

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Eric Holt

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Eric Holt conducted by Brent Edwards and Christine Frohnert on November 30, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

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Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Eric Holt

Location: Mount Vernon, New York

Interviewer: Brent Edwards (Q1), Christine Frohnert
(Q2), Lorne Leib (Q3)

Date: November 30, 2015

Q1: I'm Brent Edwards. It's November 30, 2015 and I'm very happy to be here at the Rauschenberg warehouse in Mount Vernon, New York for the Rauschenberg Oral History Project talking with Eric Holt. We'll be joined a little later by Christine Frohnert, but we're going to start. We have the artworks and we'll move through throughout the rest of the day, but what we wanted to do in starting was to just get some basic biographical background information. So if you wouldn't mind, I wanted to start by asking you where and when you were born and some questions about your childhood and upbringing and education.

Holt: I was born in Petaluma, California. My mother was a Japanese occupation bride and my father was a sailor. We were still in the military. We moved back to Guam for a couple of years and then he got out and we returned to where I would grow up eventually, which was southwestern Pennsylvania. A small town called Washington and Canonsburg, very close to Pittsburgh.

Q1: Was your father still in the military? Why did you move to Pennsylvania?

Holt: I think when he got out, that's where he was from.

Q1: He went back home?

Holt: Yes.

Q1: What about in terms of your family? Did you have siblings? Did you have—?

Holt: I have an older brother who was born in Tokyo and my younger brother was born in Guam.

Q1: Now in terms of your education and moving towards the art world, your training in terms of art, can you give us some of that basic information?

Holt: Well, I was educated in public school, just like most people, and my interest was always the arts. From there, I went one year to the University of Pittsburgh. I didn't particularly like the art department, so my girlfriend and I decided to move to Florida where we both attended the University of South Florida [Tampa], which at the time had a program known as Graphicstudio. It was supposed to be a nice, interesting art department. When I got there, I liked it and I stayed there for—

Q1: Growing up had you been attracted to a particular form of art?

Holt: Well, in the little town that I lived in, there was no such thing as the sculptor's apprentice job. There was however, you could make pots at the high school if you wanted to. I was inclined to mess around with my hands. But I had no real formal training in the shop, but at that time you

did get shop and you got home ec[onomics] and things like that. So I did have a little bit of experience messing around with tools and machinery. Now at that point in my life—say from the age five on—my father had died, my mother had left the family and was living in Indiana, and I became a ward of the state, me and my brothers. We were living in a foster home and fortunately we managed to stay with the same family for our tenure in foster home. That family lived in Washington, Pennsylvania.

Q1: Were they involved in art at all? Was that part of the—?

Holt: No.

Q1: No.

Holt: No, they were done with raising kids. My interest was always the arts. Somehow and I'm not going to explain it to you, but that's what my interest is.

Q1: No, I understand. Sometimes one isn't sure where one's passions come from. Were there museums there? Were you exposed to art that way too, earlier?

Holt: I was exposed to museums, but I'm always more fascinated by, for instance, the natural history museum and the things in it. Didn't spend a lot of time at whatever modern museums or thing of that nature that they might have in Pittsburgh. There was nothing in the smaller towns.

Q1: Right, okay. Let's go to Florida and the scenery around Graphicstudio and that environment. Obviously I want to get you towards the initial connection with Bob Rauschenberg. Can you sketch more of the scene of the Graphicstudio and that educational environment?

Holt: Well, Graphicstudio, for the first three of four years, was this mythical enterprise that most people didn't really rub shoulders with. Since I was most people and being a young first or second year student—I knew of its existence and I knew that people were working with big name artists, and they were making this, that, and the other, but I never quite managed to be involved in it. So basically I just decided what I was interested in and that was sculpture. They had a terrific facility and I more or less threw myself into that eighteen hours a day. That's basically how I ended up on the trail and I had a couple of good professors who were encouraging and helpful.

Q1: What medium or media did you work with in the sculpture program? Were they working in clay, were they working in wood, working in metal? What did they?

Holt: They had a complete wood and metal shop. They had a complete ceramics facility. They did everything from cast bronze to any kind of welding, any kind of woodworking. So the facility was extremely well stocked with machinery and people.

Q1: Did you gravitate to one medium or another at that point?

Holt: I took it on myself to learn how to weld. I was kind of fascinated with metal and what you could do with it. Woodworking was a means to an end, mostly. I didn't mind doing it and I still do it today, but for me it was welding and grinding and buffing and finishing, and this and that and the other. Whatever processes were available.

Q1: Did they have a forge?

Holt: Well, actually, they had the facility for a forge, but at the time, no one was doing it. So I never learned to do that type of work. But we did do a significant amount of casting. Aluminum and bronze casting was something that I was exposed to.

Q1: Were there particular teachers in the metal shop that were important influences or that were particularly memorable?

Holt: I had two sculptor teachers that were instrumental in my mind. One was [Ernest] Ernie Cox, he was more or less the head of the sculpture department. The other gentleman's name was Alan Eaker— They were both very supportive and very instrumental in helping me. They both knew Bob. In time that would become important.

Q1: Just chronologically, what age would you have gone to Florida, if you can pinpoint it? If we can give it an age and a year.

Holt: Let's see, I would have been nineteen.

Q1: What year is that?

Holt: '73.

Q1: You were at Graphicstudio how long? How many years?

Holt: Well, I was at the department, the fine arts department. I did three years of undergraduate school. Then I took a year off and worked in a factory and that motivated me to go back to school [laughs]. I went to graduate school at the University of South Florida. It was during that time that I met and actually started working for Bob.

Q1: You went to graduate school in the same—?

Holt: In the same department with the same people.

Q1: The graduate program, would it be an MFA in sculpture? What would it be?

Holt: It was an MFA, yes.

Q1: We've gotten to the moment of the meeting. Can you tell us how you met Rauschenberg for the first time? How did that connection come about?

Holt: Well, my final college roommate was a brilliant photographer. His name was Alex Mirzaroff— Anyhow, Alex was actually working for Bob, doing photography for him. In what capacity, I'm not quite sure. Although Bob would tell me a couple of years later what they were trying to do. He comes to me one day about six months from the end of my tenure at the university and says, "You should call Bob Rauschenberg. Here's his phone number." I thought well that's interesting.

Q1: No project mentioned? No particular—?

Holt: I didn't do anything. In due course, within a week, several professors said the same thing to me. "You should call Bob Rauschenberg, here's his phone number." So I started to think well, maybe I should call Bob Rauschenberg. So in fact, I did. I called and someone answered the phone and I explained myself. They said, "Well, Bob's not here." I said, "Fine, can I leave a message?" "Oh, absolutely." So I left a message. Three or four calls later, after being told that Bob's not here, I heard someone screaming in the background, "Don't hang up the phone!" And it was Bob Rauschenberg. He got on the phone, I explained myself to him, and he wanted me to come down to Captiva [Florida] because he had lost his fabricator. I explained that the only money I had in the world was what I was going to use to pay rent. He said, "Don't worry about it, I'll take care of things for you, just come down here for a weekend or whatever."

So I did what he told me to do. Got on the airplane, flew to Captiva, got a cab, went to The Island Store, turned left, and went straight to the beach, which puts you in the parking lot of the

Mucky Duck, which is a restaurant one block south of where Bob actually lives. He gave me the wrong directions, but I remembered that several people had always talked about Bob. Some of the professors who had been there spent time in his company and had been on the island. They kept talking about the white house on the beach, it's right there on the beach. It's great, it's terrific. So I grab my little suitcase and I'm walking up the beach and I see this white house and I see two guys on the balcony. As I get closer to the balcony, one of them turns around and runs back in the house. I walk up and it's Terry Van Brunt, and I say, "Is this Robert Rauschenberg's home? My name is Eric Holt and I was told to come down here and speak to the man." They invited me in and we had a drink, talked about what I could or couldn't do, and that was the beginning.



Rauschenberg and crew, Beach House, Captiva, Florida, 1980s. Pictured clockwise from bottom left: Bradley Jeffries, Bette (Vitkowsky?), Darryl Pottorf, Robert and Christopher Rauschenberg, Robert Petersen, and Eric Holt. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q1: Wow. Can you put a month and a year on that? I know it's a long time ago, but when that contact first happened?

Holt: I'm going to say it was in maybe September. August, September of '79.

Q1: Had you finished the MFA program?

Holt: No.

Q1: So this was in the middle of—? [Laughs]

Holt: I was six months away from graduating or being able to do anything like get out of Tampa. I figured it was a great boon to be working for Bob because none of the professors would give me a hard time. I spent, from that point forward, most of my weekends driving down to Captiva and working for him, and then driving back to the university for the week.

Q1: So you did continue the program?

Holt: Yes, I continued the program. That was one of the conditions that—I guess I had negotiated that. I don't remember doing it, but it was clear that I was going to finish what I was doing. He was kind enough to buy me a car, a truck, things like that, so that I could actually do these things. When I was done at the university, I moved to Captiva.

Q1: So that would have been that winter, the following winter six months later?

Holt: Yes.

Q1: My understanding is that Tim Pharr was the fabricator that had preceded you.

Holt: Yes.

Q1: Did you have any encounter with him—

Holt: Yes.

Q1: —or had he already gone?

Holt: During my interview weekend, Tim took me around the property and gave me the “little Mr. Carpenter test” and I failed.

Q1: What’s the “little Mr. Carpenter test”? [Laughs]

Holt: Well, we went to the Fish House, which is the small, beautiful home on pilings in the bay. On the bayside we used to call it the Fish House. We were repairing one of the windows, and he pulled a piece of wood out of the window and handed it to me, and said, “I want you to go to the shop and cut a new one and bring it back.” So I did and of course I cut it wrong and he pointed out where I’d cut it wrong. Anyhow, he was straight up about it though. When Bob asked him—and he did it in front of my face, so I can’t say that anyone talked about me behind my back—but

Bob asked Tim, “Do you think he’ll be able to do it?” And Tim said, “Well, I don’t know, Bob.” That was good enough for me. But Bob and I were actually talking about how we’re not going to do woodworking here. Part of the attraction, or the agenda, was to move away from that particular way of doing things.

Q1: You remember that being part of the conversation as soon as you got there, that that was part of the connection?

Holt: Well, it was part of the skill set that I had to offer. So yes, in a sense it was. What can you do? Well I can weld. We can do this and do it a different way. Probably the final project that Tim was involved with is these, and these are hybrids. Tim made the mats, I made the frames, and I assembled them. Then they were shipped to Los Angeles and covered with plastic Plexiglas.

[Note: *Cloister* series, 1980–81]



Eric Holt and Rauschenberg installing *Rush 2 (Cloister)* (1980) in Rauschenberg’s Laika Lane studio, Captiva, Florida, ca. 1980. Work pictured at left: *Rush 1 (Cloister)* (1980). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York



Eric Holt viewing Rauschenberg's *Rush 2 (Cloister)* (1980) in Rauschenberg's Laika Lane studio, Captiva, Florida, ca. 1980. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q1: Did you have a sense initially as to why Rauschenberg wanted to make that transition? What about the medium of wood wasn't working? Why was he thinking I need a fabricator who is versed in metal?

Holt: I didn't—there was no glaring issue that I discerned from talking with Bob about this. He never said to me, "It doesn't look right." It was just, "Let's try something else." That was more of the message that I got, that it was an attempt to move in a different direction and not necessarily because of deficiency in this, that, or the other, but because here's an opportunity, let's just take it.

Q1: Thinking back to before you make the call, do you think that those whispers—so your friend Alex is saying, "You should call Rauschenberg," your professors are saying that—do you think they originated with Rauschenberg? Do you think he was saying to a contact at the school or at

Graphicstudio, look around? Is there anyone who works with metal? Do you think that was the origin of those suggestions?

Holt: Yes, actually I do, partly because of what happened when I left. Whispers were made to look around for someone in the vicinity that might be able to do something. I think that's really what it boiled down. They were just looking for someone with some sort of fabrication skills that they could train, or had the curiosity or the interest, and the talent to take a shot at it. No guarantee of anything, but we can at least try this. Bob was very good about trying things. He really liked that.

Q1: When you come up that first time, walking down the beach with your suitcase, what were your initial impressions of him and of the environment? You come in that first time, are chatting, having a drink, how did he strike you? I know it's maybe hard to go back to that first moment.

Holt: Well, I was thinking about the way Captiva was at that time. It was very different than it is today. This was 1979. To me, it was a cross between Tahiti and Tara, the fictional plantation in *Gone With the Wind*. When I walked up to the Beach House, and I saw Bob kind of run away—because he knew who I was, obviously—my impression was maybe he doesn't really want to talk to me too much. Or maybe he thinks I'm doing something peculiar. He kind of let me have it a bit because he assumed that I was sneaking up on them somehow. I didn't quite have the nerve to tell him that he gave me the wrong directions, so I figured, well, if you want this job, you're just going to laugh, chuckle about it, and then move on. That's basically what happened. We all chuckled and then we talked about why I had actually come down there.

Q1: You said Terry, Bob. Who else was around?

Holt: That was it. Terry and Bob were at the Beach House on that day.

Q1: Who else was on the scene in Captiva when you initially—?

Holt: Tim Pharr was there. As a matter of fact, when they got around to showing me the place, it was Tim in a pickup truck and we drove around the island, drove down the Jungle Road over to the other properties on the bayside and things like that. Tim showed me the shop and everything.

Q1: Was [Robert] Bob Petersen still around at that point?

Holt: Yes, Bob was there. Where he was on that given day, I don't recall.

Q1: I wonder if we should move to the particular artworks or if we should keep going.

Q3: It's up to you.

Q1: What do you think, Christine?

Q2: I think it's a good moment to talk more about—

Q1: Stay here and talk more?

Q2: To talk more about the skill set that you brought into the studio and setting up a metal shop and how this translated into some of the artwork.

Q1: Okay, let's go there then. Can we do that?

Holt: What was the question?

Q1: Well, one question I was going to ask in a related vein, in terms of the negotiation, those first conversations, did he say—was there a job title? Did he say: I'm looking for a fabricator and this is the skill set you're going to bring and I want you to be able to do X, Y, and Z. You're going to work this number of hours and this is going to be the remuneration. Was there any discussion around that?

Holt: No, that was never brought up. Someone may have asked me, "Well what can you make or what can you do?" I probably said something like, "Well I can weld aluminum and I can make this, that, or the other." We never talked about money. We never talked about facilities, so to speak, per se. At some point I would have had to have said, "We need to actually go buy a welder." You know, if you're going to weld—

[Laughter]

Holt: —and do a little infrastructure work. You got to understand that at that time, the facility was primitive. It was under the old studio, completely open to the elements, and had a dirt floor. If you've been in Captiva for any amount of time, you know there's two things that are going to happen to you. You're going to have to take a bath in DEET bug spray in order to be able to work. If you're going to weld, you have to wear fairly heavy long-sleeved clothing because you will sunburn with TIG [tungsten inert gas] welding if you don't.

So what that means is I'm down there in August with bug spray sprayed all over me wearing flannel shirts. So this isn't exactly as glamorous as you might think. The other issue was if you've ever heard someone cutting aluminum with an electric saw, a chop saw, you know what that sounds like. Sound travels, so I figured myself to be the most hated man on Laika Lane at the very least. It could have been the whole island because when I would start wailing with that stuff, it could go on for hours. The only thing I can say in my defense is that I tried to keep it to daylight hours. I would cut in the daytime and I would weld at night. Welding is not so loud. It's just the amount of heat and light, so it's not a big deal.

Q1: So where did you initially set up a metal shop? You must have had that conversation and said okay, I'm going to work where—where did you?

Holt: I'm going to work exactly where Tim Pharr worked. Tim had a little chop saw, a bench, a big table. It was a little open room—a room with two walls under the house that was used as the office. We stuck the welder in that little room because it had a little more protection from the

elements and I just set my chop saw where Tim's chop saw was and used his table to do construction. But it was still the dirt floor—

[Laughter]

Holt: —and completely open.

Q1: That didn't get changed? You didn't—?

Holt: Not while I was there. We did make a couple of half-hearted efforts along the way and they were pretty much disastrous, so we stopped. But I do recall very early in [Lawrence] Larry [Voytek]'s tenure, he called me up once or twice and I gave him the advice that he wanted to hear. But the one thing that I did tell him that I really think he took to heart was, “Do not pass up this opportunity to make them set up a facility that is proper.”

Q1: This is Larry Voytek?

Holt: Larry Voytek. Because he was walking into the same situation I had walked into and once Bob starts working, you are swimming full speed just to keep up. I never wanted to be the bottleneck guy. I always wanted to be right there helping.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: Did you feel that you were thrown into the deep end right away? Did he say, okay, we're going to give you a shot, come on down next weekend and I want you to work on this?

Holt: I never felt like someone took me aside and said, "Hey kid, we're going to give you a shot." They just made me feel like I was welcome. "When are you coming back?" "Well, I'm going to come back next Friday night." "Okay, we'll see you next Friday night." Then I would go back to Tampa and then I would come back and there'd be a little repeat of the same thing. They would ask me what my schedule was and they would give me enough work to keep me busy and to put enough money in my pocket so that I could actually afford to pay for the gas and things like that. In a way, my final six months of graduate school was luxurious. I had all this money and I had a vehicle. Most of my professors weren't picking me to death about something. Everything was looking good and going well for me. I think if there was a point at which, well let me put it to you this way—there were a couple of times when Bob didn't fire me, so that meant that I was hired, if you know what I mean.

[Laughter]

Q1: You mean there were things that didn't go well and you felt like—?

Holt: Well, yes, in a way you could say that. It's not that it didn't go well, it's just that as a young man I had some eccentricities that would have made it difficult for me to get a job.

Q1: But he was understanding?

Holt: He was. Extremely so. I wasn't a big talker. Socially, I was—I don't know, let's just say inept would be a nice way to put it. But it didn't matter to him.

Q1: Did he talk at you? Did he talk a lot? Whether you were responding or not? Or was it not so much about that, was it focused on the work?

Holt: We always talked about what he was trying to do. He would talk about ideas, "I would like to make this. How can you do that? What's possible here?" Then we would make a drawing on a scrap of paper or a cocktail napkin or whatever. Quite often this would be over dinner or some other situation where we all got together at the end of the day. It really was very much a family kind of enterprise at that time. We all ate together and we all sat around in the Beach House and socialized and talked about what was going on. Occasionally, he would grab me and take me over to the print shop and show me something and ask me, "How can we do this?" Or, "Can we do that?" And blah, blah, blah. I would always say, "Yes, we can do it. I'll give you the details tomorrow." Once I tried to actually figure out how this was going to come together. That was usually enough.

Every now and then I found myself involved in a project where I was doing something that was going to have a significant impact on the visual nature of the object, which might not have been discussed previously. At which point I would go grab Bob and I would drag him over to the shop and show him what was going on. Then we would decide exactly how this would be handled,

generally from a list of options. We can do this or this or this. There are a couple of examples of that in the room right now.

Q1: Where were you living when you would go there at first over the weekends? I assume you weren't staying in the metal shop.

Holt: No. I was living in what they called Black Bart's House. Black Bart's House was beside the old print shop. Half of it was used as curating. It's a little shack right on the inside corner, just before you get to South Seas plantation [South Seas Island Resort] on the left hand turn, as you're going into the plantation. Very small little wooden cracker box, but it had a shower and a bed and a bit of a kitchen. I never cooked one thing. I don't think I ever turned the stove on. We always ate at Bob's. I spent more time over there going through his refrigerator than I did putting anything in mine.

Q1: Can you describe the rhythm of more or less a normal day? My understanding from talking to a number of other people who were there in that period, like Bob Petersen, is that Rauschenberg was a night owl. That the work pattern was very much nocturnal, that it was late mornings. You were starting to describe those kind of conversations around work and what could be done over dinner. But can you just narrate what a normal day would have been like?

Holt: Well, for me, considering the nature of what I was generally doing, which was making a lot of noise, I would—like I was saying before—I would tend to get up relatively early. I didn't feel the need to be there at 8:00 AM, but 9:00, ten o'clock, I would get up. If I had things to do I'd try

to organize it so I wasn't waking everybody up at ten o'clock. I'd try to wait until 12:00 or something. That's when I would start cutting or doing that kind of work. There were always enough things to do so that you could pick the time when you were going to be the most obnoxious. That's what I tried to do.

But my day started relatively early. I worked until dark or dinnertime, and we ate late. If I was under the gun or there was a lot of things that needed to be done, I might go back to work for a couple of hours and then wander over to the print shop and see what they were doing. Bob and Terry would be working at the press. But they wouldn't get started until ten or eleven and they would work all night, whereas I would bow out at midnight at the latest and go to my little shack and get ready for tomorrow.

Q1: You had mentioned coming down with a girlfriend. Did you have visitors? Did you have friends come and visit you? Or your friend Alex, were there people like that around?

Holt: I mean that girlfriend was long gone by then, but I did have other associates.

[Laughter]

Holt: I had a couple of friends come down, but generally speaking, when I was on Captiva it was just me. If I felt a need to go visit my friends, I would do that every now and then. Take the weekend off and stuff.

Q1: One thing I meant to ask you before when you were describing the initial contact—that I forgot or we went in a different direction, but let me backtrack for just a second. I was asking you about exposure to museums and things like that. I know that in the environment around Graphicstudio that you would have heard the name, but would you describe yourself as having been familiar with Rauschenberg? Had you actually seen in person any of his work before you met him?

Holt: The truth of the matter is if I saw an actual genuine Rauschenberg at that point in time, it would have been something they were working on at Graphicstudio. They were his artworks but they were not originals. They were prints or reproductions. Everything else would have been out of illustrations in a book, something along those lines. I knew the basic outline, a trajectory of his career. I knew who he was, where he was from, when he was born, all that sort of business. I had read some things, not an extensive biography, but I could tell you he was from Port Arthur [Texas] and that he went to school in North Carolina [Black Mountain College] with a bunch of other very influential and famous people, and they were all young students together. So yes, I knew who he was, but I can't say I was up on him really.

Q1: One other detail question that I had meant to ask you before, that I wanted to fill in. You said you didn't talk about money in the beginning, but you were actually, that last semester, you were living pretty well. How did it work with money? Would it be the end of the weekend he'd just hand you some cash or what?

[Laughter]

Holt: More or less. I think basically what I did was—when I was commuting between South Florida and Captiva, I did most of the work actually at the university because they had a welder and the shop was set up. I would kind of sneak in there and do it and I would just keep track of time. At some point, I'm sure we agreed, "Oh, I'm going to pay you twenty bucks an hour until you get down here and then we'll do something else." Every couple of weeks, I would give somebody a piece of paper that said I worked forty hours and they would give me a check. That was awesome—

[Laughter]

Holt: God, I didn't know what to do with five hundred bucks.

Q1: And who would—? That wouldn't be Bob. Would it be Terry? Who would do that actually, who took care of that?

Holt: I think, quite often, I would make the check out and take it over to Bob and he'd sign it. I'm not quite sure. Maybe Bradley [J. Jeffries] was just starting to work there and that was one of her jobs was to provide us with the signed checks that we needed. I think she had a little checkbook, that Bob would sign half a dozen checks, and you'd go to Bradley and she would give you the appropriate check.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: So once you were really installed, once you were really living in Captiva, did you stay there from say the end of '79 through '82? Did you stay there straight through that couple of years' period?

Holt: Yes.

Q1: Did you keep doing your own work during that time?

Holt: I did but the pace was so glacial that I might have actually almost finished a whole piece by the time I was done.

Q1: What kind of pieces were you doing?

Holt: I was somewhat fascinated with plastics and plaster. I had a couple of things that I had been whacking away on for years. One of them was kind of coming together right there towards the end. Bob caught me one day. I was huddled in the corner, he kind of sneaked up on me, but I didn't mind. I'm not sure I wanted to be criticized by Bob Rauschenberg.

[Laughter]

Q1: What did he say?

Holt: He didn't say anything. He was sweet. I mean he was always trying to be supportive about things like that. That was important to him. He might have actually been a little hurt that I didn't grab him and ask his advice, I don't know. I'm just speculating on that, but he was always supportive and wanted to help.

Q1: Did you talk about that? I guess where I'm heading is, was it important to him that you all—Petersen also had his own practice—was it important to him that you all had your own vision, your own practices as artists, that you were going somewhere as an artist? Did you feel that he was invested in that?

Holt: I feel that he was invested in the concept. I also feel that he understood that there were some people that you couldn't help. That for whatever reason, they had to make changes or do certain things that only they could do. Interceding under those circumstances was not going to be productive. My theory is that he understood that. Like I said, I was somewhat eccentric so it may have been a play. That whole concept.

Q1: Would you be able to say that working for him had a major impact on shaping you as an artist, in terms of your own work as an artist?

Holt: Well, to the extent that I continued to work, I would say yes. I think that Bob's influence was—to my mind when I look at art today—almost universal. It's kind of hard to deny. It goes in so many different directions and so many different mediums and paths that it's a little breathtaking. Even though I saw it happening and I saw him doing it and I saw how he did it, it's

hard to imagine that someone could actually do that. Even if you sit there and watch it and you don't understand it. I've never really resolved that.

Q1: Did it transform the way you would work as an artist? Or did it change the way you thought about materials and what could be combined with what? Or did it change the way you thought about the relation between art and the world?

Holt: Well, I think it changed all those things, but I don't think I was prepared to utilize what I was learning in my own work. It was something I wasn't capable of for whatever reason. But that's the fair answer.

Q1: Well, sometimes teaching has a delayed impact. I've certainly had former students come back and—

Holt: Well, I'm waiting.

[Laughter]

Q1: Well, it can be years later.

Holt: I'm just kidding.

Q1: Maybe we should just narrate the whole period before we get into the individual artworks.

What did bring it to a close? Why did you stop working for Bob in '82?

Holt: There's this big, beautiful place called New York City and I didn't see myself with a job there. Not the job that I actually wanted with Bob, which was being one of the makers. I had no people skills, I wasn't a good secretary, I didn't like doing research, it was just not the fit that I thought was reasonable. I wanted to come up and live in New York, so that's what I did.

Q1: Had you come up with him? Had you been to 381 [Lafayette Street]?

Holt: Oh yes, oh yes. I spent a number of times up here. I was part of the truck driving, art hanging, and handling crew along with everybody else. We all did various jobs, but I made it, I hung it, drove it around.

Q1: You would not have come to New York before you came with Bob? Would you have been to New York before?

Holt: No. The first time I ever came to New York City was in a truck full of artwork that I had driven up from Florida. We arrived at dawn and looked out over the water, saw the Statue of Liberty, drove through the Holland Tunnel, and almost killed a Chinese family who was crossing the street at the wrong time, but we made it. That was the first time actually seeing New York.

Q1: So these kind of periodic trips, work trips with Rauschenberg to New York, gave you—that's how you caught the New York bug, that's how you became interested in the city?

Holt: Yes, really. I was always interested in New York, but actually to come here, and spend time and to be somewhat pampered. You had a place to stay, 381 was always interesting.

[Hisachika] Sachika [Takahashi] was there. There was always somebody coming and going. All the New York crew would kind of take you under their wing and get you in trouble and show you where to go, and so forth and so on.

Q1: Did you do any metal work? Did you do any fabricating work in New York as well as in Florida? Or was all that kind of work in Florida?

Holt: All of that kind of work, for Bob anyhow, was done in Florida. Every now and then in New York I might fix something. The restorer's nightmare would be me fixing a Rauschenberg or something [laughs]. The guy that glued King Tut's nose back on. Never really got to that but there were a number of things that needed to be worked on over the years.

Q1: This is another detail that may be too hard to go back to or reconstruct. But the moments when ideas are being generated and tried out and thought through that you were describing—those kinds of dinnertime conversations, you're standing around the table in Captiva. Can you talk more about how that would work? Where did ideas come from for him? Did you yourself suggest ideas? Did it come out of a conversation? "I saw a great exhibit by so and so," and Bob would say, "Oh really," and get interested in something. Or was it more that things would come

from Rauschenberg and then you, and whoever else would be there, would respond to his ideas and try to bring them to life? Do you see what I'm asking? It's hard to set that scene, I know.

Holt: For me, and from what I observed, it was the latter for the most part. Bob would have a concept or an idea in his mind. He didn't always know how or what—I don't know. This is an odd thing today. Sometimes he didn't know what he was trying to do, but he would bring up the idea and then we would start talking about what could be done given what we're actually doing. Here's what's available to us and how can this be done. But basically it flowed from him and I always saw myself as an—I don't know, an enabler. Like I said, I never wanted to be the bottleneck in the process. I just wanted to be the guy that said, "Okay, we can do this. We might—" If I saw a red flag, I would say it during the process, during the discussion. "We can go in this direction, but we need to think about some eventualities that we're going to run into just from the basic outline that we're looking at here." Like I said it was a little sketch, a little drawing, and then from there the mechanics—me—we would begin to sketch out the specifics. When the specifics did not match the concept or the ideas or further clarification was necessary that's when I had to go find Bob or vice versa.

He would see something and say, "Well, that's not really what we were talking about." It was a two-way street, but in my mind, it was always flowing from Bob and through us, to us.

Q1: Were those initial ideas—if you can generalize about them—were they generally in terms of media, material? "I really want to do something with silk." Or were they ever about content? "I want to do something about what's going on in the world, about a political event, about the Iran

hostage crisis,” whatever would have been going on at a particular moment. Did he ever say, “I want to respond to an event,” or to a particular content, thematic idea? Or was it more, “How do you put a metal piece of this weight on top of this? Can you attach that to that?”

Holt: I never really heard Bob talk about, “Well I want to make a sculpture that honors the Dalai Lama,” or something along those lines. Not really. What I felt and saw was someone who was conjuring up all these different things out of whatever was going into his head. It could be something as mundane as seeing the bicycle fork lying over in the weeds followed by a wedge of cheese. That’s just an easy conjecture, it doesn’t have anything to do with reality, but that’s what was happening. These things were being assembled in his mind and then we, the mechanics, were there to kind of—not necessarily narrow it down, but at least move it from the theoretical into the real. That’s what mechanics do. That’s how I saw my role: enabler and a mechanic. Not the guy that says, “Oh you can’t do that.” Yes, we can try. We can try to do that. I won’t guarantee it, but we can try it.

Q1: I want to just make sure I have the information clear. In terms of New York, when you come to New York after you’ve left Bob, what did you end up doing? Did you end up doing fabricating work?

Holt: [Laughs] I did, actually. I had a studio on Bond Street, which was right around the corner from 381, and I had a little welder in there. I would just build stuff. I worked for other people. I did a few little pieces for myself. Mostly I was just living in New York and you know what that

is. I was having a good time. My wife and I were young and interested and it was a terrific time for me.

Bob didn't like losing people, so for a couple of years he was—he wasn't mean or mad, it was just he didn't really want to talk to me. That's even a little harsh to say that. But inevitably we were friends for almost thirty years. Over the years he really made an effort to include me in many, many different things. He wasn't afraid to ask me for help. He says, "Oh, I got a problem with this thing or that thing, will you come look at it?" So I was always at 381 doing something and I knew the entire crew. I might show up there for god knows what reason and they would be there. It was a good thing.

Q1: So you were still part of the scene?

Holt: I was, yes. I still felt like I was part of the family. I can't emphasize that enough. At that point in time, the late seventies and the early eighties, it really was—I know this is a horrible cliché but—it was kind of like being in a little family. We all cooked together and we ate together and we argued and did what families do. But we all had jobs and our job was to help Bob get this stuff out. That's the way I looked at it. There was never any kind of corporate mentality. No one belonged to the union. You were allowed to pick up a hammer if you weren't a carpenter. So it was completely open in a way.

Q1: Was it your sense that that kind of feeling was crucial to his sense of himself, to his practice as an artist?

Holt: I believe it was.

Q1: In other words, it wasn't just a functional thing—I need a lot of people because I'm doing a lot of stuff. But that he needed to be surrounded by people and to have that kind of family feel?

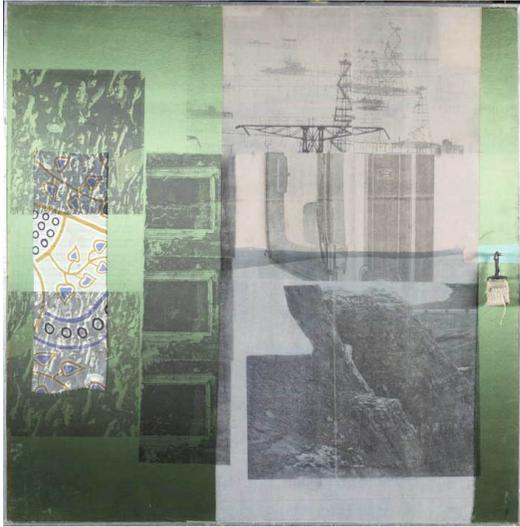
Holt: I believe that's a fair statement, yes. Bob loved people and he always wanted to be around people. The only time he didn't want anyone around him was when he was exhausted. Those couple of hours on the beach, sometimes when he was just melting in the sun and didn't really want to talk to anybody about anything. You respect the privacy and that's fine. But every other circumstance he was the first one in there. He really loved being around people, talking to people, joking with people. The personality was so huge and the postures. You could just watch him. From a distance you wouldn't know what he was talking about, but you would know what he was saying, if you catch my drift.

Q1: Well, I think this is a place we could pause and move to the artworks. Is this okay? We'll both be asking some narrative questions.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: All right, so we are in front of *Port*, a work in the *Signal* series from 1980. It's solvent transfer and collage on plywood with metal frame. One thing I wanted to ask you—a more general question to contextualize it. Do you remember what the first work or the first series by

Rauschenberg that you actually were working on when you were first going there that fall—you were still in school—do you remember what you were working on?



Robert Rauschenberg
Port (Signal), 1980
Solvent transfer and collage on plywood
32 1/2 x 32 1/2 inches (82.6 x 82.6 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Holt: I want to say *Cloister* [1980–81] was very early. These were somewhat early. Other than that there's so many that it's kind of hard to keep them in order.

Q1: Yes. Now this series, the *Signal* series, can you tell us about the general idea? The genesis of the series, if you remember that?

Holt: Well, for me, at that point, I would generally be shown a bunch of things, panels in this case. They would ask me to frame them [laughs] or do something to them. I never really heard any explanation for Bob's titles. To me, it was either obvious or it was completely obscure. To me, *Signals*, I didn't—I never heard him talk about—"What do you mean by signals?" So forth

and so on. It was just like a natural thing for me, “Okay, I didn’t get that one, so let’s just move on to the next one.”

Q1: Did he give you a title when he was starting to give you instructions? In those conversations, would he say, “I want to do something called the *Signal* series?” Would he give you the title?

Holt: No. I can remember on many occasions watching Bob sitting in the corner or at the counter with a pencil, writing down titles, making them up as he went. He might finish six pieces and then two days later he would go through them and figure out what he’s actually going to call them. I think in some cases it was clear. He already knew. But it was just as often that he sat down and kind of had to put on the thinking cap to come up with something, yes. I liked his titles though.

Q1: They’re great. Do you want to jump in?

Q2: I’m Christine Frohnert, I’m a conservator for contemporary art. I will ask you some more technical questions and I’m interested if you remember any details of the fabrication of the artwork or if you have been more involved just with the framing of the work?

Holt: For a piece like this, what I would be involved in might be for instance, to figure out how we were going to put something on the surface of the painting. Everything else was just the framing. The image itself was already more or less created. That was print work, and they did that in the print shop. Like I said, every now and then I would be confronted with a dozen panels

that had been done the night before, at which point we would start talking about, “Well, exactly how are we going to handle these things? What do you want to see happen to them?” You might end up with something like that or it might be a simple flat frame just the way this is. So there’s no telling what was going to happen, for me, but I would have done everything that needed to be done as far as finishing the work, so to speak. By finishing, I mean taking it from what came off the press to the point where you could actually put it on the wall or the floor or wherever it was going to go.

Q2: So we are looking at a very early example with a metal frame.

Holt: Yes.

Q2: Fabricated by you.

Holt: Very early. This would have been one of these pieces where we were still working on things called adhesives. “What should we actually be using here?” Well, I had my ideas that didn’t quite work and then we involved two other things.

Q2: Did Bob immediately like the aesthetics of the aluminum frame?

Holt: I think he did. He never complained about finish or anything like that. He seemed intent on just carrying on with this process, just to find out where it was going to go. I think he realized that this would allow him to do some things that would have been more difficult or maybe a little

clumsy in wood. Assuming that you weren't going to go find an absolute master grade cabinetmaker and try to keep him busy. Part of it was—they traveled quite a bit, so Bob liked to produce a number of things, turn them over to me, we would decide how we were going to handle them, and they would go off and they would know that I've got something to do. When they came back these things were done. It was all part of the process, was keeping people busy and carrying on the inquiry, "What am I going to do with this stuff?"

Q2: One thing I noticed on this artwork is the use of the extremely fine silk on the surface. Knowing that you have not been involved in the fabrication of this part, do you know where he sourced the silk?

Holt: I think some of it may actually have come from China or the Far East, Japan, or it may have come from Canal Street [New York].

Q2: [Laughs]

Holt: Seriously. I know they were traveling over there and I know things would come back in the luggage and all this sort of stuff. Things would appear in the print shop, bolts and reams and boxes full of stuff. I couldn't exactly tell you though with any degree of certainty for a given object where it actually came from. But I would not discount the possibility that it did actually come out of China.

Q2: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: We're in front of *Consul*, it's from the *Spread* series [1975–83] from 1980. Solvent transfer, collage, and acrylic on wooden panels with aluminum. This one—it's from a series that Rauschenberg had started a number of years before you were working with him, I think in 1975. It was very much influenced by his visit to the King Tut show at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. [Note: *Treasures of Tutankhamun*, 1977] My first question was—since I know that Tim Pharr was originally the fabricator and that some of these are wooden support-based—what was your role in work like this? What would you have done?



Robert Rauschenberg
Consul (Spread), 1980
 Solvent transfer, collage, and acrylic on
 plywood with aluminum
 80 1/2 x 110 3/4 x 26 1/2 inches (204.5 x
 281.3 x 67.3 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Holt: I think this one was actually completely fabricated by me. It's not a hybrid. The issue for the piece was that front edge. He wanted it as close to the floor as it could be. That meant that there could be no frame under the leading edge. Trying to do that in wood would have been very difficult. So Tim and I did—like I said, there were a couple of pieces that were actually hybrids,

in which I might have finished some minor detail on something that he had made or he would contribute something, as he was leaving, that would be part of something that I'd make. Like the *Cloister* piece there [referring to *Rush 19 (Cloister)*, 1980]. But my recollection of this piece was that it was aluminum. There may be some wooden bracing behind it—I don't recall completely—but this is a frame that I made.

Q1: When you first got involved in the process, he came to you with that idea, “I want it—”

Holt: Yes.

Q1: It's not quite draped. It's actually attached or supported underneath?

Holt: That was the first question when we talked about the idea, was, “How do you want this front edge handled?” Because obviously it's an issue. He was emphatic about one thing: there was to be nothing underneath it. It was to go straight down to the floor. That's great if the floor's level and there's no dips, like the old [Leo] Castelli galleries and Sonnabend galleries with the wooden floors. So it's no problem here, but I always would point things out that didn't really matter to him. He just wanted it to be—I think he assumed that at some point, there would be great spaces and things would be square and the floor would be level. It's just a matter of time. So he didn't want any compromise on that aspect of this piece. It was to come as if it were part of the floor and sweep straight up the wall.

Q1: A work like this, that was part of an ongoing series that preceded you, would he have given you some sense of the prior works in the series? Would he have said, “We’ve done fifteen, twenty works in the series over the past five years and this is the kind of stuff we’ve done”? Would you have talked about that?

Holt: No, we never really did. Like I said, for the most part I would wake up and either go over to the print shop or they would be brought over to the studio and see new panels—because that’s what he and Terry had done the night before or they were just done drying or something—so that then they became part of my reality. At that point, Bob and I would start doing our little sketches on cocktail napkins or whatever it was that was available during dinner. He would talk to me about, “Well, I have this idea for trying this, but I’m not quite sure what we can do.” For instance, on this piece, really what is the radius of the bend that you can actually make on this material without destroying it? That was not a given and he didn’t come to me and say, “Well, I want you to put a 32-inch radius bend on this—” No, you mess around with it until you figured something out. Then you go back and say, “Is this appropriate? Does this work?” Then the decision is made at some point and then you go on with it.

This is a beautiful example of that process. It’s a give and take but there’s a starting point. The starting point was his idea. “I want this painting to literally come out of the floor and go up the wall.” But I had never felt that he had the need to put it within a context that I wasn’t aware of somehow. He never said to me, “Well this is part of this series,” and blah, blah, blah. No. We never heard that, I never heard that.

Q1: Again, he wouldn't have prepped this thing with a title. "This is going to be *Consul*."

Holt: No.

Q1: He might not have had that type of—?

Holt: On a few occasions, I think he may have done that. He may have said, "This thing, we're going to call this—" something. But my recollection was that nine out of ten times, of the things I saw him working on that we worked on together, I can specifically remember him sitting at the table with his pencil and his odd handwriting and going through these—and he'd even get the thesaurus or the dictionary out and he would work at it. It was work for him. But he did it that way for the most part. Every now and then one would pop up and it would more or less be done. You know what I'm saying? That it was done. All you had to do was actually make it. He was done, the piece was done, there was no explanation. You didn't have to fiddle with it and the title was already there. So you just go make this thing and then, well, we're done.

Q2: I'm interested in the process to determine its shape. If I understand correctly—so Bob handed you the three panels. In order to find a way to create a sturdy support to attach the panels to, did you bend those panels, or did you work on a template first to determine the shape? How was that process?

Holt: I have a feeling that what I did was go find a couple of prepped panels that had not been worked on and start bending them until I found out where the breaking point was and then back

off to a reasonable point. These panels are in fact plywood and most plywood has voids in it. There are airspaces in there, between there. If you're unlucky and you've just finished a real beautiful piece of work and you decide you're going to bend it and you happen to come across a void in exactly the wrong spot, you can't fix it. So what I would have done was—in fact what I recall doing was nailing a board to the floor and then taking the panels and shoving them down and then nailing a board over the top and then taking that radius and then designing everything around that. But it was important to not wreck the thing while you were doing it. Probably relieved the back of the panels with small cuts so that it could bend easily, more easily than before. There's several of these style of—there's another one with two curves, yes.

That would be the way in which it would be done and the issue for Bob was the curve. It's not specified yet. The specification comes during the process of building it. He's involved in that as well, in the sense that I would go to him and I would say, "Well, we can bend it at a twenty-four-inch radius or we can bend it at a thirty-six-inch radius. Of the two, the one most likely to fail is the twenty-four-inch radius." He didn't want to trash the stuff either, so we would inevitably pick a medium somewhere that would work and give him an idea of what he wanted—that satisfied his idea and was still somewhat safe.

Q2: How did you attach the panels to the support?

Holt: These were probably done with—I'm hoping—

[Laughter]

Holt: —that we were not using epoxy at that point because we had graduated to silicone. We were just using a silicone adhesive. That gave the wood a little bit of an ability to move around. The issue for these works was that wood and metal contract and expand at different rates. Unless you can absolutely control every aspect of the environment, you're going to be in trouble at some point, especially when you get to extreme situations. But it wouldn't surprise me if I had some reinforcing behind this with a fiberglass or something along those lines to kind of set the bend. I just, I don't remember all the specifics. In order for me to do that, I'd have to literally take them off the wall and look. I really don't want to do that because that would give me problems. Because then I would think, "Well, geez, you dummy. You actually did it that way." But that was part of it. We wanted to get things done. We were curatorially inclined, but it wasn't the issue. We really wanted to get these works done and out. So we did experiment and some of the experiments didn't work very well. I'm sure [laughs] you'll see some examples of that in the future, but—

Q2: It's beautifully made so given how sensitive the support is and the panel is, it's beautiful.

Holt: Yes, it's just a nice idea. How often have you seen something like that?

Q2: Did you also write installation manuals to put the works together? Was this—?

Holt: I did for a lot of things. For some things. For instance, that largish piece, for this. I would write little manuals that I hope survived somehow or another, because if you didn't do it a certain

away you're going to have problems. That was part of the process too. Once we found ourselves being—well, you tried to be as open-ended as possible. The ideal situation is anybody can take your artwork and put it anywhere. But that's not realistic and when you get to something like this, or even this, you have to think of ways in which it should be handled and you're making assumptions that the people doing it are thinking about it and they're willing to go the extra—or use whatever protocol has been developed. It's like the Space Shot or something. If you don't do exactly right, sometimes you got a problem. In many cases that's true for Bob's work.

Q2: One more general question that we would like is whether or not you got a sense how Bob distinguished between *Spreads* and *Scales* [1977–81].

Holt: That's one of the mysteries of life, isn't it? Because no, I never did. I never—he never said anything to me and I never discerned this, that, or the other. I didn't crack the code on that.

Q2: Because material-wise and shape-wise they have been very similar, so we were wondering if there's any distinction that comes to mind?

Holt: No [laughs]. I didn't see a distinction. I don't know why, but some things were just never discussed. It was just like, the sun's going to rise today and we're going to go to work. That was good enough for me.

Q2: Anything you would like to add to this work?

Holt: Well, it's great to see it and it's great to see that it actually still survives and in pretty good shape. I like that. One of the pleasures of my life is going to a museum somewhere and running into one of these—which I did last year in Portland [Oregon] and one of the pieces were there.

Q2: I can see that.

Holt: That's really kind of an interesting sensation, but it's personal too.

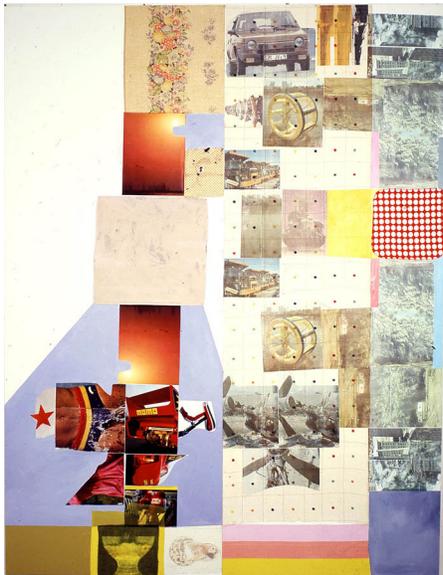
Q2: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: We're now looking at *Helm*, also part of the *Spread* series from 1980 and also solvent transfer, acrylic, and collage on a wooden panel. So this one—a really wonderful collage of images. Can you talk about your role in—I assume it was mainly the aluminum framing in the back?

Holt: Yes. This to me was a good example of when I could really channel my inner Henry Ford and just do real fast production. Because there's nothing else that—as long as I managed to orient the panels the proper way, my job was very simple. There was nothing to be added. I didn't have to accommodate any objects coming off the surface. It wasn't bent or in any other way needed to be manipulated. It's just take good dimensions and knock out the frame. Quite often there would be a number of pieces that were very similar in size, so you could really

produce a lot of things very quickly. For me, this is a perfect example of that work ethic as far as that goes. Because that was part of it as well, was to try to get things done as quickly as possible. Like I was saying before, part of my job, or my hope, was that I was not the bottleneck in the process. That I was actually helping with the flow of ideas and objects that were coming out. As you know, Bob was an extraordinarily productive person so he could keep a lot of people very busy. I never wanted to be the guy that was two steps behind everyone else. This was my way of catching up.



Robert Rauschenberg
Helm (Spread), 1980
 Solvent transfer with acrylic, fabric, and
 printed reproductions on plywood
 96 1/2 x 74 inches (245.1 x 188 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q1: In this one, the effect of the framing is actually to project it out a little bit from the wall, and I wonder if he talked about that. The difference between the first one we looked at, where you could see the aluminum frame around the painting, and this one where you can't see the aluminum—it's behind and kind of pushing it out, giving a kind of volume to it. Is that something he would have said? "Give it an aluminum frame, but I don't want to see the

aluminum frame on this one.” Would you have talked about that?

Holt: Yes, actually, I think we did. For the small pieces, the first one we talked about, we did go over alternatives. The one obviously was you don’t see anything or you put an edge around it and he wanted to see an edge on the smaller pieces, and several other pieces that’s what he wanted to see. But there was a lot of paneling, particularly in *The 1/4 Mile [or 2 Furlong Piece]*, 1981–98], that there was no edge around it obviously because it all went together. But I’d say this was the more common approach at that time, was just to have this panel more or less floating in front of the wall. Basically that’s what you see.

Q2: I would like to learn more about the construction of the frame itself. Given that the panel is actually mounted to a very thin wooden board, I would assume there are crossbars behind the panel that it’s adhered to?

Holt: Yes, there’s some framing underneath it. It might be on sixteen-inch, eighteen-inch, twenty-four-inch centers. The wood paneling doesn’t really need to be supported that much, but just in general terms, I would always add something behind it that the center—and in this case, maybe three—that would always ensure that the wood panel stayed flat and never had a chance to bow or pop or come up. All that would be glued down, so you would have a grid shape behind the object that would more or less hold it together. It wasn’t just edge gluing.

Q2: Was it a very fast-setting adhesive that you used? We talked about silicone before. I meant to ask you earlier, did you apply any weights on the surface to keep it in place? How did this work, especially with the shaped forms?

Holt: Right. Our first attempts were using an epoxy, that was a disaster because, like I said, the materials were incompatible and the adhesive wasn't flexible enough. We had a bunch of metal weights that we would run along the edge and kind of hold it down. Going to the silicone, one of the problems that we kind of thought about—and never really resolved in any way—was the notion that—my understanding, which may be wrong—that silicone would excrete acetic acid as it cures. And so one of the issues to my mind was, is that going to cause long-term damage. So what we would do is we would glue the panels up—and this was usually just me working alone—and then I would lift them and let them air out for a short period of time. This is my crazy scheme to circumvent that and then drop them back down and put the weights on them.

I never saw anything that made me think that there was a problem. I never saw any yellowing underneath or back behind the paintings and I never saw any damages to the images, so at a certain point it became moot. Whether it's still a moot point here thirty years later, that's not up to me [laughs]. Someone else is going to have to make that call, but it'll be someone like you, obviously. But hopefully it's not an issue. I can tell you that there are a number of epoxy-glued pieces out there still. If they've held up this long, they might be okay. But if—like the commission piece at the Children's Hospital [Medical Center] at Washington, D.C. [*Periwinkle Shaft*, 1979–80]—if they're in the entrance way atrium things are going to happen in the wintertime, things are going to happen when it rains, blah, blah, blah, so forth and so on.

Q2: Yes. As you mentioned before, they are just conflicting materials with different expansion and contraction ratios that are fighting each other.

Holt: Yes, yes. You can't build that out. You can accommodate it, but things do have to move. So that was a learning curve for me, was figuring out what was going on and what we could actually do about it. Like I said, no one's perfect but we were basically experimenting. Some experiments don't work.

Q2: Is there anything else you would like to add to?

Holt: No, I just think that this is the kind of size and situation that I felt like I saw a lot of. That would be exactly the same if this was orientated different and didn't have these other things, but like a two-panel painting seemed to me to be pretty common for me when I was working there.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: We're in front of *Tattoo*, also in the *Spread* series, from 1980. Solvent transfer, acrylic, paper, and fabric, with windsocks and metal fixtures on wood. Now here's one where I assume in addition to doing the frame, you must have been more involved with the projecting element, with the fixing of those. Can you talk about that process? I actually wonder, just in general, how would Rauschenberg come to you saying, "This one I'm going to put a hook on or windsock on,"

or would that come into the process later? He would just have a collage and say it needs something else? How did that happen?



Robert Rauschenberg
Tattoo (Spread), 1980
Solvent transfer, acrylic, paper, and fabric,
with windsocks and metal fixtures, on wood
73 3/4 x 96 5/8 x 19 inches (187.3 x 245.4 x
48.3 cm)
Private Collection

Holt: In this case, it's a really beautiful example of everything we've been talking about and it's really a good question. But I do recall sitting around at night at the kitchen counter, while Bob made a drawing of what he wanted me to do with these panels. He actually drew that armature and I said fine. I went and we made the armature. At that point we had a stopping point because the question was, did you really want to be extremely elegant. Because that armature could go straight through the panel with a half-inch hole, two holes, and then into the sub-frame, at which point you would see nothing else, and it would just be the projecting thing. Or the other option that I gave him was, "Well, we can just weld it to a plate and we can just screw the plate on the panel." He said, "Well, do the plate," which surprised me because my thinking was the more elegant solution, was to have it disappear into the image. But that's not what he wanted.

The other question was, “Well, how finished and refined do you want this thing to be, this armature? Is it okay if it still has scales on it from bending it or do I have to grind it up and make it all shiny and nice?” And he said “No, just leave it more or less the way it is right now and we will just stick it right onto the image.” So that was it. It was a give and take over a number of days, but in truth I do remember him actually drawing the armatures like if he was looking from above. He made a little sketch of what he wanted them to do. So then it was just a matter of execution and little details about how that was going to attach to the surface.

Q1: Does that mean that he already had the windsocks? He already knew he wanted to include them?

Holt: Yes. He had everything. He had everything. He had already assembled it in his mind. It was just a matter of actually executing. During the execution there are always these details that you have to resolve. You may not be prepared visually to project on these things, but for whatever reason he picked—in my mind—the least elegant solution, which maybe that tells you something. And it was important for him that it not be, I don’t know, as slick as possible. Crudity was allowed here for this piece.

Q1: What about the can? I can’t see if it’s a beer can or a soup can or a soda can?

Holt: Yes [laughs]. I was looking at that and I don’t even remember that. I was kind of wondering whether it’s glued on or—I don’t imagine that there’s any kind of fastener involved. But a lot of times they would do something like that that was light and compact and more or less

smushable—they would do it over there and they might use heat treatment stuff that photographs are mounted with, things like that, or just a simple epoxy. Whatever is at hand.

Q1: So that would be part of the panel that would—it would already have been finished?

Holt: It could very well have been part of the panel. For instance, the first thing that we looked at and the little tab that's sticking out, that would have been loose, and someone would have said it goes here. In that case I would actually build something behind it so it's not stuck just to the panel, so you support it. But I don't recall that there was ever anything ever put behind that beer can and I don't think—I don't see a fastener on it and welding a bolt to a beer can is not exactly an easy thing to do without changing the look of it. That was the other issue. There were plenty of things you could do, but when you started changing the way things looked or when you started obscuring parts of the painting, that was a decision that I had to go to Bob and I had to say, "It's heading in this direction. Is this okay?" More often than not, he was okay with it. But it was part of the conversation, it was always part of the conversation.

Q1: Working on something like this, do you—? I just wonder how you would handle the associations that would run through your head. Because me looking at it here, live, for the first time, there's so many associations running through my head. I wonder if you were able to compartmentalize and just think of it as, "Okay, how am I going to put these armatures up here?" Or were you thinking about what it means to repurpose a windsock and to me it looks like a planter maybe, but they also look like breasts, sort of withered or fallen breasts you could say. It's certainly something other than a windsock now, because it can't function as a windsock, the

way it's been hung it can't work as a windsock. Would these kinds of thoughts run through your head? Did you kind of muse as you're working on works like this?

Holt: There were so many different things going on, just in my end of it that I think if I had gone down that road I would have never returned. It was just too much. So to me it became, "I'm not going to think about it in those terms. What I'm going to concentrate on is how I'm going to do this and where do I actually need help, consultation. What's important here?" And then proceed from that point. I didn't want to go in that direction. I never thought of those as anything other than two objects I had to deal with.

Q1: That's understandable.

[Laughter]

Q2: Eric, it sounds like in most of the cases you were given the artistically designed panels already in order to create the support or in this case to create an armature. Are there cases where Bob went back after your work was done and he continued working on the imagery of the panels? Once additional elements were attached, did it change his view of the works and inspired to add something else?

Holt: I'm not sure that anything I did inspired him in a direct one-to-one—this action caused this reaction. But there were times when Bob would go back and hand paint on the works after they were finished. I think basically what he was doing was dealing with the new reality maybe so to

speaking. So it went from concept to flesh and now somewhere along the line something else needs to be done here. That was not terribly uncommon. But I never felt like—in a way that would have been something that I would have looked at as being not flattering—like somehow I had gone off the track, in my own mind, and made this thing less than what it could have been. But I don't see it that way. I just see it as something that at a certain point he would come across it and in an instant he would understand, "Well, I really should get the paints out." They'd roll up the cart of paints and he'd do his hand-painting thing. Not very often but enough to make you realize that even though you'd gone through all the motions and it was supposed to be finished, it wasn't finished until he decided it was finished. Now it wasn't just enough for me to have done all the mechanical work. It had to reach a point where he was willing to let it go in a way. "I'm done." More often than not, after the process, "I'm done." But every now and then he'd come back and he'd work on it.

Q2: Do you know where the windsocks came from?

Holt: No, I don't actually.

[Laughter]

Holt: I don't. A lot of things would just turn up around the print shop—road signs, who knows?

Q2: Did he have a room or a box with accessories? How does this work? Would he have things or windsocks first and then he would immediately imagine an artwork that he can make with it? Or would he start working on an artwork and then—

Holt: Go look.

Q2: —at certain components he had in the studio?

Holt: I think Bob had a little bit of pack rat in him because there was always a lot of stuff out in the weeds in various parts of the property. I know that he and Terry would go out every now and then and just, I don't know, go to a flea market, go to a junkyard. Just go somewhere and they would accumulate things. It didn't need to be an antique store or something like that. It could just be a pile of stuff that somebody saw alongside the road. They would literally go out and pick it and they'd come back. It would end up under a building somewhere and then eventually Bob might say "Hey, let's go get that—" whatever it was and bring it into the studio. From there, these things would assemble themselves, so to speak. I would come along as the mechanic and figure out the fasteners involved. So that was the process. It was through here, up here, and then the process occurred, the making. But the making is what happened before. We would just help him.

Q2: This work has an unusual name for Bob, *Tattoo*? Do you know what inspired him to—?

Holt: No, I never really understood his titles. Like I said, that was work for him and I always enjoyed watching him do it for some reason, because he really was thinking about it. It wasn't some, "I'll just stick a pin in the thesaurus." It mystified me to a certain extent. How did you come up with that? I mean, really. I never asked and he never volunteered. But it was one of the things that I found very mysterious about Bob, was his ability and his way of doing it. It always made me think, "Well, if I make artwork, that's what I'm going to do somehow or another." I think it ran the gamut, from a preconceived complete thing to being mystified when you finished. And then having to work at it and figure out where you're going to go with it as far as titling it goes.

Q2: It's a nice way of—

Holt: It was always an interesting event when Bob was titling. He usually, as I recall, it was more or less before something had to go somewhere or do something. Every now and then, things kind of got a name somehow. But at some point he always kind of made it official.

Q2: Anything else you would like to add about this work?

Holt: No. It's just, to me, this has always been a curious one. I wasn't a great fabricator. I don't see myself as this maestro of metal or anything like that. I was competent and able to do some things. When I look at this now and I realize how crudely made it actually is and I know that that is not me coming through. That's what he wanted me to do. He stopped me from going the elegant way and doing it the way that I naturally would have wanted to do, even at that point. I

probably didn't have quite the skills to make it Ferrari perfect. But it could have been a lot slicker than that. If you really look at it, you touch the edges, you look at the grinding, that's rudimentary work. It's almost as if someone said, "Stop." And I think that's pretty much what happened because I did go to him and we did talk about how we're going to do this. He showed up, he saw what I was doing, he said, "That's great." "Okay. I'm done. I'll stick it on the panel and we're done."

Q2: Thank you.

Holt: Yes, thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: All right, we are in front of *Rush 19* from the *Cloister* series, 1980. Solvent transfer, fabric, paper, and wood, and Plexiglas casing. I believe you said that the *Cloister* series was one of the first, if not the first, series you might have been collaborating on and that this also was a good example of a hybrid fabricator job, where you and Tim Pharr were working on a piece. Can you explain how that hybrid process would have worked and with this one in particular?

Holt: Well, I think Bob had conceived the idea of the large mats. Tim had quit basically and Bob needed him to fabricate the mats. I think it was one of the last things Tim did, was actually manufacture and assemble the mats that they worked on later. That's what I mean when I say it was a hybrid. So there were basically two fabricators. I assembled it and built the frames and

everything, but Tim was the one who actually did the work on the mats. They're a marine plywood and I remember that he had a pretty hard time finishing the edges on these things because of what they were going to do to them. Running the printing over the edge was going to be a problem, so he spent a lot of time sanding and trying to clean those up.



Robert Rauschenberg
Rush 19 (Cloister), 1980
Solvent transfer, fabric, paper, and wood in
Plexiglas casing
98 x 72 inches (248.9 x 182.9 cm)
Private collection

Yes, so the actual mat—the mat that you're looking at inside the plastic frame—is actually marine grade plywood. What we were talking about earlier, that plywood tends to have voids in it. That's true for everything except marine grade plywood, theoretically.

[Laughter]

Holt: If you were to cut up a bunch of mats and then all of a sudden there was a void in the edge, that would be a real problem. So Tim had a hard time getting enough stock and then cutting,

because there was—I don't know what—half a dozen of these, ten or twelve, something along those lines. There were quite a few of them.

Q1: So you came in and what did you do?

Holt: Actually, they did the printing, set the background in, and then placed everything where it was going to be. Then I would come in, take measurements, build the aluminum frame, and then I would assemble the entire thing except for the plastic, which was done by [Douglas] Doug Christmas at the Ace Gallery in Los Angeles after they were shipped out there. Bob wasn't particularly pleased by that. He didn't really care for it and it was not part of his conception. He kind of didn't want it, but he didn't fight it. It was one of the first shows that I worked on with him on the West Coast.

Q1: The Plexiglas is part of the conception of the piece, right?

Holt: No.

Q1: No?

Holt: That was done at the behest of the gallery owner in Los Angeles after the pieces were shipped out.

Q1: Okay. Now behind it, there's a metal framing, is that what—?

Holt: Yes. The little edge thing that you see and then there's framing all around it and behind that.

Q2: I would like to talk a little bit further about the structure of the piece. You mentioned the matting board already, then we have these two pieces on paper that are mounted to another wooden panel. This wooden panel is attached to the metal support, correct?

Holt: Correct.

Q2: Okay. With regard to the printing of the matting board, do you know if the marine plywood was isolated in a certain way? Were any lacquers used or any adhesive? I know Bob used Golden matte medium a lot, was this something that was done in preparation for the printing? And also was some white paint applied first before the printing was done?

Holt: I think generally, on all these panels, Bob would have them gessoed. After the printing process, generally the matte medium was used on top of everything. In fact Terry Van Brunt was "Mr. Matte-Medium" and he covered everything with it. So it wouldn't surprise me if that were the case here. I'm trying to remember just how the joints were made on the mat because I'm pretty sure they were not printed assembled. This little green stripe down here would have been an example of something that—all the printing and the fabric would have been applied, the mat would have been assembled, and then Bob would have come back with a brush and paint to

make that streak because that goes through two pieces of mat. The question that I'm not quite remembering, because I didn't do it, was how was that joint made between, let's say, that piece of mat and the one on the bottom. There has to be some sort of mechanical dowel or something of that sort in there. Then the aluminum frame, the wood that the actual paper part is laid down, then the mat is laid down, and then the mat is actually screwed from behind through the aluminum frame.

Q2: I understand. Do you know how the paper was adhered to the backing part?

Holt: No. No, I don't. But I do remember that they did use a lot of that heat-sensitive adhesive that photographers used for a lot of things. In fact a lot of the photos were done that way.

Q2: Fusion? Is it a Fusion film? Is that the brand name?

Holt: Yes, it comes in a film and then you just have a little heating iron.

Q2: Is this likely that this was used for the application of the fabric as well?

Holt: It's possible, but I think a lot of that was done with matte medium or some sort of gesso. So they would just wet it, put it down, and then print over it or do whatever, but then they would usually add another layer or something. I was a pure spectator for this process, but I did spend a lot of time in the print shop watching what they were doing.

Q2: So they would apply the adhesive to the back of the fabric first and then—?

Holt: No, generally it was the other way around. They would lay the adhesive down where they thought they wanted it, then they would put the fabric down, and then they would cover it.

Q2: Was it covered with weights or would it just sticking naturally?

Holt: No, no, they just kind of left it. Yes, left it, let it to dry, that was it.

Q2: Anything else you would like to share with regard to this artwork?

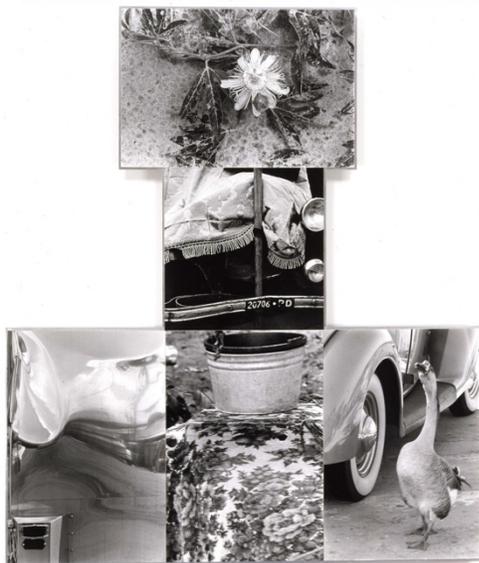
Holt: Well, these pieces were—I was trying to save weight and probably a misguided attempt to keep it light and cut a lot of metal on the back and stuff. There's some edges that need to be worked on and this was before we knew that they were going to be covered with plastic. At that point the weight becomes moot because it's fairly heavy. But I've always liked these pieces. I've seen examples of this large mat and large format that—I think Larry did a lot of that and they used PVC, which is a much better solution than wood.

Q2: Thank you.

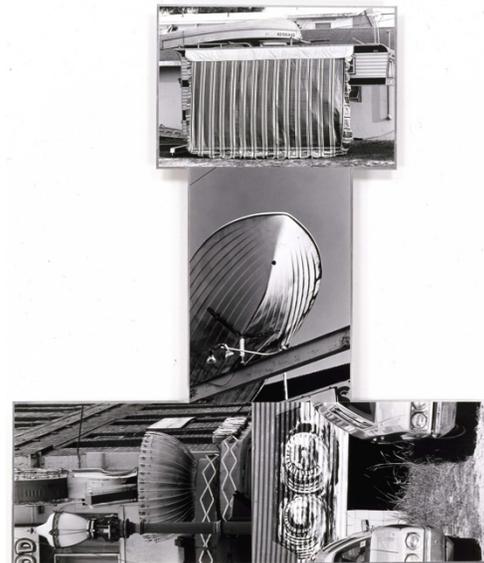
Q1: These are from the *Photem Series I*. That's #2 of the series on the left and #5 of the series on the right. They're both gelatin silver print collages mounted on aluminum. I wanted to ask you just generally, in terms of photography and the importance of photography in Rauschenberg's

work—I mean this in relation to what we’ve been looking at with a lot of the solvent transfer works—these seemed like moving into a different area. Do you remember talking to him about photography? This was a period when he’s really returning to—he had taken photographs almost thirty years earlier, but this was a period when he’s really starting to foreground photography in his work. Do you remember that being a topic of conversation or you noticing him being interested or practicing photography a lot more than he had been?

Holt: Actually, I noticed that he always had a camera with him and he was using it always. He never really talked to me about it, but it was clear that he was becoming much more interested in using his own imagery. Everywhere he went he had the camera. I think this is an example of what came out of that.



Robert Rauschenberg
Photem Series I #2, 1981
 Gelatin silver print collage mounted on aluminum
 54 3/4 x 46 1/2 inches (139.1 x 118.1 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Robert Rauschenberg
Photem Series I #5, 1981
 Gelatin silver print collage mounted on aluminum
 54 1/2 x 46 inches (138.4 x 116.8 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q1: You said one of the ways you were first put in touch with him was your friend Alex, who was a photographer?

Holt: Yes.

Q1: Did he talk about working on photography with Rauschenberg?

Holt: Alex personally never talked to me about working for Bob, but several years after I started working for Bob, Bob brought him up once in a conversation. He was kind of asking me what I knew about Alex and he kind of let me know that one of Alex's jobs was to teach him photography again. I found that quite odd because Alex was a brilliant photographer, but he was very secretive. He was one of those alchemists. He had his own special sauce that he used in the developing room and all these other things. If you happened to walk into the room, he would leave. It was like a secret to him. So I found that very curious [laughs] why he would agree to teach Bob Rauschenberg something like that when he didn't really do that. That was not his specialty. So I kind of told Bob and he kind of shook his head, "Yes, that explains it. He really didn't want to do it." But they did put together a darkroom and I know they worked together for things, but my understanding at the time was that Alex was just there really taking pictures and documenting things. I didn't really know about the student-teacher relationship.

Q1: Did Bob have a darkroom on Captiva? Was he—?

Holt: Yes, he did. Underneath the Beach House was converted into a darkroom.

Q1: He was developing things himself?

Holt: I don't think he ever really got in there and did it himself. I know Alex worked in there every now and then. But Alex and I were like two ships in the night for the most part. When I first met him and we were roommates he was always gone to Captiva and then it became the other way around. I know Alex worked in the darkroom, but I don't ever recall Bob going in there and working.

Q1: Okay, now in relation to this particular series, such striking works and totemic as the title implies—thinking back to those sorts of dinnertime conversations, do you remember a point when he said, “I want to do something affixing photographs to aluminum? Can we do that?” Was there a conversation of that sort?

Holt: I think what may have happened is they may have laid out several of these as collages on the table or something. I probably wandered through and they said, “Can we just mount these?” “Of course. Yes, we can do that.” That's how they started and it was just a matter of rounding things up. In terms of the most obnoxious guy on Captiva, that would be me because these shapes were cut out with a three horsepower router. If can you imagine what that sounds like on this beautiful tropical island and there I am under the house driving everybody crazy within a

half a mile at least. But that's what we did. I didn't really think a lot about it, but it kind of explains a few things.

Q1: Is your memory that he would lay them out in the collage pattern on a table and then you'd maybe outline the—?

Holt: Yes. Then we would take measurements and from then it was there that you cut the panels, cut and actually assemble the panels, and then they were pressed. They had a hot press, photo press—or whatever you call it—and then they were mounted like that. The issue for me with this particular piece was the way in which the actual panel is attached to the substructure. In this case I had to bolt through the panel from this side into the substructure. If that bolt ever comes loose, it could rattle back out and begin to interfere with the photo.

Q1: We'll actually turn it over to you.

Q2: So the substructure is a metal bar that you used, which is always acting as a spacer and just elevates the piece a little from the wall.

Holt: Yes, that's what's giving you the separation from the wall.

Q2: Right. And then the photos were mounted to cardboard first, right?

Holt: Yes.

Q2: And then the cardboard was mounted to the aluminum?

Holt: Right.

Q2: I can see a little bit of a residue along the edges of the aluminum. Was there an additional adhesive that was used as well?

Holt: I think they used the—it was just a sheet of glue that was heat-sensitive or something and then there was a big—I don't know—3-by-4-foot panini press, I guess, is a good name for it, and then they would just lay these things out and make sure they had them where they wanted. I never really did that part, so that would be Terry and Bob and whoever else was working on these. They would press them down and I guess if they mis-cut the adhesive you might get something on the edge.

Q2: I assume there were inter-layers when they pressed the photographs because the substrate is a little heat-sensitive?

Holt: I don't know. I don't know exactly how it was done to be perfectly honest with you. I wasn't there when they were actually mounting these things. I produced the actual metal panels, mounted the metal panels, and then those would be trucked back to the print shop and they did their magic, whatever it was they were doing.

Q2: The aluminum panels are slightly larger than the photographs, so was Bob particular about this look, this little lip?

Holt: Yes, that's what he wanted. It's got to be whatever it is, a 1/4 inch, 5/16, something along those lines.

Q2: So the entire series was made like that?

Holt: Exactly. Everything was laid out first and then along I come, do the measurements, and then everything is mounted and so forth and then we're done.

Q2: It's said that he used both earlier photographs that he took in the sixties, as well as contemporary photographs that he combined in the series. This is correct?

Holt: Yes. I think there's several of these—one or two of these—that might have an image of Terry Van Brunt in them. That's my recollection anyhow. But yes, so it is a mix of contemporary and—what? Sixties era? Seventies maybe? But it seemed to me by the time I got there, he always seemed to have a camera. Anytime they went anywhere the camera bag was right there along with the rest of the luggage, so he was clearly headed in that direction if not already solidly on the road. But plenty of images from that era.

Q2: Anything you would like to add?

Holt: No. I can only see one dimple, so I'll live with it. I always was struck by these. Such stark black and white amidst all this color. That was one of the curious things about it. And the shapes.

Q2: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: This is *The Ancient Incident* from 1981 in the *Kabal American Zephyr* series [1981–83/1985/1987–88], made of wood and metal stands with wood chairs. Here we have another shift in materials and in associations and implications as well. The first thing I feel that I should ask you is about the title of the series—and you've told us that he didn't necessarily tell you the titles or talk about it. But this one in particular one immediately wonders about. It seems puzzling. As I understand it, he was inspired by a nineteenth-century Japanese woodblock printmaker named [Tsukioka] Yoshitoshi, whose work he had seen in exhibition and he had found his work to be fantastic and macabre. That he wanted to reproduce or capture some of that sense is the explanation he gave later—he, himself, gave later. But did he talk about that? Do you remember the genesis of this series that we've got a few works from?

Holt: He never discussed the genesis of the series with me, but one of the things that I do remember about this piece in particular, it seems to me it was one of those pieces—like I said before in terms of titling—that somehow just showed up. I think he knew what it was called from the very beginning. I remember when this was presented to me—we were in the studio and there were three or four people standing around with chairs and trying to hold it together and Bob said,

“Well, this is the way it should be.” So, okay, well you had to have one guy for each chair, and so there was all these people clustered around the thing and the question became then exactly how do you want to do that. How much hardware do you want to be able to see? Is that okay? As opposed to the piece with the windsocks on it, the answer turned out to be that what we really want is not to see any hardware if at all possible.



Robert Rauschenberg
The Ancient Incident (Kabal American Zephyr), 1981
 Wood-and-metal stands with wood chairs
 86 1/2 x 92 x 20 inches (219.7 x 233.7 x 50.8 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

So as opposed to having the plate that holds these two chairs together, it's not just stuck to the bottom of the chair, it's actually inset into the chair. So that when you looked at it from the side, you might see the edge, but you wouldn't see this thing sticking out from the bottom and that was important to him. The other thing was the way in which the chair legs actually connected to these—whatever they are—and with simple steel rods that are anchored into the legs. And then there's a corresponding hole. Everything just slots together and falls together and there's only one way to put it together. That was always an issue when we worked on these, Bob's general

rule was, “Put it together so no one can take it apart.” But if that was not a possibility—which in this case it was clearly not practical—it was, “Put it together so that when it is taken apart, it can only be reassembled in one way.”

I always loved working on these things for a number of reasons. One of them was that I could work inside an air-conditioned building. I didn’t need a welder or a torch or a saw. A hand drill usually and a couple of wrenches and a screwdriver was pretty much all we needed. It was just a matter of assembly. It was a nice break. It wasn’t in any sense a production type of situation where some of these other pieces, given the volume involved, were very much a matter of production and trying to be efficient. This was just thinking and trying to make it work.

[INTERRUPTION]

Holt: So I was talking about the difference between doing something like this and doing these other works. The other works, given the volume involved, would require me to be constantly thinking about efficiency. How can I get this done with some sort of standards and at the same time keep up? I was never behind, it was just a matter of focusing on some things that were not necessarily interesting. Whereas something like this is assembly and that’s all there was to it. I would get to work inside and I would get to work strictly on how can I make this come together in a way that was satisfactory to Bob. But there was always a little thought about handling it, because inevitably I was going to do that at some point. So putting it in the truck and putting it in the gallery and moving it around and things like that were issues.

These pieces were really like a breath of fresh air a lot of times. Because I would put all the production thinking aside and then just start thinking about making simple connections and trying to figure out how we can make these things—for lack of a better word—idiot-proof or make it easy for people to manage them.

Q1: So this was one that was intended to be disassemblable? That you could take it apart and put it back together?

Holt: Yes. The crate for this thing would have been enormous, for one thing. The ability to just lift the chairs off the steps is fairly simple to do. There's nothing complicated in this at all. The key to it is getting the chairs to connect and making sure that that was strong enough to last because it was going to be handled over and over and over and over again. You could have done something like dowel into the seat, but that seat is laminated. In other words, we went through a number of possibilities and the one that worked the best was the one where you had a big metal plate holding the whole thing together and that's what's in there. You just can't see it very well.

Q1: What about in the chairs? The rods that go down, the vertical rods? You didn't put those in, those were—?

Holt: Yes, I put those in. Yes. That was the solution that we came up with. One of the legs was completely gone, so this is another thing that I got to mess around with. It's something I wouldn't normally do. In this case it was get some epoxy and you get some colors and you mix stuff up so it looks similar. So that was a treat. It wasn't just loud noises and heat.

Q1: The stands or ladders—I'm not sure what the right word is—the support part of it, those braces. None of that metalwork—those nails—none of that is stuff that you added, that was all original?

Holt: No, that was all original. These came out of—I want to say they came out of a lumberyard that Bob and Terry wandered through one day and just grabbed them for some reason. Who knows where the chairs came from. This always struck me as something that he actually had fully done before it got to us. That was kind of clear.

Q1: And the finish of the chairs—?

Holt: Nobody touched anything. The only thing that may have happened to that was I'm sure Terry put matte medium on it.

[Laughter]

Q1: Of course.

Q2: I also would like to follow up on that question. There's also a metal belt on the right stand. So this is also the way you found it or was it added?

Holt: Yes. Anything from the chairs down I did nothing structural to. I don't even remember putting a screw or a nail anywhere on these things. I think they were done—what they found is pretty much what you see. They might have taken a brush and cleaned the mud off of them. That's about it.

Q2: The work was later cast in metal, actually a couple of years ago [*The Ancient Incident (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1981/2006, patinaed cast bronze]. Did Rauschenberg have that in mind already when he created this?

Holt: I really don't know. I was a little surprised to find that they had done that. He never mentioned anything to me. So yes, I was surprised.

Q2: Well, you answered all of our questions already, so do you want to add anything?

Holt: Larry Voytek told me a funny story about when they did the castings for these pieces. Obviously they had to make molds and everything, but he said they found a pupa of a praying mantis underneath one of the stairs. So he took it to—well, they found something, they didn't know what it was. A cocoon, right? So they took it to an entomologist and it was for a praying mantis. He got a kick out of that. Just a funny story.

Q2: It is a funny story.

Holt: I'm wondering if I look under the castings will there be—?

Q2: Residue?

Holt: Yes. Will there be a cocoon casting under there or not?

Q2: We have to watch out for that.

Holt: Yes. That sounds like a Larry project to me, to be honest about it. Something he would like to do. He really loved that stuff. The casting and so forth.

Q2: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: This is *House of the Eyetest of the Earth Spider*, also part of the *Kabal American Zephyr* series, from 1981. This one looks like an enormous [laughs] daunting fabrication job for you. It looks like you were the main fabricator. It's made out of mixed media but a lot of metal structure, handmade metal structure. Can you talk about the making of this one? Did he come to you with a fully formed conception in his head in terms of this one?



Robert Rauschenberg
House of the Eyetest of the Earth Spider (Kabal American Zephyr), 1981
Mixed media construction with fluorescent light
82 1/2 x 40 x 105 inches (209.6 x 101.6 x 266.7 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Holt: As I recall, we did a little sketch and then as we started measuring panels that dictated the size that the thing would begin to take on we had to change a little bit of the idea. Because as I recall, Bob wanted a single fork under the piece and I was afraid it wouldn't be strong enough. So we found another fork and doubled up on the bottom. But there is a lot of structure in there and it's heavy. At the time I had just got back from Castelli or Sonnabend galleries. One of the things that always struck me about those places was that if you took a bag of marbles and threw it on the floor, you had no idea where they were going to go because the floors were old wooden floors. They could go anywhere. So that left me with the problem of how to hinge something off of the wall and offer some support to it, knowing that the floor might dip an inch or two. That was the engineering issue for this piece and the solution was to overbuild it to the point where it could pretty much hang off of it and nothing would happen to it. So it is definitely overbuilt. I guess I didn't win any fans with the installation crews or the travel guys with this one.

Q1: You welded together two bike axels—is that the right word?

Holt: Yes, the forks, yes.

Q1: The forks. You took two and welded them together?

Holt: Yes, basically and I just figured out a way of attaching them on the bottom and that's basically just a regular old bicycle handlebar that they're attached to that's been welded to the underside of the frame.

Q1: Does the whole structure move? Can you swing—?

Holt: Yes. The idea was that you could roll it back and forth in an arc. From my perspective as the engineer, that was the problem, knowing that at the time the floors at Castelli could dip an inch or two within 3 feet. How do you accommodate for that when you're having something fixed to the wall? That's the reason why it was a little elaborate in terms of structure.

Q1: But Rauschenberg wanted it movable by viewers? He wanted people to be able to push it around?

Holt: Yes. He did.

Q1: Do you remember people actually doing that in those galleries?

Holt: I never saw anyone do it. I personally never did it—

[Laughter]

Holt: —but that was the idea. He clearly wanted that and that's the reason why it is more or less designed the way it is, with the real beefy fulcrum in the back there and the bearings and everything. It's intended to be moved around.

Q1: I suppose the title is as enigmatic to you as it is to me [laughs].

Holt: It is. It was one of the most enigmatic of titles, of all the things that we worked on.

Q1: Does K.A.Z. have any meaning to you? I see that the acronym of *Kabal American Zephyr* is K.A.Z. Is that a name that—?

Holt: No. I don't recall anything like that. No nicknames that I know of, or no dogs or pets or anything.

[Laughter]

Q2: In terms of interactivity, the viewer was also invited to switch on and off the light switch. Is that correct?

Holt: Yes. Whether they work or not, I couldn't tell you. Knowing that I wired them originally—let's just say I was not an electrician.

[Laughter]

Holt: I probably had it working at one time, but I won't vouch for it and you don't want me wiring your house.

Q2: Was he particular about colors that you chose for the fluorescent lights? Or was this something that was already decided in an early phase of the creation that it should be different colors of light?

Holt: I don't remember the specifics but I don't— Well, let me put it to you this way, I don't remember that he had specific colors already picked out but I think what actually happened is that we put the fixtures in and then we changed various bulbs and that's how the final determination was actually made, after the fact.

Q2: Let's talk a little bit more about the construction of the piece. In some of the paperwork, I read that it's made of sandwiched aluminum wood board— Is this correct or is wood board just referring to the panels that are adhered to the inside?

Holt: Whatever is wood in here, those are the panels. The entire structure is aluminum and the skin on the outside is aluminum. There's nothing between. There's no sandwich per se. If there's a sandwich in there, it would be the outer aluminum skin, the frame, and then the panel on the inside. The panel is where the images and collages are attached to.

Q2: The Plexiglas panel on the top of the work, is this just resting on an aluminum lip or is it secured by other means as well?

Holt: When we looked inside, there are little clips. It looks to me, considering that one of the panels is actually broken, that one of the clips has come loose or somehow something has happened to this piece that it probably needs some attention.

Q2: The mirror piece on the bottom, was this just screwed in with one screw? I saw there's one screw hole to the right. Other than that, it was just resting on the bottom or was it adhered to the bottom as well?

Holt: I think one of the things that we found about working with the mirrored plastics was that if you used an adhesive on the back—which was actually the other side of the reflective surface—what would eventually happen is that that adhesive would pull the aluminum—that mirror is actually a thin film of aluminum—would pull that loose. So what we tried to do at a certain point was use strictly mechanical means of holding those pieces onto the piece. Or if we couldn't get something on the edge, we might actually put as few fasteners as we could and the fasteners

would always be—the holes would always be oversized so that you wouldn't get movement problems. In other words, we tried to keep them as loose as possible while still retaining them to the point where they would actually stay where they're supposed to be, but they still could move around a bit.

Q2: We noticed that on the bottom part the protective backing is still attached to the bottom of the Plexiglas. Was this also a measure to protect it, to leave it on? Now it's not visible, but on the underneath of the yellow mirror Plexiglas, there still is a backing foil that is attached to the back when it pushes them. Was this a measure to also protect it further for any interaction with adhesives or other surfaces?

Holt: I think in the case where we couldn't put something under it or didn't for whatever reason, we would leave the backing on as long as possible. Generally a lot of times, things might actually make it to the gallery or at least through shipping with the backing still on the piece. What we discovered was that if you didn't take it off, the gallery might not either. So sometimes you had to remove it. But in this case, we would have left it on because it was an extra layer of protection and that was the only real reason. It had no aesthetic purpose or value to it.

Q2: Let's get back to the light, just for a second. There's a time sequence of the light, how was this developed?

Holt: I don't think there was a sequence. I think what we're looking at is some electrical gremlins. Considering that I was told recently that someone got shocked by this piece—as I was saying about my wiring skills—it's probably time to take a long look at it.

Q2: The door is pretty unusual and we were wondering where this was found. Was this a sample in a window-slash-door store? Where did you find it?

Holt: [Laughs] I have no idea to be honest with you. It's just one of those things that just showed up at the studio on a regular basis, like these ladders and any other number of what you might call garbage or trash that got picked up somehow by somebody. Usually it was Bob. He'd be out driving around and drive past something and go back and get it.

Q2: Did you remove the lock? Was there a lock initially?

Holt: I don't remember doing it, no. I think that was very much what was there when we got it. All I did was install it, cut the appropriate sized hole, and put it in.

Q2: In the inside, right on top of the yellow Plexiglas mirror, is this an oilcan? Or the remains of an oilcan?

Holt: It's the remains of a gas can.

Q2: A gas can.

Holt: Yes, they're always red.

Q2: We also have a question with regard to the packing and crating. From early on, the work was crated upside down. Do you remember a particular reason for that?

Holt: No. Other than possibly that it might be a little easier to handle, I don't have any reason for it. As the person who made it, I don't think I would have specified that. We did talk about the idea that—for a number of pieces, I would write down some fairly detailed instructions about how to go about assembling or hanging something. I don't really recall—I may have written some instructions for trying to mount it to the wall and what was important because my mind was always obsessed with this whole idea of the floor being varied and walls not being plumb and so forth and so on. That was the Achilles tendon, as far as I was concerned for this piece, was installation and how to handle that.

Q2: What else would you like to share about this piece and its production?

Holt: Well, I'm kind of surprised to see it. It's a beast—

[Laughter]

Holt: —to handle and to hang. So I'm gratified that people went to the trouble to actually put it up here.

Q2: Let's take a look inside.

Holt: Okay. Well, pretty standard stuff.

Q2: Yes. Fluorescent tubes taped to a support.

Holt: Oh, yes. I don't know how that happened.

Q2: So we are looking at the top and there are three fluorescent tubes. One is blue, one is white—I want to say—and one is green. They are standard mounts and it's taped to a support.

Holt: Yes, I can see the old mounting holes where the tape is. So this thing has been through some changes.

Q2: Did you do the wiring yourself?

Holt: Yes, unfortunately, I would say. One of my old friends told me he once got shocked by this piece. But it's clearly not exactly the way it was assembled. Somebody—right here, see the holes? The screw holes? Here. Those would have been for this. So it's been changed, removed, somehow. The whys and wherefores, I wouldn't know. But the point is to have a little tender love and care.

Q2: Good. Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: This is *Petrified Relic from the Gyro Clinic* from the *Kabal American Zephyr* series [1981].

Metal table with a metal wheel on top and a ruler and the duct, which I suppose is the petrified relic. Any insight on the title of this one?



Robert Rauschenberg
Petrified Relic from the Gyro Clinic (Kabal American Zephyr), 1981
Metal table with metal wheel, ruler, and duct
42 x 19 1/2 x 46 inches (106.7 x 49.5 x 116.8 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Holt: No.

Q1: Gyro? Is there a place called the Gyro Clinic, is that a real—?

Holt: Not that I know of. I think that these titles—the *Kabal American Zephyrs* were all eccentrically titled.

Q1: What did you do in the fabrication of this one?

Holt: This one is just pure assembly. There were a couple fiddly little details with this thing. One of them for instance was the exact location of the ruler and how do you want to cut it. Does it matter if the saw curve takes an eighth of an inch out of the ruler and it's not reading correctly all the way around the corner? And in this case Bob's response was, "Well, let's just stick it on there. It doesn't have to be mitered or anything like that. It just needs to be in the right location." This would be an example of something that we wanted to put together in a way that you really couldn't take apart without damaging it. The other alternative method for us when we were doing these kinds of things was to make it something you could disassemble but always put registration pins or some other method of making sure that when it was reassembled, it would only go back together in one way. So this would be more of a permanent type of a situation. The crate for this would not be overwhelming and it's fairly easy to handle. It's light.

Q1: Is the duct, the petrified duct, is it attached there to the table or not?

Holt: Yes, it should be thoroughly attached to the bottom. There's a little brace under the table there.

Q1: The ruler—if I understood what you meant—you took a straight ruler, a metal ruler, and you cut it so that it folded that way along with the table?

Holt: Yes. It followed the edges of everything. The question was, do you want the ruler to keep proper measurement as it went around the corner and then up the other side and then across. The answer was, “No, you can just cut it and stick it together.” You would really have to pay a lot of attention to even notice the difference. But that would be an example of one of the detail things that we would come across while we were assembling these kinds of things.

Q1: Do you remember any conversation about writing the title on the artwork? I don't think it was on the chair.

Holt: No, I was a little surprised to see that. I don't remember that we ever did that. It doesn't bother me in any way.

Q1: I wonder if it's a feature of this series. I don't see it on the chairs on *The Ancient Incident*, but I do it see on the *House of the Eyetest of the Earth Spider* and on this one, the *Petrified Relic*. I wonder if that's a feature of the series as a whole.

Holt: Bob never had mentioned it to me as part of what he was trying to—that that would be part of the piece. So I don't know.

Q2: I would like to go back to the ruler and the wheel. First, my understanding is the wheel is bolted through the ruler into the table.

Holt: Yes.

Q2: And then the side parts of the ruler have been adhered to the table, or they have been attached by other means?

Holt: I would think that there's some sort of glue, some adhesive that we had a hold of at that time. I don't recall and I don't see any evidence of any—obviously, well, it could be welded. But that's not something you would do and still retain the finish that you see, so there's probably, definitely, some sort of industrial mastic of some sort. Something to keep an eye on, in other words.

Q2: Do you recall where the parts came from?

Holt: Where the cart came from? No.

Q2: And the other parts?

Holt: It's like I said, it's one of those mysterious things that would show up in the studio or in the yard somewhere, maybe close to where the car was parked a couple of days ago. Years later if I went down to Captiva, there was always, I don't know, a bone yard or a junkyard where you would see things like this and carts and chairs and little pieces of wood or whatever. A dedicated spot and every now and then, Bob would wander out there and start picking stuff up. Didn't mean pieces came out of it but it was a resource.

Q2: Thank you.

Holt: Thank you. It was fun to work on these.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: This is *The Proof of Darkness* also from the *Kabal American Zephyr* series, 1981. It's a fire hose, lead plate, and a blue airport runway light. Were you involved in the construction of this piece and if so what did you do in the making of this one?



Robert Rauschenberg
The Proof of Darkness (Kabal American Zephyr),
1981
Fire hose, lead plate and blue airport-runway light
Dimensions variable
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Holt: I remember when Bob first showed me the parts and he described what he wanted to do. Basically my job was to fabricate a little piece of metal that would hold the bulb to the end of the fire hose and then find a way to affix the end of the extension cord or the electrical wire that's in there to the other end of the fire hose and that was it. This is one of the pieces that I remember the absolute most. I've never forgotten this piece. To me it's just pure poetry.

Q1: He came with all the components?

Holt: He came with the parts and we were in the studio and he, “Well, I wanted it to be like this.” I kind of held the bulb at the end of the hose and kind of set it on the lead plate and, “We’ll just put something in there, in the fire hose, and plug it into the wall.” That was the whole consultation. It was simple and beautiful.

Q1: So a pretty quick fix.

Holt: Quick, quick.

Q1: There’s a plate behind the light and what is on the socket side? What did you put in there?

Holt: That plate that you see behind the light, that’s the part that I made.

Q1: But on the socket, didn’t you say there was something that affixed the—?

Holt: I’d have to look at it but it’s probably just a piece of metal that’s been cut out and sized to hold the plug and then screwed into or somehow affixed to the end of the hose. Very simple. Maybe half a day’s work maybe, at the most.

Q1: What about the lead plate? Did he come with that too?

Holt: It was there. It was part of the bucket of things that he brought over. This is what we're going to do. Another one of those fully conceived things. The only real question was how elaborate do you want to get with your little clips that hold the bulb on and so forth and so on. It was, "Just keep it simple."

Q1: Is this one where he came with the title fully formed too or—?

Holt: I don't remember that he had a title for this, but to me it's working on all cylinders. The title is perfect, the piece is perfect. It's just so poetic, so simple. It's hard to forget.

Q1: This is one—in terms of what you were talking about earlier: disassembling, reassembling—it looks like the modifiable aspect of this is the coil, it can be done any way you want to. Right?

Holt: Yes, yes. I've seen it shown any number of ways. It doesn't have to be plugged into the wall, it can be plugged into the floor. In which case it's a little different. So forth and so on.

Q1: He didn't have a specific idea that it has to be regular coil or that it has to be really messy? He didn't care?

Holt: No, it didn't seem to be the case. Like I said, it was shown a number of times. In the studio we had floor plugs and we had wall plugs, so I've seen it in any number of configurations.

Q3: Can I ask a question? So you said it was poetry, pure poetry. Could you say a little bit more about why this piece affects you so personally, given all the pieces we've talked about today and all that you've worked on with him?

Holt: It's just so simplistic and so appropriate in every way, for me, visually. The title and the object combine in a way that is very, very touching for me. It's just natural. It's like breathing. It's wonderful. It's just a beautiful piece. All these years, this is one of the pieces that I've remembered forever and a day. *Proof of Darkness*. Simple. Absolutely haunting in a way. Nice stuff. In a way, being most proud of something that took you two and a half hours to do [laughs]. That's okay.

Q2: Larry Wright also mentioned that he had been involved in sourcing the components for that piece. Does this sound about right?

Holt: I think somebody may have actually gone out and found the kind of—it's not an extension cord, but the electrical wire in there. He could have done that, yes.

Q2: He also mentioned the plug, which is a quite unusual plug, was probably sourced in a marine supply store?

Holt: The what?

Q2: The one in the outlet? In the wall?

Holt: Oh, yes. I would think so. My recollection was that at some point, we ended up as—I believe there is an armored cable inside the hose. It's got a brass mesh on it and it's very much a marine product. I remember one of the things that Bob said about this when I was starting to put it together was, "I don't want a red extension cord in there. Just get something really heavy duty," and that's how we ended up at the marine supply store.

Q2: The light is actually referred to as an airport runway light. Do you have any idea where you got that?

Holt: None.

[Laughter]

Q2: I also would like to get back to the lead metal plate because I could see the work maintaining its poetry without it too. So why was Bob so particular about the metal plate that it needed to be added?

Holt: To me, it's just the simple fact that it's lead. It's a base metal. There's nothing precious about it. It's only in this context and under this circumstance that it lends a counterpoint or something, in my mind. I suspect that's true for Bob too.

Q2: Okay, got you. Any other stories you want to share about this piece?

Holt: No, it's just a real beauty. Who'd have thunk it, after all these years? I remember all the other technical things, but this is one of the most memorable things that I worked on.

Q2: Wonderful. Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: This is Panel 24 of *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* that was begun in 1981 and that Rauschenberg worked on all the way up through 1998. There were in the end 190 panels and the piece measured nearly a thousand feet in all. I know that you worked on a number of the panels in the early portion of the making of the piece. I wonder if you can tell us about the genesis of the project. It's such a remarkable undertaking, just to get your head around the idea of the piece, much less the physical presence of the piece—it takes some work. Can you tell us, do you remember how the piece came together? How he came to the idea of putting it together?



Eric Holt, second from left, and Rauschenberg at right with others during the installation of *The First Footage of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Gallery of Fine Art, Edison Community College, Fort Myers, Florida, 1982. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

Installation view, *Rauschenberg in China*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2016. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Pieces* (1981–98), panels 21 to 24. Photo: Li Sen, courtesy Ullens Center for Contemporary Art



Holt: I remember him raising the subject. I think in a way, he was gauging the level of incredulity that he might elicit from his staff. At the time I think he was spending or talking to or having dealings with the Meyerhoffs who were big collectors. They were big horse collectors, or horse people. Somehow or another the whole furlong thing started to come into his consciousness. It was ambitious, to say the least, like a lot of other projects that he always put himself to. I don't recall the ah-ha moment or anything like that. It was just let's start talking about this and see what happens, see what people think. Then once we started it was more like

well, we're not going to stop, so this is what we'll do when we're not doing something else.

Basically.

Every now and then we would get to a pause or a stopping point—which, to me, this is one of them. To a certain point this happens, then something else starts to happen, until everything gets welded together in one large assemblage.

Q1: Was it conceptualized as a series? I mean, did he have a plan for—if the first batch was the first thirty, did he have a plan for what those first thirty panels were going to be? Or was it one by one?

Holt: I think it was more—I don't recall ever having a single panel showing up in the shop or in the studio, where they would come to me and they would say work on this. It always tended to be three, four, five, or six different things. They would be arranged in a way so, "This is a single. Let's do this one as a double," and so forth and so on. But the first section that I worked on was very much flat, there weren't a lot of accoutrements, there was nothing stuck to the pieces. There was no three dimensional forays into this or that or the other, and then all of a sudden this comes up. That's the way I remember it. But this came up flat. When I first saw this it was in the studio on the floor. My recollection of it was that it could very well have stayed there or been thought of in a way that it was supposed to be on the floor. But at some point, once we got it covered and the plastic was on it, Bob started asking me if it could be hung. Of course, it could be hung, but it was going to be heavy and awkward and take six people.

So once again, the hanging crew was not a fan of me. They didn't much care for this. It's a handful when you have the plastic on it.

Q1: So you build the aluminum backing I assume. But that wood frame, did you built that too?

Holt: Yes. This would be an example of something where, once we started it and once the decision was taken that we're going to put a plastic cover over this, that meant that we had to have some edge that was usable. That meant that I was going to end up covering up some part of the image. It may only be a strip that's an inch wide all the way around, but when that kind of thing would happen I would go to Bob first and I would say, "Look we can do this. It's not really a problem. But it's going to impinge on this thing." Sometimes the edge of what he was working on was just as important as the middle. I mean he didn't want to see any shavings or nothing like that to make it smooth.

He wanted it to be just exactly the way he left it. So before I would do anything like what you're seeing here—like add those wooden strips or wooden boards—I would always go to him and ask, see what he thought. Generally, I'd have it mocked up, lay it down, and then go grab Bob and say well, this is what's going to happen if we go this route. He didn't have a problem with it. The other issue was that those boards would eventually be covered up by aluminum, which would kind of clench the plastic all the way around the edge so it couldn't come out.

Mechanically, that was one of the necessities of doing this, especially if you were going to hang it off the wall.

Q1: Did you affix this—it looks like a rocking chaise longue?

Holt: Yes, I did all that. Once we figured out where we wanted it. So it's lying on the floor and we run around and we put little registration marks on everything. Bob and Terry had done all of the reinforcements, all of the fabric that's been gessoed around various joints to try to keep the thing from sagging all the way over. It was kind of a mess. They did all that to make it more structural. So I think it was just fun for them. We figured out where we're going to have it, then you build a frame, you go back, you put everything back where it came from, and then you figure out how you're going to attach it. It's another example of well, we could be super elegant here or we could just take some wire and bale it onto the frame. That's what he opted for. "Let's just do the wire." I mean, look at the thing: it's a mess. It's basically falling apart. We're not going to use some space age hardware to try to pretend that this thing is something that's it not.

Q1: That is part of the logic of—I assume those two wood pieces on the right were originally part of the framework of the chair and they just were broken and he decided—?

Holt: That's how it was laid. When it was laid out on the floor and they told me that we're going to do this and then it was, "Can we do this?" In terms of, can we put something over it? And, "Yes, we can do all that, but—" all these things were laid out very much as you see them now.

Q1: One more question about the series as a whole. Did he ever work out of sequence? Did he say, "We're going to do number 22 and then we'll go back to number 18"? Or was it always 1, 2, 3, 4?

Holt: I don't recall him ever doing that. I don't recall him ever giving me a panel to be framed and then telling me, "This goes between 11 and 12." Even though it might be number whatever, 25. I don't remember that at all. I'm not sure that there was a sequence in the sense that you and I think of it. I don't think Bob was thinking linearly, that number 12 actually has to follow number 11. It was all a visual thing. As I was saying before, things seemed to come out in spurts. There might be five or six panels that were done in one night. There might be eight or ten that were done over a given week. Let's say two or three days. But once that was done, the next phase, then the next phase. It was not, "Oh, we've got thirty panels but we've got to do 120 more." I don't think—there was no goal line that I could see other than the phrase, that was *2 Furlong* or *The 1/4 Mile Piece*. That was the description.

Q1: Just thinking about this work in relation to his working process in general. This one, you were saying, came out in spurts as you're not working on other stuff. Would you describe that as being something having to do with the rhythm of the work in general? In other words, was working with him—did it feel like we're doing the *Spreads* now in that series, and then suddenly there's a big shift and we're doing the *Photems*? Or did it feel like there are always maybe two or three or four series that are in the air at the same time? "Today we're doing one, but tomorrow we might do another one." Do you see what I mean? Which was the norm?

Holt: The norm for me, from my observation, was that Bob was doing so many different things. You got to remember that while we were doing all this, they were doing the clayworks in Japan and there were always prints and other works being done at Gemini G.E.L. [Los Angeles] or

print shops. There were always like five or six pokers in the fire. I might have had my hands on one or two of them. In the meanwhile, they would fly off to Japan and do something and they'd leave me with a dozen panels to work on while they were gone. Then they'd come back and that's basically the way it was. We knew that we would always be working on something, but you never really knew day-to-day what it was going to be. I would say though that when there was—not so much a deadline—but a show was imminent, then of course there were certain things that we would focus on.

Q2: I would like to recap on the structure and fabrication again. So, let's see, the map was mounted to wooden board. Is that correct? And then the wooden board to an aluminum structure and then you built the frame around it and the wooden lip to accommodate the Plexiglas vitrine?

Holt: Right. So you have the aluminum frame, you have the door skins with the map that's attached to the frame, then you mount the wooden edging, and then the Plexiglas goes over the entire thing, and then you screw an aluminum channel that goes all the way around the entire piece and that channel is wide enough so that effectively you don't see the front surface of the wood. You don't see all the screws and all the holes. All you see is an aluminum bar. You can see the inside edge, but—

Q2: I can imagine it takes a village to install it.

Holt: Yes. This did not help my popularity with the hanging crews, because it's a real monster to handle.

Q2: Was there a tolerance to show it either with the Plexiglas cover or without? Or should it always be shown with the Plexiglas cover?

Holt: Well, surprisingly to me, this was one example of something where Bob wanted the plastic. That was one of the first things we talked about. “Can we get something over this? And what will it look like?” I didn’t have a real good answer exactly at that moment. I had to go somewhere and find a couple of things. For one thing, everything about this is oversized. If you go to a plastic fabricator you’re going to find twelve-foot this, six-foot that, this is all oversized. You have to really look around to find the appropriate sized materials to work on this. It’s not so bad in New York or Los Angeles, but good luck in Des Moines [Iowa]. It’s just not going to happen. That was true for this.

Q2: Do you think that Bob had a higher tolerance for this particular plastic cover because it also has sculpture characteristics and helps the painting move into the wall?

Holt: Yes, I think he did. I think that made all the difference to him. It gives it a little bit of a jewel-like quality, a faceted kind of structure to it. And then behind that, you get this wonderful mess with the chair and the fabric, the bandages screwed around, and all that kind of stuff and the relative crudity of the wiring and all that stuff. Then you have this very clean, very modern-looking cover. Something you can open. It’s one of my favorite things, too, but very much something to be careful with.

Q2: You were in the studio during the creation of the first thirty panels for *The 1/4 Mile* painting, and we're wondering if any of the images will trigger memories that you would like to share with us? If you could just refer to the number of each panel that you're mentioning.

Holt: When I looked at images like number 8, 12, 13, and 21 and 22 in particular, I thought about other series of works that Bob had done. One of them was—I don't know if I can describe it adequately—it was a series of photographs with zippers between them.

Q2: Right, *Hiccups* [1978].



Robert Rauschenberg

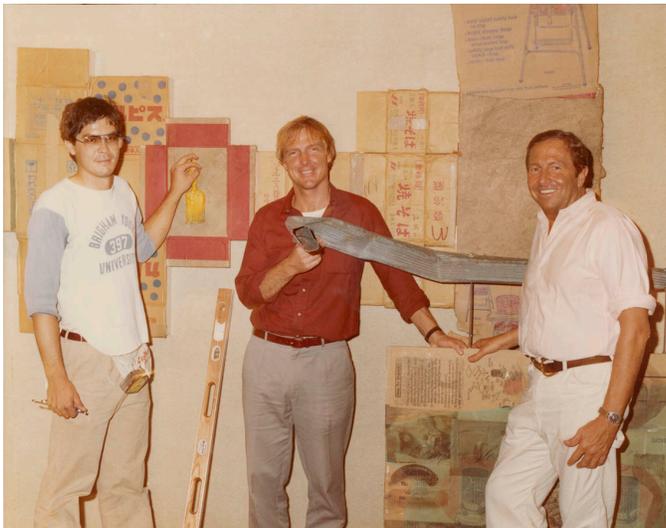
Hiccups, 1978

Solvent transfer and fabric with metal zippers on 97 sheets of handmade paper
9 inches x 63 feet 2 1/2 inches (22.9 x 1926.6 cm)

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Gift of the artist in honor of Phyllis Wattis

Holt: *Hiccups*, yes. When I was working on those panels, I kept thinking of them because the way they're laid out and the linear quality. It's not necessarily something that he does a lot of, but the *Hiccups* were exactly that. I always wondered about that. The thing about working on

The 1/4 Mile is that—as I was talking earlier about production and doing things quickly—a lot of it lent itself to that because it was two panels, very much the same size. So it was just a matter of getting in there, driving people crazy for a while, and then being done. I really don't have a good solid memory of any of the cardboard parts, like 25, 26, 27, but the time period is appropriate. I just don't remember doing them, to be honest about it. That's really about it. This is the one that sticks out the most for me. I guess in a way it's pretty unusual in this series.



Eric Holt, Terry Van Brunt, and Rauschenberg during the installation of *The First Footage of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Gallery of Fine Art, Edison Community College, Fort Myers, Florida, 1982. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q1: Did you see some or all of it installed?

Holt: This was shown at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York] at one point, I believe. [Note: *Selections from Rauschenberg's 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, 1987–88]

Q2: Yes.

Holt: And yes, I was there and I helped install part of it at least. I have seen it in bits and pieces, but I don't think I've ever seen the whole thing. That would be interesting. It was an interesting job for a twenty-five-year-old.

Q2: Thank you so much.

Q1: Thank you very much.

Holt: Thank you, I appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]