

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Brice Marden

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Brice Marden conducted by Mary Marshall Clark on March 19, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcriber: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Brice Marden

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: March 19, 2015

Q: Today is March 19, 2015. My name is Mary Marshall Clark. I'm delighted to be interviewing Brice Marden. We're doing this interview for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project. But as I said to you before, we always start with your history. And so I really would love to know how you became interested in art yourself. I know you came to New York in 1963. And I'd just like for you to begin talking about your own artwork and then eventually, how you came to meet Bob.

Marden: Well, I'm a product of the suburbs. I was brought up in Westchester, a town called Briarcliff Manor, New York. And very late in my high school career, I decided I wanted to be a painter. This was after years of thinking I was going to go into the hotel administration business. So I spent a year in Florida, at a place called Florida Southern College [Lakeland], to really see if I was interested in art. Transferred to Boston University [BU], studied painting, graduated there, went to Yale Norfolk Summer School [of Art, Conn]. And there they invited me to go to Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut]. And I was at Yale for two years, got a master's degree, came to New York. I married, had a son, Nicholas. I went to Paris to live with my wife [Pauline Baez]'s family. And then while there we decided to split up. I came back to New York. I wanted to paint [laughs] being in New York and my wife did not want that. So they went to California.

And then you get these jobs to survive. And I had a job working as a silkscreen printer at the Chiron Press, which did artists' editions. And then eventually I was offered a show. And so I quit the job, finished painting the show. When the show was over, I didn't have any money. I went around asking friends if they knew of any jobs. Dorothea Rockburne said, "They might have something where I work. Come by." And I went by for an interview and it was at Rauschenberg's. And he had just moved into this new house [381 Lafayette Street, New York] and needed help moving a lot of the stuff around. So that's how that happened.

Q: Thank you. I want to get back a little bit to your own work. I noticed that you did your first monochromatic single-panel painting in the winter of 1964. Could you talk a little bit about what your work was like and who you were drawn to?

Marden: Well, the works that have seriously evolved beyond sort of the final stages of the student work were at Yale. Boston University is a very conservative school, and the tradition is basically Oskar Kokoschka, Max Beckmann, German Expressionist, figurative—strong [Paul] Cezanne, [Henri] Matisse influence. That was my real background. But I was always drawn towards the New York School—Abstract Expressionism. My next-door neighbor when I was a kid was a guy named Fred Sergenian, who was a big influence in that he had been a painter. He became an art director. He was the art director at Young & Rubicam. And he didn't so much encourage me but calmed my parents down—

[Laughter]

Marden: —who were very concerned that I was going off to lead some horrible, beatnik life. And I remember him. They gave me a subscription to *Art News*, which was the Abstract Expressionist sort of trade rag at the time. So that was a big influence.

So I had always felt that I would eventually go to New York and in the process I became very involved with abstraction. And at that time it seemed to me an either/or situation. It was either figurative or abstract. And I was very much down on the side of abstraction. When I got to Yale I painted one self-portrait and that was the last figurative painting I ever did. And then I was involved in kind of a reductive sort of situation. I had these influences—[Édouard] Manet was a big influence. And then the Spanish painters: [Francisco] Goya, [Francisco de] Zurbarán. And I was very fortunate to have Esteban Vicente as a teacher who was Spanish and knew these guys' work comprehensively. So that was a big help. And when I left Yale, I think I was painting paintings that were divided into four parts.

I went to New York and I was in New York for a short time. My in-laws were very upset that we were living in the depths of the Lower East Side. We were on Avenue C. It was kind of scary at the time. And they were in Paris. My father-in-law was a physicist working for UNESCO [United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization]. And because he was a diplomat, he wasn't paying taxes. So he said, "I'm saving all this money. Why don't you come over and live with us?" So we went over. It was great for me because I could go to the museums. I took my son to the museums all the time. We'd go and he'd be on my shoulders [laughs].

But also at that time, they were—[Charles] de Gaulle and [André-Georges] Malraux were doing this whole thing of cleaning up Paris. Reinvigorating it. There was a lot of plastering of walls—stuccoing of walls. I just was fascinated watching them do that. Before I had left for Paris, I had started a group of paintings in New York, left them somewhere. I got them back when I returned. And I ended up one night just painting everything out on a painting. Under the influence of the walls. And that's when I did the first monochromatic painting. And then I worked on that for quite a while—making monochromatic paintings. And sort of developing the ideas. You do something almost by accident, and then you do a lot of work, and you can intellectually justify it. And that's what I showed in my first show. It was the whole group of monochromatic paintings. Which Grace Glueck wrote—

So there was this sort of total involvement in making something real. And it went sort of beyond being just real; it became other things. And I felt Jasper [Johns] was somewhat involved. He was painting realist paintings, but they were abstract paintings. And I felt I was doing a very similar thing, except I had no image. The image was just totally abstract. There was no flag; it was just the rectangle. So I was painting the rectangle. And that was always a big deal, the choice of rectangle, what it was. I made a lot of drawings working out the rectangle. So Jasper was a big influence. It was this whole question of what's real? And I felt I was an abstract painter painting real things. Does that sort of answer it?

Q: I like that. Yes. Thank you. That helps, helps me understand. So you mentioned Grace Glueck and you also mentioned earlier when we were talking that new things were happening in the art world. And you said that you and your friends used to come down—I don't know if this was

from Yale or not—and kind of gawk at the Cedar bar [Cedar Tavern, New York] and the art scene there. So what was the art scene like as you were coming down and then when you entered it? If you can take me back to that time.

Marden: Well, you're up at Yale, which is pretty close to the city. I have these notebooks with lists of shows. I would make a list of what I wanted to see in the city. And you would come in, do all the shows. And sometimes that night you would go to the Cedar, because that's where they were all hanging out. And you would see Franz Kline. The one you always saw was [Nicolas] Calas.

[Laughter]

Marden: He was always there. And he'd always wear this big red scarf. You were just gawking. You were a tourist. And then at Yale, the teachers there were active artists. And you also had these visiting critics that were coming up from the city that were part of the milieu. So it all becomes a much more real thing. You go from being a spectator to being involved.

And then I went to Yale. I came into Yale pretty well prepared. BU really taught you a lot. But it didn't really teach you how to make paintings. They kept saying, "Everything's a study." Or, "These are studies so you learn how to make paintings." But they weren't teaching—so that's what you went to graduate school for.

[Laughter]

Marden: And then also you meet these other students, and you're going to the city, they're going to the city. These are the people you sort of know. So you're a little bit at home in the city.

But I was here for about a year. I met people at Yale Norfolk and then I went directly from there to Yale. And what Yale did was they would have art schools from all over the country send their most promising person going into the last year at that school. And then they would recruit people from—it was like a farm system. So I was at Yale Norfolk with guys like—Chuck Close was there and David Novros and Bill Hochhausen. I can't remember whether I graduated Yale or I had to submit the paintings—no, I think I graduated. Because lots of people—you took a year out of residence—I can't remember whether I did a year out of residence. No, I didn't do a year out of residence. I just graduated from Yale.

Q: You did.

Marden: And then moved to the city. And then the people that I knew well were still at Yale. And so I spent this really kind of weird isolated year. I was married, with this child, living on Avenue C. Then we did this Paris thing. And then I came back. And by that time people I knew were moving into the city.

Q: So when did you first learn of Rauschenberg's work, who he was? And were you at all knowledgeable or influenced by it in any way, or did you like it?

Marden: Well, Bob had showed at the Jewish Museum [New York] just before Jasper. A retrospective [*Robert Rauschenberg*, 1963]. So I knew the work. But I wasn't that involved with it. Because it had a completely different kind of physicality to it than what I was interested in.

I remember being in a Rauschenberg show. And Ivan Karp was walking around with a couple of collectors. And they said something about a broom hanging on one of Bob's, and Ivan said, "Well, that gives it scale." And I thought, "Oh, Jesus Christ. I can't take this."

[Laughter]

Marden: So I really wasn't that into Bob's work. My whole theory was that abstract painting was going along very well and had sort of fallen into this second-generation, third-generation Abstract Expressionism. And then Pop art had become this sudden big thing. And this had grown out of Bob and Jasper. I figured Pop art was just realism—another version of realism. So I just, as an abstract painter, dismissed it. Or wanted to dismiss it. So all that stuff was not my favorite stuff. Aside from the fact of Jasper and that influence we already talked about. [Pauses] So, I forget what I was answering.

[Laughter]

Q: So I wanted to move a little bit towards your work with Bob. So you were hired to fold up some art pieces. Could you tell that story?

Marden: Yes. Steve—

Q: Steve Paxton.

Marden: —Paxton had done a piece for 9 Evenings[: Theatre & Engineering, 1966]. And it was these big tunnels made out of sheet plastic [*Physical Things*, 1966]. And Bob had been traveling, I think with Merce [Cunningham]. And I think while he was traveling his stuff was moved into this new house on Lafayette Street. And when I was going around looking for this job I ran into Dorothea. I knew Dorothea because I knew Mel Bochner. And Mel Bochner had taken my job at the Jewish Museum. When I left, somehow he got it. So that's how I knew him and Dorothea. Oh no, Dorothea I think had been friendly with a guy named Murray Reich. I knew Dorothea, saw her at an opening. She said, "There might be something where I live."

And then I went, and it was Bob, and he had just moved in. So my first job was to fold up this pile of taped-together plastic sheets. And that's what I did. And I did pretty good. It was about that high and—

[Laughter]

Marden: —it had started from filling up half a room or something. And then Bob said, "Well, I'm going to be doing some work in a little while. Maybe you can keep busy around here, and then when I get started with the work you can help me with that." So that's what I did. We moved various things around the house. And I washed all the windows.

Q: That was a big job.

Marden: Yes, there were a lot of windows.

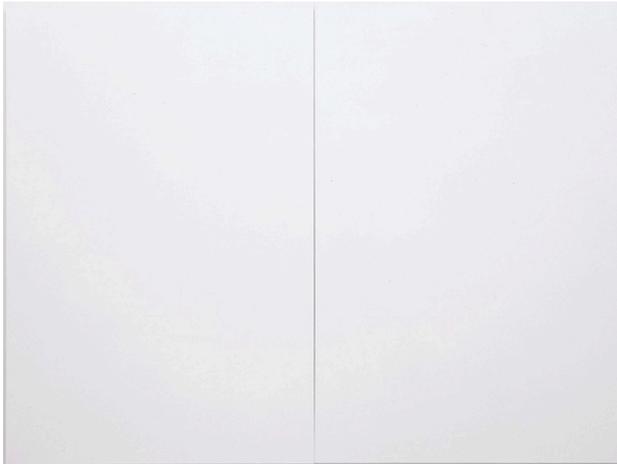
[Laughter]

Marden: Yes. It's funny, at that time it was all empty. There'd be one floor for the dogs. We got it worked out.

Q: What were some of your first impressions of him, once you had actually met him?

Marden: I don't know. I thought he was a really nice guy. He was just very generous. And it was very comfortable working there. And then eventually it evolved into a thing like I would go to work at 11:00 or something and he would come upstairs. And I'd have the coffee ready and all that kind of stuff. And then the phone would start ringing and I would answer the phone. And I was pretty good at being able to identify people on the phone and I could say, "Oh yes, Ileana [Sonnabend]," and he could go yes or no, whether he wanted to talk to them. It was pretty easy. The job, in essence, was to make everything easier for him just to do his work. But he very rarely worked while I was around. He did a lot of stuff at night.

Q: One of the things you worked on was the reissuance of the *White Paintings* [1951]. Could you talk about that a bit? The refabrication?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*White Painting* [two panel], 1951  
Oil on canvas  
72 x 96 inches (182.9 x 243.8 cm) overall  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Marden: Well, I thought Bob wanted to redo those basically because of this whole Minimalist thing going on and he just wanted to show, “Been there, done that” kind of thing. “I did that.” And he did. He had made these things. And I don’t know if they were ever shown. I forget the story. I remember there was one story that [Barnett] Newman nixed it. And he told Betty Parsons not to show them—the *White Paintings*. And there was one existing in the Moderna Museet [Stockholm] and all the rest of the panels had been used up in other paintings. He incorporated them into other paintings. So he said he wanted to remake the set. So that was a job. And I had to try and find out how thick the stretchers were and what kind of canvas. They weren’t exact replicas of what he originally had done, but they were the same size, shape, and everything. And he said, “Paint them so they look like they haven’t been painted. No hand, just put a coat of paint on them.” And that’s what I did. And I think he set it and then went away.

And then there was the show. And we had to go hang the show. [Note: *White Paintings 1951*, Leo Castelli, New York, 1968] I remember Greenberg, Clement Greenberg, came in and he was insisting they’d been painted in such-and-such a year. I said, “Well no, I happened to research

these things and they were really painted in this year.” It really wasn’t a very good idea to go up against Greenberg in those days. But—

[Laughter]

Marden: —what are you going to do? That was also one of the battles going on, the Greenberg against [Harold] Rosenberg schools of abstraction. That was a—

Q: Absolutely.

Marden: —big thing in the bars.

Q: Yes. [Pauses] So he was—

Marden: But we just hung the show.

Q: Why do you think it was so important to him, or did he tell you, why he didn’t want the hand—why he didn’t want the brushstroke?

Marden: No.

Q: No?

Marden: That's what he wanted. Anybody could make them. And it was a numbered thing. I don't remember—was there a five-panel? [Note: the five-panel *White Painting* was destroyed and not remade]

Q: Five.

Marden: Yes. He just said, "Five is the first complicated number." [Laughs] And that's one of those things I remember. "Five's the first complicated number."

No, I think it was just a thing—he wanted to put it out there. For all I know, that's the way they first got made; somebody else painted them. And he just said, "Paint them so it looks like anybody could've painted it." That wasn't hard to do. [Laughs]

Q: Well, you've done monochromatic work yourself [laughs] so you were kind of prepared.

Marden: Yes, but my monochromatic had a real insistence on the hand. And there was a lot of painting going on where everybody wanted to eliminate it. There were a lot of people coming in from California and there was this whole [Kenneth Howard] Von Dutch influence. They painted cars. They wanted those cherry-bomb red kind of colors they had on cars in California. With no hand. And so I remember people—David Novros spending all this time building this huge spray booth so he could get a perfect kind of surface with no hand. And it was a big deal. Surface is a big deal. My whole thing has always been—the evolution of modern art is like the surface just

gets tighter and tighter and closer to the surface. And that was part of it. Of that kind of evolution.

Q: Was Bob very self-conscious about criticism?

Marden: I can't remember any—no. I think he was aware of it. There seemed to be a lot to his process. He was a real thinker. And it was almost as though he was kind of embarrassed about his thinking process. It was this kind of dyslexic thing. He wouldn't sit around intellectualizing about painting. But whenever he had to come out with—verbalize it formally, it was always very simple, but it was very, very deceptive. Really brilliant stuff. This whole thing—what is it? “I work in the area between art and—” something or other.

Q: Life.

Marden: Life. It's a huge statement. And that's the way he was. He wasn't sitting around talking about this stuff. But he, I think, could really justify everything, but he never felt he had to.

Q: That's a very good answer to that question. Thank you.

Marden: Yes.

Q: I wanted to ask you too about *Urban Round* [1967]. You did some work on that.

Marden: Which one was that, the—

Q: That was Fall Gallery Concerts at School of Visual Arts [SVA, New York].

Marden: Oh, that—yes.

Q: Yes. The silkscreen painting with people standing in front reading newspapers.

Marden: But weren't people being carried around and stuff like that?

Q: Yes.

Marden: Yes.

Q: Do you remember that?

Marden: Yes. Quite confusing.

[Laughter]

Q: But a lot of interesting people were there.

Marden: Oh yes, yes. Well, a lot of interesting people were hanging around Bob. This whole thing with the kitchen. You weren't just making him a pot of coffee. By 4:00 in the afternoon, there's all these people sitting around drinking Jack Daniel's. And—

Q: So what was the window between coffee and Jack Daniel's?

[Laughter]

Marden: Well, sometimes Bob would come over and make some horrendous kind of hangover concoction. Drinking was a big deal there. Bob was a real drinker. And if there was any sort of a tense situation, like someone was coming by he didn't know, it was some kind of meeting or thing, he'd warm up for it. But—

Q: Who were some of the people that stand out in terms of people who just dropped by on a regular basis? Or were there different people all the time?

Marden: What—

Q: Who were some of the people who would come over?

Marden: Well, Bob was doing a lot of the art and technology stuff. So [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver was there a lot. And he worked very closely with Billy. And there were other guys from

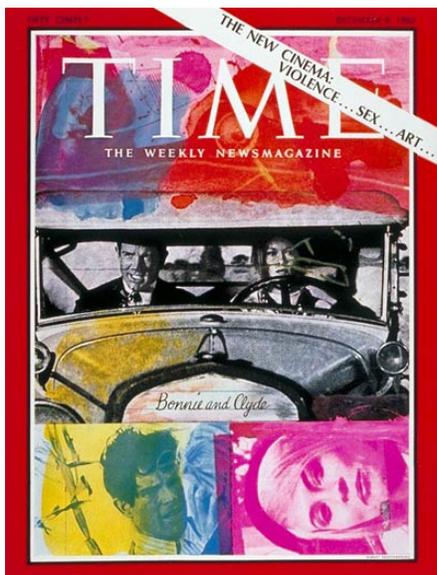
the Bell Labs coming in. I remember [Robert] Bob Whitman used to come in. He was working on stuff like that. I remember William [S.] Burroughs coming one day.

Q: Really.

Marden: He wasn't just dropping by. That was sort of a very carefully arranged thing. Lots of times he would just disappear. I had to show paintings to Marcello Mastroianni and the *Bonnie and Clyde* [1967] actress. Oh, what the hell was her name?

Q: Faye Dunaway?

Marden: Faye Dunaway— Yes. And there was Warren Beatty and Julie Christie—because he did a *Time* magazine cover for *Bonnie and Clyde*. So there was that whole celebrity thing. But he wasn't there and I had to show these paintings. Mastroianni was—



Robert Rauschenberg  
Cover for *Time* magazine—December 8, 1967  
Offset lithograph  
11 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches (28.3 x 21 cm)

[Laughter]

Marden: —looking bored. I remember showing them the big black paintings [1951–53] from Black Mountain [College, North Carolina]. But he had people like David Bradshaw, David Prentice, Alex Hay, [Deborah] Debbie Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown. A lot of the Judson [Dance Theater] people. He had these friends, they were old friends. And they were there a lot.

Q: At that time—I'd be interested in your own opinion of the art and technology work, and what you thought of it at the time.

Marden: I never quite knew what was going on. He was doing all this stuff, and I never was privy to any of that. That's all the kind of stuff he was working out with Billy. But then a lot of it had to be fabricated. So there was Treitel-Gratz—the fabricators. But I didn't have anything to do with that. I was mostly answering the telephone—

[Laughter]

Marden: —sweeping the floor, that kind of stuff.

But with the [Experiments in] Art and Technology [E.A.T.], he did *Soundings* [1968]. The big piece?

Q: Yes, *Soundings*. [Note: Discussion below regards *Solstice*, 1968.]

Marden: That all had to be set up in the chapel. That was supposedly the studio. He very rarely worked in there.

Q: Really?

Marden: Yes.

Q: Where did he—

Marden: He usually worked up on the second floor, in the drawing room. Did a lot of drawing.

Q: So what was the studio used for primarily?

Marden: Parties. [Laughs] I remember he did *Soundings* [note: *Solstice*] and I think when he got it finished, he had a whole bunch of people come by. And then somehow or other, I think everybody took their clothes off and were walking around in it. Because all the doors would open and close, and it was quite a scene. [Laughs]



Leo Castelli, Pontus Hulten and others interacting with Rauschenberg's *Solstice* (1968) in the chapel of his 381 Lafayette Street studio, New York. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Shunk-Kender © J. Paul Getty Trust

But I remember doing the *Revolvers* [1967]. That's the one I remember working with him the most closely.



Brice Marden and Rauschenberg assembling Rauschenberg's *Revolvers* (1967) in the chapel of his Lafayette Street studio, New York, 1967. Still from "The Walls Come Tumbling Down," *Eye on Art*, July 2, 1967. Television broadcast, 60 minutes. Produced by Merrill Brockway for WCBS, New York. Audiovisual Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Tell me about it.

Marden: These were these paintings which were on Plexiglas, and he would have five Plexiglas circles, and they were in stands that you controlled how they revolved by remote control. So the

viewers basically could make their own painting. And the most impressive thing—I've never seen anybody concentrate the way he concentrated making these paintings. You could tell he was really figuring out on these five different levels, or four different levels, how things would look—an unbelievably complex situation. [Note: The *Revolvers* each have five Plexiglas discs.] And I've never seen anyone stare [laughs] at something so intensely as he did working on those things. That I'll never forget. That was one of the most impressive things about working there. You just knew when he wanted to think, he could really, really think. And that was impressive. And we had these mockups. Because of course the machine was late and was complicated. So we had to put them in. He would paint on it, put it in, and then we would move it by hand. It was a lot of fun.



Robert Rauschenberg

*Revolver II*, 1967

Silkscreen ink on five rotating Plexiglas discs  
in metal base with electric motors and control  
box

78 1/4 x 77 x 24 1/2 inches (198.8 x 195.6 x  
62.2 cm)

Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Do you think he thought visually? Is that how his thinking happened?

Marden: How do you mean?

Q: Well, I'm imagining him concentrating, like you were saying, and imagining the visual—

Marden: Well, a lot of it was sort of worked out before. One time he sent me up to *Look* magazine, to collect images for him to use in the drawings. Because he liked the way *Look*—somehow *Look* magazine was printed in such a way that the kind of frottage thing worked very well. And I spent a week in *Look* magazine, cutting out these things for him to use. And you're working with someone for years and you're involved with the work. And you're trying to get these Rauschenberg images. And I just totally missed. I think he used one. Sometimes you would come in and there would be a stack of *Scientific Americans* on the kitchen table this high. You'd come in the next day and they're all gone. And there are all these tear sheets. And they're perfect Rauschenberg images. But had you been going through the same thing simultaneously, you just wouldn't have gotten it. And so he was just drawing. I think a lot of it was, he was always drawing. And I found it very, very amusing that you just couldn't predict it. He just turned it into his own thing so fast.

Q: How long did it take to create the *Soundings* and what specifically did you do?

Marden: Well, *Soundings* there were very few images. No. *Soundings* was the one with the chair. And lights were activated by sound. And so it lit up various parts. And I think the image was basically of this one chair. There was another one of these things—you did a lot of it at night. I have no idea how long. I went to Cologne to set it up or—I think to light it. At the Wallraf-Richartz Museum. I had to go—I was having a show in Paris—so we joined it together. And the

word that lit up all the lights was “Om.” And I don’t know whether that was planned or that just happened. But here I’m working with these German technicians and they don’t know what to make of me. Some long-haired kid. And [laughs] I’m saying, “You just gotta say, ‘Om.’” That way you could tell, the whole thing lit up, what you had to change and do. Any kind of sound would activate something. A great piece. It’s still there. [Note: collection of Museum Ludwig, Cologne]



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Soundings*, 1968  
 Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on  
 Plexiglas with concealed electric lights  
 and electronic components  
 96 x 432 x 54 inches (243.8 x 1097.3 x  
 137.2 cm)  
 Museum Ludwig, Cologne  
 Ludwig Donation  
 Engineers: Billy Klüver, L. J. Robinson,  
 Fred Waldhauer, Cecil Coker, Per Biorn,  
 and Ralph Flynn

What was the other one, with the supermarket doors that opened and closed? That was the one that was set up—that was big. It was deep. It was a real structure [*Solstice*]. *Soundings* is flatter—it isn’t flat, but it’s a flatter thing. The other one is almost a cube, big cube. And the doors were like supermarket doors that automatically opened and closed. So you would walk through it and it would open, and it would be that same thing. It would be this layering of images. And then he was doing some in color, so he knew what color was going to read over another color. That had something to do with [Theodore W.] Ted Kheel. Ted Kheel was big in the Art and Technology thing. I thought I saw a thing where that piece was in some foundation of his. [Note: Rauschenberg donated *Solstice* to Automation House, New York, which Kheel

founded in 1968 and where E.A.T. had headquarters. It was later sold to the National Museum of Art, Osaka.] It was an amazing piece. It didn't quite work right. It worked right, but it seemed to me like a lot of stuff around a painting. And you could have [laughs]—I'm still sitting here thinking, "Well, just do this painting."

Q: Yes. Did you see him as a painter?

Marden: Yes, like the—

Q: Primarily, I mean.

Marden: —the SVA piece. [Note: Rauschenberg choreographed *Urban Round* for Fall Gallery Concerts, November, 1967; the artist also created the stage design including a silkscreen painting on unstretched canvas as backdrop.] I remember him making those paintings. That was sort of going back to the old style, with the silkscreens, and you take the squeegee and you do that whole thing. But I just remember that being—it seemed very rushed and chaotic. But then, at the same time, visually it all worked out quite well. And I remember him saying, "Yeah! We need Max Neuhaus."

[Laughter]

Marden: And I said, “Who the fuck is Max Neuhaus?” And this guy appears and he’s about 7 feet tall. Max is a really big guy. And Max Neuhaus was playing a big bass drum. Just pounding this bass drum as the piece was going on.

Q: What about the *Cardboards* [1971–72]?

Marden: He did the *Cardboards* right after I left. Or right—yes, right after I left. And I remember him, all his friends, Hisachika [“Sachika” Takahashi] and a lot of the friends, everybody just went out into the streets to find cardboard—cardboard pieces. And then it was just all kind of stacked in the studio. And then next thing you knew, there were all these pieces. It was incredible. But I wasn’t involved with that.

Q: Right. You were involved in the *Carnal Clocks* [1969].

Marden: Oh yes.

Q: Talk about the *Carnal Clocks*.

Marden: So with the *Carnal Clocks*, he took all these photographs of friends. And they were erotic pieces. They are erotic pieces. And they’re set up so that it lights up like the dial of a clock. And then at midnight all the lights come on so you see the whole image. The image was made up of these photographed images. Maybe nine different images on a square. I think they were squares.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Audition (Carnal Clock)*, 1969  
Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on Plexiglas in  
metal frame with concealed electric lights and clock  
movement  
67 x 60 x 18 inches (170.2 x 152.4 x 45.7 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Were you part of that yourself?

Marden: Yes, I think so. Yes, I think I was. I think my wife [Helen Marden] was. People he knew at the time. I can't remember the situation. I think he showed them at Leo's [Leo Castelli gallery, New York]. And they were really hard to read. I don't think people got it. But these are the kind of things, you see them now, and they just really look solid. Real Rauschenbergs.

Because he had a lot of that stuff. I remember him doing a piece for Harry Van Arsdale, who was a big labor leader. And this had something to do with Kheel. I remember him taking—and it was on sheets of Plexiglas. It might have been five things deep. One of them was a big picture of Harry Van Arsdale. And I remember him taking cerulean blue and putting it on just in the right place, and I thought, "Oh, this is kind of decorative." But he had it—he really had it—he knew what he wanted to go where.

There seemed to be very little kind of experimentation—where you put something on and then you think about it and take it off and try it again. It was like he knew what it was supposed to look like and then he got that. If he didn't get it the first shot, he got it the second shot. It wasn't a matter of rethinking the whole deal. He really knew what he was doing. It seemed to me later that he was laying things out more. But I don't know. As I said, when most of this was happening, I wasn't around. It was rare that I saw him actually doing the physical work. I remember seeing the studio in Captiva. I guess we went down after he died. And it really looked like it was laid out so he could have a lot of things going at the same time. But I never got that feeling at the— There is that [Henri Cartier] Bresson photograph and there's all these things laid out, and I can't figure out what they were, or why. Because it seemed to me at that time he was doing a lot of layered stuff. You would read through these Plexiglas sheets.

Q: Was David White a figure at the time? Did he come around also?

Marden: Yes, David came around. David Whitney would come around.

Q: Really?

Marden: Oh yes. He wasn't there a lot, but I sort of associated David White with David Whitney. David White would come with David. Cy [Twombly] would be there. Twombly would come [laughs]—he would sit in a couch in the living room and just very quietly watch everybody come in. It would be this parade of people coming in and out. And Cy just loved to watch it. Cy was the great voyeur. And he was this huge guy. And you probably didn't even notice him. He just

loved watching this whole— But the thing with the people hanging around Bob, it wasn't like how we used to hang out at Max's [Kansas City, New York], and you'd be in the back room and there was the [Andy] Warhol table. And Warhol would come in and then all these people would come up to sort of perform for him. And it was really kind of sick. He would just sit there. And it wasn't any kind of a scene like that at Bob's. Everybody was really his friend.

Q: Did Chris hang out with him much? [Christopher] Chris Rauschenberg, his son?

Marden: No.

Q: No?

Marden: No. No. Not while I was around, no. Weren't they usually away at school or something? I don't know.

Q: Probably, yes. Did you ever have any conversations with him about painting and drawing and what you thought about it, together? Did he ask about your work?

Marden: He used to buy it. [Laughs] That was great. He was the only person that bought it.

Q: Wow. What did he buy?

Marden: He had two *Back* series [1967–68] paintings. And we traded. I'd give him a drawing, he'd give me a drawing. He'd say, "Take anything you want." I have some really beautiful prints of his. I have one of those early lithographs with [Tatyana] Tanya [Grosman]. I have a drawing—he made a drawing that incorporated all of the stuff I was supposed to be doing, like taking care of the garden on the roof.



Rauschenberg's studio at 381 Lafayette Street, New York, with paintings by Brice Marden in the background, 1968. Photo: Shunk-Kender © J. Paul Getty Trust



Brice Marden  
*Choice (Back Series)*, 1967  
Oil and beeswax on canvas  
69 x 45 inches (175.3 x 114.3 cm)  
Private Collection

There was a time Helen and I were going out to California to visit my son. And I was going to get a driveway. You used to get these driveway cars. And they wouldn't give me one, because I had long hair. So Bob bought a Volkswagen so we could drive out [laughs]. It went further than the others and he still had it, the Volkswagen. What was that called, "It" or something like that? [Note: Rauschenberg had two Volkswagens named This and That.] He just went out and bought

a Volkswagen so we could drive out. And back. I remember it breaking down somewhere in the Rockies. [Laughs]

Q: So a used Volkswagen.

Marden: What?

Q: A used Volkswagen?

Marden: No, it was a Bug.

Q: Oh, the Bugs, yes.

Marden: And I think we called it That or something. Because some guy in Colorado, some Native American guy, like a gun on the rack behind the front seat, asked, “What do you call that?” he said. [Laughs] I think that’s how the car got named.

No, Bob, he was really very generous. So there were a lot of people he was really helping out. And I think that’s why he started Change [Inc.] and—

Q: What do you mean by—

Marden: —sort of formalized that situation.

Q: What do you mean by “change”?

Marden: This thing called Change, Inc.

Q: Oh, Change, Inc. [a non-profit established by Rauschenberg in 1970].

Marden: And you apply there. It’s for artists that have emergency situations. And I remember some sculptor who had a fire in his place and all his tools disappeared, obviously were taken by the fire department. And Bob—a quick application to Change and then the tools are replaced. People get sick, that kind of stuff. And it just kept people from having to come to him. He never said that. That’s my own theory on it. But he was just always very generous.

Q: You spent some time working at Captiva [Florida]. So I have a couple questions about Captiva. Why do you think he moved there? Why did he leave New York?

Marden: He, very early on when he was showing in New York, had sold something. He bought a Jaguar. And he drove the entire East Coast, just scouting for places where he might want to be. And that’s when I think he saw Sanibel [Florida] and Captiva. I think he had a pet rabbit. Then I think he went on and went home and arrived at home and got out of the car, and the rabbit got out of the car, jumped up in the air, and came down dead. [Laughs] Or something like that. I’m not very good with stories. But the—

Q: You're very good with stories.

Marden: —but he did do that. So he contacted realtors. I remember him getting the call. And they said, “Something's come up down here.” I think he went down there the next day, or two days later. And I think he bought it right away. Then—I can't remember the timing, but it wasn't very long before, he had gone down; he bought it. And at a certain point he called us all together. All the people who were working for him. Me, Dorothea, and Sachika, a lot of us, and he said, “You really don't have to be working for me anymore.” And he was right. I was teaching. And he said basically he was just going to move the operation down there. And that was it. Then he gave us what I thought were very, very generous severance situations. And that was it. [Laughs] And he moved down there. I'm here, I've got this place in the country, and I've been living up in the country basically. But I just can't make the break. And he just—it seemed to be no problem at all.

Q: Was it simpler for him, do you think?

Marden: What?

Q: What do you think attracted him to Captiva?

Marden: Well, basically, it's right across the Gulf [of Mexico] from Port Arthur [Texas]. So it was very nice. And I assume Port Arthur really isn't very nice. And I think that was it. He wanted it warm. He wanted to swim. And it was really great. I'm sure him being down there

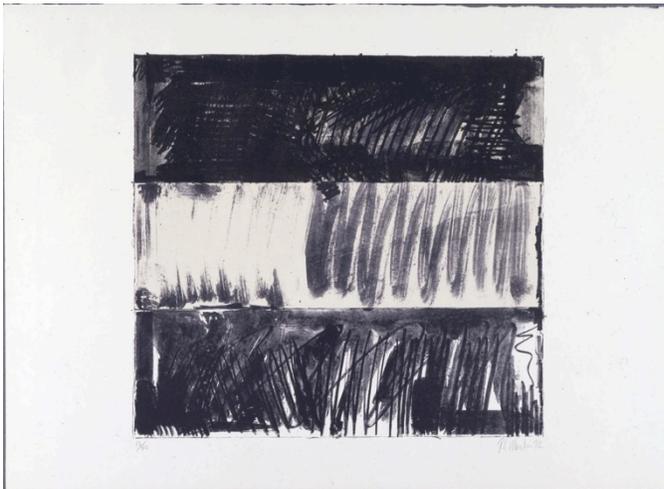
made his life a lot longer. I never had any idea that he didn't like New York, but he didn't seem to be a guy that went out experiencing the city a lot. He really liked staying home. Or traveling. He did a lot of traveling.

Q: So you were there, working at Untitled Press in 1972?

Marden: In Captiva?

Q: Yeah. Do you remember what you worked on or --

Marden: Yes, I did work on Untitled. I did a group of lithographs [note: Marden completed a series of lithographs with Untitled Press, Inc. in 1972].



Brice Marden  
#2, 1972  
Lithograph on paper  
26 1/8 x 19 1/8 inches (66.4 x 48.6 cm)  
From an edition of 48, published by  
Untitled Press, Inc., Captiva, Florida

Q: Right.

Marden: And then I think at that point I made a couple of drawings or one drawing or something that, I just gave it to him. He had just cut a path through the jungle so you could walk from his house to the print workshop. And [laughs] I was taking this acid. And I had these little tabs; I would just kind of walk through the jungle, nibble on the thing, and go work on the prints. And [laughs] it was never anything where you're really tripping or anything. It was just a great kind of acid high. That's my real memory of the pieces. And then there was this whole thing, like you gave some to this for the turtles, and this—he had all these things worked out. [Note: The print editions made at Untitled Press often included some marked "CC" and were inscribed "Captiva Con" as they were made to benefit the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to preserving the natural resources and wildlife habitat of Sanibel and Captiva islands.] You were helping all sorts of stuff. And basically we were just hanging out. I think Helen was there. She was hanging out at the house. It was nice. He seemed really happy there. But that was the first house. And then, we didn't get back down there until— It was also this kind of thing where you would go there and then you were kind of stuck there. [Laughs] So you had to eat those big steaks every night and—

[Laughter]

Q: Is that what he ate, big steaks?

Marden: Well, they used to cook up these steaks. It was incredible.

Q: He was from Texas, so of course.

Marden: Well yes, but Hisachika used to do them. And he had that big stove at the house [381 Lafayette Street]. The house had been an orphanage. And it had this big stove, which he had all cleaned up and made operable. He loved cooking. He loved stuff really hot. Really, really hot. Spicy. And it was always like there'd be somebody else there and the spice would be kind of a contest, who could eat the— Helen, my wife, she likes really hot stuff. So they'd get in these face à face—

[Laughter]

Marden: —eating contests. At a certain point there'd be all these people sitting around and Hisachika would just come in and start cooking the steaks. Everybody would eat. This was more on Lafayette Street. And then it translated down there, to Captiva.

You'd go to Captiva, and he bought this property and got that property, and the place just kept getting bigger and bigger. It was wonderful.

Q: I'm thinking about what you're saying, about him going to Captiva, and also how much in many ways New York was a tiny place, with certain artists' groups. And that Rauschenberg did begin to travel in the seventies a great deal. And I know you weren't with him at that time, but I'm wondering about your thoughts, about its effect on his work. To see different light, to be in different cultural contexts.

Marden: Yes. I don't know. I sort of lost touch with the work. He would go places and make things. He did these Venetian things. That was all done in Venice or wherever. [Note: The *Venetian* series (1972–73) were sculptural works inspired by Rauschenberg's visits to Venice and were made at his studio in Captiva.] I never saw those until—you start seeing them later. He did ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, 1984–91] after I left. I remember once sort of questioning it and somebody saying, "Well, you do get kind of bored. And maybe this is his way of staying interested." By going to Tibet—he loved Tibet. He said, "Anything with the slightest question about it, all they do is put yak butter on it, and everything's okay."

[Laughter]

Marden: And I remember opening these crates and this smell of yak butter coming—[laughs] overwhelming. [Laughs]

He'd very early on done a thing with the Sarabhai. [Note: Rauschenberg had been invited by the Sarabhai family in 1975 to work at a paper mill in Ahmedabad, India where he created the *Bones* and *Unions* series.] And I remember years later, I got a kind of feeler from the Sarabhais about working there. And I said, "Should I do it?" And he said, "No." No hesitation. He said, "No. Don't do it." Bob didn't like them because they were vegetarians. He'd spent all this time and had to eat vegetables all the time.

[Laughter]

Marden: There was a story that Hisachika—there were these peacocks—and he captured a peacock and cooked it. I don't know if that was true.

Q: Was this in Captiva, you mean?

Marden: No, this was at the Sarabhais's.

Q: Oh, yes.

Marden: The house designed by Le Corbusier. That's what you would get. I remember a bunch of people coming by and the Sarabhais coming by and it would be this whole event. These people would come in and suddenly they're cooking Indian food. There was this great sort of spontaneity. Sometimes it would just be really quiet and protected for a long time, and then there would be this spontaneous thing. But I also think that's one of the reasons he wanted to go to Captiva, was to get away from all these people dropping by all the time.

Q: As you look back at him now, because you were intensely involved with him from '66 to '69, and then with him in '72, how do you see his influence? On you, if there is one, and on the art world?

Marden: Well, I think the perception was that the late work became more manufactured and didn't have the depth. And I think as time goes on, it doesn't read that way. It reads with real depth. And there were things, like he stopped taking photographs, and he would send two people

out and say, “Take fire hydrants,” or “Take stop signs,” or “Do this,” or something. And it still read as his stuff. In ways he’s overrated and in a lot of ways he’s really underrated. Really underrated. He was making really beautiful things, really beautiful things.

I saw something just the other day, somewhere. Where the hell was it? In a group show someplace. Oh, at Larry’s. *In the Studio*, I think. [Note: A group exhibition at Gagosian Gallery, 522 West Twenty-first Street, New York, 2015.] There’s a piece there that’s just beautiful. It’s one of the later pieces. You’d see these shows at Pace [Wildenstein, New York]. This thing was incredible. And everybody was always trying to end his thing. Like, “Oh well, the *Hoarfrosts* [1974–76] were good. That’s the last.” Or, then this. But I think it’s much better than that. The stuff’s really beautiful. And so thoughtful. And I think that when I was working for him, he was really pushing it. Pushing this art, technology, science thing. That’s when they had that big show in L.A. [*Art and Technology*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971], where all the people did these collaborations and he did this big mud bath [*Mud Muse*, 1968–71] thing with these—god, what was it? Some big scary masters-of-war kind of company, that was making all those sound things they put on the Vietnamese trail [laughs] that didn’t work. What’s that company? General—they made that big bubbling mud bath thing. [Note: Rauschenberg collaborated with Teledyne for the project.]

Q: Did he talk about politics at all? Did he talk about Vietnam?

Marden: I can’t recall specifics. It was just sort of general. Obviously we were a bunch of liberals kicking around. There were political people around. The Kennedys. [Edward M.] Ted

Kennedy was around. I think he was pretty friendly with [Edwin] Ed Schlossberg. And then he was with Caroline [Bouvier Kennedy]. I'm really wrestling—I can't even—

Q: That's okay.

Marden: —I don't even remember all these people coming by.

Q: No, that's okay.

Marden: Marion Javits. For a while, she was around a lot.

Q: Wow.

Marden: Yes. And every once in a while Senator [Jacob K.] Javits would come. God, that's a trip to think about that.

Q: Well, you were—

Marden: We were liberals.

Q: Yeah. Was he involved at all with writers, in that same scene? Time?

Marden: You kind of got the feeling he didn't read very much.

Q: Yes.

Marden: How do you mean writers? You mean like art writers, or—

Q: Well, writers that were also involved in—

Marden: —literature people?

Q: Literature people.

Marden: I don't really remember. I think he got much more excited when Julie Christie came by.

[Laughter]

Q: I can understand that.

Marden: I remember he had this party for them. Something about this *Time* Magazine cover, this *Bonnie and Clyde* thing. And it was weird, on this side of the room there was Warren Beatty and Julie Christie and that crowd, and then on this side of the room was all the art crowd. And they were just sort of looking at each other. It was a very weird standoff.

[Laughter]

Q: Well, he sounded like he liked a lot of different kinds of people.

Marden: Oh yes.

Q: He was attracted by many different types of people. And many different types of people were attracted to him.

Marden: Yes and he had access to them and he didn't make himself not available.

Q: Were you there when he won his gold medal for painting? Were you at the ceremony—  
American Academy of Arts and Letters? Maybe not.

Marden: No, I don't think so. No.

Q: I think somebody quoted you there, though, that said that, "His work evokes immense range, intensity, beauty of thought, an entire love of images, that lifts you up into a realm of near-pure awe." That you had said that. Maybe not there, but somebody read a quote from you.

Marden: Well, I'll go with that.

[Laughter]

Marden: There's that print with Robert Kennedy. That image just stays with you. The train track. And it was all about that last trip, when they took him to— [Note: Refers to an unrealized book on the death of Robert Kennedy and the train that delivered his body to Arlington National Cemetery. Proposing a design for the cover, Rauschenberg reused his collage *Signs* (1969), to which he attached an acetate overlay bearing the book title and Kennedy's image] I think a lot of his later work is so involved with the landscape or just what's around. It stays with you. There's kind of an atmosphere that just stays with you. It's very American. Very American. One of my jobs was to curate his collection. And he had these things like [Kurt] Schwitters and his [René] Magritte and—he was influenced by those guys and a lot of the Europeans were really influenced by him.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Original artwork for *Signs* (modified for unrealized book cover), 1969  
Collage of printed reproductions, photographs, graphite, gouache and stickers on illustration board, with acetate overlay  
20 x 15 inches (50.8 x 38.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Who would you say was influenced by him? [Pauses] Or what movement?

Marden: What?

Q: Or what movement? Who were you thinking of when you say they were influenced by him and he was influenced by them?

Marden: I don't know. Can't say. I remember when I was in Paris, he had a show at Ileana's, of large colored silkscreen paintings. [Note: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, *Rauschenberg*, May 1964]. A lot with the [John F.] Kennedy image, the Statue of Liberty. And I remember seeing him in the gallery, being very impressed. He was trying to speak French. [Laughs] And then going to see his performance. And what he did was he just went out on the street and found all this stuff and that made the set. And it was this incredible set. And a lot of this stuff, ladders and bicycles, but it was just amazing. He had this facility. [Note: Rauschenberg was in Paris in June 1964 with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for whom he created set designs.]



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Press*, 1964  
Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas  
84 x 60 inches (213.4 x 152.4 cm)  
Private collection

I remember at one point the director of the museum in Dusseldorf was coming by and we had to set up two paintings. And he had a painting called *Wager* [1957–59] and it was a diptych. And he had in the studio, in the chapel, there was this shelf and you put the things up on the shelf. So I had—[laughs] I got one of them up. And I got the second one and it starts coming over on me. And I had to support it with my head, to push it back. And I remember, this thing looked like the most fragile thing that'd just fall right apart. And it was put together so solid. Those things were really constructed beautifully. And not taking away any of the integrity of whatever it was he was attaching to it and stuff like that. It was amazing. Really. I think they bought the painting. But that was another one of those things; Bob just wasn't there. A guy came by, saw them. Leo wasn't even there.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Wager*, 1957–59  
 Combine: oil, graphite, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, photographs, wood, and pencil body tracing on four canvases  
 81 x 148 x 2 1/4 inches (205.7 x 375.9 x 5.7 cm)  
 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

And Rauschenberg had this turtle and there was this whole thing about the greenhouse, making this greenhouse. But Sachika was much better about that. He could really build things. He did a lot more with fixing up the house and stuff like that. [Pauses] What I say about the European influence, now I can't think of any—I don't know how it—

Q: No, it's important just to say it.

Marden: Yes. But he was really close with [Jean] Tinguely. And Niki de Saint Phalle and these people that he just sort of met early on. And I'm sure they had a big influence on each other.

Q: I'm interested that you talked about how he's really an American artist.

Marden: Oh yes.

Q: And what do you mean by that, exactly, when you say that?

Marden: Hmm?

Q: What do you mean by that, in terms of the tradition of American art?

Marden: Well, its basis is America. The stuff of the place. And it's not based on any ideas that are coming from Europe. Like there's no Cubism in Rauschenberg. Even before the Abstract Expressionists, he was still a fresh abstractionist. Like the stuff he was doing at Black Mountain. And sure, you have [Domenico "Mimmo"] Rotella. You got people doing these collage things. But Bob—[laughs] Bob's things just become physical. There's no literary connotations in them. That's much more American than European. And then all of the materials. It's just American stuff. Even when he's over there. I keep thinking of these big boxes with sand on them and veils. I don't even know what they were. The Venetian stuff. I do remember being very impressed with

the fact that it seemed this guy spent a lot of time just sitting around. And then when he started working it just really came together fast. Really fast. What was going on? I never had any idea. I remember once a whole bunch of paintings showed up and someone was taking them. They'd been put up for a loan and suddenly they were all going to disappear. Oh really? Geez. You never knew anything about that stuff that was going on. And I remember once I was at a performance at Judson [Memorial Church, New York]. I was working for Chiron Press at the time. And there was a guy named Neville Powers. He was one of the two owners. [Stephen] Steve Poleskie and Neville Powers. And Neville was at Judson. And he was in charge of holding all the valuables of the people performing. And he said, "This one wallet has four hundred dollars in it. Must be Rauschenberg's."

[Laughter]

Marden: Because he was the only person making any money. But that was before I was working for him.

Q: So you stayed in touch with him during his whole life? After you stopped working with him?

Marden: Yes, yes. I was a younger artist. We didn't sit around and discuss art. I think it's much rarer than most people think, but artists don't sit around and talk about art with each other. You might, if you talk about anything, you talk about what you don't like, what you can't stand that's happening and all that kind of stuff. As I said, when Bob bought my stuff, he was basically

buying it because nobody else did. And he was doing me a favor. [Laughs] But he had them and he liked them. Would hang them up.

Q: Yes. Did he change?

Marden: And they survived. A lot of that stuff didn't. Yes. Took care of them. And he told me he would take care of them. Then I remember, when I wanted to borrow one for a show or something, and it needed some kind of restoration, he was a little reluctant about that [laughs]. It was a pricey restoration.

Q: So he really helped your career along.

Marden: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Could you talk about that? What effect it had? His support of you, what effect did it have on your career?

Marden: I think one of the good things about our relationship is our work didn't have anything to do with each other's. That was taken care of. You didn't have to worry about that.

Q: It was probably good for both of you.

Marden: Yes, it was. As I said, I was really lucky. I got the job with Bob. Rather than getting stuck in some sort of thing where you're influenced by somebody. You're influenced by him just as a human. He was a really great human being. And it reads that way a little bit. He became much more of a big figure than just being some painter. He's a visionary. And some day they'll get together that book of those [laughs] fabulous quotes in it [laughs].

Q: I think you had given me a great quote before we started, which I wish you could repeat for the tape—about how he always wanted to keep the market flooded.

Marden: I was very friendly with Robert Graham. And so Bob and Anjelica Huston were coming by to lunch. So we said, "Let's invite Rauschenberg." So Rauschenberg and Darryl [R. Pottorf] came by. And Rauschenberg—it was incredible with Anjelica. He just lit up. And he said one thing after another that was just incredible. You wish you had a notebook and you were just sitting there writing it. But then if you had been, he would never have said it. And one of the things he said is, "All I want to do is keep my market flooded." [Laughs] Which was true and which was really great. That was an incredible afternoon. And she liked it too. She's okay. [Laughs] He could really come up to a situation. And that's what he did then.

Q: I think that's all I have for today.

Marden: Okay.

Q: Thank you so much for your time. It's been a great pleasure to meet you.

Marden: [Laughs] Well, I hope this all goes well. This—

Q: It's going very well.

Marden: It's weird, when you know somebody, they die, and then you see all this stuff that starts happening. You think, oh god must be spinning in his grave. But the Rauschenberg stuff seems to be pulling together pretty well.

Q: Seems like it.

Marden: That was upsetting with Darryl. That was really upsetting. You get these weird things. I remember getting a thing from Bob saying—and it was like a form letter. “Anybody got any ideas about what to do with all this stuff when you're dead?” Not that way. “I'm looking for ideas about—” blah, blah, blah. And obviously he got a lot of that together. There must've been certain causes and stuff that he was involved with that he was working on while I was there, but I just don't remember them.

Q: That's Okay.

Marden: They did Earth Day posters and things like that. He was very involved with all that. I think he got much more so later. I always had this feeling when I worked for him, he was just sort of reconfiguring it. Not reconfiguring the whole deal, but he had had this whole success, and

then a certain kind of work just stopped. And when he toured with Merce, that was like a year. And he comes back and you have the feeling he's really been thinking it out, and he starts doing all this Art and Technology stuff. And he had done—I forget the name of the piece, where there's all these different pieces and then radios playing back and forth at each other [*Oracle*, 1962–65]. I remember it was all broken down and Billy came by and got it all fixed up again. And that had been sort of an early manifestation of what he got involved with. That whole Art and Technology. Time. Yes. Okay.

Q: Thank you so much. Really great.

Marden: Cool.

Q: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]