

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Alex Hay

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2014

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Alex Hay conducted by interviewer Alessandra Nicifero on December 8, 2014. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcriber: ATC

Session #1

Interviewee: Alex Hay

Location: Bisbee, AZ

Interviewer: Alessandra Nicifero

Date: December 8, 2014

Q: My name is Alessandra Nicifero I'm here with Alex Hay, in Bisbee, Arizona, and today is December 8th, 2014. Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

I would like to start with your childhood memories, where you were born, where you grew up.

Hay: I was born in Florida, just south of Tampa, in a very rural setting, beautiful old roads and lived very near a beautiful natural spring, which we used to go to. I was born in 1930, so it was at the beginning of the Depression, but we weren't really too much a victim of the Depression because we had family members who supported us and bought my father a car every year, so we were quite well off in comparison to other people. My parents were very resourceful. Although they had never involved themselves in farming, my father would farm, grow vegetables, and we would raise chickens, but no heavy livestock. We had a cow that my mother milked. So that was it. It was quite a wonderful childhood because it was pretty free. We had some amenities but not too many. An outdoor toilet and things like that, but it was a beautiful little old house that I was born in and grew up in and we just carried on like children do. In a sense, I kept to myself a lot. Although I was in good relations with my brothers. I had two brothers and we were like a year and a half apart, so we were very close in age and we could relate to one another, and I just

remember a beautiful childhood there. It was very free. We would get on the school bus—I attended the first year of school in that setting and we then moved to a place where my father’s family lived in Plant City [Florida], and we lived there for a few years and we then moved to Tampa and the outskirts of the town. I don’t think I was a normal child, but I managed to fit in pretty well.

Then I went to high school there. I went to grade school and high school in a predominantly Hispanic community. There were a lot of Cubans in Tampa. It was a big cigar-making town. Little cigar factories on the outskirts of Tampa and a lot of cuisine of the Cuban-Hispanic culture there.

I went to high school—it was a predominately Hispanic high school with quite a few gringos, so to speak. When I graduated from high school, my brother and I decided that we’d go to California, so we drove to California in an old car, and basically turned right around and came back to Florida, and I then enrolled in the local college and went to college there. And then we all—since that was the beginning of the Vietnam War and we were all going to get drafted, so a lot of people in the classes where we were in college decided to join a reserve unit. It was a communication unit in the Air Force and we were activated so we spent our—actually, that wasn’t Vietnam. That was Korea. I’m sorry. We never went outside of the States, so we stayed there. I stayed in the service for twenty-one months or something like that, then the unit was deactivated. I came home and enrolled in Florida State University [Tallahassee], and that’s when my real art career started.

Q: You took art classes there?

Hay: Yes, I was a fine arts major and I got a scholarship to graduate school there, and then after that I just got on a plane and went to New York, and so that was it as far as that goes.

Q: What was the attraction? Why did you decide to go to New York?

Hay: Basically, I felt that that was the only thing I really wanted to do. I didn't want to go home. I didn't really—well basically, I really didn't like the weather in Florida. It was too hot all the time and when I went to school in north Florida, Florida State University in Tallahassee, it was sort of like in the buffer zone between the north and the south. Sometimes we would have a little bit of snow there, but it was basically cold in the winter, whereas in Tampa it was never really cold. Occasionally a little cold weather would come in, but it was never really like the kind of weather I really wanted to—because I had been a couple of times to New York with some friends from the university, so that sort of intrigued me a great deal. I just loved the ambience and the weather there.

That was it. I was, even as a child, I had little art kits and things like that, and did drawings and paintings and stuff like that, and was very much interested in dance too. At one point my mother was talking to me and asking me what I really wanted to do and I said, "I would like to be a ballet dancer." I don't know where I came up with that, but I was always interested in it.

So in college I actually did get involved in the modern dance department. I guess it's really typical that not too many men get really interested in dance, so I was one of the select people in the dance department and I'd always get to do things. I remember doing one performance of *Boléro* [1928 by Maurice Ravel]. It was really great. *Boléro* is one of the superb pieces of music that I just love. Every time I hear it, it just sends chills up my spine because it's really one of the most beautiful pieces of music, I think, and very conceptual. I just loved it. Anyway, we did that. I was interested in movement.

When I went to New York, I didn't really get involved in any dance groups there. People used to describe me as a dancer I think, in some instances, because of my involvement in doing the performances. Deborah [Hay], my former wife, was a dancer and she took classes with Merce Cunningham, so I used to—Merce used to have people come in and observe the classes, so I would often go. He had a row of benches down one side of the studio, and I would go and just sit and observe the classes because he had just a marvelous company and it was just so great to watch. He would go through pieces, parts of pieces, because it was basically rehearsals and developments of his pieces, so the classes were based on that. So I would go and watch these things. Then at one point, I think 1961 and then 1962, Judith Dunn, one of his female dancers, and Bob Dunn, who was a composer but also played piano for Merce, did a workshop based on John Cage's theories of chance composition. I attended those and Rauschenberg came because Steve Paxton, Rauschenberg's partner, was in Cunningham's company, so that's where I first came into contact with Rauschenberg. But those workshops were such an amazing turn-on. It was just beautiful to see what happened, what they came up with. So at the end of it they decided they would go down to Judson [Memorial] Church [New York] and just continue the group. It

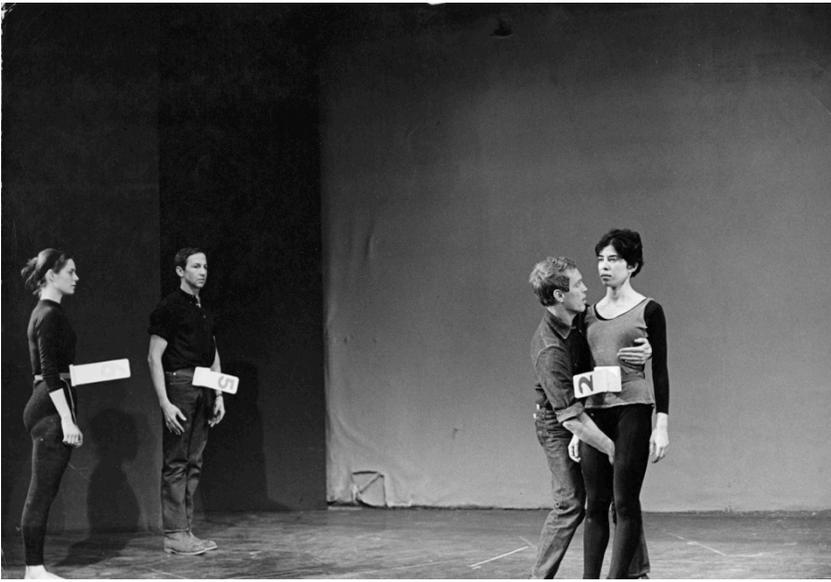
was no longer workshops or anything, it was just a group of people. And so we all went down there—Rauschenberg included—and most of the people in Cunningham’s company went down there. Judson Church is where we went, which is a great place because the Reverend [Howard R.] Moody, who was the pastor of the church, would encourage it. They had a music theater and a dance theater, and they did literary performances and readings and things there. So he was very active in that community of artists and they took advantage of that space, so it was a natural place for us to go.

So we all went down there and that’s where I got really involved with Rauschenberg. Basically, Rauschenberg and I were the only two artists there. The rest of them were dancers, like Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, and Deborah of course. There were also some musicians who were there. And so we would meet once a week at Judson and bring in pieces. The first piece I did was a collaboration with Deborah [Untitled, 1962]. We had a sort of rectangular frame that was in front of us. I guess it was made out of pipe. It was free-standing, so I stood in between that with two flashlights in my hands and did light patterns and Deborah did her movements out in front of it.

And then—we all socialized. We were a very, very sociable group. We just got along so well together, all involved in this incredibly exciting period. Well, it turned out to be an exciting period. Then it was just people meeting together to do these—what they wanted to do. And then the next thing that I did was, there was a sculptor, Charles Ross, Chuck Ross who was involved in a collaboration with the group and he made a huge thing out of pipe that he welded together. It was like a rectangle, but none of the sides were of equal length. One of the corners was way up

in the air, but basically it was a rectangular shape; it had four sides and a top and bottom. That was the first piece I did on my own and that was a piece I labeled *Prairie* [1963], where I made a recording of the words, “Are you comfortable, is that comfortable, that doesn’t look comfortable, that’s not very comfortable,” and I recorded that. It was asking me questions. Around my waist I tied some ropes and put two pillows on—tied them at the ends of the ropes, maybe about a couple of feet long so they didn’t drag, and then I climbed up on top of the structure and just sort of worked my way around it, putting the pillows underneath me as I went, so they would fall out and I would pull them back up because of the ropes. And then the tape would ask these questions and I would answer it. That was a very short piece, about five minutes. That was the first piece I did.

Then after that, I did another piece, which was called *Colorado Plateau* [1964]. That was a piece that I had other people in—six people. Rauschenberg and Steve Paxton and Deborah, and I don’t remember the other people [Childs, Tony Holder, and Yvonne Rainer]. I made attachments so they could strap a piece of board that stuck out with a number on it, and the number would correspond to what I was doing in the tape and the tape was based on a circle of compass directions. Not literally on the floor, but I had the six people lined up in the circle, around an imaginary circle, and then the tape would say, “Move one northeast, leave them horizontal, put them horizontal or leave them vertical,” and then I would run around as the tape went and it would move to other people and it got faster and faster—it was an exhausting piece. But that’s the first piece that Rauschenberg and I were in together.



Alex Hay, *Colorado Plateau*, performed at Surplus Dance Theater sur+ series, Stage 73, New York, 1964. Pictured: Lucinda Childs, Rauschenberg, Alex Hay, and Deborah Hay. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Hans Namuth

We were at Judson about a year before we started—well, Steve Paxton would get venues for us, once we left Judson, because we wanted to continue on doing the performance stuff. So Steve Paxton would get venues for us and we would go various places. We were always in one another's pieces, so we got a very good, close relationship, and Rauschenberg—Bob and I almost thought alike. We almost didn't have to talk to one another, we communicated so well together. We were very similar in a lot of ways in that we were very action-oriented, could really make decisions very quickly and arrive at a solution to something very quickly.

Rauschenberg at that time had a loft on Broadway—a huge loft. [Note: Rauschenberg lived at 809 Broadway from July 1961 through fall 1965.] It was like 50 feet wide by 150 feet long. I don't know, it was a gigantic loft. Deborah and I were living in a little apartment—basement apartment down near Tompkins Square on East Seventh Street, which was the middle of the ghetto at that time. But it was a great time. So I had a little studio there. Anyway, we spent many,

many hours at Rauschenberg's loft because we were all involved in continuing the performance stuff. And Steve would get a venue for us and we would put together some pieces and go do it.



Rehearsal for Rauschenberg's *Spring Training* (1965) in his Broadway studio, New York, 1965. Pictured: Alex Hay, Rauschenberg, Steve Paxton, and Trisha Brown. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Ugo Mulas © Ugo Mulas Heirs. All rights reserved

One of them was at a place called Stage 73 [New York], which was a really great place—I think it was used by the studios to do indoor shoots. Anyway, they had a great superstructure up above and I did a piece there called *Leadville* [1964] and that was a piece that was based on a straight line. I made a tape of various sounds. Some were insects and then turkey sounds, gobbling, and a dance song, *Red Roses for a Blue Lady* [1948 by Sid Tepper and Roy C. Bennett], and the sound of me running, and it ended with the sound of Gatling guns, which is a type of machine gun that had multiple barrels, that was like extremely fast sound. I don't know why I chose that. It wasn't about war or anything like that. It was basically about sounds is what it was. It was very dramatic, sounded like a very staccato, very fast, pop-pop-pop-pop-pop, that sort of thing. And so I had an imaginary line on the thing that went towards the audience, and from the superstructure which was I guess about 20 feet up, I attached a pole that I could slide down. I

was up there at the beginning of the piece and I made a pack and put a big Wollensak tape recorder in it on my back with the tape in it, because I had no sound system. It was all coming from the tape recorder. And then I first tried to make a suit out of vinyl. I put it all together, but once I started moving in it, it all just ripped apart. It had to be glued together, I didn't sew it together. Finally I just spray-painted a pair of coveralls silver because it was based on the color silver, because the Wollensak was silver and the pole was silver, so I wanted that to be what it was all about and then just a straight line. So I slid down the pole with my back to the audience, it just looked like sliding down a pole. They couldn't see my arms moving at all, but I would just slide down. My feet were sort of around the pole at the bottom. Very nice. I saw images of it. It's quite a nice image coming down.



Alex Hay, *Leadville*, First New York Theater Rally, former CBS studio, Broadway and Eighty-first street, New York, May 1965. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Anyway, as I left the superstructure, I'd pull the tape reel of my tape recorder off, so the tape was just spewing out of the tape recorder. It didn't affect the performance, except when I got to the bottom of the pole, there was a pile of tape there. I didn't know what to do, so I just slowly turned around and let the tape spew out and did my piece. That was the second piece I did.

We all put that together in Rauschenberg's loft, so Deborah and I would just—we spent half of our time in Rauschenberg's loft. Rauschenberg was really a great cook. Occasionally he would do something that didn't turn out, it was a disaster. I remember once he made a dish of black beans and oysters. Now, I don't know why he thought that would work, but we took a couple of bags of it and it was just so awful we threw it out. But mostly Rauschenberg was really a great cook.

Q: So he was experimenting all the time, even in cooking?

Hay: All the time, yes. Yes. Anyway, our time there, until Rauschenberg moved to Lafayette Street, was spent there. We spent a lot of time at that place. That was a time of loft parties. Every weekend there would be a loft party somewhere, we would all go and there would be great dancing. Everyone was into it. It was just an amazing period in New York.

Rauschenberg often gave parties. We had a big party there and a lot of people there, but a lot of people you didn't even know came to the party—there might have been fifty or sixty people there. At one point, there was this big guy who, for some reason or another, confronted [Johan

Wilhelm] Billy Klüver, and Billy Klüver was this very gentle soul—just not a bone in his body that had any sort of aggressive tendencies. Anyway, this guy was just confronting him and we didn't know what was going to happen. I was almost fearless in those days. I would do anything. So, I just stepped in between Billy Klüver and this guy, and this guy was off and laughing that he was threatening Billy Klüver. So, finally, Steve Paxton and me and a couple of other people got this guy on the elevator and took him down and threw him out of the building.

Q: Who was this guy?

Hay: Well, as it turned out—I figured this out later. They stole the Magritte breasts and knees. [Note: Referring to panels in a 1954 version of René Magritte's multi-panel female nude *L'Évidence éternelle*.] This was all a diversion so they could take that. Because this was a great big guy, he could have knocked us all to smithereens. So that was what was going on; he was just diverting us so someone could go over and get those pieces and take them out. It was amazing. We didn't know who these people were, so we couldn't figure it out at all, trace it out or anything, but that's what was going on. It was at that time that these pieces were stolen, so that's what was going on.

And then we did Stage 73 together and we did another venue uptown. I forget what that was and I did a repeat of one of my pieces. I think it was *Prairie*, but I did it on a ladder, sort of like laying in and out of the rungs on a very tall step-ladder. I guess we just did one performance at Stage 73. But it was really strange because we were in the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor [Michigan]. The organizers/performers [of the ONCE Festival] used to come to all of our

performances, and we went out there once and did a performance in Ann Arbor, but they would come to our performances, and Steve had arranged with them, unbeknownst to us, all of the logistics—when one piece would end, the people from the NOW Festival would come in and do something. So it was really nice. A surprise performance for us is basically what that was all about, but we didn't know it. Only Steve knew that Steve had communicated with them to do this. That was a great situation.

Q: That was 1965 I believe. Do you remember the Merce Cunningham world tour?

Hay: Oh, yes. Yes.

Q: That was '64.

Hay: Okay. Well, that was another period, because the performance period was very involved. Rauschenberg, Deborah, Steve, and I were very, very closely collaborating and going places and doing performances. Rauschenberg and I had worked so much together in the performances, any time he needed someone, Deborah and Steve and I were always in his performances, and vice versa. And so, on the Cunningham tour, I don't know if it was determined right in the beginning, or during the planning of the tour, that I would go along as Rauschenberg's assistant to help him do the lighting and the stage and stuff like that, but at some point that happened. I made a door for them that they could open and close in a framework for their tour. I think that's the only thing I did for them.



Alex Hay on the tour bus, Merce Cunningham Dance Company world tour, 1964. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Attributed to Steve Paxton

Then Deborah was going to go on the tour because someone was leaving the tour in London, and they needed a replacement. So they took Deborah to do this and I went along as Rauschenberg's assistant. I was going to leave the tour after the European phase of it, because they didn't have enough money to continue it, to pay the rest of the tour for me. But in London, something happened. The company was like—Merce was the dance director of the company and Cage the music director and Rauschenberg the artistic director. But as it turned out, Cage and Cunningham had free rein to do anything they wanted and then they just put it all together, but Bob was almost required to light the dances and do the stage sets so they didn't interfere. And Rauschenberg wanted to get himself more integrated as an independent member of the company. So we did a performance in London where Rauschenberg started doing this. What he did was, we had a clothesline strung way up high over the stage and a huge ladder, a free-standing ladder that went up to it, and Rauschenberg didn't actually dye stuff on the stage, but he would just put stuff in water and I would take it up on the ladder and hang it on the clothesline and we strapped a

stuffed eagle with outspread wings on my back. I think [Cunningham's] *Story* [1963] was the piece that that occurred in, and at the end of that performance, Merce wouldn't even take curtain calls, he was so furious.

But anyway, I think that was the end of our tour. Maybe we went to—Stockholm was the last venue in Europe. [Note: Krefeld, Germany was the last European city on the 1964 Cunningham tour.] We'd been to—

Q: Italy, Germany, Paris.

Hay: Yes and we went to—

Q: Venice.

Hay: Poland, I think—was Poland in it?

Q: Mm-hm.

Hay: Poland was incredible because we had a huge hall. It was almost like a factory that everything had been taken out of. So the audience was on a flat space and it went on forever, maybe three hundred or four hundred feet long. The stage at one end of it, that's where we did the performance. But anyway, we were in—at the end of the European tour we were in Stockholm and I was going to leave the tour and fly home, which I was perfectly willing to do at

that time. I got along fine with Rauschenberg, and Cunningham and Cage too. I got along fine with all of them, but I was just tired of it. I wanted to go back to New York and start doing what I wanted to do. So it was all arranged, so it was fine. I was not deserting the company. Anyway, we were in Stockholm and I don't know if Bob had started this procedure before the tour, but he had Castelli sell a painting to pay for the rest of my trip on the thing. So it was real funny, because they gave me a going away party and then at the end of that, Bob got up and announced that I was going to continue the tour. So that was really funny.

Anyway, we ended up—I guess it was Germany—in Germany we did another thing, which was [Cunningham's] *Winterbranch* [1964]. That was a place where Bob was asserting what he wanted to do. Not related to the dance or the music or anything, all the costumes were like gray and he never lit any of the dances. Sometimes the light would appear on the stage, sometimes it would be in the audience, some of it would be up into the flies or whatever, across the stage horizontally. It was just amazing because I think at that point, they realized what Bob was doing, so they would adapt to this and they would change their patterns and run and jump into the light and the light would go away. If they had accepted that and let Bob in and adjusted to Bob, that would have been a whole new dimension to the company, but they didn't, so at the end of the tour, which was Japan, half of the company left I think. Viola Farber, Steve, and Barbara Dilly. At one point, I think we were in Vienna—we did a concert in Vienna and in one of the pieces Bob had a clothesline across with the costumes on it so the dancers would go behind the hanging things and they would change costumes. Well, Barbara Dilly stood out in front and took her blouse off and exposed her breasts and then put it on. Lou Lloyd, her husband, just was furious at that. Anyway, she also left the company at the end of that, I think. I'm not sure, but I think she

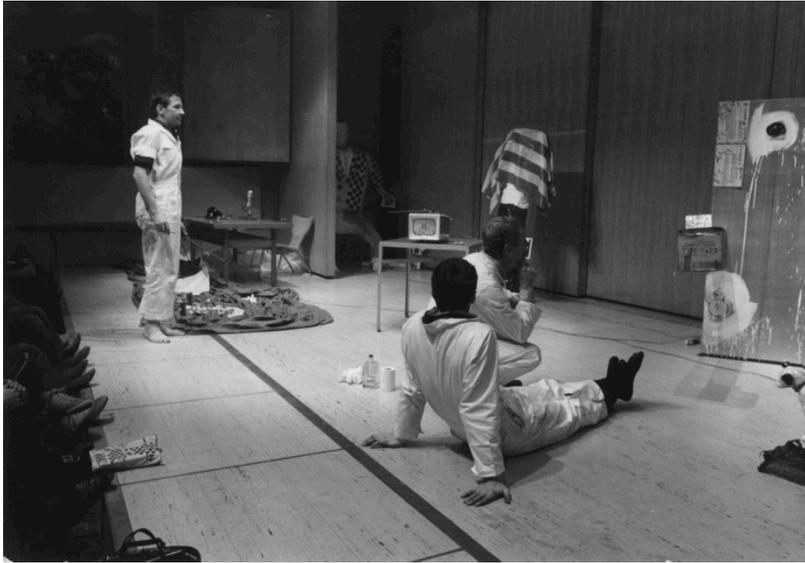
did too. Anyway, that didn't hurt his [Cunningham's] company. He got new dancers, but Steve and Bob and, of course, Deborah really wasn't in the company, she was just on the tour. She probably could have been a member of the company if she wanted to, she was an excellent dancer. Just incredible and did very well on that tour.

But anyway, we went our separate ways.

Q: I found a program for something in Japan. Bob Rauschenberg had organized a specific event for the four of you; Bob Rauschenberg, Steve Paxton, you, and Debbie, and you were performing for Modern Dance Workshop with a bunch of Japanese artists.

Hay: Yes.

Q: It was also when Rauschenberg did *Twenty Questions to Robert Rauschenberg* [1964]. Do you remember this event, where he was painting? There are photos of you and Bob Rauschenberg giving them back to the audience and the painting was produced [*Gold Standard*, 1964]—



Rauschenberg, Steve Paxton, and Alex Hay with Rauschenberg's *Gold Standard* (1964) during *Twenty Questions to Bob Rauschenberg*, Sogetsu Art Center, Tokyo, November 28, 1964. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Masaaki Sekiya

Hay: Yes, he did a painting. I remember that. I don't remember too much of the event. I remember what you're talking about, but I don't remember any of the questions. There was a great group. The Hokusai Group [phonetic]? Was that the performance group in Japan?

Q: Yes, with some of the butoh dancers, [Sachiko] Ishikawa was there. I have the program. This was the program. Bob Rauschenberg did *Shot Put* [1964] and you were doing *Prairie*.

Hay: Okay and we were doing that performance. Who were we doing it for?

Q: The event was called Modern Dance Workshop.

Hay: But there was a group that invited us to do this and it was a Japanese performance group.

Do you have that there? I don't remember. [Note: Sogetsu Art Center, Tokyo]

Q: I think that [Yuji] Takahashi was the musician, the composer. Also the 20th Century Dance Group. That was also a Japanese dance group.

Hay: Yes, it was a Japanese group and as I understood it, it was supposedly an exchange performance between them and us. I don't remember exactly what they did, but I did a repeat of *Prairie* and Bob did *Twenty Questions* and the painting, and it was really funny because the man who was sponsoring this event was an entrepreneur in Japan who had a flower-arranging enterprise of some kind [Sofu Teshigahara]. Anyways, a very rich man. He was under the assumption that he was going to be given this painting, but Rauschenberg wouldn't give it to him. He said, "You can buy it, I can't give it to you." So it was really funny how they resolved that because of pride, Japanese pride. When we flew back—we flew into Hawaii and they presented Bob a box of macadamia nuts, but underneath the macadamia nuts were ten thousand dollars in payment for the painting. So that was it, in terms of the tour.

Then by that time, Rauschenberg was on Lafayette Street, so we just continued our association. We didn't do too much performance stuff or maybe we did. We went to a—the Weyerhaeusers sponsored a trip to Washington state to do a workshop, which Deborah, Steve and Bob and I did. It was at that same time that the World's Fair was in Montreal [1967]. So we all went up to Montreal together and then we got a car to drive across Canada to Vancouver, where we went to meet Doug Christmas, then went down to Vancouver, actually the island—the peninsula—it was Vancouver Island—Olympic Peninsula, right on the coastline of the bay in between Seattle and Vancouver and the peninsula itself. That's where we did the workshop, in an old farmhouse around the edge of a cliff. A beautiful time.

The trip across Canada was quite amazing. I remember we all had sleeping bags and we had a big tarp and we would just stop at the side of the road and pitch camp. I remember one time we were sort of west of Montreal somewhere, out in the middle of nowhere. We waited until it was dark until we pulled off the road because it was very open country there. So we pulled off the road and laid our sleeping bags out on the ground and we laid the tarp over all of us because it was going to get a lot of dew. In the middle of the night—to begin with, the mosquitoes were horrible. Just absolutely voracious mosquitoes. Paxton had brought this very potent repellent along, so we used up a whole bottle of it that night. And I had a flashlight. And we heard these noises right around us, and I looked and there was a skunk walking around, and then we heard some really loud noises and I shined a light on it, and it was a black bear going through some garbage or something. So the next morning when we awakened, we found out where we pulled off, we pulled off the road next to a garbage dump, and so the bear was there going through the garbage.

And then we continued on. It was a great trip across Canada and then we got to Vancouver.

Q: And who was on the trip again?

Hay: Steve and Bob, I mean Rauschenberg, Paxton, and Deborah and I. We were going to do the workshop that the Bloedells or the Weyerhaeuser group had sponsored, they had paid our expenses and everything for it [Port Townsend Theater Workshop]. We went to Vancouver first and spent a little bit of time with Doug Christmas and that was a very interesting period. I think it

was at the time of my birthday. Doug Christmas wanted me to do a painting, so I said, “Oh, I’ll do a painting in exchange for cigars,” and he was going to send me cigars every month from Canada, because you could do that; you could just package the Cuban cigars and you could send them in. So I said, “Okay, I’ll do a painting for cigars.” So I did a painting and we were talking on my birthday and I don’t know how the subject came up, but we were talking about pie-throwing and I said, “I’ve never really been to a pie-throwing thing.” So, at one point—I didn’t know what was going on, we got in cars—a bunch of us from Doug’s gallery and his friends—Doug had ordered a whole bunch of pies and he had laid them out around a big fountain in the middle of a plaza in downtown Vancouver. So we all went down there and started running around the thing picking up pies and throwing them at one another. He was a quite an amazing guy, Doug Christmas.

Then we went to the Olympic Peninsula and did our thing. I think we were supposed to have students from the university of Seattle [Seattle University] or the University of Washington [Seattle]. I think we had like four or six people who were involved and they would all come out and we would do these performance things out in the fields and stuff. I don’t remember what any of the rest of them did. I did a piece where all the people who were in it would be out in the middle of a field and they would shout directions to one another, to run in a certain direction or something like that. That’s the piece that I remember doing. I don’t remember what Deborah or Paxton or Bob did. I don’t have a recollection of what they did. And then we came back to New York after that.

Anyway, the period at Lafayette Street was also a period that was basically centered around Bob's table. Every evening we were all there. I remember once Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty were there, Marion Javits was often there. Billy Klüver and maybe small little groups of people—we would have our parties there and sit around the table in the kitchen. It was a great time. I don't know exactly how long that went on. I guess until around '67, '68.

That was the time of Max's Kansas City [New York] and I loved to go to Max's Kansas City. At one point, one of my openings, we all decided to go down—it was a loft party, so we were going down to Red Grooms's loft and so we all got on the subway to go downtown. He was down, I don't know, near Chinatown, maybe in Chinatown. I don't know exactly where his loft was. Downtown near Canal Street someplace, I think. So we went down there, all of us got on the subway from the gallery and went down to Canal Street or wherever we were going and Joseph Kosuth—I didn't really know Joseph at all, but he was on the subway too, and he was passing up and down the aisle in our car handing us cards of his project. So that's where I met Joseph Kosuth. So we all went downtown—he was with Christine Kozlov at the time and I remember we would—Bob, Steve and Deborah and I were into this thing about doing quadruple dance; we would all get together in the center of a room and dance together. And we would end up sort of like bumping and stuff, onto the floor and stuff like that. Christine Kozlov at one time sat down on my head when I was down on the floor and I couldn't get up from the thing, she was sitting right on my head. Her butt was right on my head. Anyway, that's how I met them.

Joseph and I became really close friends at that time and Joseph loved to go out too. So Joseph and I would go to Max's practically every night, because Mickey Ruskin loved to have the artists

around. So that's what we did. It wasn't like Bob and I were estranged or anything, but I just loved to go to Max's and loved to hang out with that group of people, because we weren't drinkers, we didn't go there for alcohol or anything. We'd just go there for socializing. It was such a great place for socializing, all the artists were there and Mickey loved the artists, so he just opened the place up to them and any artist that came up would get in immediately and the other people were lined up on the sidewalk waiting for tables, but all the artists were able to go in immediately. So that's what we did. It was a great time and that's what Joseph and I did. And so many things happened during that period. I'm trying to remember—

Q: Well, there was the 9 Evenings[: Theatre & Engineering] in 1966. How did you get involved? I mean, how did it all start?

Hay: Well, Billy Klüver was the liaison for that, and I don't know if Experiments in Art and Technology [E.A.T.] happened after that—I think it came together after 9 Evenings, but this was Billy Klüver's doing, getting Bell Labs involved with us artists. There were ten artists, right? [Note: Cage, Childs, Öyvind Fahlström, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Paxton, Rainer, Rauschenberg, David Tudor, and Robert "Bob" Whitman] But basically, most of the people were from Judson. Some of the people like Öyvind Fahlström, was just a close friend of Klüver and Rauschenberg's, and Bob Whitman, all the rest of the people, Yvonne and Lucinda, were all involved at Judson. So it was basically the Judson group, plus a few extras in that. So we just had our meetings. We went out to New Jersey to Bell Labs and got together with a bunch of science technicians there to find out what we wanted to do and everyone had their thing and we were so busy doing what we wanted to do, I didn't really know too much about what people were doing.

Lucinda had these big boxes and Deborah had these platforms that moved around. Basically a simple central thing. I always did like a line or a sound or an activity or something like that, and everything else would work around that—it became simple after that because I had this basic thing. And this was a lot about sound. I said, “I want to do a piece about sound, that uses sound.”



Robert Kieronski, Alex Hay, and Lucinda Childs with ground-effects machine, technical rehearsal for *9 Evenings: Theatre & Engineering*, Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, Summer 1966. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Frances Breer

My first idea was to have a sound source split in two. So you would transmit half of the signals from one place and triangulate it with the other half of the signals to meet, and the sound then would appear there, right in nowhere. The scientists didn't know how they could possibly do that.

So then I decided well, I'll use internal body sounds—use my brainwaves, muscle movements, and things like that. That grew out of the idea of a—it's called *Grass Field* [1966]. Well, the idea about my *Grass Field*, and this is where the title came—was, if you took a field of grass, just a big expanse of wild grass without any trees or anything in it, and put microphones down in it, you could pick up the sounds of the insects and things like that. So, subtle sounds. I wanted subtle sounds. But I didn't know how to really put that together. How it was going to work. Then I decided, well, I'll just use my own internal body sounds, which are quiet, so they built these differential amplifiers, and they did four of them, for brainwaves, eye movement, muscle movement, and my lung noise. So they built four amplifiers for that, pickups for them, then transmitters that went on my back. So I had a backpack of—the amplifiers were on my front and on my back were transmitters. [L. J.] Robby Robinson was the guy who finally came up with it, there was this one guy who was trying to deal with it but he couldn't really come up with—because there was no off-the-shelf equipment for that at that time, so they had to build it. Well, they were well-equipped to do things like that, but finally this guy, engineer Robby Robinson, came in and solved the issue and did it quite well. He did a really good job of it. So then I wanted an activity. So for the activity, I wanted a square area to work in because we had a big space, so I had to use the space. It was a big space, so I took sixty-four squares of six-foot squares of canvas, dyed them. I wanted the color to match me, so I did try to match skin color. Dyed them all in skin color and then stenciled in large numbers, one through sixty-four. I said, "Eight by eight equals sixty-four, so eight squares—an eight square area." Then right in the center of it I set up a projector—a camera picking up my image and a projector behind me that projected my face onto the thing. As I was doing the piece, I said well, I'll do this. I'll do this projection of my face on the screen so it will really get—I guess it was twenty-foot eyes. A big image of my face.

It worked out really well. I envisioned this piece as being ten or fifteen minutes, but it turned out to be like forty-five minutes.

We opened the program, the event, and Steve's thing was a big plastic dome and tunnel going into it where he had sound stuff in it, but he started—he was due to open at eight o'clock. The doors opened. Well, his piece didn't even start until eleven and then it went after that. Or maybe it was a little earlier than that, but my piece didn't go on until eleven. So here I was, Billy Klüver was just totally out of his mind, rushing around. But Steve was like this. Steve often took forever to do things. He was very exasperating to work with, but you know, it worked with the great stuff he did.

Anyway, it was really amazing how well the piece worked. At one point Robby Robinson and his two other people came up and had to adjust my transmitter. At this point I sat down and when I sat down they realized it really wasn't working very well, so they went out and adjusted it, but then the sounds were so disturbing to me when I was sitting there. I could hardly stand it, particularly my lung sound, which sounded like a siren, so I had to try to control my breath. And the brainwaves were like thunder, undulating, a little louder, but they weren't too bad. Then my eye movement was like this. Every time I'd move my eyes, it'd go "zzzit, zzzit." So finally I had to sit up here. Well, half the time I sat with my eyes closed so I didn't have to move my eyes and hear the sound, but I couldn't do much with my lungs, I had the sound come out. And my muscle sounds were like squeaks because I think they had pickups on my arms for my muscle sounds, so if I moved my arm at all or moved my hand at all, the muscles would move a little bit and it would be like a squeak.

Q: It was an earlier version of what was used later called motion capture [technology]. Merce Cunningham did a piece much later, maybe in the late 1990s called motion capture [*Hand-Drawn Spaces*, 1998] where the dancers had sensors that could record all the movement and make images. What you were doing was very interesting because you were trying to capture the inner movement of the body.

Hay: Mm-hm, well the sounds. The sounds that would emanate from the inside of my body. That piece worked quite well. That was probably, of all the pieces I did, I think one of the most— except the one I did in California, *Top Soil* [1966], I liked that piece a lot.

Q: I've seen photos of *Top Soil*, but I don't know if there is any recording.



Alex Hay, *Top Soil*, NOW Festival, National Area roller-skating rink, Washington, D.C., 1966. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Peter Moore © Barbara Moore

Hay: I don't think there is anything. We were very poor about notating what we were doing. We didn't do it very well. I didn't do it hardly at all, because none of the material we used—like at Judson, when performances started, the main performance simply came out of what we put on our little mailer, it was a performance at Judson. So that's how the whole title of performances came. I did all the bills and our various responsibilities in those performances and I volunteered to do all the very simple, little simple mailers we sent out to, what, maybe five hundred people I would guess. We had them printed up, funny little cards and things like that. The first one I did was an image of the arch at Washington Square. I had an image of that and it was about 12 by 8 inches, something like that, and it was just a print out of that, but on it, I had like roaches crawling around on it. That was one of the things. I don't know how many performances we did at Judson, but it seemed we were there every week. We didn't do a performance every week. We did a lot of performances, maybe six or seven during the year. We didn't save any of that material. I don't think anyone did save any of that material. I don't even know if we had any of the information we handed out at the performances. We just moved the pews and did the stuff.

Q: You were also painting?

Hay: Yes.

Q: While you were doing the performances?

Hay: Yes. I didn't stop doing painting. I forget when I had my first show at Kornblee [Gallery, New York]. '67 or something like that. I have no idea.

Q: I wrote it down. I think it was '67, one in '67 and then in '69, with Kornblee—at Kornblee Gallery when it was still on Seventy-ninth, on East Seventy-ninth, is that possible? [58 East Seventy-ninth Street]

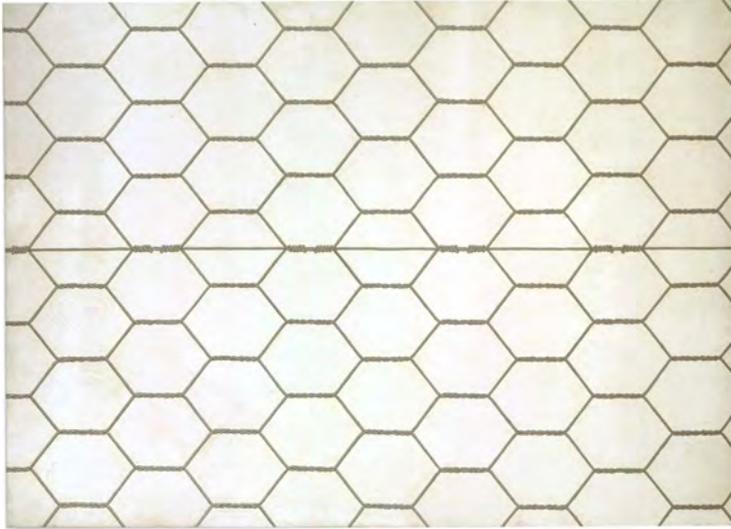
Hay: Yes.

Q: And you did a solo? Was it was a solo exhibit or a group exhibit?

Hay: Where, at Kornblee?

Q: Yes.

Hay: No, they were all solo exhibitions. All the ones at Kornblee. Castelli had a show very early on, when I was still down on Tompkins Square on the Lower East Side, when Rauschenberg and I first became friends, he [Castelli]—I think he bought a painting of mine and then he put on a show of some of his artists and younger artists that they would invite to show at the same time. The only thing of note in that was the *Chicken Wire* [1963] painting, which was one of my favorite paintings, really, because after that I started doing the two dimensional stuff, objects, two dimensional objects, paper things.



Alex Hay
Chicken Wire, 1963
Krylon spray acrylic and stencil on linen
44 x 60 1/2 inches (111.8 x 153.7 cm)
Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

Q: For *Chicken Wire* you were using the same technique that you are using now for your latest painting?

Hay: Yes. It was all stenciled, except I didn't have a compressor. I used Krylons—enameled Krylon [spray paint] for that. I didn't get a compressor until I moved to Howard Street, which was fairly soon thereafter. I forget exactly when. Actually, I—when we came back from the tour, Deborah stayed in Japan because she wanted to stay and travel around and I came back, and then I found the loft down on Howard Street. Moved to a loft off Tompkins Square.

Q: Was Deborah traveling by herself?

Hay: Yes, yes, we were quite independent. Actually, when Deborah and I split up, in 1968 I think it was, at the time I became friends with Kosuth and we did our thing, Deborah still had a close association with Rauschenberg. So when Rauschenberg would need a companion to go

someplace since I wasn't there, and Deborah was, and they were real close too, they would do things together. And that's when Deborah and I sort of split apart—grew apart. But it was very amicable. There was nothing bad about it or anything like that.

There was never any split between Rauschenberg and I, he just started doing what he wanted to do and I started doing what I wanted to do. I mean, the whole performance thing was over by that time, and we weren't doing anything, and I was on the verge of wanting to get out of New York. I think that's when I started my first show at Kornblee. I think Rauschenberg also had an opening at that time, and he brought the Grinsteins [Elyse and Stanley] over to my opening, and the Grinsteins invited me to come out to visit them in California in Los Angeles.

So that summer I went out to California and spent the whole summer there with the Grinsteins, and then had a great relationship with the Grinsteins. I used to go out there every summer and spend time with them and their daughters. I think Nancy was like nine years old and Ayn was fifteen or something like that and Ellen was in between the two of them. And so I would come out there and just spend the summer at the Grinsteins'. We had a great time together and I did a few workshops and did some pieces out there and did a lot of artwork out there. Did a lot of stuff. I did the *Ground Drawings* and *Sun Prints* and the *Collection Bags* [all 1968]. I did all of that when I would visit out there, so it was a very productive period for me. It was great. It was really interesting how ideas are sort of in the air, because I remember the pieces that I did—the *Sun Prints* and the *s* and the *Collections Bags*—I thought of as process pieces. They were just like things that would occur without a natural process. And it was very interesting because—I'm in a mental block now—but there was another friend of mine, an artist in New York who worked

for Rauschenberg—worked at Rauschenberg’s—an artist who was working when I was there.

What’s her name? Mel Bochner’s friend. Who was that woman? [Note: Dorothea Rockburne]



Installation view, *Alex Hay: Circumstance / Art*, Peter Freeman, Inc., New York, 2016. Works shown are Hay’s *Collection Bags* (1969–70). Photo: Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.



Installation view, *Alex Hay: Circumstance / Art*, Peter Freeman, Inc., New York, 2016. Works shown are Hay’s *Sun Prints* (1968). Photo: Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

Q: I don’t remember.

Hay: Anyway, she was doing the same thing but doing it in a different medium, doing the process. I did a piece out there, a very interesting piece, I call it an accumulation piece. The best description is, we used to go down toward San Diego—not to San Diego, but almost to San Diego—we had some friends who lived down there and there was this artist who had this giant—the guy was 7 feet tall, a German artist—he had a huge sort of warehouse structure where he would give these parties. We would all go down to the parties and we’d also go down to the beach, but the beach was about a hundred-foot drop down with paths going down to it. So I did a piece called *Beach Description* [1968] where I would walk up from the beach to the top, and then I would describe it. Then I would do the same thing over again and I would make it more dense, accumulate more information. I think I did three trips.

Then I did the performance piece where I just sat, because I was doing a lot of verbal stuff then, in terms of performance. I did a breakfast piece, which was just about me doing breakfast and basically it was slides of my eating breakfast and then just alphabetical positions, A to B, where I would take food from plate to my mouth and things like that. That was a talking piece. And then a piece I called *Ayn Grinstein*, because Ayn had these four friends who were always around, so I did a relationship piece, structure, where I just sat on stage and said, “Ayn knows so-and-so of the other girls, members of their families—” and then, “That girl knows such a member of the other three members—” I just sat down and read this saying in front of an audience. It totally infuriated people.

Q: And you were the solo performer?

Hay: I was solo. Most of my pieces were solos, and when I did group pieces it was always with Deborah and Steve and Bob, they were always in them. Likewise, I was in his pieces. The only pieces I really remember of Bob's, two of them, were *Map Room* [1965]—Steve and I were walking around and we had our feet in tires, but we were having to walk in tires but roll the tires as we walked and we had to walk around on bed springs. Do you remember that? I don't know whether there's any images of that or not, but that was an amazing piece. And then, the piece he did at Stage 73. We were there and the whole place was dark. And then suddenly you would see a light and then the light would start moving around and then another light would appear and it would start moving around and then suddenly there were like fifteen or twenty lights moving all around and going everywhere. You couldn't figure out what was going on and then the audience started giggling. And then the lights come on and Bob had taken these little flashlights that had straps to them that you put to your head and he'd strapped them on turtles that he had gone to a pet store and rented, thirty turtles or something like that, and they were wandering around all over the place and finally they'd started wandering into the audience and the audience realized what it was. But it was a beautiful piece. Those are the only two pieces I remember of Bob's.

[Note: Hay describes *Spring Training* (1965). Rauschenberg's performance at Stage 73 was *Shot Put* (1964), where he danced in the darkness with a flashlight attached to his right foot, drawing with light in space.]



Alex Hay and Steve Paxton in Rauschenberg's *Map Room II*, Expanded Cinema Festival, Film-Makers' Cinemateque, Forty-first Street Theater, New York, December 1965. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Peter Moore © Barbara Moore



Lucinda Childs and Rauschenberg with turtles in Rauschenberg's *Spring Training* performed at ONCE Again Festival, Maynard Street Parking Structure, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, September 18, 1965. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Peter Moore © Barbara Moore/Licensed by VAGA, New York

Q: What about [Rauschenberg's] *Linoleum* [1966]? Speaking of *Chicken Wire*, do you remember *Linoleum*?

Hay: Well you have to—

Q: *Linoleum*, Steve Paxton, and sort of a tunnel made out of chicken wire—

Hay: Oh, okay. Chicken wire, right.

Q: Eating chicken and—

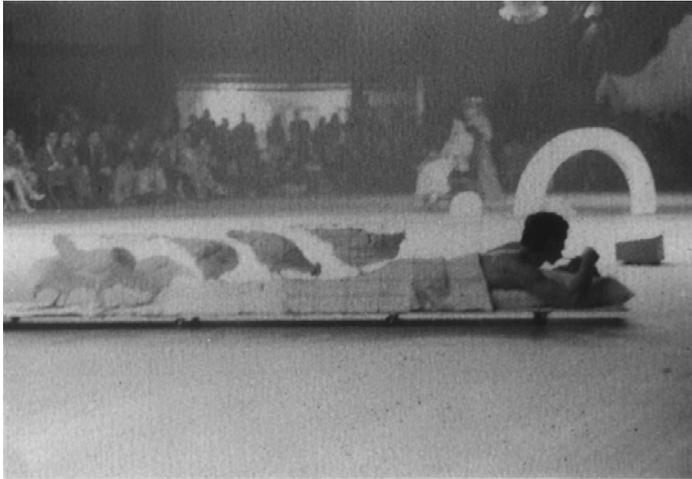
Hay: Was that the one where I did the thing in the tires, or was that *Map Room* [performance with tires]?

Q: I'm not sure.

Hay: Yes, I remember that one, and Deborah put out spaghetti. [*Linoleum*]

Q: Yes.

Hay: A line of spaghetti and I ran around and I would jump over Steve's cage. He was in this cage with chickens in it, eating chicken. Right. That was a beautiful piece.



Steve Paxton in Rauschenberg's *Linoleum*, NOW Festival, National Area roller-skating rink, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1966. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Steve Schapiro

Q: Another beautiful piece that there are little video excerpts of is *Pelican* [1963].

Hay: Oh, *Pelican*, yes. I did *Pelican* with Bob—the second performance—skating with Bob and that I remember—this was when he was on Broadway and he asked me if I would do the skating. Well, as a kid, when I was young in Florida, I used to love to go skate at a big skating rink we had in downtown Tampa. I hadn't skated in years and years and years, but when you skate that much when you're young, you don't forget it, and I guess Bob was the same way. He probably skated as a kid, too. Anyway, he bought two pairs of skates and we first started in the loft, we skated around and did it, but it was sort of a scary piece to do because we had these big cargo chutes that were extended on steel rods and we had backpacks. Well, it was okay because there was a lot of air resistance, that wasn't the problem. The problem was when we had to come together and circle around Carolyn Brown in the center of the thing and not engage these two parachutes that were about 8 feet wide, extended. But we managed quite well. No mishaps at all. We didn't collide or fall down or anything like that. I guess that was good.



Rauschenberg, Carolyn Brown, and Alex Hay performing Rauschenberg's *Pelican* (1963), First New York Theater Rally, former CBS studio, Broadway and Eighty-first Street, New York, May 1965. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Elisabeth Novick

Q: Do we want to take a break?

Hay: Sure, let's—

[Interruption]

Q: Okay, so we are continuing in the afternoon. We are in the beautiful, cozy studio of Alex Hay. Where did we leave this morning? We were talking about you considering leaving New York.

Hay: Well as I said, I looked at all of my friends, artists, and I realized that they were getting into very repetitive modes and I didn't want to do that and the only alternative was to quit all together or just take a long break. And so, I just told Jill [Kornblee], my dealer, that I just wanted to leave New York. I didn't want to do shows. I had been doing shows one a year, and the way I worked, which was very time intensive, it was just such an effort to do the number of works I would need

to do to have a show every year. So, I'd had three shows, and I said, "Well, it's time that I just need to go and do something else."

That's when I bought my truck and decided I was just going to drive around and I didn't know what I was going to do, but I just wanted to get out. So, I just started traveling around, and at the time I was also going to California a lot and visiting the Grinsteins so I would do that at certain times of the year and then go back to New York. I didn't want to totally break with New York, and that period is when I would go back and spend summers with Hannah [Alderfer] and Mary Beth [Nelson] and Joseph Kosuth—well, he was away. He would go to Italy. He had a place in Italy then. So he would go to Italy, so I would go back there and spend the summers there and do various projects.

Then, I wasn't doing any kind of art projects, I was just doing work for other people, be what it may. I got together a mobile—a dolly that I could put a mortar panel on to take all my tools wherever I wanted to go, and I always worked down in SoHo, and so I just went around doing stuff for people. I would do plumbing, I would do concrete work. I would do all kinds of stuff. Then after I'd done a certain amount of work, I would leave New York and travel around, and I came here.

Finally, I decided that I would take on this old hotel as a project. That's when I started working seriously doing all kinds of things. I did everything around the hotel. I put a roof on the building and I would do all kinds of very serious electrical work or very serious plumbing work, because part of the thing about my work is that instead of concentrating on an area and just perfecting

that, I wanted to be able to do anything I wanted to do. And so it's not so much learning skills as it is developing a frame of mind, a way of approaching things to figure out how things should be done and doing them. So that's basically what I had been doing all along with my work, but not to the extent that I did when I left here and came to the Philadelphia—to Bisbee [Arizona] and the Philadelphia Hotel [Bisbee].



Philadelphia Hotel, Bisbee, Arizona, 2008.
Photo: Ross Griff via Flickr/ Licensed
under Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0

I did all kinds of projects, but as I worked I would save little parts of what I was doing; a little piece of wood or whatever. I didn't know why I was saving them, but I was saving them and I had a whole box full of it. So, when I decided that I wanted to do art again, I had all this material, which related to the work that I'd been doing previously on the hotel. So that sort of fit in—sort of like a new category of doing things. Because when I first went to New York I established two conditions and one was that I wanted to do things that were very personal and that I didn't want to be influenced by other people's art. So that's what I did. I did things that were unrelated to art, but that appealed to me.

I liked to make paper airplanes and it just so happened at the time there was a contest on of making paper airplanes, so I started making paper airplanes, all kinds of paper airplanes, and ones that I thought could fly better than ever. I actually did a sculpture of a paper airplane, an eight-foot tall piece, just of paper, legal sized paper, which I painted and then folded into the shape of a paper airplane, and then reinforced it with fiberglass. That's one of the things that I did. Breakfast is my favorite food or meal during the day. I told you I did a performance piece of that once, of *Breakfast* [1969]—and so I made a six-foot fiberglass plate of a certain kind of dinner plate that is ubiquitous. It's everywhere; this white porcelain plate that has a certain design on it. So I made a plate—I had to make like a slice of pie, which was one-eighth of the area of a paper plate, of a dinner plate, and I joined them all together to make a large plate, and I made a cut-out of shaped canvas—of formed canvas of a fried egg and then some silverware to go with it. That was one of the pieces that I did.



Alex Hay
Paper Airplane, 1968
Fiberglass, epoxy, spray lacquer and stencil on paper
91 3/4 x 39 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches (233 x 100.3 x 24.1 cm)
Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

Anyway, when I came back, when I was here, then I had all this material that I could work from, so I just started doing the paintings [that depict the materials from his construction projects] for the second show I had. The first show I had at Peter Freeman [New York] was of older works [2002–03] and then the second show I had was of the new work [2007], which took me about— at that time, as I looked at the records of it, I did a painting a year, which suited me fine. But anyway, Peter Freeman was very supportive and he let me do my own pace. So I used all this material I had of little pieces of wood. I did a series of slide projections, all pieces of wood, maybe about 4 or 5 feet.

And the next show [Peter Freeman, 2012] I did basically a continuation of that, but also moving in another direction that was suggested by that work, or maybe some of the techniques that I was using in that work, particularly the stencils. The first stencil that I did of a piece was always the most interesting. For some reason, because it had all of the fine detail in it, the shapes and things, it came out in the projection of the slide, and the stencil that I drew, I would cover canvas with masking tape and that was my stencil material, and then project an image on it and draw that out, and then cut out that pattern and then take off the areas that were going to be sprayed. Usually I did a base coat on it, and so that first stencil was that base coat, which was usually a light—it went from light to dark. But those shapes that were on that canvas because it was totally unexpected, they came out—some of them were extremely, strangely organic and kind of like figures—animal figures or things like that.

So I used those to do a secondary thing, which was—well, I would draw a graph on that first completed stencil with that material still on it, and then I would do like ten squares across, ten

squares down, and I would take a piece of water color paper that was smaller than that, but a very large piece of water color paper, then I would do the same graph portion on that—ten across and ten down—and then transfer those little pieces of images that were on there, which was what was blocking the first stencil spraying, to that paper and then go over that with colored pencil and usually it was dark. And then I took those—when I would peel those little organic almost beautiful shapes off, I would save them. Then I took slides of those and did large drawings of those. Well, I have only done one but I'm going to do a series of those. I don't know what you'd call them, but basically what it is like—if you look at it circumstantially, you would have something that would suggest or determine a condition that would exist, but basically the shape determined what I did in my next piece. That's sort of like a circumstantial development of the work itself, which now I'm very much into and maybe just doing the colored pencil over the shapes suggested another thing, which was—turned out to be face prints, but using the same technique in terms of—I would do a drawing of a face print, which was on rice paper with gum arabic using the material and press the paper against my face, and then come up with an image—a strange looking image—and then I would do a drawing of that and then I would transfer that to a same sized paper with a frisket—stencil frisket on it and then cut that out and then go over that with pencil. So that was sort of a follow-through of the work I was doing on the first image, using a reverse stencil. So, that's where I'm at now really.



Alex Hay
Proto Zero 10, 2010
Spray acrylic and stencil on linen
51 1/4 x 48 1/4 inches (130.2 x 122.6 cm)
Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

Q: So when you left New York, were you still able to be in contact with the old group? With Rauschenberg, with Steve Paxton?

Hay: No. The only person I stayed in contact with was Deborah. Paxton I would occasionally see, but I never communicated with Rauschenberg again, mainly because our lives had taken such different paths at that point that I hardly ever saw him. Sometimes I would see him on the street or something like that, but it was sort of like his life was going in such a different direction, and mine was—I was still extremely insistent upon doing life in a slow, contemplative way. I didn't want to get involved in that frenetic thing that had to do with the general art scene in New York.

I taught visual arts for a couple of years and some conceptual classes that didn't work out at all for the school because they'd hired a number of teachers to do that, but it was just too destructive to the whole thing of the school, but Hannah and Mary Beth, who I'd met during that period—

and Joseph was very close friends with them—I stayed in touch with and still communicate with, and they come out here usually like, once a year they'll come out and visit. Those are the only people that I stayed in contact with, plus Jene and Kitty Highstein were two people that when I'd go back to New York when I had no place to go stay in, I would stay with them. And then they moved to upstate New York, so Kitty and Jene and Hannah and Mary Beth were the only people really that I stayed in contact with in New York.

Q: But you were mentioning that you went to visit Bob Rauschenberg at Captiva.

Hay: That was in the earlier days.

Q: The earlier days. When was that?

Hay: It had to be like in the seventies maybe—yes, it had to be in the early seventies. I left New York for the first time in '72 when I drove out—went out to California. Bought my truck and went to California—bought the truck there. It was during that period, because I remember once I drove down—so it was probably in the mid- to late seventies was the last time I saw Rauschenberg, visiting Captiva. Long before he had a stroke or anything like that.

Q: What memory do you have of that visit?

Hay: I remember that down the street from his place there was an old orchard of Key limes. One of the early cosmetic women—I forget who it was, but one of the very early people, she used

lime juice in her cosmetics and this was an old thing. I remember we used to go down to that orchard. It was wild. No one was there. It was just a lot of trees that had been abandoned and there were a few that still survived, so we would get Key limes and go back and make Key lime pies. I was really into making Key lime pies. And his boat-house which we would go over and look at—well, he didn't own it. It was vacant, so we would go and look at that. But I remember outside of his house there was a wood of—a pile of limbs and there was an indigo snake that used to—do you know what an indigo snake looks like?

Q: No.

Hay: They're the most beautiful snakes. They're non-poisonous. They look black, but in the sun they have a—like a hummingbird, the iridescence of them will be a beautiful indigo. If the sun hit them there would be an indigo color. Beautiful thing. And we used to go out—I used to go out and sit by that wood pile and wait for that snake to come out and lay on top of the wood pile and it was a big snake. It was about 7 feet long. A beautiful, big snake, and its body was about 4 inches in diameter. That was very interesting.

Plus you know it was so sandy around there. Even the island, if you go inland, it was still that white beach sand. Of course there would be a lot of trees and stuff, there were little coconut palms, various types of trees that would grow on that island. Captiva Island was a very famous island, because that and another island were two islands that, instead of following the contour of the beach, they went out vertically from the beach so that the shells didn't get broken and washed and broken up. So people would come there to collect sea shells. It was a beautiful area. Bob was

always very open to the local people, so he had these people who lived there—because people did live on the island before it got really developed. It was when the development period of Florida after—I guess it was during the twenties where everyone was sort of coming to Florida and trying to make these big developments. And when the Depression happened, everything fell apart. And Captiva was one of those places where it had a certain sort of ambience of the past—old archaic situation. And so there were a lot of local people who could still afford to live there because there was no development and the prices were very low and no one would really live out on an island. So there were a lot of local people and Bob had this one woman who he made friends with who would come and cook for him and stuff like that. She was wonderful. And then I went down one time after that because one of my brothers lived in Tampa when he was still alive, and his family, and I would go down. And the house I was born in was like right between Tampa and Captiva, and Captiva is near Sarasota. So I used to stop by and look at the house I was born in. It was still there and it was amazing. And I remember as a kid there was the house and then right next to it was a cow pasture where we had a cow, a milk cow, and it was completely open. Then when I started going back down there, that whole pasture had been filled with oak trees, big oak trees, so it had been years. 1930 to '36 was when that pasture was there, but it was gone. Then I went in and talked to the people that were working on the house and said I was born in this house. So they let me walk through. It was much smaller than I remembered.

Q: That's always the case.

Hay: Yes. It was a beautiful time—beautiful area.

Q: That was not the last time that you saw Bob Rauschenberg?

Hay: No, no. After that I would see him when I would come back to New York. But not so much because when I started going to Max's Kansas City and then working in my studio at night, I would go down to Max's because it was much involved in art. Deborah and Bob sort of formed a liaison where she would go with him to all of his events and stuff, minus me. Usually it was she and I, because we would do lots of things together when we were in the performance period and when we were involved with one another.

I remember one time we went to a Japanese restaurant and it was Bob's birthday, and I guess they knew about it or he told them or something like that. It was so funny because, you go into these rooms and you all sit on the floor. So there was this big table there and a party of maybe eight people were there around the table. And Deborah and Steve and me and Bob and whoever else was there, and it was really sad in a way because they brought him in a birthday cake. I wouldn't tell this story, but he's gone so I can tell it.

It was in the shape of a log and it was a chocolate cake and it was filled with ice cream, and I don't know why Bob did this. They sat the cake down on the table and [laughs] Bob did a karate chop on it—right in the middle of it. And as he hit the cake the ice cream shot out on both ends and these poor Japanese people—they're so formal you know—it was so sad. But anyway, it was so funny too. We had been drinking a lot of sake and that was the reason why, but it just—and they were horrified. That's one of the things that happened.

We used to take trips a lot. That trip across Canada, which was quite memorable. We did some performances. One time we were going to Washington [D.C.] to, I think it was, the NOW Festival that Alice Denney arranged. And we drove down, Deborah, Steve, Bob and I, and we stopped at Deborah's cousin's house, who lived somewhere in between. So we stopped there and spent the night. And how we slept that night is we took all the cushions from all the chairs and laid them out in the area and then put a sheet over it. And so we all were laying under this sheet. It was sort of like, I don't know, me and Deborah and Bob and Steve. Steve and I were on the outside and Bob and Deborah were on the inside, and they got into a laughing fit, so they wouldn't—they couldn't stop laughing. You know how it happens; someone would start and—we were very tired from our trip, from our driving trip, and so they started laughing. Bob and Deborah were sort of like—they were like the more open and comical—

Q: Outgoing, yes.

Hay: Yes, and Steve and I were very serious people—very serious. They were sitting there and we kept making them shut up because we were tired and wanted to go to sleep, but this really exacerbated the whole situation, and they couldn't stop laughing. They were just hysterical laughing. So finally we moved Bob to one side and Deborah to the outside, and Steve and I, then we told them they had to shut up, but they couldn't shut up. They would laugh and they would vibrate the things [laughs], so this went on for half the night. Anyway, that was one of our trips.

I don't remember what I did there, but I remember we did *Pelican*. I don't remember many of the pieces that we did on those trips. We didn't do too many trips. We were going to establish a

whole company and Steve was trying to get us venues in Europe—to go to Europe, but it never worked out. We were never able to do that, so our trips were like— We went to Goddard [College, Plainfield, Vermont] once and did some performances there. And Ann Arbor. And then we went to Washington. I think it was those three times we took trips. Of course California. We went to California once and did some performances, and that's where I did *Top Soil*. That was a very interesting time. I don't know if Lucinda was there. Who else was there? Of course Deborah and Steve and Bob. I don't remember what they did, but what's-her-name—she did a piece on a skateboard on the platforms outside of the loading docks for the museum. That was—

Q: Let's see. Someone that lived there? Simone Forti, Trisha Brown—

Hay: Trisha. It was Trisha. That was one of the really good trips. A really good trip. I forget who the director of the museum [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] was, but the director of the museum went to Connecticut I guess—a museum in Connecticut. [Richard F.] Brown was his name. Anyway, that was one of the really memorable trips we took. I don't remember. We used to—Joseph and Christine Koslov and I used to go out and visit the Grinsteins together and do a couple of weeks out there.

Q: So you were mentioning earlier that you felt this need to leave New York, you did not want to be influenced by others, but were you influenced by others indirectly? Do you remember seeing some work in New York and being struck by something that you really liked when you first came to the city?

Hay: I don't think so. I don't think so, because in that New York period, which lasted, I don't know— But it takes awhile to get started in New York. Because I went to New York in 1959, I think, and it wasn't until the mid-sixties that I really got started— I met Deborah when I was teaching at Police Athletic League [1960] where they had these after-hours programs for school kids. That's where I met Deborah.

But no, I don't think I wanted my influences to be anywhere but art. And it wasn't that I had any need to. I liked what was going on. In that way yes, I was influenced in that sense. But as far as imagery or technique or anything like that, I don't think so. The first paintings I did, the first painting I did in New York was a painting of a shaped canvas as a toaster, and that was related to breakfast, right? The second painting I did was the light bulb painting, and that's because I just loved those old porcelain fixtures with a single light bulb in it.



Alex Hay
Light Bulb, 1964
Spray acrylic and stencil on linen, in eight
parts linked by two painted linen bands
95 1/2 x 40 inches (242.6 x 101.6 cm) overall
Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.



Alex Hay
Toaster, 1961
Krylon spray acrylic and stencil on linen in two parts
60 x 53 inches (152.4 x 134.6 cm)

And then the third painting I did—well, I did a trip. Deborah and I had this friend who had been a graduate student and then taught for Florida State University when I was a student there, and became a graduate student. And then when I left New York, he had left New York and got a job teaching at New Paltz [State University of New York]. And I used to go up and visit him all the time—Deborah and I. And, at that time, you could. It's such a beautiful trip driving up by the Hudson. I used to take the trip to go up by the Hudson, the Palisades, go throughout the Palisades Parkway to a certain area and then you'd take a route that goes almost by the Hudson, follows the Hudson up. A beautiful way and I just loved that. So the third painting I did in New York

was a shaped canvas that was just the highway and that's sort of like the influence I'm talking about.



Alex Hay
Road, 1961
Krylon spray acrylic and stencil on
linen, in three panels
57 x 67 5/8 inches (144.8 x 171.8 cm)
Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

And then the fourth painting I did was the *Chicken Wire* painting and at that time I wanted to—I thought, well how can you paint objects and not have the illusion of shape or form. Well, the only way I could do that was to do paintings of flat objects and that's the reason I got into paper painting. I chose paper that I really love. I love legal size paper. The yellow legal pads. There was just something about them. They were very attractive to me. And they corresponded.

So I did those and there are a few things that had— One painting I did which Peter [Freeman] owns now, I was painting in spray lacquer. There was a company called Balin Brothers in New York, which had fine, fine paint products. They did all kinds of things, but they had a spray lacquer that had beautiful pigmentation, so that's what I used. I did all those early paintings with spray lacquer and I just loved it. That store was on Christopher Street, right around the corner

from Eighth Street. What is it? Gramercy there. And I did a painting of just the cash register slip from that and Peter has that. That's one of my favorite paintings, that and the *Chicken Wire* were—a few other things. But that's what—maybe if I had stayed in New York longer and developed what I wanted to do with painting in New York. I never regret having left New York because it introduced me to a focus on doing things in a different sort of way. There had to be something innovative about the way I did it. The materials I used or the positioning things I had to do, to do whatever I wanted to do. That developed when I came out here and started working out here.

It's not that I think there's something bad about being influenced by art. I just made that determination about myself in order to— It's very grounding. It keeps you really grounded to be able to not be able to be influenced. Because influences can be very distracting, plus I got involved in performance very early on and so that was quite a—almost a liberating way. And this whole thing about letting circumstances take me where I wanted to go, but in a very serious way. I was never flippant about it. It wasn't just that everything I saw as a result of what I was doing took me there. I was very sort of selective about what I did. But in a way, it frees you. In a certain sense, if you really look at the work, you can say that I did it and see certain things, particularly if I'm doing stencil work because I've always insisted on working in that way, but there's no problem with being something entirely different, and still using that attitude about— okay, you want to do this, so you have to really figure out how you want to do it. If you can develop that—and when I develop that, well then I can do almost anything. Well, that's not completely true. But anything in terms of my aesthetic or whatever I wanted to do, or whatever appealed to me, I could do it. And it's very liberating. It's very liberating and I think that's

basically the thing that allowed me to do what I wanted to do, and it's very liberating to have that attitude. Well, it was for me. Other people can do what they want to do and that's fine. I have no objection. Generally people spend their lifetime developing that particular aesthetic they have about something, a painter, [Vincent] van Gogh or whatever, those great painters of the French period and whatever. There's no reason why they should do anything, but I just didn't want to do that. I didn't want to be a stylistic painter. I don't know why. I think probably because—like all of the artists I knew—Rauschenberg—knew well, and I don't know about the dancers. Deborah, I think she's pretty grounded. But the two artists that I really knew well, Rauschenberg and Kosuth, because I spent a lot of time with him and developed a very close relationship, and I still—Joseph and I are still close friends—there was something very strange about them.

We have a series on PBS now, it's a brain series that Charlie Rose does—it's sort of silly off-the-wall stuff, but there was this one person on and she was talking about artists. And what she was saying was that she suspected that all artists had a kind of abnormality. And this is basically—I must admit that both Bob—Bob was very personable. He functioned very well in the world, but he was— He had that fear of heights. He couldn't walk over those subway grates, walking up the street. Not only couldn't he, he insisted on everyone walking with him not walk on them. There was that. And Joseph and I used to go to Max's Kansas City several times a week. We would do our work in our studios and then in the evening, ten o'clock, we would go down to Max's. And Joseph suffered from narcolepsy. He was very entertaining. We'd be sitting at the table and Joseph would go to sleep and it was sort of his whole— It was very entertaining and I would just laugh a lot at Joseph.

I must admit that I— Other people who know me very well, like Carmen [Megeath] for instance, she would describe it as something that's annoying about my behavior, but I think that I also—I don't know what it is; I cannot remember left from right. This could be really problematic when you're doing performances and stuff like that. And also, I was involved with a Gurdjieff movement in Tucson, where we go up and we do these extremely complicated movements, which involve putting together unrelated movements of the hands, the feet, and the head. So things are moving in different ways to different tempos, but often it's related to left and right. But I find that we'd do a movement in one of these movement series we're doing—we call them movements, that was developed by Gurdjieff—and I would finally be able to do it during that session. But the next week when I tried to do it I couldn't remember whether I was to move to the left or the right, because a lot of them have movements to the left and right. So I have that. And that's—what's that? There's a term. Is that dyslexic? I think I'm minimally dyslexic. Something like that. It's not a serious problem.

As a child, when people would come to visit our house, I would hide. I would hide under the house. The house we lived in— All the houses in Florida were built up off the ground because of air circulation and water. You didn't want it to be right on the ground because the water table is right below the surface of the ground. I would hide underneath the house when company would come. So I think that's very strange. I overcame that later on in life, but as a child I didn't.

Still, one-on-one, I'm fine. But when it comes to crowds of people, I'm like— I remember at parties we'd go to, loft parties and stuff, I would usually just sit over by myself. Enjoy it—and I loved dancing. I loved to dance but in terms of socializing, I think it was very difficult. So I think

that's a problem. I think what Carmen was getting at—well, I think—art requires a strangeness. To be an artist I think you have to be somewhat strange—a strange type of person. I think if you examine artists, and this woman who was talking had done her research on it, she was talking about all artists. Artists of a certain level, they're very conceptually involved in what they're doing and it's very serious. They're able to present a very clear vision of what they're doing, realize what they're doing. It's very strange. All of the artists I've known have been like that, even the ones I didn't know real well. As I say, the only two people I really was close to and formed a really close, a very intimate relationship with, were Joseph and Rauschenberg. But I knew a lot of artists, California artists and New York artists, and there's something very strange about artists, I think. They're not like normal people. I don't think they're normal. Not that they're abnormal, but there's something sort of strange about artists, I think. Anyway—

Q: Shall we take a break?

Hay: Shall we take a break? Yes.

[Interruption]

Q: Okay, so today's Tuesday, the 9th of December, in Alex Hay's studio.

Yesterday we were talking about a series of works that you made inspired by the tool that you showed me [*Ground Drawings*]. Can you tell me a little bit more about that and the process?



Alex Hay
Ground Drawing, 1968
Graphite on filter paper
41 x 23 1/2 inches (104.1 x 59.7 cm)
Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.



Alex Hay
Ground Drawing, 1968
Graphite on filter paper
35 3/4 x 39 1/2 inches (90.8 x 100.3 cm)
Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

Hay: Well, as far as the tool goes I can talk about that. I don't know which of the three things that I mentioned—the *Collection Bags* and the *Sun Prints* and the *Ground Drawings*—started first. I could have seen the tool, which is called a protractor head, and it's part of a combination square thing, where you have the regular square and then you have a centering tool for that, which you can draw on a circle, on a round object and find the center of it. And then this one, which allows you to level the protractor head attached to the ruler, and get precise measurements or lines or angles that correspond to 90 degrees. Just the locations of a compass, like 360 degrees, so it's set up like that.

When I traveled, particularly when I went to California, I did a lot of other kinds of work. At that time I was building a certain kind of chair, which was a lean-back chair, which had an extra set of legs on the back so you could lean back in it. I was going to do that so I carried my tools with me, my hand tools, and this was one of them. And, as I was working with it, I realized I had this paper material that I had gotten to make some sun prints. I silkscreened fugitive—yellow fugitive pigment onto the paper. And then just put it out in the sun and let the sun take the color away from it. I did a series of those and I had this paper. So at some point it occurred to me to do this. It's not too connected. It had more associated with what I was interested in, was like natural processes at the time, which is like the *Collection Bags*, which is staking out a certain type of bag that I made in the desert and on the beach, to let material blow into it or people who would put stuff in it and I just called them *Collection Bags*. So it was about a natural process. The idea of—in a certain kind of way, notating the surface of ground. And I went to—there was an area in Los Angeles—in Santa Monica, which was Venice Beach—a very famous beach—but at the end of that there was an area. And they called it Venice Beach because at some time, some developer was going to replicate Venice with canals and stuff. So this was an area that had a bunch of canals, but basically it was like an unused area. No houses were there. It was just a lot of vacant land probably owned by the city. And it was at an area that I went to often that I said, “This is a good place to do this project.” So I took large sheets of chemical filter paper that someone from Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles] had given to me and I would just lay a sheet of paper—probably about 40 by 60 inches—big sheets of paper. They were very thick, they were almost like felt and very pliable. So I would lay that out on a clear area of ground and pour water on it and then conform it to the surface. And then I would put this tool—it had a straight area of about 6 inches and at the top of it, it had a circular area that was—it was all part of one tool—that had a level in

it where I could turn this circle to a point where it was level and then notate the angle that it was at, then I would just draw a straight line using the long six-inch area of the tool—just a straight line and then notate the angle and then just map the whole surface—the irregular surface of the ground, which had a lot of little mounds and little valleys and things in it. Where you had a little mound area, I would almost trace a circle of lines around that. All generated from the center of it. It turned out to be like a big area of very random looking straight lines with the angle notations on it. That was it. That was the process. It was a very, very successful project in terms of this whole thing of natural process. I don't know how that relates to it, but the *Sun Prints* and *Collection Bags* were more appropriate for that. But these *Ground Drawings* were something that I felt were a very successful project.

Because I did all kinds of things in California. Someone from Gemini gave me a 16 millimeter camera, so I did a lot of filming. I think at the Grinsteins, I filmed their driveway. I don't know whatever happened to those films. They were basically part of that natural process concept that I had at the time.

Q: Since it seems that time is a very important element in your work, a way of reflecting the process of your painting, would you tell me a little bit about your relationship with the concept of time?

Hay: Well, time itself, when you start getting older you get more conscious of. When you're young you're basically immortal. At least that's the way I looked at it. I had no consciousness of time or the passage of time, or the end of my life in fact. But for me it was a very productive way

of coming to terms with my life and how it was going and what was happening to it. So aspects of time, my own life, like whatever is happening around me and what is happening in the world in terms of time— Because time corresponds to how our civilization develops, because it's measured in time. So if a certain number of years go by and you're conscious of what's happening around you— I grew up in Florida and when I was a child, where I lived, particularly when I became interested in what was taking me in the direction where I'm at now. Because I always was interested in making things and building things and working, I did a lot of things like working in sand and Florida has a lot of sand so I'd build things in sand. Also that environment as a child, I lived in an area, right on the edge of Tampa, which was at that time, not a very large town—maybe two hundred fifty thousand people, but it was a large city in Florida.

But we lived on the outskirts of it, almost at the edge of town, and if you walked away from town you come across an incredible area of cypress swamps. I would spend a lot of time in cypress swamps wandering around. I had a dog at the time that would go with me and I would just go around and go to these areas within walking distance. Maybe I would travel a couple of miles or something and I would go into these swamps. I became very conscious and appreciative and involved in the natural environment and it was so beautiful in those areas because these little swamps, cypress swamps, were very pristine areas. They were filled with water, but the water looked like tea and if you picked it up, it would stain like tea. But there was no debris in it. It was like you could drink this water. It would taste like the ground and the trees that grew in it because there were many beautiful cypress trees, called bald cypress. And there was lots of plants with animal life in them. We'd always run across ducks, little beautiful wood ducks and things. These swamps had been there for years and years and years. Undisturbed. And so as a

tree would grow old and die, it would fall down so you could walk through these swamps literally on the trunks of trees and it was something I did often. I would come home from school and at least several times a week I would head out to the swamps with my dog and walk in these swamps, just walk around looking at things.

How this relates to time is because time has passed. I graduated from college and I went to New York immediately from college. Got on a plane and went to New York and that was it. I just loved being in New York. And I didn't really go back home and involve myself in that manner. I was an artist in New York and basically a city person at that time, but I still loved this area. But you become very conscious of the changes. And I relate that to time as all these swamps are disappearing and houses and developments come in. Time, if you relate to it in that way—because it's a passage of time—that allows you to see what's happened in the interim. So in a sense, time for me then is related to what's happening to the earth, to the world, to things like that.

When I came to Bisbee and started working—I had left the gallery—I mean, I was still an artist, because how I developed in New York in the interim, as my life passed, all lead me in this direction. It was an attitude about doing things and how to do things and the way that I wanted to do them in a very clean, efficient way. Basically that's how I do art. When I left New York and I did—what am I going to do? I sold the property I had in New York so I wasn't wanting for money. This friend of mine, Peter Young, had bought an old hotel in Bisbee, I located myself there in one of the storefront studios and just took on the hotel as a project. To keep the hotel, which became my home, to keep the hotel from falling down, from leaking water and stuff. So I

did all kinds of projects. The gamut of what's required: electricity, plumbing, a lot of carpentry, working on the roof, doing everything that needed to be done to maintain a big old building. In the process, for some reason I would save little pieces of wood that were in the projects that I was doing. Could be anything, but just little scraps of wood I could find, old wood, if it suited the project. So I ended up with a whole box of little scraps of wood.

So at one point in the late nineties, I decided I wanted to basically finish my art career in terms of gallery work and what you could show in a gallery and the whole art world. I didn't finish my career in New York, basically I interrupted it. Then I started doing things in Bisbee. I set up a studio and I had this wood. I wanted to continue to work so I got the equipment I needed, a small compressor, and used this material I had. When I was doing a painting I always used stencil material and projections of slides of objects; so I took and projected them onto a stencil surface, on canvas and then just cut out the projected areas that I wanted and sprayed the prepared stencil.

But anyway, this wood that I had was basically an instrument of time. Often it was unpainted wood, old pieces of unpainted wood, or wood that had very little paint remaining on it, and they were basically a record of time. So you asked about the titles of some of them. That's what I was referring to—the fact that these objects are not just objects. When you blow a small object up like that, it becomes very interesting because it expands itself and reveals itself more than the little object you're looking at.

So, this is a reference of time that I refer to because now time is—the whole process of time in my own life and in the natural environment around me and whatever I come into contact with

and am affected by, is all mediated by time for me. It's a very healthy way of looking at things, I think, because you can have these morbid associations with time or you can just have a natural association with time and that's basically what it is; just a natural association with time.

I don't right now, but I did read a lot of information that high-end scientists write—they write these books and they're basically books that are written for non-scientists, but they explain very well the things that they're doing. Quantum physics was an area that I was interested in, but also basic theories. There was one person who talked about time and he said, "Time in fact doesn't exist, it's only the relationship between events." But I can't really accept that, I think, because of the passage of our life. Something happens to us. We get older, we lose our capabilities in whatever we can do. Our physicality has to adjust to an old body that's been affected by something. Is it time or what is it? Is it just movement through space that does this? I don't know what it is, but for me, time is something that is there and is not there. You can't see time, as some of the Eastern philosophers say. It's basically an eternal moment. But then a moment is—what is a moment? A moment is simply a precise point between the movement of the past and the future, so it's the present, but the present never stays. The present is just constantly in movement.

Basically, if you look at time in that way, it's totally inexplicable. You can't understand time at all. You just have to live in it. So I don't know what time is. But I know that it exists for me. Something of that nature exists for me, for all of us basically.

Q: So you moved here in a stable—you came to Bisbee and stayed here in the mid-eighties, correct? Did Bob Rauschenberg ever come to visit you?

Hay: No, no. He never did. Our lives had taken such different paths. My life had moved away from the environment, the social environment of art. There is an artist community here, but it's more of a local artist community. It's not like the New York artists' community, which is extremely—it's very cerebral. I was very struck by the difference between the West Coast and the East Coast. The East Coast is very cerebral and concept-oriented, whereas the West Coast is all about surface, all about the object. Object-oriented, tactical-oriented, which is quite valid. It's just one way—it's just the nature of the people and what your environment does on the West Coast, which is very sunny and open and you want to be out all the time and it's about enjoying those aspects of life. Whereas at least my take on New York was, it's a place where you're in your head a lot and you're involved with the intellectual relationships like that. When I moved here, I moved into an entirely different environment and so all the friends that I had—and I wasn't ever a very good communicator verbally. Or I was perfectly willing to do it, if there was a reciprocal nature of it, then it was fine. I was involved in it. But if it required that I do it all the time—

Bob never made any attempt to get in contact with me. I would go back and forth from New York and at that time I did have an infrequent relationship with Bob. I would see him sometimes—sometimes we'd go to see him. When Deborah and I split up and Deborah maintained a relationship with Rauschenberg, I was away a lot of the time, and so I didn't do it, and Bob did not. It was mutual, I think, our drifting apart. I tried to go see Bob at one time, but I was told that he was too incapacitated at the time. I should have just ignored that and gone to see him, because I think we had such a strong, wonderful relationship and we really loved one

another a great deal. And we were best friends for, I don't know, five or six years. We spent all of our time together. Bob had these episodes that he would go to events and things, but basically Deborah, Steve and Bob and I were together for like five or six years almost constantly. So we had a really close relationship and a really deep understanding of one another.

But I can let those things go. I had an interesting life to live. I wasn't finished with things. So then I decided at some point to re-engage with the art world and so I did that. And Peter Freeman called me and said he was having a show of my old work, unbeknownst to me, so that was my entry back into it. Jill Kornblee contacted me to have a show, so I've been very fortunate in that sense. So then I was off again. And I'm still doing it really. And now my whole idea of time is what is a really valuable closure to time? How do you do it? So that's basically what I want to do now. I want to finish my career—I haven't quite finished it yet, but I think the finish of it will be a— From the crescendo of your early days, it goes down into a very faint melody, your life. Winds down to it. It should be very quiet in the end. It should be quiet. So my idea of how I want to wind down this life process that's just about myself, is to let it sort of end with as few traces as possible. I mean, what I've produced—it's not that I think all my art should be disappeared and thrown into the ocean or something, but I just think that my process should end and maybe revert back to some sort of representation in the way that I would do it, in terms of nature or something like that. Wear out the last pair of pants, the last pair of shoes, have my space almost entirely free of material. That's impossible to do, but one could make an attempt at it. So that's basically what I would like to do. Clean up my act and clean up the traces of my life that are messy. Not leave a mess when I'm ready to leave.

Q: Where do you see mess?

Hay: Just, you accumulate a lot of stuff. When I'm trying to clear my studio out of all the stuff that has collected that shouldn't be there. There's a lot of stuff in your life that shouldn't be there because it's not necessary for yourself. The extreme example of that is a hoarder, a person who just hoards. I remember when I was in high school, the street cars were still existent in Tampa and I would ride the street car to the end of the line and then I would walk maybe a quarter of a mile to where I lived on the outskirts of this area I was describing, down to the end of the road, the unpaved dirt roads laid out in a grid—a strange sort of thing to have a city that's not paved yet—but this was the truth about my city.

Anyway, I'd ride to the end of the line. There were two guys who were Eastern European of some nature. They would come—sometimes, not every day, but they'd be on the street there and they would have with them bundles of newspapers and not just a couple. They would have maybe fifteen or twenty bundles of newspapers that weighed probably about 50 pounds apiece because they were big bundles of stacks of newspapers that were several feet high and you know how much a stack of newspapers—

Well, they would have these on the street car and these two guys would unload them from the street car and then they would carry as many as they would carry a block away and then come back and get the rest until they moved that stack and then moved the stack—I don't know where they lived. But I was told that their house was totally filled with bundles of newspaper and they just had passageways in their house. So this is like an extreme example of hoarding, but we all

hoard. Hoarding is simply an accumulation of stuff over what we need, so we have a little left over, so that stays there and this happens again and again and again, so eventually we end up with a lot of stuff we don't need and it's not as extreme as these two guys who carried the newspapers around, but my life is like that. Some people are better at it. I'm not bad at it, but I have a lot of paint cans of empty paint, half full paint cans that I have to throw away now because I'm never going to use them. I have a special area where I keep all the wood because I work in wood a lot because all the projects I use require building jig materials for positioning something or a canvas or some other thing. So I have a lot of scraps of wood that I often find use for so I don't throw them away, but it's another thing that I either have to make something out of or I have to throw them away.

But anyway, that's an example of what I'm saying about cleaning up my life, to have that down to the minimum. Basically you think of your life as requiring a path of some kind, well then you have a less cluttered path to walk around in, for your mind to go around in.

Q: So to wrap up, is there a question that I haven't asked that you would like to answer or anything else that you would like to add?

Hay: Well, this is about closure. Closure is an important thing and that's basically what I've been talking about. Closure is very important. So maybe that's the question that you should finally ask and I think you've already asked it really or you've got the answer for that question, which is closure.

Our interview had a lot of material in it. Started out very small with your first question, I don't remember what that was and then it increased in volume, so you end up with a big volume, so you've got to end that. You've got to bring it back to a small point again. So that's basically like what closure is. How do we end it? It's hard for me to— There's so much in what we talked about that I didn't touch upon, like my relationship with Bob and all the things we did together, and my traveling around, my trips to California. There's so much material in there that we didn't touch upon and I couldn't even remember, but it's—it's there. So it's almost an indication that there's so much material in your life that it's just impossible to deal with it all and to arrive at some sort of—we all want to successfully end in a clean, ethical way, of whatever we do. Particularly if you're conscious of those things and artists basically are really conscious of things. They're trying to really do something that's basically impossible to do and they do it in the best way they can. They're trying to create perfection of some kind. Whatever that means. But to have their efforts and what they wanted to say, to have some value in terms of art.

Art has changed so much in this world and I don't really know where it's going, but it's going someplace. The art of my career and the art of museums and the whole art of artists, who are the generators of all of it, then the people who are associated with it, like the museums and the galleries and the people who respond to art and collect art, is sort of so dependent on a relationship between—particularly in this environment we live in now—it's almost like a corporate world now and so art has sort of extended in a horizontal way and there is another direction for art to go. Like vertically, however that means, what it means to have a vertical expansion of art rather than just a horizontal expansion. And when I say horizontal, I mean the extension of wealth generated by art and what's required to generate that particular development

of art, which I would define as a horizontal development of art. It's natural. I don't think it's avoidable. I think art is in a dilemma just like everything else is in a dilemma in the human experiment on this earth and I think everything reaches a crisis point and I think we're all in a crisis point now. I think the earth is in a crisis point and I think art is part of that, if people recognize it, if artists recognize it. I think some artists do recognize it and some artists don't recognize it. And you get an incredible generation of an accumulation of wealth from art and I don't think that's a healthy thing to do and I've never been interested in it. I think that's one of the reasons why I left New York and the reason I'm back in it now—not for that reason, but just to finish doing what I started out to do. I feel confident that I'll do it the way I want to do it. How other people respond to it is their problem. Is that a good way to end?

Q: Sure. Sure. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]