

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

George Holzer

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2016

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with George Holzer conducted by Cameron Vanderscoff on February 3, 2016. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: George Holzer

Location: Easton, Maryland

Interviewer: Cameron Vanderscoff

Date: February 3, 2016

Q: Today is Wednesday, the 3rd of February. It's 2016 and we are in Easton at the Art Academy Museum—Academy Art Museum—

Holzer: Academy Art Museum.

Q: —Academy Art Museum where there is actually currently an exhibit of Bob's work focusing around pieces from ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange; *Robert Rauschenberg: ROCI Works from the National Gallery of Art, 2015–16*]. This is Cameron Vanderscoff. We're here with George Holzer for the Rauschenberg Oral History Project. So to start us off if you could just give us some context—I'm curious a little bit about your early years and then what drew you to photography.

Holzer: Now early years as in how far early? [Laughs]

Q: Well, when and where were you born we can start with.

Holzer: Okay, sure. I was born in New Jersey in 1949. My growing up years were in suburban New York area with no particular art around me—living right outside Manhattan, but only

seeing Manhattan when we went in to visit relatives. I rarely saw museums, but once in a while I did. I was told at a point in high school, where the draft was a big issue for Vietnam, that I'd better get some kind of a plan going. And I was not a very good student. Like Bob, I'm dyslexic, so I had a hard time with learning and other issues. So I didn't have a very good educational background as far as grades and whatever.

My parents worried about me and they sent me to be evaluated—every kind of test you can imagine in terms of anything from drawing pictures to the SATs and any kind of thing. Three days of testing and that was kind of a new experimental thing at that point in time. That would have been in the sixties and that really wasn't common. So this was a bit of an experimental thing. And at the end of the whole thing, they came out and said, "Well we think the guy should be an artist." I looked at them like I didn't have any idea what they were talking about and neither did my mom. I thought, why? Where did that come from? "Well, just that you seem to have talent for composition and design and good color sense. You're very sensitive," and that kind of thing. I thought, what is an artist? How can an artist be a career? All I could think of was my next-door neighbor who was really good at cartooning and drawing cool racing cars and all that. That kid's an artist. I'm not an artist—I can't draw a thing. Typical naïve thinking. So I kind of thought, no, that's not going to be me.

He was like, "Well look kid, your grades are terrible and you're never going to like school. You hate it. And maybe you should go into a field that's pretty open and has a good chance of making money without real difficulties. There's this new field opening up. It's computers and maybe you should get into that." This was '64, '65. I was like, "I have no idea what you're talking about, but

okay, we can look into that.” He said, “It’s a growing thing. There is going to be lots of room for people in that kind of a field.” And my parents were like, “Well, why don’t we look into a school to do that?” And I did. I tried going to college for computer programming, computer science, didn’t do terribly well at it. And I also thought this isn’t really what I want to do—this is pretty dry. This is pretty uninteresting.

So being the good fool that I am, I just kind of dropped out and said, “I’m not going to do this—I’m not doing this anymore. This isn’t what I want to do.” Well I was drafted within a month. [Laughs] Anyway, I did all that stuff. I got drafted. This was Vietnam and I was lucky enough—unlucky enough—to be actually drafted in the Marine Corps. Vietnam, the Marines were getting killed so quickly they made a deal, somebody made a deal, where they could take ten percent of the Army draft lot and stick you in the Marines. And I got stuck in the Marines. I thought my life was in big trouble at that point, which it could have been because you pretty much are going to be frontlines walking in the muck. And it was looking real bad. But I screamed and begged and pleaded and wrote on every application and every test that I took, “Have computer experience, have college.” It wasn’t even on the list of things that you might have experience with or knowledge of or anything. But they picked it up and that’s what I ended up doing.

So I got lucky. I ended up just being a computer operator guy for the Marines for the whole two years that I was in there.

Q: Well, probably a better argument than “I was supposed to be an artist.”

Holzer: Yes, that wouldn't have went anywhere with them clearly. It was interesting during all this testing in the Marines and defining your career and all that, I guess that's when I first started to realize that I'm actually not stupid and sort of retarded. I was just not a good student and had a problem with learning, but I was in a good school system and I really am not as dumb as I think of myself. Having sisters on both sides—I'm a middle child—having sisters on both sides that were stellar honor students, I was looking real bad. [Laughs] So I kind of came out of childhood thinking I was a complete moron or couldn't learn or something. So anyway, that was interesting.

So they stuck me in the computer stuff, which worked out really nicely. I spent most of my time in Hawaii—a really nice duty station. If you have to be in the Marine Corps, you might as well be stationed in the—

Q: A tropical place, yes.

Holzer: —in the Hawaiian Islands. In the Marines, I really hated—I just couldn't believe I was in this thing because they're all such gung-ho and this is what you signed up for and we're the first in there and we're tough and we don't care, nothing will get us. I was like, this is not me. [Laughs] But you're in and it's too late. But slowly, during all that boot camp and infantry training stuff, I was terrified that I was going to Vietnam. I was sure I was going to Vietnam. That's what they were training us to do. But I was learning that I am not stupid, that I was actually helping the other guys that were a little less with it than me learn rules of this and the

nomenclature of the rifle or whatever. And I was thinking, I'd better start thinking differently about myself. It was interesting in that sense.

So I get out of the service and I fiddle around trying to be a computer guy and it wasn't going so great. I was finding it pretty boring. And of course, it's sitting in cubicles or going in shifts and it was just not interesting. I thought I'd sort of run away from it all and I went back to Hawaii thinking I could just maybe hang out back there again. That was nice there. Well that didn't work out so well. [Laughs] There were no jobs there either and certainly not at that time.

But I was fortunate to meet a man who was an elder, older than me. He was probably in his fifties, Chinese. He had just had a divorce. He had been working for IBM [International Business Machines Corporation]. He was on his way back to China. And we became friends. He was very fatherly towards me and really was saying, "You have a brain kid. You need to develop it. You need to go back to college. You need to do something. Don't stay here in Hawaii and become a beach bum because where's that going to be in twenty years? Or do you want to work in a restaurant? What else is there here? Do you want to work in a hotel?" "No." So he was very, very instrumental in that way.

And so I was thinking. He said, "It doesn't matter what you go back to school for, but just go back to school." I thought, god, he's right. I need to do that.

Q: What was his name?

Holzer: Dick Wei [phonetic], which I'm sure was not his real name. The last name was Wei, but his first name, Dick, was obviously some Americanization thing. I lost contact with him unfortunately. I tried to get in contact with him years later, but he had obviously gone back to China and I lost contact.

Q: But he inspired you?

Holzer: He inspired me to go a different route that yes, you have a brain and you have some talents and you need to just buckle down and develop this and education is your first step. I didn't know quite how I was going to do that exactly. I knew I had G.I. Bill [Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944] money. That was a big thing back then so I knew I could get a chunk of it at least paid for. That was an issue—money. I didn't have any money. And since I had dropped out so defiantly in my first go-around of college my parents—mostly my father—was like, “We will never pay for a penny of his education after this because he has hurt us so badly.” And that was his issue. My mom would have caved for sure, but my dad was so hurt by it because I was going to go to college and he never went to college. He grew up in New York City and just had to make a living. So it was just—it just crushed him.

So anyway, I knew they weren't going to pay for any of it. And I thought, I've got the G.I. Bill. Some other circumstances with a failed first marriage and whatever, I realized the only way I can go back to college is if I bite the bullet and go back and live with my parents, who had moved to Florida, and try to start going to school there. Because I could claim that I, as a resident, I could

get a local tuition kind of thing. It was the most horrible decision to make, but it was the only logical one.

[Laughter]

Holzer: There was no other help that I knew of. I had no other relatives that I could go to to ask for money or whatever.

So that's what I did. I went there and I enrolled myself in the cheapest community college I could find around there and said, "Start taking classes and start taking art classes along with the other fundamentals you're supposed to take." And funny, it just kind of it worked along. It just seemed like it was resonating. It was bouncing back every time. The classes were going well. I wasn't some fabulous artist, but I felt like maybe this does make some sense—this is interesting. And the more I dug into a little bit of art history and art-making, I was thinking, this is a lot more in depth and interesting than I had any idea about and how dumb of me from my early high school days of going, "Get out of here, what are you talking about? Not a chance dude."

[Laughs] So that was just naiveté and not having any real education.

So anyway, I followed that for a while. And then this was in the mid-seventies and at some point I'd taken the local college experience in southern Florida, which is not a very culturally happening place—I need to move up. I need to ratchet this up. And several professors I had said, "Kid, you're working hard at this. You've got some talent. You've got to go to a bigger better school. You've got to get up and get out there and I don't know where that's going to be." And

all I could think of was the only thing I can do, I have to stay within Florida because I can get reduced tuition.

So I looked around at the Florida schools. And interestingly it was probably around that time that I went and I saw a show. I can't remember what it was called. I can't even remember exactly where it was, but I saw a show of prints—printmaking I think—and it had this Rauschenberg in it from the sixties [opens Rauschenberg catalogue]—

Q: So we're looking at *Crocus* [1962, a silkscreen painting]—



Robert Rauschenberg
Crocus, 1962
Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas
60 x 36 inches (152.4 x 91.4 cm)
Collection of Linda and Harry Macklowe, New York

Holzer: *Crocus*.

Q: —from '62.

Holzer: '62 and it just completely captivated me as fascinating and wow that's what you can do in art? As opposed to let's say, what I've been seeing so far is how well can you draw or can you sculpt or whatever. It was conceptual stuff tied in with visually recognizable things, abstraction. I was fascinated by it.

Q: So what about this one in particular? What, if this was such a moment—

Holzer: That's hard for me to say exactly. I guess it was the fact that there were these disparate things and hidden things in here that I couldn't really understand, other than this very clearly military vehicle that's so weird-looking, being in a negative form like that, and things in here that I got a sense that there was an idea being projected to me, being thrown to me, as opposed to a lot of the other art that I'd been seeing so far. Well not entirely, but mostly it had been general art history and eighteenth-century this or whatever and just the basic history kind of stuff. We barely would touch on modern things. Maybe we would touch on something as modern as this in the last part of the class or something and—

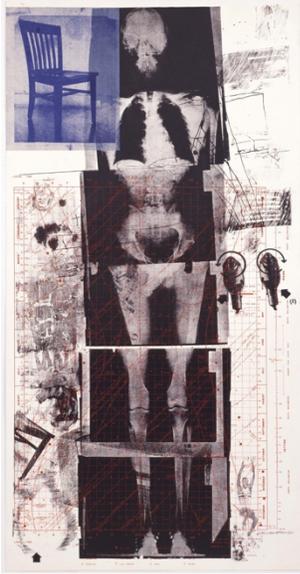
Q: Because of the time, we're in the middle-seventies here or something like that and this being from '62—

Holzer: Just because I hadn't gone to a school that would have had twentieth-century art history—

Q: It has classical art history.

Holzer: Yes, it was more like an overview art history and then maybe some—I don't think anybody taught what we call "modern." Maybe it went up to—oh what do you call it, Impressionism-kind of thing.

Anyway that happened to be one of them. And I guess I had seen other Rauschenbergs around in some reproductions. I was very taken by *Booster* from '67. I don't remember, I'd seen that maybe in a magazine or whatever. I was starting to look for things. You know how you start becoming aware of art when you see it, like in *Time* magazine, where normally most people would go, "I don't know what that crap is," and flip by it. But I think what's interesting about these is—this intrigued me, but it intrigued me also in that it used photography in it. And that was something that I hadn't seen that much of. I'd seen also in James Rosenquist photo imagery even though sometimes they were painted. But some of the Pop artists that might have—an [Andy] Warhol or whatever—that would have used photography. But this was a powerful use of it to me and a use of it out of context and in an ambiguous context. And I thought that was pretty fascinating although at the time I wouldn't have been able to say any of this to you. I just was like, "Wow, cool!" and trying to figure out what I'm looking at.



Robert Rauschenberg
Booster, 1967
Lithograph and screenprint on paper
72 x 35 1/2 inches (182.9 x 90.2 cm)
From an edition of 38, published by Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: It's something that it started with that gut thing. It didn't start with this cerebral, "Okay, right, this is painterly, this is—"

Holzer: Absolutely. No, "Rauschenberg is great and you should like his work because of—" No, not at all. And it was definitely what did lead me to photography. I guess it's why I got so deeply into all this. I had been playing around with the traditional drawing. I don't know that I ever took an official painting class. I've dabbled around in some painting. I didn't really think I was too great at drawing or painting. Sculpture—I thought, I've got possibilities there. I've got a tactile feel and I'm pretty good with tools and that was interesting to me. You know how it is when you get a professor in a class that really challenges you or pushes you or inspires you by whatever means. This guy was kind of an asshole, but—I don't even remember his name—but he challenged me, I guess. And I was at a point where I am going to do well in this studio class hell or high water kind of thing. And it was a printmaking class—screenprinting—and so that's how I

got into screenprinting. That was not photography stuff. That was stencils and design kinds of things and most of them were pretty bad. [Laughs]

So now I'm going to bring us back to where I decided I'd better go to a bigger better school. I was looking at schools. I looked at the University of Miami. I looked at Florida State [University, Tallahassee]. But then I found this University of South Florida in Tampa and it was a little under the radar and it was a little less known and glitzy, but I liked the look of their catalogue and their descriptions of things. For instance I was strongly thinking about the University of Florida in Gainesville. That's the big flagship school in Florida and I went up there and they wanted me to claim right here and now my major and this is the track you'll be on. And I didn't like that idea. I was like, "Well I'm interested in printmaking but I'm also interested in sculpture." "Well you've got to pick. Maybe you can take an elective in that later on, but right now you've got to do graphic design. You've got to do two—" that kind of thing. I didn't really like that idea very much at that school. I didn't get a great feeling.

I went over to the University of South Florida and the guy that was the interviewer—what was he called? He was an adviser, that's what he was—a funky, cool dude. He's wearing a big baggy T-shirt with Mickey Mouse on it. It wasn't like some guy in a tie. "Hey, how are you doing? What's going on? How's the surf in Fort Lauderdale," that kind of thing. Okay, this is more interesting. I talked to him about what I had seen at the University of Florida in Gainesville and he was like, "Well we're not like that here. Sure you're going to have to hone yourself down at some point, but no, you can take printmaking class. You can take a sculpture class at the same

time. You can take drawing. We have certain things that you need to take as fundamental things that we feel are important sure, but—” I was like, “No, I like the sound of this a lot better.”

I also looked in their catalogue and looked in some place or another that they had this thing called Graphicstudio, which I read a little bit about and got really interested in because, oh shit, here’s that Rauschenberg guy and here’s this Rosenquist guy and here are these other guys. And it was like, oh this is really interesting. They do experimental print projects with these artists. I really am interested in that and that kind of fits with printmaking, but it doesn’t look like traditional printmaking. So that might be really interesting.

Q: Because what year—

Holzer: This would have been ’76, I think.

Q: Okay, right. So yes, you had several Rauschenberg/Graphicstudio collaborations by that time.

Holzer: There was. They had done some of these earlier works before I came there.

Q: The *Made in Tampa* [1972–73].

Holzer: Right, *Tampa*.

Q: He did the *Crops* [1973], the *Airport Suite* [1974].

Holzer: Right. Some of them I saw, some of them I didn't. But I saw these things in catalogues—these particular ones [indicating in catalogue]—the *Airport* series.

Q: *Airport Suite, Cat Paws* [1974], yes.



Robert Rauschenberg
Cat Paws (Airport Suite), 1974
Color relief and intaglio on fabric with
bottle caps and buttons
34 x 35 1/2 inches (86.4 x 90.2 cm)
From an edition of 20, published by
Graphicstudio, University of South
Florida, Tampa

Holzer: Those obviously really captivated me like the way this *Crocus* did because it involved objects and collage and photographs. And that's what I was really interested in. I thought of it as, that's the printmaking thing that I'm interested in pursuing and I thought, well, they've got that going on there. I don't know how, but I'll see some of that maybe. And I also noticed in their catalogue they had—I forget what they called it, but they had an experimental digital music studio there, which was a new thing. And I was really interested in that.

[INTERRUPTION]

It was using computers and I thought, oh, that's an interesting tie-in to my past. And I was also interested in experimental music in my own sort of naïve way. I didn't know a lot about it, but I knew a little bit about it and I was fascinated by it. So I thought, god, that's where I've got to go.

Q: That's a place to pan out. It's a place to try. It's a place to—

Holzer: There are a number of options there. Well so that's what I did. I decided to go there. Well it's funny how things happen. [Laughs] I got there in '76. Okay, '76 is the year that Graphicstudio basically went dormant. They had funding problems and political issues—they shut down. Great. So all I got to see were some of the places where they used to have the presses and the studio stuff, but that was it. Okay, great. All right, well that's not happening.

I go, well, I'm going to enroll in electronic music class. So let's start learning about that, let's start learning electronic history and music history. Well I went there and that was very cool, very interesting, but I then learned everything was music-oriented. It had nothing to do with visual arts at all. There was no computer-visual anything. It was all about sound computer generation and stuff and synthesizers. I was like, well, I guess that's not happening—at least not for now. So it was kind of funny and here I am—and Tampa's not the most lovely place, if you've ever been there. And back then it was even worse. I was like, geez, maybe I've made a mistake, but I'm determined. I am determined I am going to take my classes and I am going to learn and pursue.

It did work out fine. I was able to take twentieth-century art history. I was able to take more diverse classes like Asian arts, Chinese and Japanese, and learn some of that stuff. I wasn't going

to learn that in a small school someplace. They just don't offer that kind of thing. I thought of myself as a printmaking major roughly. But I came back to this thought and I was putting transfer, like what Bob would do, transfers of magazines and newspapers into my prints and then also with silkscreening them—not trying to copy him particularly, but just trying to use those things. That's when I realized to myself I don't want to keep relying upon having to find images in magazines and then reversing—I maybe need to take some photography classes so I can start using my own photographs.

So I enrolled in a photography class. I bought a cheap camera. And that's how I got into photography. I had dabbled the tiniest little bit with a camera a little bit earlier, but nothing other than trying to take a nice snapshot when I was in Hawaii or something. I knew nothing about the art, fine art of photography at all. But I got into the photography department and just by chance, or by fate, they were a much more lively group. They were more or less open to mixing of media. And at some point one of my professors, David Yager, he was very much into mixed media combination, Rauschenberg kind of work—and he was encouraging me. It was like, “No, no, you don't have to make the nice little 8-by-10 print like the traditional thing. And in fact I don't find that interesting at all like most schools do. Print on whatever you want to print on or print it as a blueprint or print it as—” He encouraged alternative mediums in photography. And I thought, this is much more interesting.

Again by luck there were some good people in the classes that were pretty vocal and were challenging. The printmaking department was flat to me. They were just smoking cigarettes and rolling out plates and just not much happening there—there wasn't any inspiration. So I ended up

switching to a photography major, which that school—the University of South Florida—was open to that being an option as opposed to other schools that would have said, “No, no, that’s multimedia,” or “That’s mixed media,” or “That’s printmaking.” “We’re into the standard, 8-by-10 perfectly printed silver print, mounted properly.” This school was not like that and that’s why I chose to go there, kind of on intuition, I guess. And that’s how I ended up there. It’s weird, but it’s the way it happened.

Q: And then you wind up staying with photography through an MFA [Master of Fine Arts], that’s right?

Holzer: I did, yes. Because I had transferred there and I was a little older, my two professors at the university there along with a couple other professors that I’d had—I’d only been there a little over a year—and they were encouraging me to go to graduate school. I wanted to go to graduate school because I wanted to keep pursuing art, but I had a feeling—and it’s probably true—that once you get out of school you’re probably going to have a hard time pursuing it too much unless you really get lucky or you’ve got money. And I didn’t have money.

So I thought, well one way to force me to develop is to go to graduate school. And I thought, I’m going to run out of my G.I. Bill money here, but I’ll figure it out. I had a discussion with my mom. My dad had passed by that point, but my mom said, “I’d like to be able to say I’ll help you with graduate school, but I have to honor your father’s decree back from the sixties that you hurt us so badly we’re never going to pay for your school.” So I was like, “All right, I’ll make it work somehow or another.”

I was going to go to Florida State, one of the other big schools, up in Tallahassee because they had a very interesting professor up there that I thought was good. And both of my professors at the University of South Florida had said, “Yes, go work with this Robert Victor [phonetic] guy up in Florida State.” Well I went up there to meet with him. Graduate school is only two years and he said, “Well, I’m going to be on sabbatical for a good full year of that.” And I thought, geez, I don’t know if I want to come all the way up here. Who am I going to be working with—graduate students? He *is* the art department. I was going there to work with him.

So I didn’t know what to do and then David Yager and Oscar Bailey, my two main professors in photography at the University of South Florida, said, “You can go to graduate school here because you really have only been here not even a year-and-a-half. It’s not like you spent four years here. That’s incestuous and we don’t usually approve that, but you’ve only been here,” blah, blah, blah, “and several other faculty said they would love to work with you so if you’re interested, you can do this.” Okay, let’s roll. So that’s what I did. I stayed in photography through that although I did play with other media. I didn’t do strictly camera to negative to print. But yes, that’s how I got solidly into photography.

I graduated from there and that’s what it actually—again by luck—I didn’t really know what I was going to do after I graduated. I was staying in Tampa for the time because at least it’s a city and there are jobs to be had there. I got an artist-in-residence job, a visiting artist job for the city of Tampa to underserved communities. It was hard but it was fun and it didn’t pay very well. It

paid my bills because I lived so cheaply, but it wasn't going to go anywhere and it was just like a one- or two-year grant kind of thing. I was a little skeptical about what I'm going to do next.

Out of the blue I get a call from David Yager, who was my professor from the University of South Florida, saying he's now become the chairman for the art department and that he was, with [Donald] Don [Saff]'s blessing and Don's help, was going to kick Graphicstudio back into production to some sort of development and am I interested in that? "Of course, yes." "Well, then the first thing we're thinking about is a photography-based project and it's to do with Rauschenberg." I'm like, "Yes." I had not met Bob at that point. I'd seen his work around at the galleries and stuff that they'd shown, but he hadn't visited there. I hadn't met him or anything. And I thought, geez, it's only a one-year job. That's fine—I'll take it. It's going to be a lot of hours—all fine. It's not going to pay great, but fine, I'll do whatever you want.

So that's how I got started with Bob, was to do this *Chinese Summerhall* project [1982]. And that was the beginning of it for me. It was a little sketchy as to how everything was going to go, but basically Don and an entourage of people were going with Bob to China and they were going to work on projects and take a lot of photographs and the first thing was that they were going to bring back all these photographs. They were going to shoot, they were going to give Bob a Hasselblad camera to shoot with so we can get large negatives. "You're not a professional printer but you're a darned good printer—you'll do the printing of these things. And we're not sure what they're going to be or how big or how many or whatever." "I'm in, I'm in."

So that's how that started. And I'm going to show you this [referencing a photo library Holzer queued up on his computer]. They came to me. Anyway, that's a photograph in the darkroom of a strip of negatives. They handed me fifty-some rolls of color negative film shot by Bob from the China summer and they were concerned for a number of reasons: one, they didn't want to take them to a lab, just in case. There is a good chance it will be fine, but maybe it would be better if you hand-developed them. And I agreed with that. They were also concerned that through traveling, if they had been damaged, we don't know what we've got here—heat-damaged color film. In those days, it was pretty bad. They'd probably been through—who knows what they'd been through, X-ray things? I know Don tried to protect them with his life, but there was a lot of, “Here you go dude. I hope this is going to be okay.”

Anyway, I was pretty nervous. And I should have even been more nervous as I think about it now.

[Laughter]

Holzer: It was kind of like, I'm committed—I'm just doing this. I'm just doing this so just get in the darkroom and develop them. Well I think I only messed up maybe—there's a problem when you hand-develop that you can get two pieces of film in the spiral of the—that they actually touch and they kiss each other and they mess up the development at that point. They'll stick together. I think I messed up one or two, but it was nothing of any consequence. So I'm developing these fifty rolls and fretting terribly the whole time.

Q: It's remarkable that they brought you in to do that since you'd never worked with Bob before.

Holzer: Well at that point I have to say that I was sort of not a—I was a lab. I wasn't the collaborator at that point. Don Saff was and David Yager was.

Q: That's a shift that you perceived at some point?

Holzer: Well I kind of knew that, but I also assumed that I was going to meet Bob and work with Bob a little more. But that didn't happen until we got much further down the line. Bob's a busy guy. So at first it was develop the negatives, make contact sheets of all of them. Then I sent them down to Bob. And then he said, "Okay, well, make me prints of all of them. Make 8-by-10 prints of every negative," that kind of thing. So I did that. Then he sent me them back. So it was kind of a mail thing—I don't know that it was literally by mail, but he just sent them back with notes saying, "Print this one this size and this one this size. I want to see this one at 30-by-30 and this one at—"

So I printed a lot of the prints in the darkroom. They did supply me with a nice lab lit by a first-rate enlarger that's—David Yager and I talked about doing an old technique from back in the day, which is to—instead of a standard negative carrier to put it in the enlarger—is to file out the negative carrier to make a black line around it. And it's an old trick—not really trick—it's a look and it gives it a funky edge so it's not cookie-cutter sharp. And it also implies something which Bob was into—and I didn't know this at the time—which is you're the photographer. You compose it in the viewfinder. That's your photograph. He wasn't into cropping. He wasn't into,

let's make that into a horizontal. I guess his training in earlier years was more traditional in terms of that's what the filed-out negative carrier look implied—that that was what you saw in the viewfinder. There was no messing around really.

Q: So dealing with photos as intrinsically whole compositions?

Holzer: Yes, so your shot, that was the end result. You make a print, but you didn't crop off too much sky or you didn't—which I never subscribed to personally. I personally never subscribed to that. Coming from what I came from, I didn't think of that in the slightest, which is weird about—that was one thing I noticed right away and thought was pretty strange about Bob. Here's what I knew about Bob looking at—

Q: *Crocus*.

Holzer: —*Crocus*, right, and very much isolated and pieces of things and collaged elements and stuff being layered up and whatever. Yet he did a lot of photography, which I was not that aware of in the beginning, but that he came from that purist background about the photograph, being you keep it whole. But when he went into other works, when it went into paintings or prints, then those bets are off. I thought that was very strange. [Laughs] It was incongruous to me. But I figured whatever, maybe in his early photography days that made an impression upon him and he kept it.

Q: But that's something you noticed in the choices that he would make about cropping and in the presentation—

Holzer: Well I would say—I don't have an example here, but I would ask when I sent back the initial prints, the first visible-sized prints, "Do you want any of these cropped in any way? Just indicate them." "No, nothing is cropped." Oh okay. I think that's when the discussion about the filed-down negative carrier idea came up, as if we put the black holding line around it, it will soften the edge of the image. Aesthetically I think it's a nice look and it would also fit with that thing, that Bob's not questioning has something been cropped or whatever—it is the negative.

So yes, I got all these prints. I was set up with a nice enlarger, a very nice vacuum easel, a color print processor dedicated just—it was a nice state of the art little lab set up for me.

Q: This is within Graphicstudio?

Holzer: It was at the university, right. They just took over an unused room and we retrofitted it for this specific darkroom. I hired a couple of my friends that were photography friends to be assistants because we were printing a lot of prints and we were printing seven days a week. I was printing seven days a week. I usually worked twelve, fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. I didn't have a day off for six months. Those guys were fighting to get some life, some time off, but I kind of beat them up and made them stay with me. But for the most part—

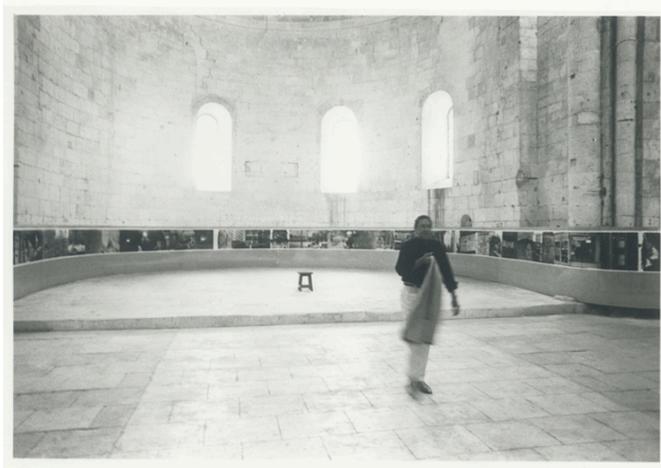
Q: So this is really quite involving then?

Holzer: Yes it was. Yes, I had to at some point—one of my best friends from college, and was a roommate, was Doug Brown. And he was also quite a good darkroom guy and had a really good eye. He worked with me pretty much through most all of it. Another guy was Wayne Bryan. He was a little more of a painter and a printmaker guy than a photography guy, but he knew how to handle things. He had grown up as an artist and he was quite good, but he was starting to burn out. It was just a lot of hours—a lot of hours. I listened to books on tape a lot because you're in the darkroom for eight or ten hours or whatever. [Laughs]

Anyway, we printed a lot of prints. And what ended up happening was I sent down—Bob had requested, “Give me a 20-by-20 of this and a 30-by-30 of this,” and I sent down these boxes and boxes of prints. And he made a collage. He took those prints and either took—he took a one hundred-foot-roll sheet of Mylar and just Scotch-taped them down onto this thing to make a one hundred-foot-long photograph. Once in a while there were cutouts with scissors and whatever, this will overlap this—there was a little bit of that. There was no handwork into it, but it was all within the negatives.

And then I was told that there was this collage being made and that that's what we're going to be making, is this one hundred-foot photograph, *Chinese Summerhall*, and it's going to be your job to—one, all the negatives that Bob chooses, we want to make single intact photograph prints of before we cut the negatives. So that meant editioning twenty-eight negatives to the tune of, I don't know, 75 plus all the rejects. [Note: Referring to two portfolios, both titled *Study for Chinese Summerhall*, 1983, one comprised of ten 24-by-20 chromogenic prints and the other

comprised of eighteen 40-by-30 chromogenic prints, totaling twenty-eight different images.] It was a lot of printing and there were a lot of 30-by-40s. Kodak got to know me well—boxes and boxes of 30-by-40 paper. So we did that. That’s one of the guys that I mentioned—Doug Brown and Wayne Bryan—that’s when they both started going, “Oh my god, what have I gotten myself into?” I was like, “Let’s go!” But they were like, “I didn’t sign on to print like every day of my life.” But we got that done. We got all those prints printed, boxed up. We got some help from some other art students to cut interleaving tissue for all of them and all that kind of stuff. It was a lot of production in that. It was a lot of prints.



Rauschenberg with *Chinese Summerhall* (1982) in an apse at Abbaye de Montmajour, *Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie* (Arles photography festival), France, July 1983. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

And then it came to here comes the one hundred-foot collage for *Chinese Summerhall*. And I would roll out parts of it and look at it and, “Oh well, that’s not too hard,” and, “Oh this is going to be hard. How am I going to reproduce that?” Because there was a cut-out—a lot of them were just single images, like I’m pointing out to here, and they were just butted up against each other, one after another—not such a big deal, but when they started changing scale—



Robert Rauschenberg
Chinese Summerhall, 1982 (detail)
Chromogenic print

Q: We're trying to bring up photos of various segments of *Summerhall*.

Holzer: Here, this will work [opens detail image of *Chinese Summerhall*]. So here are some segments out of it. And how am I going to do this kind of thing? This is small print and then a full big 30-by-40 that kind of runs into this and gets cut against that and this is part of another negative and this is another.

Q: Just to summarize for the audio, the basic problem there is—?

Holzer: These are small negatives. They're not tiny negatives, but they're not very big. And it's a different thing to have a full-scale print to collage, but to actually be able to print it from a negative at the right scale on a single one hundred-foot-long sheet of photo paper—that's the trick. I was up for the challenge of it. It was intriguing and interesting, trying to think of how to solve that.

It was a little scary cutting the negatives I have to say. They gave me a quiet office that I could be left alone in and have nobody else in there and I could get it fairly dust-free to a degree and a light table and whatever I needed to surgically cut these negatives. Well cutting a negative that is only 2 1/4-by-2 1/4 inches is a little tricky and it's—you can't be super-accurate. It's just too fine. And I know now there are some tools that would have helped me, but it was a little terrifying.

Q: So these weren't tools that you had access to at Graphicstudio?

Holzer: Not really, no. I had a loop and I could look at things and I had a magnifier. But I should have had a fairly good Optivisor or something to be able to really have both my hands on the X-Acto knife—and I'm working with an X-Acto knife. Well, I probably should have used a surgical scalpel, that's a little more—things like that you just don't know about.

Q: It sounds like surgery.

Holzer: Yes, it was definitely surgery. But I felt like at least having seen Bob's work, I knew that it didn't have to be some kind of a seamless putting-together thing. It wasn't what he was about. That's why I felt like this will be okay—and if he doesn't like it, we'll do something else. Which I learned later was very much what Bob was about, that accidents happen and you can incorporate them. He always used to say that. If there was something spilled, “Oh, free art, free drawing.” I didn't know that at this point.

Q: At this point you still have not met him, is that true?

Holzer: I hadn't, right. It just wasn't working plus they had my nose to the grindstone partly because Bob and whoever else—I'm not sure—had committed to [Leo] Castelli in New York to show this one hundred-foot on New Year's Eve [*Rauschenberg on Greene Street: Kabal American Zephyr, Japanese Clay Works, Japanese Recreational Clayworks, 7 Characters, Chinese Summerhall*, Leo Castelli, 142 Greene Street, and Sonnabend Gallery, 112 and 136 Greene Street, New York, 1982–83]. And we're counting down here; it's getting to be September, October, and we're just now getting into the one hundred-foot as opposed to all those single images—which took forever to edition no matter how fast I went unless we started doing multiple shifts, which was not really a good option. You couldn't get extra hands in there.

So it was getting rather scary intense, rather tense. Can we do this? I kept saying, "There are a lot of things I don't know that could go wrong here, but I am still pursuing this. I'm moving forward." Well there's a picture of me trying to—actually I'm not cutting the negatives there, but I'm assembling them on the light table to be able to do things like this little section out of the one hundred-foot. So trying to cut them—how do I put this negative to this negative fairly convincingly and yet have this other little floating area drop into that—which today is a simple thing. It's a walk in the park to do it today, but back then it just was—there was probably some artist that could do it, some photographer, darkroom people. But I didn't know any good way to do it.



George Holzer preparing the negatives for
Chinese Summerhall (1982), 1982

So cut the negatives then the task was to—actually I made a to-scale one hundred-foot long of the photographs so I could see every single part of it and start breaking it down into bite-size pieces. Because I realized to project this stuff, we were going to have to modify enlargers to project horizontally as opposed to vertically, which we could have done the other way, but we didn't—I couldn't think of how to do that. We need to have a large darkroom that's got at least like a forty-foot running wall that we could work on to project onto. We built that. We had help doing that. We had guys help us make a giant darkroom out of a storefront in downtown—not in downtown Tampa, but it's where the commercial strip—and started running tests. Okay, this is off-campus by about a mile-and-a-half or so, going there, getting it dark, projecting, bringing down a bunch of paper, et cetera, projecting onto them, wrapping them all up, driving back up to campus, running them through the color processor to see how they process, making notes about color corrections, exposure corrections.

So what we ended up having to do was to make I think it was six different enlargers that we modified to project out onto the wall. We made negative carriers that could hold the negatives so they weren't just single negatives, so that they could be pairs when they overlapped and stuff like that. We had to figure out the focus distance on it. All of our negative carriers all had notes written on them—I don't have a picture of them—what was the exposure? What was the f-stop on the lens? What was the color balance on the enlarger?

What we would do eventually in the end was we got rolls of one hundred-foot long paper from Kodak and we would in the dark—now I don't mean the complete dark, but color film is very sensitive to most all color so it's not like a black-and-white darkroom. You could work in pretty bright red light. This had to be in almost—your eyes would adjust, but you could easily stumble over anything on the floor. It's pretty dark.

So we set it up in there and we built a track that was probably about 25 or 30 feet long that we could put the paper up against and pin it in, get it with our gloves, smooth out the paper, protect the rest of the box of paper so that it wasn't exposed. And we have already set up the enlargers, one, two, three, four, five, to project all at the same time. So we would have everything ready to go in our little—it was like a little choreographed thing. Part number one is negative carrier A, which has got this and this on it. So we would have to preset all that up, focus, color balance, et cetera, turn off all lights, bring out the paper, smooth it out, project onto it, roll that up, and secure it in the dark. Actually we used plastic bags a lot because it was easier than boxes. So we would do that and at first we would cut off those, I don't know, generally anywhere from eight-to twenty-foot sections at a time, depending on the negatives. And then we would cut that off,

roll that up, and take it up to the university to process it and see how it looks. So this is all pretty time-consuming.

At some point we realized okay, we now have it all choreographed. We have our list. We know enlarger A gets this and enlarger B gets this. We knew what we were going to do. It would take three people—usually myself, Doug Brown, and Wayne Bryan, but sometimes other people would help us. So we all three have to be locked in the darkroom now to run through the entire thing. That took a little over eight hours. We could stop in between, but we didn't usually want to try to close up everything and light-tight it so we could go out. But once in a while we did—we would go out for lunch or whatever. But we were pretty much stuck in there for eight hours or so making an exposure of one and then we would have to wrap that all up and take it up to the university and start feeding it into the processor. And usually Doug Brown was the one who fed it in the processor and then I was on the outside at the receiving end seeing how it was coming off. Then of course, "Oh, it looks great. It looks great. It looks great—oh we missed an exposure on that," or "We missed the color balance on one," or "We missed an alignment. Stop it. Cut it off. Throw it out. It's useless." It's got to be one whole continuous 100 feet.

So we went through a few of those and it was getting down—it's probably December now and we still haven't gotten a good one. It was getting pretty frightening. I'm sure Bob was anxious. I know that Don Saff and David Yager and the other people involved in the process were quite anxious about it. Castelli was anxious about it. But obviously we did get one. We did manage to make it.

I did get to meet Bob before we did make the one hundred-foot. I needed to look at these test sections that we had done and ask him what he wanted me to do with them. And it was easier for me to go down there for it than for him to come up to us, which I'm not sure why that would be, but it was. So I drove down there and we went through it. And there's a picture of me with Bob there looking at—we were looking at different sections sort of proofing, "Do you want to have this overlap or do you want to have—these are the colors and this is how they mix," just making small adjustments on it and getting his blessing and approval for it.



Rauschenberg working on the original collage for *Chinese Summerhall* (1982), Laika Lane studio, Captiva, Florida, 1982. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

That was an interesting visit. I spent the day there. I spent pretty much most of the night because Bob was a night owl. And I sat there in his—he was in his older Beach House at that point [note: referring to Rauschenberg's residence in Captiva, Florida]. I sat there and talked with him. And I think it was probably five o'clock in the morning, it was like, "You know what, I think I either have to go to bed or I've got to go home." So yes, we talked about lots of different things, mostly

just normal old stuff about life, not great discussions about art. I wouldn't dare to presume to talk with him about any of that, which is kind of dumb on my part, but I was way too insecure to try to talk to him about some of his artwork.

So we did make the one hundred-foot. I made it like probably within a day of when there was the absolute cut-off—

Q: To get it shipped up to Castelli?

Holzer: To get it up there in time for them to figure out a way to display it, which was a trick in itself. Yes, I remember I got it finished—and back then nobody had cell phones—I had to go to a phone booth and call David Yager and say, “I've got it.” And he was like, “I'll be over.” “Here it is. Guard it with your life.” He had already booked the flight and he took it on the plane with him, not checking it or anything, and took it to them.



Installation view, *Rauschenberg on Greene Street: Kabal American Zephyr, Japanese Clay Works, Japanese Recreational Clayworks, 7 Characters, Chinese Summerhall*, Leo Castelli, New York, 1982–83. Work shown: *Chinese Summerhall* (1982; partial).

They ended up fabricating a hanging Plexiglas enclosure for it, so it went diagonal in the space of the gallery because nobody had a one hundred-foot running wall and nobody knew what to do about a corner. So what they ended up doing was—it kind of surprised me, but I thought later, oh that’s all right, that’s cool—they just kind of rolled it up at the beginning and the very end, scroll-like. That’s fine—it was a scroll. It was based on China and Chinese scrolls. They made a bigger square box at the one end to have the rolled up end—at the both ends—and then Plexiglas in a frame suspended from the ceiling, running diagonal in the room. So it was about at your eye level so you had to duck under it if you wanted to go on the other side of it or go around it. It was kind of strange. And on the backside, I kept thinking, what are they going to do about the backside—because I heard that they were going to put it between Plexiglas—because it just says “Kodak Paper” back there. How dull is that? Which I guess could have been considered like a *White Painting* [1951] [laughs]. But Bob made a collage of fabrics from China back there. I don’t have a photograph of it or anything, but yes, he just made some kind of a montage, collage of fabrics, mostly of silks and that kind of thing.

So I got to go up for the opening for that.

Q: So you were up for the New Year’s—

Holzer: I went up for that, yes. They sent me up for that and that was pretty cool.

Q: After how consuming this was, are you totally numb to the final product? For you, looking at it right at that point after dealing with it in the darkroom—

Holzer: So closely, yes. Well I had not really seen it displayed. I had seen all of it in little bits and pieces because I didn't have a place to really lay it all out. It would have been dirty. I guess I could have claimed a large classroom and put out some paper and rolled it all out, but I had never done that and I didn't have time to anyway. I had only been able to take a table about as big as this right here and lay out and see sections of it. We were looking at an 8- or 9-foot table and seeing that much of it at a time and then rolling that up and trying not to get anything on it and scratch it and do all that stuff because it's somewhat—it's glossy paper. It's vulnerable.

I do remember—it was interesting too, in the beginning when I had the negatives and I made the first contact sheets and I'm looking at the contact sheets with a loop, I noticed that quite a number of them are not really sharply in focus. I was concerned and I called up David Yager at the time and I told him that and he said, "Well don't fret over it. Just make the 8-by-10 prints of everything. We'll look at that." So I did and some are fairly sharp, but there are a number of them that are, they're what's called camera shake. There is a little bit of movement either from too slow a shutter or too low a light. That's pretty normal and it's also—I didn't know this at the time, but Bob was shooting this stuff with a Hasselblad, which is a bit of a heavy camera plus he had this big heavy telephoto that he insisted upon. So it's really heavy. That's probably what led to it because he wasn't used to shooting with one of those. He was a 35 millimeter guy. So it made sense and it concerned me because we're going to blow these things up to 30-by-30s. So anyway David Yager was like, "Yes I see. Well I'm taking them down there and we'll see what Bob says." He called me up. He said, "Bob said, 'Don't worry about it. They're fine.'" I was

like, “Really? Okay.” [Laughs] Interesting lesson there, you know? I said, “You showed that to him, right?” “Yes. Yes, it’s fine. Just roll dude. Start editioning.” “Okay.”

Q: So you work on this *Chinese Summerhall* and I know that’s a Graphicstudio project and I think Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles] had something to do with that as well.

Holzer: They did. Gemini, the director of whatever and his wife [Stanley and Elyse Grinstein] went to China with Don Saff and Ruth [Saff], with Bob. So they were involved in that and after the big premiere at Castelli of the one hundred-foot, I came back to the task that there are five in the edition so I have to make four more of these. Well that didn’t go so well. We thought, well it might be okay. We know what we’re doing now and I’ve got teams of three people and I’ve got a couple of spare people that have worked on it now. But it took us a while. [Laughs] I think the first ten were bad and I was starting to panic.

Q: That you weren’t going to be able to replicate this.

Holzer: Yes. It’s like, did we just get extremely lucky or something here? I couldn’t believe it. We just kept making mistake after mistake, one thing or another. I was really getting nervous and so were the other people that were helping me. We were getting a little disheartened. But then we got one and we were like, “Okay, now we know we can do this.” And then after that we made less mistakes. It took us months, but we finally got five good ones. I don’t know how many we made total—at least twenty-five, so most of them were trash. [Laughs] At that point I thought that was it. We’re going to wrap it up and I was expecting that would be the end of my job.

Q: That was the end of your gig.

Holzer: That was the end of the—yes, it was about a year now and that was the end of the gig and all that. But that’s when David Yager and Don came to me and said, “Oh Gemini is interested in getting in on this to some degree.” And I don’t know the genesis of it exactly. I don’t know who brought it up to who and whatever, but “We’re thinking—” or Bob’s thinking or whoever’s thinking—“that maybe we could do the primo sections out of the one hundred-foot and edition those,” which makes a great deal of sense. Because the actual hundred-footer, there’s some big sections of it that are not that interesting. They’re a travelogue a little bit and—

Q: You mean in terms of the content of the photographs themselves or in terms of this issue that you identified earlier with the shake or—?

Holzer: No, just I guess several of them were real travel pictures. Some of them had Bob imagery in them. But there were a number of sections—and there’s five in here that we editioned—that are the ones that have the collaging of things. And this I don’t know that I have pictures of—I don’t think there are—of the actual what we called sections out of the one hundred-foot. But these are the more interesting parts of the one hundred-foot and that’s a really good idea. [Note: *Studies for Chinese Summerhall* #I, #II, #III, #IV, and #V, all 1984]



Robert Rauschenberg
Studies for Chinese Summerhall #V, 1984
Chromogenic print
30 x 99 3/4 inches (76.2 x 253.4 cm)
From an edition of 25, published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa

Well we had to modify this somehow. They can't just be a flat square end to them and whatever—or they could have been. But Bob decided to just modify how they would begin and end. He had me fade in so that it starts soft with an image not just a hard edge—sometimes they were a square end or whatever. So we came up with these five images that would be editioned. At this point Doug Brown, assistant/colleague/friend, he had left. He had moved up here to Washington [D.C.] actually, so I got Wayne Bryan, the other guy I named, and I said, “Are you in on this?” And he’s like, “Yes, sure.”

Q: And you wanted in.

Holzer: Sure, heck yes. So we're ordering one hundred-foot rolls of paper again. Now we're just going to be cutting them, but it'll be a lot easier. And they were easier because we knew what we were doing. We honed in on those enlarger choreographed dances we had to do, which enlarger goes where and putting up just a—they range between say 6 and 12 feet. And it was a thing you

could put up—it wasn't like you've got to deal with this whole roll. So that went pretty well. So we editioned those and those were published by Gemini. [Note: The five *Studies for Chinese Summerhall* composite prints were co-published by Graphicstudio and Gemini.] But that was the end of that gig at that point.

Q: And so for you then all together this had been how long?

Holzer: A year-and-a-half.

Q: And so once you come to the conclusion of that then—I know we're coming up towards the beginning of the ROCI period so do you continue to work with Graphicstudio?

Holzer: I did, I did.

Q: Because Don isn't back at Graphicstudio formally at this point.

Holzer: No, not yet.

Q: This is Yager still.

Holzer: Correct, right. Don was around. I remember during the one hundred-foot, Don would pop in sometimes into my office where I was working on negatives or whatever and would look

at things and give me some encouragement. I wasn't real close with Don at that point. He was a professor.

Q: Because this was you getting to know him well I suppose.

Holzer: Yes. I just never happened to take a class with him. When I came there was when he kind of went on sabbatical and then started working with Bob on other things. He wasn't around that much. And the only thing he was teaching was etching and I just wasn't taking etching at that point. So I really didn't have a lot of interaction with him. I would see him. I would see him at different things at the college or I would hear him talk, but I didn't know him that well. But no, he was not in charge of Graphicstudio at that point.

But David Yager was and he was like, "Well I can offer you a part-time job working on anything that has to do with any darkroom, any photo processes. And I'd love to have you document, to start taking documentation photographs of the visiting artists." "Okay." He said, "Well, I'm talking with Robert Mapplethorpe. I want him to come and there are some photo things there." I said, "Sure. I'll help. Part-time's fine." So I started doing that. I worked on a number of projects.

And then in '85, that's when Don stepped back in. Sort of coincided—David Yager was going to leave the chairmanship and Graphicstudio and Don had negotiated a deal with the National Gallery [of Art, Washington, D.C.] to set up an archive for Graphicstudio works at the National Gallery. And I guess some discussion went on about—the show would be sometime after 1990 and that gives you five years and do the best you can. Just go for it dude—that kind of a thing.

Don came in and he didn't know me that much. He wasn't sure if he really wanted to keep me on there. He basically was going to sweep it clean and start with all new people of his own choosing. But he and I knew each other and I didn't really convince him, but I guess he decided that I could be of use in the same role, but in full-time. Any darkroom work, any photo kind of thing—I was hoping there was going to be some photo project or something that I could be more directly the lead person on or whatever. That ended up actually never happening, but that's just the way it goes. But also to be the documentarian for this five years of Graphicstudio shooting slides, black-and-whites, and some video—I said, "Okay."

So that was a rejuvenation of Graphicstudio. So from '85 until '90 we were trying to work big and with big names as much as possible. That's when we started to do some work with [Roy] Lichtenstein. Jim Dine was in there. If you've got the cachet to say that this stuff is going to be shown and archived at National Gallery, these artists get much more interested in your experimental print shop in—Tampa? Where?

[Laughter]

Holzer: Bob knew about it, Rosenquist knew about it, but a lot of artists are like, "What is that place? I've never heard of that." But they got much more interested. So yes, we did large Jim Dine prints and we did Chuck Close prints and things that did involve a lot of darkroom stuff. They were either darkroom things that I needed to do for making the film work or we did a bunch of photogravure type prints.

Q: Which Deli Sacilotto did a lot of.

Holzer: Correct.

Q: I interviewed him down in Boca Raton [Florida].

Holzer: Okay. Deli and I were paired up and I worked with him on making the film and/or exposing the tissues and making the plates for the etchings for the Dines and for the Chuck Closes and the Mapplethorpes, et cetera. Deli's like the—sorry if you get offended Deli, but you were the absentminded professor and I was the sometimes obnoxious but fairly organized one and I would keep the chemicals right and I would keep the supplies correctly ordered and whatever. [Laughs] That was not Deli's strong suit. But Deli was quite a master at how to etch plates. So anyway that's what I ended up doing with all of that.

We did do some ROCI projects during those years.

Q: Because Don Saff of course is sort of the advance man for that. He's helming the whole thing.

Holzer: He is. He's working on that stuff and he had talked about doing things like what you're looking at right there, those ROCI pieces.

Q: Right. We have a photo of *Fifth Force* [1986; open on the table], which is one of George's photographs of Don and Bob working on it.



Rauschenberg and Donald Saff discussing Rauschenberg's *Fifth Force* (1986), a Graphicstudio project, Captiva, Florida, 1986. Photo: George Holzer

Holzer: Right. Yes so that's being down there talking with Bob. So we would travel down to Bob's studio most of the time and show him progress on things and talk about solutions to things. So yes, there were four different sculptures that were done, two of which are downstairs right now [in the Academy Art Museum ROCI exhibit]: the *Tibetan Garden Song* [/ *ROCI TIBET*, 1986] and *Araucan Mastaba* [/ *ROCI CHILE*, 1986]. So they were ROCI-based, but we published them. We published the editions of them. Mostly since they were sculpture I did some work on them, but not a great deal. *Araucan Mastaba* has photo images screenprinted on the faces so I would have made the film work for the screens. And I probably made the screens—I can't remember, but I must have—for printing those. Getting the image for color transfer here—



Robert Rauschenberg
Tibetan Garden Song / ROCI TIBET, 1986
Cello, chrome-plated wash tub, glycerin, Chinese scrollmaker's brush, mirrored Plexiglas
43 x 18 1/4 inches (109.2 x 46.4 cm) diameter
From an edition of 25, produced by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa; only 20 realized



Robert Rauschenberg
Araucan Mastaba / ROCI CHILE, 1986
Hand painting and silkscreen ink on mirrored aluminum with cast sterling silver and lapis lazuli
20 5/8 x 22 x 22 inches (52.4 x 55.9 x 55.9 cm)
From an edition of 25, produced by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa; only 12 realized

Q: On the *Fifth Force*.

Holzer: On *Fifth Force*, copying this out of a book and making that into a plate for the etching.

Q: The Leaning Tower [of Pisa].

Holzer: Right, out of the dictionary—that kind of support work thing. But other than that I mostly would just be the documentarian that took pictures. I would listen to conversations. I might throw in a thought or an idea or two, but mostly I was behind the camera during most of these projects and I photographed the guys in the shop making it, the production. That was part

of the documentation. Not everything got documented thoroughly. It depended if I was really busy with—I was making gigantic wood block film things for Philip Pearlstein. I was just swamped with trying to get those done—then maybe I wouldn't document them. I don't remember having much documentation of them making these specifically. But some things, certainly the *Fifth Force*, I have lots of pictures of them making those things in there. So if I could get away I'd run over there and shoot some pictures.

Q: And so your main engagement with Bob's work in this time then is documenting the process of its creation with Don when it comes to some of these ROCI ventures.

Holzer: Right, other than some film work and some screenmaking. But that wasn't the main meat of it. *Tibetan Garden Song*, I didn't put anything into that. It has no imagery, no screenprinting, no whatever, so there was no reason. *Bamhue* [/*ROCI JAPAN*, 1987] is the fourth one out of that group and I had no real role in the production of it. So that would have been pretty much documentation.

Q: And what do you remember of the particular energy of the ROCI projects? Because there were eleven countries in the end and obviously Don's running around to all these places vetting them. [Note: ROCI was launched in 1984 and exhibitions were mounted in ten countries outside of the U.S. from 1985–90, in chronological order: Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, China, Tibet, Japan, Cuba, U.S.S.R., Germany, and Malaysia. A ROCI retrospective was presented at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 1991, with the U.S. being the eleventh ROCI country.]

Holzer: Well it's funny—

Q: Does that make ripples for you at Graphicstudio, these goings-on? Or is that kind of insulated, Don's doing something else?

Holzer: Well not insulated, but not heavily involved in it necessarily. He's running off to go do these things. It depended—if I went up in the office I would see or hear him on the phone or I would meet some people or Brenda Woodard—I'm sure you've spoken with her?

Q: Not personally.

Holzer: She was on the phone continuously on all these ROCI things, making arrangements and coordinating flights and cars and all that stuff. So I would catch bits and pieces of that. When I first did the one hundred-foot *Chinese Summerhall* thing, it wasn't a ROCI project at that point. That was before it was really named, established. I don't know at what point I actually heard, but at some point I did. At some point there was a brochure or something that talked about ROCI and I thought, oh, I see.

ROCI, what year would this have been—1990. So this is kind of late, but at some point I saw that there was this thing going on—other than me just hearing that it was going on—other than say several people that worked at Graphicstudio went to some of the countries and hearing those stories. It was mostly going on somewhere else. I didn't realize the size of it and the scope of it at

the time. I was pretty busy with what we were doing. We were tasked to put out a lot of work, as much as we could in those five years, and we built up to a staff of probably twenty-something, starting off with like three of us. [Laughs] So it became quite a production of things that were going on.

Q: And I assume a lot of projects being juggled at the same time and people pinch-hitting for each other in various roles.

Holzer: Absolutely, yes. So yes, we were pretty absorbed with that and that stuff wasn't going on in Tampa, in Graphicstudio, so we wouldn't have to know or see that was going on. So the only thing was that we knew from conversations that oh Bob was going to Cuba or Bob was going to go to the Soviet Union and some of the arrangements. And I remember at one point I was asked to pick up a rental car and pick up the two ambassadors I want to call them—they're not official ambassadors—from the Soviet Union. They were coming here. It was Tahir Salahov and he was the—what was his title? He was the president or whatever of the artist's union in the Soviet Union [First Secretary/Chairman of the Union of Artists of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] and he was the one who was coordinating Bob coming there and doing the show. And there was a discussion about bringing Graphicstudio or a Graphicstudio-type thing to Moscow and he wanted to come to the U.S. and see Graphicstudio and meet any of the artists that he could meet.

So anyway, that kind of connection where I went [to pick up him] and his assistant, who we're all convinced was a KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti/Committee for State

Security] guy who came there. And I was to impress them and pick them up in a big, big Cadillac and drive them to Graphicstudio and tour them around Graphicstudio and then take them up to meet James Rosenquist. And then they probably went down and met Bob—I don't really know, but he had certainly met Bob in the Soviet Union. So things like that would happen.

[Laughter]

Holzer: I guess it was at the end of that five-year window that we were working on, 1990 was sort of the end of all that. I think Don was ready to leave the university. He was getting pretty tired with the politics that go on and the funding things and whatever stuff that goes on. I have no idea how bad it is; I'm sure it's horrible. But he fought and was able to get a Graphicstudio kind of thing off the ground, which is pretty hard to do with an institution. And he did it by all kinds of means and one of them was to set up a base of print subscribers, people that put up cash for operations where the university would be like, "You want us to give you one hundred thousand dollars to spend on art materials and you don't even know what the art is yet?" They weren't interested in that. But he pulled that off by getting people in the community—and I don't know if that was his brainstorm, somebody else's brainstorm, or just an idea that he gleaned out of a couple of different people. I don't know. But it's the only thing that made that happen, to function. They would have shut it down right away if he hadn't come up with his own way to get some money into the thing so that we could say, "Oh the artist so-and-so is here and they want eight-foot wide paper. We've got to order it today and have it Fed-Exed." The university would have went, "What? You have to go through a requisition. You've got to wait for a bidding process." Come on. That's not going to happen.

Q: Well, there's a rate of turnaround that doesn't lend itself to university bureaucracies.

Holzer: Not at all.

Q: And I've heard that in other contexts, but I would assume an artistic one especially—just to the process of creation and composition, it doesn't seem that that would align easily.

Holzer: It could if the right people were in charge and wanted it to happen, but very unlikely. It's too loose. They don't want loose. They want to have it nailed down and bid and the cheapest bidder and we don't have time for that. There's only one place that has—New York Central [Art Supply] is the only place that has that paper. We've got to get it right now. You've got to be able to give them a check.

Q: By '90 it seems that Don's getting rather burned out about this, which is when he moves up here [to Maryland], is that correct?

Holzer: Actually we technically moved up here in '91, but '90 is when he decided, "I think I've had it." And he had a place up here in Maryland in this area. He had decided that he really liked it up here. He had bought a farm and was having a house built. I don't know exactly what year it started, but let's say '90 and that's where he was planning to retire. And he called us all together at Graphicstudio and basically said—this is early in the year of '90—"I think I'm moving on, but I'm not exactly—I thought I was, but I'm not ready to retire. And I am interested in doing a—I

don't want to call it a print shop—an experimental art atelier or a shop that is for profit and is not part of an institution in a university. And any of you that are interested, please come to my office and let's talk about it.” I think about ten or twelve of us said, “I'm interested,” as opposed to try and stay at Graphicstudio. That was a bit of an unknown.

Q: What was the draw for you then? Because of course here we are [in Maryland].

Holzer: Well, the draw was to keep working with these artists and not take my chance on—Graphicstudio was going to get a new director and I didn't terribly find him interesting or somebody I wanted to work with. And I knew that there was going to be trouble with him with the university and I thought this could all fall apart and I don't know that this guy has the kind of drive that Don has to keep this thing going. And I'm not really sure I want to take that chance. It got complicated of course. I had a girlfriend at the time who also worked at Graphicstudio and she decided she did not want to come up here. And I was really shocked—I really was—one that she was not wanting to continue working on these projects, which I thought she was enjoying, but that basically I was given an ultimatum. It was like, “Well if you're going up there, you're going without me.” It was like, whoa okay. That turned out okay, but it was like, “Well put a little pressure on me!”

But no, I guess it's fair to say that—and I hope whoever looks at this doesn't get offended by it—but I think the stronger people that worked there all wanted to go. So it was like, “Yes, I'm going.” And they wanted me to go. I was the darkroom guy. I was the technician guy that could do all that stuff that they'd have to find somebody else [to do] and that probably wasn't a very

pleasant thought for them either. Don was going to offer decent pay, better than what I was getting at the university, and benefits. I'm originally from New Jersey so I wasn't terribly afraid of the cold although I wasn't excited about it because I'd been in Florida for at least fifteen almost twenty years and Hawaii before that. So I was quite warm-acclimated, but I knew you could survive life up here. I'm not going to die. One guy who came up with us couldn't take it. Right away he left. [Laughs] Another guy made it for a few years and he couldn't stand the cold.

Q: Got froze out.

Holzer: Just, "I can't take this. I don't care." [Laughs]

Q: So you come up here and—and I guess before we go any further, why don't I put this on pause for a second and let's review where we stand.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: All right, so here we go. So George would like to start off with a coda on *Chinese Summerhall* and then we'll pick back up with Maryland.

Holzer: Yes, I guess one thing that is unfortunate about that project, which is not like an earth-shattering thing, but we tried to figure out a way to make this photo project somewhat archival and black-and-white back in those years was the only real way to do that. And that wasn't an option. The next best thing that we could think would have been Cibachrome printing, but that

was really not very practical at all for a project like this—much, much more expensive and it would have been much more time-consuming to try to get what we needed to do it. So we had to drop back and go with a standard Ektacolor printing paper and that processing which, I guess, is C-41. And that's somewhat fugitive material and that's unfortunate. It just means that the works can't be out in bright light for any length of time. That's true of a lot of things, but their vulnerability, I always was disappointed that that was the case. I have seen a number of prints out there in the real world and there clearly are—they're there. They're still there, but they're discolored and they tend to turn pink or they can be bleached out. Even UV [ultraviolet] protective glass or Plexiglas helps, but doesn't keep it from being damaged. I guess that can be said of Bob making art out of cardboard or out of newspaper so I don't know why it bothers me—but it does. I just feel like, darn, I wish we could have done better. But there wasn't a good option at the time. So that is what it is.

Q: Well thank you for that reflection on material. So picking up in Maryland, in the Saff Tech Arts [Oxford, Maryland] phase there were continued collaborations with Bob, the first of which was actually the last—it became the last of the ROCI projects—

Holzer: Right.

Q: —the *Wax Fire Works* [1990–91].

Holzer: Correct.

Q: So I'm wondering if you could just share your memories of that project, that process and your role in it.

Holzer: Well it was great. It was a fascinating project. Again I knew about ROCI. I knew certain things about it. I had seen some works for ROCI like when we would go down to Bob's, maybe working on the sculpture from Graphicstudio, and maybe he was working on some of them. I remember those periodically. But I hadn't seen the shows. I hadn't really seen that many of the works. That was probably not technically our first project of Saff Tech Arts, but it was pretty darn close to it.

Yes that summer of '90, that's when Don said, "We're starting Saff Tech Arts, but we're not ready to move to Maryland yet. So we've just got to start temporarily getting going here and I've got a Lichtenstein project lined up. We need to get started on that. And then we're also starting on Rauschenberg ROCI USA pieces and we've got to start getting set up on that." So that's what we did. We just set up temporarily in Tampa.

And I had quite a lot of work to do with that. I guess Bob had decided on the photographs that he wanted to use and he sent me a pile of them, a pile of negatives, to start making large—and I don't remember, but he must have given me direction on the sizes that he wanted them to be. That's something I can imagine, making large halftones of those negatives, which was a time-consuming thing. I did that in my own darkroom at home because we didn't have a darkroom like that set up temporarily. I just did that at home, which was fine with me. It was comfortable.

And I was projecting his 35 millimeter black-and-whites onto a halftone 8-by-10 film so that I could take that over to the temporary Saff Tech facility.

I had an enlarger there set up to project the 8-by-10s up to these rather large—these don't really show scale here, but some of these pictures—and they're not coming in very well [indicating pictures on his computer]. That's a photograph of a wall and this is 6 feet tall. So this thing is a five-foot tall photograph. I'm taking these 35 millimeter [black-and-whites], making a halftone for making a screen if we're doing a screenprint and then I've got to blow it up into the film work for full-scale to make the silkscreen and blow it up to the scale. And that was a trick in itself, making those big, big photos.

And then we had to make all those into stretched screens which we then piled all in a big truck and drove down to Captiva. And we camped out there for I don't know, three weeks or a month. So we went down to Captiva in the fall of '90—it was October I think. Yes it was October and we brought down I don't know how many, but lots and lots of screens, lots and lots of color, lots and lots of ink, lots of whatever, and lots of panels of stainless steel and aluminum—all the things that we had talked to him about using in this series. I remember he wanted to use a mirrored stainless steel in them because it would be reflective. Your first thought is, do you really want to have a mirror in the artwork? But he wanted to have it be reflecting yourself—sort of the USA connection there, looking at yourself.

So he sent me this pile of photographs, all of which he shot. You probably have this in a million different interviews, but Bob at one point had trouble with copyright issues with using, co-opting

photo images, and so he was very sensitive to that. So these were all ones that he had shot. I don't believe there were any of my own photographs in there, but I did do that once in a while if Bob said, "Hey, take a picture of that for me." I'd be glad to give it to him. Or if he saw something of mine, "Use it. Go ahead Bob." It was kind of cool to see your own thing sometimes used in his art.

Q: Would you see your own photo then on the tail end as a part of some piece or—?

Holzer: It would be in a piece, sure. I guess it's not really quite the same thing, but I remember in the Moscow show—no, no, not Soviet Union. For [ROCI] Berlin he wanted the Brandenburg Gate and he didn't have an image of that. But he had me find and copy some images that were in fair use. And there it is down in the show down there, blown up to gigantic proportions—I didn't do the blow-up. Or as I'll talk about in a little while, he wanted these windmills in these prints. And so we got a windmill and I photographed it in different lighting configurations. And then, "Here you go Bob. Use it." So it's kind of fun to see that. That was an interesting thing about working with him, certainly when you were in more of the studio situation rather than like in the *Chinese Summerhall* [where] I was a little more just the guy in the darkroom, the lab technician. I didn't work with him to say, "Why don't you put this image on top of the bull's horns," or whatever. I don't know if anybody said that to him, but I wasn't in that way collaborating with him.

But in some of these later ones, certainly the ROCI USA, I was in the room. And yes, sometimes I was taking pictures, but sometimes I was cleaning screens, sometimes I was helping squeegee,

sometimes I was holding something, sometimes I was carrying stuff. So I was hands-on and a documentarian. But he would say, “So what color should I print that on there?” and you’d be like, “You’re asking me?” “Yes. What should—?” “Oh, I don’t know.” I’m just making this up but, “Well, green. How about that?” “Yes, okay,” and he’d use it. And you’d be like, oh god, I didn’t really think about that very long, did I?

[Laughter]

Holzer: I didn’t think he would actually take my—I thought he was just playing with me. He would do stuff like that. I would see him do that with other people too, which was fun—somebody that didn’t know it was coming. It was like, oh boy, what’s Tim [Pharr] going to say to him when he says, “What photo should I use over there?” And Tim has no idea that he’s really going to use it. He liked to do that. So that was fun.

I did a lot on that project and all of which was pretty fun. We lived out in Captiva for those three or four weeks and did the pieces. Sometimes we worked on more than one at a time, but basically worked through them one at a time. I distinctly remember having a really, really fun time—Bob had the greatest junk pile. Right outside of his studio, a heap of junk that—I’m calling that “junk” in quotes—ladders and wheelbarrows and buckets and who knows what, either stuff that washed up on the beach or he would actually go to the junkyards with his guys and gather up stuff and old signs and whatever and just would pile it up in this heap. Bob would say, “Well, come on you,” to me and to somebody, “Come on, let’s go down and find something

to stick on this.” Cool, how much fun is this? It was like a dream to be able to go and pick out weird, funky, broken stuff to attach to the artwork. [Laughs] It was fun.

So yes, a lot of my work was in the pre-collaboration. Part of it was getting all the photographs and getting them all made into screens, so that they were his palette basically. One guy was making all the colors and making all the wax colors that we might use in the project—Bob had said, “Let’s have this and this and let’s have certain reds,” and whatever. I was doing all the photo work and all the screenmaking so that Bob—he didn’t use all the screens. He didn’t use all the images. I’m sure he didn’t use all the colors, but it was all there to— He had a book. He’d say, “Do we have that screen?” “Yes, we sure do.” We had them numbered and we’d find it for him. I’m pretty sure we ended up leaving all those screens there with him; I’ve seen some of these images pop up later on in other works.

So yes, that was pretty fun. Some of them are very big. I know you can’t tell from this picture, but that thing is 6 feet tall and that’s got to be 12, 14 feet wide, and this is a big crumpled piece of metal.

Q: Yes and the particular piece is in here too that I’m trying to—I don’t remember exactly what it’s called.

Holzer: I think it’s called *Washington’s [Golden] Egg [/ ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works), 1990]*.



Robert Rauschenberg
Washington's Golden Egg / ROCI USA
(*Wax Fire Works*), 1990
Acrylic, enamel, and fire wax on mirrored
aluminum and stainless steel
96 3/4 x 189 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches (245.7 x
481.3 x 34.3 cm)
Private collection

Q: That does sound right.

Holzer: I did not bring the ROCI catalogue. I forgot to bring that one along, but I think that's in here.

Q: That sounds correct to me.

Holzer: Anyway there were a number of them that had—yes, it's got to be in here actually.

[scrolling through Rauschenberg catalogue] I have a tab—I'm looking at my own tabs.

Washington's Golden Egg, that's what it is.

Q: Correct, *Washington's Golden Egg*.

Holzer: Yes, it's in there.

Q: From the *Wax Fire Works*.

Holzer: Those were big, pretty massive things. So it was pretty fun to watch those come together.

Q: I have a couple photos that I brought here. Here's one of working on—



Rauschenberg in his Laika Lane studio with Graphicstudio staff Patrick Foy, Tom Pruitt, and Donald Saff, working on *In-Dependents / ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works)* (1990), Captiva, Florida, 1990. Photo: George Holzer

Holzer: Right, so there's Bob's older studio, Bob and Don and Patrick [Foy] and Tom [Pruitt], two of the main printers and they're working on not that specific one, but another one. They're making the crumpled-up metal. It's funny, Saff Tech functioned differently than a typical print shop in that artists didn't come to us or we didn't accept artists coming to us so much as we went to artists. And we also, in Saff Tech days we came up with some ideas, concepts, and processes, and then went to the artist saying, "This is something I can't believe Bob wouldn't go nuts with and have a ball with." And we would go and show them those things. And that was the crumpled metal that we worked on and showed him as a way to make imagery that wasn't something that he was typically doing—printing on it and then crumpling it and kicking it and bending it and then attaching it, riveting it, and attaching it to the base image.

That's working on ROCI too, yes. Because I did have some pictures that were around in here where he was working on, like when we first showed him the idea and we brought down some metal—that might be from that actually—just some flat sheets of thin stainless steel metal and said, "Don't cut yourself up dude, but crumple this thing and feel it." And he had a good time with it. He said, "Yes, I like this idea." Actually he's making—that's for ROCI. That's for a different piece—I don't know that I have it here. But yes, that was a fun thing to work with.



Rauschenberg working on *Wax Fire Works* series in his studio, Captiva, Florida, 1990. Work in background is *Washington's Golden Egg / ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works)* (1990). Photo: Attributed to George Holzer

Q: Right, there's that. And then of course one of the signature things about that [project] is the whole encaustic element.

Holzer: Yes, which was—the encaustic thing was a Graphicstudio-developed idea. One retired professor/administrator—I don't know what Mack [phonetic] was—but Mack gave Don this idea about encaustic printing as opposed to painting. And how do you do that? Then when we started

Graphicstudio back up in full bloom in '85, Don took it back over—that was one of the first things once we got rolling that he wanted us to start trying to work out. I was instrumental in that I was more or less—I wasn't an expert screenprinter, but I had done a fair amount of screenprinting. Patrick Foy was the etching printer, but he had worked with a lot of different printing techniques and mediums and had worked in a number of shops so he put us together to try to work out this screenprinting idea. Patrick didn't know a lot about screenprinting—he had no reason to. He was primarily an etcher but like I said he knew a lot of other techniques.

So he and I were working on it for a while and we were thinking, well, we've got to be able to maybe have a stainless steel screen that we can heat up and we can electrify. Well it turns out that doesn't work at all. It just melts out and it just becomes an unrecognizable thing. So we tried—oh, this isn't working so great. Then we thought, well, what if we—I don't know, we bounced around with that and struggled with it. It was not looking good for a little while there. But then I don't know how it came about—everybody was getting pretty frustrated. But at some point the idea came up that, what if we just squeegeed in the cold wax into the stencil area, and then with a solvent, if you put the right amount of solvent on it, could you get it to release, to let go of the screen? Because that's what it wants to do—it wants to hold in there. Well we got it to work a little bit. And then we later learned that you don't need to have a stainless steel screen at all. It will work just fine with a regular old monofilament screen. It almost works better. So that's what we ended up doing later.

I think when we did the ROCI USA we did use a lot of the stainless steel screens still. We still thought that was critical to it. I think it was right about that point when we finally realized we

don't need to use stainless steel and they're not so heavy now and they're not— So this project has the encaustic wax along with acrylic, which was typical of what Bob would screen with. He used Golden acrylics. You can see it in the background in a number of the pictures. He had a small army there of Golden acrylics—every color they had basically. Golden acrylic back then was trying to really get their name out there and really become a force and they are quite a good company. And I think they gave to artists like every color we make—that was a typical thing to do just to get them to use it.

Q: So it's fascinating to me that Saff Tech Arts was developing this model where you and the people who you worked with over there were developing some sort of a technology like this encaustic approach and then pitching it—

Holzer: Correct.

Q: —to Rauschenberg. How would you decide what would be a good fit for Rauschenberg in particular, let's say? How would you know he would want to do something like this encaustic thing?

Holzer: Some things seemed more obvious than others. It depended a little bit on our tests, our experiments—clearly this whole encaustic printing thing started with the idea of a Jasper Johns project. But it turned out to not go that way. Jasper wasn't interested in it and I don't think Don and Jasper got along terribly well. There wasn't good chemistry. So that went nowhere. And you just kind of go, well how else could this be applied?

So yes, there were a number of projects. Most of the projects we did would be trying to come up with a creative use of a material or a process or whatever and either seeing if the artist would be interested in biting at that or what their thought was. And then they might say, “I’ll take a pass,” but then later come back and go, “That process thing you had—I’ve got an idea for that.”

We would pitch things to Bob, to Lichtenstein, to [James] Turrell, and it would depend a little bit on their take and their response to it. They might say, “Yes, I don’t know exactly what I’ll do with that, but I want to do something with that.” And then maybe Lichtenstein would disappear off the radar for several months and then all of a sudden a call would come and say, “I think I’ve got an idea for that process.” “Cool. Let’s talk, let’s look, let’s see. What are your ideas and how shall we shift and come up with how to do it?” Clearly Lichtenstein and Rauschenberg, even though they were friends, their work approach is so different—so different. So it was kind of funny, but it seemed some things maybe fit better than others. “Well that seems like such a thing for Bob to play with.” But then Lichtenstein went, “Oh I’ve got an idea for that,” and you’d be like, “Oh really? Surprise!” So yes, we started—that became our model basically.

Q: Developing these tools for uses that you couldn’t really imagine?

Holzer: Sort of let’s develop a palette and see what you do, which actually does fit. I hadn’t really thought about that until now. One of the things about Graphicstudio and Don’s original Graphicstudio concept that—I don’t know if it was above the door, but it was certainly something that I picked up—which was that we want to, not in an aggressive way, but we want

to challenge the artists to go out of their comfort zone and work with something that they don't typically do in their own studio with their own assistants. Why would they need us to do that unless they're just looking to make more stuff that they're already making? And that's not so interesting. There are plenty of shops out there that will make traditional lithographs and etchings and photogravures or whatever. But we wanted to do things that were unusual scale-wise, media-wise. If you're a sculptor, how about we make some prints? How about if we do some photographs? Let's throw something uncomfortable into your lap.

Some artists would say, "No, no thanks," and some would say, "Sure." Bob was the perfect guy for that. It's like, "I'll try anything." It's not like they were being told that if you fail we're still going to publish this. [Laughs] You've got the right to say, "No, you can't release these." But that was a challenge and the motif for Graphicstudio, certainly in the latter years. So going into this business model in our for-profit business, Saff Tech Arts, does make sense in that way. It was doing the same thing, just in a different way. Now we're actually handing you a process or a palette and saying, "Can you do something with this?"

Q: You aren't just providing a service. You're provoking in some way.

Holzer: Yes, sure. I think that's Don's thrill in the whole thing, not just to say, "We've got this artist to come here and do this thing." You can do that without too much trouble especially if you're in Florida. Any New York artist would be glad to come down to Florida for free for a month and work at your shop and get everything paid for and just sign the prints. But to do something interesting with them and to get them to collaborate and have a dialogue and have

possibly something significant come out of it rather than just another one of those—that was the aim.

Q: That's one thing that's really struck me actually about this whole Rauschenberg [oral history] project—obviously it's his name on it, but it's not like the auteur theory, if you take that from film. It's this whole mix and this whole medley of people and this collaborative element, which is something that I'm interested in and I'd like to touch on at the very end.

But as case studies there were a few other projects that Bob did with Saff Tech Arts in the nineties. So there's the *Eco-Echo* [1992–93]. There are the *Shales* [1994–95]. There are the *Arcadian Retreats* [1996].

Holzer: Right.

Q: I wonder if you could just walk through those, what your own role was, and how the collaboration played out in those.

Holzer: Chronologically the first was the *Eco-Echoes*. I don't remember exactly who came up with the idea of the windmill.



Rauschenberg and Donald Saff discussing the *Eco-Echo* project, Oxford, Maryland, 1993. Photo: George Holzer, courtesy of Saff Tech Arts



Robert Rauschenberg
Eco-Echo VI, 1992–93
Acrylic and silkscreened acrylic on
aluminum and Lexan with sonar-activated
motor
88 x 73 x 26 inches (223.5 x 185.4 x 66 cm)
Made in collaboration with Saff Tech Arts,
Oxford, Maryland
Private collection

Q: According to this *Art in Collaboration* book [*Donald Saff: Art in Collaboration*, 2010]—

Holzer: Which I probably should have read.

[Laughter]

Q: Bob wanted to do something with a hope chest and Don showed up with a windmill so—

Holzer: Okay that sounds vaguely familiar.

[Laughter]

Holzer: Well somehow the idea of a windmill—I don't know where that came in from, but the all-American thing, the idea of a rotating—and he had done those pieces previously with lights. I guess that's somehow how it got in there. Well we did some research and found where you get a windmill like that. My role in it primarily was, when we got the windmill, was to photograph the blades. Because that's what we had—we didn't assemble. We just had the blade structure. Setting it up on a wall and photographing it and making some prints for Bob to think about and think about playing with those images of the windmill. After that it became mostly a sculpture project, which wasn't exactly in my field. I did play around with—I don't remember now—but the images that are on the blades of the windmill, mostly they were either signs that one of the other guys that worked there—I believe it was Ken Elliott—went around and collected up signs that could be templated and cut out to the blades. Some of them were images of screenprintings of Bob's. I don't believe I did anything special or specific to those images.

The hands-on part that I'd say I was involved in with this was really after the fact. I was busy with a Lichtenstein project when Don and several of the guys from the shop went down to Captiva to work out the details of this—most of the sculpture-oriented people—how it was going to be constructed, the making of the blade images, et cetera. So I wasn't there on that trip. But when they came back with the prototype, then we had the task of making the rest of the edition. [Note: The nine *Eco-Echos* are each unique artworks.] And Bob had laid out what the blades would be and took Polaroids of them. And then I was actually one of the people that did the construction of them, assembling all the blades, bolting them all together, and making them all like that. So it was more of an assistant hands-on kind of project for me as far as that goes. We

also, at the same time as this, made a series of prints, which I believe we just referred to them as the “windmill prints.” But that’s not actually what they were called—I don’t know if they had a specific title or not.

Q: We can look that up.

Holzer: They were prints on paper, and screenprinted. They had, again, acrylic, and they also had encaustic—so there was some encaustic. That’s sort of like my photograph of the windmill blades, and then Bob had a photograph here of the clock, which might have been an old screen back from the ROCI stuff I made. Like I said, we made all these screens. [Note: Referring to the print *Sterling/Whirl*, 1993. Rauschenberg made two other prints at this time with Saff Tech Arts: *Cock-Sure*, which included a windmill image, and *Prime Pump*, both 1993.]



Robert Rauschenberg
Sterling/Whirl, 1993
Acrylic screen print, acrylic hand painting, fire wax
and silver pigment dust on paper with acrylic
screenprint on Lexan in aluminum frame
63 1/2 x 44 inches (161.3 x 111.8 cm)
From an edition of 17 published by Saff Tech Arts,
Oxford, Maryland

Q: And they get recycled.

Holzer: They get recycled, sure. You see stuff go through his work. And there again the windmill is put into there with these chickens and layered images, and a dog in there and stuff like that.



Robert Rauschenberg
Cock-Sure, 1993
Acrylic screenprint, fire wax and silver pigment
dust on paper with acrylic screenprint on Lexan in
aluminum frame
63 1/2 x 44 inches (161.3 x 111.8 cm)
From an edition of 17 published by Saff Tech
Arts, Oxford, Maryland

They were I want to say 40-by-60 or 60 tall by 40 wide, something like that, and they had acrylic printing on both paper and then on the face of the Plexiglas that was in the frame. And actually he made some transfer drawings that he called the *Windward Series* [1992]. I don't know if they're really well-known, but they were a series of uniques and he used the windmill imagery into those too. But those were not our production. I just saw those and saw the photographs—or did I photograph them? I can't remember now—I was also the photographer that photographed the resulting works. That was something that I brought to Graphicstudio and to Saff Tech and to this place here [Academy Art Museum], was that I had had quite a lot of experience photographing artwork for reproduction in catalogues. And that was one of my tasks besides the documentation of the processes, was to photograph the finished works for all of these books and

catalogues pretty much—not all of Rauschenberg’s, but just the things that relate to Saff Tech Arts and Graphicstudio.



Robert Rauschenberg
Windward Series IX, 1992
Acrylic, solvent transfer, and graphite on paper
60 x 37 3/4 inches (152.4 x 95.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

So anyway that was pretty much my involvement with the windmills. Again that was the thing where Don would say, “Can you make some photographs of this thing and are you okay with Bob using the images?” “Of course, hell yes”—which I did in other projects, too. “Sure, I’ll take a photograph of that and Bob can use it. Honored. He doesn’t have to reproduce it or—”

Q: And that wasn’t anything formal—that was just a thing of taking the picture and giving it to him.

Holzer: Yes. “Bob loves that picture.” “Well here Bob. Take it, use it.”

The next one we did was *Shales*.



Robert Rauschenberg
Toss + Measure (Shales), 1994
Fire wax and transfer on canvas
60 x 48 x 1 1/2 inches (152.4 x 121.9 x 3.8 cm)
Made in collaboration with Saff Tech Arts,
Oxford, Maryland
Private collection

Q: Yes, *Shales*, where the encaustic actually—

Holzer: Right, that's an encaustic.

Q: But with the transfer this time.

Holzer: Correct and that was another one where we came up with a process and thought this would fit Bob. We had played around with some different ideas about how to do that, but we had sort of discovered by accident really that printed images would transfer to the wax surface. And literally I was one of the two people that discovered it. We were in the shop. I was in the upper deck of the shop and my colleague Conrad Schwable was in the lower deck. He had just thrown some—we were working on some other wax stuff—he had just thrown some wax in the garbage,

and I was standing right there and he went, “Do you see this?” And he pulled it out and an image had transferred to the white wax. And I was like, “Let’s take that to Don right now. [Laughs] There is something that he can do with this absolutely.” So we ran up there.

Q: It’s like finding the Virgin Mary—

[Laughter]

Holzer: Yes, we were the heroes. We discovered this thing by pure trash accident, dumpster diving. So we played around with ideas. We experimented and whatever and then finally showed some ideas to Bob. And Bob thought, I can do something with that. Eventually it got honed down to what size he wanted to do and that it would be white wax as opposed to any kind of a color and that it would be transferred images onto it. We initially thought of it more as something that he’d handwork into. And we tried to push that, but he wasn’t biting. He didn’t want to do it. It’s kind of like you can lead him to water but—[laughs] And it was so up his alley. I just couldn’t—none of us could believe it. All of our tests we did we transferred photo things, but then we always put in dripping wax and crayon stuff and all the stuff that you can do into the encaustic. Nope, wouldn’t do it. “All I want to do is transfer photo images onto the wax.” Okay, whatever.

Q: So when you were working up a pilot model like that, are you trying to—so if you’re doing that for a particular artist like Rauschenberg, you’re trying to sort of mimic their style or you’re trying to—

Holzer: *Very* carefully.

Q: [Laughs] Say a little bit more about that.

Holzer: Trying to show him something that clearly they see as potential, but we're *not* making Rauschenbergs. That's a tricky thing. And with Bob it's really tricky because some of that stuff could look like Bob had done it. It's loose. But how do you make it not look stupid and sloppy and look intriguing so that—

Q: Because with the Lichtenstein, I suppose then you're in a different world of little Ben-Day dots stuff. That's a different—

Holzer: Well we actually took literal reproductions of some of Lichtenstein's work and made a piece using his process in it with the preliminary saying, "This is not what we're trying to make here. We're trying to show you this is your kind of imagery in this process." That worked okay. Bob you had to be a little more careful with because it would be pretty easy to fake a Rauschenberg. You just wouldn't have the signature so you're kind of screwed. But that's a little harder. Actually Lichtenstein yes you could—it's so hard-edged. There is no brushstroke to be distinguished.

So yes, it was a tricky weird thing.

Q: Were there situations where Bob reacted in that way with a perception that you were doing faux-Rauschenbergs?

Holzer: Probably. I can't cite one. I can't think of one off the top, but that's a risk. That was a risk and I remember us having many discussions about, "Is this going to look too much like we just made a Rauschenberg and we think we can make Rauschenbergs?" That's not what we're trying to say here, but Bob could take it wrong if you caught him at the wrong time in the wrong way. He could get pissed and tell you to go. So we had to be careful and we'd have to carefully pick what would be shown and how it would be fostered and couched. It's a tricky thing. I personally didn't do any of those direct discussions. That was Don's job.

In that *Shales* group, he sent me a bunch of slides because he wanted it to be color, not black-and-white. So he sent me a whole bunch of slides, which I made into color copies to be used. We also grabbed a whole bunch of stock imagery—that was starting to happen at that point in time. Stock imagery was brand-new in the world. But we grabbed a bunch of those and made some of those into things that could be transferred. And I made photographs of things and color copies of things. We bought a color copier and brought it down there to Captiva and I just started grabbing things out of the studio, out of the yard, out of the beach, out of the whatever, and copying stuff. I just started generating tables full of things ready to be transferred. Bob would go around the table and find things and place them. I was in another room and every once in a while I'd hear, "Who is bringing me this stupid dinosaur picture shit?" Oh okay, I guess he doesn't want any of those. How do I know? It's like, maybe he'll find that cool.

[Laughter]

Holzer: I was just trying everything and just trying to be thick-skinned. And other things he would just love—and you just didn't know.

Q: Could you predict it? Did you start to develop an eye for oh, he's going to love this or he's going to hate this?

Holzer: Sometimes I was right. Sometimes I was dead wrong. So yes, I don't know. It was very strange that way and what he would pick off the table—and a lot of stuff never got picked, never got used. And whether we just ran out or he just didn't like it, I'll never know.

Q: So his eye didn't follow a pattern then that you could—

Holzer: Not necessarily, no. He definitely had things going on in his mind that I have no concept of, which I understand now a lot more about it than I did back then. It was such a mystery.

Q: That's just retrospect or reading or that's—

Holzer: A little bit of both. I guess you get wrapped up in what you're trying to do and you're not thinking so much about what could be going through Bob's mind. Because he was very talkative, but it wasn't about what he was thinking about in making his art. It was about observations or of what was on television. The television was always on. It was just about life or

he talked to me about my relationship with my father. It was just talking about stuff. It wasn't about, "My concept in this is—" It was never like that. And I don't know that it was like that clearly in his conscious mind.

He just seemed to have some magic kind of ability, which would bring me to a subject that we haven't talked about that I think is important—that I always was amazed at watching Bob work especially during larger pieces like the *Wax Fire Works* or the *Shales*—but not the *Shales* as much because they're not so big in scale. The frescoes, the *Arcadian Retreats* that we'll get to, they're fairly good-sized pieces. It's hard for me to imagine trying to make a cohesive aesthetically pleasing composition with the canvas essentially laying down as opposed to being upright and I'm looking at it. And Bob always worked laying down—[the support] was laying down. Not only was it laying down, it wasn't on the floor. It was on a table. So he has no overview of this thing—never. From a pretty oblique angle, if a large piece—but he never seemed to let that bother him. I could never comprehend it. I'd be like, okay, maybe I could see starting off making it that way, but at some point, I'd say, "Okay guys, hold it up. Let me look at it." No, never—he did the work and, "Okay, I'm done. It's done." I could never ever comprehend that. And I don't know where that comes from with him or not, but it's always fascinating that he would work that way.

And like we're talking about with these *Shales*, he would do those. Those were on a table and he could pretty much in his field of view see the whole thing. He had a fairly good idea. But still to work flat like that was pretty amazing. So it's almost like there's magic going on there or something—I don't know what it is. Or he's so relaxed with it that he is just letting it happen and

it works like you'd like to think it should work, if you're so comfortable with what you're doing that it will come out compositionally correct without you struggling over it. I'd be noodling it left and right a little bit and shoving it this way. That's the way I am. Bob was completely not that so it's interesting—that was always a fun thing to work around.

Q: And again that's something that went through all of the work that you saw him do.

Holzer: Pretty much. I guess you could say the windmills not so much because he would just lay out the blades and you're seeing that all in one thing and on the floor. But most of these larger pieces like this he just didn't labor over it at all. And most artists do, especially somebody at this point in his career being so focused on—and whatever he puts out is going to be so looked at and so criticized and so written about. Whoa the pressure of that—and I don't know how he was able to do that. "It will be fine"—I wish I could say that.

So anyway, I did a lot of the imagery on the *Shales*. I grabbed a piece of bread and I think I enlarged that a little bit or whatever. Some of these are stock images of a brick wall or I grabbed a ruler out of his studio and did some rulers and he was like, "Oh, I like the rulers. We need some more rulers. Make some more of those rulers." So it was a fun collaboration in that way. The only thing like I said earlier that was difficult was that you were laying yourself open for him to go, "Get this crap out of here." Which did happen, which is fine.

Q: So what would happen when he didn't like a piece—the critical part?

Holzer: He'd just either tear it up or just throw it off the table or something— "Just get this out of here." I found a book and I thought these aardvarks or whatever would be cool. "Get this stupid crap out of here." "Okay, sorry." [Laughs] But I didn't take it too personally. It was like I was just throwing out anything I could think of that he might find visually playful or appropriate. So you've got to win some, you've got to lose some.

But that project also, it was difficult. Bob was drinking pretty hard at that point and Don and Bob were not getting along very well. I think that was a tough visit. I enjoyed the whole collaboration with the imagery and making the *Shales*, but those two—it ended up with Don leaving and Bob just—oh geez, it was a mess. But those things happened.

Q: How would that—because throughout this oral history a lot of people have talked about the life in Captiva and the subject of Bob's drinking has certainly come up time and time again. So how would that ebb and flow impact the work that you were doing and the collaboration?

Holzer: Me personally not so much other than maybe Bob would have been—he was drinking pretty hard at the *Shales* time there in '94 and probably the hardest I've ever seen him. And I think after that everything, that's when things started getting addressed finally. He never did stop, but got it a little more under control. But yes, it just makes for a lot of awkward tension and stuff. And if he's fairly drunk and Don's trying to talk with him and he's getting mad and yelling at Don because he's drunk instead of saying, "No, I don't want to talk about this now," but now they're yelling and fighting—it makes it kind of difficult. It wasn't fun. A lot of the other stuff, Bob clearly was inebriated when he would come in the afternoon in the studio and he would

leave even more inebriated. Well I guess that's probably what I would do if I had the emperor's new clothes, like I can do whatever I want. I'm the famous artist and everything I do, who's going to say to me, "Don't do that?" Nobody. Somebody will, but nobody in your studio is going to say that. They're all your employees. So they'll just shut up and hope for the best.

So yes, none of us felt comfortable or liked it. Of course it was always fun when you went out with him or when you stopped for dinner or if you stopped at the end of the day and everybody else was able to drink. If everybody is having a good time, that's a different matter. But when you're trying to work and you're trying to keep your focus and your process together that doesn't work so well.

Q: So was there much of a flip side of that for you, where you were there on the more social end of that, him cooking, that sort of a thing, or is this more like you were there in these work spaces—if there was that hard of a division?

Holzer: Well there was a little bit of both. I guess not at Graphicstudio time so much. Although when I went down there to meet with him when we were doing the one hundred-foot *Chinese Summerhall*, like I said nobody else was there pretty much. This photographer that used to work for him was there for a while, Emil [Fray]. He was there for a while, but then he left and it was just Bob and I. We were just hanging out. I guess I was drinking wine, but I wasn't drinking too much because I was too nervous and I didn't want to get drunk and do something stupid on my first visit with the man. [Laughs] And I didn't know Bob well enough either.

But yes, in Saff Tech days there was a lot more. When we'd go there we would go over and hang out at this house and eat dinner or whatever—a little more of a social situation. But you still had to be on guard. You still had to be careful of what's going on, what you were saying, and you didn't want to get too stupid and make a blunder and piss him off or—

Q: In terms of the work or like interpersonally?

Holzer: Interpersonally or whatever. It's a group of people all hanging out so—and often times other than us there might be a visitor. The director of the Museum of Modern Art [New York] might be there too. You never knew who else was going to be there so you had to be somewhat professional. So I didn't want to be a complete fool.

So yes, the drinking part—I don't know. I never had any real problems directly with him or anything. He always was pretty friendly and a buddy with me and never like—I didn't drink very much when I was around him. I'm not that much of a drinker and I just knew I wouldn't—that's where I'll get myself in trouble, is if I drink too much. But that's when a lot of people became good friends with Bob, I noticed over the years; people that would get loose and get drunk and then they would hang with Bob. And then they'd bond.

Q: Like a chum, a drinking chum, and they hang out.

Holzer: Yes, so it was always a little weird. But I was like I've got to just keep it—I've got to keep focused here.

Q: So how would you characterize your personal relationship with him—personal plus professional, since these lines were so blurred I suppose.

Holzer: I was always very nervous around Bob, I guess because he was such a big star in my eye. And also it wasn't easy-flow conversation a lot of times with Bob and I don't know if that's all me and my anxiety or the way I am. Because he and I were definitely different kinds of people. He was very social and very outgoing, very in the center of things, and I am not. And he said to me as much, "Boy, you're really kind of shy." I'm more of a shy person. He never said I was an idiot for being shy, but he was making an observation. Through the different experiences or different times when I was there just with him, those are the only times I really felt like I got to know Bob a little bit on a personal level, which there weren't that many of those.

I did in 1999 go down there and live down there for a while and work down there and there were more times then. I was also a little guarded I have to say. I went down there and I was being looked at as an employee to be working there and I wasn't sure what I thought about that. So I played my cards close to the vest a little bit and I purposefully didn't engage with Bob a ton. I could have gotten—I could have done that a lot more. I was there for months and I just didn't want to get pulled into the whole social and political drama of the place because there was plenty of it. It was like you've got to make a decision or you're going to jump in here with both feet and probably have a job working here. But I finally decided I don't think this is a good place for me to stay and to work so—

Q: This is in '99, 2000?

Holzer: '99, yes. But during that time I definitely had a bunch of time alone with Bob because there weren't all of us from the studio or whatever. It was just me there. Sometimes some of the other people that worked for him were around, but there were a lot of times. It was interesting. He was always interested in talking about, "What's your relationship with your parents, and your mom and your dad, and were you ever married?" Just talking about those kinds of things and talking about his—sharing those kinds of things with you.

I definitely remember it being—it was always kind of sad to me, but I don't know if sad is really the right word for it. But Bob was very fearful of the end, of death, and that was very clear to me right from the first time I ever really spent any time with him, that he was very concerned about that, and what does that mean. I know I've heard the quote from him that he was just worried what he was going to miss, which is kind of fun and cute. [Note: In an obituary for *Slate* Jim Lewis remembered Rauschenberg saying, "my fear is that after I'm gone, something interesting is going to happen, and I'm going to miss it."] But I think he was more dark underneath that. He was quite worried about getting older and dying—and we all are. [Laughs] But he seemed to be quite—and maybe because he was such in the lights, such a star in the world of art and of other venues, you think about your place in history where I don't. [Laughs] So he's thinking about that more. Maybe he's thinking about that much younger than I'm thinking about that now—but he was thinking about it when he was younger than I am. He's so focused on by the media and by whatever. I always felt that there was an underneath sadness that made me sad—not that he

wasn't enthusiastic about life and going at it [laughs] like I can't even comprehend. But that was always back in there somewhere, it seemed like.

And he was definitely a guy who was sometimes distracted and not necessarily in a bad way.

[Laurence “Lauren”] Laury Getford, who I’m sure you’ve spoken with—when I was down there in ’99, I worked a lot with Lauren. We were working on the “Cathedral” as we called it—the “Cathedral piece,” the Padre Pio [*The Happy Apocalypse*, 1999]—and Lauren summed it up perfectly for me one day. I needed to get some questions answered from Bob about an image or whatever. And we had gotten the call: Bob’s on his way over to the studio. And I said, “Well, I need to talk to Bob about this.” And Lauren I think, had been over at the house earlier that day. And he said, “No, I don’t think today’s—it’s not a good day to talk to Bob about that. He’s got some heavy background music going on today.”



Robert Rauschenberg

The Happy Apocalypse [original artwork for Padre Pio Liturgical Hall], 1999

Inkjet pigment transfer, acrylic, and graphite on poly laminate

96 x 250 1/16 x 2 inches (243.8 x 635.2 x 5.1 cm)

The Menil Collection, Houston

Gift of the artist in memory of Walter Hopps

Bob was like that sometimes. We all have that to a degree, but he was thinking about something. It was interesting about him, like sometimes he didn't seem—he was just smiling and joking and loved to make jokes about everything and working away and stuff. But some days he was just—he was somewhere else. I don't know what I'd be like if I was an artist and there were people waiting around for me at the studio every day. Go home! [Laughs] I'm not in the mood today. He would say that, but that would be weird, weird pressure.

I think he felt pressured. I think that's part of the thing that I'm trying to talk about here. He talked about that directly to me, that he felt a great deal of pressure. And at the time I didn't quite understand what he meant, but I certainly do now. Whatever he does is going to be in the spotlight big time. There's no, "Yes that's a series of work that's not his best, shoved to the side." No, that doesn't matter when you're Rauschenberg. It's going to get the spotlight, lots of press—and whoa that's a lot of pressure.

Q: That sort of pressure that you talk about or that sense that there was some sort of a weight there underneath the surface, is that something—it sounds like it to some extent impacted the collaboration. Is that something that's in the work as well or is this the man as it were?

Holzer: I don't know an answer to that. That's a good thing to think about. Could I look at the work that I know and say that I see some of those issues or things popping up in the work? I don't know. I certainly in hindsight now can look more at the work that I look at and understand a little more about what he was maybe thinking or the idea or the feeling that he was getting to, where most people would maybe look at it and go, "I don't have any idea what any of those have

to do with each other.” But that’s a different thing than what you’re asking. I guess not really having a good grasp of his background in working with him in those earlier years didn’t serve me well. Maybe they did—maybe it’s better that way, I don’t know. [Laughs] But really, I knew about Dada and [Marcel] Duchamp and [René] Magritte. And I knew about John Cage and I knew about Black Mountain College [North Carolina] and experimental abstract things that are not Abstract Expressionism et cetera—I knew those things, but I hadn’t really attached them clearly to Bob. And that’s where his roots are from and that stuff comes out so clearly in his work—the idea of chance, the idea of accident. It gets back to that thing I said about him saying, “What image or what color should I use over there?” That’s letting chance just happen. I should have picked that up. What’s wrong with me? That’s so obvious now, but at the time you’re like, “Oh god, you’re not going to take my idea?”

Q: A green?

Holzer: “Who am I? You’re the artist.” That was the interesting thing about all of these endeavors—Graphicstudio, Saff Tech Arts. I think most of us that worked in those shops—not entirely, but for the most part we didn’t do artwork during those years because the feeling and the pressure of working in the print shop with these blue-chip topnotch artists—*they’re* artists. I’m just some guy who plays around. And that’s changed. I don’t think that way now, but I certainly did during those years. And most of us did also, I would say. I can think of very few that kept making their own art very actively at all during those years. And maybe that’s just from exhaustion and from, “I don’t want to bring the shop home with me” or whatever. I did a little bit

of work, but I was pretty quiet. Because I came into it, I'm an artist, I'm making art, and I'm getting shows. And then I got into this and it pretty much stopped—not entirely, but mostly.

So I think that's an interesting thing. It's probably true in most of the print shops—I don't know that's true, but I wouldn't be surprised. You feel like you're, "Oh, here's Jim Dine. This is an artist. Jesus, this guy can do whatever. He can draw. He can draw with a Dremel tool! I can't even draw with a pencil." [Laughs] And not that Bob encouraged that—I remember him many times encouraging me or us to do a work, to do our own work. That wasn't something that he said or proposed in any way.

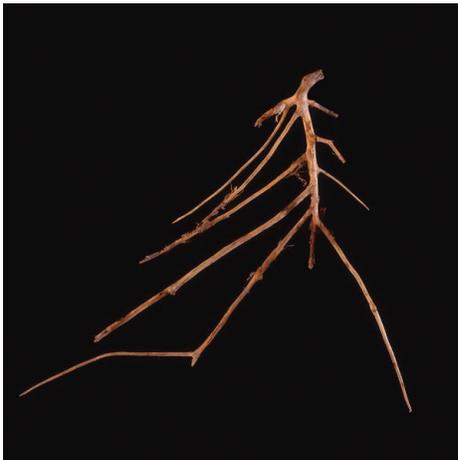
Q: So when—but now you do.

Holzer: I do, but actually it's slowed down again mostly just because of different financial situations. I need to make some money and it's like, all right, I've got to stay on my job. So my wife used to work and was helpful in that and now she stopped working and so it became all on me to keep things flowing. So in the last three years or so, three or four years, it's been pretty flat for me. I still make some, but—

Q: So one question that I would have—if at the time the bulk of these giants of the field or that influence or that shadow or whatever it was that led to you not making any art, is that period something that you draw upon now? Or is that a totally separate venture and you're now back on—?

Holzer: Well I certainly draw on what I learned about materials, process. I learned an awful lot of things from different people—not so much specifically like I learned from Rauschenberg or I learned from Lichtenstein, but I learned from working with those processes. And the other people call us “artisans” sometimes or the guys that work [as] collaborators. I know a lot more about processes and materials than I ever did. I don’t use them very much, but I know about them. [Laughs] I do get a number of people that pick my brain and ask me about things because they know I’ve worked around some of that stuff and, “What do you know about encaustic?” or “What do you know about paper?” or “What do you know about acrylic?” or whatever it is.

As far as my artwork itself, it’s hard to say. It’s pretty hard to step back and really look at your own stuff very effectively. For instance some of my more recent work, some series of works, were singular images of leaves or of seeds or of sticks, things that are dead, things that are not pretty but I find interesting-looking. And I photograph them on just a flat black background. So some people find them pretty depressing because they’re so dark.



George Holzer
Dashing Stick, 2008
Photograph
20 x 20 inches (50.8 x 50.8 cm)

Q: I didn't think so. I saw them on your site.

Holzer: Okay. Well some people do, some people don't. But I know that a lot of those images are about my own thinking about death and getting comfortable with it and maybe its beauty. I much prefer seeing dead flowers usually than pretty, live, brand new flowers. I'm just more interested in them. They have more character going on rather than the stereotypical thing, although I don't have anything against beautiful flowers. [Laughs] But did I pick that up from Rauschenberg? I don't think so. I think I was already playing with that idea a little bit in some of my real early work when I was in graduate school. So now I worked with Mapplethorpe some and I certainly admired his work and mostly of his still lives and flowers, and that led me somewhat to those images in the way I presented them, lit them and presented them. Although he didn't do them on—well he did do some on black backgrounds. But yes, I didn't think about that until about five years ago somebody saw one of my images and said, “A little Mapplethorpe influence there, huh?” And they didn't know I had worked with him or knew him and I thought, wow, you're right, it is. That's funny how that stuff happens, that you're close to it and you don't think about that. But it's not like I thought, oh, I want to make some images like Mapplethorpe. But it just gets into your psyche. It just gets into your skin.

And sure, I'm sure a certain amount of Bob's stuff—certainly the found object stuff, which I was interested in already. But Bob, that's like a—here it's been given the gold star. Found object stuff is good to work with as opposed to the artists around here in our little town [Easton] who would be like, “What the hell?” [Laughs]

Q: Put that down, put that back. [Laughs]

Holzer: Right. Why aren't you trying to paint a nice farm or a sunset or something? So that's hard to answer. And some artists, you can maybe learn a little bit about some of their approach or maybe about their demeanor or their security or insecurity around their work, which we would see because of our working model there [at Saff Tech], the sort of—here's the deep end of the pool. Do you want to jump in here? You could fail at this. And some of them would get more uncomfortable than others—and I'm sure all of them were uncomfortable. I would be. I don't care how secure you are in what you're doing in your art. You're getting thrown into—you're getting a curve ball and what am I going to do with this? Well I've got to do what I know how to do. And it works out. But wow, it would freak me out, coming over there the first day to start working on this thing—Jesus.

Q: It's interesting to think about because of course that's not the natural perspective you would take on that. You would just think, okay, here's this icon of art coming in and this is a new tool for someone who's known for using new tools. But right it may be that each—going back to the idea of pressure that you were talking about actually, when it came to Bob.

Holzer: Well sure. And Lichtenstein, not so much. He's a much different, completely different guy, but much more of a controlled guy. And we would pitch our process or give some ideas and, "We could use this or this might be interesting." And then he'd come later and say, "I think I have an idea," and it was usually a series, not a piece. And then he would produce a collage. So it was that he did on his own and then we would come up with how are we going to make this the

scale that we want and how the process will be done. So it was a different issue than working on it right here right now with me over there with a damn camera clicking away. [Laughs] That would drive me nuts.

Q: Yes and I'm curious actually about that question of what distinguished Bob as a collaborator in that sense, given that you've worked with Rosenquist, Dine, Mapplethorpe, Lichtenstein, and Turrell and so on.

Holzer: They're all different, all different, for sure. Bob was probably the one that would invite you in more than any—although that wasn't always true. I don't know if it was he could only deal with X number of people in the room at a time. I don't really know, but sometimes you would feel like, back off, give him some space here. And other times—he wanted a lot of activity to go on in the studio. He wanted the TV on. Oh it was so annoying, blaring away. It was like, “Bob, can we turn that off? Please, I can't think,” and especially the stuff that would be on there, soap operas and good god!

[Laughter]

Holzer: But yes, there had to be a lot going on and people coming and going and the FedEx guy coming in and he'd have to have a whole big thing with the FedEx guy and making jokes about his outfit. [Laughs] It was a whole, whole thing. It was a parade.

But some of the other artists—I remember watching Jim Dine work. I thought he was pretty fascinating to watch, the way he would draw and would work on a plate or whatever. But he also told me to go take a flying whatever. He didn't like me over his shoulder that much and I don't blame him. He obviously got into some insecurity there about what he was doing and I was too new at the game to know that this is really out of his wheelhouse and I should leave him alone. My job was to take pictures of the artists working and telling me to fuck off is perfectly acceptable now, but that freaked me out at the time. I think it was our second project or something and I was like, oh my god. [Laughs] So I tried to become a little more sensitive to that—they don't want to look bad and you don't want to make them look bad. But how do you do that and how do you stay out of their way but get the pictures—that was tricky.

Q: Was there a particular approach that worked for Bob in that way? Some people, clearly they want to be alone. But Bob it seems was more social, but variable.

Holzer: He was absolutely, “Yes, fine, take your pictures, whatever.” There were certain things that he'd want to maybe have some editorial control over. He cared about his looks and we're all vain to some degree. And I knew, I was told there were certain angles he didn't like of himself. So I learned a little bit, “Oh yes, let's not show that to Bob. He's not going to like that”—that kind of thing. But Lichtenstein, I think he tolerated it. I don't think he liked it particularly, but he tolerated it. Most of them did. They understood that it was—especially when Graphicstudio was part of a university and it was a learning experience, we'd show this to students and all that kind of thing.

Turrell—I don't know. It's hard to tell if any of them were terribly uncomfortable, but nobody gave me too much trouble with that. Some of the artists you just click in better with than others and some are a little more hands-off and go, "I'm doing this thing and leave me alone and then I'll show you this." I wasn't the printer on a lot of things so I wasn't being asked. Who needs my opinion, right—

Q: Because a lot of your stuff it sounds like would have been more the front end—certainly a lot of stuff you're talking about for Bob, preparing the screens, that sort of thing.

Holzer: Except when we went to Bob's. Then we would all be—like I said, I'd be involved. I'd be putting stuff on there. I would squeegee stuff or I would clean the screens or—I was more hands-on because there was so much to do and there were a lot of hands needed and everybody was busy as heck. I was an assistant printer for a Lichtenstein project and Mapplethorpe prints and whatever so I did those things as needed. But as to actual collaboration of making the plates for those prints, not as much.

Q: Before we do come to a final conclusion here, I do wonder if there's anything you'd like to say about either the *Arcadian Retreats* or the Cathedral piece. Those are the two things I think that are hanging here.



Robert Rauschenberg
On Hold (Arcadian Retreat), 1996
 Fresco in artist's frame
 74 1/2 x 111 1/2 inches (189.2 x 283.2 cm)
 The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica,
 California

Holzer: Right. Well, the frescoes [*Arcadian Retreats*] were pretty fascinating. I got to work a lot on the development for the pitch that we gave to Bob, different ways to make the transfer. And at this point the shop, Saff Tech Arts, was down to a smaller group. I think there were only five of us at that point. So we were all pretty much hands-on in there, trying different things, suggesting things, arguing about things, “Get out of here, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” and the stuff that goes on. But I was involved in a lot of the preliminary ways to make the transfers, plus I was, being the photo guy—we hadn’t decided exactly how we were going to make the images for transfer, but I was going to clearly be making the photographs that would be used for this. So I was making images for us to test with and practice and play with and then once we got the idea of the project figured out with Bob, what we were going to do and the scale and all that—then we were going to print them all in-house.

So we were going to buy an Iris machine, which is what Bob was using down there and I was going to print out the large photographs from his trip to be transferred. But it became clear that that was impractical. It was a very expensive machine and it was going to take me too long to get up to speed to be able to effectively print these. It wasn’t just a photo lab and it wasn’t printing

with a negative like I knew how to do. This was digital printing and I was barely hanging on/literate with that at this point.

So I took the images and I had them printed by a place in Washington [D.C.] that had an Iris printer. I arranged to have that done and I cut the sheets of transfer paper that we used and brought that all over to them and all that. They printed them and I picked them all up and then we brought them down to Captiva. Meanwhile the other guys in the shop were making all the plaster panels that we were going to transfer onto and were getting all those supplies ready. And then we went down there with Bob's palette. Here we come with a truck full of these—they were honeycomb panels with plaster applied to them and grated off relatively smoothly, but keeping the edge very rough, almost the way a deckle edge of a paper might be. So those guys, Ken and Patrick, worked hard to figure out how to make that, which was not easy. [Laughs]

So they loaded all that up and we loaded up all the photographs and everything and went down there. And again Bob just working on the flat table there. [Laughs] He had practiced on a few small pieces to get the idea, the feel of how they worked months before. But no, typical Bob—no, you don't do a sketch. You don't do anything. You don't do a preliminary anything. You just start doing it. You just start laying it down there and transfer it and to my amazement again, just laying it down there and just sticking things in there. Some things were sort of obvious—we need something over there. But how does he figure this out, laying on the table and you can't even see it? But he did.

So a lot of that I actually didn't have—other than helping Bob with the photographs and maybe helping him peeling off the transfers or helping the guys move the panels or whatever—other than that, I was just documenting to a large degree. Because these were all his photographs from his travels in Greece and Turkey. So the photographs were already done and I was just assisting him. That project went really well. I thought they came out really nicely and they were a financial success, that's for sure. [Laughs] That was one of our first.



Donald Saff assisting Rauschenberg in the production of *Party Line* (1996), from the fresco series *Arcadian Retreats*, in Rauschenberg's Captiva Drive studio, Captiva, Florida, 1996. Photo: George Holzer, courtesy of Saff Tech Arts

Q: At Saff Tech?

Holzer: Yes. They were sold, gone, which didn't happen with a lot of the other things. So they kind—

Q: Because it was a new media for him?

Holzer: Yes and they were nice pieces. I don't know, but some of our *Wax Fire Works* from ROCI USA, they didn't sell very well at all. They're just barely all sold out now. It's a long—they really slowly trickled out.

Q: But this one went.

Holzer: This one, gone. [Laughs] Pace [Gallery, New York] basically bought them all. They said, "This is a gold mine," and they just bought them. [Laughs] So that helped financially. But I'm sure, as you know, it wasn't too far after this we started into the Lichtenstein project, the last one that we did before he died, the still lives [*Brushstroke Still Life with Lamp*, 1997]. And he died in '97, which was right smack in the middle of the production of that project, which was a nice project. And they couldn't be finished. Roy dying, Don and Bob were sort of on the outs—they sometimes got like that—and those were our main clients. Nancy Graves, I think she was dead at that point—I think she was. So it was like either start with some new artists that we had not worked with before or wait until our next chance at Bob. Don was like, "I can't do it. I'm not doing it." I was fine with it. Some of the other guys in the ship were not happy about it because they felt like they worked hard to build this Saff Tech Arts and he's not going to just jump out on it.

I don't know—we had places to go with it for sure. We were working on some new ideas and they were for Bob. The main printer, Patrick, and I were working on—I was printing Iris prints at this point and I was printing things and we were transferring them to fiberglass and different substrates, some of which is in that Saff Tech book. And I guess Patrick was more excited about

it than I thought. I didn't realize he was the one who didn't want it to stop. He didn't want it to fold. But there were—it could have been years before Bob and Don got a new project going. It seems like these guys kind of rotated around the different print shops. “This year I'm going to do a print project with Gemini. This year I'm going to do it with [Kenneth E.] Ken Tyler. Now I'm going to do it with Don.” So we saw it could be a while before we get back in the rotation.

The other thing is about the Cathedral project, which is what I called it, because we didn't know what else to call it back then but the Padre Pio thing.

Q: Because you went down there—because this is after Saff Tech has closed.

Holzer: Saff Tech had stopped production and we were still working there, most of us, but it was mostly wrapping up everything for storage and cataloguing and I was photographing things—that kind of stuff. And it became clear that it was just not going to happen. Don was not going to keep the shop going and we're all going to be out of here. I don't know if I talked to Don about doing work for Bob or if Bob talked to Don or if Darryl [R. Pottorf]—I don't remember how that happened exactly, but the discussion came up about me working with him on this.

Actually, now as I think about—we were working, we had not given up completely yet. We had a couple of interesting ideas and they were Bob-oriented. One of them was could we make a pinhole camera that we could shoot a digital back in. And that idea was really cool. It seemed like Bob would be really interested in that weirdness and it would be like the oldest of photo technology and the newest. Well I worked on that for a while, but that was just not coming

together. Technology wasn't there yet. They didn't have capture-backs that could capture that kind of low light like they do today because that's a really long exposure. [Laughs] So we played around, Patrick and I played around with that for a while and we got excited about that idea.

Well then somehow—and I don't know where this came from. I don't know if it was something that Patrick thought up, Don thought up, Bob thought up—but somebody came up with the idea of a kaleidoscope. And the idea came up about photographing through a kaleidoscope, letting Bob's chance thing come in or whatever. So we built a large kaleidoscope that you could put a camera into and Bob liked that idea. It was around that time. That was around the end of '98 that it came up about the kaleidoscope and that maybe George should bring it down there and see if you want to play with it. Then this came up about the Cathedral, the Padre Pio thing.

Q: So the camera actually pre-dates the Cathedral thing.

Holzer: Yes.

Q: It was being developed independently of that.

Holzer: Right. We were working on some ideas around that and I think that was right around the time when Don said, "Look, we're going to have to shut this down." He talked to Bob obviously because Bob called me, which he didn't usually do [laughs] and asked if I would come down there and work with them and that he's got this project and that Darryl was becoming very busy with his own work and that he needs some more hands-on with this. I didn't realize what he was

saying. I think about it now in retrospect—it's typical of me. You hear what you want to hear or you think it the way you want to think it. But what he was actually, I think, asking me was would I come down there and perform more of the role that Darryl was performing, which was coordinating things and traveling with him and all that. I didn't realize that, but I realized it much, much later that he was talking to me about that. In my mind, he wanted me to come down and work on this project—which he did, but that was only part of it.

So anyway, I went down there, scared because I didn't know quite what I was going to be expected to do.

Q: This is your first time collaborating with him—

Holzer: By myself.

Q: —a sole proprietor, individually.

Holzer: Yes and I wasn't really—I was friends with most everybody of his staff down there, but what am I walking into here? I know it's kind of weird here. There are all kinds of politics and, as any place, there are jealousies—who is Bob's favorite and whatever. I'm thinking, I don't know what I'm walking into here, but that's the kind of stuff I don't do well with. [Laughs]

So anyway, yes, it became clear right off that Darryl was testing me a little bit. I didn't really like the dynamic of that. He was having all the guys in the shop do all of his stuff. He was having

them make all of his frames and make all of his paper transfer substrate and I thought, this is a little weird. I don't really like this idea a whole lot. I thought, well Bob loves it. Bob thinks it's great, but I'm not going to be part of it. And it was running around in my mind at one point that maybe Darryl would hire me to work on doing the imagery and whatever because he needed help. But then I found out that he had a guy that did this stuff for him and I was like, well I don't really know what's going on. That's when I decided I'm going to just play real aloof and a little hands-off here because I don't really understand. This is hard for me—I don't know how to play these kinds of politics.

And I think that's when I talked to Don about that on the phone and he was like, "Well maybe that's not a good place for you. So why don't you just try to do your project, do your job there, but don't try to move into something else. I don't think that's going to be real healthy for you. I think it will be too stressful." And that's exactly right. It would have been.

Q: Just negotiating these various—

Holzer: Yes, it was always like, "Oh Bob's coming back." Bob's always either going or coming on a trip and it would be like, "Oh Bob's coming back." Well I didn't realize that meant you're supposed to go over there to his house to welcome him back. Oh—I don't understand the rules of this game exactly. "Bob's leaving Thursday for two weeks." Oh well that means you're supposed to go over there some time before that and say goodbye. I can't do it—I'm not built like this.

[Laughs]

Q: It's exhausting.

Holzer: Yes, it's exhausting. And those guys all knew how to play that and they'd been playing it for years. I don't really mean "play," but they knew how to work with that. And it was like, okay, Bob left and then they'd all disappear and take off and go do stuff. And they all knew. I didn't know about that and here I am by myself and I don't know what to do. [Laughs] It was just hard for me. Anyway that was all kind of weird.

So I just tried to focus on helping to get this thing scaled up. And it was big and it was hard to do. It was a large-scale thing and we tried to make a to-scale mock-up of the entire thing. So these probably—my slides that I took—

Q: Yes, these are— [note: referring to photocopy of Holzer's Padre Pio project slides]

Holzer: Yes, they're probably all my slides that I took. I took some slides while I was down there. Yes, that's probably what all these are. I actually have the slides right there.



Rauschenberg at right, Darryl Pottorf kneeling, and assistants working on *The Happy Apocalypse* [original artwork for Padre Pio Liturgical Hall] (1999) in Rauschenberg's Captiva Drive studio, Captiva, Florida, ca. 1999. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: George Holzer

Q: These are all just images of the making of the Cathedral piece.

Holzer: The making of, right. So I guess it was to be made into fabric and I had no idea how that was going to happen. And I told Bob that and I wonder if maybe Bob thought I knew how to do that or he was disappointed. I don't know. Bob started realizing I was not quite what he thought maybe I could be or would be and he pulled in—I can't think of his name now. Boy, I'm really skipping out here—Bill Goldston. He called in Bill Goldston to take control of the project, in handling it from how it might get printed and all that. And that took a little pressure off me because I really didn't know how to get that done and didn't have connections to that.

So yes, I printed out all these different images. Some of them are his photographs. Some are stock images. He wanted to have a satellite dish as the central piece of it. One of the guys, Lawrence Voytek—you probably know him—he went to a junkyard and found an old scale-style satellite dish. We spray-painted it. I think he spray-painted it silver initially and I photographed it. And then I scanned it and I blew it up and then we ended up coloring it gold more than silver and then got this image. I think I took these out, copied them out of some books et cetera and figured out ways to transfer those things into the—

Q: The image of the earth in the satellite dish.

Holzer: Right, right. We finally made this whole thing. And actually over here, which are hard to see, but it kind of tapers off into these weird—if you were to actually see it up close, they're sort

of abstract-looking little funny-shaped images, not at all like what you'd expect of Bob's stuff.

But they were taken through the kaleidoscope.

Q: Oh and these are the images on the lower right-hand or the right-hand side of the piece.

Holzer: Right, the right corner of it. And so we couldn't—Bob and I weren't communicating on this well and I don't know what the problem was. And somehow it got decided with Darryl that what should happen is maybe we should go in the darkroom and project images, photographs—I don't know if they were Bob's work or just of photographs—and shoot those through the kaleidoscope, which was kind of hard to do because it's dark. But I did it. I was able to do it. It was funky. My thought, our thought was that we would take it out into the world and shoot things. But it just wasn't going to happen that way I guess, for whatever reason.

Q: And so that wasn't a thing about the functionality of the camera? That was a thing about the—

Holzer: I think, yes. I think it was Bob's decision just to not want to do that. It very well could have been, "I don't want to go schlepping around with this guy George for days and days, taking pictures." It might have just been that simple. I don't know. [Laughs] That could be true and I'm fine with that—or he just didn't have the energy to go out and to do that. Where are we going to go? Where are we going? Do you go to Fort Myers? Do you go to the beach? What do you photograph? Maybe he just didn't have the excitement or energy to do that—I just don't know.

We never talked about it, but I was just told, “Oh Bob decided he wanted to just shoot images of these things.” So that’s what we did.

At some point we got that finished, all those panels. It took quite a bit of work. It came out okay. And then it was, well now what do we do with it? They happened to have an 8-by-10 camera down there in Captiva. I said, “Let me look at it. I might be able to get this thing functioning and I can shoot an 8-by-10 of it that would probably give you enough detail for scaling up.” This thing was going to be huge, I think like 30 feet tall kind of thing. So I did. I got the camera functioning. It was an older thing, but it was okay. I ordered some film and I got some holders and I photographed it obviously with an 8-by-10 there. And I handed those over to Bill Goldston. He came down at some point and saw the—I don’t know, it’s not a collage—the transfer and saw the transparencies and said, “Okay, I think these will work fine. I’ll take it from here.” And after that I was sort of told, “Well I guess your job is done here dude so pack it up.”

So I left, came back up here. As I understand, that never got accepted. It was rejected by the—I don’t know if it was rejected by the Pope or by their committee or what, but that thing did get built and another image that looks a little bit like it was put in there—but not Bob’s.

Q: In the cathedral?

Holzer: Yes, in the cathedral. [Note: Padre Pio Pilgrimage Church, San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy]

Q: I heard it was actually the satellite dish apparently that was the theological offense. [Laughs]

Holzer: Correct. Darryl was the one who said right from the beginning, “It looks like a big penis.”

[Laughter]

Holzer: Sure, okay, and if that was the real holding point, we could have broken that down some. But yes, the satellite dish—but that was Bob’s idea. It’s just the way it played out.

Years later—I didn’t think about it. I just didn’t think about it at all for a long time and then years and years later, when the Internet got a lot more like it is today, I looked it up. And I was like, goddamn, that looks a lot like that thing Bob and I made. [Laughs] But I looked at it a little more closely and realized no, that isn’t it. It didn’t have the satellite dish, but it was a colorful multi-image like that. And I don’t know who ended up doing it. It didn’t talk about it in the article I found. [Laughs]

Q: So then this is 2000 or is this still ’99?

Holzer: This is still ’99.

Q: Still ’99 when you come back up here to do George Holzer Photography.

Holzer: Yes, I just start becoming a freelance guy, trying to reinvent myself. Saff Tech is over and I didn't really see any work with Don directly in the near future. I have done work with him, working on his inventory in his storage facility up in Baltimore or on different shows or working on photography stuff with him with his clocks or whatever. But I didn't know that anything was in the near future.

I looked around for jobs but kind of struck out, discovered that when you're fifty years old, you're considered over the hill. Nobody was interested—teaching, printing jobs, nothing. I mean, I didn't search everywhere, but everything I looked at was pretty much, "No thanks, we're looking for a thirty-year-old or a twenty-something-year-old." It was like, oh geez. I always just assumed I could get a teaching job after all these experiences. [Laughs] No. And I guess my own thoughts and editorial on it is that I did try and teach a little bit at our local Salisbury University [Maryland] and at our community college up here. The other faculty are not real happy or excited about having you there because you seem more sexy and glitzy and you've done some real stuff and they haven't.

Q: Politics, I guess.

Holzer: Politics and like, "Get lost. Get out of here. This is my department." And I felt that very, very clearly. [Laughs]

Q: That stuff can get pretty cutthroat in universities and—

Holzer: Especially in a small college where there are no other real options. It's not like you're in a city where there are three other colleges or whatever. But the photo department guy down here in Salisbury was very clearly not interested in me being in his turf and didn't want me around there and I was definitely a threat. I thought, geez, I'm bringing in a gold mine here, but I realize now that's not at all what he thought. Here I might upset the apple cart and he'll lose his tenure or whatever. I don't know what he thought, but—

Q: So in this context you go freelancing, which you're doing currently. You mentioned some continued work with Don—

Holzer: Yes, I help him with lectures, whether they're clocks or art lectures. He does a little bit of both. Gathering information or slides for him or digitizing, scanning stuff for him, or actual photographs. I've photographed a number of his clocks and—not all of them are clocks. Some of them are devices, but I've photographed a lot of those for him. So yes, I've been doing some of that.

I tried to be a printmaker for a while, a digital printmaker. That didn't go so well. I wanted to work with photographers that I could collaborate with. That's what I knew how to do, but you can't do that out here too well. You need to be connected up with artists and galleries that have plenty of money, like I was fairly good friends with Mapplethorpe. If he hadn't passed away, that's a client, somebody—but I just didn't get anything like that going. I found a few local artists that I worked with, but as soon as 2008 hit and the decline in the economy, then all of them were just gone.

So that's when I reinvented myself again. I reinvented myself because I had done it in the past, I was framing, photographing artwork, installing artwork at this museum here. They happened to need it at the time so it was lucky in that sense because there are not many jobs around here and I didn't really want to move back to a city. I thought about it, but you get older and cities don't have that appeal. You're not—you don't feel fast. You don't feel—you feel old and in the way real quickly. [Laughs]

Q: Well off the record we talked about the decompression you feel driving out here. For the record I came out from the city today.

So in all of this context then you don't work with Bob or see Bob again? He passes away eight years or so after the time that you're talking about being down there in Captiva.

Holzer: I don't think I saw him at all after that, '99. I must have seen him at something. It was—it was at an opening or something. Yes, I probably did. I saw him at a few things, but just, "Hi Bob," give him a kiss and a hug or maybe we went to a dinner, but not much. Did he pass away in—

Q: '08.

Holzer: 2008, yes, so that's a good number of years there.

Q: So to close and come full circle around, it's interesting we began with you saying it was recommended strongly to you that you should go into an artistic career.

Holzer: Right.

Q: So what we've been doing here has been overviewing the fulfillment of that prediction, one way or another. [Laughs]

Holzer: I could actually round that out with a couple of nice things here. One is, yes that guy was spot-on and as I look back at things—well yes, sure, I could have done other things. What if I had stayed in computers from the 1960s? I probably would be a millionaire or whatever. I'd probably be very wealthy because I was in a very ground floor level of all that. But I made a choice back then in '68 or whatever it was that I either have to own a computer company or start one up and be a manager—and I didn't like that idea much—or I've got to go back to school and finish my degree in programming. And that didn't appeal to me either, sitting in a cubicle and doing flow charts and math problems. And that was my big decision, at some point was, "Screw it and what have I got to lose? I'll just go into this art thing, see where it leads me." And it kept leading me. It had its bumps along the way, but it kept going fairly positively. It kept feeling like there was plenty more in this for me. This is a very deep—it's a very strange field of life or of endeavor, but it's got so many facets to it and it's not fluff and it's not boring. So I kept with it.

Along that line, it is interesting that the later work that I did with Bob and also with Saff Tech before we closed was all computer-based. So here I am going back to computers all over again.

There was a big gap in there. I did nothing with computers let's say from 1971 or so until 1995. I had no—well that's not true. I actually take that back. I did play around with some early computer stuff at Graphicstudio. When the first Apple Macs [Macintosh computers] were out, we were looking at ways to apply that to art. We were going to do a [Shusaku] Arakawa project with letters and skewing letters and stuff. Yes that's true—we did play with that. But it did feel like it came back full circle when we were getting into these last—printing with the Iris printer and the experiments that we were doing with printing and transferring to fiberglass with a Bob project in mind. So that was all very computer-based.

I guess one, I just have some sort of a natural affinity to computer digital stuff, whether it's the photography or the software. And I think having that basis in that stuff from the sixties—even though it was so rudimentary—but it probably helped me to be comfortable with it, to understand its underpinnings, understanding binary code stuff and everything from my teenage years. I think that helped me somehow to be able to embrace the computer thing where a lot of photographers in the nineties were, “I'll never, I refuse,” that kind of thing. I never was one of those guys probably because of that.

Another roundabout thing that's pretty interesting is that—in a smaller circle—is that I went to the University of South Florida, transferred there to be excited by Rauschenberg and Rosenquist and Graphicstudio and it disappeared the moment I got there. And the computer idea with college being all music-based, that was not an option, but it did lead me to take some interesting courses in electronic music, which I'm not sorry I took. They were really interesting, conceptual things that related very clearly to say John Cage or Rauschenberg. It fit into there nicely, but I

certainly didn't know it at the time. And when I graduated, I finished my undergraduate year-and-a-half or whatever I did and then I did my—actually it was two-and-a-half years or so of graduate school there. Then a year later Graphicstudio comes back alive and I worked there.

[Laughs] And how strange is that circle? Okay, not what I expected. I thought Graphicstudio—everybody was saying, “Yes, they don't have any budget and the state doesn't want to fund that.”

I thought, well that's probably not going to happen. I don't know what I'll do. Maybe I'll become a commercial photographer or I don't know what I'll do exactly. Maybe I'll try and get a teaching job. But then Graphicstudio popped back up with the Rauschenberg project.

Q: Rauschenberg returns.

Holzer: Pop and how perfect.

Q: And then interesting fanning out from *Crocus*, like you were talking about earlier—

Holzer: Yes, right, having that influence, that piece really capturing my imagination and my curiosity. Being typical of myself, not like I went home and tried to look up anything about that. It was hard to do that back then, not like today, where you could look up images and read about them. It was hard to dig stuff out. I'd go to the library, go in there and look up Rauschenberg. Good luck—there's nothing. There's like a page or two in an art history book. I'm not going to find out anything about that print. And if I was more ambitious, aggressive, I guess I could have tried to find out. If that piece really did really interest me, why don't I find out more about it?

Q: But in this interesting way, being open to change and the possibility, which is a theme which did lead to this interesting full circle thing.

Holzer: Yes, it's a strange—sometimes when I talk to Don— Again I told you Don was a professor while I was at the University of South Florida, but I really didn't have any classes directly with him. And so he didn't really know me my total first days there, first year there particularly. I wasn't taking anything that he was teaching. And at one point I explained to him that I transferred there and that I was really interested in Graphicstudio and specifically Rauschenberg and Rosenquist and that's what drew me there. I'm sure that made him feel good that something that he founded, that got a little spin-out into the rest of Florida, which is fairly a cultural wasteland in terms of that kind of stuff. I had been living in Fort Lauderdale and if you've ever been there, there's—well there is a museum there and I guess it's different. But when I was there, it was just pathetic. People don't go there to think about or talk about art. They go there to get sunburned and die or sail on their sailboats or something.

So that's not the place for culture and that's what that one professor had told me when I was going to the smaller schools around there: “You've got to get up. You've got to go to a real school dude. This place isn't—there's not going to be a challenge. I don't have anything new to tell you. You've got to move up.” I thought that's good advice.

Q: It proved to be.

Holzer: It did, I guess.

Q: Unless there's anything else you'd like to say by way of closing—

Holzer: I hadn't really thought of anything—

Q: —vis-à-vis this Rauschenberg project?

Holzer: Well, I certainly feel—I have nothing scripted, but I certainly would say I feel fortunate to just have been at the right place at the right times to be able to get involved in some of these projects. And a lot of it was purely luck and serendipity, that I happened to be a recently graduated graduate student who David Yager knew and knew of my tenaciousness and my ability to figure out things and he knew I could do that project. That's pretty just on the luck thing that I was there and I really wasn't attached to any other job. I had a job, but it wasn't anything I couldn't just jump out of—so that's funny.

I feel very fortunate that other things, when Graphicstudio was going through its change back when Don was taking back over, I was pretty much on the edge of, “You're not staying here dude.” And I knew that. I felt that very clearly. And at the last second I got pulled into Don's office and was offered the job. And I said, “We're doing this because you respect what I can do—you're not doing this as a favor to somebody.” And he said, “No, get out of here. Go to work.” Because that was what I was worried about, that he was just trying to be nice and placate me. Luckily I had worked with Don on a couple of his own pieces of art just before that and he

knew me from that, which boy six months earlier and that wouldn't have been true. So it's funny how that stuff happens.

But Bob was a very interesting man. I was always a little uncomfortable around him. I probably—most people do, probably because it was a work thing as opposed to a completely social thing. People that just met him at openings or at dinners or at events or whatever and they're just on a social level with him—he was always looking for a drinking buddy. You could have fun with him without a problem. But I was always guarded from doing that, so trying to be sober, and in later years to not be an enabler at all, because there was plenty of that going on down in Captiva. And I don't remember if that was ever discussed openly with us at Saff Tech, but that was sort of in the air. “Okay when it's all over and we're having dinner and there's no more work tonight, go ahead you guys, break out the beers.” But otherwise no because everybody else there was drinking already at noon and that's a slippery slope. So I didn't want that to happen and it wasn't a problem for me. But it was definitely a palpable thing.

But I feel lucky that I was able to be part of a lot of interesting stuff. I wish I would have been involved in more of it sometimes because there are a lot of things that are in the ROCI show I had no part in at all and they're pretty fascinating-looking imagery. And I used to see Bob working on some of those pieces, just partly working on them. And it was like, cool I want to see what he's doing. What's he going to do now?

Q: Right, but nonetheless, remarkable as it stands. And on my end I want to thank you for your time and for your memory about the process involved in the work and for sharing your own story.

Holzer: Well yes, you're more than welcome. I'm sure this went on way longer than you thought.

Q: I enjoyed it.

Holzer: It's always interesting to talk about the development of things and how the most fun stuff is seeing those full-circle things that you never would have predicted. I thought for sure when I got to the University of South Florida and Graphicstudio is gone, it's like, well I don't know how long I'm going to stay here. Well here you are fifteen years later and now you're working there as a Graphicstudio guy and one of the main guys there—it's interesting. Then Saff Tech Arts, there were a lot of times when it looked like that was going to go south, it was going belly-up. Financially it was difficult. We just hit the bad timing economy-wise. '91 is when we officially moved up here and I think it was the very end of '90 when the market crashed badly in the art world. I remember that discussion very clearly down in Tampa. We're getting ready to pack everything up and are we sure we should do this because the market has just tanked and art's not selling. It was sort of like, well I'll go if you'll go. [Laughs] And we went. So yes, it's had some times.

Q: Exactly. And with that, here we are.

Holzer: Right.

Q: Shall we close out this record?

Holzer: Yes.

Q: Great.

[END OF INTERVIEW]