ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Arne Glimcher

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Arne Glimcher conducted by Sara Sinclair on May 27, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcription: ATC | Session #1
Interviewee: Arne Glimcher | Location: New York, NY
Interviewer: Sara Sinclair | Date: May 27, 2015

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with Arne Glimcher. Today is May 27, 2015, and we are in New York City. So to begin today, if you wouldn't mind just telling me a little bit about where and when you were born and some of your early memories.

Glimcher: I was born in Minnesota in 1938. My early memories were how lucky I was to move to Boston. I went to school there and when I was just graduating from art school, MassArt [Massachusetts College of Art and Design], I opened a small gallery in Boston called the Pace Gallery. We showed [Claes] Oldenburg and [Andy] Warhol and [Robert] Indiana and the generation of artists after Bob [Rauschenberg]. In 1963, we moved the gallery to New York, and then, of course, as part of the scene, I met Bob.

It was a very small art world. We were all a very tight community. Everyone knew everyone else. Even the dealers were collegial in those days. We were all so interested in succeeding in some way with the art that we thought was important. It was very hard; there was a handful of collectors. I met Jasper [Johns] and Bob and [Cy] Twombly, and that group. They were a group unto themselves. I already knew the Abstract Expressionists, many of them. I was a very good friend of Mark Rothko's and Louise Nevelson and actually, I think Nevelson introduced me to Bob and Jasper. They were all friends, and I think very often, they went to her house to parties. There was a loft party, or a house party, every Saturday night, and everyone just went. You

weren't invited, you just went. That was how small the community was. You would go to a loft party at Oldenburg's, and while the party was beginning, Patty Oldenburg [Patricia Mucha, née Muschinski] would be sewing up one of the soft sculptures at a sewing machine, and then finish what she was doing and join the party. It was very relaxed—a different lifestyle. None of us ever thought that art would become a business. I know for myself, I just wanted a life in art and hoped that I would make enough money to send my kids to school. But things happened. I don't know how they happened.

So that's how I came into the neighborhood and met Rauschenberg. He was already then a major force. I was representing, from 1963 on, artists who were friends of his. So when Experiments in Art and Technology [E.A.T.] happened, I was a bit involved, because I was involved with the other artists. [Robert] Bob Whitman was a very good friend of his, and I represented Bob [Whitman] from 1963. Those were some of the very avant-garde things that were happening, and still seem to be some of the very avant-garde things that are happening. When they did E.A.T., both Bobs were integral to it, because Whitman was so infiltrated into Bell Labs with the work he was doing, and he brought the Bell Labs scientists to Rauschenberg. I think that's how it happened. [Note: Johan Wilhelm "Billy" Klüver first worked with Rauschenberg on Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1960. Klüver began to bring artists to visit Bell Labs in the early 1960s, and Whitman and Rauschenberg were among those who went. Klüver, Rauschenberg, Whitman, as well as engineer Frederick D. "Fred" Waldhauer, founded E.A.T. in 1966.]

Q: Billy Klüver—

Glimcher: Billy Klüver, yes. Billy and his wife, Julie Martin—who is a very good friend of my wife's—were always very involved with Whitman, and Whitman sparked so many ideas. I was very much involved with the 9 Evenings[: Theatre & Engineering, 1966] because of Whitman and that was a very exciting moment. In a funny way, things had cooled down. They weren't as hot as they were in the early sixties, and the 9 Evenings brought things back up—the sense of experimentation, the feeling of the late fifties. I think it was a funny kind of continuum that had a hiatus. That was exciting.

Rauschenberg giving instructions for *Open Score* (1966), 9 Evenings: Theatre & Engineering, Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory, New York, October 1966. Photo: Peter Moore © Barbara Moore

I would see Bob every so often at exhibitions. I'd go to his openings and he'd come to our openings and we became friends, but not good friends. Then things changed drastically for him in the marketplace. While the demand for work by his friends—specifically Jasper and Twombly—was escalating, the demand for Bob's work was diminishing.

Q: When are you talking about right now?

Glimcher: I'm talking about the late eighties and early nineties. It was a kind of fallow period. Some of it was because Bob is such a different artist. Jasper is intent on painting a masterpiece every time he makes a picture. Rauschenberg is intent on becoming the wind that blows through the art world, and he doesn't care what that picture looks like. And he makes the greatest pictures. They're the most challenging. He's the biggest influence of the second half of the twentieth century on contemporary art. This force is a force to be reckoned with and respected. But I think people didn't know how to sell it or collect it. Everyone has this idea that they have to have the quintessential work. There's no quintessential Rauschenberg. There were the Combines [1954–64]. There are other periods of the work—*Cardboards* [1971–72] and things like that. There is no quintessential Rauschenberg. Just because the market has focused now on the Combines, because there are so few of them left in private hands, it doesn't mean the Combines were the beginning and the end of Rauschenberg. There's major work before the Combines and extraordinary work throughout his life afterwards.

He is such a fast moving target that nobody seems to be able to hit him. However, we seemed to change that in the last twenty years. Before Bob's first show here, he hadn't shown in New York for a while, and the relationship with [M.] Knoedler [& Co., New York] was over. I just made a beeline for Bob. We had known each other and we just connected for the first time in a very different way. I went down to Captiva [Florida] and the relationship seemed deeper immediately than it had been. Then we became really intimate, close, close friends.

Q: Can you tell me about how you approached asking Bob to come to Pace, or whether that's what happened?

Glimcher: Well, it is what happened. We had mutual friends who had talked to both of us, but I just told Bob that he knew how much I loved the work, and that I thought the new work was as good as any work he had ever made, and would love to present it, and to trust me to present the work in a new way. I think the reality is that the other artists in the [Leo] Castelli stable were running away pricewise, and Leo was very lazy. I think Leo has this image of a deity, but he was far from it. I knew Leo quite well. He was lazy. He loved to go to lunch. He was a gentleman farmer and he sold things over lunch. Those are the easy things to sell. Rauschenberg wasn't given the attention. Even though Ileana [Sonnabend] loved Rauschenberg more than Leo did, and he loved Ileana more, Leo didn't give Rauschenberg the same respect that he gave Johns. Johns was his artist, although he didn't discover him. Johns was in another gallery before [note: Johns previously participated in the Third Annual invitational exhibition at Tanager Gallery, New York, 1955, and a drawing exhibition at Poindexter Gallery, New York, 1955–56], as was Rauschenberg in the Stable Gallery [New York]. So that's not where it started, and Leo gets the credit for finding all these people, which is not true.

But, he was so poised and elegant, and had a sense of refinement about him that the Midwesterners and the West Coast were knocked out by. Everyone was. I liked Leo a lot. He was terrific, but I don't think he was a great dealer. Isn't that a weird thing to say? I don't think he was a great dealer at all, because what he sold, he sold easily, and he gave a lot of his work to

other galleries to sell. Other galleries supported him. [Lawrence G. "Larry"] Gagosian got his start by being there and picking up all the droppings that Leo would give him. Then it turned into the point where he was selling Leo's work for him. Leo liked that. Leo liked that. But he anointed Larry into this salesmanship position, which is very different from what Leo was. But in a funny way, Leo was a salesman, too.

Q: Did you discuss any of this with Bob?

Glimcher: Sure, I did. Yes. He agreed. When Bob was leaving them to go to Knoedler, because he needed the financial support for ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, 1984–91], there were rumors that this was happening. I met with Leo and Ileana, and I said, "He's going to leave your gallery." Leo said, "Rauschenberg will never, ever leave us." I said, "Look, he's going to leave the gallery. I'm going to make a pitch for him. Why don't we do it together? I think you need me, and you would continue your role with Rauschenberg." I thought it would be a very good combination. They wouldn't do it. They kept telling me, "That's impossible." Ileana said, "Impossible that Bob would leave."

Q: So they were stunned.

Glimcher: Yes. Pace would have had Bob ten, fifteen years earlier, and it would have been a very different market profile.

Q: How were you proposing sharing representation with him?

Glimcher: That we would be fifty-fifty, and we would share the profits fifty-fifty.

Q: Was there a specific way that you were imagining dividing the work?

Glimcher: No, we never got to that point, but the idea was that they would do one show, and eighteen months, two years later, I would do another show. Maybe we would do a show together. But Julian Schnabel left the Castelli Gallery to come with me and that really hurt Leo, because he had never lost an artist before, and at that point, Julian was the biggest deal in the art world. So that hurt our relationship. But there's a reality—if an artist doesn't want to be with me, I can't hold on to the artist. You have a life of gratification and some disappointments. That's how it goes.

Q: You've touched upon several things that I'd like to ask you about. Obviously mentioning Castelli and Sonnabend conjures up a different time. You spoke a little bit about your beliefs that maybe Castelli wasn't as strong a dealer as his reputation suggests. So I'm wondering, what responsibilities do you think a dealer has to an artist, and whether those responsibilities have changed as the market has changed.

Glimcher: I think they have changed in the subsequent generations of dealers, most of which I don't have a lot of respect for. I think you live your life with the artist. I don't think it's about making a show this season, and selling the show, or getting works for an art fair. I think it's about being there when the works are being made, having conversations in the studio, having

dinners; those are your friends. Now, so many of those people are gone from my generation. The artists were all older than I am. But, I saw Chuck Close yesterday, and I'm having dinner with him tomorrow night. I live with these people. We're a partnership. I don't think it's like that anymore. First of all, they have so many artists, and they're buzzing around the world so much, how can you keep up with anyone? We do, too, but I have a group of artists in China that mean a great deal to me. I go visit them four times a year, and China's pretty far away, so eight weeks a year in China is a lot. But there wasn't such a separation between the artist and the dealer, as there is today. We just were all together. We interacted in a different way.

I think Leo was the first—well, he loved Johns, and he loved some of his artists very much and really gave them huge attention. But I like the idea of being accessible to people. Now, probably because of my age and history, a lot of people don't ask for me in the gallery. They ask for other people, younger people. I think they don't think I'm here, maybe. I certainly have my own clients whom I work with. But if somebody came in downstairs who was twenty-five years old, and said they were interested and had questions and they'd like to see me, I'd be down there in a minute. I don't think it's that way in most galleries today. I think it's kind of imperious. I'm sorry for the fact that, when the gallery gets to this scale, it becomes intimidating to people. I'm sorry about that, but we're trying to correct that.

Q: How?

Glimcher: We're building a new building downtown, and I think it will be very radical. It's a nine-story building and it will ultimately house all of Pace. We won't have other galleries. And

we’re going to turn the gallery inside out. You will come into the library. The main entrance will be into the library of the building with a hundred thousand volumes. It will be on two levels. On one level, anyone who comes in can read the books. There will be tables to read the books in the entrance of the gallery. Up above will be a glass wall, and you can take a staircase up, and the archivists will all be working there, and you can see them working. You will be able to go through a selected rack room, and then into the gallery. So we’re turning the gallery inside out, so it’s not so precious, and people don’t know what’s happening. I think we’ve got to stop this—not elitism, because I believe in elitism.

[Laughter]

Glimcher: But elitism. No, I just believe art is an elite enterprise. I do not think it’s for everybody.

Q: Okay, I have a couple more questions about—well, first, obviously, you represent a number of Chinese artists, and over the last several years, you’ve been really interested in work that’s coming out of China. I saw something that you said about them having the narrative now.

Glimcher: Yes.

Q: Like we recognize that we had it in New York in the sixties. So I’m interested in, what was the narrative that you think that we had in the sixties, and when did it end, and how was it lost?

Glimcher: The narrative was based on our naiveté, our wonderful naiveté and innocence that we had in the sixties. We had the world going for us. We had the first president of the United States whom we, as younger people, could identify with. A first lady who brought contemporary arts into the White House. It was amazing. We had a group of artists who had made history already, the Abstract Expressionists, which for me was the greatest achievement after Cubism. From Cubism, you waited forty years for the next thing. People don't realize that today. They think that every couple of years, there is a new thing. There is no new thing. Right now, it's all the old things being reprocessed into some kind of pabulum. But there was this kind of innocence and optimism and the urge to build a new world.

The Abstract Expressionists had reached for the sublime. People think that that's something like religion and looking at the sky; it wasn't. They were reaching for the sublime inside of the human being. Rothko was a very good friend. He was an absolute atheist. And they achieved that. It was an extraordinary achievement. What did the next younger artists, like Rauschenberg and Johns, have to deal with? They wanted to bring in a new kind of realism, not necessarily figuration, but recognizable signs. Everything had become so dissected, and we were going towards Minimalism. Johns brings in a new verification that the painting is not a painting of anything, but a painting itself. So it's the first time, with his flags, that we see the congruency of image and support. The next step is Brice Marden making the wax paintings. There's all of this amazing investigation. It's the end of taking this puzzle apart.

In order to introduce a new kind of realism, a new kind of sublime, they find it in the street. So that was quite exciting, the rediscovery of the image of America, whether it was the Campbell's

soup can, which—who cares, it's a symbol—it's about what that meant. The idea of the media coming in and people being famous for ten minutes. In a lot of Rauschenberg's paintings, the overlapping silkscreens looked very much like the flop-over images on television sets. The television sets in that time would never stay on. You know, they would flop over, and you would work the rabbit ears, and stuff like that. Bob never was without television. When we would have lunch in the studio, a huge television was hanging from the ceiling, he would sit on the side of the table where he would see it, and we would talk, and he kept looking at it; this flood of imagery was always being reprocessed by him. So I think that that was an amazing achievement, which ended in Pop Art existing almost like an island, and Abstract Expressionism ending. Rauschenberg and Johns, they are the central figures. Minimalism, I think, is the extension of Abstract Expressionism. Bob has a huge part in Minimalism, which is really very interesting. People don't see that yet, but I think they will.

Rauschenberg working on *Auctionhouse [Anagram (A Pun)]* (1998) with the television on in his studio. Captiva, Florida, 1998. Photograph collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Ed Chappell

That was the American narrative. Then the wars, Vietnam, disappointment, the criticism of our government and the way it worked, the defrocking of our presidents, the foibles become visible. Well, China comes along, and it has a bad and corrupt government, but Mao [Zedong], in the Cultural Revolution, destroys the entire history of China that he can. They go into the museums, and they break all the Ming porcelains and Song and Tang porcelains. They destroy the furniture. What he's trying to do is create the new China. Well, a generation of artists, young artists come out of art school, and they go underground, and they become critical of what's happening. But it's a tabula rasa. They don't even know what ancient Chinese art looked like, because it wasn't taught when they were kids. So it's this amazing dichotomy of a country that is one of the oldest civilizations in the world, and simultaneously the newest civilization in the world. It created a really fertile bed for the new art to flower. I find that interesting.

I think in the sixties, parallel with New York, you had the German artists evolving, but they didn't evolve really to maturity until the eighties. Who knows where it goes next, but there's this egalitarian view today that in Africa and in China and in Sri Lanka and in South America, every place has a great artist. Yes, baloney. It's not the way art works. Art isn't just a question of making crafts and decoration. Art is the tool by which society extends its perception at the highest level, which is why I say I'm not an egalitarian. I don't believe that every country makes great art. Every country might make very interesting folk art, but I don't think that's part of the universal stream of this instrument called art.

Q: What is required for a nation to produce great artists?

Glimcher: I think an intellectual base. It actually has to have an intellectual base.

Q: Okay. You spoke a little bit about the surprise that art could make money. I'm wondering if that's something that you can speak about a little bit in the context of what we're just discussing—how the emergence of the global art market might actually change the energy in New York City itself.

Glimcher: Yes. I think it might change the energy in New York City, and, more dangerously, it changes the energy in the artist. That's the danger. When dealers are saying, "I need a painting for Frieze [Art Fair]; I need a painting for [Art] Basel; I need a painting for [Art Basel] Miami [Beach]," what does that tell us? It's that the artists are painting for dollars. That's not making a painting out of inspiration. I think that's the terrible thing that's happening. That's the commercialization of art that is so destructive. If a young artist in his twenties has an exhibition, and everybody agrees that this is a real talent, a real budding talent, the paintings go to the most important collectors on that dealer's list. Then, thirty or forty of the second level collectors are all on the waiting list for paintings. Our policy has always been that the paintings go up about ten percent every time we sell out a show. But now they double and triple during the show. I know some dealers who change their prices, which is unconscionable. So you're twenty-three years old, and you have this huge hit, and you've been working on these paintings for years before anybody found you. Now there are forty people waiting, and they're paying three times as much, and you're a millionaire. Are you going to make a left turn and say, "I'd like to experiment with something else"—I don't think so.

Q: [Laughs] Right.

Glimcher: That's what is happening today. I went to Frieze, and I saw almost nothing I didn't see in art school fifty years ago, fifty-five years ago.

Q: How often does this kind of sensation that you're describing come about? In New York, say. How often is there a twenty-three-year-old that the world is abuzz about?

Glimcher: Oh, it's every year, every other year. Oh, sure. It's every year. There may be two or three of them.

Q: Yes.

Glimcher: Promise and fulfillment are two different things. There are a lot of people with promise. That doesn't mean they can carry it to fulfillment. One needs time and space. All of these young artists, who I feel terrible for now, are living under a microscope. There's nothing that isn't shared immediately in the media. It's not a way that art develops.

Q: Can this change?

Glimcher: Yes, I think it can change. It could change with a great catastrophe, like the art market—which isn't going to happen—totally collapsing, a huge depression, which would be a terrible thing for the world, but it would be a wonderful thing for art.

Q: Right. So art needs beginnings.

Glimcher: It needs time and space and investigation. Look at the greatest artists that we can think about, how long they worked before anyone knew the work, before anyone would buy the work. I remember in ’65, I sold a [Alberto] Giacometti to the Art Institute of Chicago, *L’homme qui marche* [*II*, 1960], six-foot-tall, walking man. It sold last year, at Sotheby’s, another cast of it, for a hundred ten or a hundred fifteen million dollars. I knew Giacometti. I was very lucky. I was having lunch with him one day, and I told him that I had sold his *L’homme qui marche* to the Chicago Art Institute for sixty-five thousand dollars, which was huge; it was the highest price ever achieved for a Giacometti. He looked across the table and he said to me, “You will be arrested.”

[Laughter]

Glimcher: He couldn’t believe it. Mark Rothko couldn’t believe that his paintings were a hundred million dollars either. It’s ridiculous, really ridiculous. But there’s so much money out there, and people just want things, and it doesn’t matter. If you have ten billion dollars, and you wanted that Rothko for a hundred fifty million dollars, it’s not going to change your lifestyle.

Q: Okay. So returning to Bob—

Glimcher: We have digressed so badly—

Q: No, no, not at all, not at all. The moment that he comes to you in the late eighties—and you spoke about an interesting difference, which people speak about, the difference between Jasper, who seemed to be curating his own work, and Bob, who was absolutely not—who just wanted to make something every day.

Glimcher: Yes.

Q: People are critical of Bob for that. They say he made too much and he should have been editing himself. But should an artist ever be thinking that way?

Glimcher: Never. One of the great artists of all time, [Pablo] Picasso never edited himself—and he is probably one of the greatest artists of all time—who made the most terrible work of any famous artist, because he was, like Rauschenberg, making art every day. Jean Dubuffet got up every day and made art. It wasn't this nitsy attitude of making masterpieces, or making a picture. Bob was never making a picture. If fifteen of the works in a group of twenty were not really great pictures, they were Rauschenberg's, and those fifteen got him to those two.

Q: Right.

Glimcher: That's what it's about. That's what you want to see. The idea of seeing a painting hanging on your wall—you know, it's a weird way for me to talk. It's ridiculous, this idea of masterpieces. When I was a kid, if you had a tiny little scrap of drawing that Picasso had laid a

hand on or something, you were so lucky to have a work by Picasso. I knew that the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* [1907] was in the [Museum of] Modern [Art, New York (MoMA)]. It didn't mean that I wouldn't be happy with a little drawing. It's not the attitude anymore. There is no connoisseurship. It's easy to pick the paintings that are in all of the coloring books and all of the art books. But how about the paintings that really show you how pictures are being made? That's what is so exciting, the paintings that show the struggle. The Rothkos that look like picture postcards, three bands of red—and they're gorgeous, and they're terrific—those are not the Rothkos that interest me. The Rothkos that are burgundy and black and clay color, and you can see the struggle to get that painting made. The thing is, that painting is a gift, because the artist allows all levels of its creation to be visible. So it's a painting and it's a notebook for the painting. Some of the paintings that are three bands of red that knock you out, they're not the same thing. They don't have the same life for me. So I'm so interested in seeing something that struggles, that near misses, that then comes out with something great. That's so interesting. I don't think people, for the most part, know how to look at it. They're too valuable now. It's an investment, and they want the picture book paintings. I hope there are young people out there who just wish they could have something by Rauschenberg.

Q: How do you think you learned to look at it?

Glimcher: I was an artist. I was only interested in art from the time I was four or five years old. I was a very peculiar kid.

[Laughter]

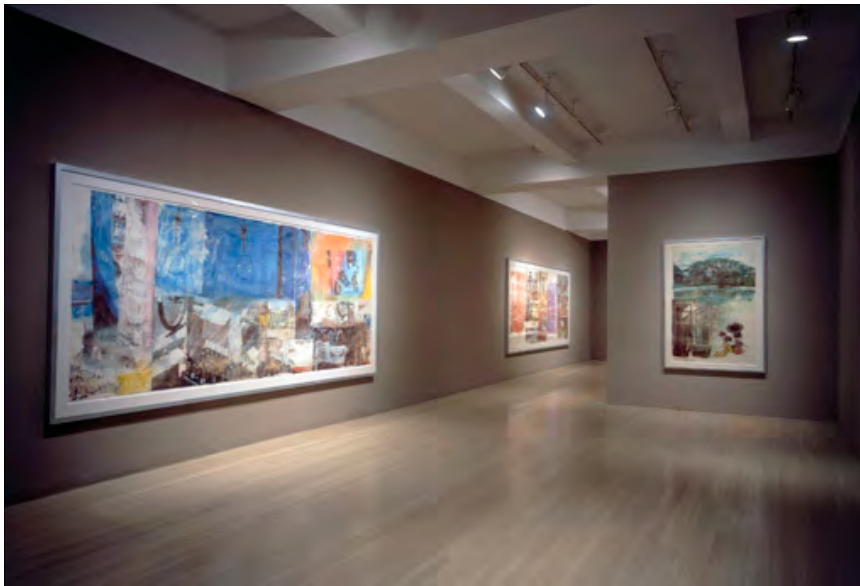
Q: Okay.

Glimcher: I was an artist, so I'd look at a painting, and I can see the painting being made. It's a huge advantage, and it's been a huge advantage in my relationship with artists. I am not an artist, but I have the sensibility of one. I think Bob picked up on that. I know Bob loved the fact that I understood the nature of his work was not for the masterpiece. The nature of his work was really like channel surfing. All of this information that's on the page is for you to create the narrative within it. Aesthetically, they're dazzling, the way he balances the work and uses the space. But they're incredibly challenging, because so many of the images have nothing to do with each other, and you have to stretch your perception in a way—learn how to look at something in a different way. You have to look at parts of the picture as well as the whole, because parts of these pictures are whole pictures.

Q: How would you characterize that moment when he comes to Pace, in terms of his career?

Glimcher: It was an interesting moment, because he was drinking quite heavily before. He went to Betty Ford [Center, Rancho Mirage, California], and I got him right after he came out of Betty Ford. So it was a fresh start all over again. It was a lucky moment. Then he made those extraordinary big works on paper. People generally don't care so much about works on paper, as they do about painting. But I was thrilled with them, and I said, "I would like to do a show just of these." We did the show; we sold the show out—the Whitney Museum [of American Art, New York], San Francisco, Los Angeles—it was amazing. Everyone bought them, and they were huge

works on paper. We sold out every single show. It built up a great momentum, and every show sold out. [Note: The exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg: Anagrams* was presented at PaceWildenstein, New York, 1996, and traveled to PaceWildenstein, Beverly Hills, 1996–97. The Whitney Museum acquired *Fusion (Anagram)* (1996); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art later acquired a work from the *Anagram (A Pun)* series (1997–2002).]



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: Anagrams*, PaceWildenstein, New York, 1996. Photo: Pace Gallery

Q: You had spoken a little bit about how you liked to look at work. So would you go to Captiva and look at what he was doing—

Glimcher: Yes.

Q: —and then discuss what was going to be included in an upcoming—

Glimcher: I would make selections for the show. But very often he would hide paintings from me.

[Laughter]

Glimcher: I know that from David White, too. He would say, "Oh, Arne's coming. He's going to take everything. Let's put these away for the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation. Don't let him sell everything."

[Laughter]

Glimcher: But, it was wonderful. We would go down to visit while things were being made, and then one of the visits would be a selection, because there was a show coming up. It got more and more difficult for him towards the end of his life. He was a very emotional man. I remember one day sitting in the studio towards the end of his life, and he looked at his hands, and he began to cry, and he said, "Arne, I have lost so much." It was so sad. I said, "Bob, you've given so much." I think he is a great artist, <u>the</u> great artist.

Q: Can you speak a little bit more about looking at the work with him while you were there?

Glimcher: One day I was looking at a series of paintings which were called "Paragraphs" [*Short Stories*, 2000–02], and there was one painting I really loved, and it had two guys on the beach [*Page 48, Paragraph 4 (Short Stories),* 2001]. He had taken the pictures; the photographs were

all his at that point. He had taken those photographs, and Bob was a great photographer. The photography isn't even appreciated at all, and I have several works of his photographs. He was a great, great photographer, and he was a photographer before he was a painter. So there were these two guys in the water. Then there was a patch of blue paint that was quite heavy, and seagulls. I kept going back to that picture. He said, "You really like that picture." I said, "I do." He said, "Well, it's yours." He gave me that thing. It was so nice. It's a major painting. And then there was a painting I wanted that was his—I wanted it for myself, and everybody wanted to buy that painting. It had his dog in it. And then I got that painting [*Wolf Wood (Urban Bourbon)*, 1991]. There was something very—you know when you're on the same wavelength.

Robert Rauschenberg
Page 48, Paragraph 4 (Short Stories), 2001
Inkjet pigment transfer on polylaminate
85 1/2 x 61 inches (217.2 x 154.9 cm)
Private collection
Courtesy Pace Gallery

Robert Rauschenberg
Wolf Wood (Urban Bourbon), 1991
Acrylic on enameled aluminum
97 1/4 x 49 inches (247 x 124.5 cm)
Courtesy Pace Gallery

When Bob cooked meals, they were delicious; he was a terrific cook. He would never show me the works as soon as I came down. I came with [Mildred] Milly [Glimcher] most of the time; he loved Milly. We would come into the big house, the kitchen area, and we would sit there and talk for maybe two hours. I was always nudging to get into the studio to see the work, and then, finally he'd say, "Okay, okay, I know. I'll take you to the studio now."

Q: Would he say anything when he was showing you the work?

Glimcher: No. No. He loved that I loved the work. You know, he loved the comments I would make about the works, some things in certain paintings that stood out to me, that were reminiscent of other things, or the way he used the space. But he never discussed his work as works of art.

Q: Did he discuss it in other terms?

Glimcher: Not really. Things he really liked himself he would call "keepers." Sometimes he'd show me something that I wanted and he'd say, "Oh, that's a keeper." I'd say, "I want to show it anyways, because it's so integral to this work." So sometimes we would have a show with two or three keepers in it that were not for sale, but they had to be seen, because they were unique or special in some way. Sometimes the keepers were the best works.

Q: I wanted to ask you about some of the sales that you negotiated to museums and public institutions.

Glimcher: There were a lot. I think that's something that hadn't been done for a long time.

Q: Yes. So there was a package of thirteen—

Glimcher: San Francisco [Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)].

Q: Yes. I know it was first offered to MoMA here. So maybe you can start from that point in the story.

Glimcher: Yes. The package wasn't first offered to MoMA. Or was it? No, the package wasn't first offered to MoMA. The *Erased de Kooning* [*Drawing*, 1953]. I had grown up on the *Erased de Kooning*. That was one of the milestones in the history of art. I think [Marcel] Duchamp's urinal [*Fountain*, 1917] and then the *Erased de Kooning* were the two most iconic images in the first fifty years of the century. It had a huge influence on me, the *Erased de Kooning*, and on people like [Robert] Ryman, too. I was worried about what was going to happen to the *Erased de Kooning*, because Bob was not always well during the period of our lives together. So I went to [John] Kirk [Train] Varnedoe, and I said, "I think that I could get the *Erased de Kooning* for sale for MoMA." He said, "Oh, it has to be in MoMA. That's just where it belongs. It's such a great thing," blah blah blah, "I'll work on it." So two months went by, three months went by. I said, "You know, I can't wait for you forever on this work of art." "Oh, we should have it. We'll get it." A year went by, and I kept reminding him, and nothing happened.

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

David [A.] Ross, who became the director of San Francisco—he left the Whitney—we were pretty good friends. They had a huge budget. I called him and I said, "If I put together in essence a history of Rauschenberg, would you have money to buy it? And it would include *Erased de Kooning.*" He said, "Absolutely. I'd do anything for that." At that time, we put three million dollars on the *Erased de Kooning*, which was a huge price. Now I think it would be ten million dollars. They bought it all, and they assured us that when they built the wing, there would be this Rauschenberg installation, and there's going to be. Next fall we'll see this Rauschenberg installation. We also did a whole installation like that of Ryman. We sold them about fifteen or eighteen Rymans, so that was exciting.

Then there were a few other things that—

Q: Yes. *Asheville Citizen* [Untitled (matte black painting with *Asheville Citizen*), ca. 1952] was sold to MoMA here in '99.

Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled [matte black painting with *Asheville Citizen*], ca. 1952
Oil and newspaper on two separately stretched and joined canvases
72 1/4 x 28 1/2 inches (183.5 x 72.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Purchase

Glimcher: Yes, yes. The Whitney bought the Combine with the blue light on the floor [*Blue Eagle*, 1961]. Leonard [A.] Lauder bought it for the Whitney. That was a very important sale. And then, *Scanning* [1963]. That was Bob's last silkscreen painting that he kept. It had Merce Cunningham dancers in it. That was really important. That was part of the package [SFMOMA]. The Schwabs [Charles and Helen Schwab] put up the money, but they signed a contract. It was a fractional gift, and so they were locked into that. These *Anagrams* [(1995–97) and *Anagrams (A Pun)* (1997–2002)] are the greatest late paintings; frankly, I think they're his greatest late pictures. This was gigantic; so that was Bob for SFMOMA. The other one was bought by the Whitney. The tire track [*Automobile Tire Print*, 1953] was part of that. I don't think anyone sold as many of his works to museums as I did.

Robert Rauschenberg
Blue Eagle, 1961
Combine: oil, graphite, printed paper, cotton T-shirt, tin cans, and wire on canvas with electric cord and light bulb
84 x 60 x 5 inches (213.4 x 152.4 x 12.7 cm)
depth variable
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Gift of The American Contemporary Art Foundation Inc.,
Leonard A. Lauder, President

Robert Rauschenberg
Scanning, 1963
Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas
55 3/4 x 73 inches (141.6 x 185.4 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Fractional and promised gift of Helen and Charles Schwab

Robert Rauschenberg
Fusion (Anagram), 1996
Inkjet dye transfer on paper
60 1/2 x 144 3/4 inches
(153.7 x 367.7 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase, with funds from Leonard A. Lauder and Thomas H. Lee

Robert Rauschenberg
Port of Entry [Anagram (A Pun)], 1998
123 3/4 x 180 inches (314.3 x 457.2 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis

Robert Rauschenberg
Automobile Tire Print, 1953
Monoprint: house paint on 20 sheets of paper, mounted on fabric
16 1/2 x 264 1/2 inches (41.9 x 671.8 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis

Q: What was your fear about what would happen to the *Erased de Kooning*?

Glimcher: I didn't know, but I didn't think that it should fall into an estate. It was such a milestone in the history of art. The whole idea about making a work of art by erasure rather than by the opposite, by lead. So he was using the wrong side of the pencil to make a work of art. I just talked with Bob about taking all of these early great works that he had and placing them. I said to him, "This is an enormous treasury of work. You don't even look at it. Wouldn't you be happier to see its placement in your lifetime than have it dispersed later? Maybe they'd be sold to

collectors. This way, you would know exactly where they went, and who got what group, and we'd decide together." That's how I convinced him to sell all of the early works.

Q: Was that important to him, that his work be held by—

Glimcher: Yes, yes.

Q: Yes.

Glimcher: Although he loved people living with his work. He liked that it was alive. There's something different. Art in someone's house has a different life than in a museum. It's more alive. In a museum, you stand off. There's a wall of approval between you and the painting.

Q: [Laughs]

Glimcher: Anyway.

Q: So what about *Synapsis Shuffle* [1999]? Bob said that he'd envisioned that it would end up in a number of different collections, and you approached the Whitney hoping that they would purchase the whole work?

Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: Synapsis Shuffle*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2000. Photo: Jerry L. Thompson, courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Glimcher: Yes. I approached Leonard Lauder, because Leonard bought all of the most important things for the Whitney. Marla Prather was the curator at that time. So I said to Leonard, "I think it's an amazing work." We were talking also about getting earlier works for the Whitney. So we got on Leonard's plane, the three of us, and flew to Captiva and saw the work in Captiva. On the way back, I said, "You know, I'm really making a push in any way we can for you to buy this." Right there on the plane, he said, "Okay, I've bought it." That was nice.

[Laughter]

Glimcher: We flew back and forth the same day.

Q: Okay. And how much later was the big reveal in Long Island City?

Glimcher: Six months, maybe? Three months? Not much longer. Bob had no time. You suggested something—<u>do it</u>. It's not like saying, "Let's have a show next year." It's coming to the studio and saying, "Bob, these are great. Let's have a show." So we'd push things out of the way, and we'd have a show two months later or three months, as fast as we could get them

photographed and the catalogue made. But you see, he wasn't painting for a show. He wasn't painting for the art fair. Dubuffet said to me, "I work like a bricklayer, one brick at a time, every day." So it's not so artsy-fartsy as a lot of other artists.

Q: Do you like openings?

Glimcher: I hate them.

Q: Hate them.

Glimcher: Hate them.

Q: Why?

Glimcher: I feel uncomfortable. I don't go to art fairs. I am actually a shy person. I know it's hard to believe, but I actually am. I don't like being as public a person as I am. I try to contain my life. I have a very different life than a lot of people. I've been married fifty-five years and I have two kids; I have seven grandchildren. I have a life. I don't want to run around to parties. I think I've put in my time when I was young. Collectors invite you to parties and it's like being the dwarf in a [Diego] Velázquez painting. You're there to entertain and everybody asks you, "Well, tell me about the art world. What do you think about the art market?" Moron, read the paper. What am I going to tell you? "It was a good auction."

[Laughter]

Q: Yes.

Glimcher: So I don't like that. I think standing in a booth at the art fair is humiliating. Unfortunately, it's what happens now. But I decided some years ago I just could not do it anymore. I couldn't stomach it. There are so many people, I don't know who they are, who think I know them. I can't remember all of those people. You have to talk to them and that's not how I sell art. I like to sell the exhibition before it opens.

Q: Okay. So that is, you have buyers in mind for—and you call—

Glimcher: I call them. We have quite a beautiful, big warehouse on West Fifty-fifth Street where I will do the entire installation of the exhibition sometimes and call people in, and then the show is sold, and we hang it up.

Q: Okay. You just said that you thought the *Anagrams* were the best of the late work. Why do you love the *Anagrams*?

Glimcher: Oh, I think they're this new, extraordinary burst of energy. He begins again. He begins again. It's like the first Combines. They are the most modern paintings being made today. They are paintings made without paint. They're pictorial pictures that are transfers. This is modern art. In a funny way, painting a picture now with a brush is so arcane.

Q: You said that Rauschenberg was the great artist, he was the artist.

Glimcher: Of the second half of the twentieth century, yes.

Q: Yes. So can you tell me more about why you think that?

Glimcher: Sure. Look how many different areas, artistic areas, he's performed in. There's performance, there's sculpture, there's assemblage. There's painting. He's done everything. He takes cardboards and makes works out of them, signs and turns them into sculptures. What he does is creates areas in which other artists can work. I remember going through the Rauschenberg exhibition at the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim Museum [New York], the retrospective [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, 1997–98], with Kiki Smith. She seemed very sad, and I said, "What's the matter, Kiki?" She said, "Everything I'll ever do in my life, he did before I was born." So he did make it possible for other artists to work. He really did. Things like his *White Paintings* [1951], the *Black Paintings* [1951–53]—they were conceptual art; so much of it comes out of Rauschenberg. I think Minimal art comes so much out of just a piece of fabric hung with a pole on the side, and everything's perfect. We don't even know Rauschenberg yet. It's such an enigma, and there's so much to mine in that work. I think generations will make works from Rauschenberg, influenced by Rauschenberg.

Robert Rauschenberg
White Painting [four panel], 1951
Oil on canvas
72 x 72 inches (182.9 x 182.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled [small vertical black painting], ca. 1951
Oil and newspaper on canvas
24 1/8 x 17 15/16 inches (61.3 x 45.6 cm)
Collection of Mary and John Pappajohn

Q: Who do you think of as his peers, and who do you think of as his successors?

Glimcher: Certainly his peers are Johns and Twombly. They're a distinct little group in the history of art. His successors are almost all the Pop artists and Minimal artists as well, and performance artists. He did that so before anybody, and installation artists. Think of *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* [1981–98], this huge installation piece, it's been exhibited all over the world, it's so amazing, the whole concept. So he's a Conceptualist, a Minimalist, an Expressionist, a performer. With the exception of the Realist painters, which don't interest me, everyone out there is influenced by him.

Installation view, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1998–99. Also pictured is Richard Serra's *Snake (Sugea)* (1994–1997). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Ellen Labenski © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

Q: Does he have different successors than, say, Johns?

Glimcher: Yes, I don't see Johns's successors. But that doesn't diminish Johns as a wonderful artist. I don't see Giacometti's successors, and he's a great artist. But I think the most vital artists in history are the artists without whom the stream of art does not continue. If you take Rauschenberg out, it changes. It would have been something else.

Q: All right. Well, that's probably a very nice closing note. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to speak about?

Glimcher: Not really.

Q: Okay. Well then, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]