were, like, 18 by 20 inches, or 22 by 30 inches was considered pretty good-sized. 30 by 40 inches was big! And Bob came along. He just wanted to make—because those were the days when the contemporary artists were making huge canvases. And so Bob wanted to bring printmaking into that realm.

Q: So did he express that as a goal to you?

Felsen: Not really. I don’t think so. I think it was more of a question, how large can you print? And then we gave him the answer.

Q: Well, how did he shape his ideas verbally to people? How would he walk up to a printer and describe what he wanted?

Felsen: [Laughs] Wow. [Pauses] I’m not sure I can answer that.

Q: Well, I guess I'm asking because, while I never had the pleasure of his acquaintance, I have heard a number of audio tracks of him speaking. I've heard people describe his uncanny ability to listen to multiple conversations at once, and his having constantly the TV on, or the radio on, and having a very particular way of speaking. [Robert] Bob Petersen described him always with a glass of Jack Daniels and taking a sip and holding it in his mouth.

Felsen: In the early days, yes.

Q: The early days, yes.

Felsen: Yes, always.

Q: But reenact, if you will, an exchange between Bob Rauschenberg and the printers, dealing with some technical issue that arises.

Felsen: It's funny. I think of Bob as saying very little, ever, about art. But as far as transferring information when he wanted—see, I probably wasn't at the presses like that.

So I don't know exactly what—

Q: There's a story about a stone cracking.

Felsen: Yes, well, that was when he was at ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York]. A stone cracked. And the people in the print shop would say, “Oh, my god! The stone is cracked!” And Bob said, “No, no, no. That’s great! Let’s leave it the way—print it as a cracked stone.” But it was typical of Bob. He wanted to use something that was there and available and don’t tell him that it’s not to be used. “No” is not a part of his vocabulary. So they just printed—what they did is they blocked the stone together to hold it because otherwise it would just split apart. But the printing they blocked in. So it became a famous edition. It’s called *Accident* [1963]. That was probably in 1963 or something like that. I mean, as far as *Booster*—I’m just thinking of my experiences with him. He wanted to go—



Robert Rauschenberg
Accident, 1963
 Lithograph
 41 1/4 x 29 1/2 inches (104.8 x 74.9 cm)
 From an edition of 29, published by
 Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip,
 New York

Q: So you had to take him to the doctor? [Laughs]

Felsen: No—well, I did that several times. No, I took him to the *Los Angeles Times*. Because he was always recording the feelings of the moment. So in the print of *Booster* there is the image of his skeleton. But there's all kinds of things that are placed around it. I took him to the *L.A. Times*. We got permission to look through their type barrels of the last three or four days. Because I think after a few days they just sold the metal back for scrap and so he picked out type that he wanted. He picked out pictures of basketball players. He always liked action. That was really a lot of the theme of what his imagery was. He'd pick out these different images and come back to the shop and then we'd transfer them to printing plates. Then he'd look and see what he wanted to use and not use.

Q: Did he—

Felsen: I mean, seriously, in all the years—in a lot of ways, other than his lovers, I think my wife and I were probably closest to Bob as anybody. He never talked about art. He never talked about his own art. If you asked him a question, he'd give you an answer. But he had no interest. It seemed like when he finished something, he's through with it. You go on to the next thing. And he really didn't have—

Q: Yes, there was a quote I saw. And it's a paraphrase that he said: when you get good at anything, move on to the next thing.

Felsen: Oh yes. He never looked back at what he did. He almost didn't seem interested in it. Where some artists would use a theme, and then work the theme, and work the theme—as soon as he did something, it was like, that was it. He wanted to go on to the next thing.

Q: That is interesting because I think a lot of artists, when they fall into something that might be deemed to be successful, that might have an audience, or might have a—

Felsen: Yes. Well, it's true. They sort of live off of their—they establish a reputation—

Q: A brand.

Felsen: —or a style. And then they live off of it. If you look at Gemini, he probably came out maybe fifty times in a thirty-year period and probably did twenty or twenty-five projects. And every one was different. He started out just working on paper but then he started working on fabric. Then he started working on metal. And he started working on plastic. It just went on and on and on.

Q: Was he open during the *Booster* project to input from the printers?

Felsen: Oh, yes, definitely. You could have something out there that was a question about how to do it, or do you really want to do it this way? And the printers would—yes, absolutely, he would listen to people. If you were talking to him, he would listen to every

word you said and not interrupt you. He'd really absorb what you were saying and then probably come back and say something to you. A great listener. Yes.

Q: But I also understand that he had people—well, like [Donald] Don Saff—who would come up with an idea and bring it to Bob Rauschenberg. Together they would develop it into a new work.

Felsen: Yes, well, again, everybody functions differently. Don was a person who did that. I wasn't. I'm not. [Laughs] I never give an artist a suggestion of what to do. And he liked to. Bob was a listener so I'm presuming that—Don Saff and Bob and I didn't work together other than one particular moment. So I don't have the experience of those. But I didn't do that at all. But Saff was a working artist and he probably suggested things to Bob that he took.

Going back to *Booster*, I'm just thinking, one of the first thoughts that came up was—again, these were very early days—Bob helped us get connected to other artists. The first experience was Frank Stella, who at that time was married to Barbara Rose. Barbara Rose was an art critic and a writer. They signed a contract to come to Irvine, California and there was the University of California at Irvine and so Frank was supposed to teach painting and Barbara was going to teach art history and art criticism. And they had two kids. When they got to California, they found out that you had to sign a loyalty oath to the United States government to be able to teach in the University of California system. Well, Barbara signed it and Frank wouldn't. He was obstinate. He resented the fact that

he'd have to sign it. So he was in Irvine. He had nothing to do. And so, going back to what you've already learned about Bob—where he liked to have people around him—well, Frank would drive up almost every day and hang around Bob for hours. I think Bob enjoyed it. So there was a certain amount of cronyism going on. Frank was twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old and Bob was probably about forty years old.

After six or seven days of Frank visiting—we had limestones around our shop in stacks. There was a stack of limestones that were 17 by 23 inches. They were very thin. So they were, therefore, manageable to pick up. And Bob picked up a stone and put it in Frank's hands, and said, "Why don't you go back in the corner and draw?" I never knew whether he was trying to help us only, or if he was trying to get Frank interested, or whether he needed a little more privacy and Frank was with him all the time. [Laughs] But anyway—

Q: Or all of the above.

Felsen: All! So Frank went back in the corner and drew a series—it was called *Black Series* [1967], which was based on his *Black Paintings*. And it became an icon in the print world. It turned Frank on to making prints and he became a great printmaker in the history of the art scene.

So we're still in that, probably, second year of Gemini. Then we started talking to Claes Oldenburg. Claes was in New York, we were in Los Angeles, and Bob was in the studio. He kind of grabbed the phone out of one of our hands and said to him, "You've got to

come here! It's really great here. It's sunshine, palm trees, ocean. And, yes, come!" And Claes came. Then I got brave. I wrote a letter to Jasper Johns and then Jasper came out. I presume one of the reasons Jasper came was because, already, Bob was here, and Frank and Claes. So within three years, Gemini had all these great artists working with—and Roy Lichtenstein came that year, and [Edward] Ed Ruscha, and [Kenneth] Ken Price. So we had started a workshop for fun to be around the artists. We had no idea that it would become a business, that possibility. Within two years you could see, wow! I just thought maybe it was a fluke. That it would last for a little bit of time and then it wouldn't go on. But the third year was the same thing and then it went on. So yes, it's now forty-eight years later. I think it's for real. But he was so instrumental in helping us to get started.

Q: Didn't Ed Ruscha work for you at one point?

Felsen: No, what happened was *Artforum*, the magazine, started in San Francisco and then it moved to Los Angeles and it was on La Cienega [Boulevard]. It was about five blocks away from Gemini. And so, when Albers finished his first project, *White Line Squares*, we decided to put a full-page ad in the magazine. I carried the copy of the ad our graphic designer did over to the office of *Artforum*. I handed it to this kid and he laid it out. Well, within three or four years, I realized that kid was Ed Ruscha.

Q: Oh, I see.

Felsen: So he worked for us indirectly but he didn't work for us. He did—

Q: He came to you later as an artist in his own right.

Felsen: In 1967 or '68, he did a print that said "1984" that had a fly on it [*1984*, 1967].

This was in 1967.

Q: There's a lot of interest in trying to understand Bob Rauschenberg's relationship with Albers because he had worked with him briefly at Black Mountain College. I gather it was not the warmest of relationships but—

Felsen: Well, Bob said that Albers told him he was the worst student he ever had. But Bob also said that Albers was great for him because he was very organized and disciplined. And Bob wasn't. He maybe learned—he knew he had to have that to be a success. And Albers helped him to—and Bob became very organized. When I first met Bob, first went to his studio, he had shelves and shelves and shelves of—he had taken photographs out of magazines or newspapers. This was about basketball, this was about boating, this was yachting, this was about political. And he did it. When I went out to Captiva [Florida], he'd pull the pages of the magazine and he'd do the sorting and all that. Then when he was going to do something, he'd pull out this group and he'd look at it and find something he wanted and transfer it. So anyway, that's what I know about Albers. Bob had a lot of respect for him.

Q: Did they have any contact after that year in North Carolina? I mean—

Felsen: I don't know.

Q: —did Rauschenberg ever go up to Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] when Albers was there?

Felsen: If I had to guess, I'd say no, but I'm not sure.

Q: Not sure. This interest in organization, collecting images—David White shared that when he came on board years ago, that Rauschenberg already had files of clippings in his catalogues. And he was—

Felsen: Major collection.

Q: —had already started archiving things. I guess the image a lot of people have of his work, based on his imagery, is that it's got elements of Dada, [Kurt Schwitters] *Merzbau* [1923–37], a little of this, a little of that. The Combines and all of that seemed very kind of chaotic in its aesthetic. But I mean, how would you describe his sense of order?

Felsen: Well, I think, again, the order that I saw was how he would sort. Then, when he was working on something, he would take out a cluster, he would take out a subject. He would fan it out and then he would look and he'd pick this—that's what I want to use and that's what I want to use. So it definitely was like formulas, the way he did things.

Forever, throughout his—we're sort of doing this thing—time-wise I can't think of the word—but I'm going to skip ahead a touch.

Bob used other people's imagery—based on my experience with him—all the way through 1978 or 1979. And he did a series with us called *Hoarfrost* [*Edition*, 1974–76], which was printing onto fabrics. They were huge pieces. So he took a photograph that was about, maybe, 2 inches by 2 inches out of a magazine. It was a Nikon camera advertisement of an Acapulco diver and he made this print called *Pull* [*(Hoarfrost Edition)*, 1974]. And the diver became, maybe, 6 feet tall. It was beautiful. Of the whole series of *Hoarfrosts*, it stood out as the most appreciated, cherished piece. The photographer saw this image in a magazine and sued Bob and Gemini. And he said, “You've stolen my imagery.” Well, the painful thing for Bob—here's this person who was such a strong supporter of artist rights and here was an artist who was saying, “You ripped me off.” And, if you looked at that piece, there is almost no relationship because of scale differences. We had a great copyright attorney.



Robert Rauschenberg
Pull (Hoarfrost Edition), 1974
Offset lithograph and screenprint
transferred to collage of paper
bags and fabric
85 x 48 inches (215.9 x 121.9 cm)
From an edition of 29, published
by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

The image of the diver in *Pull* is
after a photograph by Morton
Beebe.

Q: Do you recall his name?

Felsen: Yes, Irwin Osher. A lot of times he'd be called to Washington to meet with some of the committees when they wanted to talk about copyright law, and he taught in several universities. So Irwin said that the copyright was no good. It was in a magazine and the copyright was no good. So we went through a few depositions and I was deposed. And I think Bob was. One thing that they found out was there wasn't much money involved. Almost all printmaking projects have little money involved in them. Artists do it for a love and appreciation of the process. And we do it because we love what we're doing and you make a living out of it. So once the photographer heard the amount of money that was involved in it, I think he lost his gusto to begin with. I believed Irwin that the plaintiff couldn't win anyway. He didn't have a good copyright. Finally, he signed off.

We gave him one example of *Pull*, the piece that was made, and Bob signed a paper saying that if ever *Pull* was shown in public, it had to have a photo credit for this photographer.

But what happened was it completely changed Bob from using other people's photographs. From that moment on, he took his own photographs, or had people take pictures for him. Later on, when he became disabled, so to speak, he would have people take pictures for him. His instructions were, "I want something dumb. I don't want something beautiful and I don't want any story. I want something dumb because I want to make a story out of some dumb pictures." That's the instructions he gave me.

[Laughter]

Q: You are yourself a photographer, and the author of a book of portraits [*The Artist Observed*, 2002].

Felsen: Yes.

Q: How long were you doing photography?

Felsen: I did it as a young boy—in those days, everything was film—learned how to process, print. It was always for fun. I was always an amateur. When Gemini started, for the first few years Gemini hired a professional photographer, Tyler ran the workshop, and

I ran everything else in those early days. I really didn't take any pictures. But Tyler left in 1973 and there I was with all these superstars. [Laughs] So I started taking pictures. And I've always felt this: I'm not a great photographer but I have great opportunities. What happened was, when I realized where I was in this opportunity, I started buying good cameras. I started buying Leicas. Before that I was having ordinary, run-of-the-mill cameras. So when I look at my pictures now from 1973 or '74, they weren't too good. [Laughs] But I'm self-taught, so to speak. And so now, I think I'm okay. I'm definitely not a great photographer and I don't understand light at all. But I have about thirty-five thousand pictures now, with Bob and Jasper and Ellsworth [Kelly]. They're all working or playing or travel. It's great—I like what it is. And my photographs are used a lot. I get a lot of inquiries that, truthfully, I don't charge for. I feel like the artists are my pals and I don't want to make a business out of selling their photographs.

But in answer to that book, I like the pictures in it that I took. But the man who did the book, that book is beautiful. It's black-and-white. And I looked at a lot of black-and-white books by a lot of different publishers. And I thought that—Twin Palms [Publishers], they're stationed in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the headquarters—they were the best books I saw. And so I went to Jack Woody and found out after I started talking to him, I knew him. We had spent some time together. So he did the book and I thought he did a great job.

Q: There's something about the black-and-white as opposed to color that, in a way, it sort of filters the data out of it. And there's something—

Felsen: There's a purity to it.

Q: —magical and pure about it, yes.

Felsen: I agree. However, five or six years ago, I picked up a digital camera and used it. And I must say, it is so easy. It's so great to look at the picture you just took that I've stopped using my film cameras. I'm using all digital now. I bought Leica digital cameras. I think, probably, the film pictures were better but it's just—I can't resist using a digital camera.

Q: Well, the physicality of the chemistry, and the paper, and all those different variables, there's a kind of alchemic quality to it. Speaking of which, I know that a number of the artists you worked with—Oldenburg certainly—didn't Rauschenberg also have something to do with the Maurice Tuchman exhibition at L.A. County [Museum of Art]?

Felsen: Well, he did a piece in it.

Q: The *Art and Technology* show [1971]?

Felsen: Yes, *Art and Technology*. Yes, in 1969, Maurice married artists to technology and technology to artists, and it got many of the big companies to work with the artists. Bob worked with—I know the company but I can't think of it [note: Teledyne Industries] he

did a piece called *Mud Muse* (1968–71). It's like a big pool table and it's got mud and it keeps bubbling all the time. It's kind of a great piece. I think it's a classic.

Q: Where is it now?

Felsen: I don't know [note: Collection of Moderna Museet, Stockholm]. When you call the Rauschenberg Foundation now, you hear *Mud Muse* bubbling. [Laughs]

Q: Oh, that's their hold music?

[Laughter]

Felsen: Yes, right.

Q: Funny.

Felsen: Oh, it was a big company, and I know it. But, anyways, it's in the book.

Q: Well, that can be researched. It's a famous catalogue, too, that exhibition. [*Art and Technology: A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art 1967–1971*. Exh. cat. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971.]

Felsen: Yes, that was great.

Q: So maybe we should take a break and—

Felsen: Okay.

Q: —round up a couple glasses of water.

Felsen: Yes, that's what I want.

[INTERRUPTION]

Felsen: Well, let me just say something to you. It doesn't have to be off the record. But just to give you my feelings, Bob influenced me more than anybody in my life, as far as how he lived his life and—he wasn't a teacher, in the sense that he's not a preacher—but just by being around him. I find myself, regularly, either thinking something or doing something that that's what Bob would have done. That's what he would have said. And I was around him a lot and we had a lot of social time together and—

Q: Do you have a particular example? A particular anecdote or quote?

Felsen: Well, I think, first of all, it would be that “no” is not a part of his vocabulary. He believed, practically speaking, anything was doable. I certainly got better at that. I remember one time we'd come back from lunch and I drove into the parking lot and I

started going into the back door, which would lead you into the workshop. And he said, “No, no! We’ve got to go in the front door. You always want to make an entrance.” Well, and wardrobe—I think my wardrobe was very, very traditional and I probably worked at wanting to keep it sort of neutral. By being around Bob—I’m telling you, the wardrobe this guy had! It was as big as this room. And he had fancy—he had pure dress suits. He had costumes. He had—it was amazing. He loved Los Angeles. Beyond working in the shop, it was essential that we go shopping—Barneys, Saks Fifth Avenue, Mr. Guy, Mayfields etcetera.

Q: His wardrobe. How was it organized? You spoke about his organizing the collage elements, clippings, photos.

Felsen: Well, I went into the closet a few times. Everything was very orderly. I don’t know exactly what the order was. I didn’t pay that much attention. But the guy had a hundred pair of shoes. And [laughs] it was just phenomenal, really.

Q: And you said costumes. What kind of—

Felsen: Well, they were costume-looking things. They were sort of extreme. But he loved to shop and he loved Los Angeles because I think he loved the light, the freedom.

Compared to, say, living in New York. He had freedom in Florida but Los Angeles was like a big city with freedom and shopping. He struck up a lot—we’re not on yet, huh?

We’re not recording?

Q: Yes, we are.

Felsen: Oh, okay. Well, he established a lot of friendships with young artists in Los Angeles. Well-known locally at that time, there was Laddie [John] Dill, and [Charles A.] Chuck Arnoldi, and Tom Wudl, and Ron Cooper, Jim Ganzer. He also struck up friendships with Ed Ruscha, Frank [O.] Gehry, [John A.] Baldessari. [Pauses]

He very much got involved with the movie industry. There was—

Q: There was a story about him and—

Felsen: Gregory Peck.

Q: —Gregory Peck, yes.

Felsen: At Gemini, every once in a while, a movie star would come in and buy something. Not very often, because I think they would be more interested in less serious art in those days. Norman [M.] Lear was friendly with us and he'd come in. He was a serious collector. Norman would invite us to his house, sometimes, where they'd have a Sunday night preview of a movie. Bob was in town so he invited us. We went to the house and Gregory Peck was there. And so Bob and Gregory Peck start talking. And they start talking about creativity and they really struck up a friendship. Apparently, Bob said

to him, “Well, why don’t you come in tomorrow and stay with me while I’m working?” Bob was working on chairs, actual functional chairs. They were made out of brass. He called them *Borealis Shares* [1990]. And he was painting with dyes—colors with these different dyes.

So the phone rings Monday morning and this voice says, “Sid, I don’t know if you’ll remember me. This is Gregory Peck.” I said, “Yes, Gregory, I remember you.” And so he said, “Well, Bob told me that I could come in and spend some time with him.” “Yes, yes, come on in.” He arrived about twelve noon—and this is August and Bob was working outside. He had this big patio and there was like a scrim over the top of it to filter the sun so you could work there and not be outrageously burned by the sun. So for six hours Bob was painting these chairs and Gregory Peck was standing there talking to him. He’d talk with Bob when he painted. And Jack Daniels was flowing for both of them. It was amazing. I photographed the thing. But it started a friendship and I’m not sure it continued. I think they talked to each other once in awhile.

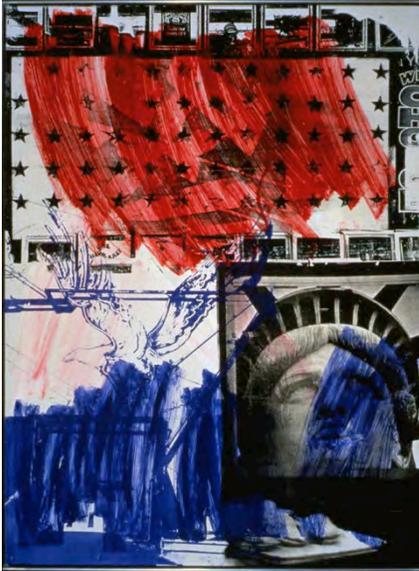


Robert Rauschenberg
Borealis Shares II, 1990
Screenprinting and hand-painted
patinas on brass panels with
aluminum and Lexan
75 x 40 3/4 x 23 inches (190.5 x
103.5 x 58.4 cm)
From an edition of 26 unique
multiples, produced by Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles



Gregory Peck and Rauschenberg at Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, during Rauschenberg's *Borealis
Shares* project, 1990. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen ©
1990

Then Bob made an image for—Norman Lear started an organization called People for the American Way and it was started at about the same time that the Reverend Jerry [L.] Falwell [Sr.] was doing the Moral Majority. And so Norman restarted it to sort of combat the Moral Majority. They had fundraisers where they'd ask artists to do an image and he asked Bob to do an image. Bob did a beautiful image that had an American flag in it. He made a painting. Then, from the painting, he translated it into a print, so we did an edition as a fundraiser for People for the American Way. Gregory bought the painting for his own collection. So that's what I was exposed to as far as Gregory Peck and Bob.



Robert Rauschenberg
People for the American Way Print, 1991
Lithograph and screenprint on paper
48 x 35 3/4 inches (121.9 x 90.8 cm)
From an edition of 75, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Bob became friendly with Dustin Hoffman. Let's see, how'd it go? I think Dustin, who had been hanging around Gemini—Joni [Moisant Weyl] and I knew him—and he asked us if he could be introduced to Bob Rauschenberg. And so the day came when they were going to have lunch together. Joni used to work at Gemini. She was up in front in the sales. And Dustin Hoffman was sitting there with her saying, “How do I look?” And Bob Rauschenberg was in the studio with me. He made himself a paper bow tie and he said, “How do I look?”

[Laughter]

Felsen: These two guys met each other, and then they went off to lunch together. I wasn't involved in that so much. But they became friends.

Bob was very friendly with Dennis Hopper.

Q: Who is also an art collector. So yes—

Felsen: Well, Dennis, first of all, he was a really good photographer. He did great photos. And he was an artist. I don't think he was such a great artist but he worked a lot at art—and he was obviously an actor. So Bob knew him from way back. They had a long history of friendship but when Bob—

Q: He was from Texas, right?

Felsen: See, I don't know where Dennis came from. Was he born in Texas? [Note: Kansas]

Q: I'm not sure.

Felsen: I don't know.

Q: But I just always associate him, first, with that movie *Giant* [1956], which is, of course, a Texas movie.

Felsen: Okay, I don't know. So let's see. Well, Lily Tomlin and Bob were very good friends. She bought a lot of his art, I know.

Q: He ever know Janis Joplin? They were both from the same town.

Felsen: Well, I think—

Q: Port Arthur [Texas], yes.

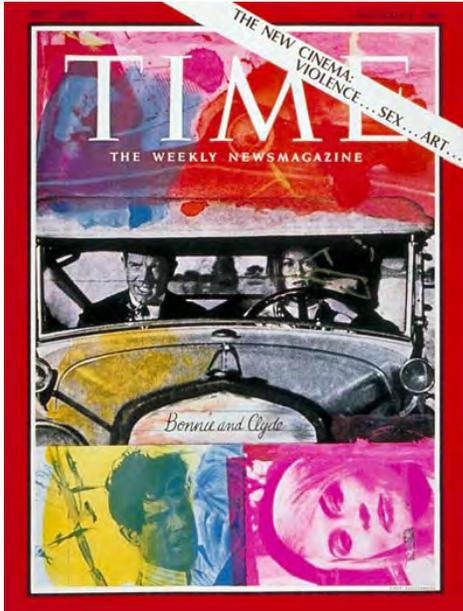
Felsen: —yes, Port Arthur. I think he met her. I'm not sure they were friends but—

Q: They didn't have the same church friends or anything like that. Their moms didn't know each other or—

Felsen: I don't know. He talked about her and I'm pretty sure he met her. Well, there's also a famous pitcher on the New York Yankees, his name is [Ronald A.] Ron Guidry. He was from Port Arthur and Bob didn't know him.

Just trying to think—there were several movies stars. Oh, well, Warren Beatty, which is a story. *Booster* was the first series that Bob did at Gemini. 1968, the next year, we were talking to Bob on the telephone and it was winter and he was talking about how he had this terrible cold. We said, why don't you come out to Los Angeles—the weather's beautiful—and do something in the shop? It was the time when the movie *Bonnie and Clyde* [1967] came out. And the cover of *Time* magazine [note: Rauschenberg created the cover for the December 8, 1967 issue of *Time* magazine], it said, "Sex and Violence in

the Movies,” [“The New Cinema: Violence . . . Sex . . . Art . . . ”] I think was the theme.
So Bob knew Warren Beatty.



Robert Rauschenberg
Cover for *Time* magazine—
December 8, 1967
11 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches (28.3 x
21 cm)

Q: How did they know each other, do you know?

Felsen: See, I don't know. But he knew him. Because he called Warren Beatty and said he was interested in doing a series of prints based on *Bonnie and Clyde*. And Warren Beatty got him a bunch of the placards that are in front of theaters, and stills, and whatever kind of information from the movie. And so Bob did a series. It was called *Reels (B + C)* [1968]—Bonnie and Clyde. Warren Beatty wasn't involved in the project but I think he came in to see Bob one time, while it was happening.

Well, Sharon Stone, he got really friendly with her. And at this time, Darryl [R. Pottorf] was Bob's companion and they had a pretty strong friendship with Sharon Stone. I remember there was a—one of the subjects we want to talk about is philanthropy.



Robert Rauschenberg
Storyline I (Reels [B+C]), 1968
Lithograph
21 1/2 x 17 inches (54.6 x 43.2 cm)
From an edition of 62, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: Philanthropy.

Felsen: You could certainly talk philosophy.

Yes, one of my themes about Bob was, he came out with more pearls of wisdom in one day than most people do in their lives. Everything he—

Q: It's the one-liner. I heard a few of these one-liners from the other people I've interviewed.

Felsen: He had a million of them, but—

Q: Well, let's hear some.

Felsen: Oh, I don't know if I could remember the one-liners. But later on I said if you put a recording device on this guy, probably in three months you'd have the greatest philosophy book ever written. [Laughs] I don't know. Maybe I'll think of some of the things.

When you asked that, all of a sudden the image came up, he was in the workshop and he was making a print about this big and I said, "Wow, that thing is really small," or something. And he said, "Well, I'm making it for that wall between the kitchen and the dining room."

[Laughter]

Felsen: So that's a half of a liner, or something.

Q: Somebody—I think it was Don Saff—told me they were in China and not going to the paper mill. They were supposed to go—I don't know if it was part of the ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] tour or at another point in time. But they were going to go to the world's oldest paper mill and they were in a hotel a couple of miles away. They were never able to go. They were not allowed to go, ultimately, at the

last minute. But he remembered Bob Rauschenberg standing on the balcony of the hotel, having a look out at the mountains with the mist. And he said something like,

“Disappointed again. They were just painting what they saw.”

[Laughter]

Felsen: Well, let’s see, China reminds me of—amongst the things that Bob did were these junkets to—first in France and then, second, to India and, third, to China. The idea was that an artist goes to a hand-making paper mill and the paper becomes the object. You do something with the paper. So for the project in France, he had us print many images that he gave us onto tissue paper. Then he went to the mill. This was in Ambert, France. He had them fuse the thin sheet of paper into the paper they were making.



Rauschenberg and papermaker working on a prototype for *Page 2 (Pages)* (1974), Moulin Richard de Bas paper mill, Ambert, France, August 1973. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni

Q: Yes, I’ve heard that. Don or Bob Petersen described how the tissue that you printed was laid on the paper pulp when it was in the mold. Then it would adhere—

Felsen: It would fuse into the—

Q: —and then after it was pressed and all the water squeezed out of it, it would have been, then, adopted. It became part of the paper itself.

Felsen: Yes, right. And they're beautiful.

Q: So who came up with that idea?



Robert Rauschenberg
Page 2 (Pages), 1974
Molded natural fiber handmade paper
22 inches (55.9 cm) diameter
From an edition of 11, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg
Link (Fuses), 1974
Handmade paper, pigment, and screenprinted
tissue laminated to paper pulp
25 x 20 inches (63.5 x 50.8 cm)
From an edition of 29, published by Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Felsen: He did. Again, before he went to France, he came to the studio and brought all these images and said, “I want you to print these onto this tissue paper.” So it was his idea. But the works that came out of France, some of them were pure white paper. They were called *Pages* and *Fuses* [both series 1974]. The *Pages* were five different images, like a triangle, a square, two rectangles on top of each other, that kind of thing. And the *Fuses* were these images that were fused into the paper and the mold. So that was the first project, as far as the junkets. And Ken Tyler went on that one. The next one was India and I went on that one. So what happened was he asked me to make arrangements to find a paper mill in Japan. We were going to go to Japan. And so I went to this Mr. [Kusuo] Shimizu. He was a famous gallery owner in Japan, in Tokyo, and he arranged for us to go to this paper mill in Japan. This was probably about eight months before we were going to go. Then, probably about two months before we were going to go, he calls me one day, and says, “We’re not going to go to Japan. We’re going to go to India. I decided I want to go to India.” Gulp. [Laughs] Because this Japanese man, he really went through a lot of effort to hook this thing up. So I had to tell him that we weren’t going to go to Japan.

There was a family called the Sarabhais. Anand Sarabhai, he was the oldest son. He was very American. He had gone to university in the United States. He was a scientist. He had taught at UC [University of California] San Diego. And so Bob worked this out with the Sarabhais that we would go to their property in Ahmedabad, which I’d never heard of before. Anyway, we got there. There were two million people there. They had a paradise.

They had a community with a wall built around it, with maybe a hundred servants. And outside, everybody was poor. There were people walking with oxen on the street. We were there twenty-three days, and I tell you, it built up. We felt worse every day. They had cars and drivers and they would drive us from the paradise to an ashram that Mahatma [Mohandas Karamchand] Gandhi established for handicapped people.

There was a paper mill, a leather mill, a book-binding mill. They were all in this one complex. We worked with the handmade paper people. There were two things he did there. One, whatever paper they were making, he again made pieces that were just white pure paper. But then we'd go to town and he'd find that some of the things that were there were bamboo, cane, a lot of fabrics. The Sarabhais owned a mill that had twenty-three thousand employees. They were making fabrics. They also had the Max Factor license for the whole country of India. There was a lot of fabric around. The silks in the city were beautiful, just absolutely gorgeous. So he, again, started implementing these products that were germane to the location into his—the series in India was called *Bones* and *Unions* [both series 1975]. And *Bones* was the white paper. *Unions* were like a piece of paper with struts of bamboo going through it, or cane or rope.

And the people would build their houses out of a form of mud. And it had spices in it that held it together—tamarind and fenugreek—and so we named it rag-mud and Bob made pieces out of the rag-mud. That was that project.



Robert Rauschenberg
Little Joe (Bones), 1975
Handmade paper with bamboo and fabric
24 x 28 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches
(61 x 72.4 x 8.9 cm) dimensions variable
From an edition of 34, produced by Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg
Capitol (Unions), 1975
Rag-mud, bamboo, silk, string,
glass, and teakwood
34 x 53 1/2 x 4 inches
(86.4 x 135.9 x 10.2 cm)
From an edition of 10, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: Yes, there's one of those pieces hanging in Bob Petersen's house.

Felsen: Yes, it could be.

Q: Yes, there is.

Felsen: Let's see. Yes— Petersen went with—

Q: There was another story in India about having to procure Jack Daniels.

Felsen: Well, what happened was we were told that you can't bring any hard liquor into India, and so I just took a chance. I took a case of Jack Daniels. We flew from New York to Bombay [now Mumbai] and then we'd transfer planes to go to Ahmedabad. And you had to go through customs in Bombay and they said, "What is this?" And I said, "It's alcohol." And they said, "Where are you going?" And we said, "We're going to the Sarabhais." They just passed it through. So I brought a case in, which wouldn't hardly be enough for—we were there twenty-three days and a lot of us were drinking. Not like Bob, but we were drinking. However, they had a rationing system. You could get one bottle of whiskey a week. You had to register with the county or something like that. So we did that. There was nine of us, including my young daughter. So I think there were eight adults and I think we had eight coupons, whatever, to get—so once a week, we would go in town and buy from the store that was run by the country. So it wasn't nearly as interesting as Jack Daniels. But it was something to drink.

Q: [Laughs]



Robert and Christopher Rauschenberg, members of the Sarabhai family, Suzanne Felsen, Charles Ritt, Sidney Felsen, and Robert Petersen working on Rauschenberg's *Unions* series (1975), Sarabhai residence, Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni

Felsen: We lived with the Sarabhais and they were Hindus, so therefore, they were vegetarians. We ate at their house every day. It is an amazing house. It was designed by Le Corbusier and all the walls flipped this way [closed] because we were there from May 15 to about June 10—or something like that—and the monsoons were just starting. But those days that we were there, every day was like 120 degrees in the daytime and about 90 at night. They would flip the doors open at nighttime to get some of the cool air in.

So anyway, besides Petersen, one of my printers went. And there was Gianfranco Gorgoni. He's a well-known photographer and we brought him along as the project photographer. We had probably eighteen or nineteen days of vegetarian food every day. None of us were vegetarians. Finally, one night Bob said, "I want to sink my teeth into some meat!" Gianfranco was going to town every day because he was photographing Indira Gandhi. There was a lot of political stuff going on in the city and he knew where all the places were. So he brought back a vat of Tandoori chicken. And the Sarabhais used to say to us, "Don't eat that food in the city. You're going to get sick." And so

[laughs] everybody got sick except my daughter. I think she was probably about ten years old then. Later on, my current partner—Stanley Grinstein and his wife, Elyse Grinstein—went to China with Bob on that project. We had made arrangements with a paper mill on the Yellow River that—

Q: Right. That was the story.

Felsen: But once they got there, they had to stay in the city. So he created some beautiful pieces out of that too.

Q: Well, see, I guess this is a question I'd have regarding the Chinese adventure. Even though the party was denied access to the mill itself, was he able to obtain any paper from the mill?

Felsen: Oh, yes. Something had to be. Sure, they made paper for us. Yes.

Q: And why were they finally—?

Felsen: See, I don't know.

Q: —denied access? Do you know?

Felsen: Look, if I had to guess, it's the Chinese attitude that they don't want people to steal our secrets of what they're making.

Q: So what was the most technically challenging project that you did with Bob Rauschenberg at Gemini?

Felsen: Well, probably *Hoarfrost* [*Editions*]. We bought a hundred copies of the Sunday *Los Angeles Times*. And [pauses]—Roy Lichtenstein used to say that the reason I don't carry a grudge is because my memory is so short.

Q: [Laughs]



Robert Petersen and Rauschenberg placing newspaper on press bed to print *Hoarfrost Editions* (1974), Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1974. Photo: Attributed to Sidney B. Felsen

Felsen: This was 1975. I remember what we were doing was directly transferring—you know the way Bob would work with lighter fluid: you'd take an image and you'd put it on a piece of paper and you'd wet it [rubs hands together] and you'd transfer onto our paper.

Q: Well, explain that process a little bit. I mean, I understand it. I'm a visual artist and have messed around a bit but for a researcher or for a future reader of the transcription, what exactly is the process and the principal behind that process?

Felsen: Well, the idea is you would just take a piece of a newspaper, or it could be some—and you lay it on top of, say, a printing paper and you pour lighter fluid and you rub it. And it just transfers.

Q: The ink would be transferred but—

Felsen: The ink transfers from the newspaper onto the printing paper.

Q: It would be like a mirror image of it?

Felsen: Yes, well, or you could flip the image if you wanted to—

Q: Or you wet one side and then you put it down. So it's whichever side you'd wet.

Felsen: Yes, right.

Q: So it must have been pretty tricky because if you put too much on and rub too much, then you get both sides of the newspaper. It's sort of like—

Felsen: Well, there's some of that but that wasn't the problem we had. You know, again, we're making editions and so what he was doing was transferring and making a work of art on this paper he was transferring onto. But we couldn't print off of that. We tried and tried and tried. It took us a few months to figure out how to get that image onto a printing plate to be able to print off of it.

Q: So was there ever any way devised to do a transfer process like that directly onto a lithostone or plate or—

Felsen: He never tried it with our plates. I don't think so. I don't know.

Q: Well, I understand also that eventually he went to some kind of a vegetable transfer, or abandoned the Zippo approach—

Felsen: The lighter fluids.

Q: —and went to a different kind of chemistry.

Felsen: See, I don't know. I can't help you on that.

Q: So I'd have to talk to one of your printers.

Felsen: I could find out more about that problem because the person who ran that project is still very close to me and I'm with him all the time. But technically we had a lot of trouble with that. Look, Bob's things were challenging.

When he was on his ROCI tour, he was in Uzbekistan, which was the very southern tip of the USSR at that time, and he found this fabric that he called "colored lightning."

Apparently, some families had their own little mills and they would run the fabric and it never repeated itself. It was always different. And so he made a set of them in Uzbekistan. Then he brought them home to us to print onto. Then he wanted to do editions and we didn't have any of this fabric, so there were a lot of problems. Armand Hammer was very strongly connected into Russia. He helped us get back into Russia—one of Bob's persons, Thomas [Buehler], went back to Uzbekistan and we bought over five hundred yards and made the project in Los Angeles. It's called *Samarkand Stitches* [1988].



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

Q: The prints were made directly on this cloth?

Felsen: Yes, they're all fabric. He took photographs in that area. And we printed—at the top or bottom—some of his images.

Let's talk for a minute about Bob's philanthropy. You know, the expression I'd use for Bob is he gave and gave and gave. And then, he gave and gave and gave. He was amazing as far as—he supported almost anything he believed in. Institutionally—and he gave a lot of his time and money—besides, I'd say, world peace, atmospheric issues—

Q: Environmental.

Felsen: Environmental issues, liberal political issues, medical issues and institutions. And he helped people. Whether it was money or time, if somebody needed some kind of help in a way, he always helped. You've probably heard, he created Change, Inc., which was this one organization that—

Q: Well, that started very early. [Note: Rauschenberg established Change, Inc. in September 1970.]

Felsen: —way, way back, yes. Again, the principal of it was, you're an artist, you need money to pay the rent, or pay the electrical bill—it's a one-time only. The amounts changed. It was always the same amount to each person but it may have started with \$500, then went to \$1,000, and it went to \$1,500. All you have to do is prove to them—whatever the rules were—that you were a working artist. And they gave you [money]. He said it was the memories of when he didn't have money to pay his utility bills or dental bills or something like that.

There were so many political campaigns that he helped. We did a lot of fundraiser editions and we always gave one hundred percent of the money to the campaign. Anytime somebody asked Bob, as long as he believed in their politics, he would do it. Very kind, yes.

Q: Yes. I know that Don and Bob Petersen both talked about how he would make editions and donate them to certain causes to be sold and raise money.

Felsen: Yes, and the organization got one hundred percent. Bob didn't take any. We didn't take any. But if I had to guess, I was involved in maybe fifteen political campaigns that he helped somebody with.

Q: Are there any specific ones that stand out?

Felsen: Well, Geraldine [A.] Ferraro, I remember. She was running for something in the state of New York, wasn't it? [Note: United States Senate]

Well, there was Harvey [B.] Gantt, who was a black architect in North Carolina running against Jesse [A.] Helms [Jr.]. [Laughs]

Q: I remember.

Felsen: All you had to do was say "Jesse Helms" in the art scene and any artist would do it. Harvey Gantt was winning until the last week or so. Then the dirty politics came into it and Jesse Helms won by a few points.

Well, [William J.] Bill Clinton—

Q: Did Bob Rauschenberg know the Clintons? Was he—

Felsen: Well, I don't know, really. I mean, he knew them to say hello to them. You know, we were all in the White House together a few times. But I don't—there's an organization called FAPE, which is Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies [note: now Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies]. And the idea is to get American art in the United States embassies around the world.

Q: Well, it's like the USIA [United States Information Agency] programs years ago, Cold War.

Felsen: Same idea. Yes, and it started out where they would call an artist or a publisher and say, "Can we borrow a work of art to send to Iran?" Or something like that. And you'd say, yes, sure. Then the year is up and they'd say, "Can we extend the loan?" Yes, sure. It got to the point where people were getting annoyed by this thing, and so somebody developed the idea, "Why don't we have artists do an edition?" There will be, say, fifty prints. And what they do is they write to the 173—that's the last number I heard—U.S. ambassadors around the world and say, "Do you want this image?" And the first fifty that say yes, they go to that installation. We've been to the Embassies in Berlin, the one in Paris, the one in London. Spectacular, this U.S.A. art all around.

Q: There are amazing art collections in some of these places.

Felsen: Yes, so Bob did one of those and because of that program, we were always invited to the White House once a year for, usually, cocktails with the President and the

First Lady, and then a dinner with the State Department or something like that. He certainly was around the Clintons but—it's funny. Bill Clinton came to Bob's memorial [note: October 27, 2008; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York]. He spoke. He said, "I knew I liked him the minute I met him." [Laughs] That's a Bill Clinton line. He was great. So you know, when I think about it, the fact that Bill Clinton came to speak, maybe there was more connection than I knew.

Q: You worked with him at Gemini and you saw and worked with him, probably—or were around him— when he was working at Captiva.

Felsen: Yes.

Q: How was that different? What was the atmosphere like?

Felsen: [Laughs]

Q: What was—?

Felsen: Well, look. Captiva, that was his palace. First of all, Captiva is very tropical and you live a tropical life down there. I'd say in Captiva he probably started working, usually, four or five in the afternoon and would work until, say, ten at night. At our place, he'd come in like eleven or twelve noon, and work until six or seven. Then we'd all go out to dinner every night. Well, in fact, in the early days, we didn't even do that. He'd

say, “Let’s get Mexican food.” There’s maybe ten people working in the shop so I’d go out and get Mexican food for everybody. The next day, “Let’s have steak tonight,” or something. These are the nights when he’d stay twenty-four hours and not go out. But as the time went by, he wasn’t able to work twenty-four hours anymore and he’d cut it down to civilized time. Then we’d go out to dinner.

When I spoke about Los Angeles—Bob’s a foodie. He was a great chef, for one thing. He was like another one of these never-took-a-lesson but could cook some great things.

Q: Yes, I heard he liked especially Gulf [Coast] fare—

Felsen: He did.

Q: —jambalaya—

Felsen: Yes, he did like that.

Q: —and the shrimp and the spicy food. But I was also told that he never ate—that he seldom ate.

Felsen: Well, I wouldn’t put it that way. I’d say Bob never ate at a party.

Q: Oh, okay.

Felsen: He'd eat when the party was over. But, like in the experiences in the workshop, he ate during that time. And when we would go out to dinner, he always ate. He was very interested in where we were going. He became very friendly with Wolfgang Puck and, you know, the Los Angeles chefs, Nancy Silverton. There's a few. So he'd say, "Let's go to Spago tonight," or "Let's go to Nancy's restaurant tonight," or something like that. The chefs loved him. They'd come over and sit at the table and talk and all that stuff. It was obvious, when Bob was around, you'd get some really great things—extra—sent to the table.

Q: I have this image of him always on his feet.

Felsen: Well, that's true. That's probably true. He stood up all the time, which reminds me of something a little different. Let's say, if we only worked until seven o'clock at night and then we went out to eat, then we'd go back to somebody's house or something like that, Bob would stay up all night. He'd stay up until two or three in the [morning]—and I was hanging out a lot of times and a lot of the other people were but he was amazing. Jack Daniels was always there. He very seldom got drunk, very seldom. He was high, but I practically never saw him when he was slobbering and all this stuff. But you're right, he did stand up all the time.

I had the experience—Joni and I—of driving him to Betty Ford [Center] for a rehab program. The Betty Ford clinic is in Palm Springs. He went in. He was there for probably

a month, four weeks or so. And he came out and he said, “You know, they were really good. They really knew how to handle me.” They had this twelve-step program, which was based on Alcoholics Anonymous and it was religious, and he said, “I didn’t participate in that.” But otherwise, he thought they really did a good job. So when he came out, he was dry. He started drinking Coca-Cola and coffee, both iced, because they looked like Jack Daniels. It lasted a while. And then, pretty soon, he started sipping wine. And then—he stopped drinking Jack Daniels—he started drinking vodka. He would take a glass with maybe just a half-inch of vodka and all water and ice and pretty slowly went back. I’d say once the Betty Ford clinic was over, I don’t think he drank nearly as much as before that. He cut back. He just kept putting more water into the drinks. But he drank a fair amount of wine because I think it had less alcohol content.

Q: But that was also part of his interest in food? Was he knowledgeable about wine? Did he learn about—?

Felsen: I doubt it.

Q: —the different—

Felsen: I don’t think so.

Q: So he didn’t become an oenophile and—

Felsen: I don't think so, no.

Q: —have a wine cellar. He just—

Felsen: Look, it's possible. Later on—really later on—I think he probably knew he had to drink more wine and less hard liquor and so, he may have gotten a little bit—I don't think of him as a guy who really was—

Q: Well, I understood that part of the problem at the end, too, was that he was drinking still—a lot, or a little bit, whatever—but then he was also on the Coumadin, which is a tricky combination.

Felsen: Yes, a blood thinner. Well, look, the last two or three years of Bob's life were terrible for him, as far as his physical condition and all of that.

Q: Well, he had that injury, that fall.

Felsen: The fall, yes. That started it.

Q: Right. I just had a thought. I was wondering, the studio in Captiva, over the years—and again, I want to try to learn a little bit more about his studio practice and his working habits.

Felsen: Okay.

Q: Over the years, obviously, the studio evolved and his working practice evolved. When was the first time you went to Captiva?

Felsen: Probably in 1971 or '72, pretty early.

Q: So what kind of working arrangement had he established there for himself? If we walked in the studio, paint a picture for us. What was the space like? How big was it? How was it laid out?

Felsen: Well, it changed. At first, it was the second floor of one of those buildings, which—it's on legs and underneath was open. But it was like, cars could park there, things like that. I'd say it was similar to this, probably a little bit bigger than this.

Q: Yes, the room we're in, which is, I'd say, probably 25 by 40 feet.

Felsen: I don't know.

Q: Probably about 800—

Felsen: At least, yes.

Q: —900 square feet.

Felsen: The room had a huge table in the center of the room. It had enough room on the outside to walk around it and work around it. But it was all table. He had one studio assistant who I thought was not a very good worker, in the early days.

Q: Not Brice Marden?

Felsen: No, no, no. Okay, Brice was Bob's studio assistant in New York.

Q: In New York.

Felsen: Yes, we're in Captiva now. I don't want to mention names but—it's funny. Later on he built this thing that I call the "Metropolitan Museum." It was huge. And it was—here's the water and then there's 50 feet of land or something like that, of tropical shrubbery, and then this beast. [Laughs] It comes out. It's like a shock to see this building on an island like that. It looked very Metropolitan Museum-ish. It looked weird. I must say for me, it looked sort of very institutional. And it was a huge room. It was one big room. Now, he was already into where he was using [only] his own photographs. So he had, in one part of the building, on the same floor was a fairly large digital section, where his photographs were being printed digitally. Very large, probably 5 feet or something, like 4 or 5 feet. And, again, there were large tables but they were more—two or three tables. And the digital person—there'd be a table and he'd lay out six or eight or ten

pictures that Bob would look at. He would sort them out and cut and paste it down, and that was transferred onto his new paintings.



Rauschenberg's studio, Captiva, Florida, 2012. Photo: Jonas Stirner

Q: So if he was going to turn any of these things into prints—like the painting you spoke about that he did for Norman Lear—would that be photographed then and printed in a mechanical way?

Felsen: Well, not mechanical. No, we always—

Q: It was all hand-printing.

Felsen: —printed by hand. So you'd photograph—in screen-printing, you'd most likely do it—you'd start out with a four-color process, a chemical process. That would be the basic print. Then you'd start doing what we call "touch prints." You heighten the intensity of the orange and then add a little dab here—maybe another ten or twelve or fourteen printings to come back to where you pretty much emulate what he wants.

It didn't necessarily have to be exactly like the original, like the painting was. In most cases, the artist will want a print to be somewhat different than the painting.

Q: Right. Well, this is another idea that keeps coming up. You talked about him wanting, in the *Booster* series, to make a print that would exist on the same scale as the paintings, that would be big, and that would sort of—

Felsen: Yes, okay. But even there, I'd say if I had to guess, if he was doing a painting of *Booster*, it would have been bigger.

Q: It would have been bigger.

Felsen: Yes.

Q: But he wanted to push the boundaries of the printmaking technology.

Felsen: Definitely.

Q: But at the same time, it seems like even though the printmaking technology was designed and is mostly used by a lot of artists as a way of making multiples, he was also finding ways of making each impression, in some way, a unique image.

Felsen: Well, sometimes.

Q: Sometimes.

Felsen: Yes, I'd say that was one avenue that he traveled. And another one was, I'd say the first two or three projects that he did with us were works on paper. That was about scale. Oh, and in fact, in Joni's booth, there's that one up in front, *Sky Garden* [(*Stoned Moon*), 1969]. That's 89 inches vertical. That put *Booster* to shame by scale. So once again, he went bigger. But then, in 1973, he worked on cardboard. It was a series called *Cardbird* [1971]. And it was a combination of real cardboard and paper that was printed as cardboard. Reality and illusion—



Robert Rauschenberg
Sky Garden (Stoned Moon), 1969
 Lithograph and screenprint
 89 1/4 x 42 inches (226.7 x 106.7
 cm)
 From an edition of 35, published
 by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg
Cardbird VI, 1971
 Collage print with corrugated cardboard, tape,
 photo offset lithograph, and screenprint
 26 x 28 inches (66 x 71.1 cm)
 From an edition of 75, published by Gemini
 G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: Like trompe l'oeil.

Felsen: Yes, and then in 1974 was *Hoarfrost* [*Edition*], which is fabrics. It was cottons, cheesecloth, satins, silks, chiffons, all kinds of fabrics mixed together. And then '73 is when he went to France, and '75 was when we went on the India project. Later on he did works on steel—forms that he designed, made in steel that were powder-coated.



Robert Rauschenberg
Ringer State (Hoarfrost Edition), 1974
Offset lithograph and screenprint
transferred to collage of paper and fabric
70 x 36 inches (177.8 x 91.4 cm)
From an edition of 15, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: Well, what do you think inspired him to want to manipulate individual prints and specific editions to be unique?

Felsen: Just for that reason. He loved the idea of everything being different. He understood, in printmaking, in order to make something unique he'd either have to hand color it himself or have a printer do it. And then he felt it wasn't really his so much. But I think it was all about, it's just something different. This was different than that. And they were substantially the same but each one is different.

Q: So with each squeegee pass, he'd change the color a little bit.

Felsen: Something like that. Or he did one series where he had us—this is when he was still using other people's imagery—cut out little strips of imagery. He had us do this though. They were called *Horsefeathers* [*Thirteen*, 1972]. There were strips of imagery but each print had a different image. We would cut out imagery from magazines and cut them into a certain size, and they'd fit into each print.



Robert Rauschenberg
Horsefeathers Thirteen I, 1972
Lithograph, screenprint,
pochoir, collage, and embossing
on paper
28 x 22 1/2 inches (71.1 x 57.2
cm)
From an edition of 76,
published by Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles

Q: So it was really a matter of just whimsy on his part whether he wanted to do that or not.

Felsen: Oh yes, totally. You wouldn't know until the project started. I don't remember him warning us he wanted to do unique things. But he was an early champion of it. Later on it became fairly common in printmaking. Like Bruce Nauman did a series, and it was—"pudding" was the word. He had it printed in eighteen different inks, the word "pudding." It was the *Proof of Pudding* [1975]. See, each one was a different flavor.

[Laughter]

Q: So talking again about his studio organization—he had different parts of the space, initially a large space, but not as large as the later space.

Felsen: Well, the later building, again, is two floors, and the second floor was all Bob's studio for painting, whatever you want to call it. The lower floor was like a workshop and he had a person working there. It was like a machine shop. Because Bob did a lot of construction pieces. Bob would make a drawing of what he wanted and Lawrence [Voytek] would build it for him. That went on for years and years. A lot of those were unique pieces. They were sculpture pieces.

Q: Petersen talked about one of the buildings there having a ground floor studio and a dwelling above, and talks about how some great wave came through and—

Felsen: Yes. Well, that was called the Beach House. That was the first house Bob bought when he originally purchased Captiva Island property. That was probably in 1970.

Downstairs was a photo lab, was what it was. And upstairs, was where he lived. And—say it again? Oh, a wave came and—

Q: Yes, a great big—

Felsen: —it didn't destroy the total property. It ruined the photo lab that was downstairs.

Q: No, but it—

Felsen: It ruined the first floor.

Q: Right.

Felsen: Yes. Well, his property was on the Gulf Coast, on the water. You walk out and you're on the beach. So that was the original house. Then, later on, Darryl designed Bob's new house, which was much bigger. The living room—in a way, what you walked into was almost like a big room like this. It was a kitchen—it was one room. It was a one-room floor and the bedrooms were upstairs. The idea was that when he finished a project, he would bring it into the house and put it on the walls to live with for a while, to look at.

The one wall facing the water was all glass. But then the rest of the house was pretty much all walls.

Q: He had a dedicated, I understand, muse wall—a wall that was hung with works by friends or works—

Felsen: Oh.

Q: Some—

Felsen: Well, maybe sometime. It certainly wasn't regularly. I don't remember seeing that wall.

Q: It was ten years or so.

Felsen: Ten years, so it would have been like, let's see—

Q: Early seventies, early eighties.

Felsen: —1970, '80 or something like that.

Q: So Petersen worked for you.

Felsen: He was a printer at Gemini. The two Bobs formed a friendship starting in the summer of 1968. Shortly thereafter Petersen went to work for Bob. He was Bob's studio assistant. He was always a working artist but he was very much working for Bob. And then he left and after Petersen there were at least two more companions before Darryl, John Peet and Terry Van Brunt.

But that wall you're talking about, it certainly wasn't up all the time. We'd go to Captiva two or three times a year and spend at least a few days there. Occasionally, I'd see somebody else's work on the wall.

But I'll tell you what really shocked me. I'm on the [Robert] Rauschenberg [Foundation] board. And so we have what we call "non-Bob" and "Bob's" work. I was around him all the time. I had no idea how much artwork he owned from other people, whether it was John Cage or Marcel Duchamp or Jasper Johns.

Q: Is it all up at Mount Vernon, at this point?

Felsen: It must be. They passed out these groups of papers to us, what was in the non-Bob inventory. Wow! And then [Lawrence G.] Larry Gagosian had a show for sale.

Q: Oh, yes, of course.

Felsen: There was a tremendous collection that he had! You probably heard, to pay for ROCI, he sold an Andy Warhol and a Cy Twombly painting, at least that, that I knew of.

But, anyway, I don't know what this wall was.

Q: So was none of this artwork on the walls at Captiva?

Felsen: I wouldn't say it never was. Once in while, I'd see somebody else's work there. But I almost always saw Bob's—well, Bob would have a few things. You look in the kitchen and he'd have a Jasper Johns this or that, or a Duchamp, and maybe three or four things around that were—but they were usually small, fairly intimate things.

Q: I know he was close to [Alexina] Teeny Duchamp.

Felsen: Yes, definitely. Well, he was close to Marcel Duchamp—

Q: Right, and Marcel Duchamp, too.

Felsen: —in the early days.

Q: I just was speaking to Brian O'Doherty, who told me that, back in the early days when he was working at the *New York Times*, he used to give stuff to Bob Rauschenberg.

Felsen: From the newspaper.

Q: Photographs and the like. So was he often harvesting this material from other people?

You talked about going to the *Los Angeles Times* and—

Felsen: That was my only experience where he did that. So what I saw Bob collecting was wherever he was he'd look at junkyards and buy this thing and that thing. He had a phenomenal inventory of things. So when he was going to make a sculpture—the same way—it was his own organization of he'd pick this and that and then put it there, and look at it and study it, and then decide what works together and then start putting it together.

Q: So was he an explorer of antique shops and yard sales?

Felsen: I don't think antique shops. I don't think that was his deal. I don't know about yard sales. I think when he used to walk around the streets of New York, he saw things on the street all the time in shops. But when we were with him—sometimes we'd go to a place, not L.A. or New York. There's different kinds of junkyards. Auto wrecking yards—I don't think I ever saw him go to. But there are places that had big metal stuff. He was interested. In fact, Joni and I got to the point where we'd travel somewhere and we'd say, this is really great for Bob and, occasionally, we'd send something to him. We never know whether he used it or not.

Q: So did he ever say that he was influenced by any other artists?

Felsen: Sure, Josef Albers, and—

Q: Oh, Albers is his teacher, yes.

Felsen: Well, Kurt Schwitters. Those are the two that I remember. He was influenced—
and I don't know about his art, but—by Franz [J.] Kline. He really liked him. [Laughs]

Q: Well, he was acquainted with him, right? Didn't he—

Felsen: Yes, well, I think it was a Cedar [Tavern] bar experience.

Q: Right, it's part of that.

Felsen: And it seemed like he was friendly with de Kooning.

Q: Yes. Well, the famous story of erasing the de Kooning drawing—

Felsen: [Laughs] Bob said de Kooning looked at every drawing he had. "He was looking
for the one that would be the hardest one to erase and that's the one he gave to me."

Q: Well, the trick of not tearing the paper in the process and having to try to remove as much material as possible without destroying it.



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

Felsen: Yes. I just had a flash on another Rauschenberg story where—what I say is that everybody that knew Bob Rauschenberg had a story to tell about him. The reality of it is that everything about Bob Rauschenberg was a story. So he went to Eleanor Ward—this has got to be middle 1950s. Eleanor Ward rented this horse stable and horses had been in it and it had a fair amount of remains of horses on the floor. He went to her and he asked her if she would show his work and she said, “If you clean up the stable, I’ll give you a show.” And so, he said he got Cy Twombly to come and help him and they cleaned up the Stable Gallery [New York], which was hers. And then, he said, she gave the two of them a show together. [Note: Stable Gallery, New York, *Rauschenberg: Paintings and Sculpture*; *Cy Twombly: Paintings and Drawings*, September 15–October 3, 1953]

Q: Good story.

Felsen: Give me another subject.

Q: I keep returning to how he worked. And all of these interviews, it's like a *Rashomon* [1950 Akira Kurosawa film] experience. Because everyone has a different—

Felsen: In our place, we had to rent a TV. He always watched the soaps. He knew all the soaps, every one of them, didn't want to miss any of them. He definitely wanted people in his studio. He would invite people to come and hang around. He'd be talking to you. He'd be talking to me. He'd be talking to her. And he's working. He's making art. He's doing this. He practically didn't want to be alone. It's comparative—some artists come in our place, close the doors, "I don't want to see anybody. I have to concentrate on my making of art." But Bob reflected off of the news of the day, how people reacted around him. In *Captiva*, I don't think he had that many people around him, because—

Q: Yes, that's another question.

Felsen: —there weren't so many people down there that he knew.

Q: How many people would have been there as guests at any given time?

Felsen: But Bob probably had ten people working for him. Maybe one was a studio assistant, and then the rest of them were administrative or taking care of this or that.

Q: Petersen told me that they had two cars. They had a Bug and a Volkswagen van. And they called one of the cars This, and the other car That.

Felsen: [Laughs] Well, that I don't know.

Q: That's not—

Felsen: What I saw, they did have a van. But they had a couple of Volvos. And then I think he painted a car for BMW. And BMW gave him a car—a pretty good one, a big sedan. Bob didn't drive very much. I think it was because he was drinking all the time. He knew better. So Petersen or whoever Bob's companion was would be the driver.

Q: So he never had any run-ins with the local gendarmerie of—

Felsen: See, again, I never heard that he did. I don't think he drove very much. He would drive around his own property. But I think he stayed off the streets. [Laughs]

Q: So again, I'm trying to fill in the gaps about his working process. So he had a darkroom. He had a workshop, power tools—

Felsen: In Captiva, he had a digital room. They had a lot of sophisticated digital equipment. He also had a workshop. He had people work in and manage these areas. They collaborated with Bob on an everyday basis.

Q: Starting when?

Felsen: The workshop probably started in the 1970s and the digital shop much later. But he always had a technician that was a highly trained person who worked full-time for him.

Q: And they would take images and process them and—

Felsen: Yes, he would tell his person what size he wanted it blown up to. “I want three of these” or “five of these.” And then, you’d see this image. A lot of times they repeated an image on a painting.

Q: But did, at any point in time, Bob Rauschenberg install any printmaking equipment in Captiva?

Felsen: No, no, no. Well, he had a printmaking studio. And he had a printer, early. In the early days of Captiva, they did screen-printing and lithography. And he had Cy Twombly come there and make prints. Bob made some of his own prints I think. Cy did a

lithograph series [Untitled, 1971]. [The printmaking studio] was called Untitled Press, Inc. [founded in 1970].

Q: Oh, that's right. Yes.

Felsen: And in fact, it's one thing that Joni and I were talking [about], incidentally, when I was interviewed by Karen—

Q: Thomas, yes.

Felsen: Joni and I did this.

Q: Right, I read the interview.

Felsen: I forgot to tell you. Before you, Karen and I—she was there a lot with me. She'd probably have a lot of things different than I have to say about it.

Q: But what was capable of being done by Untitled prints was fairly limited.

Felsen: Well, they were okay. I mean, they weren't really sophisticated but they were decent. I can't remember who—he did a few projects with artists and probably gave the prints to the artists.

Q: Yes. So other people would come there and use his resources.

Felsen: Well, I know this, that thing, it's been dormant for years and years and years. So it was early days when it happened. I'm not sure Bob made prints there. Well, you know what? He had a litho[graphy] press. It was called Grasshopper. It was gray-green.



Rauschenberg working at his lithography press named Grasshopper, Captiva, Florida, 1977. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Right.

Felsen: And I think he probably made some of his own prints there.

Q: Did you ever do any work with Don Saff and—

Felsen: No, Gemini started as a lithography shop and Don Saff's specialty was etching.

When I was starting an etching studio, I had him help me, as far as the equipment to buy,

and he interviewed printers and helped me find two printers that were very good. But that was the only time were we ever working together. Other than he did a few print editions at Gemini.

Q: Right. So what is the most memorable—

Felsen: [Laughs] That's a tough one to answer with him. Most of them were memorable.

Q: Well, most memorable working experience with Bob Rauschenberg in the studio.

Like, were you ever with him alone in the studio?

Felsen: No, because I'm not a printer. So I may have been with him alone for a minute of work—not in any length of time. No, he'd come in my office a lot. I'd come out in the studio a lot when he was working. First of all, I was photographing him. And second, we'd just—were interested in what was going on. And he always liked to talk so it was fun to be around him. I don't know. As far as most memorable—if we have another session, I'll think about it.

Q: Well, I think the first conversation, part of it is just getting acquainted, having a conversation, realizing that it's going to be incomplete. And then, the follow-up is going to be when we have the sort of *esprit de l'escalier* moment where you walk out the door and say, "Oh jeez, I forgot that story."

Felsen: Well, I'll try to make notes at the time. But I'm coming back. Around the first week of December, there's a Basel art fair [Art Basel] in Miami Beach and we have a booth in that. My guess is this year, from the third to the ninth or something like that. And then what we'll probably do is come here for about three days. So if you're available at that time—

Q: Sure, we'll make ourselves available.

Felsen: —I would make myself available for that.

Q: That'd be great. Thank you.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriber: 3PM

Session #2

Interviewee: Sidney Felsen

Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: James McElhinney

Date: December 13, 2013

Q: This is James McElhinney speaking with Sidney Felsen for the Columbia [Center for] Oral History on behalf of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation at 381 Lafayette Street, the headquarters of the Rauschenberg Foundation in New York City, on Friday the 13th, 2013. Welcome. Nice to see you again.

Felsen: Thank you very much.

Q: How was Miami?

Felsen: Hot. Many, many thousands of people at the art fair. We did okay. Not great but okay.

Q: How did Bob Rauschenberg like the art fairs? It's sort of a recent phenomenon. [Art]

Basel started—whenever it was, back in the late sixties.

Felsen: It was 1969. [1970]

Q: '69. And then they migrated over here. And now everybody's got FIAC [Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain] and—

Felsen: There's an art fair probably—I don't know if it's major but it's certainly a substantial art fair every week throughout the year.

Q: Yes. Almost every week, somewhere, anywhere on the planet there's an art fair.

Felsen: It almost feels like there's one every day. Seriously. But they're everywhere throughout the world. [Art] Basel, Switzerland, I think was the first. If it wasn't the first, it was the first important one. I think it's still the most important art fair in the world. [Art] Basel in Miami Beach is twelve years old. It's good. I think the one in Switzerland is more quality. And it's possible the one in Miami Beach is more heavily attended. Feels like it is.

Q: Well, probably. I mean, they've got the capacity to host a larger crowd and more hotels. And you know, Basel is a relatively small place. And if it's still being held in that—

Felsen: Mustermesse.

Q: Yes. Right, that round sort of donut-like thing near the Rhine.

Felsen: Same place.

Q: You don't imagine hundreds of thousands of people jamming into that town.

Felsen: Well, a lot of people go to the Basel art fair and stay in France or Germany and these outlying areas and either have a car or one of the transportation methods.

Q: And they come in?

Felsen: So I don't know about that part.

Q: Did Bob Rauschenberg ever attend Basel art fair? How did he like it?

Felsen: Well, there's a belief amongst dealers, let's say, that art fairs are not for artists. It's like a meat market. And you walk in and there's thousands of works of art and it can be disturbing. It's very commercial. Artists generally don't come to art fairs. Bob came to several. Bob loved people. My guess is he probably enjoyed it.

Q: So he liked the party aspect of it, the social aspect?

Felsen: Yes, social aspect, yes.

Q: So how do you think he would feel about how they've continued to evolve? Just what you said—that every week there's an art fair somewhere.

Felsen: I don't have a handle on that. In Basel Miami, there was a dealer named Jamileh Weber. She's from Zurich, Switzerland and she was Bob's dealer in Europe. She came to the Miami Beach art fair every year and had a booth and she always featured Bob and sometimes Darryl. So he came pretty much every year and it wasn't a casual visit. He stayed for a few days. He'd come to our booth, where we had his prints, and go to Jamileh's booth quite a bit. Bob loved to travel. So it's possible he would have enjoyed it, but I'm really not sure.

Q: Well, I was curious, specifically, how he might have felt about the commercialism of it because he famously advocated for artists' royalties. And there's the well-known confrontation with [Robert C.] Bob Scull. Was it a shove or a push? Or was it a friendly pat or were voices raised? But it seemed like he did have a sense of there being some kind of a division between the art and the money. What's your sense of that?

Felsen: Bob loved to sell art—loved to have his art sold, and Darryl's. My guess is he appreciated the art fair. When Bob was in the heyday of his career, I think the art galleries is where the art business was. So, in a way, you're saying this. But nowadays, the art fairs and auction houses are pretty much where a lot of it has gone to. And then the Internet has come on, where you could say, theoretically, people don't have to program art and do an art gallery anymore to see art. But I still think—in the sense of if you're talking about incidental art or trinkets or lesser important art, the Internet is valuable. I still feel that if somebody's buying a work of art that's of high value—say paintings or

drawings of an artist in the caliber of Bob—that you’ve got to see it. You’ve got to look at it. I don’t think somebody’s going to buy that off of a picture.

Q: Unless they’re only interested in it for—

Felsen: —as an investment.

Q: —investment, status, whatever.

Felsen: Well, all of us resent people that buy art purely as an investment because it’s not a healthy reason. Somebody who buys as an investment doesn’t appreciate what they have and they’re just going to follow market trends. It’s really bad for the art market when people buy art for that reason. Then, eventually, usually when the market starts to have a downturn, they dump it, so to speak. It’s not healthy.

Q: No. Well, I was also curious how Bob felt about all of this information technology.

There’s an image of him that elicited a comment—an image that we’ll talk about—of him talking on the phone at night. I’m sure it was on the phone. And someone—David White, Gina [Guy], I don’t know who it was—said, “Oh, he liked to talk on the phone.” Well, how did he deal with mobile phones? How did he like mobile phones? Did he carry one?



Rauschenberg, 1970.
Photo: Sidney B.
Felsen © 1970

Felsen: I don't think so.

Q: Did he have Internet? Was he—

Felsen: I'd say no. I remember when the computer started to become important and people were getting websites, I remember Bob saying one time, "Look, we've got too many different kinds of things happening now. I don't want to add that to it." And he was a person who certainly appreciated inventions—

Q: Oh, absolutely.

Felsen: But he said, "There's telephones, there's fax, and there's mail." He wasn't thrilled with it.

Q: But he was not a Luddite. He was interested in technology. He was—

Felsen: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: But he would not have been heading out to buy the latest iPhone.

Felsen: I don't think I remember him having a cellphone.

Q: Interesting.

Felsen: Or an iPad. I'd say, no, he didn't have it. Did not. But, you know, when digital cameras came in, he switched to digital photography fairly quickly.

Q: But did he also learn how to use Adobe Photoshop or any of that?

Felsen: No.

Q: He would just hand the camera to somebody.

Felsen: He'd have someone do it for him.

Q: He'd have a technician do that for him.

Felsen: He had a person that's working here now—[Laurence] Lauren [Getford]—who was with Bob for many, many years.

Q: We've met. Let's have a look at some of these pictures.

Felsen: Okay.

Q: So the first one here is of Bob Rauschenberg—

Felsen: This table is misleading. You see this?

Q: Oh, yes. I see. The table in this room—this is, I guess, the boardroom or the conference room or the lunchroom, the break room. I don't know what it is. But it's a nice room. Just to describe to the reader at some point a century ahead, it's a glass table on a welded steel trestle, and the overhang is in one place and the trestle is another. It looks like the trestle is the edge of the table.

Felsen: So sit back.

Q: So stay away from that table.

Felsen: I'm talking with my hands.

Q: So here's a picture of Rauschenberg. I'll describe it. He's doing kind of a wheelie on a tricycle. Is that a tricycle? No, it's a bicycle.

Felsen: It's a two-wheeler.

Q: It's a bicycle with a really small rear wheel.

Felsen: It's a weird bicycle.

Q: So can you tell us anything about this image?



Rauschenberg during a break for the proofing session for his *Stoned Moon* series (1969–70), Gemini G.E.L. parking lot, Los Angeles, 1969. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1969



Robert Rauschenberg
Local Means (Stoned Moon), 1970
Lithograph
32 3/8 x 43 5/16 inches (82.2 x 110 cm)
From an edition of 11, published by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Felsen: Yes. Okay, well this was 1969 and Bob was at Gemini creating a series called *Stoned Moon* [1969–70]. And it was based on the launch of the Apollo 11. NASA invited Bob to go to—at that time, Cape Canaveral, I think it was called. They said they thought he was the United States artist most interested in space travel and so they invited him to come and observe, which he did. He took photographs and then NASA gave him charts, maps, pictures. Then he came to Gemini and developed a series of thirty-two or thirty-three different images, all lithographs. He'd come in at around eleven o'clock in the morning—this would be a standard arrival. And then he'd work, maybe, a lot of times until nine or ten o'clock at night. This happened to be one night where he stayed all night. He went all the way through 'til—this is probably eight o'clock in the morning. He had worked all the time: perhaps twenty, twenty-one hours. Our printers, what they would do is work maybe eight- or ten-hour shifts. Then they would lay down for a few hours and rest and come back. And so he came out at eight in the morning to get some fresh air. Bob was a bicycle nut, as far as imagery and usage of it, and so this was our parking lot and he found this bicycle there. He was just riding around. That's when I took the photograph.

Q: Whose is that car?

Felsen: Well, one of my partners was Kenneth Tyler and the car belonged to his wife, Kay Tyler.

Q: Is that a Rambler? That's a Rambler American?

Felsen: No—

Q: —station wagon?

Felsen: No, it was a—

Q: Chevy?

Felsen: I think Chrysler had a small station wagon in those days. It did have a specific name. I don't remember what it was.

Q: Here's another photograph of Bob Rauschenberg, again, I think, in the studio. It looks like when he's wearing a star. What's the story behind that?



Rauschenberg at Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969.
Photograph Collection. Robert
Rauschenberg Foundation
Archives, New York. Photo:
Sidney B. Felsen © 1969

Felsen: This is a picture of Bob Rauschenberg during the making of the *Stoned Moon* series, 1969. Bob was born and grew up in Port Arthur, Texas. Texas is associated with sheriffs and so somebody—one of the wise-ass printers in the shop—decided to make a sheriff's badge and give it to Bob. It's gold, actually. It's a gold star. That's the essence of this one.

Q: So it was just a gag.

Felsen: Oh, yes.

Q: So in the working environment, was he more playful than other artists you worked with?

Felsen: Bob was a super collaborator, in the sense that he was very human in his approach. He appreciated everybody's efforts. He didn't treat them like underlings. He treated them as equals. He was very much involved in proofing. A lot of artists would just, in a sense, do their part of the imagery and then let the printers do the printing. Bob was always at the press, talking to the printers, cracking jokes, making humorous remarks. Made everybody happy. But at the same time was looking at the art coming off the press. When the proofing session was over and he was saying goodbye, you could really see tears in people's eyes. They just loved having him around.

Q: There was a question that, as you were speaking, came to me now—sort of in an *esprit de l'escalier* moment. But there's a story about when he was in the Navy and he was inventing games to get the patients of the hospital ward to go to sleep. Did he invent any games in the studio? I mean, you've got this badge here. Did he pull pranks? Was he a practical joker?

Felsen: I don't think that. I think it was constantly an interchange of—the artist studio is in one location and the [print] shop in the next area, let's say. He'd always go from the artist's studio into the shop and was always hanging around the presses. He was always talking to the printers and commenting on what they were doing and just talking about things, about life, constantly. He just made everybody happy. He made everybody want to do something for him because they really enjoyed him and appreciated him so much—and the fact that he made them feel like they were part of his art-making.

Q: Here's a photograph of Bob Rauschenberg and, I believe, his son?



Hisachika Takahashi and
Robert and Christopher
Rauschenberg,
Ahmedabad, India, 1975.
Photograph Collection.
Robert Rauschenberg
Foundation Archives,
New York. Photo:
Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Felsen: To his left is his son, Christopher [“Chris”] Rauschenberg. To his right was Hisachika [“Sachika”] Takahashi. Hisachika was a Japanese young man who went to Italy and worked with a famous Italian artist [Lucio Fontana] for several years. Then he came to New York and worked for Bob. He worked for Bob for decades—many years, right in this building. And he cooked for Bob. He was somewhat of a studio assistant. He was an artist and very joyous, playful. Bob appreciated him a lot throughout the years.

Q: And to his left we see his son, Christopher, who, you earlier commented looked kind of Indian, I think, in this one.

Felsen: Well, in that other picture.

Q: Right, in this other picture.

Felsen: No, not that one. The one in the—

Q: Oh, the one in the paper mill.

Felsen: Yes. Well, let’s see. Christopher is Bob’s only child. When Bob and his wife [Susan Weil] split, Christopher was raised with his wife. So there were several years, I think, when Bob did not see Christopher very much. But then, in later life—I think, from my experience, it would be the last ten or fifteen years of Bob’s life—he and Christopher

became very close. Christopher's a photographer, a very good photographer. He lives in Portland, Oregon. He started an organization called Blue Sky Gallery [Oregon Center for the Photographic Arts], which is a nonprofit that encourages photographers to bring their art—it's shown and sold through Blue Sky. Christopher was the creator of it, the thrust behind it, continued with it throughout all the years and still is very much active in Blue Sky. He doesn't show his own photographs there. It's really for other photographers. Bob and Christopher became very close in the later years.



Robert and Christopher Rauschenberg on the occasion of the opening of *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany, June 1998. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1998

Q: How was he as a parent? I understand that—well, here, he's in Ahmedabad, right? I understand that your daughter was also there. So how did the two of them interact with each other?

Felsen: Well, my daughter was, I think, eight years old. And Christopher looks like he's probably twenty-five or thirty. There were nine of us and we were a family. We were

there for twenty-three days. We always had evenings together, worked together during the daytime. So there was a lot of interchange of friendship.

Q: So how was Bob Rauschenberg as a dad?

Felsen: Well, what I saw of him around Christopher was great. First of all, Christopher was the apple of his eye. He loved seeing him and being around him and he was very kind to him. Christopher is a very kind, gentle person who seems very uninterested in money. He's interested in happiness and helping other people. He's the president of the board of the Rauschenberg Foundation. You can just see, he's very happy. The board is very much in the business of giving things away and Christopher's great at it. It's always about helping others.

Q: Well, he seems to have inherited that from his dad, who early on was making emergency grants to artists in need and other things like that.

Felsen: Well, Bob started this organization called Change, Inc. And what he said was—

Q: 1970 or so? [1970]

Felsen: I don't know. But it reminded him of in his early days, where he didn't have money to pay rent or the dentist or the light bill. It's designed one hundred percent for working artists. Whatever their rules are, you have to prove you're a working artist, and if

you do, there's a certain sum. The sum changed and got larger as the years went on. But it was one-time. You apply, you prove you're an artist and they just automatically send you whatever the stipend is.

Q: So Change, Inc.—he liked wordplay a lot. So was the “change” in Change, Inc. like change-ing or was it like “pocket change” incorporated? What was his thinking?

Felsen: Well, I think the idea was that it changed someone's life. That's what I took it as. All of a sudden—you're destitute—you got this grant. It helped you at the moment. It changed your life. As far as the Inc., probably the name—it was a corporation. I think you had to say Inc. in those days, add I-N-C. So he just made it into a—Bob was a master of play at words, so—

Q: Right. I was just wondering if you knew anything about the origin of that.

In this picture, the first one we looked at, the one with that Hisachika Takahashi on Bob's right and his son on his left, they're looking together at what looks to be like a Moleskine sketchbook. So I inquired of others who told me that Bob Rauschenberg didn't really work in sketchbooks that much. He didn't carry around a pocket notebook.

Felsen: He did not. Yes, he did not.

Q: Yes, he did not. But I did learn from Kayla Jenkins here that there are, in the collection, a number of notebooks or books that contain lists of possible titles. I don't know if you were aware of that. But his wordplay, actually, wasn't always from the hip. It was sometimes—he would make lists.

Felsen: I was not aware of this book or list. I thought Bob was a master of titles. They were always short. They were almost always one word or two words. They always had an interesting twist to them. For someone who wasn't a reader, who wasn't advanced in school as far as language, he was a master of language. He had words all the time that would just make you laugh when he titled something. Yes, I don't know what to say. I don't know what this was about, as far as whether it's a sketch or words.

Q: But you were unaware that he was playing with words—writing it down?

Felsen: I didn't know that. I was always impressed by how he titled. Bob made a lot of art and a lot of artists just say, "Call it Untitled." You know, "Untitled 1973." Bob titled everything. I don't think there was an "Untitled." He titled every piece. They were always one or two words and you'd smile at what they said.

Q: Did he ever talk about what inspired him to apply a title to a project or a work of art?

Felsen: No.

Q: *Bones and Unions*, or *Jammer* [1975–76], or—well let’s—

Felsen: *Bones and Unions* had a logic to it.

Q: Right.

Felsen: But I’ll tell you, Bob didn’t talk about his art and he didn’t talk about titling.

[Laughs] You could even try to get him engaged in art and he didn’t seem to want to talk about his own art.

Q: Well, he was kind of close in age to some of the Beats. He was a little younger. Did he have a relationship with any of the Beats?

Felsen: Well, he certainly was around William Burroughs quite a bit and he knew Allen Ginsberg. He told me that we should work with Allen Ginsberg and we did.

Q: Tell us about that.

Felsen: Well, he just said something—it was almost like saying, “You’re making art and art and art and why don’t you do something different and make it interesting?” You know, work with a creative person, a creative mind, who is, for example, a poet. We contacted Ginsberg and he decided he wanted to do visual art so he brought in a large

stack of books about Far Eastern art. He studied a lot of what was done and then he created a series. It was very handsome.

Q: Did Bob Rauschenberg have any interactions with Bob Dylan? There's a book—I ask because that picture of which we spoke earlier with him talking on the phone—that opened up that line of questioning about cell phones, et cetera—behind him are shelves loaded with books. And I'm wondering, why does a dyslexic person have shelves loaded with books? One of them said "Bob Dylan." So—

Felsen: Well, I know he had a friendship with Janis Joplin. She was born in Port Arthur. But as far as Dylan, Dylan was certainly the man of the hour in those days and I don't remember Bob ever dealing with him or talking about him.

Q: Did you ever meet Janis Joplin?

Felsen: No.

Q: She never came by like—there are images of other Hollywood types—I shouldn't say Hollywood types—distinguished actors like Gregory Peck and Dustin Hoffman, although there isn't a photograph of him that I've seen yet. But Henry [F.] Winkler is another one.



Dustin Hoffman and Rauschenberg at Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, circa 1980s. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen ©



Rauschenberg and Harry Winkler at Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1992. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1992

Felsen: Henry Winkler he was friends with. Billy Wilder, Dennis Hopper—

Q: Hopper was also a major art collector and an artist in his own right.

Felsen: Dennis was a great photographer. He was an art-maker, which—I didn't appreciate his paintings very much. But he made a lot of art. He took great photographs of the sixties, perhaps.

Q: What was the nature of his friendship with Bob Rauschenberg? How did they get to know each other?

Felsen: I don't know how they met but I had an evening with Bob and Dennis where—you know, Dennis Hopper was seriously involved in drugs. Then he went clean, and then for, the last twenty years of his life or so, as far as I know, he stayed clean. But during Dennis's drug days he came in one night to see Bob and he was just out of his mind. He was so high. And he had money everywhere—hundred-dollar bills all over him. Bob and I took him down to a cab and put him in a cab and gave the cab driver a hundred-dollar bill and said, "Take him to this address." We never knew how he arrived. I don't know how they originally met.

Q: Isn't he also from Texas? Dennis Hopper.

Felsen: I don't know. [Hopper was born in Kansas]

Q: He was in that movie, *Giant*. So I guess I must assume he was from Texas. So, can you tell us any more about Bob Rauschenberg's friendship with Janis Joplin?

Felsen: No. I know he was friendly with her because of their origins but I don't—

Q: Would that be here probably in New York and hanging out at Max's Kansas City?

Felsen: That's a good bet. I don't know. I was in Max's a lot of times with Bob, but I never saw her there. I don't know.

Q: Kris Kristofferson?

Felsen: No. In Hollywood, there was a lot of people he was friendly with besides the ones we named, but Kris Kristofferson wasn't one that I was aware of.

Q: There are a number of images towards the end of his life that you took of him, I think, with his sister.

Felsen: Janet [Begneaud].



Rauschenberg at his seventieth birthday party at Sidney Felsen's residence, with Rick and Janet Begneaud, Los Angeles, October 1995. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1995

Q: Janet. And also Meryl Streep.

Felsen: He was very friendly with Meryl Streep.

Q: How did they become friends?

Felsen: There was an art gallery in Naples, Florida [Eckert Fine Art], which is very close to Captiva. It's a 50- to 60-mile drive. That gallery was Bob's dealer in that area and the people that owned that gallery, Jane and Henry Eckert were very friendly with Meryl Streep. That probably came through the fact that Meryl's husband was a sculptor, [Donald] Don Gummer, who showed his art with the Eckerts.

Q: Right. And is, I think.

Felsen: Yes and is. And they showed his work in the gallery. So I'm just guessing that that Florida connection started that way.

Q: Don Gummer.

Felsen: Yes, Donald Gummer. And I'd say Bob and Meryl Streep were very close.

Q: And how often would they see each other? Here in New York or—?

Felsen: Well, my guess is they were seeing each other some of the time and probably talking on the phone a lot of times. I—meaning Gemini—gave a dinner for Bob at the Spice House, whatever it's called, here in New York—Spice something—and— [note: Spice Market]

Q: Sounds like a German restaurant. Schpeisshaus!

Felsen: There were about twenty people at the dinner. And Meryl sat next to Bob. And I think Dorothy Lichtenstein sat next to Meryl.



Rauschenberg, Dorothy Lichtenstein, and Meryl Streep at a dinner for Rauschenberg hosted by Gemini G.E.L. at Spice Market, New York, 2005. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 2005

Q: Those are the photographs.

Felsen: Yes, I think there's some pictures from that.

Q: There are. I think those are the ones we're talking about.

Felsen: I was probably around the two of them together maybe four or five times and it was usually at some social event. Bob was very close for a while to Sharon Stone.

Q: Yes, tell us about that. She was an art major at Edinboro University in Pennsylvania.

Felsen: Oh, yes?

Q: Trivia story. She began, I think, as an art major at Edinboro and then the rest is history.

Felsen: I didn't know that. But I know that Darryl Pottorf's sister was the director and, I think, founder of a—I suppose the generic term would be a rape clinic in Fort Myers [Abuse Counseling and Treatment (ACT)]. So Bob created a fundraising auction that was held every year for several years. They'd get a personality to come down to do the auctioning and I know Sharon Stone went once or twice. She's great at that. She'll sit on someone's lap and coo in their ear and tell you you've got to raise the bid or something like that.

Q: [Laughs] Until your checkbook emerges, right?

Felsen: Yes. She's fantastic at that. Bob was very friendly with the gal who was the telephone operator in the movies all the time. On TV—

Q: Lily Tomlin. *Laugh-In—Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* [1967–73]. And of course, lots since.

Felsen: She collected a lot of Bob's art. And Sharon Stone had some of Bob's paintings.

Q: Were they real collectors or was it more just they liked it and they—?

Felsen: For a few years, I'd say Bob and Sharon Stone were seeing each other and talking all the time.

Q: When would that have been? In the early 2000s or late nineties or—?

Felsen: I would guess either early nineties or middle nineties. Somewhere in the nineties.

Q: When she was a big—

Felsen: She was a star.

Q: —big star.

So we talked a little bit about Bob and the Beats. So he did know Ginsberg and he knew William Burroughs. Didn't he do something with Burroughs? We were talking about that.

Felsen: Yes. What happened was—I think what started it was, before the Ginsberg thing, when he said—I may be crossing these stories over. Somewhere he was talking again about how we should do something other than working just with artists. And we knew he was friendly with Burroughs and so we came up with the idea, “Would he be willing to collaborate with Burroughs if Burroughs was willing to collaborate with him?” He said yes. Then we contacted my partner, Stanley Grinstein. He was very friendly with Burroughs and so we asked William Burroughs if he would do it and he said yes. But it was a strange collaboration, where Burroughs wrote text and gave it to us and we gave it to Bob, and Bob created the art based upon the text that Burroughs wrote. And maybe during this session I'll come up with the name. It was a series he did.

Q: I'm sure that can be researched.

Felsen: *American Pewter with Burroughs* [1981] is the name of it.

Q: *American Pewter with Burroughs*. When I was here last week doing a little bit of preparation for this conversation today, there was a book, *Rauschenberg at Gemini* [2010]. It had all of the different series. Wonderful book. Enormous amount of work.

Felsen: Bob did about two hundred and fifty editions, meaning there's fifty prints of these and forty of those prints and seventy prints of those.

Q: It's quite a lot of—names like *L.A. Flakes* [1982].



Robert Rauschenberg
American Pewter with Burroughs I, 1981
Lithograph with embossing
31 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches (80 x 59.7 cm)
From an edition of 34, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg
L.A. Flakes—400' and Rising, 1982
Etching with embossing
30 1/2 x 23 inches (77.5 x 58.4 cm)
From an edition of 40, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Felsen: That's about snowflakes.

Q: I guess the first was *Stoned Moon*?

Felsen: No. The first was *Booster* and *7 Studies*. That's the X-ray of his body. After that was *Reels (B + C)*, Bonnie and Clyde. Then *Stoned Moon*. Then he did *Cardbirds*, which was cardboard. Then he did *Horsefeathers*.

Q: Marx brothers movie.

[Laughter]

Felsen: And then he went to France and did—

Q: Fused—

Felsen: *Pages* and *Fuses*. Then the next year did *Hoarfrost [Editions]*. Then the next year we went to India and did *Bones* and *Unions*.

Q: And then you did *Jammers*?

Felsen: Well, no, see, *Jammers* was his.

Q: That was his.

Felsen: While we were in India, he found these beautiful silks and he bought many. Then he made his first *Jammers* while we were in India together. *Jammers* was a series of unique works that he created and showed at the Leo Castelli Gallery [New York].

Q: Okay, this is a good time for me to ask you about one of these photographs.

Felsen: That's definitely in India.



Rauschenberg wearing *dhoti*, Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Q: This is definitely in India. This is a portrait of Bob Rauschenberg nude from the waist up wearing a diaphanous pair of balloon-trousered pantaloons [*dhoti*].

Felsen: Probably silk or—no. I see, it's more of a cheesecloth. It's a cheesecloth on top and it's something underneath which could have been silk.

Q: Well, I looked at these pictures fairly closely—and there's a number of them—and it seems like underneath he's wearing a pair of boxers. He, personally, is wearing a pair of boxers.

Felsen: Well, but what I'm looking at is that you can see cheesecloth and here's something very much more opaque. They had a lot of really good materials there.

Q: Well, who's the guy on the floor? Whose toe is that? [Said jokingly] Gee, I wonder. So who took this photograph?

Felsen: Look at that. Perfectly unfamiliar.

[Laughter]

Felsen: I never noticed that toe, until just now. [Laughs]

Q: Well, it didn't exactly leap out at me. But I thought, here's a photograph we have to talk about. I understand there are hundreds of shots from this. It looks like you're wearing the same thing. Or is that just a linen?

Felsen: This is somebody else. It must be—that looks like a person with a—

Q: That's definitely a knee. That's somebody else. There are a few of these.

Felsen: Well, see, I see it as another possibility. Like in India, they all wear shawls. Or that's like a woman's head. But it could be. Probably.

Q: Could be.

Felsen: It could be, in India.

Q: Anyway, do you recall that session?

Felsen: Oh, yes. [Laughs]

Q: Can you put us in the room?

Felsen: It was Bob acting. And I think I've told you this—the Sarabhais had a fabric mill they owned that had twenty-three thousand employees. There were fabrics all over the place and so it was a combination of Bob buying the silks from the merchants who would come to the house and show it to them, and whatever the Sarabhais had. So he was just clowning around. We had a room. We'd meet, the nine of us. And so he was just clowning around.

Q: He had quite a sense of play.

Felsen: Definitely, yes. For one thing, I think he was a joyous person. I think he was somewhat entertaining us. It was a hard project. We were there twenty-three days. Every day, the temperature was about 120 in the daytime and it got down to about 90 at night. And he worked every day. He worked on—*Bones* and *Unions*—he would always use the material that was germane to the area he was in. So cane, bamboo, fabrics, and paper—the *Bones* were made out of that. *Unions* were—you see this picture of two hands forming a piece of mud.

Q: Yes, this is one other image I wanted to ask you about because there are a number of these. There's a picture of—I guess it's Bob Rauschenberg's hands forming balls in mud around pieces of twine.

Felsen: Again, twine was something very germane to them. We'd go to town and we'd buy hundreds of balls of twine. The Indians use this material to make their houses. We called it "rag mud" and I think it was slang from whatever they were calling it themselves. He loved the material. It had a certain strength to it. He made about five or six different forms. Here you see a ball and then here you see he's making more of a slab.



Rauschenberg working on *Unions* series (1975), Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975



Rauschenberg and Asha Sarabhai working on *Unions* series (1975), Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Q: Well, this other image—can you tell us a little about this? Because there is, I believe, a slide here in the collection that shows these balls. They're about the size of a tennis ball, each one.

Felsen: Or bigger. I think—

Q: Or bigger, with a piece of twine in them. And then—

Felsen: He made forms. Like there was one form where it had—it would be a wall-hanging form that was rectangular and it had round ends. Then he made holes in this form and so somehow these balls would be on the twine and then the balls would be hanging. Something would go through those holes. The twine was attached to something that would hold it and then the rope would come down and at the end was the ball.

Q: I see. So I've seen a couple of images of them. And Bob Petersen's got one in his house that has a rectangular hole cut through the slab, as I recall.

Felsen: Was it big? Was it this size?

Q: Yes, it's pretty big.

Felsen: See, that's called *Capitol* [(*Unions*), 1975] and it's probably about 4 feet horizontal, maybe 3 to 4 feet vertical—again, using rag mud [note: see illustration on p. 42]. But in the center is a square cut and behind it is a piece of fabric, a beautiful piece of fabric. And it's on a rolling trolley, so to speak, and then as you move this piece of fabric by the pole it's on, the image in the square changes its color.

Q: I see.

Felsen: This lady, her name is Asha, and again, the Sarabhais were probably the most influential Indian family in this one area they were in, and one of the most influential families in the whole country. And Asha was a Pakistani. She was married to one of the two Sarabhai sons. It was Anand and Suhrid. And she was married to Suhrid. She was from a very influential family in Pakistan. Bob loved her. She was a very nice person and she was beautiful and she definitely was brought into our project as far as helping us where—

Q: Had she any artistic training or was she just a spirited—

Felsen: I don't know. She was very sensitive and good at what she was doing with us. Later on, she and Suhrid left Ahmedabad and went to London. She owns a shop in London—a very well-known shop [Egg]—selling objects.

Q: This pail, too—there was an image of a bucket—it may have been that very one—with these balls of rag mud. Which, I guess—rag mud, to the reader of the transcription, we could say it's like adobe in the southwest. It's got straw in it and other stuff. And they were in water, like matzo balls or pieces of tofu or something.



Rauschenberg, at right, working on *Bones* and *Unions* series (1975), with, left to right, unidentified man, Hisachika Takahashi, unidentified child, Gianfranco Gorgoni, and Anand Sarabhai, Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Felsen: In water?

Q: Yes. They're in pails full of water with these mud balls.

Felsen: Well, I don't know. My guess is maybe somebody premade them and then they just kept them moist and then Bob took them and formed them. That would be my guess. Because I know that once they were made, the idea was to put them into a drying process.

Q: So after *Bones* and *Unions* and after Ahmedabad, Bob Rauschenberg did, in his own studio, the *Jammers*. Did he talk at all about the title of the *Jammers*? Where that came from?



Robert Rauschenberg
Mirage (Jammer), 1975
Sewn fabric
80 x 69 inches (203.2 x
175.3 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg
Foundation

Felsen: No.

Q: He loved clothing.

Felsen: Definitely.

Q: Well, I was wondering, a play on—

Felsen: Well, maybe “pajamas.”

Q: That’s what I was thinking.

Felsen: Well, it could be.

Q: Because here you've got him wearing these jammies. You can think about windjammers being like sails. Sails, jammies.

Felsen: Again, he never mentioned it. But Bob never talked about what he did. He never talked about what he did and when he finished something, it was finished. He didn't care. He wanted to go onto the next thing. It was past him. He wasn't interested.

Q: So he loved clothing.

Felsen: I think I've told you, he had the greatest wardrobe I've ever seen—anything from very high-styled formal things to nonsense things but, across the board, they were all interesting.

Q: Well, here's a photograph. I think maybe this is—is this your office?



Rauschenberg trying on a robe in Sidney Felsen's office, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, during the *Samarkand Stitches* project, 1988. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1988

Felsen: Yes. Well, there was a fellow from Afghanistan—this was in peaceful days as far as Afghanistan. This was probably in 1988. And this fellow was a rug merchant primarily and he'd come to see me regularly. My wife and I bought rugs from him. He came in one time when Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein were there and Dorothy and Roy bought a whole bunch of them. So he came in this one day when Bob was there and he had this robe. Bob fell in love with it and bought it.

Q: And that was just on the spur of the moment, right?

Felsen: Yes. Well, it says here he was making *Samarkand Stitches*, which was one of the projects, where he used fabrics from Uzbekistan. It was the southern tip of the USSR at that time and he was traveling through on one of his ROCI trips and he came across these families—the fabric makers were families and they'd have a table this long with some sort of device to put fabrics together. He said it never was a repeating pattern. Whatever came out came out and the next thing would be different. He referred to it as “colored lightning.” That's what he saw, these beautiful colors. So he created his series called *Samarkand Stitches* in our studio. What he brought back from that trip was maybe fifty or twenty-five yards. We needed—I forget—five hundred or a thousand yards to do the project so we had to get permission to go back into Uzbekistan to buy the fabric and then bring it back.



Rauschenberg and Ken Farley working on *Samarkand Stitches* series (1988) at Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, November 1988. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1988

Q: How did you manage to do that?

Felsen: Armand Hammer was a United States wealthy person—influential—who had very close ties to Russia. He had something to do with it, as far as helping.

Q: So you weren't immediately involved in the process of—?

Felsen: I didn't go with him on this trip. We reflected off of what Bob did and brought to us.

Q: Here's another picture of him wearing what seems to be a dark frock of some kind.

Can you—

Felsen: Well, first of all—

Q: —put us in the room there?



Gianfranco Gorgoni and Rauschenberg, Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Felsen: —it’s a photograph of Bob and Gianfranco Gorgoni, who is a photographer of some reputation who lives here in New York. They’re both wearing—look, I have to make an easy guess. The Sarabhais had so many different kinds of fabrics that they must have brought in these two gowns and they both put them on just for, again, another moment of entertainment frivolity.

Q: So what were your working days at Ahmedabad? Were they the same kind of schedule that he would keep at Captiva or did he have to be more—

Felsen: I think he got up earlier. Captiva schedule, he usually started in the studio around five o’clock in the afternoon and usually worked until ten or eleven. It didn’t mean he

slept that long. He'd maybe wake up at ten or eleven in the morning. And he was on the phone a lot. He used to say—he had an expression like, “I do these chores all day so that I can get to my work in the evening.” He was on the phone or wherever. He had a very involved life. I think in India he came to work earlier. Well, India was split into two things. It was really *Bones* and *Unions*. The *Bones* were done in the paper mill. So, for example, if they made a sheet of paper and Bob wanted either bamboo or cane or fabric, they would merge it into the paper while it was being made. We worked with probably twenty Indian nationals, and they loved Bob. Again, we don't think they understood exactly who he was, as far as such an important artist, but they knew he was an artist and they were absolutely thrilled with the idea of working with him.

Q: So did he have the same impact in India that he had in China? I've heard people talk about how, in China, they measure modern art or the history of art as sort of pre-Rauschenberg and post-Rauschenberg, to some degree.

Felsen: Probably Don Saff told you that because he went. I didn't go to China. My partner Stanley Grinstein went. I don't know how to measure. I don't know how to compare the two. But in India, in a certain way, it was somewhat like in my own studio in Los Angeles in the way you work with him. He makes you feel an important part of it and in no way are you treated like a subordinate. The Indian people gave Bob a party the last day of our trip. It was the most amazing thing. It was a huge party and these people are very poor. They had these—there'd be a bowl of corn flakes and they're crazy with

the heat that they eat [laughs] and so they'd sprinkle in this powder and you'd start eating corn flakes and, wow, you thought you were going to die.

[Laughter]

Felsen: You had to run to get some water to be able to survive. But it was a great, great example of—you know, poor people working with this man who was directing the whole show and always hands-on with them. He was there days, and hours and hours, working with them while they were making the paper. There was phenomenal appreciation—love for him.

Q: How close, in terms of distance, was the Gandhi ashram from the Sarabhai compound?

Felsen: The Sarabhais had nine automobiles and nine drivers. There weren't many automobiles in Ahmedabad. There were oxen and bicycles. So they always insisted on driving us anywhere. If I had to guess, it was 2 to 3 miles.

Q: So how often did you make expeditions to the markets to look for materials?

Felsen: Well, the interesting part is—we went once, I think. We went once to the markets. After that the markets came to us. The Sarabhais had this huge—it was called a paradise—it was walled and they had a hundred people working there. They had guards

at the front. So at three o'clock in the afternoon, you would go to this part of their house—not their house but in front of their house, a big open area—and this guy would be selling hashish, and this guy might be selling the sequel to cocaine, and these two people may have fabrics but they were just beautiful silks.

Q: You had such a hard time finding booze but you could find—

Felsen: Well, booze was illegal.

Q: But hashish wasn't?

Felsen: I don't know.

Q: It was there.

Felsen: The Sarabhais were so powerful, we didn't know what—I think I may have told you, we landed in India in Bombay and I brought a case of Jack Daniels. So we got to that desk where it'd be their customs [officer]. And they said, "What is this?" I said, "It's whiskey." Then they said, "Where are you going?" I said, "We're going to the Sarabhais." "Oh, okay." They just pushed it through. So we didn't know whether that was legitimate or not.

That was about six or seven merchants. But I may be wrong when I say we went once—we may have gone a few times into the city. But a lot of fabrics came out of those people visiting. They brought these beautiful silks. And they were nothing—they were so cheap.

Q: So you have these images of the paper mill—this large, dark room with these sheets of paper hanging and others piled up on the floor. How did it operate? Was it like the paper mill in France with a water wheel? How did they—?

Felsen: Well, I didn't go to France. But it was much more primitive. Everything there was. There's probably pictures of—is that—this is more India?

Q: There's some. I don't know if there are more pictures of India.

Felsen: Yes, there should be.

Q: Yes, there you go. We're looking at two pictures of the interior.



Workers with stacks of handmade paper at the Gandhi Ashram paper mill, where Rauschenberg's *Bones* series (1975) were created, Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Felsen: Here the paper's already made, you see.

Q: I see.

Felsen: But I was looking for—there's pictures of Bob where he's—

Q: But this is an interesting image that you've got in your hand now that has one of these large—

Felsen: Here. The trouble is you can't see—see, there are boxes and there's water in there. They built a form for him so he could put something in that box or something here. I think he was doing it as—see, I think there's fabrics right there. And so the fabrics are being merged into the paper.



Anand Sarabhai, Rauschenberg, Hildegard Lamfromm, Robert Petersen, and others at the Gandhi Ashram paper mill, making handmade paper for Rauschenberg's *Bones* series (1975), Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Q: So that's the box form. We're taking a look at a photograph of Bob Rauschenberg hanging over a table. There are a couple of other people around him and there's a wooden box form into which materials are going to be placed—a kind of pulped rag mud, right? That's going to—

Felsen: Well, no, not rag mud.

Q: Oh, this was paper.

Felsen: This with paper—pulp. That's why that other picture—

Q: It's like a vegetable pulp or some—

Felsen: Yes. So again, it ends up with—this is the actual sheets of paper they were making for themselves.

Q: I see. So, in a way, it's like any other kind of paper mill. There's a form with some kind of screen or cloth and then it's poured onto the screen, applied to the screen, allowed to dry—

Felsen: Well, what you do is you shake the water out of it as much as you can. They were doing it by hand. Then you let it dry.

Q: Right. And then afterwards, it might be stacked up and pressed, or not.

Felsen: Well, see, I don't think they pressed it.

Q: No, they're air-drying it. So it looks like sheets, like laundry hanging from cables. Were they using things like clothesline clips or—?

Felsen: Well, I don't remember. It was some principle like that.

Q: Interesting.

Felsen: Bob Petersen.

Q: There's Bob Petersen, yes. Here's another image. Again, perhaps you could tell us who these people are. That's Bob Rauschenberg over one of these slabs.

Felsen: This is *Capitol* [(*Unions*), 1975].

Q: That's *Capitol*.

Felsen: This is, again, a form. See, this was very properly, you might say, flattened and evened out. You can see it has regular ends and in the middle is the hole where the fabrics passed through. So one of the persons in this picture is Anand Sarabhai. That's the—

Q: He's on the left.

Felsen: —oldest son. This is Sachika. And this was a guy whose name was Pal Babu. He was the senior craftsman of all the people around the Sarabhai house dealing with this kind of material so he was given to us for several days to help us. [Note: Pal Babu was a teacher at Shreyas, a Montessorri school in Ahmedabad. The school had been founded by Mani Sarabhai, Suhrud and Anand's mother, and their aunt, Lean Sarabhai Mangaldas.] See, Bob—you can see he's shaping something like that with wood.

Q: Interesting to have an insight into the process. Yes, it looks like he's using two pieces of wood to create a regular form. Is that a relief on top? It looks like a rectangular step on top.

Felsen: Yes, I think what has to happen is—this is—see, there had to be some kind of a mechanism how this thing could slide. So it's very possible—this must be the top, and somewhere, this formed the beginning of something that let the trolley go through there.

Q: Oh, that would be a point to secure some apparatus. That makes sense.

Felsen: Yes, that's what I think it is.

Q: So just to describe this, this is in a kind of garden setting—tree in the background, clothesline with some cloth hanging over it, a man kneeling in the back. Two people. Hisachika Takahashi—long hair, t-shirt—on the right. This man, Pal Babu.

Felsen: Pal Pabul or something like that [Pal Babu].

Q: Pal Pabul?

Felsen: The first one was P-A-L. Pal Pa-something.

Q: Pal Pa-something. Anand Sarabhai and then Bob Rauschenberg in, it looks like, a dark polo shirt or t-shirt, leaning over, in shorts, working on this slab—just for future identification.

Felsen: There's a couple more of Bob forming the balls that became a part—

Q: Well, they are quite bigger than tennis balls, aren't they?

Felsen: Yes. I think probably what you saw wet was brought to him in a bucket and then he started shaping them. You can see they're attached to some form of rope or twine.



Rauschenberg working on *Unions* series (1975), Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1975

Q: So they would hang from these pieces. How have these held up? How have these pieces held up?

Felsen: Well, there's a lot of spices in these. I remember fenugreek and tamarind. And the aroma is phenomenal. This was 1975 and you open up a box now, it'll throw you back. The aroma is still there.

Q: So into paste went—

Felsen: Yes. And to answer your question, they've held up well. I don't think we've ever heard of any problems with any of them.

Q: This is another thing about Bob Rauschenberg's work that's interesting is that I think most people who know his work from art surveys in college know him as being sort of a neo-Dada—the found object—his early work. But actually, I was at a party two nights ago, a collector uptown had a very big piece from the late nineties. And the things are beautifully made. The craftsmanship, the level of craft is astonishing. How did he express his views about craft?

Felsen: Well, I don't remember, ever, a conversation about it. I don't know. I don't think I can help you on that one.

Q: I'm just asking because I think a lot of people assume, based on his early work, that he was, in some way, like a lot of his contemporaries, contemptuous of craft and "it's for the moment." And there are plenty of stories, too, about, for instance—the one piece, the title escapes me—made with Scotch tape that had yellowed and a curator wanted to restore it to its original appearance and he said, "No, that's part of the process." But then, at the same time, a lot of his work is just exquisitely crafted.

Felsen: Well, look, I think he had a great feeling of responsibility, wherever his work was, that he was concerned about the longevity factor of it. I think that was sort of built into him that he wanted it done well. But I can't remember him, in a sense, informing us or lecturing us or instructing us—"This had to be really done so it will last forever," or things like that. I don't remember.

Q: He never had a fortune-cookie one-liner like that? Because others—Don Saff, Bob Petersen—were able to recall a number of his zingers. He would come up with these one-liners.

Felsen: I think—if I didn't mention it the last time—I often said that if you put a recording device on Bob for three months, you'd have maybe the greatest philosophy book ever written. They were really pearls. They were really bright things and complicated, involved. But they all had a little message in them and they made you laugh.

Q: He was a thoughtful man.

Felsen: Here's another one of the same idea.

Q: Right, reaching into the bucket. Here, Bob Rauschenberg is wearing what he appears to be clowning around in—those muslin pantaloons, the native garb [*dhoti*] (see illustration on p. 211).

Felsen: Yes, it could be.

Q: There's the one of him standing—sort of towering above, nude from the waist up, with this mysterious foot at the bottom. Interesting photograph. And of course, there's a photograph we've picked, which shows just his hindquarters with a *mouchoir* dangling tastefully from his left back pocket.



Rauschenberg, 1975.
Photograph Collection.
Robert Rauschenberg
Foundation Archives, New
York. Photo: Sidney B.
Felsen © 1975

Felsen: Always had a handkerchief hanging out of his pocket.

Q: So when he went to work, he always changed into work clothes?

Felsen: No, he worked with what he came in with.

Q: So, I mean, I'm just looking—he's wearing a pair of Lee painter pants.

Felsen: Yes, I'd say he came somewhat like that.

Q: So was his *mouchoir* collection as extensive as his shoe collection?

Felsen: [Laughs] I don't know. I think he was low-key when he was working.

Q: But he's got a scarf. And what color would that have been? Yellow, you think? It's a light color.

Felsen: Well, I don't know. It looks white to me but I don't know.

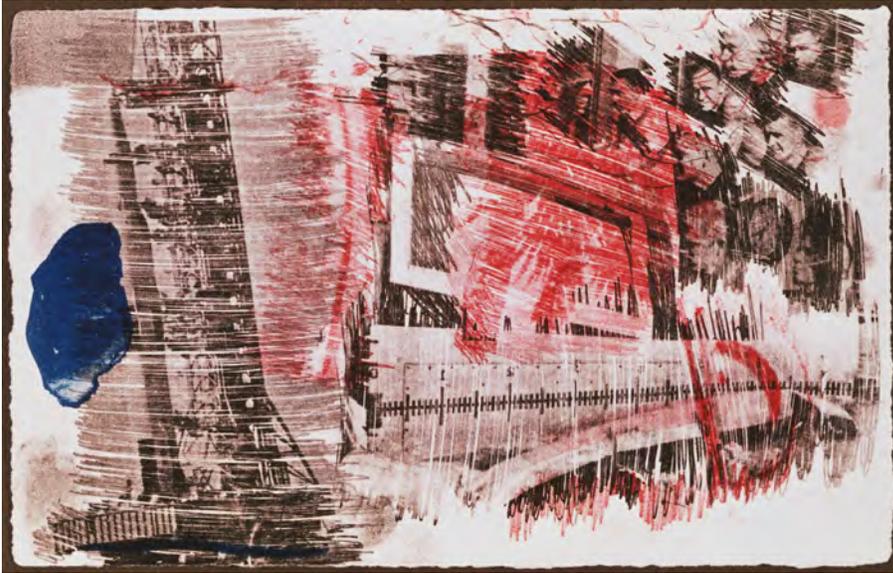
Q: It's a black-and-white photograph, so it's hard to tell.

Just a little housekeeping here. One of the things that I know that the Foundation wants to know about is the unpublished *Stoned Moon* book [1970], the book that was created or almost created. What was the genesis of that project? Whose idea was it to turn it into a book?



Robert Rauschenberg
Cover Page, Stoned Moon Book, 1970
 Collage of
 photographs,
 watercolor, press type,
 acetate, graphite, and
 colored pencil on
 illustration board
 16 x 20 1/8 inches
 (40.6 x 51.1 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg
 Foundation

Felsen: Well, I'm sure it was his. I'm sure that he was interested in doing a—there was a man named Henry [T.] Hopkins who at that time was a curator at the Los Angeles County Museum. And Bob liked Henry and Henry did come to the studio quite a bit when Bob was working. Whatever writing is in that book was written by Henry and so it's possible that Henry proposed it. That's possible. It's a mystery because we started to produce that book and Bob even made a print, called *Sub-Total [(Stoned Moon), 1972]*. It's book-sized. It's probably about this size. It was done in an edition of 500, which—I think that's the only 500 edition we ever did—with the idea that it would accompany this book. Probably the idea was there would be five hundred books.



Robert Rauschenberg
*Sub-Total (Stoned
Moon)*, 1972
Lithograph
8 x 12 1/2 inches (20.3
x 31.8 cm)
From an edition of
500, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los
Angeles

Q: And each would have an original.

Felsen: Yes. You'd get a print with it. And the project didn't happen. I was asked about that by the Foundation recently, and I don't know. All I can do is put together what probably happened, and that is, in 1967, '68, '69, '70, and so on, the United States economy was very strong and the business was really good. So we were rolling. And somewhere in '71 or '72, we had a fairly serious recession.

Q: Fall of 1971. I remember it clearly. I was in college.

Felsen: It probably reduced the tuition.

Q: Well, it reduced my access to certain kinds of frolic.

Felsen: It's very likely that we dropped it because we were struggling like everybody else in business just to keep our doors open and it probably was overlooked from then on. It was forgotten, really.

Q: And like you said, once something was done, he just moved on. So no one—

Felsen: Yes, that's true. But it's interesting. I think late in his life, very near the end—I think he even asked me if that book still could be done.

Q: Well, somebody here—Gina maybe—told me that the mechanicals still exist and that at this point, with the technology we have, it wouldn't be so hard to do.

Felsen: Yes. Well, I think Christy [MacLear] told me that they're interested in doing it—if the board is interested.

Q: It would be a great thing to have. A couple of other questions that I had—there were a couple of images people related to Bob's work. One—Harvey Gantt?

Felsen: Harvey Gantt was an architect who was black who lived in North Carolina and he was running against Jesse Helms—

Q: He did it twice.

Felsen: —for Governor of the—oh, no, United States Senator.

Q: Right, Senate.

Felsen: So the art world, however—somewhere, they got to us. And several artists did editions to raise money for Harvey Gantt. Harvey Gantt almost won. He was winning and winning and winning.

Q: That was '90. I remember that too. That was on the heels of the [Robert] Mapplethorpe scandals. Janet Kardon had organized that show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia [*Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*, 1988] and Helms used some of the more explicit homoerotic images of the show as a kind of rallying cry to conservatives to withdraw funding from the arts. How did Bob Rauschenberg respond to that whole situation?

Felsen: Well, I think he was gung-ho to help in any way he could. But Harvey Gantt was our hope, the great black hope that could possibly beat this guy. Bob was very, very active and demonstrative about causes he believed in or believed against.



Robert Rauschenberg
Spackle, 1990
Lithograph
5 3/4 x 4 1/2 inches (14.6 x 11.4 cm)
From an edition of 250, published
by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Rauschenberg made *Spackle* to raise
funds for Harvey Gantt Election
Campaign for U.S. Senate

Q: That's another question I have on the list here, which is the Earth Day activities, the first Earth Day [April 22, 1970]. Were you involved at all?

Felsen: We made an edition for Bob. What is it, November 22, October 22 is Earth Day? [Note: April 22] We made an edition at the original time, the origin of Earth Day. And later on, many years later, he came back and did another edition [*Earth Day*, 1990]. On these fundraising editions, all the money goes to the cause. We don't keep any and Bob doesn't keep any. We raised a fair amount of money.



Robert Rauschenberg
Earth Day, 1970
Lithograph and chine-collé on paper
52 1/2 x 37 1/2 inches (133.4 x 95.3 cm)
From an edition of 50, published by The
American Environment Foundation,
produced by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: For an artist, there isn't a whole lot of financial incentive because you only get to really write off the cost of production.

Felsen: Well, he wouldn't have any cost. He made a prototype for us and we made it.

Q: So it was a pure gift on his part.

Felsen: And we write off—yes, pure gift.

Q: So how many of these causes were you involved with?

Felsen: Lots. Almost any one that we were involved in, Bob was. If I had to guess, I'd say we've done between a hundred and two hundred editions for fundraising. Well, we did it for [President Barack H.] Obama. In 2012, I called nineteen artists and asked them to do an edition and all nineteen said yes. We raised \$3.2 million. It went to the Obama Victory Fund. In 2008, thirteen artists said yes—we only asked thirteen. And we raised about \$2.1 million.

Q: If Bob Rauschenberg didn't speak about how he chose titles or why he had a certain attitude towards craft in his work, was he opinionated at all or outspoken at all about other things, like political causes, nature conservancy?

Felsen: Well, yes. He was vocal about—yes, yes. I don't know if I can give you any examples, but it was constant. The Rauschenberg board is following Bob's life. In other words, we are very active in philanthropy and we try to follow everything that Bob did as far as the cause and the purpose of it and the specific institution.

Q: As if he were alive today. So you're *in loco*, Bob. And that's the mission of the foundation.

Felsen: Yes. That's one of the missions. One is that Captiva has become an artists' residency and that's very active now. It's been functioning for about a year and a few months. It's phenomenally successful. We get these letters that—I tell you, the tears roll out of your eyes. They're all artists. The idea of Captiva—it's sort of unspoken but the

idea is collaboration because Bob was such a collaborator. So we invite two visual artists, two photographers, one dancer, two poets, a philosopher. The hope is that when they get together on this island, that they'll start to collaborate. And they do. We've never said—the origin—the—how can I say it? The development of the artist residency was sort of my job and what I wanted to make sure was that we never advertised it for the idea of collaboration because it might scare people away. So it's interesting how they get there. They have lunch and dinner and breakfast together and they live in this compound, so to speak, and they're there four or five weeks. And there's been a lot of collaborations, it just happens.

Q: But they're interacting all the time with each other. That's quite different because, as you were unfolding all of that, I was thinking, "Well, should I ask Sid if he looked at places like Yaddo or MacDowell?" And actually, it's not like that at all because there you've got people working in isolation, except during mealtimes.

Felsen: We looked into—I mean, I read a lot about the different foundations. But we knew we wanted to feature collaboration. We knew we wanted to—I guess we were hoping that collaboration would become a byproduct of this whole residency. And it really has.

Q: And what kinds of outcomes are there? Are there works of art? Books? Specific things that have been conceived there and then—?

Felsen: You'd probably have to ask the lady that runs it. You know her. Ann [Brady]—

Q: I haven't yet had the pleasure.

Felsen: She's great. She's great. She's there and so she's—I haven't been down there since it started. We were there just before it opened. So I don't know. I don't necessarily—

Q: It'd be interesting to see how, tracking all of these people afterwards, whether they keep in touch, whether they work together post-Captiva.

Felsen: Yes, that's interesting. That's an interesting point.

Q: It'd be interesting to know that. So Harvey Gantt was a disappointment because he lost.

Felsen: He was winning until the last week or so. And supposedly the dirty tricks of politics came in and Jesse Helms won by about two or three points.

Q: It's a very funny state, North Carolina. Actually, the head of the Columbia oral history center [Columbia Center for Oral History], Mary Marshall Clark, is a native of the state. We've spoken of this. I spent some time there. A land of extremes— You have Maya Angelou and Jesse Helms.

Felsen: It's weird. It's weird. But apparently, the state legislature is very conservative. You read about this legislation that comes through there. When you think of North Carolina, you start to think, "There's a lot of good universities there and cities—" I live in a state like California, where San Francisco and Los Angeles are so progressive, so to speak, and the rest of the state is agriculture and they're very conservative. And even San Diego is very conservative.

Q: Well, Orange County and even Palos Verdes, I dare say. It's a matter of money and I guess class and self-image and so forth. Yes, Research Triangle in North Carolina, Raleigh–Durham–Chapel Hill. And right outside of the Research Triangle, there are places like Lizard Lick. So it's an interesting place.

But did Bob Rauschenberg actually go to any of the events that were related to Harvey Gantt's candidacy?

Felsen: I don't know. If I had to guess, I'd say no but I don't know.

Q: A couple of artists I was curious about because they haven't come up in conversation. One of them is a person who superficially gets discussed alongside of Rauschenberg, apart from Johns and Twombly and that's Larry Rivers.

Felsen: Well, I don't recall Bob ever talking about Larry Rivers. He certainly never was a part of the society that I was involved in as far as around Bob. I met Larry Rivers through somebody else and I never saw him with Bob around him.

Q: So it was just a different crowd altogether.

Felsen: I think so.

Q: So Larry Rivers, [Frank] O'Hara, those people.

Felsen: Okay.

Q: I don't know, did Bob ever have anything to do with Frank O'Hara?

Felsen: See, there I think more of Jasper Johns than Bob. So I don't know. If he did, I don't know.

Q: There is a photograph—

Felsen: Who was the other artist beside—you said a couple of artists.

Q: I'm trying to remember—I mean, really basically Larry Rivers because of his use of found objects and other things. Maybe another person would be Louise Nevelson.

Felsen: I never heard Bob talk about her. I never saw her.

Q: But her approach was, dare we say, more formalist somehow? And she was older, too.

Felsen: She wasn't a part of his life that I know of, in any way.

Q: Another person with whom I've spoken and knew Bob Rauschenberg, he says well, is Brian O'Doherty, who was the—Patrick Ireland [O'Doherty's artistic pseudonym]—performance artist who—

Felsen: See, that's possible. I wasn't around him.

Q: That was in the early days. So that would have been later. There was another image—

Felsen: I'm sorry—again, it's possible I mentioned it the last time but for me, Roy Lichtenstein and—I came into Bob's life in 1967, so I missed all those early days—but Roy Lichtenstein and [James] Jim Rosenquist were by far the two closest to Bob during that period. And Bob, of course, to them.



James Rosenquist and Rauschenberg, Los Angeles, 1995. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1995

Q: And all of them ultimately living on the Gulf Coast of Florida?

Felsen: [Laughs] That's funny. Well, Roy didn't live there. What happened was Roy and Dorothy visited Bob and they loved Captiva. It was really Dorothy. So they bought the house. She would go down there maybe every few months or something like that and spend a week, and she sort of kidded Roy when it was Christmas time—he brought a sketch pad and he stayed in the house and made drawings. Captiva's such a sun culture—everybody's at the beach or outside. But interestingly, Dorothy bought another house recently next door—so she's still there. She still lives in Southampton [New York] but she spends time at Captiva.

Q: So Jim Rosenquist had a place in Aripeka.

Felsen: Aripeka, Florida—that burned.

Q: That burned.

Felsen: Well, Jim's still looking. He's still looking for a place in Florida. And he hasn't found it.

Q: He just turned eighty.

Felsen: Yes. On November 29th, yes.

Q: Wow. There was a picture that we were having a look at the other day—a person who we couldn't really identify—and someone provisionally identified him as Councilman Joel Wachs?

Felsen: He was a city councilman. Very strong arts advocate. Ran for mayor, got twelve percent of the vote—lost—decided he didn't want to stay in Los Angeles, moved to New York, became the director of the Andy Warhol Foundation [for the Visual Arts], which he still is. Bob was friends with him.

Q: How did they meet? In L.A.?

Felsen: Yes. But Joel is phenomenal. He was an attorney, became a city councilman. He got something into law where every commercial construction in Los Angeles over a certain amount of money, you have to have a certain amount of money invested in art.

Q: Oh, the percent for art law. That was a terrific boon for artists back in the seventies and eighties, wasn't it?

Felsen: Well, it's still in existence.

Q: Of course.

Felsen: Joel did a lot of things for art. Amazing collector. Joel's house [laughs]—you go in there and you open, I'd say, the door to the cabinets that hold the things in the kitchen and inside the cabinet is art hanging on the wall. It's on the ceiling. It's everywhere. Bob used to have this expression. I don't know if I said it but he said, "A tiny work of art, that's what you put between the kitchen and the dining room." And Joel had something between the kitchen and the dining room.

Q: That's funny. Why don't we take a quick break and maybe have a drink of water and I'll ask you to look at some more photographs?

Felsen: Yes, sure.

Q: Thanks.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay, so we're looking at some more photographs. This is a photograph of Bob Rauschenberg with a vast table and three large vertical pieces behind him. Can you put us in the room with him?



Rauschenberg working in his studio, Captiva, Florida, 1996. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1996

Felsen: Well, it's 1996 and Joni, my wife, and I went down to visit, which we did probably at least a couple of times a year. This was probably starting in the late afternoon—Bob started working on his own things. And again, he loved to have people around him, so we stayed with him throughout the whole four or five hours that he was working.

Q: And can you describe what he's doing right now?

Felsen: Well, his general modus operandi would be—again, he was using his own photographs. They were blown up to large proportions, big images, and he would transfer them onto the board or whatever he was working on. Sometimes he would paint on top of them. Sometimes he was just using a fluid to seal it down to the base of it.

Q: Like a varnish. But he wasn't, at this point in his life, achieving the transfers with lighter fluid?

Felsen: No. Solvent transfer, no. I didn't see him do that in later life.

Q: So how was he doing the transfers?

Felsen: Well, he had a setup there. Laurence [Getford], he was working with Bob and he'd make these big pieces. It was a transfer but it wasn't by a solvent. Whatever system they worked out [note: the solvent was water].

Q: Some kind of a substance would capture the image and leave it on the opposing surface.

Felsen: They printed it on their own printing devices and machines.

Q: The Untitled Press?

Felsen: So Laurence was in Captiva for years after Bob died. Just recently, I think, he moved up here. But he was the one that would work. Bob would take the picture, in most cases, and then he would give it to Laurence. He would give Laurence the scale that he wanted and he would come back to Bob. However the process was, I don't know. It transferred pretty easily.

Q: Just out of curiosity, as a photographer, were you influenced at all by Bob Rauschenberg? And if so, in what way?

Felsen: Well, I don't think so. I don't think much. Because I'm only interested in taking pictures of people. I don't seem to be interested in things. Bob influenced me tremendously in a lot of ways—the way I think, probably the way I dress, the way I learned to better respect other people. But if it's in photography, I don't realize it.

Q: It's not directly in terms of your practice as a photographer. It's just how you conduct yourself in general.

Tell us about this next image, which is a really very wonderful image of Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, on the left. Very powerful image. You call this—

Felsen: My Mount Rushmore.

Q: Your Mount Rushmore. Because they are monumental. So can you tell us the occasion of this image?



Jasper Johns and
Rauschenberg, Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles,
October 1980. Photo:
Sidney B. Felsen ©
1980

Felsen: Well, there were at least two or maybe three times during the whole life of Bob Rauschenberg at Gemini, or Jasper at Gemini, where they were there at the same time. I've learned from experience that what you don't want is to have two artists in the place at the same time—certainly not working. They could even be the best of friends but somehow they need attention. They need a hundred percent of the attention. I've had a couple of cases where, by bad scheduling or somebody was late, two artists arrived at the same time. It was somewhat disastrous. But this is different. Jasper was working at Gemini and Bob Rauschenberg called one day from the airport and said, "I just landed in Los Angeles. How about if I come down and visit you?" And so I said, "Oh yes, great. But you know, Jasper is here." "Oh, that's great." So I went out and I said to Jasper,

“You know Bob is going to come to visit.” “Okay.” So anyway, he came in. And it was interesting. They absolutely embraced each other. They hugged each other, laughed a lot. You could see a couple of times, they annoyed each other. But Bob was sort of—Jasper was working and so he stopped when Bob came in. So Bob started asking him some questions about this or that and then he started giving Jasper some advice. It went on for a little while and then pretty soon Jasper came over and he said, “Why don’t we just pick all these things up and we’ll finish later on?” And so it was the end of Jasper’s working that day and then he came back the next day and started going on again. That was my remembrance of that moment.

Well, look, one thing about the two of them—let’s say if Bob arrived at Gemini and Jasper had done a project in the last period—whatever, three, four, five, six months—he always wanted to see what Jasper did. And when Jasper came in, he always wanted to see what Bob did recently.

Q: Well, they had been close earlier on.

Felsen: Well, they lived together for a period of time.

Q: Right.

Felsen: It was maybe a year or something like that. Then they split apart. I always heard the stories about how they were so angry with each other. I saw a lot of friendship between the two of them, a lot of appreciation.

Q: A lot of real warmth.

Felsen: Yes. To me, that was one of the miracles of our time—where these two people found each other and fell in love with each other, lived together and they ended up being maybe the two most important artists of our time.

Q: Let's look at this next picture, which you were describing during our break.

Felsen: Well, did I talk about this the last time?

Q: No. You talked a little bit about Gregory Peck coming in and watching Bob Rauschenberg work. But can you put us again in this location at that moment in time?

Felsen: Well, I may be repeating myself but Norman Lear invited us to a cocktail party, previews, screening. All right, so I won't talk about that. So anyway, this is Monday morning after the screening. Gregory Peck came in to visit with Bob and the night before, at this gathering, Bob and Gregory Peck found each other and they zeroed in on the subject of creativity. What is creativity? And so they wanted to continue the conversation the next day. So Bob said, "Well, come on in while I'm working." So Bob created two

chairs. They're brass. They're functional chairs. They have a lot of imagery on them. They're called *Borealis Shares*. And Bob was painting a group of acids or dyes, colors, onto this brass, and he did that this whole day. Gregory Peck stood with him. Bob would walk 40 feet and Gregory would follow him walking and walk back again. They talked continuously and it was a great camaraderie.

Q: Did they stay in touch with each other over the years? Or was it just that one—?

Felsen: I don't know. The only other thing I know is that Bob then did another image for Norman Lear's People for the American Way. A beautiful American flag was woven into the imagery. He did a painting first—it was like a study—and then he did a print that was after the painting. He would never do exactly the same thing but it was based on the imagery of the painting. Bob gave the painting to Norman to sell for the organization and Gregory bought it. I know he had it until he died. But I don't know about whether they continued their friendship.

Q: What's he wearing there, Peck? It looks like he's wearing some kind of ball cap.

Felsen: Well, it has the look of a sports cap of some kind. I don't know. It's hard to read. It looks like an "S" on it.

Q: Who's the woman standing to Peck's right?



Francine Matarazzo,
Darryl Pottorf, and
Gregory Peck watching
Rauschenberg work on
Borealis Shares (1990),
Gemini G.E.L.
courtyard, Los Angeles,
August 1990. Photo:
Sidney B. Felsen © 1990

Felsen: She's an artist. She's married to one of Gregory's two sons. I'm pretty sure that's Darryl [Pottorf] standing there.

Q: In the back with his hand—

Felsen: With his hand on his—

Q: —hand raised.

Felsen: —forehead.

Q: And to whom is he—some conversation going on. So Darryl and some unnamed person. Do you happen to remember the name of the woman, Peck's daughter-in-law?

Felsen: I could find—I know her. Oh, yes, in fact, it’s here. Francine Matarazzo, yes. She was a known artist in the Los Angeles scene.

Q: Another question I didn’t ask you was earlier on because it’s been a kind of a nimble conversation here, hitting on a lot of topics, is about the cover of *Time* magazine, which was for *Reels* [B+C].

Felsen: *Reels*, yes.

Q: The cover of *Time* magazine.

Felsen: Yes, in 1968 [Rauschenberg *Time* magazine cover, December 8, 1967; *Reels* [B+C] series, 1968].

Q: How did that come about?

Felsen: Well, Warren Beatty made the movie *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and Warren Beatty and Bob were friends of some sort. At that time, I think the name of the article was “Sex and Violence.” [“The New Cinema: Violence . . . Sex . . . Art . . .”] Not necessarily in the movies—I don’t know if it was about just the movies. And so Bob was in New York and he had a cold. It was February. He was talking to us on the phone and he said, “Oh!” He felt awful. And we talked him into coming to Los Angeles. “Why don’t you come home and do something?” So somewhere he grabbed on the idea of

Bonnie and Clyde and got in touch with Warren Beatty, who got Bob a bunch of the stills and takes of what was in the movie.

Q: And so *Time* just—the editorial people of *Time* magazine, how did they come to pick Rauschenberg for the cover?

Felsen: Well, that was first—before we did it.

Q: Oh, okay.

Felsen: It's possible we even suggested, "Look, why don't you come out and do something about *Bonnie and Clyde*?" But that was first. Ours was after that.

Q: Oh, the *Time* cover was first and then *Reels* came after that.

Felsen: Yes, *Time* went to Bob and asked him about an image for—

Q: I see. Because one would assume—I guess I assumed—that it followed *Reels*. But it preceded it.

Felsen: Yes. I think the picture on the cover of *Time* was from the movie.

Q: Yes. It's stills from the film. And it's red and blue, kind of—we have here a few more images from your studios. And perhaps—are you hunting for a particular image?

Felsen: No, no. I printed eight pictures that I liked of Bob. And I gave it to Christy and several people on the board. So that's what this group is.

Q: Oh, Okay. We'll make sure we've got them all, like which ones were the—

Felsen: It was this.

Q: Have we scrambled the photographs?

Felsen: Well, there's no order to them. Okay, well—I don't know whether I took these or not but again, it's *Stoned Moon*.



Rauschenberg and Gemini printers, including Robert Petersen, moving the lithography stone for *Waves (Stoned Moon)* (1969), Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Malcolm Lubliner

Q: Right. And that's Bob Petersen.

Felsen: These are Petersen. If I had to guess, I'd say I probably didn't take them. But I don't know. Bob Petersen is standing at the press. Bob was a printer. Did I tell you that? He was a printer at Gemini. Bob Rauschenberg came along and Petersen had bought a new truck. He took Bob Rauschenberg for a ride and then about three months later, Petersen left Gemini and went to live with Bob. [Laughs] So I lost a printer but gained a son-in-law. But these are just, you know, sort of traditional—

Q: Just in the studio.

Felsen: Yes. Well, this was at the end of *Stoned Moon*. These were all the printers.



Rauschenberg with Gemini staff during the *Stoned Moon* project, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Pictured: Charles Ritt, Tim Isham, Stuart Henderson, Andrew Vlady, Robert Petersen, Ron Adams, Rauschenberg, Kenneth Tyler, and Daniel Freeman. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: It's an interesting photograph. Can you identify them?

Felsen: Oh, yes. You mean all the names, you want them?

Q: Oh, I don't know if we need to do it on the interview but one of the things I'm cur—

Felsen: There's Bob.

Q: Right. There he is—in the back! It's like Orson Welles, the last name on the credits of *Citizen Kane* [1941].

Felsen: There's Petersen leaning on Bob. Well, I could throw you the names but you'll—

Q: No, I think the image is interesting because, as you were saying, Rauschenberg never took an authoritarian attitude. He just looks like one of the crew there. He's not the one who's out in front with everybody standing behind him. He's actually in the back, in the background.

Felsen: Well, you know, it's about happiness. I've got hundreds of pictures of Bob in the studio with people smiling. And the smiling wasn't so much for the picture. A lot of them are action pictures. He just made the people smile.

Q: Well, if we were to say, "Where are they now?" I mean, all these people?

Felsen: Well, he lives in Oregon. He's a carpenter. He lives in Los Angeles. He's a conservator of paintings.

Q: Who's that? What's his name?

Felsen: His name is [Timothy] Tim Isham. His name is [Charles] Charlie Ritt. He lives in Oregon. They live in the same community.

Q: Interesting.

Felsen: He started a wallpaper company. He went to Mexico City and started a print studio.

Q: Who's that?

Felsen: Andrew Vlady. He married a Mexican girl and then went to—[Ronald] Ron Adams died. He'd married some gal in Las Vegas and lived there for many years, a gal who had an art gallery. There's [Daniel B.] Dan Freeman. These are all printers at that time. Dan was teaching at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts, Valencia] for years. He works at his own art somewhat and I think he teaches at Santa Monica College now.

Felsen: This is a limestone. It's a huge limestone.

Q: That's a very big stone. It's a very big lithostone.

Felsen: And it's part of *Stoned Moon*. Do you want to look at the other ones?

Q: There are a few. There's one here just of Rauschenberg in the studio. Interesting shot.

Very high point of view, having looked down.



Rauschenberg working on *Air Pocket (Stoned Moon)* (1970), Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Malcolm Lubliner

Felsen: Somebody must have gone up on a cherry-picker or something like that. We didn't have—there was no—

Q: Or a ladder? Did you have a ladder in the studio?

Felsen: Maybe a ladder. Well, this is all *Stoned Moon*. Same project.

Q: Did Bob Rauschenberg ever share with you the origin of the title of *Stoned Moon*?

Was it, again, a play on lithostone?

Felsen: I think so, yes. Well, this was sitting around, probably—this was my ex-partner, Ken Tyler. It's probably his office. And Bob and these are three printers, probably after the work session was over.



Kenneth Tyler, Tim Isham, Daniel Freeman, Tim Huchthausen, and Rauschenberg, during the *Stoned Moon* project, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Malcolm Lubliner



Gemini printers Ron Adams, Stuart Henderson, Robert Petersen, and Tim Isham, with Rauschenberg during the *Stoned Moon* project, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1969

Q: And the same crew here with Petersen.

Felsen: Yes, yes, yes. Well, that's that same stone.

Q: That's that same stone?

Felsen: Yes. Yes, printer, printer, printer, printer, and Petersen and Bob. Yes, a stone. I'll make a guess that it weighs five hundred or six hundred pounds.

Q: Have you ever pondered the idea of making a book of all of your photography or have you done so?

Felsen: There's a book of my photographs titled *The Artist Observed* by Sidney B.

Felsen. It's black-and-white. It's beautiful. It's a publisher in Santa Fe, Twin Palms. Jack Woody is owner-publisher. I like my photographs but he really did a fantastic job of real, real rich black-and-white and good—he selected them all. The book never was a great success out in the commercial world but we had a book signing here in this house and Bob and about six of the artists were signing with me. We sold about two hundred books that night. And we had a book signing at the Hammer Museum in West Los Angeles. And we sold four hundred books. We only had a hundred there and we sold four hundred. It was a nightmare for me but I had to order the other three hundred and then get the books shipped to Los Angeles and have about six or seven artists to sign. So I had to take

three hundred books to each of the studios, get the artists to sign the books for the people—and it was all a fundraiser for Change, Inc., so that was the good part. So I'd like to have more books made but it was such a hassle to make that one. It took forever.

Q: Well, we're doing an oral history here but what you've done over the years is to create a visual history, and after our initial conversation and speaking with people here, it seemed like it would be a great idea for the follow-up conversation to be in dialogue with your pictures, since, really, you were there with all of these people, including Bob Rauschenberg. Seeing it all happen through your lens seemed to be a good portal for conversation.

Felsen: I'd be interested in doing it. I think I have about three thousand pictures of Bob.

Q: And a lot of them are here? All of them are here?

Felsen: Well, no. I don't know. Whatever picture I take of an artist, I send it to them. Whatever Bob kept, I don't know. I don't know what they have here.

Q: He seemed like he kept pretty good records. He was pretty—

Felsen: You know, I must say he was very organized for a guy who had such a free spirit about him. He definitely was very—like, I'd go to Jim Rosenquist's studio and I'd see it really wasn't organized. But Bob's very, very, very much meticulous.

Q: So he was a meticulous record keeper and—?

Felsen: Yes. Look, again, he credited Josef Albers, who was his teacher at Black Mountain. He said, “Albers really taught me order.” And Albers told Bob that he was the worst student he ever had.

Q: Albers didn’t have the power of foresight. Nobody’s perfect. But I think I may have quoted Albers to you in our previous conversation but one of his former students and teaching assistants told me that there were always a few people at Yale who tried to paint like Albers to please Albers and Albers would say, “Don’t paint like me. Be like me.”

So what’s the takeaway for a young artist, do you think, from the life of Bob Rauschenberg? Other than his work, why should they be inspired by him?

Felsen: Oh. “Can’t” was not a part of his vocabulary. Well, this sense that the world is yours—that’s the way I thought Bob lived his life. Whatever you want to do, try it. You’ll probably succeed but you’ve got to really work hard at it to do it.

Q: So he—

Felsen: Be kind to other people. Be kind and helpful.

Q: And he was.

Felsen: Yes.

Q: It's so atypical of a lot of visual artists. I've heard it explained that it's because it can be such a solitary lifestyle, where you're alone with your thoughts and your work. But Bob Rauschenberg seems like he was hardly ever alone.

Felsen: And all the time he worked with us, he would love to have, say, the three of us in the studio with him, talking to him while he was working, having the TV on with the soaps on—he never missed a soap—and listening to what you're saying. To some extent, sometimes maybe using it, taking it.

Q: I think this could be, perhaps, our opportunity to conclude. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Felsen: Well, I don't think so.

Q: Thank you so much for your time.

Felsen: Sure. It's fun to be with you.

Q: Likewise. It's been a real pleasure.

[INTERRUPTION]

Felsen: So as far as the photos, if it was a business meeting, it was seven seconds. He just told them what happened.

Q: Okay, we had a little *esprit de l'escalier* moment here. After concluding, we're going to resume for a couple of minutes. We didn't really speak about how Bob Rauschenberg interacted with dealers and I thought perhaps you as a publisher would have insight into that.

Felsen: Well, my experiences with Bob in the world of business or business relationships—there were no contracts ever. He never asked anything about any aspect of our business together. If I were doing something that I thought he should know, I would tell him. He'd listen and never responded. He never asked any questions. There was no business relationship other than the business relationship. There was no verbal—he never questioned anything, just accepted everything.

Q: So there was an understanding of what would happen vis-à-vis production of works of art and sale of works of art and things just—

Felsen: The arrangement we had is that we pay all expenses of everything and he would get a royalty of each sale. And it's a private number. If you shut the machine off, I'll tell

you what it is. Every three months, he would get royalties based upon the sales of that three-month period.

Q: Well, it's interesting that that's a confidential piece of information. That's nice to know because I think many people have standard templates in their mind about what is appropriate as royalty or commission. And as you stated earlier, with the rise of auction houses and art fairs as being the primary mode of sales these days, that's changed the whole structure of commissions.

Felsen: Of the sales part, or the distribution part of it, yes.

Q: Right. So was it like you said earlier about Chris Rauschenberg, that you see that—perhaps I'm paraphrasing—that he seems not to care about money. Was that also true of Bob? Because he grew up poor. So—

Felsen: Well, I think Bob probably cared about money more because he used it for—first of all, he had many people working for him. And he gave away so much money. And he lived the lifestyle—so he needed money—where Christopher sort of lives quietly by himself with his wife. So I think Bob cared about money.

Q: But he cared about the people working for him, too. He was like a tribal chieftain. You imagine somebody like, I don't know, Sting, let's say, who only serves spring water to

his crew backstage. There are no drugs or booze. But sort of “big daddy.” You know, sort of taking care of everybody and a sense of responsibility—he had that?

Felsen: Oh yes, definitely. He took care of his people extremely well, paid them high wages. He was always very human, always concerned about their welfare. I’d say he was a benevolent father.

Q: Apart from his dealings with you, did you have any insight into his dealings with other gallery owners or art dealers?

Felsen: Well, Leo Castelli was his dealer. I think he started out feeling great about Leo and then as years went by, I think he felt Leo wasn’t really selling his work very well. So he became disillusioned and left the gallery and went to Pace [Gallery]. I think he stayed there.

Q: [Arnold] Arne Glimcher.

Felsen: Yes. Well, I think he had a decent relationship with Glimcher as far as appreciating him.

Q: Well, just wanted to capture that.

Felsen: Yes, yes, okay.

Q: Thanks so much.

Felsen: Yes, yes, sure.

Q: Appreciate your time. Pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]