

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Laurence Getford

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Laurence Getford conducted by Sara Sinclair and Christine Frohnert on May 11, 2015, and Sara Sinclair on May 12, 2015. These interviews are part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

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Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Laurence Getford

Location: Mount Vernon, New York

Interviewers: Sara Sinclair (Q) and  
Christine Frohnert (Q2)

Date: May 11, 2015

Q: This is Sara Sinclair, it is May 11, 2015, and we're at the Rauschenberg warehouse in Mount Vernon, New York. Will you please introduce yourself?

Getford: I'm Laurence Getford. I worked with Bob for a little over two decades from 1987 until his death in 2008. I initially met him in a social setting because I was working in Fort Myers [Florida], which is a community near Captiva [Florida]. I'd come down there to engineer a planetarium and multimedia environmental theater, and was really bored. I had been living in a college town for a long, long time and this was a much smaller venue, a beach town basically. So I found some friends who went to the same art school that I did, which was Rhode Island School of Design [RISD, Providence] and they were roughly ten years younger than me. That would be Lawrence Voytek, who was Bob's fabricator. We became really close friends because we were sort of out in the wild together so occasionally I would go by and help or whatever. But I was really busy doing the planetarium and nature center.

Q: Before you continue with how your life comes to intersect with Bob's, let's talk a little bit more about you.

Getford: Okay.

Q: Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Getford: I was born in Florida. I'm a fourth generation Floridian, which is very unusual, from Central Florida about sixty miles north of Orlando, a small town called Silver Springs in Ocala. I grew up near an ancestral home in a very old town in Florida called Fort King, which is no longer a town; it's been subsumed by Ocala, in that sort of metro area. Both sides of my family had been in Florida since at least the 1920s.

Q: Right.

Getford: Anyway, my family had been there a long time so obviously they were involved in agriculture.

Q: What did they grow?

Getford: Cattle and oranges. Cattle, oranges, tourism, and the beach. That's what Florida was about. Not so much these days, but that was it in those days. I grew up in the fifties and sixties in Florida, which was very primitive.

Q: How was it primitive?

Getford: A lot of dirt roads. There were no interstates. Orlando was a cow town. It had one main road in each direction. There was no Disney. I own a truck that's from the late forties, a 1948

Ford pickup, and when you look at it you can understand what the world was really like then. Everything is very identifiable; there's nothing that doesn't have a useful purpose and a lot of space in between the purpose. It's like, oh, that's pretty obvious what that is and there's lots of space around it. Florida was like that. I remember lots of open space. People lived pretty simply. Even later on in the sixties and seventies when Bob got there, it was still pretty open, unlike today. It's much more like California these days.

Q: Right. So tell me about your path to art school.

Getford: Let's see, I was a musician, traveling around the south, mostly in Florida, sometimes in Georgia and Alabama.

Q: What did you play?

Getford: I was a singer and a keyboard player, just playing post-British invasion through Motown kind of stuff up until say 1970. I got stuck out on the road and decided I would start doing something that was a little more stable so I decided to go back to university and become a visual artist. Just prior to that I had gotten a scholarship to the University of Florida [Gainesville] to the art school [College of Fine Arts]. Being in school was a lot more stable.

Q: Had you always made art?

Getford: Yes, I hid out in the graphic art department in high school to keep the school administration from seeing my long hair. In college I continued studying art; I was interested in sculpture at the time.

Q: So when you applied to go to school you already had an interest in sculpture or a practice?

Getford: Yes. I had already been painting. I started working in art in high school. The only thing you could study at that time in the small high school I went to was what they called commercial art, which was basically advertising, what we would call graphic design now. I really had never considered doing anything other than either being a musician or being an artist. It really just had not occurred to me to bag groceries or even work in agriculture, like my father and grandfather had done here in Florida.

So I went through undergraduate school in Florida. I had done really well there, had gotten some awards, and graduated at the top of my class. I don't remember whether we were on a quarter or semester system, or whatever, but I was voted by the faculty as the most outstanding art student to have graduated that year. That gave me an entry into going to the Rhode Island School of Design. At the time I didn't know whether I wanted to stay on the East Coast or go to the West Coast, I really wanted to go to London. But that was during a time when London was in such dire financial straits that it just wasn't something that was possible because I needed to work while I was going to school. I had always worked, even when I was at the University of Florida, doing art projects and labor for professors or whatever. So I didn't go to London.

On the way back from London I stopped in at Rhode Island School of Design and decided that's where I would go because they had a graduate video program. When I was studying sculpture I got into making kinetic sculpture and started documenting the kinetic sculpture with video and got thoroughly involved in video at that point. That's what led me to go to RISD because RISD had the only graduate school on the East Coast that had an MFA in video. In fact I think they only gave two or three before all hell broke loose and they decided just to start doing undergraduate degrees exclusively. They probably do it again now, I don't know, I haven't kept up with it. In the seventies it was a pretty exotic degree to be doing experimental video or anything like that because it was all analog and there was no market. You still had to carry around big TV sets to show it and galleries didn't want to sell it—it was worse than being a photographer.

[Laughter]

Q: Okay.

Getford: So I wound up being a museum photographer essentially, being able to do video and having access to equipment because after having bought a couple of video cameras, I realized that you had to really either go out to California or New York and get in the entertainment business, which I didn't want to do because I was an artist first and not just a videographer. After graduate school I worked at the University of Florida, at the natural history museum [Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville]. So contacts from there led me up to the point where I was doing the theater work in Fort Myers. All of these jobs were taken so that I could

have access to the equipment I needed. That was what I was doing prior to moving to Fort Myers and Sanibel to work with Bob.

Q: That's great. So tell me about moving or how you made the decision to move to Fort Myers.

Getford: Oh, what can I say about that? [Laughs] There were two reasons. I had been working at the university for a while, maybe ten years. My partner got an internship in Fort Myers. I followed her down there because the gentleman who ran the center where she got her internship, the PhD who was running the center, was from another small town very near where I was born and grew up. He said, "I've got this problem. I'm trying to build this thing, the planetarium and environmental theater, and nobody here can engineer it. Why don't you come down here and build it, and I'll pay you considerably more than you're making at the university?" He also had gotten his degree from the university at Florida.

Q: What was he trying to build?

Getford: It was a forty-foot hyperspheric dome theater, which means that it's like a planetarium, but instead of just coming down to the visual horizon the domed screen is tilted twelve degrees further down to create an immersive effect. It had lots of motion-controlled projectors with 180-degree panoramas and 360-degree 35 mm film projection. Do you know OMNIMAX?

Q: Yes.

Getford: Well in this case, in addition to the star projector it had a large film projector in the center, which had a lens which would project in 360 degrees above you. This was a time when Bob also was still working with NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], which is one of the reasons we got connected. I was putting this theater together and working in a peripheral way with films that were being made on a space shuttle with more of an end user relationship than actually producing the films. But this projector would project 360 degrees onto the dome so that meant that you could look up and out and see essentially what you could see in space from the space shuttle.

That was intriguing to Bob because he had been working with NASA as a NASA artist.

Although I had been seeing him socially through Lawrence and other people I had met, when Bob came out to the opening of the theater that was the first time he saw my work. He brought Terry Van Brunt, who was his manager and companion at the time. Terry had come on board right after [Robert] Bob Petersen; actually he overlapped with Bob Petersen. They were both really interested in the technology, especially Terry. So we kind of bonded over that. I started going out there to Captiva more and more, but I still had this primary job that I was doing.

Eventually I had to leave the planetarium because I had an agreement with the theater that once it was built, I could be the composer-in-residence, which was what I was really interested in. I was not interested in running the theater. They had a change of administration and the new guy really wanted me to run the theater, which I did not want to do. So I left.

[Laughter]

Getford: I kind of worked around the area. I was a small-time gallery director and worked briefly as an independent artist and then started working more and more for Bob.

Q: You said that you had already begun to go out to Bob's place.

Getford: Right.

Q: So what were you doing in those early trips out there?

Getford: Well, in the early trips out, it was mostly parties. Bob had really good parties, a lot of really good parties. He was still living in the small Beach House at that point. We would go out there and a lot of times I would go out and just videotape things; some of those events are recorded in the collection. We would do things like, well, one of the musicians I still play with, Kat Epple, she and her husband were musicians who had moved from San Francisco. They were early electronic musicians like me. They would come out and for example Lawrence would make instruments and so for say Bob's birthday or someone else's birthday we would all play or I would play or videotape and play. So it was more of a social relationship at that point.



Laurence Getford playing piano, Kat Epple playing flute, and Rauschenberg playing violin, circa late 1990s or early 2000s

The way I formally got involved with Bob, working, was that because I had been a sculptor and Lawrence was also a sculptor, when they were working on ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] China, he called me up and said, “Have you got a couple of days you can come help us? We’ve got to ship on Wednesday.” This was maybe the Sunday before or something. Because he knew I knew my way around fabrication he said, “Can you just come out and help us for three days? Work the weekend.” So we worked pretty much nonstop until they shipped ROCI China. I think the first thing I actually worked on was *Sino-Trolley* [/ *ROCI CHINA*, 1986], which is a large piece with wheels and a yak’s tail on the front.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sino-Trolley / ROCI CHINA*, 1986  
Acrylic and fabric collages on fabric-laminated paper  
mounted on aluminum support with objects  
105 x 264 x 60 inches (266.7 x 670.6 x 152.4 cm)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
Gift of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Can you talk about those first few days you arrived? You hadn't worked with Bob before, he's like, we've got to get this out. What does he say to you to get things going?

Getford: Bob didn't say much, he was working hard too. We arrived, I think, in the afternoon and we worked until four in the morning. Then we all went over to the Beach House and we went to sleep. They had a gym downstairs, a gym and a Ping-Pong table. I slept there. There was always a Ping-Pong table. Downstairs there was a room that had been set up that was facing the beach; they had the Ping-Pong table and then next to it a gym and then right next to that was the darkroom. I remember we worked until we were absolutely fatigued, found places to sleep, I think I slept on some sort of shiatsu massage device until maybe ten in the morning and then we just went at it again. We did that for several days until we were done, until we were ready to ship. I can't remember whether it was two or three days, it's a little hazy at this point. People would bring whatever we needed so that we wouldn't stop working and of course there was always as much food and alcohol as you needed to fuel the fire.

Q: Who else was around at that time?

Getford: Who else was around? Terry was around, Terry Van Brunt, Emil Fray, Bradley [J.] Jeffries, let's see, Darryl [R.] Pottorf, Lawrence Voytek, and Bob. I think that's about it. There may have been a few more people floating in and out. But that was pretty much the staff. I keep thinking I'm forgetting someone, but that's all I can come up with for right now. It seemed like there was one other person assisting us downstairs, but if it comes to me, I'll pop it back into my brain.

Q: Sure. So you get everything done in time?

Getford: Yes, we were crating up—everything had to be done in the big green crates and we got everything done and it was shipped out and I just kind of returned to my regular life for a while. So then I would, for the next two or three years, that would be '86, '87, somewhere in there, you can check the records for whenever *ROCI China* was. This was mainland China, this wasn't Tibet, so I think that was the last of the Chinas. [Note: The *ROCI CHINA* exhibition took place in 1985; *Sino-Trolley / ROCI CHINA* was the second and last work in the series, completed in 1986 and delivered to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.] So I went back to my job and did that for a while and then by '90, '91, I transitioned again and came back.

In the interim I actually had become a public school administrator and was running a distance learning initiative in the region. We had four microwave broadcast channels that I ran and I learned a lot about computers doing that work. Initially, I was the distance learning and microcomputing person. This was very early in personal computing, part of my job was trying to get people to use computers. They were really somewhat resistant and there was still a debate as to whether it was going to be PC or Macintosh, and many people were really assuming that Apple would never last, that it would just be there a few years and be gone.

Q: [Laughs] Right.

Getford: But I was in the Macintosh camp and so we hired someone else who knew more about PCs, and I took the video, distance learning part. I did that for about a year-and-a-half or two years and while I was doing that I learned a lot about computers because I had a lot of access to tech people coming to me, because the school system bought a lot of equipment. It was a pretty rapid ascent in things I didn't know much about. I'd done a lot with computers that controlled the planetarium so I had a pretty good footing. But this really put me right on the edge of things because when you're buying a thousand computers, people pay a lot of attention to what you know.

Q: Right.

[Laughter]

Getford: So that also attracted Bob. Thomas [Buehler] was also doing things with computers at the same time because he was automating the ROCI tour and we sort of collaborated a little bit. So I managed to make a transition again because I was not really an educator. I knew the technical stuff, but I really wanted to get back to doing art. I started talking to Bob and the crew, especially Terry essentially, and through Lawrence, Thomas and I came up with a project and started scanning all the archived art work, to try and make preparations for the obvious eventuality of the move towards digitization of everything.

This would have been in '89 or '90, something like that, very early Macintosh days. I was thinking last night about that. We bought a Macintosh IIcx, which was one of the first heavy-

lifting computers that Apple made. I'm thinking we paid thousands of dollars for one megabyte of RAM, which was just like, it was all you could stuff into a machine for doing scanning and production. So it was an enormous amount of money at the time for something that people weren't really sure was going to take.



Rauschenberg and Laurence Getford working with a Mac computer in the print shop, Captiva, Florida, 1991 or 1992. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Thomas Buehler

We started printing things and Bob was not one to let something lie around and not utilize it. So when he began to see what we could do and we started talking about it, a way to improve the silkscreening process, which was what he was doing at that time. I don't see any screens around, but we can talk about that later. They were doing silkscreening on metal primarily. This would have been after *ROCI Cuba*, which is another point that I spent a lot of time with him because I went to Cuba with him. [Note: Rauschenberg traveled throughout Cuba in summer 1987 in preparation for the *ROCI CUBA* exhibition in 1988.] But I was a video person then. I went down as the assistant cameraperson and came back an editor; not that that was my plan at all, it just turned out that way, I think my footage just looked a lot better. And Terry asked me to come to New York and we edited the video for Cuba. But I digress. To get back to where we were, we

started digitizing things, primarily for archival purposes, to support the things that Thomas was doing up here in New York.

Q: So was there a formal conversation where Bob said, “This is what I want you to do, this is why—”

Getford: No. Bob really liked for you to intuit everything. Things were never really said very specifically. His theory was, he would get people who should know what they were doing and they should do it. He didn't want you giving him ideas and he didn't want to give you ideas. That wasn't his job. His job was to make art and your job was to control your own domain. But he was always very, very sensitive and aware of what you were doing. He always knew exactly what was going on even if he didn't know the technical aspect of it. He saw what the manifestation of it was. And he saw that this was a potential image-making machine, as we all did. In those days most printers didn't exceed 8 1/2-by-11. Even a really good Kodak photographic reproduction printer, which would do an 8-by-10 photograph and cost about twenty-five-thousand dollars for the printer.

Q: You said that he could see that this machine was capable of imaging. Can you speak about that? Was there a specific moment where you all realized, oh, we should be using the computer in new ways? How did that unfold?

Getford: Well, like I said, the first idea was to try and enhance the situation that they were already working in, which was printing silkscreens. They were doing photo-silkscreen and it was

a kind of cumbersome process because they were doing the high-contrast orthos [ortho litho films] up at ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York] and shipping them back down. They were using Bob's photographs because this was a period of time where he had already started using his own black-and-white photographs. They were limited to one color at a time and what we had proposed was doing separations in the computer because that was becoming available.

I had an uncle who was in the printing business in Orlando, working on the periphery of Disney, which was there by then. When I was at RISD the thing that I was doing in the background was studying silkscreen printing and learning how to do photo separations. When I came back to Florida, that was one of the primary things that I was doing on my own was photo separations. I was working for the natural history museum and what we did was build exhibits. That was all three-dimensional exhibit work and graphics, which primarily were done with silkscreen. I had done a lot of photo work and chemistry at the museum. I didn't want to go back to that. That's one of the reasons I came to Fort Myers because I wanted to get out of the photochemistry business. I didn't think it was good for my health and as it turns out, it wasn't. So I didn't mention that I could do that type of process when I worked for Bob; I was interested in doing something that was electronic, that would allow us to move the silkscreening forward, but I was not interested in getting involved in the chemistry at all.

We did propose using electronics and at that point it was still kind of a digital-analog hybrid. They sent me to Amsterdam to look at some large European machines that would do four-color separations that were just hugely expensive. In fact the new studio was built with a room in mind

for one of those large machines. I think it was a company called Mographo [phonetic] or something like that. It was like a half-million-dollar machine that would make 5-by-7-foot silkscreens because that was always one of Bob's things. It needed to be bigger. He really wanted to work at a large scale and this was a roomful of machine. It was about 15 feet long and 10 feet high and 6 or 8 feet wide, you stuck big silkscreens in there and exposed the screen with a laser refracted off the largest chunk of whirling optical glass I've ever seen. Their claim to fame was that if you broke a screen in the middle of run, you could make a new screen and go back to work, and you wouldn't be able to see any registration change, which at the time was just phenomenal, the fact that you could maintain registration in that sort of situation was most impressive.

That never worked out because initially there was some sort of deal where they were thinking about trading artwork for the machine and one of the partners got cold feet and it never worked out.

So Voytek and I started working on something totally different, inkjet transfers which is what Bob ultimately wound up doing for the next twenty-five years: first doing the transfer work initially on the press and then by hand, which leads to this. I can't stay on camera and show you, but maybe you could do a cutaway or something. So basically I started developing that process, using what I knew from my previous printmaking days. I had been doing some gum bichromate printing and so I was familiar with gels and gelatin coating and those sort of processes.

Proprietary gels were used as coatings for inkjet papers to improve adhesion and reduce dot gain. As it turned out in the early days, adhesion was the Achilles heel of inkjet printing, which made

it perfect for us because while everybody else wanted the ink to stick, we wanted it to come off to make a transfer paper. So essentially what we were doing was expanding what I had done in a smaller scale in drawing class, we had all done it in college in the seventies; everybody had experimented with Rauschenberg-style transfers using lighter fluid and whatever petroleum worked on magazine photos, I had taken it further and had done Xerox transfers in school, both at the university and at RISD.

To digress a bit again, one of the things I had worked with at RISD was one of the very first color Xerox printers, which I had access to. I think it was a color Xerox printer # 002 and so there has always been this sort of multiple stream going on in what I was doing with printmaking and electronics, and electronic graphics. But the technology was so primitive and rare that it really wasn't something you could grab a hold of and work on for long. And so based on that experience I took some really small inkjet prints and worked out how to transfer them and that grew into deciding that Bob should get an Iris printer, which was pretty much the best and largest printer of the day for printing inkjet prints. I can't remember exactly where we got that information about the Iris printer from, but I think maybe it was from an article about Nash [Editions, Manhattan Beach] out in California; they were the only other people we knew about who had any interest in using it for artwork. [Note: The Iris was designed and used as a printing industry color proofing tool.] But Nash was strictly into black-white photography or maybe we read it in *Signs of the Times*, which was a trade rag for sign making. That's probably where we got it from. I think maybe Lawrence or I read it there.

Q: You're using the word "we," when you're using the word "we," you're referring to?

Getford: I use the word “we” a lot about things that I would do at the studio because it was collaborative. Ideas flowed freely; people weren’t very protective about who came up with what, when, and if I’m not sure. Sometimes you would get the idea being tossed around a table or usually at Bob’s bar, and we would be sitting around talking about these things. So sometimes it was a collaborative thing. And if I’m not sure exactly where the idea came from, I’ll use the term “we.” In this case, now that I think, it probably was Lawrence who saw the machine in *Signs of the Times* and said, “Hey, look at this!” So that’s why I use the word “we” if I’m not sure exactly who came up with it, even if I suspect it was me.

Q: Right. It’s interesting what you said about Bob not wanting to have to delegate or task people with things or ask people to do things, but instead he surrounded himself with people he thought had an assortment of skills that he wanted to be part of his team and he wanted to have around him.

Getford: Right.

Q: So I’m wondering if you can speak a little bit about the few of you who were around at the time and how your roles all sort of emerged.

Getford: Okay. When I first got there, Lawrence was the fabricator, Emil Fray was the photographer, Bradley was the administrator. Darryl was helping Bob do a lot of the silkscreening. Just before I rejoined the crew in late eighties there was a period of time that other

people passed through and people were added. So those were the people, along with Terry, that were on staff when I first got there because they were doing *Gluts* [1986–89/1991–94] and silkscreens pretty much at that point. Later after ROCI Cuba while I was off doing other things, a number of people entered or passed through. Tup was there, [Rodney] Tup Schmidt, and then John Peet, who was Tup's buddy, was there for a while. He was a brief companion of Bob's. And then that's all I can think of for right now. But also you had people like Bill [Goldston] from ULAE passing through with his people. Also you had people like [Donald] Don Saff and his crew, I think you talked to some of his folks; they would come through and help and do projects. Usually they would come in and do specific projects. Saff Tech [Arts, Oxford, Maryland] or ULAE would come in and do two-day or a week intensive and then move on. They would do something specific. So those are the people who kind of were the players at that time. Emil did primarily black-and-white photography and prints. Originally he also worked on the silkscreen orthos. I think for the silkscreens, the way the silkscreens were set up, you can see the screens themselves down in the loading dock. They were stored and processed downstairs below the studio. At that time we were in what I call the Laika Lane Studio, which is the old studio, the smaller studio, which was next to Bob's original Beach House. Downstairs next to the fabrication studio was an open porch where all the screens were stored out in the open. Upstairs was the studio, an office, and another open porch, which was the washout area. Also downstairs, there was a small area called the Red Room, which was where the screens were coated.

By the time I arrived they would send Bob's photos to New York to ULAE to make the high-contrast positives and then they would be made into exposed screens outside in the sunlight.

There was a lot of working inside and outside in those days because the studio was small, it was

the size of this room or smaller. And it was upstairs. So we kind of worked in that small network of buildings. There were two other buildings; one was called the Roadhouse, which was sort of a forties Florida house that was small, that they did archival and framing in. Then there was the print shop, which was the print shop from Untitled Press [Inc.] days, which they had set up for Untitled Press work space. That's where other artists came in, Cy Twombly and [Hisachika] Sachika [Takahashi] and others worked in the pressroom there. That building was my initial office; I worked there because there was no room in the studio and I had my digital setup there in a little enclosed porch next to the pressroom. But you were asking me about people, is there some—

Q: Well, I'm just interested in how people's roles evolved over the years.

Getford: Well Lawrence and Emil and I came in as people who already were established—as artists; people who had studied art. Emil was a photographer and he was a real photographer in the traditional sense. I had studied and had an MFA, and Lawrence had gone to RISD as well. But everybody else who got hired in my time was not an artist. Bob liked to hire people who were not artists because they didn't have pre-conceived ideas and he really liked that—for example Darryl had been a builder and worked in theater and had traveled and studied in Italy and that was art-related, but he came on pretty much to paint houses and do repair and pick up dog poop, as he says. Then there were other people who were around, like Phillip [Woods]. Phillip technically took care of the houses. But Phillip did everything with the rest of us, handled art—did whatever was needed. He was the person who was in my mind earlier that I was trying

to remember who was there from the time that I started again in the very late eighties to '90, until the very end. Phillip was a part of all of that.

Darryl, as I said, was helping with the silkscreening. But in the late eighties Terry was still the person who was sort of running things for Bob, he was kind of Bob's manager. And everyone would do all sorts of things; we would assist Bob with the art, we would put up shows. We'd have to do the hurricane runs up here to NYC every summer to get any work that was left over that hadn't been shipped to New York off the island because of the hurricanes. Voytek and I or Tup would do things like that; we'd jump in a truck and put ten million dollars' worth of art in the back of a U-Haul truck and drive it to New York. If they stopped us at the weigh station and asked, "What's that you are hauling?" We'd say, "Junk." Scrap metal, actually *Gluts*, and they'd say, "Yeah." And we'd move on. We did that repeatedly from August on through the season. I did a couple of those before I actually started working with Bob full-time because that was something they needed extra crew for.

So with Emil doing the photography and Darryl helping in the studio, John Peet also helped in the studio a little bit before I came there permanently. Tup Schmidt helped both downstairs and in the studio. I think Tup did the Red Room work there for a while, which means that he exposed screens from the high-contrast ortho films that Bill had made. And also stretched the screens on the screen frames. So people were pretty fluid; you kind of needed to be able to do whatever was being done.

When I came on board later, I was one of the few people who came on with a really specific job that nobody else really did because I knew about computers, nobody else on the Captiva staff used a computer—they were still using typewriters at that point and there was some reluctance to shift away from the typewriters. They kind of pried the typewriter out of Bradley's hands, I think IBM said, "We're not fixing this ever again." But once she embraced the computer it became a primary tool.

Q: [Laughs] Okay. Well, I think maybe now's a good time to get up and start looking at some of the work.

Getford: Okay. All right.

Q: Thank you.

Getford: Okay, so one more thing that needs to be said, I think, is that at that point the new house had been built and the new studio had been built so Bob was on the cusp of a move from the original studio, on Laika Lane, to the Captiva Road studio, which is across the hard road on the other side of the island on what was called the Weeks Property. So with that move in mind there is another transition going on. That is, a transition from the silkscreening, which continued as the studio moved over and off and on for years as needed, but a transition from the *Glut* / silkscreen era in the small studio to increasing different activity in the large studio, which is on the other side of the island. When the fabrication shop moved that's about the time the studio really began to change to the more paper-oriented work, which dominated the last twenty years of Bob's life,

as opposed to the more metal-oriented printing and silkscreening. Not that it stopped in one day or a week or even over six months or a year, but this is how I remember the transition. So maybe this is a good time to start talking about the work.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay. So you are standing beside the *Dirt Painting (for John Cage)*, ca. 1953] that Rauschenberg made in 1953. So the story goes that in 1976 Rauschenberg borrowed this work from [John] Cage for his retrospective, but failed to return it. [Note: *Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976–77] He subsequently promised to make a replacement for Cage, but had only just started it at the time of Cage’s death in 1992. Is that similar to the story that you heard?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Dirt Painting (for John Cage)*, ca. 1953  
Dirt and mold in wood box  
15 1/2 x 16 x 2 1/2 inches (39.4 x 40.6 x 6.4 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: Yes. That's similar to the story I've heard. My involvement with the subsequent dirt piece [*Clay Painting (for John Cage and Merce Cunningham)*, 1992] was that I had started working for Bob full time by then, what are we talking, '92?

Q: '92.

Getford: Yes. So we were well into it. I woke up to NPR [National Public Radio] saying that John Cage had died. And Bob still had a lot of feelings for John and I think the feeling was mutual. All those hours riding in the bus with Merce [Cunningham] and playing Scrabble while John drove on tour—with the Cunningham tour that Bob did with him; they just developed a very close relationship. [Note: Rauschenberg intermittently toured with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1961 through 1964.] So when I heard early on a Sunday morning that John had died. You have to understand that working with Bob in those days—as well my whole time at the studio, but especially in those days when he was younger—we worked all the time, every day of the week. The only day that we finally talked him into slowing down was sometimes on Sundays, so Sunday there wouldn't be a full crew there and we would kind of rotate through. So I woke up hearing that John had died and thought, oh crap, Bob is alone and he's probably heard this. And I'd better get out to the studio. It was '92; I drove all the way in, I think from Fort Myers at that point. But anyway I was just thinking, this is not good because Bob did not take people dying well. He had a thing about death.

So I got to the studio and up the stairs and I realized that he's in the studio and it's like ten in the morning and this is not normal. We didn't start until after noon for sure, two o'clock, three

o'clock, maybe not until dark. So Bob is in the studio and I think, this is not good. And he's got a hammer in his hand, which is also very unusual. And there's a board, roughly the size of the original *Dirt Painting* with nails that he's been pounding into it. So this means he's been there a while, I didn't catch him in the very beginning. He's also got wire there and he's wrapping it around the nails he has driven in the board base. I realize what he's attempting to do is to create an armature on the board to put the dirt on. I'm assuming that's what's underneath here [note: pointing to wire sticking out of the *Dirt Painting*] but you'd have to X-ray it to know for certain. He looked up at me and he said, "I fucked up." A very rare expletive from Bob. He said, "I didn't get the piece back to John in time." He just was really overwrought and he was pounding nails and crying. We worked on that for a while, I held the wood so he could wrap the wire without it sliding on the table and then he got out the clay. He'd gone far enough in planning to actually have some clay on hand to work on the piece. It wasn't quite like this original; I guess he was going to work on the dirt further. But he was taking the clay out of a bag because it was potter's clay not natural dirt, so it was kind of homogenous, which I'm assuming is not what the original piece looks like because I hadn't seen it in a long time. He was taking it out and getting wads of it and pushing it into the armature. He did that for a while until he got to a point where he was comfortable with how the piece was developing. I think he was calmed down enough and composed enough to say, "Let's go back to the house and have a drink." I'm sure it wasn't his first drink of the morning, but that wasn't unusual. So we went back to the house and sat and talked. I don't remember what all we talked about, but he spoke mostly about John. He talked about riding in the bus, being in that Volkswagen bus for endless hours touring America, talking to John, talking to all the dancers, and having Merce be the boss and all that kind of detail that

sorrow brings up. But that's pretty much the story of the new dirt painting. The next time I saw it, it was done.

Q: And did he tell you what he was going to do with the piece when he was finished with it?

Getford: I think he was going to give it to Merce. We continued to make things for the dance company—backgrounds and other pieces—until the very end. So I think he felt that giving it to Merce was like giving it to John because they were a couple. Although I don't think he ever had the same kind of relationship with Merce that he did with John. He always thought of Merce as his senior because Merce was the boss of the dance company and he worked for the company. I believe Merce was also a teacher at Black Mountain [College, North Carolina] when Bob was a student so it was always a little bit of a different relationship to Merce. But I believe it went to Merce.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

Getford: You're welcome.

Q2: Christine Frohnert, conservator of contemporary art. I would like to address some more technical questions and I'm wondering if Bob ever shared any thoughts with you about how this particular piece was made and how the dirt was bound? Or do you think the production process for the clay piece informed that process?

Getford: I think it was—I'm guessing here. I do not know for certain because there's probably no one around from '53 except maybe Jasper [Johns]. I really can't say for certain so I wouldn't want to start any undue rumors, but I'm guessing that because it's about the same size, he may have used the same strategy in building an armature, but going out and getting street dirt in '53. Do you know where the piece was made?

Q2: I don't.

Getford: Whether it was made here in New York or whether it was made—

Q2: I would assume it was made here.

Getford: Yes, that's my guess too because this looks much more like New York dirt. In Florida we don't have that kind of dirt. We have sand. We have beach sand, especially on Captiva. So if you want dirt, you have to bring real dirt in. So my guess is that he just went outside and got what he needed and he may have mixed it with something, probably paint. It looks like there's paint mixed in in here. So my guess is that he used whatever he could find. Because that was his typical strategy. "Oh, I could use that," and he would pick up whatever was around in the studio, which would have been paint and whatever. It probably wasn't really sophisticated Golden paints like we used later for the silkscreen. It probably was just house paint or whatever. My suspicion is that there's a backing board, nails and wires and armature like I saw him doing in Captiva, and whatever dirt he could find out in the street or in a nearby lot.

Q2: I agree, it looks painted as well and it also looks like some coating was applied—

Getford: Yes—

Q2: —that may or may not have turned whitish over the course of time.

Getford: I agree with you on the whitish part. I'm not even sure that there's not some fungus or some sort of chemical reaction going on there. But this is something that's beyond my understanding of conservation. Can you see—if you can see this wire right here—I don't know if you want to come up close or not, but that's very reminiscent of the wire that he was using when he was making the second one. Okay, so that leads me to believe just from deduction that—

Q2: Thank you for pointing that out.

Getford: Okay.

Q2: And as you said, the only way to know for sure is to take an X-ray.

Getford: Right, or MRI or whatever, something like that.

Q2: Did you ever see the painting installed upright or almost upright?

Getford: This one?

Q2: Yes.

Getford: No because people were very concerned about it. I think that was part of the problem, I think it was one of the reasons he may not have returned it to John because it was something they were really afraid to ship or turn upright. I don't know if you can do that anymore.

Q2: I don't think so.

[Laughter]

Getford: I don't think Thomas would allow that. [Laughs]

Q2: Thank you.

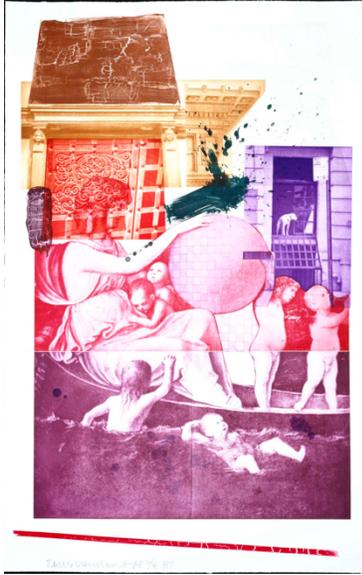
Getford: But I think that these pieces may have actually fallen off at some point.

Q2: It looks like it.

Getford: But there's a new patina that's growing on them.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay. So you are standing beside *Bellini #2* [1987]—



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Bellini #2*, 1987  
Intaglio  
58 7/8 x 37 1/4 inches (149.5 x 94.6 cm)  
From an edition of 48, published by Universal Limited  
Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Getford: Right.

Q: —which is part of the *Bellini* series, 1986 to '89. This particular work was appropriating imagery of the virtues, including fortune, truth, and justice, from small panels painted by the Venetian Renaissance artist, Giovanni Bellini, combined with contemporary urban imagery.

Getford: Named after or before the restaurant one street over on Captiva. Where they serve Bellinis.

[Laughter]

Q: A different kind of Bellinis.

Getford: A different kind of drink called Bellinis.

Q: So what I read—

Getford: There is a little wordplay going on there.

Q: Yes, yes, always, I think.

Getford: I mean intended. Yes. Okay.

Q: I read that Bill Goldston saw the ceramic pieces that Rauschenberg had acquired at a ceramic tile factory in Japan—

Getford: Right.

Q: —in Rauschenberg's New York studio.

Getford: Right.

Q: And he suggested that using the same concept for continuous tile etchings might work out.

The story that I heard is that Rauschenberg looked through a book of Italian Renaissance

paintings, saw these panels by Bellini, which were in Rauschenberg's opinion the worst thing that the artist had done—

Getford: [Laughs] Yes, that would attract him, yes.

Q: Yes. And he felt he could do nothing to hurt them, but that he might help the fellow artist out by making them better.

Getford: That sounds classic!

[Laughter]

Getford: No pun intended. But yes, that would be very much Rauschenberg's thinking.

Q: Are those lines of thought things that Bob would share freely?

Getford: Yes. He was a very sharing kind of guy. And that would be exactly the way he would think—he would say things like that, just off-the-cuff, they would just kind of come out of his mouth and you'd go, wow, that's interesting to be talking about someone like that. Let's just help him out, after a few centuries. We'll see what we can do with it. But I wasn't actually involved in making these. Obviously they were made at ULAE and as we talked about before, these are possibly mail order kinds of things, which we did often with ULAE. Bob was running multiple streams of things.

Q: Well I'm interested in hearing the story behind this. You said, "Yes, that really sounds like Bob." Did he think of himself as being in conversation with other artists or earlier artists in ways similar to this particular story?

Getford: Well yes, he was definitely in conversation with earlier artists because one of the main things that he constantly—and I only say constantly—because the one thing he resolutely insisted upon was that he wasn't a romantic. That he was a reaction to the Abstract Expressionists; that red didn't mean something in his work, that circles didn't mean something in his work. That he was more in tune with his contemporaries, John and Merce, who were dealing with things that were put together like this, that had their own life, and because of the way they came together, became something else. John was a little more resolute about the idea that you come up with a formula and you follow it and that makes the piece, no matter what, whereas Bob was more of an improviser as he went along. But he did take these disparate things and put them together; the idea of just taking a section and making it purple or making it red or— So I think that's his idea of conversing with things.

I'm trying to think of the rubbing series that he did as well. It was from Dante's *Inferno*, which was also the same kind of conversation because he used imagery that was borrowed. [Note: *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, 1958–60] His idea of borrowing images, up and to the point where using other people's photographs became a problem, was more like what comes in naturally. It's just part of the room. And he was a great user of whatever happened to be lying around, magazines or whatever. And occasionally he would start—these sort of theme-like

projects, which seemed to be started by printers he worked with. Don would have an idea, like the one over here, which I can't recall the title anymore; but they would come up with some parameters for him to work with within and he would then work within that or not. But typically later he was using more of his own photography and images in the time I knew him, which would have been the mid-eighties. But he was always in conversation with everything. So it wasn't just artists in that sense.

Q: Thank you.

Getford: Okay.

Q2: So this series really combines photographic techniques and printing techniques. This is representing photogravure technique.

Getford: Right.

Q2: And I'm interested in the creation process. So it must have been a lot of back and forth with ULAE?

Getford: Yes.

Q2: It's my understanding that this all started with a 35-millimeter negative film to be sent to ULAE. So I'm wondering if you could elaborate a little bit on the process.

Getford: Yes, I don't know where the original images came from, whether they were taken out of an art history book or from museum slides or whatever. But typically the way the process worked—for this and some other projects I was involved in—was that ULAE would take an image like this to be used for photogravure and then make a black-and-white image, a high-contrast ortho that had a half-tone or gravure type of image on it. Then the printer would send those images back to Bob, after the images had been realized in comp sizes. There could be a lot of images often more than Bob would eventually use, which follows through with all of his later transfer work. Then Bob would take those images and begin to work them up into—and I'll use the "C" word like I'm not supposed to—composition—we weren't allowed to use the C-word. But he would put these images together. He referred to them as a palette.

After they were put together and the colors chosen, he would begin to work further with them and then he would do things like this [note: pointing at a splash]. For example this typically would be done by taking a piece of acetate, placing it on the work in progress, and taking a brush and flicking paint on it. Or you'll see that same method used directly in a lot of the silkscreen paintings. This was a way of kind of breaking the ice or finishing. Sometimes it was a start, sometimes it was a finish, to throw an element of randomness in. But he would take these [note: prepress images] after the image was rendered into a high-contrast ortho film. Then he would lay them out at a usually agreed upon finished size or roughly to size because he liked to work at full size. Then Bob would go through a color chart, either a printer's color book or a Pantone book or some standard source like that, to get the color that was closest to what he wanted. Then he would cut that color sample out of the chart. If you look through the Pantone books that

survived, you can see snippets are cut out of them. Basically those little pieces of chips of paint or printed matter would go to Bill taped to the high-contrast ortho for him to try and reproduce. Then he would make one or more of these as artist's proofs to get the color combination right. Sometimes the proofs would go back and forth several times. We'd get these big tubes of proofs and if you look through the collection here, you'll find something that looks very much like this, that's different. Some element will be different. The color won't be right or right in the sense that within its own internal world, it's not right. Or it just wasn't what he wanted at that time. This is one of the accepted proofs, also there are pre-proofs, which aren't exactly the same. Any number of things could be different. So eventually what you have to send to the printer is usually either a board or an acetate sheet with all these images taped to it in the correct places for registration with the little paint chips taped to that. In this case I notice they took the tape off. In some cases they left the tape on.

If you look at a *Time* magazine cover for example or some of the other work that Bob made that were for projects like this, he would often tape them up with what we call Scotch tape or cellophane tape, which is translucent or transparent and it would not be removed on purpose. He would leave it there as evidence of the work, the working methodology. Sometimes there would be fingerprints on the sticky side, sometimes not. In this case it's more formal, they've actually taken the tape off. And that process would go back and forth until it was done.

Then there would be the signing, which was the hardest part of the whole job because he had to sign hundreds of prints and keep the spelling right and keep the numbering right. That was not easy for Bob. He'd have to say, "R-A-U-S-C-H-E-N-B-E-R-G, A-P, three over eight, eighty-

nine,” or in this case, eighty-seven. Again and again and again, we would take turns handling the prints but he had to do the hard part.

Q2: Was he particular in the—by choosing certain papers or inks at that time?

Getford: Yes. Yes, I think that the ink probably was Bill’s domain. The paper and color were Bob’s domain. Bob was very, very serious about his paper. And what would normally happen is rolls or pieces of paper would come with the images—Bob would pick a piece of paper and that would be the proof that you would get next. Sometimes the same image in the same colors on three to five different pieces of paper.

Q2: Interesting.

Getford: And that maybe where the cut got made was not because of the color or the image placement or anything like that, but because of which paper it was on, how much dot gain there was, or whether there was any difference in how the ink actually wound up becoming part of the paper. So yes, he was very serious about his paper.

Q2: Thank you.

Getford: Over to this one?

Q: Yes, to *Rotary Drive (Ground Rules)* [1997].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Rotary Drive (Ground Rules)*, 1997  
Photogravure  
22 1/2 x 30 inches (57.2 x 76.2 cm)  
From an edition of 44, published by Universal  
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Getford: Okay, this is—what's the series on this?

Q: *Ground Rules* [1996–97]?

Getford: *Ground Rules*, okay. So it's similar to, but different—this is probably earlier, this one.

Q: Yes, two years earlier.

Getford: Yes, okay.

Q: This is '97 and that one's '99.

Getford: Right.

Q2: And here's some—some of them must have been implemented already.

Getford: Okay. As I remember the way this was accomplished was that Bill had come up with a system of actually putting the photo emulsion on acetate, then exposing an image. Is that—

Q2: That's what it is.

Getford: Yes.

Q2: That's what it is. It's painted brushstrokes—

Getford: On the acetate, right. And what they would do is, they actually went down into the darkroom downstairs and put the emulsion on and exposed it there.

Q2: That's exactly, yes.

Getford: Yes.

Q2: But I would like to—

Getford: That's what I remember. I wasn't—

Q2: Because that sounds—

Getford: I was upstairs [note: the darkroom was downstairs in a corner of the 3D fabrication shop] when it was going on, but that's—

Q2: Because that sounds absolutely right.

Getford: Yes. I'm just trying to see which paper it was, but that's okay.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we are now looking at *Rotary Drive*—1997 from the series *Ground Rules*. My understanding is that *Ground Rules* began when Bill Goldston saw the new things that Bob was doing in Florida, where he was using transfers of vegetable dyes onto paper. Goldston recalled an old war buddy who played with the technique of wielding the developer in the darkroom like paint, literally bringing the image up with a brushstroke. Critics have observed that Rauschenberg's printmaking is embedded in his fundamental outlook toward his art and the place it inhabits in his world, his what-would-happen-if attitude. So I'm wondering if you could speak about that attitude, his what-would-happen-if approach to experimentation, if you could maybe speak to that with respect to this particular piece?

Getford: Okay. I've never really heard it put that way, but I guess that's the way a writer would put it because he was constantly experimenting with things. People would come to him with experiments like this. And since he wasn't manipulating things physically himself a lot of the time, that was a good place for him to make that happen. Printmakers seemed to really like this

loose thing that Bob had done in the past when they were making images; both Bill and Don liked to see things like that happen in the prints. And Bob liked to use it himself. It goes back to that—just taking the brush or whatever and flinging it at the work because the law of indeterminacy makes things set in. I suspect that's exactly sort of what's happened here, is that he's taken an approach to make this just as indeterminate as possible. But he did not to my knowledge make several versions and choose the best. You have to remember he wanted us to feel that everything has its beauty. Although he was not above polishing that beauty on occasion. Look at what's behind here on the ground, this is like what he would have previously been doing with the silkscreens. Sometimes he uses grounds or images in positive or reverse; he would use color to do this. But in this case he would have been able to take that indeterminate way of going about it and actually turn that into an image. Which was very similar to what was happening with our working with the water transfers, the inkjet transfers.

The traditional printers were having a hard time for a while because we—in this case Bob and I and the guys at the studio—had kind of leapfrogged them, in that we were able to do four-color transfers in a scale that he had never been able to do before. Bob really liked doing what he could not do with the silkscreen or other press work. Neither Don nor Bill nor Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles] had embraced computers yet. So Bob was leading that pack and that in itself was sort of a what-would-happen-if; what if we just went off on a whole different tangent than what we've been doing in the past? So there were a couple of years where people were kind of trying to come up with things that really looked like what he was already doing. And this is kind of like that. But it has its own charm. I wouldn't want to cast it as something that was imitative because it's not, from a printer's point of view. But they were still working with the tools they had at

hand because they were still working with chemistry and a lot of film technology and they were trying to catch up with Bob who had already moved on to using digital technology.

Q: Can you talk about—you speak about collaboration. So with this particular piece, who would have been involved and how?

Getford: Well Bill would have been the collaborator in this piece because this was something that Bill came up with, a process for how to extend the technical strategy. But this is something new. This is a new way to put something down in a way that Bob had not explored before. So in that sense this was a collaboration with the printer.

Bob has always collaborated with printers. He collaborated with [Sidney B.] Sid [Felsen], he collaborated with Don and his crew, and Bill. And when he would go into a print studio like that, it was like everybody who had a role was sort of a collaborator, some more than others. Like I said before, he didn't want you trying to give him ideas and he didn't want you getting in the way of the process. But if something great presented itself he was all over it and he wanted you to intuit what it was you were doing up to the level of your function. In other words, if you saw something that needed to be done and it was obvious it needed to be done, he expected you to jump in and help get it done. And if he didn't like it, he would tell you to back off and that's what you would do. But he really did expect his collaborators to step up to the plate as it were. And in this case, it would have been Bill.

Q: And did you have a role in this particular piece?

Getford: I did not have a role in this particular piece at all. At this point, I was working like a mad person to make as many prints as possible for the transfer process that we were doing upstairs. Bill came in on a special case basis to do this and they worked downstairs in the new studio. We built another darkroom in the new studio, the Captiva Road studio, which is the larger studio. They worked in that darkroom for this process. So essentially my role in it was watching them go in the darkroom and come out with these films and they would hang them up and dry them. I could imply what was going on inside the darkroom because I spent many years in a darkroom myself and I understood the process. But if you look at this work, one of the things that I think it obviously revisits are the early *Waterworks* [1992–95]. Also the *Bleachers* [*Bleacher Series*, 1988–91]. It's very much like the *Bleachers*, but in reverse. And this is something that Bob would do constantly. He would reverse things; he was dyslexic. He would take something and turn it completely inside out in order to get a different perspective on it and a different look. So you might print this dark on light, or print light on dark, in a what-if kind of scenario.

Q: Thank you. So this is *Big and Little Bullys*, 1999, part of *Ruminations* [1999–2000]. And these are his parents.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Big and Little Bullys (Ruminations)*, 1999  
Intaglio  
45 x 57 inches (114.3 x 144.8 cm)  
From an edition of 46, published by Universal  
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Getford: Yes—it's kind of interesting because this is—it was *Ruminations* and there was one on family. And it's just interesting that these two pieces were in there.

Q: Yes.

Getford: Okay. But it's *Big and Little Bullys*, huh?

Q: Yes.

Getford: Interesting, this is his family in a boat in Texas [note: at bottom right].

Q2: It's a famous photo?

Q: Yes. Did he take it?

Getford: And this is in North Carolina or South Carolina. [Note: referring to street scene at top center from a 1952 Rauschenberg photograph, *Charleston Street*] Interesting. Okay where would you like for me to be standing? So this is later, this is '99, this is *Ruminations*?

Q: '99. Yes.

Getford: But it's a similar strategy, technically.

Q: Right.

Getford: But what's interesting is—no, this is not the same strategy. Okay, there is another wrinkle here. And it's taking me a second, so just give me a second.

Q: Sure.

Getford: If you look at this, this is a water transfer. These were transferred with water to look like that. So folded process again. Okay?

Q2: It's great that you can draw us this history of—

Getford: Right. So what's happened here is, this print was made later in '99 by Bill to look like that. Now I don't know if that was the intention or if that's just the way it worked out. But if you look at the difference—there's a difference here in the way this was realized. What Bob did in

this case was throw water on the paper and he would place a reversed inkjet image down and burnish the image on to the wet section of the paper. Lawrence Voytek built a burnisher, which he needed to fine-tune his pressure control. This is a conversation we need to have later on, the movement from the press to the hand-burnishing. But you can tell this is different. Even though it looks similar, because these were put down as water transfers and then reprinted. I think Bill may have had a big digital scanner by then. I'm not sure. So we've kind of come full circle back around again. A lot of Rauschenberg images and processes just keep doing that.

Q2: That's great.

Getford: Okay? So that's the kind of thing you want to talk about with this one?

Q: First I'll get you to talk about the images themselves and then—

Getford: Okay.

Q: Okay, so you are now standing in front of *Big and Little Bullys*, which is part of the series *Ruminations* and this particular piece was made in 1999. Can you talk to me about the images that are included in this piece?

Getford: This print is also ULAE. This image on the right is a double exposure. These images started on film—the original image on the 120 film, this is a double exposure. So I could say it's a mistake in the classical photographic sense but not in a Rauschenberg sense. I just printed the

whole thing, the double exposure, on the inkjet printer and then Bob transferred it to the original paper that Bill used to make the prints. So this is of Bob's parents, the images on the right side. This image, of a sailor on the street, is kind of a classic black-and-white photograph that appears in the book of Bob's on the fifties photography [note: *Robert Rauschenberg: Photographs 1949–1962*, 2011]. All of these are images that he had printed up with the inkjet printer for this project or for another project. I printed them in black-and-white for this and then obviously there are subtle color changes like here. I believe that actually occurred in the inkjet printing before the transfer and was emulated. But we were talking earlier about how it's interesting—so I don't know if these prints will be seen in sequence or not—but the piece that we were talking about earlier had come from an idea and then this has come from that, you see similar things coming into and going back from the transfer process. Then this has kind of comeback in the loop again.

You can tell that there's a little bit of difference in the way Bob put the water down for the transfer process. Sometimes he would put water down in a large area and then work on it with a piece of plastic that he used as a burnishing bar. You can see areas where the water and the paper don't quite allow the image to become completely transferred, in contrast to a place like this where water has come out from under the transfer plastic and here where the image has literally seeped into the water beyond the image edge. This lack of control is one of the things he really loved about this process and is part of the conversation with images and materials we talked about earlier. The fact that something that was very much a photograph could turn into something very abstract and indeterminate again seemed to delight him.

This mark here is a mark because he was using a sponge. He wasn't using a brush at this point. Sometimes to transfer an image he would just take the sponge and hold it over the paper and just squeeze the water out onto the paper. Then transfer into that squeeze. The paper he transferred to was similar to this print stock; it was a Saunders [Waterford watercolor paper]. The surface was similar except that in the process of our putting it on the polylaminate, it became a bit colandered and it had a little bit more sizing from the glue. He would have to approach these differences individually, to see how each piece of paper responded because the humidity in Florida is profound and could change the transfer response depending on how long the paper stock had been sitting out in the studio. The assistants would typically glue four or five 5-by-10-foot paper sheets to the poly backing at a time and then set them up so that he would always have something to work with, squeezing water. If you look at the older things like *Barge* [1962–63] where he was painting with a rag, he still wasn't that much of a brush painter when I knew him. He was really likely to pick up whatever worked to get the water or paint where he wanted it. And if it was really boring and flat work, he'd have somebody else paint it [laughs], Darryl usually. For silkscreen, Darryl; Kevin Pottorf worked with Bob on the later transfers. But you can see how the interaction with the scraper bar, burnisher, which is something that Voytek modified from the press to do—or actually they had done it—yes, Lawrence Voytek did that to make the prints made on the press work better, rather than use the old leather-bound wood bar. I think it was Delron or some high-tech plastic that they put in there. But you can see the difference between the loose water and the tight water in these images.

I don't know if this image is—it was from the fifties and maybe early sixties, is all I know. All of this is probably from before the fifties, except these two, I don't know. You'd have to look at

the book. There are parts of other images and that's why I'm not really sure about it. But that was not unusual for him to take an image and just use part of it. The image may be this big and you would put the water down—and you can see this in the demonstration videos—he would just lay it down and just rub where he thought the image might be interesting. And it might sponge out, remove with more water over here or let it come out over here or bleed like this. Because when he was pressing it the burnishing would shove the water—the image that he was transferring—the substrate that he was transferring the image off of was a combination of paper and polyester so it repelled the water—it was kind of plastic-y. So the water didn't go back into that, which is what made it work. That's the way I designed it. So the ink and the water had to go towards the surface that absorbed the water the best.

Q: Thanks. What do you make of the title of this particular piece?

Getford: Yes, that's kind of interesting. [Laughs] Bob had some interesting stories about his family and how uncomfortable he felt. And having grown up in the South and being a different person, I can kind of understand it. His sister sort of swears they're exaggerated. But then again she was pretty well accepted, being the Yam[bilee] Queen and all [laughs] and being very attractive. Both are very attractive physically. But I think that Bob inherited a lot from his dad because they were both apparently very matter-of-fact. He didn't like decoration. He liked for things to be what they were. It is what it is. I think his dad was probably like that too. So it's kind of interesting, but—for me I don't know about the word bully because it's possibly a [Theodore] Roosevelt thing. I don't know how positive or negative—and where he found that in that

continuum of things. He was always interested in wordplay. So I guess it could go several ways.

[Note: Bully was a nickname for Rauschenberg's father] But he loved dogs so that's—

Q: And what about the series title? *Ruminations*?

Getford: Well, rumination was really a tough thing for him. He did not like to look back. He really liked to move forward. He would go to great lengths to keep from retracing his steps consciously. And he was saying one of the toughest things about working with images as material, as part of your palette, is having to deal with the images of the past that come up, the emotional charges that come along with them. Sometimes he absolutely couldn't use images that he loved—photographic images that he loved because of the associations they brought—because he was trying to keep his emotions out of the mix. And if something became too emotionally charged image-wise, he wouldn't use it. One day I came in and a lot of images were gone, I mean hundreds. This would represent, to me, months of work and also a very large check on my chair because he knew how much extra work that this was going to make for me to replace these. He said, "I've just looked at those images too many times and they mean too much to me to use them anymore." So we shredded them and threw them out. It represented a lot of time and money.

Q: Do you remember what some of those specific images were?

Getford: No—this happened years before *Ruminations*—because they were really broad-based. I can tell you that they were not part of the series, they were not family things, they were not old

lovers or they weren't—they weren't Jasper, they weren't things that he and Cy had done together. They were more modern images that he had taken himself, places he had been. They were his images; they were his photographs. So I don't think that in that case they were as charged with personal innuendo as they were just, "I was in Spain and I'm just tired of looking at Spain," that kind of thing. But he did have this thing about the memories that images brought up and how he really did try to take that out of the work, as hard and impossible as it is. We all know how it's just impossible to do that. If you're dealing with something that didn't just happen, it's got something associated with it.

Q: Thank you.

Q2: So in this series there's a reference where you moved away from press-applied images to entirely hand-applied transfers, correct?

Getford: Right. I'm referring to transfers in general not *Ruminations*.

Q2: And I'm wondering, during the course of using different liquids to transfer the imagery, whether or not you also had to shift or adjust the properties of the paper because the paper might react differently to solvents as it does to water.

Getford: The real difference came in the transition from the press images, which would be like the image over there with the horse from the *Waterworks* [*Horse Silk (Waterworks)*, 1992] to the later images, which were on the Saunders paper. The original images were whatever paper we

had laying around. Bob had a huge store of paper that he had collected over in the Roadhouse, the archive studio. You could go over and get a stack of paper like this of just gorgeous handmade paper. We/he did experiment with that early on. The press had its own kind of interesting effect in that you're always moving in one direction and so the water always went in one direction. Basically what you'd do is in this case you would put the paper down in the press—not in this case, but in the case that we're speaking of—put the paper down in the press. Bob would apply the water with a brush or with a sponge or whatever. And then you would put the images down there, put the tympan—a separator plastic sheet on the litho[graphy] press—on top or usually a cover sheet in between that and the tympan because the tympan had grease on it. Run it through the press and all the ink would be squeezed out one end that didn't actually adhere to the paper. And you can see that on the bottom of some of the prints if you look closely at them. It looked a lot like this. But that's just a reference. That is not what's happening here at all. But with the original, with the press work, there is some experimentation with papers. By the time we got to the larger pieces, anything that's bigger than the press, we had pretty much formalized on the Saunders except for a few things that he did out in L.A. with Sidney. And Sidney had a different paper, which I found to be more absorbent and took a lot more ink. But Bob was very happy with the paper that we were using because we were buying this paper in 30-meter rolls. That's 5-foot wide by 100-foot whatever? What's 30 meters? About 100 feet? He wanted to be able to go big.

Q2: About 100-foot. Yes.

Getford: Yes. Something like—no, it's more than that. Anyway, they were large rolls. And we would cut them down to the size he needed. And this isn't on—this is a printed image so these—we very rarely worked this small. The *Runts* [2006–08], which you've seen, were about as small as we worked once we started working freehand. The panels were 5-foot by 10-foot and we cut them down from there. So when you see an image this size that looks like it's the transfer, if it is a later transfer, it's usually a printed image. This is very hard to discern sometimes because a number of print series were reproduced on inkjet printers on similar paper.

Q2: I have one more question about the process. I'm just curious. Since the paper was exposed to pretty high amounts of water—

Getford: Yes.

Q2: —in an uneven way and even if you squeezed it out fast, how did you manage to keep the entire paper plain? Was there a final flattening process involved?

Getford: No, some of the earlier paintings, the ones that we'll look at over here—he called them paintings, that's why I say paintings—let me explain that. If they were small, they were drawings; if they were big, they were paintings, no matter what they were made out of. So this is a print, this is a print and there were also drawings this size. Anything that got bigger than this became pretty much a painting. That's kind of a nebulous thing. But yes, water deformation of the paper was an issue. That's one of the reasons we went to the polylaminate system because we were able to glue it, the paper, down. And we can talk about that as a transition because there

was a whole group of pre-poly laminate works, which tended to be smaller. But once they got to be sizable, 5-foot and larger, we really did need to glue the paper down. There are exceptions, some *Anagrams* [1995–97] for example. Before we ever started the transfer process and the paper was intended to come off of the poly laminate.

Q2: Perfect.

Getford: Supposedly.

Q2: Excellent. Thank you.

Getford: At least not with a pressure washer.

Q: Great! So maybe we can move on to the little piece at the end.

Getford: The small one?

Q: Yes.

Getford: Okay.

Q: And I think Christine, you can just do this one because it sounds like the reason he wants to speak about it is because it's a technical transition.

Q2: Yes. Let me just look at my notes here. This is the real first solo transfer.

Getford: Yes, this was, yes. They got bigger, they got up to about 30 inches by something. Well, they get about that size.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: We are standing in front of Untitled, which was made in 1989.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled, 1989  
Acrylic and solvent transfer on handmade paper  
5 7/8 x 4 3/4 inches (14.9 x 12.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: This one.

Q2: And this work is the first piece that was developed by using an acrylic solvent transfer technique and I would love to hear more about it.

Getford: Okay, this is actually the solvent transfer. We talked about two different—acrylic is not involved in this. I don't mean to correct you, but that's basically—the reason that I picked this out is I wanted to find things—I didn't realize they were going to pull so many things. I was looking for things that made a point without being too large. [Laughs] But previous to the water transfer, the inkjet transfer that I was involved with, Bob was working on the press and this is a very small example of what he was doing at the time. Primarily what he would do is go in and make things en masse. He may make several hundred of them or thirty or forty or whatever at a time. They tended to be small and they tended to be solvent transfers. They were using a blanket wash. I don't know if you know what that is; I don't know exactly what it is. I know it's a real industrial-level solvent, which is not good to get on your hands. It's very flammable. The can says, "Do not pour this without a ground strap." Of course they're smoking and pouring and spritzing with an aerosol sprayer. I'm thinking, "We're all going to die!" [Laughs] They did this for years. I don't have the luck of Bob. Anyway, sorry to digress, but that made a big impression when I went in there and saw what was going on. It was just—it kind of frightened me. But this is a very small example of the images that he was making on the press at the time.

These images were limited in size for two reasons: one, the press size, which was about 32 inches wide to whatever the bed length was, which was maybe 45 or 50 inches that you could maybe work with. But the greater problem was that he had to come up with preprinted clay-based images from magazines and newspapers, that sort of thing. So you can see in this, where the lettering is backwards—it also meant that for everything he did in that methodology, the images were reversed. This was another thing that was liberating whenever he started using the process with the computers and the inkjet printers, I could make the images in any orientation

that he wanted them. That was the whole change of things, which meant that he could use his photographs. Not that it meant much to him because he was dyslexic anyway, but it meant that if you wanted it right-reading or if you wanted two of them, one right-reading and the other not, he had that choice. This was a leap in technology for him.

So there are a lot of these and he would make these as party favors and gifts as well as art. For example, Bob was the kind of guy who, when he had a birthday, he gave you gifts. So everybody who would come to his birthday party would get something like this. Or if you had a birthday, he would make you something, 11-by-14 or 16-by-20 or something like that. He actually had a box that he kept in the pantry of prints like this, maybe seventy-five or eighty of them in different sizes for different levels of importance [laughs] of people and that he'd gone through and selected. If the notion struck him, he would run in and say, "Get me the box," and you'd bring the box out and he'd go through them and pick something he thought was appropriate for the person; it meant something to him that it was appropriate. So that's kind of what he was working with, with the drawings at that time on the press. The inkjet watercolor series, which became paintings, all came from this genesis.

So if you look at this process, you can see the limitations of the press and where they got the image from. What they would do is, they would have these tearing sessions. Bob had just tons of magazines that he'd subscribe to because he loved to look through magazines; he wasn't much of a reader, he liked to look at the pictures. Well before I got there, what they did was, they built these little boxes, maybe a dozen boxes of different sizes, but most of them no bigger than a magazine page. And they would go on tearing sessions. They would just tear everything out that

looked interesting from magazines and one box would be dogs, another would be trees or faces or whatever. So there were all these different categories that he had to choose from and that's how they would choose the imagery.

So he would go over and look at the boxes, pretty much in the same way that he would look at paint if he were choosing paint. He would leaf through things and he would find four or five or whatever it took, like these two little images. Sometimes they needed to be cut down, sometimes they could be used whole, and they would get at them with the scissors or he would or someone helping him would cut the image to size as in this case. He may lay one image or paper on the press bed, but almost never just one, unless the paper would fill the whole press. He would try to fill the press with paper sheets and then start putting images down so they could run them all through at one time and make ten, twelve, fifteen prints. They were all individually designed. But he basically composed each one, but he printed it—it's interesting and we can talk about this later too because it was an era that we went through—when he had to do all his composition backwards and I always wondered if being dyslexic helped or hurt that. Because initially when we were doing the inkjet prints, they were on opaque paper and he could not see what he was going to get at all. Except for peeking under the image after he placed it face down for the transfer. Eventually we transitioned into the transfer substrate being transparent or translucent. But when the images were opaque, it was the same process and he had to kind of look at each image and imagine what it was going to look like when it was transfer-printed.

I think he had a lot of practice doing these for what we wound up doing later with the other water process. He got really quick at it, he could—he had just a great eye and he seemed to know

exactly what he wanted. He didn't back up many times. I guess, what I'm trying to say—once he put something down, he would change occasionally, but usually the process was already done in his head by the time he got to the paper. Now when he got to these bigger pieces, that wasn't necessarily the case. But when we were working with smaller pieces like this, that tended to happen a lot.

Q2: And this is handmade paper, right?

Getford: This was all handmade paper. Like I said, he had a tremendous collection of handmade paper in the building next door that he collected for who knows how long and from where, working with the paper makers in Spain, I think, and in China. And then not to mention whatever he just bought because when he bought, he didn't buy six pieces of paper, he bought a pallet.

[Laughter]

Getford: Not really, but he would buy a lot of paper and he would buy it in large quantities because he would never know how long he was going to go or if he wanted to go back to it. And good paper is hard to get and it's quite a wonderful thing in and of itself.

Q2: Wonderful. Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we are now going to speak about some of the *Bleacher Series*. In 1988 Polaroid's 20-by-24-inch camera was brought to Rauschenberg in Florida. And the *Bleacher Series* arose out of his encounter with that camera.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*From the Bleacher Series 1990: Venice, 1952, 1990*  
Manipulated black-and-white Polaroid photographs  
on aluminum  
52 x 45 inches (132.1 x 114.3 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: Right.

Q: So maybe to begin you could just talk about that—the camera coming, your observations of him playing with the camera.

Getford: My information on that is secondhand. I was not there when the camera was there; I wasn't in the general vicinity. But I do recall seeing the *Bleachers* being worked on. My understanding was they took the camera to Miami and other places and Bob would point and it was such an awkward device that they, the Polaroid crew would work with it, then he would look at the image, then they would take a picture. Then you had to do the whole Polaroid thing—it's sort of like that guy with the red couch who still does the big 8-by-10 Polaroids. But it was quite

a device. But with this series it's kind of like the reverse of what Bill and Bob were doing with the series that we talked about earlier. In this case Bob would use chemicals to take the image away and to undevelop it. So basically, as I understood it, it's why they're called *Bleachers*, because he was using photographic bleach to pull things out. Obviously there were four images and this was the full size of the paper of the camera paper. I suppose they photographed the subject four times registered in camera to increase the size of the complete image. I think this strategy was as natural to him as placing multiple images on any surface to create a single image.

Another interesting thing here, besides the imagery and the fact that—well there are two things here. One I want to say is that if we're talking about the silkscreens—and this does harken back to the silkscreen here—which is not entirely obvious. When Emil, the photographer, would make the high-contrast orthos, he would print them as photographs and then they would be made into the high-contrast films. But when they were made onto the screens, because of the limitation of paper film, we had three different classifications. If you were to look at the screens, you'll see they're S for single, D for double, Q for quad—this is a quad size. Because these four sizes of paper were the largest sizes of paper that we could use in the darkroom. So that's one of the delineating factors for size, when you look at the silkscreens especially. This is not exactly that size, but the concept is the same.

Bob would compose things sometimes by these single and quad formulas because he could only have a screen of certain size. So when they were working, one of the things he would do is call for a double size screen of an image—he had books with all the images in them. And if he wanted a dog, he would go to the dog book, which is similar to the boxes that we talked about in

the press room. So there's an overlapping strategy here. Each image was numbered and if it had more than one size, which sometimes it did, he'd say, "I want number sixty-three quad," and they would go get a screen this size with that image on it downstairs and bring it up and they would print it.

The thing that's interesting here also is that this is a prototypical image mounting strategy. Lawrence Voytek had a lot to do with the metal that was used in a lot of pieces that were being produced and this is one of the early metal background pieces for photography. Like the poly laminate technique used later. I suspect they were probably already doing silkscreen prints on metal so they had the metal around. But the interesting part, beyond that, is that it's a prototype for all the frames that they used later. Because here what they've done is they've welded the back frame as an integral part—you can't see it, but it's there. And then they turned an L-shaped piece of aluminum around and you can see the relief here. Bob really liked that relief and it became a real mainstay of framing for him for decades.

Bob had aluminum framing dyes made through Lawrence; Lawrence did all of the technical aspects of it. We had them in several sizes for smaller and larger. When we see *Foreplay* [(*Scenario*), 2006] and some of those other works, you'll see those frames. All in one piece so they can be welded together on the corners very quickly, which helped make it possible to make a lot of work really fast and make large panels joinable. That was the other really nice part, was that you could use multiple panels, 5 feet by 8 feet or 5 feet by 10 feet panels, and put them together with this type of framing. It was a real great stroke by Lawrence so this is kind of a foreshadowing of major trends in that sense. And you can see the same open kind of brushwork

and stuff. I'm assuming he did use brushes on this just because of the scale involved. But if you look at it image-wise, it's very much like the transfers and silkscreens. Do you have something else?

Q2: Well I'm wondering if you feel that all those four elements were mounted to the metal support first, before they were bleached? Or do you think it was the other way around?

Getford: I think it was the other way around.

Q2: Okay.

Getford: No, I think as I recall, they worked on the Polaroids—and this was in the old small studio; I say small, it was smaller than this room. The size of a largish one-car garage. For the amount of art that came out of it, it's pretty amazing. In the Laika Lane studio we had tables for silkscreening and Lawrence had built these tables out of aluminum and there was a surface and it was probably—I'm trying to think if they were standard size. They were probably 12 feet wide and maybe 16 feet long. We would work with the silkscreening and things like this on the tables. We would actually have to get up and walk around on the tables in order to accomplish some tasks. As I recall, what we'd do is we'd cover the tables with paper or plastic and they'd lay these images out and work on them and then mount them on the metal. But you might want to ask one of those guys who actually mounted them, which would be Lawrence or Tup, someone in fabrication.

Q2: Do you happen to know what kind of bleach was used?

Getford: No, I don't. Lawrence would know. But I suspect it was something from the darkroom—it could be stop bath from regular photographic process, but I suspect it was probably something related to the Polaroid process as opposed to the Kodak silver image process. I know it stank.

Q2: I believe you.

Getford: We did a number of things that really stank. [Laughs]

Q2: So we are really looking at the early days that Bob worked with metal supports. And my eye goes towards the signature.

Getford: Yes.

Q2: Do you know how the signature was applied? What kind of technique—

Getford: Paint sticks.

Q2: Paint sticks.

Getford: Bob had a lot of Japanese paint sticks and basically they were like a Sharpie. You probably have seen them, but they have kind of a fibrous tip that looks like—there's a larger version of that that we use just on whiteboards and that sort of thing. But it has actual paint in it that you could smell with a spirit base. You would shake them up and that's what he would sign them with. He did that a lot on the metal work all throughout the nineties.

Q2: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we are now going to speak about *Horse Silk*, which was from the *Waterworks* series.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Horse Silk (Waterworks)*, 1992  
Inkjet dye transfer on paper  
41 7/8 x 29 1/4 inches (106.4 x 74.3 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: Right.

Q: A piece made in 1992.

Getford: Right.

Q: *Horse Silk* was created upon the occasion of *Aperture*'s fortieth year. Do you know the story?

Getford: I do. This one is interesting and this was one of the ones that I picked to talk about because it illustrates a period that was a transitional period. This is before we had our own printer. We were only working in black-and-white and what was happening at this point is Bob is using the same images that he was using for the silkscreen, the black-and-white 35-millimeters. I was scanning them, which wasn't easy in those days because we only had flatbed scanners, we didn't have slide scanners. I'm not sure whether I used prints or whether I used film, to be honest. But these were the same images that he was using for the silkscreen. Then I would process them, size them up, get them into digital files, and then we sent them to Seattle. We would send them up there in groups of ten or fifteen at a time. We were talking before about why did we wind up getting the printer—this is what made us get the printer because it wasn't fast enough. So he wanted to go in-house.

As we talked about before, about choosing paper—this is paper that happened to be lying around, that we didn't go out and engineer for a process, but it gave us a really good hint as to what paper we should be using. So we were able to look at this, say, "Okay, this is working

well.” Almost everything that we did wound up staying in the collection because there were a lot of things that Bob would like that were very faint or very pale. The whole series that he had up on the wall for more than a year, which was the backside of linen-backed paper, which was linen on the backside. [Note: referring to a group of works from 1991 that are not part of a named series.] You were supposed to use the paper on the other side, but he used the linen side; but it was very, very diffuse and very, very pale. Very washed out like the *Hoarfrost* series [1974–76]. He loved it. He had it hanging in the studio for the longest time, more than a year, the whole series just hung on one wall. But that was about the same time as this. It’s just after this because very soon after this, by maybe ’93 or maybe even later in ’92, we started working in color and the large paper-backed linen work was in color.

We started working in black-and-white thinking that that was more stable than color because Iris was not noted for its stability. There were two inks for the Iris, there was an ID ink and there was proofing ink, which was far better looking because it had a much larger color gamut than the ID ink had. I am supposing that the work that went to Seattle was done with the ID ink because it was black-and-white. And it was supposed to be art. So the guy probably just did it that way. But we were working with these. I think they charged us something like a hundred dollars an image, or something, just to print them. We started calculating that up and so when Bob was talking about buying a printer, Iris printers in those days were a hundred and forty-two thousand dollars without any computer equipment. Okay, this is no processing front end, this is just the very simple PC that ran the machine. So we calculated how many we were using in a month—we were mail-ordering these things, they were going out as fast as they were coming in. And so when we were discussing getting the printer, Bob’s question was, “How many drawings is that?”

A hundred forty-two thousand dollars, how many drawings do we have to make to break even?”  
I think we figured two or three. So it was pretty much a done deal.

Then it was just a matter of getting one and learning to use it, which was no easy feat. We had to go to Boston for a week to go to school to learn how to use the printer. Because as was typical in those days for high-end press devices, for scanners, drum scanners and that type of thing, you went to the manufacturer and spent a week or so learning how to use them properly, which we did. Darryl and I did that. Unfortunately there's a high voltage area in the printer and Darryl was shocked, quite literally. Basically after we got back from the training, he never touched the machine again. Maybe once. So I was kind of on my own. Because originally he was going to help like he was helping with the silkscreens because he was very prominent in the silkscreening.

So this just precedes—let's switch over to color—and this is a really good example of work from the press and then something that also turned into a mass-produced item that Bob didn't put together with tape. You can see it starts up here and then it just runs off and it exhibits all of the wonderful things and the accidental things that the process was going to offer. You can see how the paper affected things, where it's dry in here where these little spotted areas—that's where there was not enough water for the ink to transfer and the surface of the paper imposed on the image. Then you can see where there was a lot of water, too much water here, and it just blew right off the end of the paper. You can see where you have the spattering and things up here and you can see where he's put images on top of images so it shows a lot of things going on at the same time. It really is a precursor to all of the color work that comes along later.

Q: Do these particular images have meaning in the context of the occasion for which this piece was conceived?

Getford: I'm trying to remember; when you said that, I was trying to remember whether—I think the image was picked after the project was proposed. I think we looked through the images that we had and decided this was the one for—I think it was more about the process than it was about the images being good for *Aperture*. I think that Bob was very keen to have this be seen as the forefront of photography, which it was at the time because there were really literally only two or three inkjet printers being used for serious art at that level. Because nobody could afford them, they were just terribly, prohibitively expensive. But it's a tremendous image and there are a bunch of them of this time period which are really nice. Like I said, not long after that he moved into color, so they kind of become a set all their own.

Q: I wanted to ask you a question about naming. The name of this particular series changed. It had previously been called *Day Lights*—do you remember that?

Getford: I've always been a little confused as to where the break is and where it changes. That was such a fluid period that I think that's probably the reason. The surface that it was on and because there were different papers and because it really was the time when it was very experimental. I think that the naming was a renaming afterwards to create some delineation between series. And is it still called *Waterworks*?

Q: It is.

Getford: Before, it was called *Day Lights*. I'm not really certain about what the motivation for that was. But I know that there was some renaming and a lot of it had to do with the fact that scales were changing dramatically and that suddenly we were doing color and we weren't before. Originally the *Waterworks* had only been in black-and-white and then suddenly they were beginning to be color. [Note: The *Waterworks* unite two previously distinct series: black-and-white *Night Sights* and color *Day Lights*] And then suddenly they were not just on paper, but they were on fabric and paper. So I think later on there was some changing of names just to delineate them somehow.

Q: Okay. Larry [B.] Wright in an earlier interview said that there would be sometimes a day of going around and naming things—

Getford: Yes.

Q: —taking Polaroids of the clipboard and writing down names. I'm wondering if you could speak about that, observations of watching Bob naming work.

Getford: Yes. Well Bob had a curious process—he named everything after the fact for the most part. There's always exceptions to the rule, but most of the time—what he would do is he would put things up and he would procrastinate until he felt like they were going out the door oftentimes and then he would name them. Sometimes he wouldn't get that far, sometimes he would have a name immediately for it. But before digital photography we did a lot of Polaroid

photography. Polaroid cameras were sort of spread all over the place and film was there. You just had to keep loading it. So in order to register things they would photograph it and Polaroid it and do two or three copies. One would stay there and one would come to New York. We tried to duplicate everything so there would be a copy in New York to go in the reg [registry] books. There was a set of reg books in New York and a set of reg books in Florida. We tried to keep them in parity, but it was a bunch of guys moving very fast forward. [Laughs] So the New York books probably got kept much better than the Florida books although Bradley did a good job of keeping up with them.

But Bob would look at something and he would sit there and oftentimes he had a thesaurus and a dictionary. I don't know if that was as much for spelling as for knowing what the words actually meant because he would come up with a name, oftentimes first, and then go to the dictionary and look it up to make sure that what he thought it meant is what the dictionary thought it meant. So that's how he would name work when I was around and we kept that dictionary and thesaurus for the archive. It's probably in this building somewhere because I made sure that they made the shipment—that didn't get left lying around at the end because he would pore through those books, they were tools. Sometimes if he was really stumped, he would come up with an idea and try to find a word that fit the concept. But it was almost always after the fact. In other words he didn't, as some photographers like to say, he would not pre-visualize. He didn't want to practice, he didn't want to pre-visualize. He basically really didn't want you to know what you were doing while you were doing it. He'd rather you be a total novice at it if possible. And so he would change things up and try to keep you off balance all the time. And he would do—the point being, he would do the same thing with the naming, I think.

So to go back to the strategy, we would write the name and the number, each of these artworks has a number on the back, it has the year and he didn't want them sequential. They are systematically un-sequential in terms of their fabrication or date of origin so they would be done in batches and we typically would write it on the back, starting with the date and then a number. The number, we tried to do it monthly; sometimes we did, sometimes we'd do four or five in a group. Sometimes we would do thirty or forty in a group. For the naming, we kind of did the same thing. The naming was sometimes like the signing, it's just one of those things that he felt had to be done and he would put it off to the last minute. He could be a wonderful procrastinator.

[Laughter]

Q: Thank you. Okay, so on to the *Anagrams*.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: We are looking at three examples of the series of *Anagrams*. They all date back to 1996 and from the left to the right we are looking at *Cronus Eclipse* to *Jaywalk* in the middle and *Road – Show* to the right. So my understanding is that most of these works were now being printed by you in Captiva using your printer that you just purchased and elaborated about.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Cronus Eclipse (Anagram)*, 1996  
Inkjet dye transfer on paper  
64 x 30 1/2 inches (162.6 x 77.5 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Jaywalk (Anagram)*, 1996  
Inkjet dye transfer on paper  
50 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches (128.3 x 90.2 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Road – Show (Anagram)*, 1996  
Inkjet dye transfer on paper  
40 x 30 inches (101.6 x 76.2 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: Right.

Q2: And I would assume at this time you also looked into the possible dyes and pigments that were available at that time. So could you describe to us the early years of making use of this new technique in the studio, and the dyes and pigment that you used, and your observations? I know that's a lot to ask.

Getford: This is a really eclectic group in terms of ink media because we were still working with—some of these are like the first color off the press and you can see how they're not completely flat, that they have some undulation you asked about earlier. It's really surprising that they're as flat as they are actually. Years of flat file storage has been good for them. A couple series are represented here media-wise. One was a project that Bob did with Saff Tech., *Arcadian Retreats* [1996], and some of the images are from that. I believe this is one of them. I think some of the more brownish-looking works over there are from that group. And then this image is from an era of transition where we were using two different printers at the same time, in this case three different because there's the Iris printer that Don was using—and I can't remember the gentleman's name in Washington, D.C., but he was a well-known printer there. We were using our Iris printer and the images leftover from that Iris printer. And we were using a new Encad printer, which was a pigment printer.

The pigment printer had a whole different look than the Iris printer because the Iris printer was basically a dye printer. It had very subtle color gradations and it had a much larger color gamut. But even more importantly, the way the color interacted when it got to the paper was very

different. The liquid that the pigment was suspended in had more viscosity than the liquid that the dye was suspended in, as one might suspect. And the pigments tended to mix in and on the paper, sometimes with a colorcast that was different than the actual colors that were printed.

In this case, I'm thinking that this is dye and this is also dye, but from different printers. This is from the Washington printer and Don. And you can see how this is cut out and how it just bleeds around the edges. And then this is put in in the background. And then this, I think, is actually from the Encad. And so would be an early pigment print and this would also be one too, right here. I wouldn't swear to that without a chromatograph, but that's my estimation at this point [note: referring to areas of *Jaywalk (Anagram)*].

Q2: But it was a common practice in the studio?

Getford: It was common practice—there was no prohibition about keeping like materials together because that was Bob's practice, to use whatever he had. And if an image was laying there which he had used in a previous project or even if it was for something for a project to be and if it was usable and it worked here and now, it was used.

Q2: What was the substrate that you printed it to?

Getford: The substrate in this case initially, as we talked about before, was an opaque one. It was a combination of paper and polyester. I'm thinking it was still paper and polyester at this point even with the pieces that we have. He could not see the images that he was printing until he

pulled it up so it was kind of a reveal. It was fun to watch because even he was surprised with what he was going to get. You just didn't know that this was going to happen because this is where the water pools on the paper. I think he actually liked that. There was never any request from him to, "Can you do something about that?" I think that he liked the idea that it was random and that there was something out of his control, that it was part of the mix.

If you look back here, you don't see as much of that because these were printed—this is a good point. I'm glad you asked that. This was printed on a completely different paper. And because this was for another series, it was printed on a special paper that Don had found that was supposed to be a release paper. It was more like a kind of a decal paper. It would take a lot more ink, but the colors weren't as good in my opinion, they were kind of brownish. They didn't have the range of color. I'm not positive which ink set they wound up using.

The Iris had a set of paper that came with it. The Encad had a set of paper. The real difference with the Encad paper was it was 64 inches wide. We went from size 36 inches to 42 inches, somewhere in there, to 64 inches wide to 100 feet long as a possibility for image size. Of course we didn't have enough memory to print anywhere near that big. But we could now print an entire image, one image for the whole sheet, if we wanted to, which we didn't do. The images usually stayed in a 3 to 4-foot range.

Now all of these images pretty much had to stay within the Iris format, so that would be just about as big as the paper would be, 40-something. That would fill up an entire sheet. The Encad paper was a generic paper. These early generic papers, not counting the Iris, which would just be

considered throwaway paper anyway because they were proofs. It was a proof machine. The reason the whole process worked was because—even today—in order for the ink to stick to any paper so that it doesn't sink into the substrate, it has to have a gelatin coating. And that gelatin coating is the subject of all sorts of scientific work from different people and different printers to try and get the images to go on the paper, to not have any dot gain, which means spreading of the ink on the paper itself, and to stay in place on the paper. So as they would improve papers, we'd constantly have to go find crummier and crummier paper to print on that would also let us print really good images. So it was this whole kind of cat-and-mouse game with the industry—as they got their papers better, they worked worse for us because we were basically cheating the system. In the early days, for a long time, we were the only people doing it. Now a lot of people love to do it with all sorts of things. But it was really much easier in the beginning to get it to transfer because the paper was so crappy or the coating on the paper was so crappy. Eventually we were able to transition to completely plastic paper, which was acetate. But that was quite a while later. And then that way, Bob could at least see what he was doing, sort of. But that was probably not until right around 2000 or so.

Q2: Did the different substrates have any influence on the liquid that you used for transfer or the exposure time of the liquid to the substrate? You always used water, right?

Getford: Yes, it had to do with how much liquid mostly. There were a couple of things, I think, going on in Bob's mind. One was, sometimes he wanted the image to really spread and obliterate or be sloppy or whatever and then sometimes he wanted it tight. And that all had to do with the relative humidity of the paper. I think that's one of the reasons he started using a sponge rather

than a brush sometimes because he could get an even coat when he wanted an even coat. And then he could always add water by squeezing the sponge and dripping it, which he would do.

You can see that when we look at images later on; you'll see that they're much more coherent in their edges. There are two reasons for that; one was Bob was handling the images at this point. Later on after his strokes, Kevin was handling the images. Or someone else was doing it and he didn't want Kevin's hand to be part of the image. Whereas here in these images it was okay, but if something happened as a result of his implication with the water, it was okay if he did it. It wasn't okay if you did it. That's one of the reasons the type of image changed, that he kind of went to a square, whole-image format, which harkens back to another series we would have seen in the early photograms and that sort of thing. I think he was kind of working back to that because that's something he could direct, where he could have somebody else cut out the photographs and he could put them together. I think he may have thought of it like that.

But this is a real eclectic bunch of ink here. For example, this is definitely a dye and I think this is dye. But then these other parts are pigment.

Q2: And the *Road – Show* behind you, you think this is—

Getford: This one, I believe this is all pigment.

Q2: I can see the difference, it's saturated.

Getford: You see how it's—and one of the reasons I say that—see this kind of mauve or purple? Sometimes when the ink would blend together and you would get that as an artifact. And it wasn't quite as liquid. You'd have to put a lot more water on the paper for this ink than you would for the dye.

Q2: I can see that.

Getford: Because you're dealing with suspended grains of pigment, whereas with a dye it's much more part of the liquid itself.

Q2: In terms of the light sensitivity, do you think the dyes are much more sensitive to exposure to light—

Getford: They are.

Q2: —rather than the pigments?

Getford: And that's one of the reasons that we tried to transition—besides size, which was an obvious advantage, being able to have a printer that's 64 inches wide as opposed to a printer that's 30 inches, 34 inches wide, or whatever it was. That was an obvious advantage to me. Bob was not concerned about that. When we—we being Lawrence and I, who was someone I would consult with a lot in terms of things that were challenging—we talked about that. We put it to Bob—if we were making this huge jump in scale the fragility of the images was still—they were

no longer drawings, they were becoming paintings in his world. He said he was not concerned, that it was not what the images— “It was not what the work was about,” is what he said, verbatim. And of course, coming from a guy who works in cardboard and dirt [laughs] you just have to accept that, that this is not his point. And so we moved on.

However, I have to say that in the background we did move forward to stabilize things as much as possible. And anytime there was a new technological change that allowed us to improve the stability or if suddenly something would happen to one of the printers that we couldn't use it anymore—we would use that as an excuse to get a more stable ink set and move on. We went through two, four, about six different printers. It really wasn't much of an issue to change because every couple of years they got cheaper and cheaper and cheaper. By the time we got to the last printer, which was as big as—I guess it was 42 inches, which is what we kind of settled on as being a good size, 64 and 42 is what we kind of remained at after that—the printers cost less than ten thousand dollars. It wasn't even a single drawing so it was no big deal if we swapped out printers.

We printed with the Iris first, which was a dye printer; then the Encad, which was a pigment printer; and added a Mimaki, which was really a rebadged Roland. There were really only two leading large print head makers then. There was Epson and there was Roland. And different companies would use their heads. After the Roland, we switched to Epson. I think we didn't have—we had mixed success with the Roland. We tried a longer-lasting dye series because we switched to Lyson ink. Then after that we went directly to the Epson with their inks, which were supposed to be the standard of the industry.

Q2: When was that? When did you switch to the Epson, do you remember?

Getford: I'm thinking it was about 2000.

Q2: And then you stayed with Epson?

Getford: We stayed with Epson from then on out, yes.

Q2: And in terms of the dyes you used for the early works, are there certain colors that are more sensitive to light feeding than others?

Getford: Yes. The thing that's there last is blue. It's very similar to what you would find in offset printing. The reds tend to go first and then the yellows and then the blues are last. The thing that we found out about even the Iris inkjet was—well let's talk about the framing here. You think that might be inconsequential, but it's not. The reason that these are covered is because they're primarily dyes and we felt the dyes were more fragile. And this is the best UV [ultraviolet]-resistant plastic that we could find at the time. I think it's Lexan and I think it's really thick for what it is. These things are monstrously heavy; when they got to be 8 to 10 feet long and 5 feet high, they weighed three or four hundred pounds. We had to have a special lifting device just to move it around the studio.

The other thing that's going on here in some of these *Anagrams* is that even though they look like the matted paper drawings, the reveal mat where you have the beveled edge is cut plastic sheet about a 1/4 to 3/8 of an inch thick. The plastic was cut and then painted with lacquer to look like paper. So although this looks like your traditional window mat made out of paper, it's not. It's several layers of plastic on plastic. And it's just tremendously heavy and very stable by the way. Then we were making these frames that went around that and we'd sandwich them together. Now the thing that science revealed eventually was that it wasn't just the UV that was dangerous to the inks. It was any light at all.

[Laughter]

Q2: Usually it's a combination of both.

[Laughter]

Getford: And so the trick with these is to—they are not continuous display items or they're like any paper. And that's what I've tried to tell everyone from the very beginning. These are paper works; you have to treat them like paper works even if they're 8 feet by 10 feet or if they're 10 feet by 60 feet, which some pieces were. They are not paintings; they are paper work. I can't stress that enough because there's just no—paper is paper. And UV and paper don't mix, and light and general paper don't mix as you well know.

So Lawrence was making these at great effort. It was a Herculean task because these are really small ones. We did some really big ones. This was when we began to get into the larger paper sizes and some of these are 5 to 7 feet tall and 10 to 12 feet long. They seem to be holding up pretty well though. I have one of these, the very first color dye image that I had hanging in my house and I'm conscious of how much light is in the house. I have the windows or the shades drawn virtually all the time when I have work up. But it hung in my house for a good decade and then I put it away. And it still looks remarkably well.

One of the things I might mention, when you look at some of these early black-and-white dye pieces, they look like they're kind of brownish, maybe purplish. That's not necessarily from fading although that is what it kind of looks like. Some of that is actually from the way the ink mixed. It had kind of a platinum look of the old platinum prints. They're like that. So when you're looking at that, it's easy to mistake that for light damage. It's not in fact light damage. You really have to know what it looked like initially. And as we were talking about photography before, almost all of the photography gets bumped up in contrast to make it more readable. And so you have to be really careful not to think that something is light damaged by judging it by the photograph, especially some pieces, which were made just absolutely gossamer. Bob really liked that sort of look and sometimes that's what he was going for. It really didn't bother him. Not only did it not bother him, he preferred it.

Q2: So it sounds like you used dyes only for a limited amount of time. Do you recall when you stopped using them and switched entirely—

Getford: About this time, about '96.

Q2: About '96, so it was really—

Getford: I think we actually got the Encad printer in '94, '95, I'd have to look back at some records. But like I said, we didn't stop using the images we already had. So sometimes one of those dye images would show up seven years later. That's why it's hard for me to say exactly when. There was no clear cutoff.

Q2: Yes, got it. I understand.

Getford: They were commingled in a very generous way.

Q2: Speaking of dyes, the term vegetable dye is used a lot.

Getford: Oh, that's a good one!

[Laughter]

Getford: Yes, all right. When we went to school to learn how to use the Iris printer and when we went to buy the Iris printer, I think Bob actually might have gone with us when we first looked at the machine in Boston. He was very concerned with what the ink was made of because he was in a period of trying to clean up the studio from some of the things that might affect the island. We

were all becoming much more aware of the environment. He was right in there with that. He said, “Well, what is it made of?” They said, “Oh, it’s made of soybean oil and you could even drink it.” So when we were trying to name the process, he wanted to call it dye transfer because they were dyes. I said, “You can’t do that, it’s already taken.” There’s a photographic process called dye transfer and it’s very stable and I wouldn’t want anyone to mistake the two processes because I felt that would be misleading. So he said, “Well, let’s call it vegetable dye transfer. Soybean’s a vegetable right?” I said, “Yes.” And so it stuck. So he insisted on calling them vegetable dye transfers.

I said earlier that he was not a romantic. There were some things that he was romantic about: working with his hands and using things like blood and raspberries and things like that to actually draw and paint with was kind of a romantic thing that he held onto.

Q2: Okay. So there was no custom design cartridge and you used a funnel— [Laughs]

Getford: We used standard industrial stuff all along. The closest thing we came to custom design were the Lyson inks briefly, which a lot of effort had been gone into by that company to stabilize them and to make them better. So that was as close as it came, but other than that it was right out of the bottle. So whatever other people were using, whatever the industry was using, that’s what we were using. The difference, and this is probably important to say, is that it really matters what paper it’s put on and it really matters what paper it’s printed on because there’s a chemical reaction at every juncture. And there are studies—who’s that guy in Chicago? It starts with an H.

Q2: Oh, Chicago Albumen Works?

Getford: No, I can't remember the guy's name right now [note: Wilhelm Imaging Research]. But he's the guy that did the most exhaustive studies at the time—he found that sometimes the paper, the substrate for printing and the paper that was put on, had as much effect on damage as the light did, especially in the newer—

Q2: So what kind of paper did you end up using for certain substrates?

Getford: At this point, I don't know what all we were using. Eventually we used watercolor paper, Saunders, I believe. I think we used Saunders for most of it, especially once we got to the polylaminate. These works, I think, were individual papers and I don't know, we'd have to look at them, probably look at the watermarks to figure out what they are. But the great majority of things later on were all the same paper.

Q2: Thank you.

Getford: I could actually get a photograph of the cartridge that the paper came in, that I can give you, so the two of you can get the whole scoop on it.

Q2: Thank you.

Getford: Okay.

Q2: Well, polylaminate, maybe this would be a good one to do next?

Getford: Yes, that's a good one. Can I handle that? Do you have gloves or something?

Q2: Yes, that would be awesome, I was thinking about that too. Is that okay with you to use this next one next?

Getford: I have to be really careful because I'm so used to handling everything. Because before it goes out of the studio, at that point it doesn't count.

Q2: Sure.

Getford: Once it leaves the studio, suddenly it's sacred.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: We're looking at *Lotus I* from 2007. Some changes and modification in the process have been made that reflect both the way you print it, but also reflect how the *Anagrams* were mounted to a solid support. Can you explain the process?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Lotus I*, 2007  
 Inkjet pigment transfer on poly laminate  
 29 1/2 x 40 inches (74.9 x 101.6 cm)  
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: Sure. These are post-*Anagram*. This particular size is very small and these were done specifically for a print series called the *Lotus Series* [2008]. Bob had gone back in time to when he was in China for ROCI, he had taken a lot of 2 1/4 [inches square] negatives, which were in very, very bad shape. [Note: Rauschenberg shot this film during his 1982 trip to China.] We went back and I restored them, restored the color and got rid of the scratches and mold that was on them. So we made these small works and then sent them to Bill at ULAE and then Bill reprinted them as the *Lotus Series*, embossing this, the embossed photogravure lotus image in the print. This is an unusual thing that Bob had us do. There are only maybe a half dozen instances where he had me concoct things in the computer that were not photographic or changed the color. This is one of them.

In the *Lotus Series*, there are twelve prints. Ten of them are horizontal like this and have this image in it [note: referring to lotus image]. This is taken from one of his photographs and he had me colorize these, posterize and colorize them. And on each print, it's a different color. So what I did was, I colorized them and then submitted a group to him, he picked them out, mixed and matched them with the prints after they were transferred, and then they were embossed. So for

example in an earlier piece we were looking at, that rubber band ball [note: *Cronus Eclipse (Anagram)*, 96.134], that was one of the things that he did as well; he had me do five different colors or something. In one whole print, there are three of them, a red, a green, and a blue, or something like that.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Yo-Yo [Anagram (A Pun)]*, 1999  
 Inkjet pigment transfer and graphite on  
 poly laminate  
 121 3/4 x 180 inches (309.2 x 457.2 cm)  
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

There are two other innovations that go along with this; one of them is that the paper is no longer freestanding. In order for Lawrence to get away from the type of framing that he was doing and to innovate a much easier and straightforward framing, we went to an aluminum substrate. The trade name is Reynobond and it's three layers thick, it has aluminum on either outer face and a plastic on the inside. Then we would mount the watercolor paper on top of that with Golden's removable glue. That would usually be done in large sheets and then we would cut them down to the size that we needed. We cut these down into miniatures, as it were [laughs], and then used them that way.

The glue—basically what the guys downstairs—the studio is divided into two sections primarily. There was upstairs, which was the clean area, and there was downstairs, which was the dirty

fabrication area, where the metal and the sawdust and all that kind of stuff was done. However they actually did the paper gluing downstairs, which always floored me, but they pulled it off. They would take large paint rollers, house paint rollers, and they had a 5-gallon bucket of this archival removable glue from Golden; you can look in the catalogue and see what it was or I can find a label or something. They would glue them down and then Lawrence had made a huge vacuum press that would accommodate a 5-foot by 10-foot sheet of this backing and a piece of paper, because the paper that we were using was slightly over 5 feet wide and as long as we needed it. Then they would cut these down after gluing them down, bring them upstairs, trim them, and let them acclimate to the humidity upstairs before we would use them. So that's one innovation and it brought the transfers beyond even the freeform printing where Bob was using kind of a burnishing system.

When we were working on the press, to digress for a second, Lawrence Voytek had changed out the printing bar for the press, as we spoke of before, to Delrin or some plastic. What he did was, he cut out a series of scraper bars that Bob could use in his hand and he made them the size that felt good for Bob. He made a number of them, but the one he wound up using most of the time was 6 or 8 inches. It was about 1/2 or 3/4 of an inch thick, beveled on the top and slightly pointed on the bottom, but rounded. And basically Bob would put the water down, put the image down, and then he would go and burnish things to the point where he was satisfied. When we get to this point, at the time of the *Lotus* prints, Bob had already had a stroke and was no longer actually putting the images down. He would do everything except the actual burnishing. He oftentimes would do the watering. Sometimes Kevin would do the watering. Kevin Pottorf took over that. Gosh, I don't know—well it's after Bob had the stroke, so you can figure it out from

there. It took us a little while to refigure that process. Bob continued to try to do it himself for a while. But the work was physically very painful for him.

The other innovation that is here is that around that time or a little before, Bob had mentioned, “Can we find a printer that prints white?” because he wanted to have white in places that was not the color of the paper. And you can see this paper is not completely white. If you look at my glove and you look at the paper, you can see. He wanted to be able to have sections of white come up. And he talked about painting under it and that sort of thing, which was a standard thing that he would do with the silkscreen painting. It took me a while, but I finally found a substrate that both worked the way we wanted it and had a white coating on it. It was a point of purchase, sales substrate that they would use in a store, like when you go into Uniqlo or somewhere or the Gap and you see a translucent photograph. That’s what it was used for and it would come in big rolls, like everything else is industrial.

[INTERRUPTION]

Getford: Okay. So we were talking about being able to have the white background. This piece was actually made for the *Lotus* prints itself, as I said, and that’s the reason it’s this size and not the standard size or bigger because usually he didn’t, like I say, get below the *Runts* unless he was making a present for someone. There were a lot of smaller things where he would actually make them, but he couldn’t make them too big because they would be too much for a present if he were going to give it to the UPS man or something. You can’t give him a three-hundred-thousand-dollar piece of art; it’s just too much of a tax implication. [Laughs] But you could

make something small and go on. But this is the format that we followed once we started doing the poly laminates, along with the frames that were extruded and welded together. And at some point, you might want to turn one of those around and have a look at the back of one of those.

Q2: And those were shadow box frames?

Getford: The shadow box frames, right. The *Lotus Series* had wood frames. Normally the frames were aluminum. I might say that because the panels were rigid, what they would do is apply an industrial adhesive with a caulking gun. There's a specific one that Lawrence used. It may have changed a couple of times as the technology got better, but it was a really strong adhesive and we would put it on the back of the aluminum or on the front of the frame that was behind the print. Then we would cover these with Cerex and then weight them, and they would sit for a couple of days and then we'd take it off and then we could stand them up. Once mounted the paper surface would be coated with three coats of non-water-based UV coating.

Q2: Yes.

Getford: The theory was—and I always thought this was a bit of overkill, but it wasn't my domain—this example is uncoated, which is why you can see those little silver flecks in it. But an assistant would do a gloss coat and then they would do a flat coat and then they would do another gloss coat. The theory was that the flat coat, being embedded in the two gloss coats, would deflect more light than just a gloss coat would by itself.

Q2: It was similar to the original.

Getford: Plus it also gave you three levels, three dried levels of UV and light inhibition.

Q2: So I understand the thought process behind was due to the fact the shadow box wouldn't accommodate a glazing so you invested into the coating, right?

Getford: Yes, they did not have anything—they were open-face as we say.

Q2: Yes.

Getford: They were naked to the world, people could touch them, and they were very impervious. A group of those paintings were hanging in the studio during Hurricane Charley [2004], which was a devastating storm that put water all over the studio. The coated work was completely unaffected because they're absolutely hermetically sealed between the plastic on the front and the aluminum on the back. You could spray them with a garden hose, which we have done on test samples.

[Laughter]

Getford: Well, I have to give a context for that. We were trying to see if we could get the paper off. There was only one painting that I remember, that there was something that happened, that it

was damaged. So we said oh, well this is a good chance to experiment. The glue was supposed to be removable.

Q2: Removable with water?

Getford: Removable, right, but we were never able to actually get the paper off. I wouldn't recommend it because we had taken a high-pressure cleaning device and we were never able to get the paper off of it and just worried it down in layers. So I think they're there to stay.

Q2: Yes. Were the limitations in dimensions due to the size of the substrate and the size of your press? So is this a reason why some of them come in two panels?

Getford: Yes. And some of them are many, many panels; if you look at the Seattle Symphony [commission, *Echo [Anagram (A Pun)]*, 1998], which is 60 some-odd feet long, it's just a series of 10-foot by 5-foot panels. In order to work on large multiple panels Lawrence built work tables. Like the special tables constructed for the silkscreening, which were adjustable—so if an image panel seam went over the edge of two joined tables, the seam height would not be different when you were pulling the squeegee across it. We had similar tables for this work that were lighter and more agile. The other ones were just horribly heavy; they were made out of 4-inch steel and an angle iron or something. It had a whole bunch of C-clamps cut in half so that you could adjust them, like twenty-five of them around the edge of a 4-by-8 table. But these new tables were very light and the surface was the same polylaminate, the Reynobond, as the painting backing. So the panels could just lay very flat and we didn't have to worry about the seams. For

example, if you put your hand right here, you can barely feel the seam—see, even though these are separate panels—because this is the same material height. It’s almost impossible, even with modern mechanical machine-made things, to get something that well aligned. So you can see it would be easy to go across that seam with the images. So we just had three or four tables that were made like this for a working surface and those tables, and the panels that they were made from, were the delimiting size. Each panel could be up to 5-foot by 10-foot. The paper was slightly larger and it was cut down to go right to the edge of the panels. It had a deckled edge originally.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Echo [Anagram (A Pun)]*, 1998  
Inkjet pigment transfer on polylaminate  
145 1/2 x 537 inches (369.6 x 1364 cm)  
Seattle Symphony

Q2: Thank you.

Getford: You're welcome.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: This is *Foreplay*, a *Scenario* from 2006. Why don't you begin by telling us why you chose this piece today?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Foreplay (Scenario)*, 2006  
Inkjet pigment transfer on polylamine  
85 1/2 x 120 1/2 x 2 inches (217.2 x 306.1 x  
5.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: Okay. Well, I chose this piece kind of out of selfish motives because I really like it. This hung over Bob's bed for a couple of years before he died. Some finished work would stay in the house for a long time where he could see them. And other work would come and go. And I really just wanted to see it again because all of the photographs are photographs that I had taken when I was out in Colorado. It was one of my favorite pieces. It seemed to be a classic Rauschenbergian from those early fifties kind of look, to me.

The other reason I wanted to choose one from this group was because it was kind of a culmination of the paper work techniques that he did near the end of his life. He was obviously doing other things; he did some metal casting. Like I said, he always ran multiple streams in terms of his working process. And he would consider this a painting like the other paintings. This is pretty much the final form that this format took. You can see the multiple panels. This is what, 8-by-10? It's like 7 or 8 feet high, I can't remember if it was 7 or 8, and 10 feet wide. So this is a

full-width panel and the top is cut down some. The shadow box frame is welded together, but it's not welded here at the seam. So what we would do is in the back there are 1/4-20 bolts that are long enough to go all the way through the frame supports and they're bolted together. And when you pull it together you can hardly see that there's a seam there. This one's interesting because I don't know if—it looks like he left fingerprints before they sealed it and that's the sort of thing that never seemed to bother Bob. If it did, he would have made sure it didn't happen again. He wasn't shy. It's kind of like an old friend. This was the first really cool-looking coal I think I'd ever seen, being a kid from Florida. So that's basically what's going on here. So this uses the shadow box frame and the white [from the transfer paper] in the background to augment the paper color and multiple panels. So that's pretty much the way it went down.

Q: Thanks.

Getford: Okay?

Q: That was great. Thank you so much! All right, we're set.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2 (audio)

Interviewee: Laurence Getford

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: May 12, 2015

Q: Today is May 12, 2015. This is Sara Sinclair with—

Getford: Laurence Getford.

Q: And today we are at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in Manhattan. So before we do a walk around and look at some of the work that's here today, I just wanted to talk to you a little bit more about the two different worlds that you inhabited with Bob.

Getford: Okay.

Q: So Captiva and then New York as well.

Getford: Okay.

Q: So to begin, maybe we can start with Captiva.

Getford: Right.

Q: People have said that Bob moved to Captiva to remove himself from the New York City scene—

Getford: Right.

Q: —that he wanted a different place to work, but also that there was a kind of social expectation of Captiva employees to become that community for him there.

Getford: Right.

Q: So I was wondering if you would just speak a little bit to your impressions of that.

Getford: Which one, the second or the first?

Q: Both. Yes.

Getford: Okay. Well the first, from what I understand, one of the main reasons that Bob left New York—and you know that story about him driving down the coast all the way, essentially Texas back and forth, and so forth, you've probably heard that story. But what he had said to me was that he was just being driven crazy in New York. Those were times when there were a lot of people breaking down for numerous reasons: psychological reasons, drug reasons, whatever. People like—some people were driving him crazy, Yoko Ono for one. [Laughs]

Q: Really? What did he say about that?

Getford: Well he would just say that she would just show up at the door, she and other people would just show up at the door. She wasn't particularly one with personal problems, but other people were. He was constantly either taking care of people or carting people to somewhere to be rehabilitated because they were just breaking down. It's the seventies; you probably weren't around.

Q: I came at the end of that decade, so not really.

[Laughter]

Getford: Yes. It was a pretty drug-laden—although Bob wasn't much of a drug person—of course, being an artist, you can't be outside of that. But Bob wasn't a drug person, he was more of an alcohol person. But a lot of his friends were. And this neighborhood, which was where he was before he came to Captiva, was just rife with it. It was the Bowery—the old Bowery, not the new Bowery with a Whole Foods. In fact, we spoke to someone who lived across the street at Great Jones [Street] and she said that basically her strategy was to hire a junkie who would sit on her doorstep with a baseball bat. That's the way she kept her place from being vandalized constantly. So it was that kind of neighborhood; it was pretty tense—and for a guy who had come from the South and probably wasn't used to that constant pounding of social conflict, I suspect that had something to do with it. Well I know it had something to do with it.

But I think he was looking for a place where he could work more because he really wanted to work. And there's always some story about him going away from the mountains, I don't know, and there's some story about the gypsy fortune-teller or something, I've forgotten a lot of that. And he doesn't like heights—he liked things that are flat because he had—I forget what they call that, it's a phobia of things like stairs, and up and down, things like that. I think the vertical part of New York played a little part in that as well, which maybe he didn't realize until later. It was ironic that he was on the other side of the Gulf from his original home in Texas; he looked out across the Gulf, his house, his bedroom looked across the Gulf, which basically looked right towards Texas, which I thought was ironic. I'm sure it didn't escape him because almost nothing escaped him. Sometimes we joked about Florida being “far east Texas.”

So I think he looked at it as kind of pulling back from the intensity of New York, but not leaving because he still maintained this building/studio that we're at now. I guess he occasionally worked here, but mostly it became kind of the New York office. You can look at when the different buildings were bought and so forth, warehousing and all, but for a long time this was the main repository for a lot of stuff. And they're just now beginning to work some of that out and get it over to Mount Vernon. But I think he had just reached that point in life where he had had enough of New York and was looking for a place to work. And he found Captiva very laid back.

In those days Captiva was extremely laid back. It's quite a tourist destination now, but even when I started working out there, there were only a few restaurants not counting the tourist destination that got built on the end of the island—which was there when I came, but it wasn't, I

don't believe, there when he arrived—the South Seas Plantation. Everything was just really quiet; it was kind of an ex-farming, fishing village. So I think it was his version of going out to Long Island to paint.

Q: Right.

[Laughter]

Getford: He just went back to the South, which I think he felt more comfortable with.

Q: Right. What were your impressions of the community that he had created for himself there, when you first started hanging around?

Getford: Well when I—yes, it was kind of interesting. It was obviously changing in that whole part of Florida, which has only been developed in the last thirty years. It was really very quiet previous to that. Even when I first started driving down to Fort Myers, the interstate didn't go all the way through. You had to get off and get onto a little small side two-lane road that was paved called 301. Occasionally it would break into four lanes, but to get that far south you couldn't drive the interstate from Tampa to Fort Myers, which was then the nearest large city before they built the great gulf of the western desert called Cape Coral and there were only one or two gas stations on the way, so you had to make sure you got gas near Tampa to make it all the way to Fort Myers especially if you were traveling after dark. You'd have to think about that if you were going to make that drive after dark.

Q: Right.

Getford: And then the road to Miami was also a two-lane road, which was very dangerous after dark, called Alligator Alley.

Q: Why was it dangerous?

Getford: It was a very small two-lane road. There were large agricultural trucks moving up and down it. There was almost no shoulder and it was an immediate drop into the swamp.

Q: Okay.

[Laughter]

Getford: So if you were run off the road or had a flat tire or something it could be a bad situation; there still are only one or two stopping points there. Of course now, it's I-75 and it's at least four or six lanes depending on where you are. But it's still basically a swamp. So everything to the east is swamp and most of everything to the north was undeveloped. Everything to the south was the Ten Thousand Islands, which was just a mosquito mangrove area. It was really pretty remote, even more remote than [James] Jim [Rosenquist]'s place in Aripeka, which was pretty remote. But that was closer to Tampa.

But to get back to his community there, he had acquired all the property that he was going to acquire by the time I got there, which was close to 30, 32 acres—I have heard different figures. But a large swath of upper Captiva—I should not say upper Captiva because that's actually a different island, but the northern part of Captiva just adjacent to and south of South Seas Plantation. That was sort of the campus or the compound; it was called a couple of different things. He didn't call it that, but we called it that. There was a bay side, which was inland coastal waterway, and the beach side, which was where the house and the studio were initially. Essentially he had camped out on the east side in a small two-story house.



Aerial view of Rauschenberg's original Captiva beach house and beachfront property, prior to further development on the island. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Huston Photos

Typically on a barrier island, if you're smart, the bottom floor is on pilings and you get up at least 8 feet or 10 feet because you never know how high the water's going to get. I've seen it get at least 2 feet there on that spot where everything was inundated by 2 feet of sea water just overnight from what they called the no-name storm. It was a tropical storm that came up so quickly that they hadn't bothered to name it yet. So he essentially took that little two-story bungalow and kind of fleshed out the bottom, took the building next door to it, put in the studio,

the offices, and then they kind of fleshed out the bottom of that with the three-dimensional workshop where the saws and sanders and drills and all those guys were.

Q: Right.

Getford: When I got there, let's see, this was the first time because I kind of worked in a couple of different chunks becoming more and more full-time. Initially it was when Terry was sort of his manager. Bob Petersen had already left. But he had just left. My time with him didn't overlap, but it couldn't have been long because my wife, June [Getford], was his assistant when he taught at the community college. Bob Petersen had moved into town in a little ranch that he and Bob had bought together or Bob had bought for him or something. I don't know exactly how that worked out. But that was basically to separate him and Terry, that's the story I heard, because there were competing love interests or something going on there. Bob [Petersen] was already gone. So Terry was in charge.

Lawrence Voytek was doing the three-dimensional work; he was doing all the fabrication. Darryl was there. Bradley was there. Emil was still there, it was before Emil and Bradley separated. I'm trying to think if there was someone else. Then basically the crew from here [New York] would come and go. Thomas would come in and out. Sachika, who was running the house here [381 Lafayette Street], was coming in and out. And Bob basically kind of had a little world all his own, he was like the star on the island. Visitors from all over the world would show up. And there would be lots of parties initially; more parties than anything else for me at first because that's when I would go there, when there was something special. Birthdays, Christmases, any

good reason for a party. Or Bob would have a show in town at what's now the [Bob] Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern [State College, Fort Myers] and the whole scene would move into town. It was called Edison [Community] College then. There was always something going on.

Because it was constantly a pretty alcohol-laced scene for a lot of people out there, it was kind of easy-going. I think Bob would get up late, work late and probably get up at nine or ten, think about working somewhere around noon, then two or three in the afternoon might be getting to work depending on the schedule. If something was going on it would start earlier than that. But the crew would get there at ten o'clock, 10:30, unless there was something that needed to be done. And then we'd start preparing things. Some projects were long-term; sometimes there were things that just needed to be done to get ready for that day. We just kind of juggled that kind of thing.

Eventually when I came back a little later, Phillip had joined and Phillip was taking care of the houses. That relieved Darryl from doing some of that. There was quite a bit of occasional work that people would come in to do because there were ten houses spread over that 30 acres, or ten buildings, let's put it that way. Most of them had been houses at one time. And so there was always something that needed painting or a window that needed fixing or the plumbing—so there was always someone coming and going.

There was a local family called the Gavins who did all the maintenance work on the grounds, the tree climbing and cutting. The Gavins were one of the few black families that lived on Sanibel

and Captiva. They also ran the local plumbing company. The grandfather of that bunch was close with Bob and he sort of ran the crew that came in. So they kind of kept that part of it going. And it was a lot to keep going because the vegetation there grows just at will because it's warm and wet.

So beyond the sort of party scene that I first encountered, we would just go in and work. And it really was about the work because Bob worked every day. I was downstairs last night with Gina [Guy] kind of looking through things and we were looking at some of the tarnished pieces. Gina would say, "Oh, don't you remember this? This is when you had to go out on the Fourth of July and help Bob with these two pieces," because the Fourth of July meant nothing to him. It was just another day to work. That was the way it was.

Q: Why do you think it was like that for him? Why did he never want to stop?

Getford: He was compulsive. He was a compulsive worker. It wasn't like there was an anxiety about it; it's just that that's when he was happy. He would be working. And working for Bob wasn't like working in an office. When I was hired, one of the things that I was told was that waiting sometimes is part of the job; sometimes you may wait for a long time for things to be ready. Or for Bob to be ready. You may come in at nine or ten and he may not be ready until three or four in the afternoon. So you needed to be very self-directed and to kind of intuit what needed to be done so that when you get to that point, everything will flow smoothly. And that happened a lot.

Sometimes he would come to the studio and just sit and watch television. And sometimes if we had been there an especially long time, he'd kind of look up and say, "I know you think I'm wasting time, I'm not. But I'm thinking." Basically the thing that he conveyed to me was what he was doing was trying to clear his mind of anything that was bothering him or that he'd ever done before with the work so that he could start fresh each time. I don't know if that was a lifelong strategy or just a strategy that he pursued later, when he was a mature artist as it were. But he would really kind of keep himself distracted with the television, which he had on all the time. There was a time when Terry was there because Terry was particularly interested in technology, when there were multiple televisions going, usually not with multiple sound, but at least with multiple images. We had a lot of television sets floating around for ROCI because each country had its own group of multiple televisions. Sometimes they'd just push several in the studio on either end and let them play.

And people would run back and forth to town getting things and trying to find what was needed. The other thing that I found curious was that oftentimes it was easier to get something from Manhattan than it was from off-island. You could have it tomorrow from Manhattan. But it may not exist off-island in Fort Myers or in the immediate area, Fort Myers, Naples. The two closest other major cities were Naples and Sarasota, which were at least an hour away.

Q: What kinds of things are you talking about? Art supplies?

Getford: Art supplies for example. Especially art supplies. Like Bob says, "Not a lot washes up on the beach when it comes to art materials."

[Laughter]

Getford: Sometimes a few things, but even then— Well for example, when we were doing the *Gluts*, Lawrence would go into town and he found all the junkyards. They would jump in the Suburban, which is what they had at the time, and they would go into town and they would just tour the junkyards. Lawrence would either follow them in the pickup truck and they'd fill up the pickup truck and they'd come back. Initially there was a pile out behind the small studio, where they had all these bits of metal. Mostly it was metal, sometimes plastic, but mostly metal. Then eventually they built a platform called the Lizard Run because we have tons of small Cuban anoles on the island. They built a platform, which was kind of like a deck, maybe 15-by-20 or something like that, to get the stuff up out of the water because it would rain and that was kind of a low point and then you'd have to clean it up before you worked with it. Then they put everything up on the top and that was just this big pile of what looked like scrap metal, which in fact it was. But it was interesting scrap metal because Bob had picked it out.



Rauschenberg standing on “lizard run,” a platform in the back of his Laika Lane studio where he collected materials from the junkyard to be used for *Gluts* and other works, Captiva, Florida, 1992. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Right.

Getford: Sometimes other people would go and pick out things and say, “Is this interesting?” It got to the point where people just started bringing stuff, unwarranted, and a lot of that kind of stuff got sent back to the—

Q: To the dump?

[Laughter]

Getford: To the dump, right. But once people realized oh, he’s working with metal trash, let’s take it as a house gift when we go. Stop signs would arrive and twisted pieces of cars, things like that. Some of it was interesting, some of it was not. But often it wasn’t truly appreciated because it wasn’t something that Bob himself had picked out.

Q: Right.

Getford: He really wasn’t that interested in being influenced that way. Occasionally something would just be stellar. But—

It was just, it was all about the work. You just had to be careful, if you’re someone like me, not to drink too much. A number of the people around there drank constantly from waking to sleeping.

Q: Yes.

Getford: And that was one of the things that Lawrence, who was the person that kind of brought me in, said. He said, “That’s what you have to watch for here, especially if you do any work with saws or welders,” which he did a lot. Because you really can’t be drinking in the morning. You could hurt yourself badly. Lawrence was funny because he had a beer can and he’d walk around with this beer can a lot so that no one would ask him if he wanted to drink. But he just kept water in it. He used it like we use the plastic water bottles now, so he always had a—

Q: Like a prop.

Getford: A prop. A drink at hand. And that was one of the first things that was asked, “Well, what do you drink? So we make sure we have it on hand.” I didn’t really have anything that I drank regularly at the time. I eventually did get into that culture a little bit, but it was something I had to give up quickly because it didn’t suit my nature.

Q: Yes.

Getford: But Bob seemed to work just fine with it. It’s like the old Russian drinking games, who can drink whom under the table? People would come in and see him drinking and try to keep up with him and the next thing you know they were passed out somewhere. Even Darryl with the

quote “Pottorf liver” couldn’t keep up. Bob seemed to be immune to—not to the effects, but to it slowing him down.

Q: Right.

Getford: It really didn’t slow him down—some people just come to a grinding halt—I come to a grinding halt.

Q: Yes.

Getford: A drink or two and I’m not—

Q: It energized him rather than stayed with him.

Getford: Yes, it really did, he almost used it like fuel. That’s just my observation. Other people may have a different view of it, being more involved in it. But yes, he kind of used it like fuel, and he said on numerous occasions, “I don’t want to ever do anything I can’t do without a drink in my hand.” I don’t know how far that extended, but I know it extended through work.

Q: Sure.

Getford: And that was pretty much the standard, just that Bob would be walking around with a—do you know what a Tervis tumbler is?

Q: No.

Getford: It's a glass that we have in Florida that they make down here; it's insulated and plastic. They're usually about 6 inches high and they have a lot of radius corners and stuff because they're about half an inch thick. But most of it is like a thermos.

Q: Okay, like insulating or cooling.

Getford: It's a two-walled insulated cup essentially. It held a little bit less than a regular water glass; it was like 8, 10 ounces or something. Bob sort of walked around with one of those with Jack Daniel's and water or Jack Daniel's and ice because as he said, "Ice is water," you didn't really need water in your drink if you have ice. That's the way you would see him until he got to the point where he had the strokes and they tried to cut him off. Then he went to white wine and we still tried to—because well he wanted to drink. Nobody else wanted him to drink because we knew that the more he drank, the quicker he would be debilitated. Because it really was not good for him—it was just a physical thing. We knew that the end would be sooner rather than later the more he drank.

Q: Did the effect of the alcohol change after his stroke?

Getford: Everything changed after he had that stroke. Mostly having to do with his independence. He became much more dependent on us physically. It got to the point where we

literally had to move him around. Every time he went from one place to another, it took a couple of people. It's just like any other human who—because the paralysis on one side was pretty severe. Well there were several strokes and it got consecutively worse. But to kind of loop back around, after this long—I think this group of people was like his family. Not just us, but everyone who kind of came and went.

Q: Right.

Getford: In that sense it was very much like here because it was very much a scene of people coming and going, and people staying or people leaving. And there was always a very congenial sense. A lot of people were very concerned about coming around, a lot of the local island people. But then the ones who did realized that you could just come around and be yourself and it was okay. It wasn't like you were stepping into the Stargate or anything.

Q: Right.

Getford: So in that sense it was good. And Bob would go down and eat at the local restaurants and of course he was always a huge tipper so he was very welcome.

Q: Oh yes. [Laughs]

Getford: The funniest story that I had heard about that, before the sort of renovation or gentrification of Captiva, was that there was a place called Timmy's Nook, which was kind of a

restaurant bar that was really a shack. Initially it was just sort of a screened porch restaurant where they had the cooking area with a bar on the back of it. Then it was kind of a screened porch and they kind of joined all together, it was kind of inside-outside with a dock, and a lot of the fishermen came in there, a lot of the boaters came in there. Fried fish sandwiches and French fries, that kind of stuff. Kind of a family placement in the restaurant, but not a family place in the bar.

[Laughter]

Getford: And then on the other side was the bar. Before some of the other restaurants had opened up, Bob had a habit of going in there. Eventually Timmy's got replaced by a large fancy tourist place, which is run by a Swiss guy that I know, in the same location. In the early days before I was on the scene Bob would go down there. When there wasn't something going on, he'd go down there and drink. But they only served beer and wine, and Bob at that point wasn't a beer and wine drinker. So Bob would go down there with his own drink and he would just, as they say in the South, shoot the shit with the guys, the fishermen and whoever came in, because he was very comfortable with that kind of thing. He would sit. And after about a month or so, the guy who ran the bar kept saying, "The guy comes in and he's really friendly and everything, but when he leaves, there's this wet spot underneath the stool and we're going what's going on? It's like he's a nice guy, but is he incontinent or what?" And they couldn't figure it out, there was just this pool of water underneath the stool. Come to find out, he was bringing his own ice in a bag for his drink.

[Laughter]

Getford: He had his own bag of ice. That's just how direct he was.

Q: Right.

Getford: Okay, I go there, they don't have ice, I bring ice.

Q: Right.

Getford: And he just had a plastic bag. So it kind of makes two points: one is how congenial he was with the locals and how direct he was. He wasn't shy. And he just would, if you need to do this, you do it.

Q: Right.

Getford: And that's what the community was based on. The other stories that you probably heard have to do with the acquisition of the land, so that they could sort of stop the march south of South Seas [Island] Resort—

Q: Encroach the—

Getford: —yes, the encroaching South Seas. So I won't go into that. But that created a lot of goodwill on the island especially with the old timers, who all have pretty much passed on with Bob.

Q: Right.

Getford: Yes, Maybelle [Stamper, née Richardson] and the Weeks and people like that.

Q: Yes. Okay. Well what was the first time that you traveled up to New York, either with Bob or for the work?

Getford: The first time was one of the hurricane runs. I think with Lawrence, yes with Lawrence. In August typically or slightly before if there was an excess of work in the studio—because the studio was much smaller than it was later and it wasn't a 200-mile-an-hour building, it was just a forties bungalow that had been converted, kind of a garage apartment that had been made into a studio. So it had no protection against a tropical storm even. So everything that they felt was vulnerable would be loaded up into a truck and brought up here to 381. That would have been the late eighties, '87, somewhere in there. Lawrence would just go into town and rent a truck, a U-Haul or a Ryder or whatever was cheap and big, and we would jump in the truck. Different people did it. Later on when I came back the second and third time, there were more people there. Like I said, Tup Schmidt was there, sometimes Tup would do it. John Peet was there. And sometimes they would get somebody to come from here, someone who would come down and then drive back.

Q: Right.

Getford: But Lawrence and I came up here in the eighties and of course this was almost a no-man's-land in the seventies. On the way up in the truck the advice was, "Be careful where you walk when you go out the door. Don't step in the shit and don't step on the needles," because when you stepped out the door here, first of all you'd probably have to move someone to get out the door. Humanity was at its worst right outside the door. The Bowery is one block over. So from here to Broadway and over even into the East Village, this was still pretty rough.

Q: Yes.

Getford: Nothing like this scene today.

Q: Right.

[Laughter]

Getford: Sachika was living on this floor and it was packed with his Sachika-ness.

[Laughter]

Q: Okay, so after those first few hurricane runs, did you ever travel up to do any installs or—?

Getford: Installs, I didn't do much installing in the U.S. I did some for ROCI. Cuba primarily, was the main install I did for ROCI. But I was doing a lot of video work at that time because initially that's what I was hired to do, so I was usually carrying a camera. So usually with the installs I would just take pictures—

Q: Documenting it?

Getford: Yes. And if an extra hand was needed, I'd put down the camera and pick up things.

Q: What was the first time that you got to really see Bob in the New York art world?

Getford: I think we came up for some [Leo] Castelli [New York] openings. I think there was still some—well Sonnabend [Gallery, New York] at that point, I think. I'm trying to think about what would have been the first time. Yes, I think, and things were still pretty much downtown, they were still SoHo, NoHo-oriented in those days. Then later on when I came back, when I was working full-time, Bob and Darryl would go out and they would send me images back, and I was expected to have the transfer print materials ready when they got back. So it increasingly became my job not to travel because they would either send me film back or they would bring film back, because when Bob hit the ground back in Captiva he wanted to start working usually the next day or sometimes even the same day as he got back. So basically I would come up and there would be galleries and of course being someone from Florida, who didn't really know that scene, I hadn't been in New York since—let's see, I left RISD in '76 so that would have been almost a

ten-year gap. So things change a lot in New York, there's a lot of churn here. Not a whole lot of progress, but there's a hell of a lot of churn. [Laughs] It's really interesting how different but the same it really is. Everything that was going then then is still on somewhere else, but it's different people doing a lot of the same stuff.

Q: So you don't think the city changes that much, you just think it moves?

Getford: I think it churns a lot. It changes obviously because this area is very different.

Q: Sure.

Getford: But when I was living here last year, I would go out to Brooklyn and I would see things in Brooklyn that looked just like here in the seventies and people were doing the same things, it's just that they were thirty years younger. And they had a lot of the same ideas; they were just doing it with digital not with analog. They were kind of playing through the same iterations of thought. Because the language hadn't evolved. We could be philosophical now, but because the concepts hadn't evolved that much, just the technology around it had changed. And that's what I see a lot in the buildings as well. Obviously being in this neighborhood is very different now. I feel much more at ease. Because this was a time before computers had left the mainframe, basically this is—people were still working—Apple IIs.

[Laughter]

Q: Yes, so the reason that I was asking about early impressions of New York is because I find it—I'm just interested in what your impressions would have been, having come from the work environment.

Getford: Right.

Q: All the work gets done in Captiva and then you come and I'm wondering if there is a moment for a particular show or whatever, an opening where you remember feeling like oh yes, now I'm seeing the work in this larger world. And now I see how people are relating to this work that gets made in this other place.

Getford: Actually it seemed to collapse; it didn't seem to open. Because what would happen is, you would see all this really interesting stuff going on in the studio—the studio was a much bigger world than the gallery. Because the studio was where there was divergent thinking, things were really opening. The gallery is somewhere where things close down. This was a marketplace. It's sort of like—it's a terrible analogy—but it's like being on the farm as opposed to being in the market. So once the stuff is here and on the wall, it's glamorized to a large extent. The thing—those types—the galleries didn't impress me that much. I guess I'm used to being in the back rooms more than I am in the front rooms, because that's where the interesting things happen. That's where people let down their public personae and you could really talk to people. I found it much more interesting to be sitting somewhere with someone that I might have read about. It's kind of like that David Byrne line about meeting people you've read about in books.

Or it's like the idea of winding up in the elevator with Jasper Johns and okay, what do you do now? You're alone in the elevator with Jasper Johns!

Q: Right.

Getford: [Laughs] So I found those things far more exciting than actually even a lot of the museum shows because I found the gallery scene and the museum scene to be very manicured by comparison. I really liked that other world a lot more because that's where things were being tried. And by the time it got to the gallery and the museum, it was all done. It was being prepared for public consumption. That's just my opinion about it.

Q: No, but that's interesting.

Getford: Because I felt that that was sort of like the short end of the cone, not the large end of the cone.

Q: Yes. Do you think that Bob shared your feelings about that?

Getford: I think so. I think if he could have dispensed with the sales scene altogether he would have because I don't think that's why he made art. I think he enjoyed having money because he liked to do good things with money, but I don't think that was the point. I think he was—I was reading something that was talking about—do you know Richard Dawkins?

Q: Yes?

Getford: And you know about the selfish gene and propagation of the species and all that sort of stuff. And there's a thesis that there are two kinds of people: people who are advancing themselves in the genetic sense and people who are advancing themselves in the meme sense; some people live to procreate and move society and things forward, and some people move things forward through ideas. I think Bob was a person who moved things forward via ideas and he wasn't nearly as concerned about moving things forward in a meat sense. And I don't think he thought that the retail environment was a particularly significant part of moving society forward. It was a means to an end to have things move forward intellectually. That's my take on it.

Q: That's interesting. So you said that you traveled with Bob, you went to ROCI Cuba?

Getford: Yes. I wasn't a person who traveled with Bob a lot. There were a lot of people who traveled with him—

Q: More.

Getford: —heavily, yes.

Q: Sure.

Getford: Darryl, Lawrence, and Terry, and Thomas, who is probably the greatest traveler of us all.

[Laughter]

Q: Yes, his stories are great.

Getford: I have to say something about the retail thing though, before we go.

Q: Yes?

Getford: Bob truly loved Ileana [Sonnabend] and Leo and people like that. I think that's why he participated in that because he really liked those people. They were truly his friends.

Q: Yes.

Getford: And I'm just saying Leo and Ileana because they were early on. But there were a number of people in that world who were confidants.

Q: Sure.

Getford: I just didn't want to leave the feeling that he did disdain that world.

Q: Oh sure.

Getford: Okay because that wasn't really the case. The people meant something to him. And that was true with all of us, I think. And if you didn't, at least he made you feel that way. He made you feel you were special. A lot of people still can't get over that. [Laughs]

Q: Yes. So I know you didn't travel as much as others.

Getford: Right.

Q: But I'm interested in hearing about your impressions of his collection of images when traveling.

Getford: That was really interesting for me because I traveled with him vicariously, because he would send all the images back to me. So essentially from the late eighties, early nineties, on through when he would travel, I would see what interested him or whatever got filtered through his camera. So if I traveled with Bob, that's the way I traveled with him primarily; I did go places, but usually we'd go to a show or something like that. It was interesting because some images were loops of things that he was interested in before. He had this predilection and he liked to take pictures of working people. He liked to take pictures of things that were not set up. He was—you know what sampling is? Audio sampling?

Q: Yes.

Getford: He was like a visual sampler. Collage lends itself to that compositing of things, that's the way it works. You don't make art; you find it. So he was just kind of sampling his world and he would go out and they were locational in this case. So I would see recurring themes, but he used so many of them. And it was hard to—there are the tires, the working people. There are the silhouettes of things, there are the street graphics. There are hands, the word Bob, the number twenty-two—there are a lot of themes and they would just kind of circle and float through. And when he would see a new one, he would add to it so that he would have something different, but similar. And there was always this sort of different but similar thing going on, just like *Factum I* [1957] and *Factum II* [1957]—it's never the same because it can't be the same, because it's always different. But there's this tension of it almost being the same. So there was an element of that. I don't want to make too much of that, but there was an element of that. I don't know whether that was conscious because I think there was an attempt to be somewhat unconscious.

The other thing is that Bob was not a very technical photographer. He was more interested in what it was he was trying to see than what he was actually photographing. Until we got him a camera with autofocus, things like that were problematic. The camera he loved best was the old twin lens Rollei[flex]. I think he felt most comfortable with that, primarily because of the way he used it. You used it like this, you looked down into it, and the image is backwards, which is a whole other thing for Bob because things were flip-flopped—

Q: Dyslexia, yes.

Getford: —and moving around. Yes, we don't know exactly how he was receiving images, but there are theories about how dyslexia changes your perception —

Q: Dyslexics?

Getford: Yes, I can't even say how it works. But I got the impression that his favorite camera was the Rollei and he was always talking about, "Well I wish this did this like the Rollei," or, "I wish this did that like the Rollei." But oddly enough he didn't want to carry anything that big around later on. I did get him a large format camera and it was stolen right away and he didn't bother to replace it so we went back to 35-millimeter—that was the last large format or medium format film camera that he used. But he had several medium format cameras that he never bothered to use; he just used a 35-millimeter, which is essentially a miniature format. And he shot and decided pretty quickly. He liked to use a long telephoto if possible, so that he wasn't right on top of something. He liked to kind of be the anonymous viewer. That sort of exacerbated his focus problems. If you look at the negatives or the positives, the exposure and all, it's a lot of work to work for him as a printer because he was not a consummate photographic technician—he shot very off-the-cuff when he saw something. It's kind of like when you're photographing out of a car and you see something and you go, "Man, I wish I could get that," and you try. There was a lot of that.

Now sometimes, like a lot of photographers, he would just get stunning things. And sometimes you're just there. Like Ansel Adams says, "F/8 and be there and you got it." But being there sometimes is the hard part. I have to say, he would try for those hard shots. He would try to get

something that he saw that he thought he wanted, something that was significant. He would go for it, which is admirable in that sense. It just makes it tough on a guy like me.

Q: And was that the case throughout his photographing? Was that also true of these earlier—

Getford: That's a whole different thing. I've looked at all of that very closely because I'm the one who restored all the negatives. And that's Rollei work mostly.

Q: Okay.

Getford: That's 2 1/4 work by and large. That's much more contemplative. But if you look at the proof sheets—see, this is where you learn a lot about a photographer. You look at the proof sheets. You see the ones that don't get published. You see what didn't make the cut. And you see a lot about what the person is looking for and what they saw and then also what they were able to get.

Q: Right. So tell me what you learned about what he was looking for—

Getford: Well that's—

Q: —when you were working on this book *Robert Rauschenberg: Photographs 1949–1962*.

Getford: Well there are obviously things like this, where he's doing this reflection mirror thing. And this is kind of self-portrait stuff. There's a lot of self-portrait stuff in here. And then there are these—well once we get past the—there's family stuff. Well the way that this is set up, you notice that if there are people, there are close people, which is different than the later work. In the later work the people were more anonymous, okay? And when you do this sort of thing there are models and there's Susan [Weil] in the blueprints. So in all the early photography, the people who were in it were close people. There's Cy, there are the friends at college. That sort of thing.



Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil  
*Sue*, ca. 1950  
 Monoprint: exposed blueprint paper  
 69 3/4 x 41 5/8 inches  
 (177.2 x 105.7 cm)  
 Private collection

Q: Why do you think he stopped photographing close people?

Getford: I think he was looking for things that were more iconic, like this hand. I think he was looking more—he had a different intent. When he started doing the collages with photography, he was not making photographs. With these he was making photographs. The photograph is the complete thing. It's finished when it's done. Okay? And when I was working with him when he

was shooting, he was shooting for something to be a part of something later. So he was shooting for things for a whole completely different intent. For example, when he was no longer able to hold a camera and he bought cameras for everybody on the staff and would send them out saying, “You can’t go on vacation unless you bring me pictures back,” that kind of deal. But his instructions were, “Just shoot something that’s not important or significant. Make it just a chunk of something. And then I can use those chunks to make the things I’m making because they’re a palette.”

Q: Right.

Getford: They’re ideas. He was looking to create a palette. This is different; this is a photograph, it’s a record in and of itself. This was photography and it was a composition and it was a finished work. And later on when people would send him photographs, they would be good photographs, he wouldn’t use them and he said, “This is done. There’s nothing for me to do here.” So later on he was looking for things that he could put in the work, as opposed to finished photographs. They were building blocks. And the way he talked about it was it was like a palette of images. And he’d refer to it as his palette.

So when he was doing the transfer work he basically had the ink, the palette already composed of images, even when he was working from the magazines and things. So there was a multi-layering conceptually—his colors were already loaded with the images and ideas that he was working with. So he was working multi-dimensionally. So instead of having just a bunch of paints to work with, he had anything he wanted material-wise, which was a wonderful way to

be—he was pulling images in from life. And he was trying to not make a representation of life with those images, but to make an object that existed in the reality of life. So that it wasn't illustration, it wasn't composition. He wasn't trying to tell you a story about life with these things, he was just trying to put work out there and let you work with it.

Q: Right.

Getford: In that sense, which is really ironic because eventually he got into the *Short Stories* [2000–02] and he started calling them chapters and verses and that sort of thing. I always thought that was sort of irony on his part because people kept trying to read stuff into it. So he just said, “Okay, read away.”

[Laughter]

Getford: “You make it up, I'm just going to put this in front of you and you make up the story.”

Q: Okay. Well what about you? Did you end up trying to read stuff into it? Did you end up ascribing meanings to certain images?

Getford: I never did.

Q: No?

Getford: I didn't have a lot of proclivity towards that in the first place because when I came along—by the time I was studying art, there had been a pretty much wholesale rejection of Abstract Expressionism and classical art, all the art for the church that was story-oriented, it was basically training art for Christianity and Buddhism and all the other -isms. And we had Pop art, which was kind of tongue-in-cheek and a recursive bend back on commercialism. So there was a heavy ironic thing going already by the time I had gotten into it. And I was primarily involved in the sensory media concepts—sound and light. For me it was all about sound and light and performance. So I never really looked at it in that sense.

The capping of that for me was one time I happened to say, “Oh, I thought you were talking about that metaphorically.” And he looked at me and very sincerely said, “I never speak metaphorically.” He was as serious about that as he's ever been with me one-on-one. Now whether or not he was able to toe that line—and that may have been something that he didn't do when he was younger, but in the time that I knew him that's what he was striving for, I think, that openness from metaphor, that complete abandonment. The only other real indication I have of that was—I was really interested in the Beat poets because I kind of came to Rauschenberg through John Cage and that scene, the Beat poets and John Cage, and then Rauschenberg—that's the way my reading pattern started as a kid. And so I said, “Well did you know any of the Beat poets? You were a little late on that.” He said, “They're just a bunch of hopeless romantics.” So he wasn't a story guy.

Q: Right.

Getford: He really wasn't, from everything I experienced. And he absolutely loathed the fact that people tried to put sexual innuendo into the work, that this tire means an asshole or whatever.

[Laughs] He thought they were just idiots. And he just wrote them off and said, "They just don't have a clue." So anyway, that's my experience with him in the later part of his life.

Q: Right. Okay, well maybe you can tell me about your role in this particular project, *Photographs 1949–1962*. You were involved in cleaning up the negatives and the digital files for the book?

Getford: Right. Basically Jonas Stirner and I were given these negatives, which were fifty years old essentially and had not been taken very good care of. And they weren't particularly great negatives—well this one for example, this is Untitled, of a flower stall in Rome from 1952. It's a horrible negative. It's a great shot, but it was just a horrible negative. We had to work a long, long time to get it to look like that. And that is pretty much the way Bob wanted it to look. When you see prints of it, somebody else had to do a lot of work to get it like that as well.

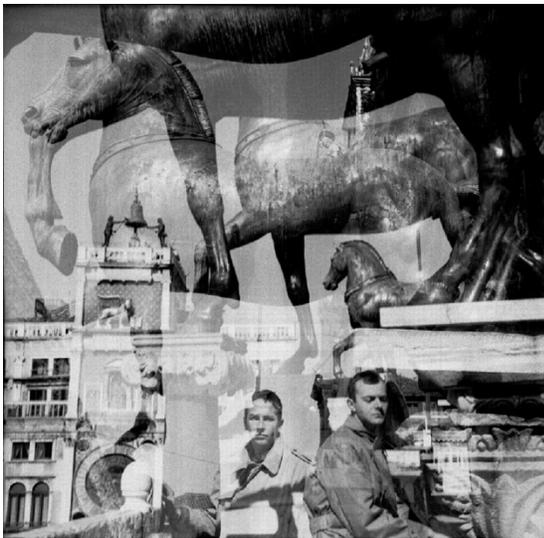


Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled [flower stall, Rome], 1952  
Gelatin silver print

I have to say that with a lot of the exposure and stuff, there was a committee with Bob's son [Christopher] Chris [Rauschenberg] and I'm trying to think of whom else. There were four or five of us and Jonas and I would make versions of some of these after we had actually cleaned up the negatives. There were some questions on cropping because Bob always said, "I don't crop," and he didn't. A lot of times he didn't crop. But it was obvious from the prints that were made that there was some cropping done. There were lines drawn on them and you could see and we had to decide whether or not that was for publication or whether it was something—so we had to go back and do research for that. But a lot of the cleaning up had to do with the fact that there was mold on the negatives. And when you get mold on negatives, because they're so small it becomes a huge thing. So we spent off and on the better part of six months or more cleaning these up.

I was getting very ill at the end. I had developed lymphoma and so I was doing some oversight with Jonas and I taught Jonas how to clean things up. Then he would do some of the first work

and I would go back and finish them—because it’s endlessly tedious to clean up negatives—and then if there are missing places, you have to decide whether you’re going to leave it or whether you’re going to restore it. Some of these pieces with Cy, there are places where they’re double exposures—what do you do with certain double exposures? This for example. See, that’s out of focus. It never was in focus. And it’s a little better than some other things I’ve seen—see, this is also out of focus. But there was just a terrible lot of trash and mold on the negatives. So—I was going to try to find that section with Cy in it. See, this was Cy, it’s also out of focus. But that wasn’t the point. The point was—where are those postcard prints? See, that would be ’52, they should be somewhere in the middle of the book, here. But there were places where there were chemical spills and things, so there was a lot of discussion about what we should do—because now, post-Photoshop, you can fix anything.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Bob + Cy, Venice*, 1952  
 Gelatin silver print  
 15 x 15 inches (38.1 x 38.1 cm)



Robert Rauschenberg  
 Untitled [Cy in close up], 1952  
 Gelatin silver print

Q: Right.

Getford: And I'm really good at that sort of thing.

[Laughter]

Getford: I've fixed some horrendous negatives. Well, things like this. Let me see if this—the choice is, do you keep this? It's really out of focus.

Q: So why did you choose to keep that?

Getford: Because for Bob, it didn't matter. The idea that it was in perfect focus was of no consequence to him. I just had to learn that. He would give me something to print and once I understood that it didn't matter that it was out of focus, it didn't matter if it was double-exposed, it didn't matter. It was something he was interested in working with. And it meant something to him whether— Okay, here's what I was looking for. You see all the chemical spots on there?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (II)*  
Gelatin silver print  
3 1/2 x 5 5/8 inches (8.3 x 14.3 cm)

Q: Right.

Getford: Well the question was, do we fix it or do we not fix it?

Q: Right.

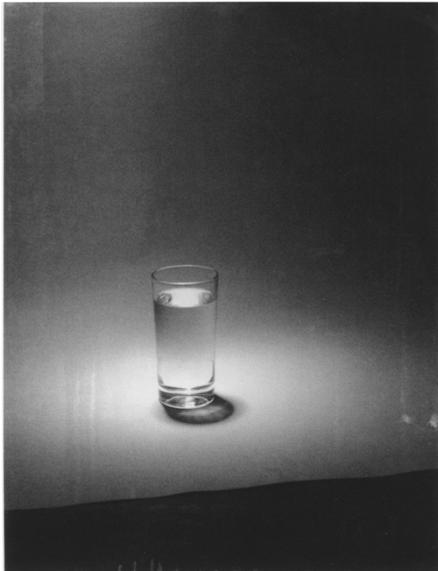
Getford: And the decision was, we don't fix it. We're not going to fix that so that you'd never know they were there. But it's—this is a perfect example. Someone might say, "Oh, you cut off the top of his head." But that's not what it's about. What I had to learn from Bob and his working method was, it's about what it's about. And any convention you ever learned before working for me no longer applies.

Q: Right.

Getford: We're doing what we're doing here and now and we're making a *White Painting* [1951] without anything on it. And that's just the way it is. So that's one of the things that I personally had to learn. I had to get over a lot of convention in order to work with Bob because that may not be what the point is. The tricky part was trying to figure out what the point really was because he was always ahead of you. [Laughs]

Q: And did you feel like you did come to those conclusions about what the point was?

Getford: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Life is—it's one of those things where you run down the road and hope you're going down the right road. Sometimes he would just say, "No, you missed it badly." And that was one of the things when I first started considering working for him and saying okay, what happens when—because Bob can be devastating. If you're really off base, he'll let you know. Some people can't take it. He wasn't mean, at least not very often. But if he was, he usually had a pretty damned good point. [Laughs] He was just really frustrated. He didn't suffer fools too well, but he was pretty gracious. He was really gracious actually because there are a lot of fools. But things like this are just so beautiful, the glass of water, which is—I believe both of these—are these Polaroids? It doesn't say. I can't remember. Then there's something like this. These are obviously studio commercial-like shots.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled [glass of water], ca. 1962  
Polaroid

Q: Had you worked with any of these negatives before working on this book?

Getford: Occasionally some would come up, especially like these—Bob had me make a museum display for a dance performance out in Seattle, I think it was. [Note: *Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham*, Portland Center for the Performing Arts, Oregon, 2004.] And we used these images for that. So I had worked with some of these images and in fact these were restored because I had already done those for a different reason. Those posters have kind of entered the folklore as semi-precious objects, originally they were just museum interpretation; almost advertising. But because they're Merce by Bob, they take on a different kind of importance.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled [Merce Cunningham Dance Company], 2003  
Inkjet print on paper mounted on board  
35 1/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches (89.5 x 29.8 x 3.8 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Sure.

Getford: Yes, so some things, yes, this one. These were all in that poster series that they used to inform about the past of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, which Bob still kind of felt like he was a member of, just not on a day-to-day basis.

Q: One question from the Foundation was whether Bob ever requested that these black-and-white photographs be converted to color or did that ever happen when the image was transferred to various supports? Did the color ever happen when the image was transferred by way of a screen?

Getford: I have to look at that. I could say yes right away when I look at the *Ruminations*. But for that kind of reason, I don't recall seeing it a lot in the art. But I think most of these are in the *Ruminations* somewhere. This obviously is.

Q: Right.

Getford: Remember we were talking about it being a double exposure—

Q: That's right.

Getford: —and the difference between the top and the bottom, and that sort of thing. So I would have to say yes. Like I said, anything was fair game.

Q: Were you involved in making any of the gelatin silver prints? That would have begun around '80, '81?

Getford: No.

Q: Okay, that was before your time.

Getford: That would be Emil.

Q: Yes. And that was a process that was no longer—

Getford: In '80, '81, I was making gels and silver prints, but not for Bob.

[Laughter]

Q: Right. So the gelatin prints didn't continue after your work with digital prints began?

Getford: If they did, they were sent out. Typically the printer for those was a guy named Larry Massing in Fort Myers, who was a fine art black-and-white photographer.

Q: Yes.

Getford: He did the printing for Bob for this—any of these that became part of the unfinished series that are still outstanding; like this one for example, which I know that sometimes there's talk of finishing. Larry would have done any of that later work in the eighties, after Emil was

there. I don't know whether he did it during the time Emil was there or not, but that's something that was sent out and he had a special darkroom that was set up for that sort of thing. He printed a lot of that gelatin silver work.

Later on, we had sent out—well this reminds me of this one, because Bob had specifically asked me to touch this one up. This had some areas that had become decrepit. He wanted it to go back to what he remembered it like. And so we had an internegative made. It was sent to New York by mail order and then an internegative made. I scanned that internegative and then made him a demonstration print of what it would look like if you were to reprint it digitally. Which he was quite happy with actually. He was really happy that I was able to do that. He didn't really quite understand the power of Photoshop. He knew I could fix things and he knew it was like photo retouching. He understood it on that level. But he didn't understand what computers really were, how they did it. To him it was another paintbrush. So he would just say, "Can your machine and you do this?"

Q: And so was he interested in learning about how the technology worked? Or was he just interested that you could do it?

Getford: Not at all. Because like he said, "We're not making computer art. We're making art with computers." It's just like he talked about paintbrushes and the difference between painting with your hands and painting with a paintbrush; they're both just tools. He had no interest in the computers or Internet or anything like that as a medium. He just liked the effect. He just knew that when he gave me images, he got back images he wanted in the form that he wanted it in.

That's what he was really interested in. And over the years we developed that. I got to know what he really wanted. And so there was less and less talk about it and more and more just moving on with the day-to-day of getting it done.

Q: Is there anything else about your process or the procedures that you used to clean up these negatives that you think would be important to include?

Getford: No, because it was sort of like we were talking about, were the inks standard or were they specially formulated? They were not. He was a great believer in subverting whatever was out there and available industrially. And we would do special things, but all of that software by then had become pretty standard. Having come from an older print world, both of us, both he and I, we both understood gelatin printing and gum bichromate printing and intaglio and photogravure and those sorts of things. But we weren't really referencing a lot of that for what we were doing. We were just using essentially Photoshop. Occasionally, like I pointed out with the *Lotus Series*, he would have me do some special effect on the computer or he would have me change the color. There were maybe half a dozen or ten instances of that over twenty years. So it was not a common practice. Again it was only to achieve a specific goal that he had in mind, which had developed in a very short timeframe. It was almost like I have an idea right now—can we do this right now so that we can have it done by the end of the afternoon? There was not a lot of pre-visualization going on. It wasn't like he woke up saying, "I want that orange," it was like he would be working and it was a reactive decision and saying, "Oh, we need this orange." And then you may not do anything like that again for five years.

Q: Right. Okay.

[INTERRUPTION]

Getford: And just kind of decompress. Brought their child with them and David [Byrne] would go out in the Fish House and work. He was writing. *Rei Momo* [1989] I think was the album he was working on. But he would go out in the daytime and work out there and then the family was staying in a house adjacent to that. And they would do things around, go to the beach, and just be around the campus. But he left a pair of shoes like this, obviously a very cheap pair of tennis shoes that he had been in the water with and Bob just grabbed them and then made a transfer with a photograph of them. So there are things that just happened that you see. And it's almost coincidental. I'm sure it wasn't planned or maybe it's just like a little something that comes back up in life and you see them. And sometimes there's a print where the shape of Cy's hand recurs and you think, what's that about? It's accidental, but what do they call it? Synchronicity in a sense. I'm sure you kind of have—Bob's hands were very interesting looking and so were Cy's. But anyway, I digress.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*David's Shoes (Shales)*, 1994  
Fire wax and transfer on canvas  
39 1/4 x 28 x 1 1/2 inches (99.7 x 71.1 x 3.8 cm)  
Collection of David Byrne

[Laughter]

Getford: What do you have for questions now?

Q: Well there are a few other works that we were hoping to speak to. So either we can sort of do this chronologically or we can talk about the things that are here on this table and then go downstairs. It sort of depends. Yesterday we spoke about the metal paintings—

Getford: Right.

Q: —that are here and you said that you could speak to them sort of as a cluster in broad strokes.

Getford: Right.

Q: So, these are the pieces that are hung right now.

Getford: Right.

Q: *Borealis* [1988–92], *Night Shade* [1991], and—

Getford: And the *Phantom* [1991].

Q: And *Phantom*.

Getford: Right. All of these are obviously on metal. The primary difference is that the *Phantoms*, I believe, are acrylic on metal. They all incorporate using the silkscreen process that you talked with Larry Wright about. By the time I got there and by the time they were doing say the Cuba [works, *ROCI CUBA*, 1988] and the *Phantoms*, they were using the Golden colors, which was probably what they were using all along. And they had quite an oeuvre of silkscreens built up that they had been doing for maybe ten years or something, they were coming and going. Those got used pretty freely and we talked about how he used the books to access the images and how they were singles, quads, and doubles, and I don't know if that was part of Larry's strategy or not. But—

Q: We're talking to him tomorrow.

Getford: Oh, you're talking to him tomorrow?

Q: Yes.

Getford: Okay. But anyway, as I understand it, he helped them set up the silkscreen process. I think it probably coincided with Lawrence Voytek coming to the mix, when they started working on metal. And all of these are a result of that. Also I think as something, well like the *Urban Bourbons* [1988–96] and all of the on-metal works, which were paint, sometimes reflective, sometimes painted on, painted with colors. They just tried every iteration that technology allowed of metal surfaces; painted, unpainted, and the like, with the acrylic paints via the silkscreen.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Courtyard (Urban Bourbon)*, 1989  
Acrylic and enamel on enameled aluminum  
121 x 144 3/4 inches (307.3 x 367.7 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

With something like the *Borealises*, they changed strategy a little bit in that they used the acrylic as a stop ground. So they would take and they would silkscreen on and then they would pour the chemistry on there and then it would keep the etching from happening. And the choice of chemistry was defined by what kind of look they were looking for, what kind of colors they

wanted to create with the brass and the bronze and so forth. Then Bob would go back and layer things in, with colors or not, of paint. So sometimes it was a transparent layer, there was a stop, so that you could see the brass coming through. And then there would be a splash of etching all around it. Sometimes it was the other way around and there would be a reverse image so that the image itself would be the etching part. So in other words there was this maximum mixing of strategies. So it was coming at it from every angle possible, which is typical.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Bible Bike (Borealis)*, 1991  
 Tarnishes on brass, bronze, and copper  
 97 x 133 inches (246.4 x 337.8 cm)  
 Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Sometimes he would limit things, just to give it a playing field, like when he would say okay, I'm making shaped canvases. Or not canvases, they were shaped polylaminates. All right, we're going to make things with wings or everything in the series is going to have a stripe that's painted in multiple colors. He would do things like that to create a series, to give him a context to work within. But things like this, they already kind of had a context that they were working with. And they were just trying to open it up and go for the maximum physical effect, I think.

For example, the *Borealises* are just stunning, I think. And so that led to the *Night Shades*. And of course if you look at the *Night Shades*, they were aluminum, they weren't the brass-bronze

kind of noble metals as it were. So they found things that worked with that and the *Night Shades*, I think, was something called Aluma Black, which was something that kind of etched and turned aluminum black. That's just the trade name for it.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Drums (Night Shade)*, 1991  
Tarnishes on brushed aluminum  
49 x 37 inches (124.5 x 94 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

All of the chemistry used was well known in the metalworking world. It was nothing exotic—there may have been some local mixing of things, but basically it was stuff that came in bottles that metal patina people would use, say for the *Borealises*. Appropriate to bronze and brass and so forth. And of course the aluminum was a different case, but the same strategies were used. The aluminum *Night Shades* were I think all on black and silver. So basically you had sheets of metal with painted surfaces and silkscreens, you had reflective surfaces with silkscreens, you had the natural metal finishes, and you had tarnishes.

Q: Right. So the *Urban Bourbons* had color?

Getford: *Urban Bourbons* had a lot of color, yes. If you look at—they're very similar to the paintings he was doing for the [ROCI] *CUBA* series and ROCI. There would be large red and blue panels or yellow panels and they would cut them down to the size that he would want to work on. We'd put them on the table and then we'd just start putting color silkscreen images on them.

Q: Right. Who fabricated the enameled mirrored aluminum supports for—

Getford: Lawrence did.

Q: Lawrence? Okay.

Getford: Yes, I'm sure he was here for the *Urban Bourbons*. I think that's post-Eric [Holt].

Q: Okay. And then was there a final coating on top of the—

Getford: I don't believe there was a coating on this. I think they were just raw paint. Because that's a pretty stable surface. All of those panel colors were sign colors. The acrylic paints were Golden paint colors straight out of the jar or occasionally they would mix them. There's a chart around here somewhere that I had made up of the colors. Have I talked about that?

Q: No.

Getford: The colors were in a rack beside the painting table. Each color had a number on the top, because when you were working around the studio, if Bob wanted a color and he was on the other side of the studio, the numbers on the top were big enough to see and he could say, “Get me number twenty-three.” Okay, because you can’t say, “Get me the blue,” because there may be five blues.

Q: Sure.

Getford: So every color had a number. And if he mixed a color that went in between two colors, it had, a number like, twenty-two and a half.

Q: Right.

Getford: So there was a designation. Everything that had a half number or something like that was something that he’d mixed or he had mixed by whoever was helping him at the time. And so it wasn’t a stock color. So when you saw that you were down to your last half quart of number one red, you knew that you had to order another three or four of them so that you had some in the closet in case the project was big and you didn’t want to have to wait three days to get paint.

[Laughter]

Getford: It also was part of the working method in that he could just tell you a number and you could reach in there. There was no trying to decide which yellow.

Q: Right.

Getford: Light yellow, lemon yellow, it was twenty-two or it was sixteen and you just grabbed it. Then you would slide it across the table to him or walk it around and either you or someone else would mix it up. Darryl did a lot of that work with him when I was there. Before, I understand other people did as well.

Q: Right. The *Phantom* series— How was the aluminum surface mirrored?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Stone Lady Radial (Phantom)*, 1991  
Acrylic on mirrored aluminum  
73 x 49 1/2 inches (185.4 x 125.7 cm)  
Private collection

Getford: It came that way.

Q: It came that way.

Getford: Yes, all of those surfaces came stocked. They weren't sanded or prepared in any way.

Q: Where did you get them?

Getford: From the local metal supplier.

Q: Okay.

Getford: I forget, but Lawrence can tell you exactly who was in business at that time. Oney Sheet Metal, I think.

Q: Okay.

[Laughter]

Getford: It was just the same place that all the jobbers got to go.

Q: Oh okay. Did the acrylic silkscreen adhere well to the adhered surface?

Getford: Yes, it did. Yes. There was never any complaining, there was no reticulation or anything like that. It seemed to stick pretty well. And I don't recall there being any surfacing to increase adhering of the paint or anything.

Q: So can you tell me what you would do to get it to stick?

Getford: Just screen it down.

Q: That's it? As if it was on anything else?

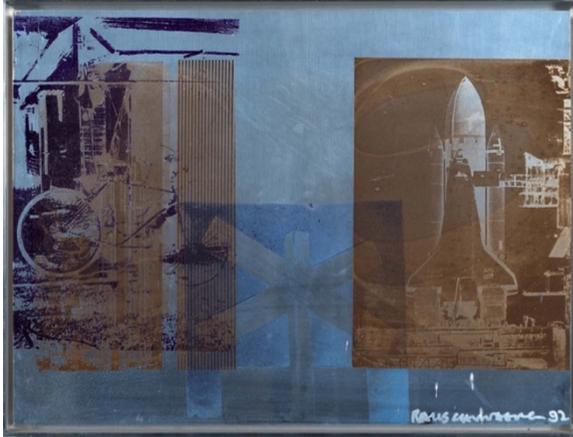
Getford: Yes. Just as if it was on canvas or a primed canvas. Essentially if you were going to put it on a sign or something, typically you would prime it first with a paint. I guess the thing that would look most problematic would be the really—well we can see this one sitting right there, now [note: referring to a work from the *Shiner* series (1986–93)].

Q: What is that?

Getford: That is a mirrored aluminum. So that would be very similar to the *Phantoms*.

Q: For the record, we're on the fifth floor. It's Rauschenberg '92. We'll figure out what that piece is later.

Getford: Right. So what you're looking at there is something—it's halfway between the *Phantoms* and it may in fact be a *Phantom*. I don't know how far the *Phantoms* went in terms of the prominence of the image.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Roads (Shiner)*  
Acrylic on mirrored aluminum  
19 x 25 inches (48.3 x 63.5 cm)  
Private collection

The idea was things that—Bob was very interested in reflections as part of the world. We did a lot of things in mirrored aluminum. And you saw the photograph on the cover here with him. He's obviously not trying to shirk the environment because he—it was a way of bringing the world into the painting for him.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled [self-portrait with *Inside Out*, early state, Broadway studio], ca. 1962  
Gelatin silver print  
15 x 15 inches (38.1 x 38.1 cm)

Q: Right.

Getford: And that's something he actually said, I didn't make that up.

Q: Right. [Laughs]

Getford: So you could see that happening here—where we are, the books from the library here and all become part of the painting. So it becomes part of the real world. And that's all part of that; it's a way of making it different every time. You can see that's very similar to the *Phantoms* in that the images are almost transparent. They're not really high contrast. The purple image on the right-hand side is high contrast. And a lot of the silkscreens, there are two types, they're all sort of high contrast, but some of them had half-tone dots. A lot of them did. And some of them didn't. But you can see that there's a translucency to it. The image doesn't block out the reflection even where the paint is.

Q: Right.

Getford: Okay? So that's part of what's going on there. I don't know what the sequence of events is, one would have to look at the books to see whether that came after the *Phantoms* or before the *Phantoms*. Whether it was prologue or—

Q: Yes. So his work in series is very much as you just described.

Getford: It is in series.

Q: Yes and it's just—

Getford: And it's a series that moves from one idea to the next. And sometimes the idea for one series happens during a series. And sometimes it gets incorporated in that series and then the next series just kind of clears away all the clutter from the previous series and only deals with that until the next idea crops up. So the work is continuous. It's kind of autobiographical in that sense. I wouldn't want to—I really shouldn't say it that way because that was not intentional.

Q: Sure.

Getford: But it happens when you work that much, that often, it becomes that way.

Q: Right. Documentation of your own process.

Getford: Right. Because you're working every day. And it gets segmented. So it kind of becomes—it has a life in its own segmentation. But it becomes kind of autobiographical.

Q: Interesting. All right, well I want to talk about *Tribute 21*, the project in 1994.

Getford: Right.

Q: Do you know how this project came about?

Getford: I know the players. I participated in some of it. I know that it was with Felissimo and it came about with Bob's relationship with Haruko [Smith]. And I have a relationship with Haruko because I in fact made the website for *Tribute 21* in Japan—

Q: Oh okay.

Getford: —while this was all going on, which was something that Bob was totally uninvolved with because he didn't understand websites and could care less. I made a really large website; this was back in HTML 1. And for me it was very interesting because I basically hired my wife, June, her daughter, and another coder, and we fabricated everything there in Fort Myers, but the server was in Japan. And this was back in the days of dial-up so you can imagine what it was like, just like in the eighties.

Q: [Laughs] Right.

Getford: The guy who was my coder was a friend, a tech guy I had kind of pulled along with me from the planetarium environmental theater days that we talked about earlier. He also worked with me through my days as the public school administrator. So my primary involvement with *Tribute 21* was that and then helping to put together the originals that the prints were made from because that's what Bob considered Captiva's printing activities to be for. We didn't do editions—we made the art for the edition and then it would be reproduced from there by ULAE or Gemini. And I contributed photographs to the project.

Q: Okay, so tell me about the photographs that you contributed.

Getford: I don't know if it was one or two in this case. I know that—do you have any of the images?

Q: I don't think they're in that folder.

Getford: I've got them on my iPad, but anyway, I know the one that sticks out is the one of a hawk in profile, which I think is nature [*Nature [Tribute 21]*, 1994]. And that's one of my images. But more importantly, this was one of the times we went back to the press to make these, if you remember our conversation about making prints on the press. By then we had already progressed on to doing things by hand. But because these were smaller and Bob wanted to do these in a smaller size—because I think Felissimo commissioned the entire series and then paid for it to be published. Then each person who was a recipient got a copy of the edition as part of the twenty-one people recognized and so forth, because there was a person associated with each theme—Buckminster Fuller for architecture and Bill Gates for technology. I remember we, the staff, were trying to get Steve Jobs for technology and not Bill Gates because we were an Apple group—but Bob didn't know the difference.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Nature [Tribute 21]*, 1994  
Offset lithograph  
41 x 27 inches (104.1 x 68.6 cm)  
From an edition of 50, published by Felissimo, produced  
by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Q: Right.

Getford: Bill just had a bigger name and he was somebody he saw on television. He didn't see Steve Jobs on television.

Q: Right.

Getford: And also Felissimo had something to do with it. So I don't know if—it was kind of a back and forth. He suggested people and I think they okayed it, but you'd have to talk to Haruko. So this is an image that I donated. And I think there's one more. It's also a nature kind of image. But I can't remember what it is. That's not the significant part of this. Most of these are images that Bob either was working with at the time or that he had that he was able to get and added to it. For example I don't believe that the pyramids was something that we were working with at the time, I think that was something we went out and obtained for that project. But these images—

Q: This?

Getford: All of those were images that we already had printed up.

Q: So this is *Architecture [Tribute 21]*?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Architecture [Tribute 21]*, 1994  
Offset lithograph  
41 x 27 inches (104.1 x 68.6 cm)  
From an edition of 50, published by Felissimo,  
produced by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip,  
New York

Getford: Right. Yes. I wouldn't swear about it, but that wasn't something that we were working with. It was something we went back and found in his images. Or it was something that he kind of went out and sourced and I don't know whether it was his or someone else's.

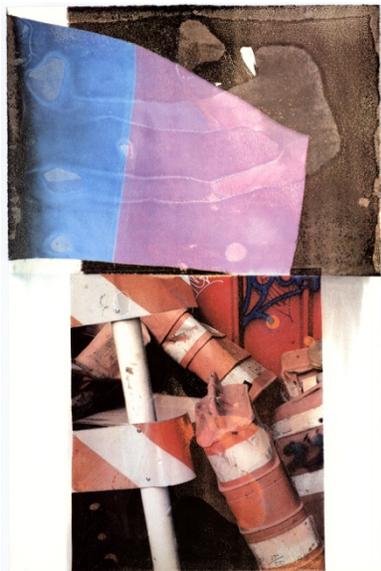
Q: Was there a particular method to sourcing the images for this project? Was there a way that it was cohesive?

Getford: As they were described, they were kind of loosely related. Architecture, this one is pretty obvious.

Q: Sure.

Getford: But when you go to—see, what’s this one here? These are from San Francisco? Yes.

Q: This is *Art*.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Art [Tribute 21]*, 1994  
Offset lithograph  
41 x 27 inches (104.1 x 68.6 cm)  
From an edition of 50, published by Felissimo, produced  
by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Getford: Right. That looks like Bob’s art, but it just sounded like many people’s art. And then this one here, I think this is—

Q: *Children*.

Getford: Yes. And that's—the bottom is easy. Most of these are images that he had and that we were working with. This is a gambling machine. And then these are toys. So that kind of leaves it up to your imagination to decide what that's all about. That's like a Bingo kind of thing, those things fall out of there and they call out a number; both of those are from somewhere in Asia though, I believe.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Children [Tribute 21]*, 1994  
Offset lithograph  
41 x 27 inches (104.1 x 68.6 cm)  
From an edition of 50, published by Felissimo, produced by  
Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

But they were images we had around. A lot of them were images we had around, but there were things that he felt that he wanted to—so he sourced them either from his own photographs primarily. But I'm just not sure about the—I don't remember the architectural one. But that's—

Q: So tell me about what would happen up until this being sent out to ULAE. The images are picked—

Getford: All right, the images are picked. If they are not already printed then they'll be printed. And they'll be printed in a size that will fit the area or Bob will tear it down or whatever needs to happen. And then he went over to the press room, the print shop we called it, which was the concrete block building on the compound, where Untitled Press was formed. So we'd go over there and they would put the paper down on the press and then they would put water on the press, either with a sponge or with a brush, and then Bob laid these images down full size on the paper. So he picked out paper that was already to the size that he wanted to do and he had enough paper to do the whole group. He laid it down there and the paper would be facing up and the water would go on. He would put the images down where he wanted them and this was in the days when he couldn't see. It was paper that was white. And he'd put it down there. And once you lay it down, you're committed.

Q: Okay.

Getford: Because you can't move it. If you do, it's smeared —

Q: It smudges.

Getford: Yes. It smears. And so you had to put it down carefully, you kind of rolled it down from one side— He would take it and somebody would hold down one edge and he'd just roll it down. When he had everything on it that he wanted for the print, they would put a cover sheet on and then they'd put a plastic tympan on top of that, which is basically a sheet of plastic.

Q: Okay?

Getford: Kind of a fiberglass plastic in this case that has grease on top of it.

Q: Right.

Getford: That all goes on a big, thick bed of aluminum, it's like a 4-inch slab, 30-something inches wide and 6 feet long or so. Then all of that is pressed together like a sandwich. This is an electric press, so it's moved back so that just ahead of the print on the tympan is underneath an edge of the scraper bar that'll act as the press point. In this case it's a Delrin bar. Then you put the press down; when it's under pressure, you turn on the motor and it pulls it through, it squeezes it all together, pushes the ink into and through the paper. Or not through, but toward the—and the axis that the paper is moving, it pushes the paper ahead of the tympan and pushes the ink down to the paper and basically does the burnishing process in a mechanical way. Any excess water comes out the bottom. And the amount of excess water was determined by how sloppy Bob was being at the time with the water. How fluid he wanted the thing to look, whether he wanted it to be hard-edged like that one or if he wanted it to be splashy. So basically that was that. It was a modified litho press, stone litho press, which was a little different than most litho presses.

Q: So the next piece that we talked about talking about is this Untitled (Faux-Tapis) [1995].



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (Faux-Tapis), 1995  
Fabric collage on bonded aluminum  
128 1/2 x 121 x 2 inches (326.4 x 307.3 x 5.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Getford: Right. Tapis.

Q: In 1995, which is fabric collage on bonded aluminum.

Getford: Right.

Q: Were you involved in producing this piece?

Getford: I was.

Q: Okay.

Getford: Long after the fact, a good decade or more than which they were made, we discovered this photo batik dyed fabric. And the story that I heard was that Bob and Terry were in Indonesia somewhere. I think Lawrence knows the details a little more. But Terry Van Brunt would know

exactly where. I think there's probably some of this left that he didn't use at Mount Vernon and I suspect there's still addresses on the wrapping. Someone found this fabric in the Shotgun Gallery, which was a long, narrow gallery next to the old studio gallery, where we kept all sorts of things, books, materials, things, this stuff had gathered. We pulled it out and it looked really interesting and so Bob decided to work with it in a very short order. We used the same glue, I think, that we used to put down the paper, which is not really paper by the way, it's rag. We call it paper, but it's rag paper, to put these down. And they're all Bob's photographs from sometime around ROCI and before that had been sent to somewhere in Indonesia that made these batiks. It took them more than a year to make them, it was like they were doing tourist photographs and stuff like that. And so these two guys show up with hundreds of photographs that they want made and so that's probably—the whole village got involved with.

[Laughter]

Getford: I don't know that as fact, I'm fantasizing. But anyway, it took them a long time to do it. And so it came back later and then they sat for a long, long time. And they got rediscovered. They pulled them out, took them over to the new studio, and Bob just really liked them and just started making these collages. So they're fabric, just like a normal batik, but they're fabric versions of Bob's photographs from around the period, sometime in the early eighties I would think. I don't know how far the photographs go back, but they're obviously color photographs.

Q: Right.

Getford: They're probably made from copies of either Ektachromes or Kodachromes.

The finished work is about 7 feet tall and about 10 feet wide. We collected—what is the—

Q: It says 128 by 121 inches.

Getford: Okay. So I'm trying to remember whether they were multiple panels or whether they were singles.

Q: So yes, that's over 10 feet.

Getford: Yes, 120 inches is 10 feet.

Q: Yes.

Getford: So the wide width is 10 feet, so the top looks like it's 6 or 7 feet. Bob did a lot of—well see, he had to think about 8-foot rooms.

Q: Right.

Getford: So a lot of times paintings were 7 feet tall because they just wouldn't fit. They would fit it in a room like this because these are 10-foot ceilings or greater.

Q: Sure.

Getford: So you had to think about that—you couldn't just make everything 10 feet tall.

[Laughter]

Q: As much as you might want to?

Getford: Yes, as much as it might be interesting to do that. And it was, because they really did look good on the wall and they're really fun pieces. And because they were all printed up already, it just was a matter of him laying them out, picking everything out, cutting things up because they weren't—obviously he was doing, it was the same things. They were different sizes. One of the things we did when we printed that and this might be interesting: we developed a strategy for printing the photographs, it was like an extension of the single, double, quad strategy, and it worked very well for Bob. We would take a specific size and we stayed with those sizes for long periods of time and then we'd make that size and we'd make a half size of it. And then we'd make a quarter size of that if necessary. And sometimes when he would pick out the photographs, he would say, "Okay, I want this in the full size," he'd still use quad and double even though it wasn't the same absolute size. But we knew that—and if he said he wanted a quad, a single, and a double, we knew he wanted one that was—whatever was the biggest thing we were making at that time. Or if he wanted one half that size.

Q: Right.

Getford: That had an effect on the way things look and it had an effect on the full size of the things he chose. So in other words, he picked a size that gave him the kind of divisions he was looking for.

Q: Okay.

Getford: And that changed some, but basically we did the same thing. A lot of that was not so much an aesthetic decision as it was a practical, to get as much out of the paper as we could. In other words, when we were doing—it was sort of initiated when we were doing the Iris prints because we would print a full sheet. And then we could print two on a full sheet or we could print four on a full sheet and use up as much paper as possible because the paper was just incredibly expensive, even though it was crap because its intention wasn't to be archival, its intention was to be used and thrown away. It was a printing plate.

Q: Sure. Sure.

Getford: But a similar strategy of sizing as the single, quad kind of thing that's going on here and you can see that these black areas are areas of their size that were not used by the photograph. So when you look at these areas here, like these big black-and-white areas, those are unused portions of the fabrics that Bob used in the composition.

Q: Right.

Getford: So in other words, if the image stopped here and it was black from here to the edge of the salvage of the cloth, he might just use that. And it may be black and it may be white. And so that's how you get this sort of thing running through these photographic images. They looked very much like batik, but very flat and pretty much—I think we did these on polylaminate. It probably says somewhere.

Q: It says fabric collage on bonded aluminum.

Getford: Yes.

Q: Yes.

Getford: And that would later have been called polylaminate, I think.

Q: Okay, thanks. So the next piece that I wanted to talk about is *Synopsis Shuffle*, 1999.

Getford: Right.

Q: So this is a participatory performance piece comprising fifty-two panels, which are selected and arranged in compositions of between three and seven panels, by someone other than Rauschenberg, each time the work is displayed.

Getford: Right.

Q: What was your role in this particular piece?

Getford: Well, the same as all of the other transfer pieces. I printed everything. I think these were printed, being that time period, probably on the Encad. I was looking at a photograph earlier and it said 1996 and I noticed that I had the Encad set up on one end and I had the Iris set up on the other. And those are definitely not Iris images, so my guess is they're Encad images.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Detail, panel of *Synapsis Shuffle*, 1999  
Inkjet pigment transfer and acrylic on poly laminate  
114 1/2 x 59 1/2 inches (290.8 x 151.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Okay.

Getford: So they're pigment images, which was one of the points I was trying to make to the people at the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York] who were worried that they were Iris images and they're not. So they're pigment, not dye.

Bob liked this. There are fifty-two because there are fifty-two playing cards in a deck. He kind of thought of this as a way for institutions to use it as a game to generate money.

Q: Oh, how?

Getford: Well, so you could lend this to an institution, they could have an event, just like the early shuffle events where you bring in illuminati and celebrities and sponsors to make a big deal out of it. People pay to do these things or they sponsor people to do them. And the sponsoring institution gets the money.



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

Q: Right.

Getford: So I think he thought it was kind of a fun thing that we could do, that was indeterminate, which falls right into his Cage-ian kind of thing. And he would have a vehicle that he could send to someone and they could use it as a fundraising device. There was also the thing

where he always made fun, in a lighthearted way responding to people saying, “Oh, I could have done that,” and this way they get to make their own Rauschenbergs.

Q: Right. They got to do it.

Getford: But there’s an element of chance involved because there’s an element of chance in the way he set up the rules of the game.

Q: Do you think—

Getford: You don’t always get what you want.

Q: [Laughs] Yes. Do you think he was happy with the way people interacted with and received it?

Getford: I think the fact that they interacted was the point—

Q: Was enough?

Getford: And I think he was happy, yes. It’s like life, sometimes it goes your way, sometimes it doesn’t. And it’s kind of interesting to see someone—well in the one here in New York, to see people with pretty big social egos, Martha Stewart going at it with someone who was her peer

socially. She wants it and that person doesn't want to give it up. What's going to go down in order for this to happen or not?



Rauschenberg and Martha Stewart at the *Synapsis Shuffle* (1999) selection event, PaceWildenstein gallery warehouse, New York, May 15, 2000. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Ed Chappell



Martha Stewart at the *Synapsis Shuffle* (1999) selection event, PaceWildenstein gallery warehouse, New York, May 15, 2000. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Ed Chappell

Q: Right.

Getford: And I think that gave him a lot of joy to watch people—

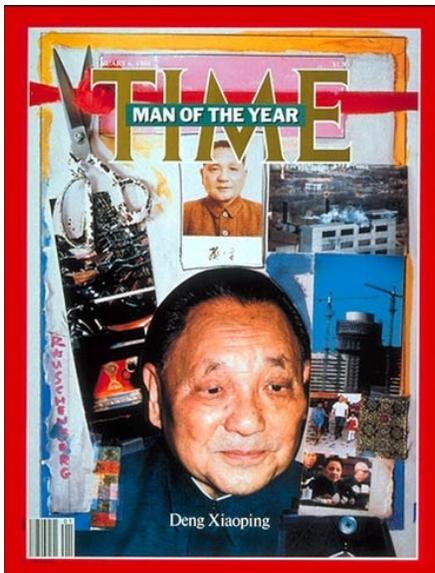
Q: Actually yes, Janet [Begneaud, née Rauschenberg] talked about Martha Stewart and this piece. So you remember that as well?

Getford: Yes. I think she must have been one of the people who had an emotional investment in what they were doing. [Laughs] I don't know. I wasn't there. Thomas was there, ask him.

Q: I'll ask Thomas.



Getford: Right. And this was sort of—because we did three or four of them and we did a couple of Man of the Year and different things. The reason I requested that was—I was thinking broadly about works on paper and I wanted to have something that showed Bob working in a commercial way, where he was fabricating something for mass production that would go right out to an immediate audience that had significant constraints that was basically—what am I trying to say here—a piece of work that was commissioned.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Cover for *Time* magazine, Deng Xiaoping, Man of the Year,  
January 6, 1986  
10 1/2 x 8 inches (26.7 x 20.3 cm)

So that was one of the reasons I picked this, not so much that—he did a number of other things, like the cover for *Afterimage*—

Q: *Aperture*?

Getford: *Aperture*. Sorry.

Q: Fortieth anniversary?

Getford: Yes, like that. But this was even more in that manner—because this really brought a lot of things to bear with his flexibility. Basically they wanted to use images that had been gathered from New York. Bob was tremendously affected by 9/11. He really had quite a soft spot for New York, which is why everything wound up here rather than in Florida. If there was a museum section dedicated to him, he wanted it to be in New York, not in Florida or Abu Dhabi or somewhere like that, because this was like the other home. But there is also—there's a box around here somewhere with all of the leftover from this. Basically the way this was put together was, they send you all of the red surround, the *Time* name, except one of them we actually subverted it and we talked them into letting us gold leaf the name *Time*. They liked it so much, they've reused it since then. That was something that Lawrence Voytek did. He actually hand gold leafed the name *Time*. But the constraints are that of course you don't make it this size. And there is an original for this. And it's roughly three to four times this size. So they send you all the images, or in this case slides, that they had copyright use of. And then Bob went through the slides, he picked out the images that he liked, a lot more than he liked, maybe double what he was actually going to wind up using.

Q: So these are not his photographs? They're from *Time*—

Getford: These are not his photographs, right, which is part of the point. These are photographs that were taken down around New York. These flowers are a whole other thing. I forget exactly where they come from, but I don't think—but these are manipulated a little bit. He had me knock

out some of the backs and that sort of thing. But he didn't want it to be too depressing. So he said, "I want to have the buildings to be the major image, but I want them to be green, because I want them to be a happy color," which was really unusual because he usually would not talk in those terms. We were talking about that whole—he was very adamant about red doesn't mean this and the Abstract Expressionists. But he said—I think he felt that that was a light color, warm, even just in a visceral sense, not in an intellectual sense. But he said, "I want them green." I don't remember where I found the buildings, but I found them and I copied them. And this was a point where since this wasn't a quote "fine art work," we did things like that, turned them green. I was lucky on this one: I got the green right away. [Laughs] So well, there's green and there's green.

So all of these were transfers—we made these again in a couple of different sizes, but we found just a few sizes really worked well. Everything was maybe 4-by-6, maybe 5-by-7, somewhere in there because like I said, the original was about this wide and about—so it's about two to three times larger. And then all of this was laid up in transparent inkjet prints. So basically he taped together a large transparency on a piece of acetate and then I made overlays so that he could see what everything looked like. I made a red transparency so he could see where things fell and we needed to know where the type boundary was.

Q: The postal?

Getford: Yes, where the address was going to be and so he took the flowers and the buildings and then the images from—because Bob was a great admirer of flowers. He said, "If I could

make work that looked as good as flowers, I'd be the best artist in the world." So you can see how some of these are manipulated; whatever was in the background was taken out. I don't know whether that's something we went out and photographed or—and I don't remember where the images were from for that. But I do remember taking out any of the background for that and then manipulating this color-wise. And then basically making a large color transparency to send to *Time* to reproduce into this. And that's why we made it larger, of course, so that it was knocked down in size so the fidelity would increase and not decrease.

It's not prominent on this one, but on some of these, you can see the tape, like when we did Man of the Year, he left the tape. And that's a scale; it's just hard to tell. But like I say, there is an original for this.

Q: Right.

Getford: That's a larger size. And then there's a box that has a lot of the leftover images, which might be interesting in terms of which ones he didn't use from the myriad of images that *Time* sent.

Q: Would he talk about images as he was handling them? Would he say anything about—

Getford: Sometimes. It depended on what time of day it was, how late it was. As it got later and later, sometimes he would talk more and more. I suspect that in the last two decades, he probably talked with Kevin more about that and he was more likely to talk about it if the group was small

and had been drinking, than if it was an active working group and we were moving towards finishing something or doing something or trying to accomplish something that he had in mind. Like if he decided, I want to do these two paintings, I want to finish these two today, then no. Depending on that. But he wouldn't talk about them too much. Occasionally they would evoke a story. These types of things would evoke a story. That he would talk about—

Q: Right, the older photographs?

Getford: —right. We would talk about that story with him and Paul [Frederic] Bowles and Cy in North Africa and the drug-laden visit and that sort of thing. And his story is significantly different than Paul Bowles's version of it. [Laughs] But once in a while those types of things would come out. But typically those would be if we weren't in the studio working, but if we were over at the house—oftentimes he would talk.

I would take proof images to him—as time and infirmity progressed, we had to make the images that he'd pick from larger and larger. Initially he could work from the slides, but because it was difficult for him to handle the loop—he had several magnifying glasses that he used, which are among his personal effects from the studio. He wasn't really good with a loop so he would use a magnifying glass to look at these things. We had a couple of light boxes around in earlier times and that's how he would pick out images. Over in the small studio he actually had a big light table. And we had light tables in my area, but he only rarely came in there to look at things. He had a smaller one that we moved around for him. But if he was doing that, sometimes he would do it in the studio. And this was just how chance would have it. And then sometimes he would

do it at the house. And if he was at the house, he would be more likely to start a conversation with someone and talk about something. But oftentimes, it was business. But like I say, if it was later, if the group was lounging, or if he was entertaining—he was a tremendous entertainer—then stories would come out. But—

Q: Would he engage a very different part of himself when entertaining versus when working?

Getford: No, he was always Bob. He was always on. I've seen him become a different person. A famous photographer was there; I can't remember if it was Herb Ritts or someone who was there when I was there. The previous night had been a particularly long drinking night and he was really hungover, as good a hangover as I had ever seen. I somehow had drawn the duty of going over and getting him in the morning because it was kind of an early day for him, it was closer to noon when they wanted to start the photo session. We got in the service elevator in the new studio. And so we got him over and he was still under the weather—this was before the strokes because he was still upright and fully functional physically. He was always functional mentally. But we were in the elevator and I think it was just the two of us, maybe Phillip was with us or something. He kind of looked up at me [sighs]—and then he kind of looked down. And the elevator door was about to open and the photographer was in the main studio. He looked up like this and there was a transformation. He was a different person. He was absolutely beautiful looking. It was just like an actor taking on a role. He just transformed himself from this hopelessly hungover guy into this bright, cheery, smile-on-the-face person. It was just that quick. So I know he was capable of it. And I didn't often see it but he could do that. But he really liked to be himself and I think that was part of being in Captiva and being around the people that he

considered family, which was basically his staff, but really we were family because we were there every day, all day. So you either like them or you get rid of them.

Q: Right.

[Laughter]

Getford: Because you don't want to have to put up with them. Even the ones that you have kind of a contentious relationship with, you either really like them or—because there were people—it was like an old couple.

Q: Sure.

Getford: But so he could be that way. And he would be that way in a gallery sometimes. But I don't think he cared for it. I think that's why sometimes he didn't care for the public appearances as much because he knew he had to be Robert Rauschenberg, the artist, rather than just being Bob.

Q: Bob. Okay.

Getford: Okay? Do you—

Q: Well, is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you think you'd like to speak about or—?

Getford: Oh, I've talked so much in the last two days, it's hard to remember what I've even said.

Q: [Laughs] I'm sure it's hard to keep track.

Getford: [Laughs] But no, but if I think of things when we do the review—

Q: Sure.

Getford: I assume we're going to go through this with the transcription?

Q: Exactly. Yes, you have a chance to—

Getford: Because there are all sorts of—there's a million little things that I can't remember because it was thousands of days and every day had something interesting happen.

Q: Right. Yes.

Getford: So it was, as they say, never a dull moment! [Laughs]

Q: Oh, sounds like. [Laughs] All right.

Getford: Okay?

Q: Well, thank you. Yes, thanks so much.

Getford: Great!

[END OF INTERVIEW]