

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Agnes Gund

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Agnes Gund conducted by Sara Sinclair on April 8, 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: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Agnes Gund

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: April 8, 2015

Q: Today is April the 8, 2015. This is Sara Sinclair with Agnes Gund and we are in New York.

Thank you for making the time to meet with me today.

With these oral history interviews, we like to start with a little bit about you, before you intersect with Bob [Rauschenberg]. If we could begin with you telling me a little bit about your early life, maybe sharing some of your early memories of growing up in Cleveland.

Gund: Okay. I'd love to. I grew up in a family with six children born in seven years, so we were all about a year apart. We lived outside of Cleveland. My father was a workaholic, a banker. My mother really loved having the children, but she became ill with cancer two years after the last of us was born, my sister, Louise [Gund]. She was in and out of the hospital and sick for eight years. She was supposed to die in six months—or, she was given six months to live. But then she did live eight years, which was kind of a miracle. I think it was more or less because she had the real will to live. She used to say that she just wanted to stay alive and be around for us children. She had gone to this school called Farmington, Miss Porter's School, in Connecticut. She wanted me to go, and said she wanted to live until I arrived there. She did take me up with her mother to Farmington and then died spring of the first year that I was there.

She was a pianist. She played the piano and tried to teach us all, but we failed at that. But she was very musical, and I think some of the music ability that some of my children and grandchildren have is due to her. It's certainly not due to me. I had no voice or anything.

We used to have a fairly regimented life. We had a governess called Louise Dickey and Mother had baby nurses. We did go to skating club to skate on Fridays. The boys played hockey. I did figure skating. So did Louise when she came along. But a highlight of our Saturdays was going to classes at the Cleveland Museum [of Art]. I loved doing that. I really did, from an early age, sort of memorize a lot of the things that were there that I loved.

I still continue to be very involved with the Cleveland Museum. I was on the two search committees—one with David Franklin and then one recently with [William M.] Bill Griswold who came to us in Cleveland from the Morgan [Library and Museum] in New York where I had known him. I had also known him at the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum, Los Angeles] because I was on the board of the Getty when he came up there to be [Deborah A.] Debbie Gribbon's replacement before he went to Minneapolis [Institute of Art], from which he came back to the Morgan and established the [Morgan Drawing] Institute.

I really care about Cleveland a lot still. My family has a foundation [The George Gund Foundation] that is one of the best family foundations, I think, in the country. I can say that because I'm the only family member who's never actually been on the foundation board. The foundation has given to all these arts, environment, education, and social justice issues. We don't

do anything, really, in the medical profession except give to Gordon [Gund]. My brother is blind with retinitis pigmentosa so we give to the foundation fighting blindness.

Some of the other boys, Graham [Gund] and Gordon and I think George [Gund III], although I'm not sure, went to the Saturday classes. Besides going to the opera, which she loved, Mother took me to a lot of shows at the museum, so I was able to enjoy that. I was like every child, a little bit, "Oh, do I have to go to the opera?" But of course I remember those things more than anything else.

I really didn't want to go away from the school I was at in Cleveland, but at Farmington I had the two best teachers I ever had in art history. That was really why I got more into it, because she really did recognize that I had an eye for looking at things, that my whole nature was tuned to being visual.

Then we had a sort of struggle with my father because he wanted me to go to Wellesley [College, Massachusetts]. He told me he could get me in and the school said maybe I couldn't get in. They didn't know. So when he said he could get me in, I rebelled, which was one of the stupidest things I've done in my life. I would have liked to have gone to Wellesley because it was at that time preeminent in art history and it would have been a great place for me. But it was hard because there was nobody really guiding me and nobody who could really sit down with me and say, "Look. Take advantage of the fact that your father says this and go to Wellesley."

But I went to another school, which is certainly a very nice school, but it was the only school I applied to, Connecticut College [New London]. They didn't have a good history of art program at all at that time. So when I was there the president, Rosemary Park [Anastos], who was an exceptional person, said at one of the assemblies, "If you are in a major where you're just not getting any demands made of you, you are in the wrong major." So I switched to history from art history, because I had taken every history of art course that I could take. They didn't offer much.

That was why later I went to Harvard [University] when I had my four children and lived outside Cambridge [Massachusetts]. I went back for my master's and had the second best teacher I had ever had, a man named Konrad [J.] Oberhuber who was very well known at Harvard because he was a Raphael and a drawings connoisseur and scholar. He went to the Albertina [Vienna] after Harvard. I met a lot of the people I've later known in the world of art there because it had all these people taking PhDs who either crossed my path or who I did know then. One person who crossed my path was Glenn [D. Lowry], but I didn't really know him. He was studying Islamic art at the time, and that was an area where unless you spoke Arabic or somehow had a background in that, you couldn't really study. The same was true of Asian art in general.

I did have a fairly good time taking courses there, but especially, I loved Konrad's courses, of which I took three. Konrad was another person who was sort of like Sarah [B.] MacLennan, the teacher at Miss Porter's, who knew that, although I wasn't curator material or maybe PhD material, I did have a real energy and drive for art.

I really decided that one thing I would like to do was to collect old masters drawings. When we went on trips for the drawings committee, I had gone to some homes where it was completely dark. I can't live in darkness, I have to have light, so I thought I couldn't collect old masters drawings, because I couldn't live in that kind of an atmosphere. After my father died, I did decide that I would like to collect contemporary artists, and that I would know them and feel more sure of what I was getting than I would necessarily feel if I collected old masters.

So I began collecting pretty early. My father died in '66, so I began collecting in the late sixties. I became a member of the International Council at the Museum of Modern Art [MoMA, New York] in '67. And then in '68 they put me on the painting and sculpture committee because I was somebody who was young. At that point, in '72, I moved to Greenwich, Connecticut so I was much more involved with both the Modern and with other arts organizations.

[Thomas N.] Tom Armstrong [III], whom I had gotten to know through the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York], lived just three flights down from me in our apartment building when I moved to New York. When I was asked to go on the MoMA board in '76, I was also asked the very same day to go on the Whitney board. But I chose MoMA because I was more knowledgeable and interested in European as well as American art.

Q: I want to jump in. There are a few things that you've mentioned that I would love to ask you to speak a little bit more about. When you spoke about looking at art when you were a child and you felt, and other people recognized, that you had a unique way of looking at things. I'm

wondering if you can speak about your memories of some of the first work that you really responded to when you were a kid and how it made you feel.

Gund: Well, I think maybe I put too much emphasis on people thinking I had a good eye. At that time, I don't think people thought much about that. They just knew I liked to look at things and sort of had a memory for things.

One of the things I liked as a child—everybody liked it—was the room that was just by the wishing well, which was by the very front door of this neo-Gothic building that Cleveland has as its main building, facing this park and lake. There were men in armor with the big—I thought they were very big—Renaissance paintings.

My father had a collection and my mother had some things too. It was very varied except for my father's was mostly Western art. So, it was a very different size. It was [Frederic] Remington and [Charles Marion] Russell and [Frank] Tenney Johnson and [Charles] Schreyvogel and those kinds of artists, [George] Catlin a little. My mother had some drawings from Germany. I don't know whether they bought together or separately, but they bought some Spanish artists, one fairly well known. My aunt, whom I never knew, my father's sister, was a painter very interested in art, and had gone to the Cleveland Institute of Art which is a school like RISD [Rhode Island School of Design, Providence] is a school for artists.

The pieces I loved there were medieval works. A man named William [Mathewson] Milliken, who was head of the museum before Sherman [Emory] Lee, had bought quite a few medieval

pieces, which I really did love. I loved the French tureen by [Juste-Aurèle] Meissonnier [1735–38]. That was a big silver tureen that had lobsters going across it. I remembered it so well that when I was visiting with this woman, this great collector of silver in Argentina, Blanquier [phonetic], and the first time I was down there at her house in the country, we went into the dining room for lunch and all of a sudden, there was this tureen. It had the same motif of lobsters and the fish and the wonderful molding on the outside. I said, “How can you have this? Cleveland has this,” and she said, “Oh, they’re a pair. This is the second in the pair. I have the other one besides the one that is in Cleveland.” And I loved this Chinese piece, very old, in wood of all things, with these cranes and these serpents going around the bottom of the cranes [*Cranes and Serpents*, 475–221 BCE]. I just recently got to do an app on that piece, which I’m sure isn’t out—nobody’s listened to it. I had remembered that from early on. I also liked the Egyptian collection. They don’t have—like they do with the Asian collection—a very strong collection compared to some other museums like the Brooklyn [Museum] or the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York] or such. But they do have some really prized things that of course as a kid you love the Egyptian things and mummies.



Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier  
*Tureen*, 1735–38  
Silver  
Overall: 14 1/2 x 15 1/16 x 12 1/2 inches (36.9 x 38.4 x 31.80 cm)  
Average: 13 3/4 x 15 1/16 x 12 1/2 inches (35 x 38.4 x 31.8 cm)  
The Cleveland Museum of Art  
Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund



Unknown Artists  
*Cranes and Serpents*, 475–221 BCE  
Lacquered wood with polychromy  
52 x 49 inches (132.1 x 124.5 cm)  
The Cleveland Museum of Art  
Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund

I wasn't as familiar with the drawings until I was older. I did love being on the print committee. My father was a member of the print committee and when he died in '66, I inherited his print membership in the Cleveland Museum. This was an incredibly forward-looking and great thing that Cleveland had, where you had a membership for a pittance of three hundred dollars and you got a print. There was a wonderful [Henri] Matisse wood cutout. And there was [Charles Ephraim] Burchfield, who had taught and lived in Cleveland for a while. There was a [Bradley Walker] Tomlin that I really loved that they had. Or it was maybe [Jack] Tworokov. But they had some people who were very well-known and some others who were mainly American artists of that early Ashcan and that kind of school. But they were wonderful things. I always learned a lot from that, but that was when I was a little bit older.

Q: I also wanted to ask you—you spoke about your family's foundation. When you were a teenager, is that something that your father discussed with you and your siblings? Did he speak about the values that he ascribed to that work?

Gund: He didn't much. I think he was a bit overwhelmed by six kids, especially with my mother so sick for a long time when we were children and then when she died in '55. It was very much a shock for him to know where we all would be and what to do with each specific child, or how to handle it. We mostly all went off to boarding schools—my sister, very early—and I, as I told you before, my mother died.

Q: Okay. So, that interest in philanthropy was absorbed in other ways.

Gund: Yes. I think it was more brought on when I spent so much to buy my first major piece of art. I thought, how can I do this without giving it to a museum or somehow having other people get to share it? Because how can I have that kind of money to spend? So it was a little more based on guilt, at first, and then it was based on interest in the art world, and then in women's issues mainly.

Q: That's interesting that you say that your role as a collector and your role as a benefactor kind of emerged and grew side by side. Maybe you can speak a little bit about how both of those roles grew?

Gund: Well, the collecting role grew rather fast. I began to be really interested and luckily had some access to the art world. Then I met people on the International Council especially and some of the younger people: Jeff Byers, who was at that time a member of painting and sculpture and I think a trustee of the Modern. Ronald [S.] Lauder, although I didn't know him really that well at first—I came to know him much better later. They were among the younger people. Barbara Jakobson. Lily Auchincloss was a person I met. Joanne [M.] Stern and [Elizabeth] Beth [Allen] Straus and [Virginia] Jinny Wright from Seattle. They all were connected initially with the museum that Phillips, Duncan Phillips, who started the Phillips gallery [The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.], was really very early on the board. Joann [Phillips], wife of Gifford [Phillips], who was the brother of Duncan. So I knew them and they were collectors. They were the ones who sort of helped me.

The biggest mentor I had was Emily [Hall] Tremaine. Emily was a collector with her husband, Burton [G. Tremaine, Sr.], who was a Clevelander. She really pushed me to collect and I went around with her and she offered many things, one of which was a collection that, had I bought, would have really completely changed my life. But I didn't purchase it because the bank was told by my father to be careful that we didn't do anything outrageous, and they thought the purchase of this collection was really outrageous, even though it was comparatively, very, very cheap. It was the [Benjamin Theodore] Ben Heller collection, which included so many really great things: [Barnett] Newman, [Jackson] Pollocks, [Mark] Rothkos, all great pieces, one of which was *Blue Poles* [Jackson Pollock, *Number 11, 1952, 1952*]. And had I owned *Blue Poles* when I had the little kids, I don't know what I would have done. So it was better that I didn't have that.



Jackson Pollock  
*Blue Poles [Number 11,*  
*1952], 1952*  
Enamel and aluminum paint  
with glass on canvas  
83 1/2 x 192 1/2 inches  
(212.1 x 488.9 cm)  
National Gallery of Australia  
Purchased 1973

But she pushed for that. She knew that I could have gotten that. But the bank just said no, that I couldn't do that. So I didn't. It was both good and bad. Some of those pieces I still would long to have. A lot of them are in the Modern; *Echo[: Number 25, 1951, 1951]* and *One[: Number 31, 1950, 1950]* [note: both by Pollock] were in that collection and the big Newman painting, Victor or Hercules [*Vir Heroicus Sublimus*, 1950–51]. I don't know the name of it, but it's a grand picture that is always up in the collections. There was one that I especially loved, [Arshile] Gorky. I liked his work very much and in this collection was the last work by Gorky, which was a large drawing that is also in the collection of MoMA and really a very dark and complicated big drawing [*Summation*, 1947]. I just loved that and wanted to give it to the Cleveland Museum. I asked Sherman if he would pay for part of it because at that point I really thought you shouldn't just give something because it doesn't make them want it unless they participate in it. That was sort of the last time I tried that. Most of the time now I always just give it. He came back and said, "Look, I've never had anything turned down by the acquisitions committee. This is going to be turned down and I don't want to do it. So we won't take it." I thought it was really too bad

because it's really a very great drawing. But Gorky was never like Pollock, somebody who really accrued a tremendous interest.



Arshile Gorky  
*Summation*, 1947  
Pencil, pastel, and charcoal on buff paper  
mounted on composition board  
79 5/8 x 101 3/4 inches (202.1 x 258.2 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Nina and Gordon Bunshaft Fund  
© 2017 Estate of Arshile Gorky / Artists  
Rights Society (ARS), New York

Q: Okay. You had started to speak a little bit about your early involvement with MoMA. So maybe we can go back to there and you can—

Gund: Well, I think my involvement there came from the International Council, which I mentioned, and the people who were on the Council. But it was also because I really loved Gordon. This teacher I'd had at Farmington, Sarah MacLennan, had really been fabulous to send me postcards from smaller museums like the Isabella Stewart Gardner [Museum, Boston], the Frick [Collection, New York] and the Morgan, the Phillips, and such like that and say, "You have to go see this." So I had been going to mostly small museums, but whenever I was anyplace where I could go to a bigger one, like when I was in Cambridge right after college, I would go to the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston] quite a bit and the Isabella Stewart Gardner because I really loved that museum. I've been on the boards of very many small museums like the Frick

and the Menil [Collection, Houston] and I've really loved being involved with them because they're in many ways more approachable than say the Met, which I've also been slightly involved with. I love the Met, but just getting to the exhibits is a battle.

Anyway, so let's see. You'd asked about later, when I was at MoMA. Well I guess because I was younger and was a collector, that was why they were interested in me. Then we moved in '72 from Cleveland to Greenwich, and because we were in Greenwich I came in quite a bit for different kinds of things.

Then I got this idea about Studio in a School [New York], which is what is downstairs. You can see the exhibits. Unfortunately they're switching over and turning it into a store because they feel they have to make money, so we're not going to have it anymore. It's been wonderful for exhibits, where the families and the kids come from all the way out in Queens, Brooklyn, and everything. They come out with their teachers if their works are in the exhibit. The eggs are in there because we were part of this egg hunt that was done by this Englishman, the brother of the wife of Prince Charles [of Wales] who died here, unfortunately, during the egg hunt, the night of the auction that we had for the eggs. That's why the eggs are there, because they were done by some Studio in a School kids.

So that I started in '77, but I was reading about it and interested in doing it when I was living in Greenwich in '76. The article in the newspaper said that they were closing all the arts in the schools. Music, art, and physical education. A terrible thing. The one thing about this mayor [New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio] is he's really brought back the arts to the schools because

he has a really wonderful [New York City Schools] Chancellor now, Carmen Fariña, who is really very good.

Q: Can you talk to me about your role, through advocacy and direct funding, for bringing new work to MoMA?

Gund: Well, I have from the beginning been interested in getting more diversity in the board and the staff of the museum. I'm one of the few, so it hasn't been pursued as much as I wanted to. I did give a full year internship to a minority person and then I started an internship program based on the Getty. When I was on the board of the Getty I saw that they had this wonderful program that they did for about a hundred people not only in the art museums, but in all kinds of non-profits throughout the Los Angeles area. [Thomas] Tom Cahill, who runs Studio in a School, went out to look at the program and we started a program for diversity in that area by having—not saying it had to be a minority, but it had to be somebody who didn't have money. They have a wonderful internship program at the museum and every summer I have them over and talk about the museum and its officers and trustees and they see the collection. We talk about their interest in going into the field. But that is largely a very white, WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant]—it used to be WASP, now it's more mixed, WASPs and Jews. But there really aren't very many other people who go to that internship program. I might be wrong about that, but I don't think I am because it always strikes me that—it's sort of like Japan. It's not very diverse.

So at Studio [in a School], we have started a high school program, which [Michael] Bloomberg pays for, which is fabulous. It is so good that Tom is going out and doing it in other cities. So

that's very exciting. But I want to come back to what you asked me because I'm not sure I'm on the subject.

Q: Well, I'm interested in hearing about your role in MoMA's acquisition of—

Gund: Oh, acquisitions of pictures. Well I had a good friend on the board, Philip [C.] Johnson. He came from Cleveland, so we had that in our history. Philip really loved—

I just think this is hysterical of Bob—I love that [referring to photo of Leo Castelli, Gund, and Rauschenberg in front of *Bed* (1955)]. And this was—was this before I was president? What date was this? Or when I was president. Might have been. But anyway, it wasn't up to me to get. It was really a negotiation of the curator, [William] Bill Rubin at that time I think. It could have been Kirk [Varnedoe], but I don't think it was Kirk or he would have been in that picture. There are other pictures from there.



Detail from Leo Castelli's 90th birthday party invitation, September 1997: Leo Castelli, Agnes Gund, and Rauschenberg on the occasion of Castelli's gift of Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955) to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, May 1989. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

It just was hysterical because Bob was such a presence. Bob had an ability where he liked people. He needed people a little more than ever I have although I very much need people. After his stroke he would be in his studio watching television or having just had some therapy or having just met with some of the printmakers who were still doing prints with his very strong input. He would be sitting fairly dejected and fairly isolated and you'd come in or a person would come in or a group of people and he'd just come to life. He really loved people and he loved the attention. He was like this. You get used to your grandchildren, my grandchildren, putting ears up behind you or whatever they do in photographs, or sticking their tongues out or rolling their eyes or whatever. But Bob was very much that.

This was an incredible acquisition for MoMA because it was during those years of tax deductions—so I do think it was in the eighties when there was a restriction by the government

on anybody giving artwork. Not just artists, but anyone giving artwork and getting to take a tax deduction on it. That didn't exist. So for Leo [Castelli] to have given that piece, which I think is—people will say *Canyon* [1959] is maybe better, but I don't think so. I think *Bed* is sort of the essence of Bob because it was done before he started the other Combines [1954–64] and it was done with the élan he had about doing his work, which was just slapping it to say—using that word—together. Making it what was there and really the Duchampian background that he and Jasper [Johns] had together because they were very close in those early years.



Robert Rauschenberg

*Canyon*, 1959

Combine: oil, pencil, paper, fabric, metal, cardboard box, printed paper, printed reproductions, photograph, wood, paint tube, and mirror on canvas with oil on bald eagle, string, and pillow  
81 3/4 x 70 x 24 inches (207.6 x 177.8 x 61 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of the family of Ileana Sonnabend



Robert Rauschenberg

*Bed*, 1955

Combine: oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet, mounted on wood support  
75 1/4 x 31 1/2 x 8 inches (191.1 x 80 x 20.3 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of Leo Castelli in honor of Alfred H. Barr Jr.

I adore Jasper and we are I would say very close. We live near each other in Connecticut and so we see each other a lot and I get to go see what he's doing and those kinds of things. He had a lot of history obviously with Bob, even after they split up, and the rancor was apparent from Jasper's side I think because of the drinking. This was stuff that I don't want to get into. But there was one moment that almost makes me want to cry. We were at a benefit [in 2006] for Merce Cunningham and Merce was in a wheelchair and Bob was in a wheelchair and Jasper came in and greeted them both because Bob, Jasper, John [Cage], and Merce started this Foundation for Contemporary Arts [note: originally Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts], which board I've been on for quite a while now and which group I really love. They started it together. Jasper came and stood behind these two wheelchairs and there were paparazzi, which don't exist for artists today except for people like Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst and those people, but Jasper stays out of it. Ellsworth [Kelly] stays out of it too. The older ones of the era that I've been involved with are not taken by it. But this night if you had more photographers there, they would have never stopped because it was an absolutely marvelous moment. I think that that was when there was a little more peace made. I know Jasper came to Bob's shows and vice versa at the end, though I think it was always very painful for him to see Bob handicapped in that way.

But this was a very joyous moment. It was a very happy time. The *Bed*, the acquisition of the *Bed*, or the gift of the *Bed*. And it was when Bob was still very much himself.

I think there's a real connection really that can never be given up between Ileana [Sonnabend], Leo, Bob, and Jasper. You probably know about the whole thing of how that started out. They were asked to go to see Bob's work or decided to go to see Bob's work and then Bob said, "Why don't you come up and look at my friend's work upstairs?" What they did was end up buying Jasper and that's why Ileana really was always wanting to make sure that Bob's work was seen and known.

I think Bob's work has only become, since his death, a little bit more recognized for not only its variety, but also its fineness—its really break-through-it-ness or whatever you call it. The *Bed* really epitomizes that because nobody had really done it in the same way, just attached something else to a painting and called it a painting. Really in the end it's a sculpture, I think. But I think that's what makes it all the more enticing because it is sculpture-like—

Q: Did MoMA acquire any other Rauschenberg works while you were there?

Gund: Well yes, they did. They acquired part of this two-part piece, *Factum II* [1957] with Kirk. [Note: MoMA acquired *Factum II* in summer 1999. The pendant piece, *Factum I* (1957), is in the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles.] And then they acquired of course *Rebus* [1955], which was one of my favorites that Sally Ganz had. I was a good friend of Sally's. And then *Rhyme* [1956] is the piece that I gave in honor of [Richard E. "Dick" Oldenburg].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Factum I*, 1957  
Combine: oil, ink, pencil, crayon, paper, fabric,  
newspaper, printed reproductions, and printed  
paper on canvas  
61 1/2 x 35 3/4 inches (156.2 x 90.8 cm)  
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
The Panza Collection



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Factum II*, 1957  
Combine: oil, ink, pencil, crayon, paper, fabric,  
newspaper, printed reproductions, and printed  
paper on canvas  
61 3/8 x 35 1/2 inches (155.9 x 90.2 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Purchase and an anonymous gift and Louise  
Reinhardt Smith Bequest (both by exchange)



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Rebus*, 1955  
Combine: oil, synthetic polymer paint, pencil, crayon,  
pastel, cut-and-pasted printed and painted papers,  
including a drawing by Cy Twombly, and fabric on canvas  
mounted and stapled to fabric  
Three panels: 96 x 131 1/8 x 1 3/4 inches (243.8 x 333.1 x  
4.4 cm) overall  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Partial and promised gift of Jo Carole and Ronald S.  
Lauder and purchase



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Rhyme*, 1956  
Combine: oil, fabric, necktie, paper,  
enamel, pencil, and synthetic polymer  
paint on canvas  
48 1/4 x 41 1/8 inches (122.6 x 104.5 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Fractional and promised gift of Agnes  
Gund in honor of Richard E. Oldenburg

Q: Maybe you can speak a little bit about both *Rebus* and *Rhyme*.

Gund: *Rebus* is just incredible. And there's *First Landing Jump* [1961].

One of the things I did know best in acquisitions is the piece that Susan Sollins and Earle Brown gave, that was done with Susan Weil. It's a rayogram [Untitled (ca. 1950), a blueprint created collaboratively by Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil]. That should be here somewhere and that came from the fact that Carolyn Brown was the one who was the dancer that was first married to Earle. And then Susan Sollins was married to Earle. So that's how that came about.



Robert Rauschenberg with Susan Weil  
Untitled [feet and foliage], ca. 1950  
Monoprint: exposed blueprint paper  
57 15/16 x 41 inches (147.3 x 104.2 cm)  
Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of Carolyn Brown and Earle Brown

Q: But you were involved in—

Gund: Well I was there when they got *Factum II*. They've always been trying to catch up with Bob at MoMA because they never had as much initially. Then I was sort of sucked into being the person who got the Johns things in between then and now, "then" being with the target pictures and the early pictures that Alfred [H.] Barr [Jr.] bought, and the period where Philip said to me, "You've got to get these things because they're not buying them," of Jasper's. So I got two, *Between the Clock and the Bed* [1981] and then the untitled one, in '94, but *The Clock and the Bed* is in the eighties. I bought those with the promise to give them to MoMA. The *Clock and the Bed* is already over at MoMA, but I have the other one on the wall. Then the map that I got from this Heller collection, which was one of the few—I can't locate what it is, but it's one of the ones that isn't an etching or a print.



Jasper Johns  
*Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1981  
 Encaustic on canvas, three panels  
 72 1/8 x 126 3/8 inches (183.2 x 321 cm)  
 Museum of Modern Art, New York  
 Gift of Agnes Gund

*Rebus*, I will say, *Rebus* is outstanding. I was so glad when the Lauders decided to purchase that in concert with the Modern because it really is one of the great, great pictures other than *Canyon* and *Bed*. There are about two or three others that are as great as those are.

Q: Why do you think MoMA was sort of late in acquiring—

Gund: Because it wasn't easy. Bob's work isn't easy and it always goes with the aside, "Oh it doesn't hold up very well," or, "Oh it isn't concentrated in this popular vein." What could be more popular than a flag or target? They're easy. And Bob's work has never been easy. And I think that's why— See, Susan Weil was Bob's wife and Christopher [Rauschenberg], who is chairman of the Foundation [board], is his son.

Q: How did you decide that you were going to gift *Rhyme* to MoMA?

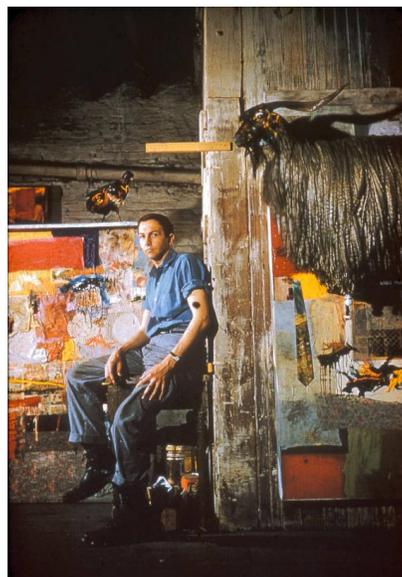
Gund: Well, I wanted to give something in honor of Dick Oldenburg and I really like *Rhyme*. I think it's important. I thought that they would think it's important but they don't really have that feeling about it. So it probably will hardly ever be shown, but anyway.

Q: Why do you believe they have a different view of the piece?

Gund: I don't know. It was a picture that was supposed to be another picture. It was originally supposed to be on the floor and be the one—*Monogram* [1955–59], that held the goat with the tire. And then it was changed. So it was cut down and the tie was added and it was seen as sort of a vertical picture rather than as it would have been, rectangular, square—rectangle more. It was changed. [Note: The panel that eventually became *Rhyme* was originally part of the first state (1955–56) of *Monogram*, when the work hung on the wall; in the first state, the goat stood in profile on a shelf attached to the surface of a tall vertical panel, already containing the tie. *Rhyme* was made with the bottom half of this panel.]



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Monogram*, 1955–9  
Combine: oil, paper, fabric, printed paper, printed reproductions, metal, wood, rubber shoe heel, and tennis ball on canvas with oil and rubber tire on Angora goat on wood platform mounted on four casters  
42 x 63 1/4 x 64 1/2 inches (106.7 x 160.7 x 163.8 cm)  
Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
Purchase 1965 with contribution from Moderna Museets Vänner/The Friends of Moderna Museet



Rauschenberg in his Pearl Street studio with *Satellite* (1955) and the first state of *Monogram* (1955–59; first state 1955–56), New York, ca. 1955. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Unattributed

I talked to Jasper about it just recently and he had a different view of it than I had, which I think everybody has. So anyway, it's kind of too bad. I like it. I think it's quite dynamic. It's quite beautiful. It's calm. It's not as great as *Hymnal* [1955], which is one I like that is of the same year. There are a number around that time that are more—actually Jasper has one in his living room—I think it's *Honeysuckle* [1956]. We just tried to get it for this show that they're doing of Rachel Harrison and Rauschenberg, which I think will be a great show at Cleveland, but he's not lending it. [Note: *Gloria: Robert Rauschenberg and Rachel Harrison*, Cleveland Museum of Art, 2015] We're lending ours, but—

Q: So maybe you can speak a little bit about your friendship with Bob. You said you'd initially met him through Nina [Sundell, née Castelli]. You said that you spent some time—

Gund: I couldn't say I was a close friend until the end. I used to see him all the time because he was with Leo and he was at the Whitney. I sat on a panel with him one time down in Washington about the [Robert and Jane] Meyerhoff Collection. It had [Jennifer] Jenny Licht, myself, Leo, and Bob. [Note: Seminar held on the occasion of the exhibition *Selections from the Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Collection*, Baltimore Museum of Art, March 19, 1978.] Bob was already pretty much three sheets to the wind. They had given him cups of bourbon. Was it bourbon that he had?

Q: Yes. Jack Daniel's.

Gund: Jack Daniel's. I was beside him. We had one cup of water and he had these three cups of Jack Daniel's. I don't know why people did that, but they did do that. He couldn't get some words out. I was so scared to be on this panel. I was really fairly young at that time. I was sitting by Bob and I had to sort of put the words in and it just relaxed me because I didn't have to worry about what I was saying. Nobody really wanted to hear my opinion at that point about this whole thing. But I remember it was so funny because somebody asked a question from the audience after the presentation and said, "What do you think about the fact that Rauschenbergs are very fragile and sometimes fall apart and don't stick—the objects don't stick to the painting or—there's difficulty with that." And Leo said, "Oh come on. It's like flowers. You get flowers. They're very beautiful, but they—" Well everybody was just extraordinarily taken aback by that.

Another time was when Bob was giving the award at the Skowhegan [School of Painting and Sculpture] dinner to John Cage. [Note: Cage was awarded the Skowhegan Medal for Alternate Genre at the Plaza Hotel, New York, 1990.] By the time he got through there were people actually in the audience booing to get him off the stage, which I thought was just dreadful. It really upsets me. Bob finally finished up and John got up and said, “Well, I don’t think there’s anything more to say but thank you,” because he was allotted five minutes. But by that time it was well over the time. It wasn’t because Bob didn’t adore him.

Then there was another dinner, down at Gramercy Tavern, National Arts Club, [New York, 1989], which [O.] Aldon James ran at that time. It was an award to Bob. [James] Jim Rosenquist and I were the two presenters to talk about Bob. [Note: Medal of Honor for Visual Arts, 1989] Bob was sitting at the table and all of a sudden he turned to me and he said, “I don’t have my speech. I had a speech written out. I don’t—” But, he could do things extemporaneously so I thought it wasn’t a bother. But he got very agitated so I said to Darryl [R. Pottorf], “What about this? He’s really nervous.” Darryl said he’d go back to their hotel and get the speech. He did find it and it was a very nice evening. Bob was very good about talking, but Jim Rosenquist was wonderful. He had had even more synergy with and interest in Bob because they both were in Florida. Jim had a studio down there and Bob did too, so they saw each other more. At the memorial service down in Captiva [Florida], Jim spoke about Bob. It was very nice to have him there because there are so few people of that group left.

So that was one of the times. But I wish I'd known him better. The only thing I remember that was really poignant was when he had the Combine show at the Met [*Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, 2005–06]. He was in a wheelchair. I went up to him at one point when people weren't surrounding him and he was more or less by himself, and I said, "Congratulations. It's really great." He looked at me and he said, "Why am I not at your museum? Why isn't this show at your museum or these works?" I did think the same thing. I thought we should have had a Rauschenberg show, so it was a very poignant evening because—I don't know what people say about that show, but I don't think it was as well done as it would have been probably at MoMA.

They did have the MoMA show and then it was going down to the National Gallery [of Art] [Washington, D.C.]. [Note: Referring to the retrospective exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg* that originated at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C. in 1976 and traveled to MoMA in 1977.] Our piece was in it. However many years ago, I don't know. I was going down to meet Nina Sundell there for the dinner, and I had a suitcase in the front of the car, and the taxi driver drove off with it. Really in fact stealing it because he knew what was up there. So I just couldn't go because it had a lot of remnants of jewelry that hadn't already been stolen, of my mother's, that were not so much valuable as valuable to me. So I never got to that and it was a very nice show. Kynaston [McShine] did that show. [Note: Curated by Walter Hopps, the exhibition was installed at MoMA by McShine.] Kynaston always had a particular feeling for Arte Povera. The reason Kynaston brought a lot of these artists in was because they had the same angst and I think kind of happening things that Bob had. Bob had a lot going on in his works. I think they stood that way in sort of opposition to Jasper's, which were more trim and cut out, and

Bob's were not. I think that's probably why he never got the same attention because they weren't clean and clean-cut. But they are very good.

I think Jasper funnily enough and this is just my opinion, of no value at all—Jasper's coming back more to looking at the way Bob did things. Not that he's doing things that way, but—in this *Regrets* series [2012–14], I thought it had more layers of Bob in it than before, than some of the middle period that is still flatter and not as what you call robust.

One time Jasper was over visiting recently because I have two major works of his up in the living room. We went to look at this wonderful Rauschenberg *Gold Painting* [series, 1953/1955–56/1965] that I have and it's lost a little of the gold [Untitled, 1953]. I said to Jasper, “What would you do about it?” He said, “Well if it really bothers you, I'd just pick it up and put it in an envelope and attach it to the back of the painting.” He said, “But we had the sides open anyway when we did it,” we being he and Bob I assumed, “so it could blow through and the leaves of the gold would sort of flap in this breeze that went through.” I never knew that. I really found that fascinating. I would have liked to have gone into more detail with Jasper about Bob, but that was a real insight into that one painting. Those paintings are just glorious—those little gold and just some of the black—the early ones that were just really fun things. I saw that when Jasper said, “We wanted it to blow through,” that it was something that was fun for them. I think Bob did that a lot with his work—he had fun.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Gold Painting*, 1953  
Gold leaf on canvas  
10 5/8 x 10 1/8 x 1 3/8 inches (27 x 25.7 x 3.5 cm)  
Private collection

Q: Yes. Do you have any other pieces?

Gund: Yes. I have a piece—well I have a couple pieces. I have one called *Docket* [(*Salvage*), 1984]. Well, I have a number of drawings. I have this wonderful drawing called “Paper Clip” [Untitled, 1968] that I got from Marjorie [Talalay] and Nina way early. It’s a sixties, early sixties drawing.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Docket (Salvage)*, 1984  
Acrylic on canvas  
77 x 32 3/8 inches (195.6 x 82.2 cm)  
Private Collection



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Untitled*, 1969  
Solvent transfer and watercolor on paper  
22 1/4 x 29 3/4 inches (56.5 x 75.6 cm)  
Private Collection

I have this wonderful small piece besides the gold piece that's a letter to Christopher Rauschenberg, upside-down [*Untitled*, 1960]. It's sort of a collage piece. It's really nice.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Untitled*, 1960  
Combine: oil, paper, and metal on canvas  
8 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches (21.6 x 21.6 cm)  
Private Collection

I have one that's later, that was done after the stroke, which is a collage of his photographs [Lotus VIII (The Lotus Series), 2008]. He was a great photographer. Very interesting and took photographs of things he loved in the South, both in his home originally and in Florida. I have one of those that I got from Bill Goldston just before Bob died.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Lotus VIII (The Lotus Series)*, 2008  
Pigmented ink-jet with photogravure on Somerset velvet  
45 3/4 x 60 x 1 3/4 inches (116.2 x 152.4 x 4.4 cm)  
From an edition of 50 published by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

*Docket* is not a work that ever will probably see much of the light of day, but it is probably his study center work because it's a collage. I never got any of the great ones that I've really loved because I couldn't afford them when the [Burton and] Emily [Hall] Tremaine collection went on sale [1991]. She had some wonderful pieces that I would have loved to have gotten.

So I have those seven works—the collage, the drawing, the gold painting, *Docket*, *Rhyme*, and the other one, the big print, which is really nice. And then I think I have something else.

I didn't have any of the early sculpture. I would have loved to have had that because those pieces, I thought, were more Duchampian almost than the ones that Jasper did. But then I had an argument with somebody I was talking to the other day. Not in an argument, we got into a discussion, but we didn't get very far with it. I would have loved to go further. I think Bob was more insightful about [Marcel] Duchamp than Jasper, but this other person disagreed completely because Jasper is so—anyway. It's an interesting thing.

Q: So there's just one other area that I was hoping to ask you about.

Gund: How are we doing on time?

Q: I think we have about five minutes. Is that okay?

Gund: Yes.

Q: So your role on the Rauschenberg board, how—

Gund: Oh, I loved it. I loved being on the board. I was on the board early. I was on the board because of Darryl.

Q: He asked you to be? Is that what you mean?

Gund: Yes. Darryl pushed me to be on that board. I really care about Darryl enormously, but I haven't been in touch with him because of his division with the Foundation and with everybody almost. He's seen Dorothy [Lichtenstein] but not much at all because he's moved to Fort Myers [Florida] I think, although he still owns the studio in Captiva. He sold his house there. I didn't know about that. I know Mark Pace pretty well. We had a fairly tumultuous time because we did get along very well and then this whole thing sort of blew up and Darryl has had a severe drinking problem and hasn't been able to control that.

But I loved going on that board. I think Christy [MacLear] was the right choice. I was not at that meeting where they chose Christy. There was another person I really liked. I think that Christy's done a far greater job than anybody could have thought. It's been a very difficult situation, but she has really gotten things going in a way that I really admire. The [Rauschenberg] Residency is terrific. Getting Risë Wilson was terrific. Really building up the artist program. There's a lot of help from Christopher too—really figuring out how to handle the Florida giving part of it.

I have really liked being on the philanthropy committee and did pick some of the people to go on that. I think [Alexandra A.] Alex Herzan, who I did bring on that committee, has really liked it even though she was not necessarily a close friend of Bob's. I think Alberta Arthurs has the background and is terrific. And of course, Charles [C.] Bergman is somebody that I've known because of [the] Pollock-Krasner [Foundation] for years. I think he has good insights and of course though he's been very feeble or handicapped, in a way has I think offered some help to Christy.

But Christy has done a superb job. I was really sorry especially about Bill Goldston because I thought he should have not gotten into that thing and asked so much. Bob wouldn't have liked that. I'm sure they would say Bob would have given him that. He wouldn't have. He would have seen it as not a good precedent to set for artist foundations. But that's not about the Foundation.

The Foundation I think has done a great job. I wouldn't say I agree with everything that they have done or chosen to do. I think they haven't where I've offered some help because I know how these programs go, especially in education. There are so many programs, so much that's being done. I think they should work more closely with people, but that's not their fault. It's not Rauschenberg's fault. It's that people just somehow want their own turf and to control their own turf. And I think it would be better if they didn't.

Okay. I have to wind up. But I think they have really made great strides and done it very fast and done it very well. I think many people didn't think they could do it, but they've done it. I like David White. I'm glad he's still so involved. I think he's exceptionally good, as I do some of the other people they've brought in. I think it's great to have Dorothy there and there are many members who are really good people. So I think they've done a fabulous job.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

Gund: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

