

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Lawrence Voytek

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2016

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Lawrence Voytek conducted by Donald Saff on April 29, 2016, April 30, 2016, and May 1, 2016. These interviews are part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Lawrence Voytek

Location: Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: Donald Saff

Date: April 29, 2016

Q: Okay, I've started this. We're beginning—recording is working on both—okay, it is April 29, 2016. I'm sitting here in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College [Fort Myers]. With me is Lawrence Voytek, longtime assistant to Bob Rauschenberg. And we're surrounded by images of Bob, as well as his mentor and teacher, Josef Albers. And we're going to have a discussion about Lawrence's activities with Bob in creating many, many series, and his technical expertise and his background. So Lawrence, tell me where you grew up, where you went to school, how you became involved in art, how you found your way to Bob Rauschenberg.

Voytek: Well, why are we here was one of the reasons why I got into the arts. I grew up in Bridgeport, Connecticut. My father was a toolmaker. He worked in a large factory that produced machines. It was called Bullard's [Bullard Machine Tool Company]. Bullard's made machines for Henry Ford, big multihead machines. They had a giant foundry and a giant, big machine shop, we used to go on tours through it. My dad used to bring home metals from his daily works, things that had problems. And so I thought my father was making the machines that made the world—parts of helicopters, parts of submarines, and things like that. So I grew up in a basement that was full of metal objects and tools. I started playing with tools. When I was quite young, I was a visual thinker, and my focus was on how things were made. And so I got really passionate about learning how to make things myself.

When I was in high school, I went to Notre Dame [Catholic High School] in Fairfield, Connecticut. My brother and sister had gone there also. They graduated as valedictorians and they went on to great careers. [Laughs] In my sophomore year, an artist, Ben Johnson, who worked with Wayne Thiebaud in California, came to my school, showed slides and played music and talked about the ABC cultural arts center [Arnold Bernhard Center for the Arts and Humanities, University of Bridgeport] in downtown Bridgeport, Connecticut. He invited everyone to stop in and see what was happening. So I went to the cultural arts center and one of the teachers there, [William] Bill Collins, had spent eight years with Frank [J.] Reilly at the Arts Students League of New York. Frank Reilly had started what was like an American academy. And Bill Collins started me on this how to be an academic artist at this time. Reilly Grays was a ten-value oil paint system that Grumbacher produced.

My mother was really upset with what I was doing with the art at this time because I was spending all this time thinking that art was the most important thing. And she actually called Ben Johnson a black devil because she thought that he possessed me in some ways. So I started making art—I was taking night classes at the Housatonic Community College [Bridgeport] while I was going through high school. I took art history class with Burt Chernow and I took welding at a technical school. Bullard-Havens [Technical High School, Bridgeport] was this big technical school that was set up a long time ago to produce kids that would go into the factories and work. Bridgeport was an industrial town that made everything. During the Cuban Missile Crisis [1962], Bridgeport was third on the bombing list because of Sikorsky [Aircraft Corporation], Avco [Corporation], Lycoming, Remington Arms [Company], and ball bearings were made there. And

when I was in grammar school, we would have to go into bomb shelters. Drills in case of atomic bomb strikes.

So I was very focused on making things. Bill Collins's training—it was a very academic training and I was a young kid that was taking these notes. Bill Collins was doing Chuck Close kind of airbrushed heads that were 7 feet tall, they were all done in dark purple. He called them occult heads and it seemed like they were really spooky. I don't know if Bill sold much of his work, but his chops were great. And I learned Frank Reilly's drawing technique where you construct figures; Reilly's six lines was a way to draw figures, which is sort of like the way people do three-dimensional mapping today, where you build a figure in space and you construct your worlds. And this was quite a basis—before I went to college—I never really ran into another teacher that was so intense with this sort of thing, drawing with your paintbrush, painting with your pencil, halftones, edge planes, highlights, oil painting—it took about two hours just to mix the color chart up. The ten values that everything was based on and the flesh tones where you mixed all your own colors. And you had your chromas, intensities—we would paint heads with different colored spotlights on them with all ten values.

It was a lot of work. I was young and it was too much of an education at that age for me to really master this, but it was a good start to get my chops together. I found that I spent so much time sitting and drawing and painting that I was just watching what I wanted to see. One wants to witness in their life what matters most and then you portray what matters most. You have to forgive me Don because I just ramble on tangents. But I was sitting there trying to portray what I wanted to see, how I could technically produce this. And I used to go to museums. All the art

books were my friends. Visual thinker—just looking at pictures, I learned things. I was addicted to seeing art. And I would take the train myself to Manhattan from Fairfield, Connecticut and go to the Modern [Museum of Modern Art, New York], the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York], and see shows. I at one point went to the Modern and I walked into the room where I saw [Pablo] Picasso's *Baboon and Young*, 1951, a sculpture.

Q: What age were you at that time?

Voytek: I was sixteen, seventeen. And that was an epiphany to me. I decided that this is the tribe that I want to belong to, that I wanted to be a sculptor. And I thought dealing with what was on the planet was more interesting than trying to portray what I wanted to see. I wanted to wrestle with the materials.

Q: Okay, you're not in college yet and working with some of the material your father had. Did you always construct? Did you ever deconstruct? Did you ever take things apart?

Voytek: Yes, I took things apart all the time.

Q: Was that part of your education?

Voytek: I just wanted to see how things were and so I took things apart. My parents were not happy with a lot of things that I took apart. When I was in high school, I started making art, making art, training, training. I was in a Catholic high school and I went into a big action

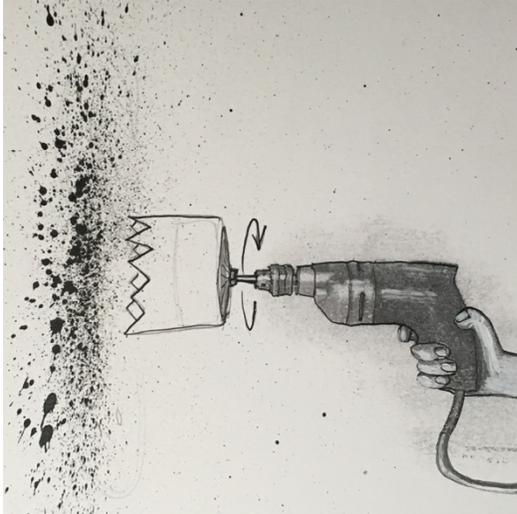
painting period and I was making machines that would paint. And I had different devices that would throw the paint at different speeds. And in my senior year in Notre Dame, I was voted artist of the year. I had long hair. I painted strange pictures on the back of my uniform jacket, painted realistic bare feet, like [René] Magritte, on my Frye boots.

Q: Your painting machine, do you think that that is a kind of precursor to a digital plotter?

Voytek: No, it's much sloppier than that.

Q: Okay. [Laughs]

Voytek: They said that I was artist of the year and they said they wanted me to paint the senior lounge. In 1975, the year before me, somebody painted in blue "75." It was in the senior lounge, which was connected to the cafeteria. It was maybe 20 feet by 30 feet. There were windows on one end. I went through all the homerooms with my Frye boots on. I told the students, "Bring in paints." We got twenty-two gallons of house paint, acrylic paints, oil paints. And I asked all senior artists to work with me. And I made some paint machines. I took a Clorox bottle and I cut it like a crown, and I connected it to my drill with a sanding pad attachment and I put paint inside of it and I pulled the trigger, and the paint shot out. And I could tilt my head and it would leave lines around the room—I didn't put any masking on the floor or walls or windows, paint was flying everywhere.



Drawing of drill with sanding pad attachment by Lawrence Voytek. Courtesy Lawrence Voytek

Q: So what was it doing? Sort of memorializing your choreography, your movement?

Voytek: The spinning of the paint would fly out and I could watch it arc on the walls and splattering. And then I'd put another color in and then I'd do stuff. I also had a boat bilge pump and I put paint on the wall. I had ways of throwing paint in containers that would blow when it hit the wall. A good friend, Bob Comarda, with modeling paste made a copy of his girlfriend's breast on the wall and with his fingers rubbed green paint on it. There was a knock on the door—this is the day we started the mural and we're sliding across the paint. At the door was the commissioner of the schools for Connecticut, Sister Marion Riley had brought him down to see the mural that we were working on. He walked in and saw the breast on the wall and he said, "Sister, lock the door. I want to talk to you in the office." They had to go upstairs. The windows were open outside. I went outside, went through the window, took the breast off the wall, and went back inside. When the commissioner came down, the commissioner opened the door and pointed to the breast on the wall, and it was gone. That was my last day at Notre Dame.

Q: So then onto college. Where did you go?

Voytek: I bought an old '55 Chevy and I put a new motor in it. I put in a 327 four-barrel with dual exhaust. I painted a mural up on the ceiling. I built a bed from the backseat into the trunk. I had my art supplies. My sisters were in California and I decided I wanted to go to San Francisco. And I took a semester course of sculpture at San Francisco Art Institute. And there were three sculptors: one was a wood teacher, one was a metal teacher, and one was a body mold maker that worked with plastics, plaster, rubbers and stuff. So we did molding and forming. And when I was in San Francisco, I was not that happy with the attitude—I loved what I was doing and the projects I was working on, but it seemed that the art students were more into themselves than learning a trade. So I researched where I wanted to be, and I decided I wanted to go to Rhode Island School of Design [RISD, Providence].

Q: Why?

Voytek: David Byrne and the Talking Heads had all been at Rhode Island School of Design. And I liked the music; I liked performance. Laurie Anderson was doing some stuff that I thought was really cool. I was looking at where she had gone, but my research of RISD, I just thought it sounded really good. So I drove from California to Rhode Island. And I showed up in Rhode Island and I looked around the school and with my own money that I made, I decided to take a special class where—it was a sculpture class—you could be a special student and you can take one class. And I took a woodcarving course with Arnold Prince.

And at that time, I was living out of the car. And I found at the student board—this was before I was accepted—I found that there was a house in Rhode Island that was basically boarded up that somebody had just bought. And he wanted somebody to live there through the winter so that nobody would mess with the house.

Q: The people that inspired you to go to Rhode Island School of Design obviously were people that Bob collaborated with eventually.

Voytek: Later on, yes.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to speak with them about the fact that they had such a—

Voytek: No, no, no.

Q: So you never spoke with David or Laurie Anderson about that—

Voytek: No, no, no. Bob was pretty adamant that I shouldn't talk to people that came in, that I should just—it's his business and not talk about—

Q: Well, how did he put that to you? What did he say?

Voytek: He didn't want me to talk about how we worked because what he was doing was what was my job. And so I was there to help him do his job—be a fly on the wall and don't bother these professionals when they're here working with us.

Q: Either socially or technically?

Voytek: Yes, right. It was not my job. I was just to do what I was supposed to do and be—I wanted to—I told them, “I'm big fans of your work, I always loved your work, and I've been inspired by your work.” But I never spent time talking about me or what I thought.

Q: Okay, so you're in Rhode Island. How do you end up?

Voytek: So I'm in Rhode Island, I've got a free place to stay. I walked into the foundry one day and Tom Morin, who was the head of the metal department, the foundry area—they were about to pour and it was a pretty big aluminum pour—and he said, “Do you mind suiting up? We're short on this pour.” And so I put leathers on and it was like 100 pounds of aluminum. And he says, “I want you to be a hold-back.” And a hold-back is the low job on the totem pole. You've got a skimmer. You clean the top of the metal and then when they're pouring the metal, you keep the crucible from falling out of the shank. So you're just standing behind the metal—

Q: Good idea. [Laughs]

Voytek: And so I did that and I wanted to learn how to cast. I wanted to do this stuff. And so with me being a special student, I was just on campus doing stuff. The teachers got to know me. When I applied that semester to RISD, I was not accepted. And I went up to Woods-Gerry [Gallery], which was where the president's office was and was where all the final art shows were. I was walking and I was emotional. Lee Hall, who was the president of the school, was coming down the stairs. And she said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Well, I applied to the school here and I'm in the sculpture department and I was not accepted. And there were no sculptors on the review committee." And she says, "Well, let me look into this and I'll see what I can do." And I said, "Oh, by the way, I made a sculpture for you that I wanted to give you before I left," which I didn't do at the time. And I ran down to the foundry and I made a small steel sculpture for her that I gave her later. They asked the three sculpture teachers, who I became friends with for that one session that I was a special student, and unanimously all three of them said, "We really think Lawrence is one of the best sculptor students that we have. We all like him." And I was accepted.

Q: Okay, so you graduate from RISD. Then what?

Voytek: I graduated in '82. And my girlfriend, who was a graduate student, Mary Sullivan, at RISD, her mother had died in a car accident. And that was in Fort Myers. And her grandmother, Dede Deford, was taking care of her estate. And Mary asked if I would pack up all the studio stuff and come to Florida and help her and her grandmother take care of the estate. I packed up her studio, my studio, moved a lot of the stuff in a big box truck, and stored a lot of it at my parents' house. Mary had a little car and I drove it down to Fort Myers. I moved into Mary's

mother's old house with her grandmother living in the same house keeping us separate. So I just graduated from RISD and came to this cow town and—

Q: So that's 1982.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: Now 1982 is when I left with Bob to do the photo project and *7 Characters* [1982] in China. And I remember leaving with Bob and Eric Holt, who was a student at University of South Florida [Tampa] and subsequently was an assistant to Bob, announced at the airport that he no longer wished to remain employed by Bob Rauschenberg. Bob got on the plane and cried and was very sad for the first part of that trip. Now I don't know whether you knew Tim Pharr who worked with Bob before Eric, whether you worked with Eric, whether there was any overlap. And I'd like to know how you began work, how you got the job, and how the processes began to change. Tim obviously worked in wood quite a bit. Eric was capable of working in all kinds of technology, materials and so forth. So how did you end up beginning work with Bob at this point that Eric left?

Voytek: My hello was—since I was in this Fort Myers cow town, I was going stir-crazy. I took a printmaking class at Edison Community College [note: now Florida SouthWestern State College] and [Robert] Bob Petersen was teaching. I brought my portfolio and I showed Bob Petersen and he looked through my portfolio. At RISD I had designed and fabricated a lot of aluminum things. One of them was an aluminum boat.

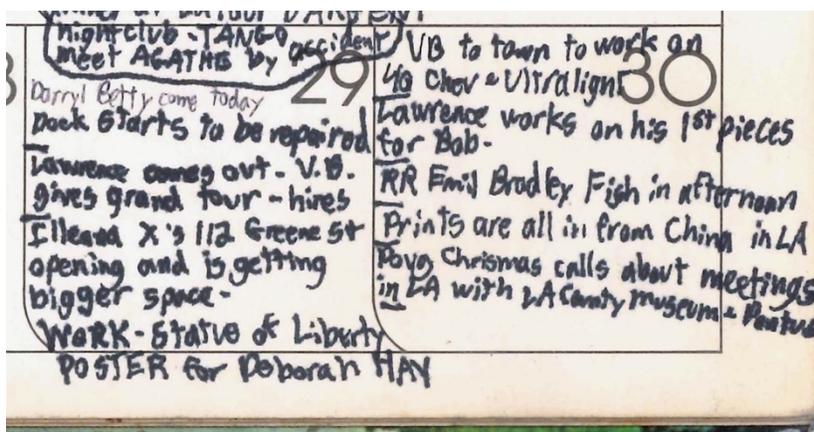
Q: Did you know at that time that Bob Petersen was working with Bob Rauschenberg?

Voytek: I was thrown into this room, I saw a [Roy] Lichtenstein on a wall. Bob started telling all these stories and so I learned as soon as I got in there that—and Bob Petersen was a world of printmaking knowledge. Your printmaking book was Bob Petersen’s textbook. And so I was thrown into Bob Petersen’s world with Bob and it was Bob Petersen—when he saw my portfolio, he said, “Do you know how to weld aluminum?” And I said, “Oh, yes.” He said, “Bob Rauschenberg had an aluminum fabricator, Eric Holt, and he left. They’re looking for an aluminum fabricator.” And so he lined up that I would go out to talk to Bob.

Q: Describe that.

Voytek: My life changed. I loved Bob’s work immensely when I was at school. I saw films like the Scull auction [*America’s Pop Collector: Robert C. Scull—Contemporary Art at Auction*, 1974]. I’ve seen Bob in movies. I’d heard Bob’s voice. So I was kind of prepared to meet Bob. I drove up to Captiva [Florida] in a little Datsun pickup truck. And I parked the truck and I was walking towards Bob’s beach house. It was a hot day. All the jalousie windows were open and I heard Bob’s booming voice through the windows. And I walked up the stairs and I knocked on the door and Bob opened the door. And he said, “Hi, I’m Bob.” And I said, “Hi, I’m Lawrence Voytek.” And I went in and Terry Van Brunt was there, Bradley [J. Jeffries] was there. And I brought my portfolio and put it on the table. [Laughs]

So Bob had Terry show me around. And we got on bicycles. Terry rolled me through the Jungle Road. He'd show me the different places, the studio and things. And he just showed me things and then he also brought me to—underneath Bob's studio. It was where Eric used to work. And there was an old welder, Heliarc welder. There was some aluminum. There were no walls. It was dirt floors. Eric had a whole bunch of these mosquito coils in boxes on the table. There was no finished aluminum framed artwork on the campus. Everything was gone. There was just some metal. And Terry said, "Do you know how to weld?" "Yes, I can weld." And over in the print shop, Bob had a *Spread* [1975–83] that he was working on and it was on the press. It was on panels. So this is what it is and I've got a little picture of Terry's calendar—because Terry used to write down every day what happened. And it says that, "Terry shows Lawrence around, Bob hires Lawrence." They never told me I had a job. They just started saying, "You have to frame this; you have to frame that." And next day, I came to work; I was making my first aluminum frame to frame the piece that was in the print shop.



Detail of Rauschenberg and Terry Van Brunt's calendar, October 29–30, 1982. Robert Rauschenberg papers. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Which was a *Spread*?

Voytek: Yes.

Q: Which one was it?

Voytek: The one with the—it says in the registry book '83, but it was actually '82. It's the one with the umbrella.

Q: And the registry number of that is 83—

Voytek: 001.

Q: 83.001 [Untitled (*Spread*), 1983].



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (Spread), 1983
Solvent transfer, acrylic and collage on wood panel, with umbrellas
74 1/4 x 96 3/4 x 35 inches (188.6 x 245.7 x 88.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Voytek: I was actually working on it in '82, but I got there October and—

Q: So that was really the very end of the *Spreads*—

Voytek: Yes.

Q: —started '75?

Voytek: Here's what's going on. And I didn't know—I think something like that. It's in the books.

Q: But there were no *Spreads* out in Captiva at the point that—

Voytek: At that point.

Q: So you didn't see any of the previous works?

Voytek: I didn't see how he made the frames; I didn't see what was there. I just saw that he had started working on this artwork. And I saw the system—Darryl [R. Pottorf] was the one that they had prepping things—they had a way of working on panels, wood panels, and I think it came from Tim Pharr days, where they had door skins they would put a sealer on and then they'd put like three layers of gesso, which is highly absorbent, and they would run that through the press. All those were cut down to be 37 inches wide by 8 feet, which is what the Grasshopper press bed was. And that was the way that Bob was working at the time.

Q: Grasshopper was a litho [lithography] press?

Voytek: Grasshopper was that litho press that was kind of hybridized to be a better transfer press.

Q: Right, that was the old Fuchs & Lang press.

Voytek: Griffin.

Q: Griffin, was it?

Voytek: Griffin. It was a Griffin press.

Q: So it was a newer one, okay.

Voytek: I got pictures of that in here.

Q: Did Bob—you started working on *Spreads*. Did he tell you what *Spreads* meant or what it was about?

Voytek: No.

Q: Did you ask?

Voytek: No, no.

Q: Do you have any idea now about what the term means?

Voytek: No. When I first started with him—I came back after this whole tour with Terry and Bob says, “I want to talk to you.” And he said, “What do you drink?” And I said, “Well, I like beer.” And there was no beer in the house. I think if I told him I didn’t drink, I think he probably would’ve showed me the door. [Laughs] I said, “I like beer.” And he said, “Well, here’s some money. Go to the Island Store and get a six-pack.” And so I bought a six-pack of Michelob in the old Michelob tapered bottle. And Bob had his Jack Daniel’s and I had my beer. And Bob looked through my portfolio and he was talking about what I did. It’s kind of a spooky thing and Bob—people talk about being Zen and really being present with people. That day probably was the most intense day that I spent being with someone. And Bob was very captivating, very mysterious, worldly. And he told me, “I knew that you were going to show up. And I knew that you were going to be here. And we’ve got some history to make.”

He looked at my portfolio and he says, “This is all fine and well. You know how to cast metals. You know how to weld metals. You know how to do things. I’ve worked with some of the best ever—I’ve worked with the top edition shops. Now I want to be able to do my work right in my own backyard and I need you to be a craftsman to help me do whatever I want to do.” And he also said, “I want us to talk privately about what we’re doing, how we’re doing it, together, just you and me. And this is in-house. This is how I want to work.”

Q: So he knew you were going to come.

Voytek: That's what he said.

Q: And things are as they should be. However it rolls, I Ching, that's the way it should be.

Voytek: And he said, "What do you say? Do you want to—are you in for it? Do you want to sign up with me?"

Q: And apparently you said yes.

Voytek: And at that time I—

Q: Did you hesitate?

Voytek: I was not afraid. I was like, "Bring it on, I'm ready." In some ways, the whole thing about—and with a lot of my teachers, the whole thing of serving someone and being an apprentice under a master was something that, it was a good thing for me. I'm the type of person that serving someone was what I wanted to do. That his work was what mattered, not to judge it, that all the pieces and parts were just as important as anything else. And I signed on.

Q: So he wanted the conversations to just take place between Bob and yourself. Was anybody else present in—?

Voytek: No, no, he—

Q: —during the gestation period of any of the projects?

Voytek: No, he wanted us to keep things how we were, keep things private—

Q: To the two of you, right.

Voytek: And one of the things—the first time that I was over at the print shop with him, with the *Spreads* and *Scales* [1977–81], he said, “All right, kid. You went to a good art school. What do you think of this stuff? And I want you to be honest with me.”

Q: He asked you for—okay, how did you respond to that? [Laughs]

Voytek: So I said, “The composition is just really nice and the imagery great.” And I said, “There are problems here.” And I said, “Bob, I had a class that the teacher had almost made you a poster child, where he said that a lot of art today is not being made out of sustainable materials. At RISD, they believed if you make fine art, it should be made with fine materials. And with these images here, you’re taking stuff that is printed with inks that are not lightfast. They’re supposed to be in magazines and books. You’re putting them down and these are going to fade

away. These colors will not stay. The only thing that'll probably stay is the black and the blues. The magenta and the cyans are going to be fading away." And he said, "What would be something that wouldn't fade away?" And I said, "Your silkscreens were great because that was true pigment and it's designed to be lightfast." And he agreed that we probably should get back into silkscreens.

Q: I was with Bob when he did *Nightline* with Larry Rivers. And one of the questions that were put to him was that there is the fact that the work was fleeting and fugitive and did he have any concern? Of course his response was, "Well, that's good because it will give conservators a job in the future. And if you bought an automobile, you can be sure that in five or ten years it would be depleted down to uselessness." [Laughs]

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: And so he analogized that, saying he had no obligation to be concerned about it. He was concerned in making the art and he even raised Leonardo [da Vinci]'s *Last Supper* [1495–98] and the experimentation that was necessary and its decline because of the experimentation. So it's interesting that he would be taken with your suggestion to—

Voytek: Well, he said, "I've made lots of art that won't last. Now I'd like to make some art that will last." Now some people—like Calvin Tomkins for the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum, New York] retrospective [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, 1997–98] had said in the *New Yorker* that, "I preferred Rauschenberg before that high-tech fabricator." And, "Yay." The

education that I had at RISD was very process-orientated for that technology, that day. And a lot of it was the design industry—that was the preacher of sustainable. Bob wanted to play with new stuff and at the time he said, “It’s your job to make stuff last.” And there were problems with the panels, the wood panels that they were using—the door skins, the lauan. And I said, “The quality of this wood is really bad for art on panels.”

Q: Right.

Voytek: “I suggest using Bruynzeel. It’s rotary-cut Okoumé, marine plywood that was used for racing sailboats.” And so we stepped up that and Bob said, “It’s your job to get the materials there that will be lasting that we’re going to work with.” Paints were changing. Like Roy Lichtenstein talked to me about acrylics that were showing up. Magna and Golden [Artist Colors] and things, all of that was in transition. And when Bob got in trouble for the [Aaron] Siskind photographs, he said that he had a problem with what he could transfer onto *Spreads* because he had to have permission to use stuff. So he said, “Well, I am going to have to use my own photography because I can’t just grab anything from the world anymore.” Because he used to just grab his *Life* magazines, his *Time* magazines.

And in ’83 we started getting the silkscreen stuff set up. We brought Larry [B.] Wright in from New York to show us—Larry Wright was the one that suggested that we use Golden’s acrylics, that the heavy-bodied acrylics is what we’re going to be screenprinting with. And we set up the screen size so that it handled that viscosity and—

Q: So Larry came down for how long?

Voytek: A week or so and he showed us how and where to get everything for screenprinting.

Whatever Bob wanted to do, I had to do it.

Q: Did you build the screen frames at that point?

Voytek: Oh, yes, yes. It was Rube Goldberg kind of stuff, where Larry showed me how to make a hand-stretched screen. You got a wood frame and you stretch it. I went to this business in town that was a screenprinting shop that had these machines that would tighten the screens and stuff and all these expensive machines. And I said, “How many screens can you do with this machine a day?” And he said, “Oh, a good operator can do ten screens.”

Emil Fray, who was Bob’s photographer in the beginning when we first started doing the *Salvage* series [1983–85], was doing the halftones in his darkroom. And he could only do a certain size with the enlarger head all the way up to the ceiling. And that maximum size was a single and then we put two of those together. It was called a double. We put four of those together and it was called a large. I made a stretching table of my own design. I had bottle jacks and I had carpet strips around the top with those carpet tack strips and I made a hinge-top. I had two paint rollers to put our roll of screen on and we’d pull it to the four corners, close the top with C-clamps, and with the bottle jacks we would press the table up, pushing the screen tight. And then we put the glue on top, staple it, and ran a knife around it. [Rodney] Tup [Schmidt] could do thirty screens a day.



Robert Rauschenberg
Proof (Salvage), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
94 1/2 x 82 inches (240 x 208.3 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: And Bob could consume them in a given day. [Laughs]

Voytek: Well, it was weird because Bob would pick out images. We'd get the images—and then eventually ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York] did our halftones because they had a copy camera. So we would send all the film there. The first ones that Emil did, it took a while for us to make them up. But Bob would make lots and lots of screens—like when he would travel to the ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] countries, he'd shoot his film, he would pick out maybe two hundred images. And it took us awhile to get two hundred screens made, but once we made them, they were in his bank of images.

Q: Okay, let's go back to—this is where you began work with Bob, 83.001. So we brought back umbrellas from China. Those were the umbrellas in that work. And the work was constructed on a horizontal surface, which is the way Bob worked for the most part. Walk me through how you

did this, how the images were applied, how the umbrellas were placed, and what your role was, and what did Bob direct you to do and what was done in your presence or done not in your presence?

Voytek: So Bob had the panels on the table and he had transferred all the images and the fabrics were glued down. Terry was the one that would glue the fabric down where Bob wanted it. And Terry usually—

Q: Glue it down to what? What did you make first? What did you prepare?

Voytek: Well, these panels, these were the door skin panels that were the way that *Spreads* and *Scales* were done.

Q: So that was left over from Eric Holt's work.

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: Yes. When I got there, Darryl was priming and painting gesso panels, and they were on the floor. The system was set up. That's how Bob was working. Bob would put the—

Q: Darryl was—

Voytek: Well, Darryl would be doing the—Darryl was doing a lot of prep stuff. Terry was the one working with Bob. Darryl would prime the panels, sand the panels, get things ready. And then when the art was ready, I would take it away—Darryl was like maintenance man, painting things, fixing stuff. When it came time to fix up where I was working in the welding shop, I told them, “This is ridiculous. I don’t want to work with mosquitos all around.” And so they decided to enclose the downstairs studio. And with Darryl, being a contractor’s son, we built the walls together, we painted the walls, we got everything built up. And so Darryl was like maintenance of everything.

When we got to the panels, they were all prepped, transferred, fabrics glued down. Bob had the umbrellas. He called me over, he held the umbrella, and he says, “I want it here.” He put a pencil mark on the panel. “I want this umbrella here,” and put another mark on the panel. I designed the frames, which were made from leftover aluminum stock from Eric. It had structure exactly behind the umbrellas. Inside the handle of the bamboo I drilled out a core and inserted an aluminum plug that I drilled and tapped to use a stainless steel bolt that would go through the aluminum frame into the threaded insert. That insert was epoxied into the bamboo handle. So you would hold the bamboo umbrella up, put a stainless steel bolt, tighten it up, and pull it to the structural back frame. And I had a safety hanging bracket in the back so that, since weight was cantilevered off the wall, it would lock it to the wall and it wouldn’t come off the wall.

Q: Did Bob ever discuss the images that he’d—?

Voytek: Never. Bob grabbed images all the time. And Bob—and this is kind of a funny—Bob was such a visual thinker. When I first started working for Bob I wanted to try to understand where this guy was coming from, how he became so brilliant. And Bob—I think you’ve talked about this in things that I’ve read, about the way Bob talked and the way that Bob played around with words and stuff. Bob early on explained—they say dyslexic—Bob said that he had a problem reading. And when I was working with Bob, Bob said that when he read stuff, he had visions of what the words were when he read them. And if he had something in front of him and he started to read it, he would confuse himself with the possible ways that this word could be. And so he would say, “The rain in Spain.” The reign might be king, it could be—rain, Spain, falls merrily on the plain—it could be an airplane. And he said that all these visions would be happening for him to choose the right word, he’d have to keep going back to try to follow where he’s going.

So his visions would slow him down when he would read. And he had feelings about visions where you say “dog,” you might think of Lassie whenever you hear the word dog. Bob had visions and feelings. And so when he’d look through pictures, he would have feelings. A picture is worth a thousand words and his editing of or combining of images was intoxicating to him in some ways. And if you talked to him, he would give you this movie trailer of how he was explaining what he was talking about. The tangents were like his artwork, where the connections were so hard to follow where it’s coming from and where it was going.

Q: Once in a car with Bob, we were in New York City, and he looked out the window and said that New York was a movie without a script. And I think he meant by that it was all open-ended

and that words were layered. Syntax was not strict, word meanings were multiple, as you described. He could not spell very well and yet in a sense he was a brilliant writer when he sat down and wrote. You can't spell very well. [Laughs]

Voytek: No.

Q: Did you ever discuss that with him?

Voytek: I'm a visual thinker and I've always been. And Bob and I were very sensitive, where the way that we communicated about our impressions of what we were absorbing—like our mind absorbs things through all our senses. And Bob was a real sensitive—I kind of lost where I was going with this. But Bob trained me to understand what he wanted and how he wanted things to be. And that tied into the way that he combined everything in life.

Like when I first started with Bob, one of the things that he wanted to know was, “What do you think about religion? What are your views?” At RISD I had a course on Joseph Campbell's book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* [1972]. The development of man happened because the religions evolved. And it's almost like the development of man through the arts, how we've grown, and how things evolved and everything started getting better. And I told Bob that I liked a lot of Eastern stuff. There was a matriarchal society before the Buddhists that was based on the women being the leaders of the religion, early, early on. I thought that made a lot of sense to me, since women gave birth to life, that they should be the creators of the religion. And Bob said that he was into a lot of Eastern beliefs. There's a lot of tantric and Tao that Bob shared with me.

Q: Yes, I had many conversations with Bob about Joseph Campbell. And did he ever talk to you about Joseph Campbell?

Voytek: He was happy that I was thinking the way I was thinking about religious stuff.

Q: But did he know Joseph Campbell? When you first met him, was he aware of that? Because he certainly was eventually.

Voytek: I talked about it.

Q: With—

Voytek: With Bob. But he didn't tell me—Bob was an avid listener and one of the things Bob explained was that when he heard things from people, he knew it. And so his education came from the people that he heard things from. So talking to people like Albers and [Marcel] Duchamp and you Don, is where he learned his life's lessons in a real deep way. And Bob was like a savant, where when he wanted—photographic memory—he remembered what he wanted to know. He talked about how, when he was doing things, he would conjure up things that he had gone through and do it again, so that he would hear the lessons again.

Q: When you first came in, was the television set on when you first met him?

Voytek: All the time, all the time, yes.

Q: Was there any time when the television set was not on? [Laughs]

Voytek: He turned it on when he came in the room. We usually turned it on when he was coming over. He absorbed stuff from living. And also this thing, smells and taste and feelings and all that stuff, he was really hyper-aware of his—and the thing that was strange too, with his drinking, he had so much information going on that he liked to be drinking because he could lose inhibitions and tap into stuff without having overload of too much stuff coming in.

Q: You mean the drinking was a filter?

Voytek: Yes, I think it was a way of—he kind of described it. He liked running, getting in and just going with the feelings, and not really being in control of his directions. He liked being out of control. And it's almost like when with certain types of meditation, you have to just relax. And you tap into the awareness by not trying to control it. And what comes to mind, you're not in control of. It bubbles up and—

Q: So on a project like this, what were the dynamics with his assistant at that time, Terry? How did he interact with him? What was the give and take? Did you see any of that? Or was that circumspect and not available to you?

Voytek: Early on Bob asked what I thought about the gay lifestyle and stuff. And I said, “A lot of my best friends are gay.” My sister, who was five years older than me, her friends from the sixties, well I grew up with a lot of gay party babysitter friends that were in my circumstances. And they were some of the most interesting, intellectual people that I ever knew. And Bob was happy with that. And he also, through the years, there was a lot of flirtation with me. Because I told him, “I’m definitely straight.” And he often would say, “Well, maybe that might change.”

And so his relationship with Terry—Bob was quite open with me. Like Bob would be hanging on the porch and Terry would be windsurfing. And he’d be like, “Oh, my lover’s like a seagull flying across the waves.” And it’s like, great! [Laughter]

Q: Well I—

Voytek: So that was just how he was. There was no hiding that. And he knew that this—Fort Myers back then, this was all in-house. You don’t talk about this in public or that this kind of thing could be going on. Because that kind of relationship was not culturally accepted at that time.

Q: Well I’m particularly interested in your observations of the relationship on a creative level. What was Terry’s interaction with Bob creatively, if anything at all? Did he have—was there a conversation on each of these works as Terry helped him? Did Terry prepare a palette for him? What was the working process?

Voytek: Terry would say, “I’m not an artist. I do what Bob wants me to do.” Terry was good at—you know Bob, “I want this shirt glued down here.” And Terry had the system of how Bob used the matte medium underneath and on top and wet it down and put the stuff down. So Bob was in charge of the ship. “Do this, do this, do this, do this.” And Bob wouldn’t say, “What do you think, Terry? Would it look better on this side or that side?” It was Bob, Bob, Bob. All the decisions, all the— And Terry was pretty much neutral, “Just do what Bob wanted me to do.” And he did a good job at the way Bob wanted it done.

Q: So Petersen was and is a very fine artist actually.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: And then there’s Darryl, another artist. Did you see a difference in the working relationship between Bob and Darryl for example? You didn’t see Bob working with Petersen, I assume.

Voytek: No, I never—no, Bob Petersen—

Q: That was before you—

Voytek: That was before.

Q: Right. So, with Darryl—

Voytek: When Darryl was—?

Q: Yes, the difference between, as you said, a person who's neutral in terms of the aesthetic decisions, as opposed to perhaps an artist that has a particular parallax in the way in which they look at art or the creative process. Did you see a difference as each of them worked with Bob?

Voytek: Well, when we started really gearing up for production, like when silkscreens were going, we needed a lot more collaborators to work on stuff while we're doing it—when it's screenprinting and washing stuff out and grabbing screens and making it. Bob was a real giver of information to people that were working with him if they asked about what's going on here. Most people just ran and did what Bob was doing. When Darryl was first—Terry was Bob's companion and Darryl was helping—that was when Darryl did the most physical labor of hustling, doing everything Bob wanted to do. Bob was the ringleader and everybody was racing, racing to do it. Later, when Terry was gone, there was more—well, Bob had told me, “Darryl's my companion and I want you to consider Darryl my equal.” And then there was more Darryl was communicating with Bob about stuff. But Bob was in charge of his art all the time. There was no Darryl saying, “I think it'll look better over there,” or anything like that.

Q: Did that ever happen with you? Did he ask your opinion as you were producing a work? Did you offer your opinion, as the second part of that question?

Voytek: There were a few times and I would usually say, “It's not my job, Bob.”

Q: He'd ask a question, you'd say, "It's not your—"

Voytek: Yes. And he asked a lot of the details with me in a fun way. You talk about people being sensitive to surfaces and colors and materials and stuff. Especially when we were doing *Gluts* [1986–89/1991–94] and making things, Bob would say, "How was this made?" And I would explain the process the factory used to make it. The weathering, the patina, the time, and the shaping and the forming, he really was extremely sensitive to the way things are. Like we had a bank of fasteners for doing *Gluts* where whenever I would take things apart, old bicycles, old things, I would put things in this box. And when we needed to put something together, I would bring him the box, and he would go through it with me and we would decide which one was right for this piece.



Robert Rauschenberg
Cathedral Late Summer Glut, 1987
Assembled metal
50 x 115 x 22 inches (127 x 292.1 x 55.9 cm)
Private collection

Q: Was he happy for you to share any of the techniques that were developed with anybody outside the Rauschenberg compound? Were you free to discuss the processes?

Voytek: Oh no, no. Whenever anybody came to town— Well, when he had said, “I want you to set up shop in my backyard. I want to make anything in my backyard. You’re in charge of making sure the materials are here. We’re going to do this, we’re going to—” So I was competing with Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles], ULAE, and Graphicstudio [University of South Florida], [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver. Bob did not want me to talk to anybody. It just happened. Everybody said Bob had deep pockets and he could have anything made any way he wanted to. So where things came from—Bob wanted to know what I learned at school. So the research and development was what RISD taught, I told him that—and this was before Internet and stuff—that the way that you find things new, you do it mostly through professional periodicals. From the sign industry, I got *Signs of the Times* magazine. For architecture, I got *Architectural Record*. I was a member of the American Society for Metals. And I was getting the green light to research anything and bring Bob samples.

But I wasn’t supposed to tell anybody what we were doing. When I needed to find information, like from you, I would call you up and ask you questions and get the answers. But Bob didn’t want me to explain too much to anybody about where this was coming from—it was just all Bob. Bob couldn’t read the technical books. He couldn’t read the magazines. He wanted the samples in front of him and then he wanted me to explain, “How do I do this? How do I do that? How do I work with this?” That’s just how we rolled.

Q: Did he share with you the processes he used with outside collaborators like ULAE or Gemini?

Voytek: I saw that stuff, yes. He reveled in the fact of going and doing projects and coming back. He liked having art materials with professionals that knew how to handle it all around, he liked messing with stuff. He was the master. He was going to make his art. He had all his training beforehand of how to play with what's in front of him. That's what he did real well.

Q: Were you around for the most part when artist friends came in or gallery directors?

Voytek: Yes, I was always there. I did get in trouble once when—[Arnold] Arne Glimcher came to town. And this was later in Bob's life. Arne came in to see the new works. He was going through the new studio. I was gluing down panels and Arne walked over. And Bob was with him, he asked Bob, "Bob, how were these panels made? What's the story?" I knew Bob didn't know. You were the one that told me about the PVA [polyvinyl acetate] glue, the bookbinding glue. I made the vacuum table, we had the Saunders watercolor paper, the Reynobond, which was a material that I found earlier that we used in the other *Off Kilter Keys* [1993–94]. So I told Arne, "This is Reynobond, this is archival bookbinding glue, this is Saunders three-hundred-pound watercolor paper, we would vacuum laminate it down. After Arne left, Bob said, "I told you never to tell anybody how we do things. I don't want you to talk about the magic. It's all in-house." Bob didn't know that stuff and he didn't have to. It was like any art studio master—all the apprentices mix up the paints, grind the pigments. They're ready for the artist to go and that's what they have to do.

Q: When I presented Bob with projects and executed projects with him, I don't recall him ever asking how the material was prepared. So he didn't try to get information from people he

collaborated with for use by himself. He never repeated any of the projects that I did with him, like frescos or the transfers to wax. He never once said, “How do you prepare the paper that you’re going to transfer onto plaster or onto wax,” or whatever the particular project was. So he was even-handed I guess, in terms of not trying to take information from other people and not wanting to share it. Now that was my perception from the outside. I don’t know what happened on the other end. He never asked me directly how it was done.

Voytek: Well I think that Picasso said, “Bad artists”—it’s some kind of quote—“Bad artists copy, great artists steal.” Bob wanted ideas, information, he wanted new, he wanted to play with what’s on the planet. He wanted to just—if you have a brilliant son and you put art supplies in front of him, he just wanted to mess with what was there. All the stuff, like Albers’s training and the chops of how you make a great piece of artwork, what it needs to be, his design sense, his color sense—a lot of that was hardwired in from his early training.

Q: Did he ever speak to you about Black Mountain [College, North Carolina] or Albers?

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: Anything you could relate in terms of those conversations?

Voytek: He talked a lot through the years at different times. One of the ones that I thought was interesting was, everybody knows that he was the thorn in Albers’s side. Bob really wanted to impress Albers. There was a project and I think it was something like make a collage out of

leaves. And people were doing Andy Goldsworthy kind of composition patterns, things that were very pretty. And Bob included some scrap metal that had rough texture. Albers came in to talk about the works, saw Bob's piece, walked through, and he says, "I don't want to know who did this. I don't want to talk about this." Bob, it bothered him that he didn't make the association of the natural surface as being natural with the manmade trash.

Q: So eventually, [John] Cage, after working at Black Mountain a couple of summers, was teaching there and Bob was there. Did Bob talk to you about John and his relationship with him at the time?

Voytek: Albers was very religious, Catholic. He had this thing about purity of spirit and being able—to be truly aware, you had to be clean thoughts and clean of mind to have spiritual art. I think that Bob being wild and crazy with John, I think that there was tension with that whole thing. Where Bob came from was what Western art was in the world, Bob was the whole concept—and I think like music, with Cage going against [Ludwig van] Beethoven and [Johan Sebastian] Bach, the established "this is what the higher music is," I think Bob went against what Western art was supposed to be.

Q: Well, Cage's *4'33"* [1952] followed—

Voytek: The *White Paintings* [1951].



Robert Rauschenberg
White Painting [four panel], 1951
Oil on canvas
72 x 72 inches (182.9 x 182.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: —which Cage certainly acknowledged. Did Bob talk to you about the *White Paintings*? Did you hear him talking about the *White Paintings*?

Voytek: Yes because I rebuilt a *White Painting* while Bob was there. There was a show that they wanted to loan a *White Painting* to that was the exact one that was going to be in another show. So Bob agreed to make a copy of the four-panel *White Painting* that was in the ceiling, that was at that first Happening [Untitled event (*Theater Piece No. 1*), 1952], that there's different accounts of why it was hanging in the ceiling and Bob was projecting stuff on it. So I was under Bob's direction to make this four-panel copy of it. One of the things that I thought was really interesting when I was making it, Bob was really adamant that I get the corners real tight, real pulled back. He says, "Albers was a stickler about doing everything perfect. I was going to stretch perfect white canvases with the best corners, the best edges, the best thing." It was almost as if these canvases were so perfect he didn't want to touch them. [Laughs]

Q: But who painted that, then?

Voytek: The original ones or—

Q: No, no, the ones you—

Voytek: Oh, I painted those.

Q: You painted the—

Voytek: Yes, the re-dos. And then we did another one later on, after Bob had died, because there was another double show. That was the last thing I made during my last two weeks of work—I made a copy of the four *White Paintings* [note: for *Specters of Artaud: Language and the Arts in the 1950s*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2012].

Q: Right. There was a lot of debate of whether that should be made or should not be made.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: And what's to become of it after it is exhibited.

Voytek: But the point that I was trying to make is Bob was so proud how perfectly he made these things, I just thought it was kind of interesting. [They were] almost too good to paint on them.

[Laughs]

Q: But he asked you to paint it, as opposed to Darryl?

Voytek: Oh yes, it was just a job. Actually, at one point, they were showing the original ones, they had pulled them out and they were kind of dingy—in the beginning it must have been done with oil paint because I don't think they had latex way back then.

Q: Right, house paint, yes.

Voytek: And at one point they were being shown in New York, Bob thought they looked really dingy. He had Hisachika [Takahashi] paint them with house paint, with a roller, to brighten them up.

Q: Why do you think he—or did he tell you why he preferred others to paint these iterations of the *White Paintings*? Obviously he didn't do it himself. You think that that was part of his collaborative process? Did he talk about that?

Voytek: He liked to just direct people to do stuff. He never—you get it done. Just do it. He didn't talk about collaborating or anything like that—just do this, do that. He was the captain. He was the chief. He was in charge.

Q: We'll get to *The 1/4 Mile [or 2 Furlong Piece]*, 1981–98] a little later on. But there's "Bob's Army" in *The 1/4 Mile*. Is this a part of the concept of his collaboration, that it's a team, an organization, an army?

Voytek: Well, yes, Bob talked to Bradley and I about the army.

Q: What is the army? What is it about?

Voytek: Bob had told me that he needed everybody to do his stuff. Part of the thing about knowing what is really important is knowing who knows how to do what's important. For me, Bob had lots of conversations about who you were to him. In the whole beginning of ROCI, Bob explained that you [Don] were the only person that could explain to academic people why somebody would come to town and take the garbage off the streets and photograph in the back alleys, put it on the wall, and why their trash was important—and that you could understand the concepts and communicate these concepts to people that would understand what's going on.

Q: The army—you're right next to him in the army, aren't you?

Voytek: Yes, yes.



Robert Rauschenberg
The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece,
1981–98 (detail)
Photo: Li Sen, courtesy Ullens Center
for Contemporary Art, Beijing

Q: Okay. [Laughs] We'll get to that later.

Voytek: Well, yes.

Q: We'll just take a break right now.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Lawrence, you did work on *Global Chute* [(*Kabal American Zephyr*), 1982], is that correct?



Robert Rauschenberg
Global Chute (Kabal American Zephyr), 1982
Metal duct, globe, and tool handle
58 1/2 x 21 x 13 inches (148.6 x 53.3 x 33 cm)
Private collection



Rauschenberg in front of the Fish House, Captiva, Florida, with *Global Chute (Kabal American Zephyr)* (1982), ca. 1982. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

Voytek: Yes, that was the first sculpture that I made with Bob.

Q: So that's 82.068. You said that 83.001 was the first one. So how did this work have an earlier registry number?

Voytek: The whole thing about the registry books and how things were written down when I started, it was not part of my job at all. It was just, "You do this, you do this, you do this." Bob would be working on something and I'd work on it. Early on it seemed Bradley was the one that would fill up the registry books when things were done and I think time went by before pieces were logged in and when things were fitted into this—

Q: So they may not be sequential in terms of time.

Voytek: Yes. And also things happened so fast that I don't think that things were registered in order, where it got to be confusing. It's like the photographer would come in to photograph what was done and then they would give it the registry number when he did the photography of the stuff. Nobody wrote down, "Ding, we did this today, write what day it is." The work was being produced and we documented it at certain times to put it in the books.

Q: So tell me about *Global Chute*. How did that work come about?

Voytek: These objects were in Bob's collection of stuff. Bob had his piles of things, his old objects, and a lot of these things were around the print shop. They were in the print shop. And where he collected these, I don't know, because they were there when I showed up. The big chute, the globe, and the shovel—Bob brought the globe over and he says, "I want you to mount it in here, I want it so it rotates at this height." I determined to make a nice piece of marine grade plywood that matched the diameter of the chute near the top. The actual globe mechanism that it spun in had a standard 1/2-inch 18 nut. And so I had a hole in the piece of plywood that I would tighten the nut to mount the rim that held the globe in space. To glue in the marine plywood, I had to go inside the tube. And Bradley was there [laughs] and I got inside the tube and glued it with it over me. I had set it up so that I would go underneath it and get it level up on the top. And I let the glue kick off and dry. I had a hard time getting back out and Bradley thought that was amusing.

Q: So these objects were in the print shop?

Voytek: Yes, his storage, or in rooms and stuff around. The print shop had a back porch that had a lot of objects on it. Also stuff that could be outside, there was a pile behind the print shop.

Q: So this work took place just at the sort of incunabula stage of ROCI. This was the very beginning of the ROCI concept. Did the global aspect of it relate in any way to ROCI?

Voytek: He didn't—

Q: Did he discuss that?

Voytek: He didn't discuss that. The genesis of ROCI—and he would talk about what was going on with me—Bob changed things. Like when Bob first explained ROCI to me early on in one of our shop talks, he explained the world tour, and originally it was a little bit different, where he was saying— Issey Miyake was a designer friend of his. He wanted to have Issey Miyake design green jumpsuits that we would wear. We would go to these countries, we would work with the artists and the people in the country, like he had done in India [1975] and China [1982]. We would make the works there, then we would show the works. I was jazzed up about the idea of doing a road trip and working there. I said, “Oh, we could go to boatyards and foundries.” He says, “Maybe you should stay here.” [Laughs]

Q: What do you think he meant by that?

Voytek: Well, I didn't think he wanted me to be there while we were working on stuff. He did not want others to see how we worked together. What ended up [with] ROCI, he would go to the countries, travel, photograph, videotape, get materials, send it all back to Captiva, and we'd make it in Captiva. I liked the idea of working there, in other countries with all their people. I thought that would be a gas—that was what I originally heard from Bob. It changed once things started rolling.

Q: Well, in a sense it didn't change, I think, because he collaborated with the people. He collaborated with those who could help him find materials by which he could have a rich palette. In order to maximize the artistic aspect of it, it basically had to come back. So he did collaborate and he did work there in the more conceptual stage of ROCI. There was a miniature of that. Did you not make a small version of *Global Chute*?

Voytek: Yes, that was a birthday present. I found, at a scrapyard, a little chute that was beat-up, and it reminded me of *Global Chute*. I bought a little globe and that little globe fit into that chute, and then I had an old antique top that was one of my tops when I was a kid, which I gold-leafed. I welded that to the top of the little globe. On the bottom I put, "Top artist on the planet." It was a birthday present for Bob.

Q: What was his reaction?

Voytek: He kept it in his bedroom. I think he liked it.

Q: I'd think so [laughs] if he did that.

Voytek: [James] Jim Rosenquist was at that birthday party and it was fun. There was a restaurant, La Vendé in Captiva. And they had a dress code. And Jim was wearing shorts and a Bahama T-shirt. In front of the restaurant they had rocks, white rocks, that were painted—they were coral rocks. They painted them white just to make a nice entranceway to the restaurant. Jim had brought big hurricane candles and put hurricane candles on this white rock. He came walking into the restaurant with this rock that weighed about forty pounds with these hurricane candles burning. He made a dirt trail coming into the restaurant. Jim took the rock from in front of the restaurant and put it on the table and that was like his birthday present to Bob that day. That was when I gave him the *Global Chute*. “Top artist on the planet.”

But the thing about—like when Bob talked to me about ROCI, when it came to the frames, Bob liked aluminum. It was high-tech modern metal. And he told me, “I’m going to be making art out of common, simple materials. I want you to come up with frames that will make it look so precious that the common man in these countries will think that this is an important thing to look at.”

Q: Well, it certainly wasn't simple. We started in Mexico. Bob always said that he wanted to start close when he was asked about it, so that if he needed to, he could go back to the United States and get a screwdriver.

Voytek: Yes. [Laughs]

Q: But technically, there were some extraordinary works. For example *Mexican Canary* [/ *ROCI MEXICO*, 1985]—tell me about *Mexican Canary*.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So *ROCI* begins in Mexico and Bob comes back with material. Tell me about three works: *Mexican Canary* / *ROCI MEXICO*, *Altar Peace* / *ROCI MEXICO* [1985], and *Casino* / *ROCI MEXICO* [1985].

Voytek: So Bob brought back stuff from Mexico—if you look at the frame of *Mexican Canary*, there are all these tin sheet metal products from factories that make Mexican foods and stuff. He wanted to use them like a laminate, a veneer on the outside of the frame to go around the painting. I welded an aluminum frame up and we got a type of glue to put the tin onto the aluminum. Bob tiled them on like this piece here. On the painting Bob put, I guess those are lottery lists, those things on the fabric he glued on the canvas.



Robert Rauschenberg
Mexican Canary / *ROCI MEXICO*, 1985
Acrylic and collage on canvas with metal
frame
80 3/8 x 150 3/4 inches (204.2 x 382.9 cm)
Private collection

Q: Right, yes.

Voytek: The works from Mexico, we had the silkscreen setup. We had all the photos—Bob shot many rolls of film. He picked probably three hundred images. All the screens were made up and we put them in books. And Bob started to roll out heavy German linen on the tables. I actually had to build tables big enough—Bob had some German linen that was 12 feet wide and so I made a table that was 12 feet wide by 24 feet long that was ultra-flat, that had a compression pad on it so that he could print randomly anywhere without getting any impressions from what was below the table showing up in the prints.

Q: Well, in *Mexican Canary* were the cans already flat or—

Voytek: The cans came from a factory before they were turned into cans. They were like 18-by-24, printed on tin sheets. There was a whole pile of them. He lined up where he wanted them and then I cut them to size to glue them down as tiles.

Q: *Altar Peace*?

Voytek: *Altar Peace* was pretty funny. Bob told me what he wanted—I was up at the house and he took a small piece of paper and he drew a two-headed snake. He said, “I want to make a snake that goes like this.” He gave me this little drawing and I said, “Well how wide is it?” He says,

“The painting is going to be 8 feet across. Let’s make the snake 7 feet across by—” he always had his tape measure and he says, “Let’s make it this wide by this high.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Altar Peace / ROCI MEXICO, 1985
 Acrylic on canvas with aluminum frame, and colored, mirrored aluminum and tin “snake”
 123 1/2 x 90 x 24 1/4 inches (313.7 x 228.6 x 61.6 cm)
 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
 Gift of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

So I went to my workshop and I was trying to figure out how to make this. I thought that snakes were round. He explained that he wanted tin cans on the snake, like tiles or scales. Bob and Terry were on the beach in their Speedos, smelling like coconut oil. I came up to Bob and I said, “Bob, I can get urethane foam and carve the snake round, and I can put fiberglass over it, and then I can try to put the tiles on it.” Bob said, “I want a square snake!” I said, “Well how wide do you want the square to be?” He said like this wide—it was 6 inches wide. My chop saw could not handle that wide a material so I had to get a 14-inch chop saw. The way the snake was made, I blew up his little drawing on a grid on my welding table. I did pie slices so that if it curved, the slice would go this way. If it’s going up, the slice would go this way. Then all these pieces were welded together and then ground smooth and then the tiles were glued on top of that. When it

came to the head, he just says, “Make up a shape.” I made the shape of the head and he said, “That’s okay. Let’s do the other one.”

Q: What made you make it faceted? You could have made it round.

[Laughter]

Voytek: Well, since it was the square body, I figured a square head wouldn’t have looked that cool. So it kind of looks like Beany and Cecil, the serpent head. To me it looks like my art. Strange that he gave me so much freedom.

Q: Was the painting complete by the time you did the serpent?

Voytek: No, I was laboring on the serpent and Bob was doing the painting. Then when the painting was done, he wanted it to come off the wall to deal with the size of the snake. So he said, “Let’s do a pyramid off the wall.” So it’s like a 45 [degree] coming off the wall and the painting is inserted into that. So it comes off like 6 inches off the wall, which was the 6 inches depth of the snake. The painting was totally different from the snake—he didn’t refer to it—he was doing the painting while I was making the snake.

Q: Okay, and *Casino*, which is number 85.011, numbered just before *Altar Peace*, how did that develop? Describe it to—

Voytek: *Casino* is this huge fabric piece that's, what, 20-something feet tall by 12 feet across. Sheryl Pharr [Long], who did a lot of the fabric pieces with Bob, was called in to sew up the piece. A lot of the fabric that Bob brought back from Mexico, sacks and different things, and then he had painting panels in sections. Bob laid it out, Sheryl had her sewing machine and she built it—I think it was 24 feet because that was as big as this table was. It was a fabric collage with Sheryl putting all the pieces together. It was interesting, because Bob said, “I want to see this hanging up in front of me.” I had 24-foot sticks of aluminum and I welded up a simple frame. 13 feet across by 24 feet high. I put anchors in the ground. And in the field of the Weeks property, we pulled it up in the air so that Bob could see *Casino* upright outside. There are pictures of that.



Robert Rauschenberg
Casino / ROCI MEXICO, 1985
 Acrylic on canvas with fabric
 302 3/4 x 129 inches (769 x 327.7 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Rauschenberg *unveiling Casino / ROCI MEXICO* (1985),
 Captiva, Florida, 1985. Photograph Collection. Robert
 Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry
 Van Brunt

Q: Bob returned from Mexico, worked on Mexico ROCI. I was off to other countries. Did Bob ever talk about what he anticipated in other countries? Or was there any expressed concern about where he might be going next? Did he ever discuss that?

Voytek: ROCI started all kinds of stuff with Bob and he started doing lots of different series when ROCI started. One of the things that he brought back from Mexico, he brought things that he was going to use in the art. I was just there, “What do you want to do, Bob?” Bob had this piece that he originally thought he was going to use in ROCI and it was a pierced tin Virgin Mary, where someone had taken a nail and poked all these holes and there was this Virgin Mary. They often made lanterns out of them. They put a light inside and it shines through the holes. Bob had an idea for the ROCI Mexico show with this pierced tin, but he says, “I don’t like the rust on this tin. Can we do this not rusty?” I said, “I can get thin stainless steel and we can do that.” I bought a roll of thin stainless steel. I put the piece of tin down, marked every little hole, banged out all these little holes, I showed it to him. He said, “It’s dead, I don’t like it. It doesn’t look good at all.”

I had this roll of stainless steel that cost quite a bit of money. I cut a piece of that stainless—it was about 18-by-24—I put it on the table. I said, “Bob, you can print on this piece of stainless steel.” That night, Bob did a print that he gave to Terry, and then when I came to work the next day, Bob said, “Can you get stainless steel in bigger sizes?” “I can get 4-by-10 sheets of this stuff.” He says, “Get ten sheets.” He started doing *Shiners* [1986–93]. So I was busy just making art that Bob wanted to make. ROCI was going on, but Bob was doing art while you were

traveling, while things were going. He didn't explain anything to me about his plans of how things were going to go. It was just, "I want to do this, I want to do that." Okay, let's do this.



Robert Rauschenberg
Diamond Club (Shiner), ca. 1987
Acrylic and metal on stainless steel
55 x 86 inches (139.7 x 218.4 cm)
Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio
Gift of Sara Jane Kasperzak

Q: Well when he returned from some of these trips, did you find that he was, if it was possible, more energized than he would normally be? [Laughs]

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: With more ideas and—

Voytek: The thing about Bob, just like with the *Salvage* series, okay, we got a way of coating screens, we've got a vacuum table. We've got somebody that's coating our screens in-house. We've got somebody making the silkscreen positives and we've got a storage system. So Bob now was looking at the world through his camera to make his silkscreens and now he was traveling the world to tell the portraits of these countries that he was going to. But he was also collecting the world to use in his art. And so he was jazzed up. And you could tell that Bob was really sensitive to how the camera was turning into a silkscreen and was turning into how he was

using it. Because his screens were getting really, really the way he wanted them to be and I think ROCI just focused his machine on how he was making art really well.

Q: Could you explain that a little bit more?

Voytek: So let's say Bob sees a big oak tree and the bright light behind the oak tree. So now it's just branches and white and when he came to his palette of colors, he had fifty-six Golden acrylics to choose from. If he wanted these veins of bright red, it could be a bright red tree. So his collection of images was—he was getting really, really good at how he was seeing things to be [translated to] the prints.

Q: Utilized through the screenprint process. And yet he had incredible experience with screenprinting early on [1962–64 paintings].

Voytek: Well the stuff early on he ordered from printed publications of stuff too.

Q: Yes, right.

Voytek: Where there's [John F.] Kennedy, here's the helicopter, here's a mosquito, or here's a glass of water—but now that he was the eye of the camera, I think that he really tuned into how that worked. What he witnessed, he knew, because he was making things from what he witnessed. He was getting sharper and sharper all the time with that.

Q: So what did you do with the *Shiners*? You began to explain how it developed. Are there any specific ones that stand out in your mind?

Voytek: Well one other thing that's kind of interesting with—Bob worked in series. I guess he got that from Albers. And he used to say, “I need to have a bunch of rules so that I can put myself in a situation where I have to solve all the problems available with these rules.”

Q: A great artist, I suppose, sets the parameters of what they're doing and then demonstrates the incredible flexibility that they have within specific parameters. So in a sense Bob did that with each of his series. Here are the parameters—how can I exploit it?

Voytek: I don't think he was writing this down or telling—he would tell me the rules and I don't know if the rules were written down [by] anybody else like Darryl or Terry or stuff. With the *Shiners*, in the beginning he fell in love with the way the light was coming back. He talked about the idea of the surface that you're working on—he had silkscreened on mirrored Plexiglas and Plexiglas and Lexan and things before me. When you had a piece of metal in front of him [that's] a sustainable metal, it was like yes, you can print on metal—the metal's going to stay, the paint's going to stay on top of that. When he did the *Shiners*, the way the light was coming back, he loved—almost like the *White Paintings*—he loved that when you walked in, you were in the picture, and you were shadowing and shining and things were moving and it's like a TV set or something, a screen. You're reacting and it's seeing you reacting.

With the *Shiners* at first he said—I think this is very Bob-ish—he said that, “I want to go to the scrapyard and get shiny objects to put on the *Shiners*.” I was like, “Shiny objects?” He said, “I want it to be the same metal as the *Shiners*.” So at first he looked for stainless steel at the scrapyard, crunched up this and that. I remember one of the first times we’re getting all these metals for *Shiners*, I found a piece of metal that was molybdenum, which is a different alloy, it’s a little bit grayer than stainless steel—it’s a little bit darker. I showed it to Bob and he said, “That’s not a *Shiner*!” He could tell the temperature of the color—he just called it shiny metal. He was really good at it. After a while Bob started putting other metals on *Shiners*. He started putting painted metals on *Shiners*. So he didn’t limit himself to just shiny objects. It was objects on stainless steel. So I couldn’t tell him, “You can’t do that, Bob.” But in the beginning that’s what he had told me.



Robert Rauschenberg
Garlic Ember (Shiner), 1989
 Acrylic and object on mirrored aluminum
 47 7/8 x 48 3/4 x 9 1/2 inches (121.6 x 123.8 x
 24.1 cm)
 Private Collection

Q: Oh, you could never tell Bob—

[Laughter]

Voytek: “You can’t put that there, Bob!”

[Laughter]

Q: He does it and he does it well. So now you’ve gone to the scrapyards with Bob. You know where that leads: to the *Gluts*.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: And tell me about the experience of the scrapyard beyond the *Shiners*. How did the *Gluts* evolve and—?

Voytek: How the *Gluts* evolved—well we were on a *Shiner* run, we were at the scrapyard. They must have torn down a gas station or something, there was a school bus-size pile of yellow metal that Bob saw. I got a picture of it here. Bob said, “I want all of that.” That was the first *Glut*, *Yellow Moby Glut* [1986]. It had all this signage. It was pre-enameled yellow aluminum and then there was the price of gas and things like that. This pile of this torn-up gas station ended up out in Captiva. Bob just said, “Hold this up here, put a screw there, put a screw there. Hold this up here. Let’s mount this here.” We used pop rivets; we used nuts and bolts. Some of the fasteners that were right in your face, he would want antique fasteners because he didn’t want really shiny new things. He did these textural wrapping compositions of metal stuff. It started with a pile of yellow stuff, then he just started collecting stuff at the scrapyards.



Robert Rauschenberg
Yellow Moby Glut, 1986
Assembled metal
126 x 114 x 24 inches (320 x 289.6 x 61 cm)
Private collection



Lawrence Voytek, Rauschenberg, and Mary Voytek with metal scraps, likely collecting material for Rauschenberg's *Gluts* (1986–89/1991–94), Captiva, Florida, ca. late 1980s–early 1990s

Q: Do you think it's a revisionist history to say that Bob went in this direction because of the oil crisis that was going on at the time?

Voytek: This was something that's come up with David [White] and I. Bob had a show in Texas, he had some *Gluts* in the show [note: *Summer Gluts*, Texas Gallery, Houston, 1987]. There was a critic or reviewer talking to Bob, he said, "Bob, where does this stuff come from?" Bob said, "Look all around. You see on the side of road: a glut of industry and things." Supposedly he thought that all this stuff came from Texas and Bob shipped it to Captiva. But Bob bought all the metal in Fort Myers and started making the *Gluts* with it.

Bob loved the stuff that was discarded and thrown away. The *Gluts* tied into his excitement of being in a scrapyard for me—it was better than going through a [Claude] Monet garden, looking

at his water lilies. He was in love with the nature of the materials and how they looked in their abandoned states. So you talk about Albers looking at this color next to that color—this color came about because it was living a life and it was a back of a truck that was banged into and ripped off and thrown in the ground and started to rust. And now it had a skin that an iguana would die for. He loved the way things were. He was very sensitive to the way everything looked. It was sort of an awareness: you see a tree and you really see it. You have an enlightened moment. Bob was enlightened with the way things looked. And wherever he traveled he would see the beauty in what man has made and the way it weathered. People usually want the shiny object that's worth a lot of money, that's brand new. Bob liked the stuff that was here for a while.

Q: The patina on these inanimate objects then became very much an animate quality because it reflected the history. Bob, from my experience, always wanted to retain the history. It's the story of those chairs in *Pegasits* [*ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works)*, 1990], where—



Robert Rauschenberg
Pegasits / ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works), 1990
 Acrylic, fire wax, hand-painting and gilt silver
 leaf chair on stainless steel
 72 3/4 x 96 3/4 x 17 1/2 inches (184.8 x 245.7 x
 44.5 cm)
 Edition of 22 produced by Saff Tech Arts,
 Oxford, Maryland

Voytek: Right.

Q: —it wasn't acceptable to buy brand new chairs, which were available. But no, he wanted them all purchased from the restaurant in Captiva because it had a history to it. He wanted the wear and tear of years to be a part of his work. It was a richer deeper history and quality to the work to have that patina. And so I think too that—let me know your feelings about that—that there was a sympathy for objects that were discarded, that he was their salvation.

Voytek: Yes, you're really onto something important about Bob. [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe said, "God is in the details." And then you have Albers, purity of spirit. Bob was sort of like "the dirty details were the good ones." The scars were life. There was something there that Bob, he'd walk twice around the block and if something talked to him he would pick it up. There was also something about Marcel Duchamp. Bob used to hang out and drink with Marcel Duchamp and they'd smoke and talk about art. Duchamp had talked to Bob about the readymades and about how they communicated to him as being special things. Duchamp, early, early on, he said that a speeding automobile is as much a work of art as the *Pietà* [1498–99 by Michelangelo]—the quote is something like that. So what man desires, what man makes—art has been a way of communicating why are we. The symbols of our time have often been distilled by the artist, that "why are we here?". The art explains why they believe we are here. The mystery of what we want, I think Bob was sort of like a shaman, trying to reflect everything back at us.

Q: A mirror.

Voytek: Yes. Bob never really explained any of this to me, but I just had this feeling of everything is important—everything matters. The least valuable thing is as valuable as the most valuable thing.

Q: At one point we were looking at reproducing a book that you put together, [Untitled] (*Glut Book*) [1986]. Bob was considering editioning it. It never happened. We moved on to other projects. What about the *Glut Book*? How did that come about?



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (*Glut Book*), 1986
Assembled metal
10 x 7 1/2 x 1 5/8 inches (25.4 x 19.1 x 4.1
cm) closed; 10 x 15 1/4 x 8 1/2 inches (25.4 x
38.7 x 21.6 cm) open
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Voytek: The *Glut Book* was in this pile the first time we found all this stuff. It was interchangeable pricing or something on a gas station sign. So price goes up, you put in the next—it was pieces of sheet metal that had printed information on it. It also had other things besides pricing. But it was advertising the wares of the gas station and how they could change it up.

Q: Was the ring on there or did you place it on there?

Voytek: That was in the pile. That was—

Q: It was in the pile, just as it was?

Voytek: Yes, as it was, yes.

Q: Just totally a found object?

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: So it's the apotheosis of this scrap into a work of art.

Voytek: He found other things at the scrapyard like that. There was this one scrapyard that we went to that was a ma and pa place out in the country. Bob liked them a lot. There was this scrapper, some guy, a seeker who would find metals. He had taken aluminum wire that was like ¼-inch wire and he found a whole bunch of aluminum objects, he drilled a hole in all these objects, and put the aluminum wire through them and twisted it up. Bob held it up and said, "Hang it on the wall."

[Laughter]

Q: Now there was a scrapyard behind the studio?

Voytek: Yes.

Q: How did he inventory that? Did he just bring material that he wasn't working on at the time?

Voytek: Well, Tup, we—

Q: There was a name for that too, wasn't there?

Voytek: Yes, Bob called it the Lizard Garden. What Tup had done is, he built a—we had a problem with the sand all over Captiva. If you throw objects on the sand and it rains, it gets muddy and dirty. Tup built a big deck that was on the ground that was made out of pressure-treated wood—we actually had one of them, we got more metal, so we had to build another one. We had piles of metal, the nice thing about the deck is when it rained, it would clean off the metal pretty good. The lizards lived amongst it, snakes, spiders. It was right behind Bob's studio. He liked to do *Gluts* at the twilight time. He'd be working on paintings, he would just say, "Let's do a *Glut*." We would walk downstairs and he would go through the piles. There was a simple system. We made piles by the color of the metals.

Q: Who organized that?

Voytek: Tup and I. Bob didn't go to the scrapyards all the time. A lot of times he would just say, "Refresh the scrapyards." Sometimes there were things that he didn't want anymore and we would take it back. I would often keep the stuff that he would send back because I thought that the Midas touch had already happened, if he already picked something. If he didn't use it, it was

still special. I would save it rather than take it back to the scrapyard. I'd take it to my scrapyard.

[Laughs]

That was parts of sculptures, parts of paintings. He used his scrapyard. It was funny because at the tollbooth [to Sanibel], quite a few times they would say, "There's no scrapyard on Sanibel if you're heading out to Sanibel."

[Laughter]

Voytek: I would say, "Oh, there's a big one on Captiva." [Laughs]

Q: So if he went to the scrap pile, things are stacked. Not everything is—

Voytek: It's a pile, yes.

Q: And so did you—

Voytek: Shuffle?

Q: —cull through it each time and shuffle through it or whatever?

Voytek: Well, a classic example of making a *Glut*, Norman Lear was coming to town. I was working, the sun was going down, and I said, "Do you need anything, Bob?" He said, "Norman

Lear's coming to town. Let's make a *Glut* for Norman." So I said, "Okay." We went down to the Lizard Garden and Bob started pulling stuff out. It was for *Shovel Reserve Glut, Summer 92* [1992]. I've got pictures of it. Bob pulled out this aluminum shovelhead and then this snakeskin-like stainless tube, he pulled out this cast aluminum container.



Robert Rauschenberg
Shovel Reserve Glut, Summer 92, 1992
Aluminum and stainless steel objects
56 1/4 x 14 x 12 inches (142.9 x 35.6 x 30.5 cm)
Private collection



Lawrence Voytek and Rauschenberg working on *Shovel Reserve Glut, Summer 92* (1992), Captiva, Florida, 1992. Photo: Unattributed. Courtesy of Lawrence Voytek

So he chose these objects and we brought them upstairs to the studio. He laid it on a table. He says, "I want this to be mounted here." I took out the box of fasteners that was a go-to whenever he was making *Gluts*. He liked all the decision-making. So I pulled out all the fasteners and the stuff and then he decided, "I want this mounted here. Use this bolt." His focus was on the perfect part in the perfect place.

Okay, I got this and so I got all these pieces together. Then it came to the point where it was too top-heavy and wobbly. He said, “Let’s put it on a base of aluminum.” I brought up a piece of aluminum and I said, “How big do you want it?” We measured it. I brought it down to the shop and cut it to size. It was 1/2-inch plate. And then I drilled and tapped the piece and mounted it to the base. I brought it back up to him and he said, “Get me the Sharpie.” I gave him the Sharpie, and in front of me he wrote, “For Lawrence, Bob Rauschenberg.” So he played a game with me that it was for—

Q: Norman Lear.

Voytek: —for Norman. It was actually a gift to me.

Q: [Laughs] Okay, let’s take a break.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Lawrence, tell me about the works that Bob did for Tibet. Clearly you were at the scrapheap and that afforded a lot of material. Why those works for Tibet and what’s the genesis of *Twin Bloom* / *ROCI TIBET* [1985]? Let’s talk about that.



Robert Rauschenberg
Twin Bloom / ROCI TIBET, 1985
Mixed media construction
17 x 28 1/2 x 14 inches (43.2 x 72.4 x 35.6 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Voytek: *Twin Bloom*, it was—that was a found object at the scrapyards. It's a type of little air conditioner motor. It had long spindles on both sides. He found fans that fit the spindles and then he found a bicycle crank that he wanted it to be able to turn the fan blades. Each of the fan blades, he either had me make new ones out of colored mirror metal or he painted them with acrylics. He painted the motor with colors. I think, to Bob, turning the crank had kind of like a Tibetan prayer thing going on, where each revolution was a prayer. He didn't explain to me why the colors of things—it was also kind of like the Duchamp bicycle wheel, where Duchamp said that he used to like to spin the wheel and look at it turning as a meditation device. So I think there was some sort of prayer/meditation device thing going on. I know he talked about the Tibetan people being so aware that he said he had a hard time trying to make something that they would find was more special or as special as everything they saw.

Q: Yes, his philosophy, I guess, was consonant with the philosophy of the Tibetan people he met. And certainly the prayer flags generated a great interest in their use of color. I certainly see that in *Twin Bloom*.

Voytek: He loved the Tibetan people. The Dalai Lama he loved dearly too. When we had the National Gallery [of Art, NGA, Washington, D.C.] show [*Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, 1991], he called on Nawang [Khechog], who was a Tibetan monk, to play didgeridoo and wood flute. Bob had a really strange connection to the Tibetan spiritual, where he had a feeling that they understood him.

Q: He supported Tibetan causes for the remainder of his life. And as I think I said in an oral history, when he was leaving Tibet he said to the people, “I will never forget you and if I had my way, the rest of the world will never forget you.” And certainly he worked closely with the Dalai Lama and he supported many, many causes with great, great generosity.

Voytek: I think that a lot of the stuff that Bob learned from John Cage early on added to Bob’s understanding of the preciousness of everything. I think Bob always had this thing that we all should learn to live together and he thought we should even be playing together.

Q: *Armadillo / ROCI TIBET* [1985].



Robert Rauschenberg
Armadillo / ROCI TIBET, 1985
Metal construction with plastic
24 1/2 x 31 x 17 3/4 inches (62.2 x 78.7 x 45.1 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Voytek: The journey to the scrapyard for Tibet was a special thing. The *Armadillo* with—here’s a type of air-conditioning heat exchanger where you have aluminum fins all over an object. Normally there’s a copper core that runs through it. It’s vital to how an air conditioner works, where it has surface area that can absorb heat. Bob loved the way the aluminum was like snakeskin the way it reflected and the shapes—the simplicity of the overall composition just seems real primal.

Q: So we’re in Asia [laughs] in China, he did a work called *Sino-Trolley / ROCI CHINA* [1986], which is an extremely ambitious, extraordinary work—apparently the first project that [Laurence] Laury Getford worked on as well. So tell me how that came about.



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

Voytek: *Sino-Trolley*’s a big monster. It’s a paper sculpture. He had a roll of this linen-backed paper that is like 6 feet wide. The linen backing makes the paper more structural and he glued on fabrics. A lot of these fabrics, I guess, he got in China. Some of where it is made on a Jacquard loom, accurate threads where the colors are in the threads. Sometimes he would put the fabric backwards next to it the right way so that you’re seeing the reflection of the backside of the warp

and the weave. We also did aluminum leaf on it. He's got ties that hang from the back. It has these giant cast iron wheels and there are yak tails that—the yoke that would pull this trolley has yak tails connected to it, which smelled funny when they came through customs. The color of the cast iron wheels, they were rusty, rusty when we found them. Bob wanted this to seem like it was some sort of ceremonial trolley. So he had us sandblast the wheels clean and the sandblaster asked if he wanted me to have them primed right after he did the sandblasting. And Bob said sure; the guy mixed up a bunch of primers and it came out this bubblegum pink color. And Bob liked the color of the bubblegum pink wheels once they came back from the sandblaster.

Q: These wheels are from the junkyard or from elsewhere?

Voytek: Those wheels were on the property when I showed up. They were around outside for quite a while. Bob chose to use them—I'm not sure where he picked those up. But they're quite heavy.

We were racing to finish the piece for a National Gallery show. They would have an opening for each piece that the NGA was going to keep for each country. They sent this giant air ride [suspension] 18-wheeler that had to back up down Bob's street. We stayed up almost two days in a row to finish what we were doing, since a lot of the panels had to be glued together, we were putting it together in the back of the 18-wheel truck and clamping it together and tying it off so that it would dry while it was on the road. And that was a work binge with Bob doing all his stuff, with us doing our stuff, just to get it to the show on time.

Q: Bob donated that work to the National Gallery. For a while, to support ROCI initially, he was going to sell a work to [Frederick R.] Fred Weisman, who had first pick of the work from any country. And very quickly Bob realized that that wasn't going to work and withdrew from that project, realizing that he had to fund it on his own because Fred Weisman was already beginning to manipulate the project and use it to his own end for his own collection, which he wanted to follow in the exhibition spaces that ROCI was placed. So fortunately that ended up at the National Gallery.

One of the works that Fred Weisman had already selected was *Happy Birthday Baby Leech / ROCI JAPAN* [1984]. And you were involved with that. What did you do with that work?



Robert Rauschenberg
Happy Birthday Baby Leech / ROCI JAPAN, 1984
Acrylic and fabric on canvas with gold-leafed bamboo poles, rope, and straw brush
116 x 137 1/2 x 64 inches (294.6 x 349.3 x 162.6 cm)
Private collection

Voytek: That was a beautiful piece. He—

Q: It's for Japan?

Voytek: Yes. We had this really nice, large, square bamboo that certain sections, Bob wanted gold-leafed. He wanted it done in the old Byzantine technique where you use rabbit skin glue gesso and then you use bowl clay and then you burnish the gold leaf. He brought in somebody that was connected to Gemini to do that gold leaf for that part of it. The kite that was on *Baby Leech*—it was in Japanese—there were antique ropes that he wanted to hold the bamboo across, and there was a small broom that came out of the top of the bamboo. So my job was to put the pieces and the parts together the way that he wanted it.

Q: I think Bob used the same person that did the *7 Characters*, the edge that *7 Characters* has, [for] the gold leaf on it.

Voytek: Yes, he was an interesting guy. My car at the time was an old 1957 Porsche. He was flying into Fort Myers and I went to pick him up. I was told you can recognize this guy because his beard and mustache are unsymmetrical—one side of his face is trimmed different than the other side of the face.

Q: And was it?

Voytek: Yes. And so I pulled up in my old Porsche and he got in the car and I drove him out to Captiva. He also did the gold leaf panel on *The 1/4 Mile*, which was like a 1-foot-wide by 8-foot-tall and it's the burnished gold leaf, where you had to use the old way—heat up the gesso in a double boiler and then he'd put on the bowl clay and burnish it with his agate burnisher.

And a funny side note, *The 1/4 Mile* had gone through someplace and one of the crates was missing. The crate that was missing was the gold leaf panel. Thomas Buehler had to have an investigation put in about where is this missing crate. It ended up that all the shipping information on this crate was on one side and they were using it upside down as a ramp at the warehouse.

[Laughter]

Voytek: The piece was fine; the crate was well structured. When we got it back, it had lots of footprints on the backside of it.

Q: I remember arriving in Chile and it was clear that this was a place that Bob should go to continue the ROCI project. We got there and there was an earthquake and it was quite an extraordinary beginning. Bob went on to the copper mines and there was a collection of lapis lazuli and the beginning of the *Copperhead* series [1985/1989] when he returned. So that had some extraordinary technical aspects to it—tell me how that came about.

Voytek: I thought that was great too, that here's—it's like you study geography and what do these people do? They've got copper and they make copper and these copper sheets. So he brought it back. So okay, "I'm going to be printing on copper." That was pretty straightforward, where he liked to print on copper. Those first *Copperhead-Bites* were acrylic printed. We did some things where the sheets, when they came from Chile, had a nice patina as they were—it

had a nice tonal range. Because of the sustainable nature of copper, a lot of people have painted on copper through the years as a panel system, as a backdrop. So it's a good sustainable metal.



Robert Rauschenberg
Copperhead-Bite VI / ROCI CHILE, 1985
Acrylic and tarnishes on copper
96 7/8 x 51 1/4 inches (246.1 x 130.2 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

So Bob had us do a little bit of polishing in some places and then he would be printing with colors in other places. But the *Copperhead-Bites* happened before the *Borealis* [1988–92]—you want to talk about the *Borealis* series?

Q: Sure, we'll talk about it at the same time, sure.

Voytek: This is one of the best things that I found for Bob to do. I was at the scrapyard and I found a sheet of shiny brass. It was polished and coated with clear lacquer to keep it bright and shiny. On the backside the lacquer was bleeding down. Where the brass was not coated with the lacquer, there was a gorgeous patina from being at the scrapyard—a green, verdigris patina.

Since we were doing all these silkscreen prints on metal at the time, I thought it'd be really nice if Bob were to do silkscreen prints with varnish and then we could do patinas for the colors instead of paint. At my foundry classes in RISD, I took a course with [Ronald D.] Ron Young, who wrote a book on patinas [*Contemporary Patination*, 1988]. I told Bob we can give him a full range of colors and can color metals this way. And so Bob said, "Let's do this." I got in touch with a chemical company that makes pre-mixed chemicals for patinas. You buy them in gallons and they had names of colors like rainbow, nickel, red, blue, green, black. And we ordered gallons and gallons of patina chemicals. I found a water-based polyurethane varnish that I would thicken with Cab-o-sil, which they use in the boat industry to thicken stuff because I wanted to get the similar viscosity of the silkscreen paint.

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Since it was water-based, we could do the same technique where we would print it and then clean out our screens with water so it wouldn't ruin our screens. It was one of those things where the acids and the chemicals stunk to high heaven. You were supposed to use it in a ventilated area. We would do this outside and Bob would have us put full sheets of metal on the ground that had the silkscreen images printed on them. We had buckets and mops in each bucket and we crudely marked what chemicals they were. Bob didn't pay attention to what it was—he would just start dipping and splashing and throwing the chemicals around and there was a lot of overlap of chemicals and smearing. Those paintings, I think, are some of the most gorgeous works of art on metal that I've had the joy of watching develop in front of me.

Q: Did you provide him with the palette of colors? What kind of samples did you give him for him to make a selection?

Voytek: As soon as all the chemicals came in, I did color swatches. And it also changes with the copper content of the metal. Copper patina's different than brass and bronze. We'd use naval brass, sixty-five percent copper; the bronze we used at the time was eighty-five percent copper. And then we used pure copper. So you take one chemical and you do a sample on each metal. Each one, the patina's different. A lot of the patina chemistry was developed because people would dig up antique sculptures that they would say, "Oh, this looks great, I like the color of this." Then they would analyze what was in the soil to make it oxidize that way.

The thing that was nice about buying chemicals that were pre-mixed is it was a little bit of standardization. So I made all these samples, but Bob never looked at the samples after he started working. He just started pushing around and throwing the chemicals—then, like he painted anything, if something got too dark, he would throw water on it. He would grab a rag and rub it out. He just started wrestling with what was going on in front of him. So it was not paint by number; it's just what's happening in front of him. When he liked it, he said, "Okay, freeze." We would hose it off, rapidly dry it, and then we'd clear coat it.

So the copper—we're back at the *Copperhead-Bites*, which was the metal from Chile. There are some things that look like chemical splashes. But on the *Copperhead-Bites*, that was liquid acrylics and silkscreen prints. When you're working on a sheet of copper, if you get water on it, you're going to be making marks. If you polish a certain zone and you're on Captiva and you

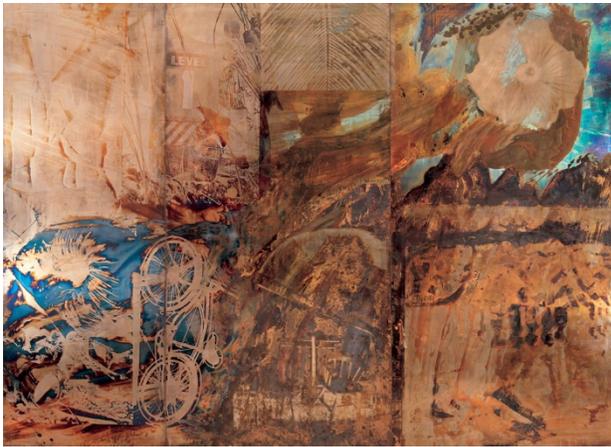
don't work on it that night, it's going to be different in the morning. So when it came time for Bob to do a *Copperhead-Bite*, he had us clean the metal, and then he had a clean slate. It was almost like a time photography thing going on, where the amount of time it was uncoated would be changing as the time went on.

Most of the time when he worked on the piece, he would finish it that night, and then we would seal it that night. So we would have to dry the acrylics with heat lamps and then we would use our clear coat—it was one of the things that I wish that I had a chemist on my side. To cover the copper, to stop from oxidizing, I looked into different coatings. There was something that they used in Mexico City, some copper building outside that was supposed to be a really tenacious clear coat. But it actually changed the copper and Bob didn't like the way that it looked. There was this paint company that we used to use, 1 Shot sign painter's enamel. They sold something that was called clear coat that was used for metals and they recommended it for brass, bronze, copper. It actually was an oil-based varnish. It did have a slight amber tint to it, but Bob liked the way that it glossed. We would hand-brush it on. It would level out perfectly and it would dry real hard. For some reason that material was discontinued—I think in the state of California they found that it could cause cancer. But we were in Florida so we didn't have to worry about that.

Q: [Laughs] Okay. So on some of the works on copper, he fixed the image right at that moment that he saw it, but in certain cases with the copper, he collaborated with time? In other words, he let oxidation happen until a certain point where he said, "Fix it."

Voytek: Yes. Copper is a funny thing, where when she's really, really clean, you can almost watch it oxidize. There were times when some zones changed more than he liked and we would try to re-polish that zone so that he would work on top of it. That was before we did the final clear varnish.

Q: *Bible Bike* [1991] is a *Borealis*?



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

Voytek: Yes.

Q: Tell me how the various parts of this work were made.

Voytek: The *Bible Bike* is a pure *Borealis*. There is absolutely no paint on it. It's all—

Q: That's incredible.

Voytek: —thickened polyurethane varnish. And the chemicals that made the patinas. These chemicals came from companies that made things like lamp parts. You'd be making brass lamps and you could order these chemicals to color your lamps. One of them was called rainbow, which is on the top right-hand side. It looked like oil on water. There was another chemical that was nickel patina and it would make brass, bronze, or copper turn a nickel color. Then we had the various greens, the browns. Bob didn't look at the color charts. He was walking on this—I think this one is brass. It's 3 feet wide by 8 and I think the next one is —

Q: You're talking about the panels?

Voytek: The panels.

Q: Yes.

Voytek: The one on the right looks like it's bronze. I think there are two bronze and one brass. The chemicals that made the blacks would eat in faster—the hierarchy of the chemicals—you would put one chemical down, if he threw another chemical on it, sometimes the chemical below was stronger than the chemical above. Other times, it would pierce into it and aggressively eat into the material.

It smelled to high heaven. It was hard to breathe. We would wear respirators. Bob usually had a Jack in his hand and would be walking around, it seemed like it did not bother him. But I'm sure the air quality was bothering him. Then when he stood back, he watched it—it was like watching

a photograph develop in a darkroom, but we're outside in the bright sun. You would see colors changing. Then when he'd like the way that it was changing—this probably happened over twenty or thirty minutes. He was noodling and messing and rubbing and throwing something here, throwing something there. Then when he says, "All right, let's stop it," we would power wash it quick. We would dry it off—when you got patina chemicals and you're drying something off, if you don't pat it, you're marking it. So we had to carefully try to dry it without smearing it around and then we would put it under the heat lamps upstairs to dry it out real good and then coat it with that 1 Shot sign painter clear coat.

Q: What did you use for the silkscreen resist?

Voytek: It was a long time ago. It was like an M.L. Campbell product and it was a two-part polyurethane. It was designed to go on floors and you had these little clear packets and you would add one packet to each quart. It was too thin to silkscreen print so I added Cab-o-sil to thicken it to a paste that was the right viscosity. And when we did print it, it did dry pretty clear. You would think the Cab-o-sil would make it like a matte, but it went pretty clear. Then when we clear-coated on top of it, it went water clear.

Q: Walk me through this work—Bob selected the images? Photographs, did he go to Laury, who then showed him the works from this period or how did he go about doing it?

Voytek: All right, this is a great, classic example. So Bob travels, ROCI photos, everything that he had, his world—he had these books and whenever a screen was made, Emil would make a

black-and-white photograph of the 35-millimeter slide of what it was. So if he had a picture of let's say the bicycle with the neon around it—if that was used in the United States ROCI show, it would be in the United States ROCI book. If it was in the Mexican ROCI book— So he had these black-and-white, 8 1/2-by-11s in a blue folder that he could flip through and find the screen number.

So Bob was really good at, “Oh, I want a flipping chicken.” He knew that the one that he took in Chile was a nice chicken. He would pull the book out, look through it, and then it would have a number that was connected to that screen. Downstairs, we kept all the silkscreens. We probably had about five-, six hundred silkscreens stored at Captiva. Now when we're doing this painting, we were up in the studio to silkscreen print on this flat table. We've got three sheets of metal on the table. Bob picked all the images that he wanted printed on the clean sheets of metal. We've got the hibiscus flower up on the right. We've got the bicycle on the left. We've got this image, which was an aluminum air conditioning tube that he photographed—

Q: In the lower left-hand corner.

Voytek: In the lower left-hand corner. And the reflection of the light off of the tube was where—we're seeing this as a negative because the varnish is the positive. The color comes only from the windows where the varnish hasn't protected the metal.

Q: So obviously the screening was done on a flat table. Did Bob ever ask the crew to hold something vertically so he could see it? Or did he—

Voytek: No, that was one of the weirdest things about Bob and I never understood how he could do this. I think the way that he could see a composition—because all of my training at school, you look at the work and you analyze its weight and form and balance and the darks and the lights, it's always been in front of you hanging on a wall. Bob could work on compositions on a table. I would be laboring with him forever and everything is going on in this composition. I could not read how it was until it was on the wall. That's one of the big mysteries of Bob, of how he could balance something that was horizontal. It was like that all the time. There are times later on where something will be on the wall, he'd be living with it, and then he'd come back and noodle with it. Most of the time, it was done.

It was also another strange mystery—we'd be working late at night, Bob's doing these works. And Bob would drink while he's working and things would be going on. I had a dangerous job downstairs. I'd be chopping metal, I would be doing things, crazy things—plus I had to drive home. So I was not drinking like the majority of the people in the studio. The responsibility of what I was doing was too important for me to lose any control. I did drink some. I drank beer every once in a while, but I didn't get to the point where I was impaired to the point of being out of control. Bob would often say while we're working, "I want you to remember this, I want you to remember this, because I'm not going to remember it in the morning." In the morning I would go see Bob and we'd be talking and he would say, "Let's go to the studio and see if I did anything that's worthwhile." That he would be able to work with such focus. It was pretty obvious that he had a pretty good buzz on, but he was in control of what was going on even when he was out of his mind—was a mystery, a real mystery.

Q: Did he ever discard anything? Was everything a keeper?

Voytek: Bob had a funny saying: “I don’t make mistakes. I just change my mind a lot.”

Everybody hits and misses. He had a lot of tricks to pull things out. Did he ever discard? I think that under my watch, I’d never see him—he would overwork something and he might let it sit for a while and then he’d work on it again and it would be okay. There were no erased Rauschenbergs that I saw. There were no things that he took away. There’d be a zone of something that really bothered him and then later he would take a container of paint and, pfft, throw it over it.

Q: Or a pencil line that pulls something together.

Voytek: Well later in the paper works—

Q: Right.

Voytek: Yes, but the hard paint stuff—these pigments that he was using were really valuable pigments. Golden’s paints, they use the real deal stuff. So you’ve got a quart of paint, it might be seventy-five dollars for a quart. And so there was this preciousness that this pigment was made out of precious stone like lapis to make blue. When he had colors, he didn’t throw things out. He didn’t take away.

Q: So there's the building of a new house and there was the making of a bed for that house. How did that come about?

Voytek: Yes and a chair.

Q: So that is the *Shares, Borealis Shares* [1990]?

Voytek: Well—

Q: What is the genesis of that?

Voytek: Okay, yes, Darryl at one point convinced Bob—he said, “Bob, you’re such a famous artist, you need a big house. You can’t live in this little house on the beach.” And Bob’s, “Okay.” And they designed this big monster house. So the house was being built and I thought that Bob was doing the *Borealises* at the time. When I was at RISD I’d done a lot of furniture and I had made furniture for Bob through the years and stuff. The furniture was always part of the design—you live life, it’s too short to live with bad design. A lot of my integrity of making things came from RISD. All the pieces and the parts and the details were important, and if this is going to be made by the hundreds of machines, it’s got to be good. So how much is it going to cost and what material should it be?

So I was thinking I’d like to make Bob a special gift for his new house, I wanted to make Bob a bed. We were working with the *Borealises*. We had all this brass and I said, “Bob, I would like

to make a bed for you, for your new house. I was thinking that we could put a painting inside the bed headboard [Untitled (headboard for *Narwhal Bed Borealis*), 1990].” I had done some drawings and he said, “I like the idea.” We had Lexan for storm windows, actually that was the reason why we had it on Captiva. And I said, “We could have a sheet of Lexan in front of the *Borealis* painting so that you could lean up against the headboard and the painting’s behind you.” He liked the bed completely the way that I drew it up and he said, “Let’s do that.” He said, “I want you to make three sheets of brass for the headboards because if I have a special guest I want to make a painting before they get there just for them to put behind the headboard.” He only made one painting. He never made any other, but it was very Bob to think of the people that were coming. When the bed was made and finished, he decided he didn’t want it in his bedroom, but he wanted it in the guest bedroom because he wanted the guest to feel that they were more important than he was, that this was kind of like the duke seat—this was where they could be.



Robert Rauschenberg
 Untitled (headboard for *Narwhal Bed Borealis*), 1990
 Acrylic and tarnishes on brass
 24 1/3 x 73 1/2 inches (62.9 x 186.7 cm)
 Private collection

When the bed was put in that guest bedroom, he said, “I want something across from the bed so that the people that are in the bed will have something to look at when they’re in bed.” And so he made a painting, a *Borealis*, to go against the wall that he called “the footboard” [Untitled (*Borealis*), 1991, 91.015]. It was almost like a big screen TV set where you would sit and look at

what's across the bed. So the painting was put on the wall. I was up there looking at it and he said, "Let's make a chair that's going to go over there." He pointed to an empty space in the room that faced the Gulf of Mexico. And he said, "Let's make a chair like the bed and we'll have a *Borealis* painting in the chair. I want the backboard of the chair to be like this big duke's chair, like a throne. Since we've got it standing upright, I want something behind it. I don't want anything to block the front of the painting, so let's have the seat transparent." So we made one and then he got in touch with [Sidney B.] Sid [Felsen] at Gemini and he wanted to do an edition. Bob designed the chair from the get-go so that's a Rauschenberg-designed artist furniture.

Q: The clock is from the Musée d'Orsay [Paris], on the chair?

Voytek: Yes. There are two different versions; they called them *Shares* [*Borealis Shares I* and *Borealis Shares II*, both 1990]. There are two different versions and Bob had this funny thing about what he wanted to do—and you know this, Don, well—everything that was an edition, he wanted each one to be an original. So since the technique of the underpainting of the *Borealis* was throwing chemicals onto the brass sheets and then he would print with acrylic on top of it, he wanted to be the one that did the patina on each sheet of brass. I think it's an edition of thirty of them or something like that [note: edition of 26]. There are two different versions. They both have two paintings each and he went to L.A. and did all the underpaintings and then they silkscreen-printed the images on top of it.



Robert Rauschenberg
Borealis Shares I, 1990
Screenprinting and hand-painted patinas on brass panels with aluminum and Lexan
75 x 40 3/4 x 23 inches (190.5 x 103.5 x 58.4 cm)
From an edition of 26 unique multiples, produced by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg
Borealis Shares II, 1990
Screenprinting and hand-painted patinas on brass panels with aluminum and Lexan
75 x 40 3/4 x 23 inches (190.5 x 103.5 x 58.4 cm)
From an edition of 26 unique multiples, produced by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

And so if you were lucky enough to be one of Bob’s special friends, you stayed in that bedroom that Bob decorated with his art. And that was like that for like a dozen years. After the hurricane and the house was f’d up, he actually told me one day, “I don’t want you to think I’m an Indian giver, but I want to give this bed to your son.” And at that time the bed was rough—the dogs peed on the legs quite a bit and it was [laughs] a pee patina.

Q: Like on the chairs downstairs.

Voytek: On the chair, yes.

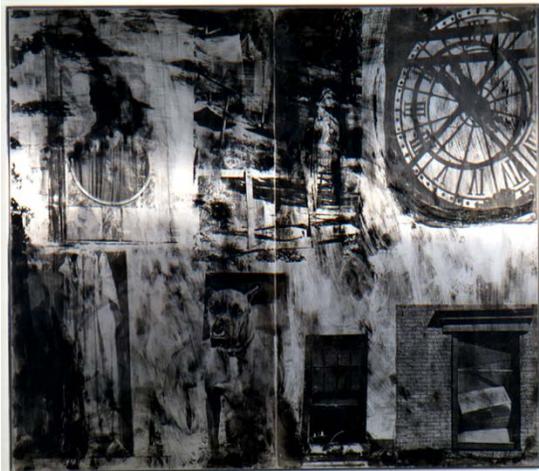
Q: Remember the chairs as well?

Voytek: Yes, so it had a really nice patina. [Laughs]

Q: Yes, that's right.

[Laughter]

Q: Okay, so now we come to the *Night Shades* [1991] because of the similarity in some of the techniques. And here I'm looking at 91.135 [*Rudy's Time (Night Shade)*, 1991]. And in the upper right-hand corner is, again, the use of the clock at the Musée d'Orsay. Tell me about that process and how it differs or how it's similar to the *Borealis*.



Robert Rauschenberg
Rudy's Time (Night Shade), 1991
Tarnishes on brushed aluminum
85 x 97 inches (215.9 x 246.4 cm)
Private Collection

Voytek: One quick thing I'd like to say—the title of this one is *Rudy's Time*. The dog was a dog that Bob saw in one of the ROCI countries and there are lots of pictures with him in it. The dog was named Rudy and he had this nasty-looking mouth. But Bob loved Rudy so Rudy shows up in quite a few things. I just thought that that's a nice thing.

So the d'Orsay clock, were you with Bob when he photographed that?

Q: Yes. We were in the museum and that part of the museum was under renovation. So there was a big drop cloth closing off the area. We pushed aside the drop cloth and went into—

[Laughter]

Q: —an area that we weren't supposed to be in. There was the clock dial through—

Voytek: Wow.

Q: —and he immediately started taking the photograph. The most amazing part is that in front of that clock were two chairs, sort of back-to-back about 6 or 7 feet apart with stretched fabric over the ends of the chairs and hanging down. It was exactly like *Sant'Agnese* [(Venetian), 1973]. So he stopped and started basically looking at his own work, produced by the construction workers at the museum. He loved it.

So the process in the *Night Shades*—

Voytek: I was dealing with different patina chemicals on the *Borealises* and I found this company, Birchwood Casey, which made—it was called aluma-black. And I called them up when I saw aluminum turned black and I said, “What—?” They said it's a selenious acid and it's

used to turn aluminum black. I had never known of a way of patina-ing aluminum and so I ordered some samples of it. It was gorgeous. It was almost like doing India ink on paper, where you take it out straight from the container and you paint it, it goes black. If you add water to it, to dilute it say fifty-fifty, you've got a gray.

So I showed Bob samples of a piece of aluminum with ink splashes on it. I said, "Bob, just like we did *Borealises*, we can print on aluminum with your polyurethane varnish and then paint with the acid." We ordered a five-gallon container of that stuff. It has such a deep, rich blackness and then the lights are shiny, shiny aluminum. Bob did some really gorgeous pieces and that series was called *Night Shades*. The selenious acid smells like rotten eggs and it's another thing that's nasty to work with. But boy, those are pretty pictures. And we used aluminum frames I designed, which—it just seemed the aluminum and black, there is something really elegant about those works.

Q: I think we'll end the session.

Voytek: Okay.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2

Interviewee: Lawrence Voytek

Location: Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: Donald Saff

Date: April 30, 2016

Q: Okay, it's April 30. We are in the Rauschenberg Gallery once again—I, Donald Saff, interviewing Lawrence Voytek. And we're going to begin this morning, Lawrence, with returning to our discussion about *The 1/4 Mile* work of Bob's. Now around '81, '82, the Meyerhoffs [Robert E. and Jane Meyerhoff] had a racehorse called Rauschenberg and it was active racing at that time. And of course the title for this work is [*The*] *1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong* [*Piece*], an obvious reference to the racetrack and horseracing. So Bob began this work and it weaves its way through almost its entire history during a period in which you were present and working with Bob. The work here that we're looking at was annotated and numbered by the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation so we're going to use their reference numbers in the event that they want to illustrate the particulars of what you're discussing. You began around [Panel] number 31 so why don't you tell me how you began work on that and what you had seen of the earlier panels.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1998–99. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) (detail). Photo: Erika Barahona Ede © FMGB Guggenheim Bilbao

Voytek: Yes, *The 1/4 Mile* was started before me. Eric Holt was Bob's fabricator that started on *The 1/4 Mile*. Bob explained to me what *The 1/4 Mile* was and my recollection was that he was saying that he wanted it to be a self-portrait of his life in making art and he wanted to include each series as he was doing in *The 1/4 Mile*. So when I was first there, he was doing *Spreads* and *Scales* and a lot of *The 1/4 Mile* looked like the *Spreads* and *Scales*, transferred images and fabrics glued down. One day he just said, "We're going to do some work on *The 1/4 Mile* now." He would do that every once in a while. Often when he was about to start a new series—all of a sudden he said, "Let's do some *1/4 Mile* right now." But the first part that he did with me were the shirts. And Terry was the one that Bob had glue his fabrics down onto things. We stepped up the quality of the wood panel—I didn't like the door skins that the *Spreads* and *Scales* were on, and we got this marine quality plywood that was very thin, 3 millimeter, Okoumé Bruynzeel.

Terry took these shirts—and I wish I knew why these shirts were special to Bob. But Terry had these shirts that Bob had given him and he brought them in and carefully laid them down exactly on these sheets of plywood that we had primed and coated. Terry was the one that would put a layer of matte medium below the fabric, pick it up, coat it both sides, put it down. There were really accurate little pencil marks that Bob made where the shirt had to be. After this was done, Bob wanted me to cut the shirts out so that they were floating in the breeze the way that they looked on the wall. I asked him if he wanted the pencil mark to be seen and he said, "Split the pencil mark." So you can see half of it.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum at Ace Gallery, New York, 1997. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) (detail).

So I set up a type of jigsaw that would be upside-down and would—I'd have to stare down with my safety goggles on and try to split Bob's pencil mark to cut out the shirts. After they were all cut out, Bob went into them with acrylic paints and worked on the surface of them. That's how the shirts started. That was my first part of *The 1/4 Mile*.

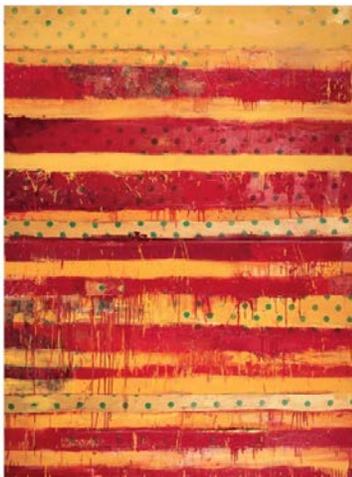
Q: Did they have a specific orientation within the work?

Voytek: The first time we hung it up in his studio, the old wood studio, the piling building, he put them on the wall and we measured the distance from the floor. He'd set them up one way. When it came time to show them at the—we showed *The 1/4 Mile* at Edison Community College first—Bob didn't use all the measurements that we wrote down really carefully. He just put them on the wall a different way. Every time that I saw him install the shirt boards, the space that he was in, he would adjust them. When he installed it for the Guggenheim retrospective at the Ace Gallery [New York, 1997], David Byrne was there and he put them up real high on the wall. He liked to mess around with their installation when he was hanging them so that wasn't mapped exactly how it had to be.

Q: So they were site-specific.

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: They kept that flexibility. Going on to Panel 37, which follows the shirts, there are horizontal bands and—tell me how that began. You can see the reference to the 1954 *Yoicks* painting of Bob's.



Robert Rauschenberg
Yoicks, 1954
Oil, fabric, and newspaper on two
canvases
96 x 72 inches (243.8 x 182.9 cm)
Whitney Museum of American
Art, New York



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

Voytek: He always had a lot of fabrics from his travels—he had a fabric area. In the print shop Bob was quite organized, things were very neat when it came to precious things that would be

used in art. When he was doing these panels with the fabrics, he was making art with special things, and I had no input at all. I just watched what was going on and my job was to frame it—*The 1/4 Mile* was all aluminum sub-frames behind it. He would have things that were meant to be bolted together. How they hung on the wall and the size of each part—he just ordered things to be exactly the way he wanted it. It was gorgeous to watch him work with the paintings and the fabrics glued down. He was just making art. And I didn't know the references; I didn't know the history. He just was busy doing his job.

Q: Could you tell at that time whether there was a change in attitude as he went back to *The 1/4 Mile*? Was it a respite for him? Was it a digression? Was it a planned return to working on that from the series that he was working on? Was his style, his methodology of working, his attitude, different?

Voytek: Yes. He had a real kind of a strange seriousness because what he wanted in *The 1/4 Mile*—he wanted to make sure that it was top quality because it was like a portrait. He wanted the pieces and the parts to be really good pieces and parts. So he had the saying, when he did a piece of artwork that he really liked, he wanted it to be a keeper. I think that what he was trying to put into *The 1/4 Mile* was his best effort. When he announced, “We’re working on *The 1/4 Mile*,” everything just stopped and it was, “This is where we are right now, I want to record this.”

Q: At Panel 41, there starts a path that winds its way through any number of the following panels. It's really quite extraordinary how—were you aware of this continuum of a kind of chute of images and paint that pulled many panels together visually?



Installation view, *The 1st 400 Feet or More than 1/2 a Furlong of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Center for the Fine Arts, Miami, 1984.

Voytek: Being privileged to what was going into *The 1/4 Mile* and when something was done and Bob would say, “Frame it.” I’d be lucky enough to enjoy Bob’s story, this visual world. For me, you make connections of what something means and you see mixed images—and it seemed like some sort of a code. But I had a lot of feelings about where he was going with this. It wasn’t written in stone; it was written in just glorious images that—you think like the Dante’s *Inferno* [Dante drawings, 1958–60], where he was translating the poem. Bob was translating his life as he was doing it at that time. It didn’t get to the point where I really felt I knew exactly what was going on until he came to things like the panel that he did with me or the panel that he did with you or the panel that he did with Bradley, that I really had feelings that it was really personal. There were things that were about that specific person that I knew that made the connections better for me. So there were a lot of things that I didn’t know the connections, but I felt that there was an important story being told.

Q: Well, the avenue of images winds in and out of some of these panels, underneath the portrait of the first “Bob’s Army” here, of Terry Van Brunt. And adjoining Terry is Bradley Jeffries. So were you there for the tracing of these images?

Voytek: Yes. I wasn’t there for all of them.

Q: Well, for these two?

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: Did you help with the tracing? Did—

Voytek: No, no. Bob did all the tracings. The tracing, it’s a funny thing, because Bob would do things like he was going back to the blueprints, there’s something about Bob wanting a record of the person being there, so that the person laid on the panel and Bob took a pencil and went around the person.

Q: Specifically, how did he do it? Laid on the panel on the floor or on a table, on what?

Voytek: Yes, I’ve seen it both ways. I’ve seen people lie on the floor; I’ve seen people up on a table and then Bob get up on the table. Most of the time it was on the floor.

Q: Traced on paper on the floor, or would—

Voytek: No, no. No, we had the panel all prepped. Panel prep was we would have a primer sealer on the first coat and then we would put three coats of gesso. We would roll it on and then we would sand in between the coats. So it was like this white rubber surface that lost the woodness because the gesso was thick enough to be the texture of the panel, so it was ready that he could transfer on it or glue his fabrics to it. Bob would have them lie on the prepped panel and he would trace right onto the gesso. So it was a primed ready-to-go panel.

Q: Are you aware of the selection of images that might relate to the specific person? Did he use images, to your knowledge, that were indicative of the activity of that person?

Voytek: Yes. It's a funny thing to have feelings—

Q: You have a reflector above Terry's head.

Voytek: Yes, a reflector. Definitely at the time there are some athletic things going on and there's some airplane things going on and there—

Q: Which would relate to Terry.

Voytek: Well, yes.

Q: Yes, absolutely.

Voytek: Yes. I think there's even a water image there of Terry's windsurfing. Terry was this healthy kind of California guy. The flowers on Bradley, definitely when Bob was making them, they felt like the person. How an image feels like somebody is, it's a really abstract thing.

A lot of Bob's sources—I don't know what this magazine was called, but Bob had gotten in trouble for using certain things, transferred. There was just one German magazine that was like a *Parade* magazine or a *Life* magazine that was well-printed and they gave Bob permission to use anything that they printed in their magazine [note: *Stern* (Hamburg)]. They always sent four or five copies to Bob every month. There was this big stack—they were like *National Geographic* quality of what's going on in the world, which transferred really well. That was one of the main sources that Bob would be cutting up. You remember being in the print shop seeing where the muse wall was and how he had these boxes of images?

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Containers that he organized the way that the images were there? So he had a way of picking things that were personal. That was also like, if he were to do a little transfer gift drawing for you, it felt like you in a really strange way. I had a little transfer drawing from that period that he gave me. It had car images of stuff that I just liked, but I did not know that he knew that I'd like this so much, that the integrity of the designs of these things—there were a series of chairs and I was fascinated with chair design and these chairs that were in it. And when

he had given me the drawing, he said, “You see that there’s nobody sitting in these chairs?” He said, “Think of me sitting in the chair when you look at this later.”

Q: Yes, he personalized the images that he had gifted. Oftentimes he’d receive an invitation to an event, a marriage or whatever. He would take the invitation and work it into a work of his and return it as a gift. So it was the ultimate personalization with Bob’s hand clearly in it.

Voytek: I think that you’re talking about something real important because Bob, being such a visual person, where he grabbed images from everywhere, to be able to connect life to—you take a photograph and it’s a window in that time period. But to be able to make that time period personal so that those conjure up that person or that experience, I think that he was a savant in being able to be the witness of what matters.

Q: The gifts, the way they were organized was a personal dialogue with the person who received the gift and with Bob, which goes on in Bob’s absence, and even in the absence of those people.

Voytek: It was a weird thing, because you didn’t really understand it, but you felt it. Or at least I—for me, it was an emotional connection to something that he found somewhere else that was connected to me. I was connected to that, and he knew that I was connected to things, which would—it’s a mystery.

Q: Did he ever talk about the blueprints he did with [Susan] Sue [Weil] in the fifties and the obvious relationship—

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: —to the army images?

Voytek: Well, he talked about the blueprints. Susan, I guess her grandmother had done blueprints, and he just totally loved the idea that it was a record of what existed. I think he even told Billy Klüver at one point that he would like to be able to put something down, it's almost like the shroud of Christ. He'd like to be able to document it almost by its presence radiating—

Q: Really? Did he talk about the Shroud of Turin at all?

Voytek: Yes, at one point I remember him talking about that, he was saying that he would love to be able to put something on an object and when you take it off it's recorded, like a photocopy—it would record it. With the blueprints, it was almost—you had the ray of the UV [ultraviolet] sensitizing the blueprint paper and then there's a record that it was the shadow that was there.

One of the funniest things—he would talk about things that he wanted Billy Klüver to do. This is a little side thing: at one point, he asked Billy if he could make a light that projected darkness.

Q: [Laughs] Great. So some of the images that wind through under Terry, you have helicopters and a cowboy and so forth. And then you arrive at, after Bradley, tell me who Bette Vitkowsky was, and then the next panel is Darryl—Panel 45, I'm talking about.

Voytek: Yes. When I started, Darryl and Bette were working at Captiva. Darryl took care of things like painting the houses and cleaning and maintenance. Bette took care of a lot of the house goods, doing the laundry, groceries. Bob had so much property that there were a lot of things to do.



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

One of my favorite stories with Bette—Bob had really cool clothes, he bought some bright red socks somewhere. She washed the socks with a whole bunch of brand new white underwear and they came out hot pink. Bob went ahead and wore them. [Laughs]

Q: I'll bet.

[Laughter]

Voytek: But I remember Bette being like, “Oh my god, I’m in so much trouble!” [Laughs]

Q: So here you have, in that path that winds its way through these panels, fabric—apparently fabric hanging. The duck—

Voytek: It’s almost like a *Hoarfrost* [1974–76] kind of things going over—it looks like he traced Darryl and Bette with color markers, those paint markers. He also painted green on Darryl’s hair.

Q: But here is fabric—you talked about Bette being in charge of the cleaning.

Voytek: Yes, house maintenance, taking care of stuff. There seems like there’s some sort of house. Darryl’s father was a contractor and it looks like there’s some sort of building going on there.

Q: So now we’re at—

Voytek: It looks like Emil Fray, yes. Emil Fray was Bob’s in-house photographer.

Q: And married to—

Voytek: Bradley Jeffries. They lived a block over. They would walk over. Emil lived in the darkroom. [Laughs] It was a really cool Old World darkroom that had water filters and things. It

was below Bob's kitchen, in the house on the beach. It was maybe a 12-foot by 10-foot little room and he had good enlargers and he had good old equipment. A lot of the magic that you do in the darkroom, Emil was really good at. And Bob would spend time with Emil, getting his black-and-white images the way he liked. Just before I had been there, they had more photo shows than when I was there. But when we started doing silkscreens again, Emil was the one that made the first halftones for the screens. He'd set up a way to do that—and so he was very busy doing that. Plus Emil would photograph the artworks when they were done, he was just Johnny-on-the-spot photographer. He did some great photos of Bob working and doing things and documenting life with Bob.

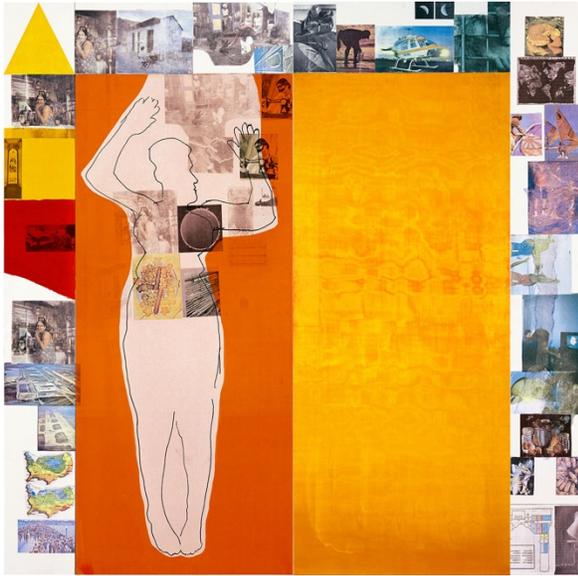
Q: Was Emil still working when Laury Getford arrived?

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: So there was an overlap of the two?

Voytek: Yes.

Q: So here we have Dora [Rauschenberg]. Were you present when he traced Dora?



Robert Rauschenberg
The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece, 1981–98 (detail)

Voytek: [Laughs] Yes. Dora would come to town and Dora was always great. Actually Bob used to tell me—I was on the payroll and he would have me distract Dora and keep Dora busy. He would actually tell me to play Scrabble with Dora. He told me, “Don’t tell Dora that I’m paying you to do this, but—” [Laughs] She was just a hoot to spend time with. She called Bob “Milton” and had all these stories. Only Dora could tell Bob off about stuff and tell Bob that he didn’t know what he was doing, and did things—like he would use old dirty fabrics on pieces. I think when the Museum of Modern Art acquired *Bed* [1955], Bob explained, “You didn’t think it was very good and it was all dirty. Now it’s in a major museum.” And she said, “Well I think a lot less of that museum for liking that.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Bed, 1955
Combine: oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and
sheet, mounted on wood support
75 1/4 x 31 1/2 x 8 inches (191.1 x 80 x 20.3 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Leo Castelli in honor of Alfred H. Barr Jr.

[Laughter]

Q: Great. And so the path that winds its way underneath Emil and then around up the side, alongside of Dora and over her head—multiple images of the United States and so forth. Any of that that you—?

Voytek: Yes—Dora, she was driving until she was in her nineties and her mind was sharp, sharp, sharp. She would always go to the same church and it was quite a drive to reach the church from Captiva. She was very grounded, Old World mom.

Q: So now the path continues along the top and then down alongside of the tracing of Janet Begneaud, Bob's sister, and underneath Janet. Were you there when he traced that?



Robert Rauschenberg
The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece, 1981–98 (detail)

Voytek: Yes, Janet would come to town a lot. Bob was very proud of Janet, the [Yambilee] Queen. It's really hard to make out exactly, but the bright pinks below her and the colors, it just has a real Janet-precious-sister feel to it.

Q: And a veil over the—

Voytek: Yes, the veil over the legs.

Q: Did you help with that tracing? Did anybody help with the tracing?

Voytek: No, no. That was Bob's hand. The only person that Bob didn't trace was himself. Terry traced Bob. But Bob traced everybody else. The thing—you talk about the army. Bob never, he

didn't want people to know that it was the army. Bradley and I talked about this, "Don't you remember Bob said never to tell anybody about the army?"

Q: What do you mean?

Voytek: Bob wanted these just to be portraits—for the viewers to go through—he didn't want their names connected to them. He wanted it unknown: this is a painting and there are people here. These people were portrayed, but he didn't want to say, "This is Darryl, this is Terry, this is Bradley." The army, to him, was—I don't know how else to describe—Hillary [Rodham] Clinton says it takes a village. This was Bob's family. These were Bob's collaborators. Bob would say he needed you. And he didn't explain why he needed these people, but he said it was his way of being able to do everything he was doing.

Q: Yes, he did put iconographic clues in.

Voytek: Well, he wanted them to be exactly who they were, portrayed. But—

Q: But instructed you not to reveal who they were?

Voytek: Yes, yes. You do the *Mona Lisa* [1503–17] and who is that woman? One time he told me about how the American Indians in [Edward S.] Curtis, some of the chiefs and different people did not want the camera to catch their spirits. I think Bob wanted to catch people's spirits.

And in some ways having the person there and tracing them, he wanted to catch their spirits, almost like a shaman would be able to get their presence into something.

Q: In Panel 52, do you know who these people are?

Voytek: Yes. I think [David] Bradshaw and his daughter. [Note: Dave and Debby Case are the subjects of this panel; the Bradshaws appear in a later panel]

Q: David Bradshaw?

Voytek: Yes. And Savannah [Bradshaw], I think, might be her name.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: He came to town with his daughter. He said, "Let's do this."

Q: Okay and now the path winds its way through the middle of the panel.

Voytek: It's interesting because you keep seeing the maps of the weather in the United States. The *News-Press*, which was our local newspaper, they'd invested in a color printing machine around probably the beginning of *The 1/4 Mile* for me. And so this weather of the day was the day he usually did the tracing of the person.

Q: So he was dating the work with the weather map.

Voytek: Right.

Q: [Laughs] Amazing.

Voytek: There's an old Eskimo saying, "Never judge a day by the weather." [Laughs] Bob, periodicals, the thing that came to him all the time was news, news was a way of checking time. Yes, you could probably track the storms at the time and the different things and what was going on. Bob was very, very tuned to nature.

Q: Well, also tuned to societal issues that were reported in the images of magazines and newspapers.

Voytek: TV set every day, yes.

Q: After the lawsuit for using some images, he stopped using topical imagery that he could co-opt from newspapers, as he did in *Currents* [1970] and other projects. Did he ever talk about the loss of that? Was that ever a loss in his mind, that now his imagery was dependent upon his eye and his photography?

Voytek: Yes, he would have liked to have been able to have everybody working for him taking photographs all over the world. He loved being able to grab whatever he liked. Also when we

were doing the silkscreens, it was black-and-white photography. He did love transferring color images because it was more information and there were more feelings and more stories in it with the colors. But he played with that definitely. But he missed, yes, being able to just take whatever he wanted to use. He kind of felt pissed that he couldn't do that.

Q: Prior to that change, he basically collaborated with every magazine, every newspaper in the world. That's a big army that he had working for him.

Voytek: Yes, that's a lot of Bob, where everything should have been available. Nowadays it seems that everybody surfs and grabs. It's one of the things where people, what's important to see—early way back when, there's a French saying when somebody paints something—this is before cameras—where they witness this and so, “This I have seen.” Where people would go into museums and they'd see this gorgeous woman and they would say, “Oh, I envy this artist because he witnessed this true goddess.” Being the witness of the specialness of something that is so important, that you're in the presence of something that is real important. It makes the artist, it puts them in such a special place. Like you talk about *The Blue Boy* [1770] and [Thomas] Gainsborough and Bob's seeing it? Bob had described that to many people when I have been around him. At one point when Bob was describing it, he was talking about how gorgeous *Blue Boy* was. I used to think, does Bob want to be the man that has this boy dressed up in silk, he's the one that is documenting this beautiful child of that time? Is that a strange concept? [Laughs]

Q: As I think about this as we talk, in a sense, Bob almost invented the Internet. It was like Rauschenberg's Internet well before the Internet was ever invented. He took images from all

over the world and made them available through his work to a multitude of viewers. He gathered material the way one can gather, one can graze through the Internet, picking and choosing and collaging, conceptually and visually, a statement—the Rauschenberg Internet.

Voytek: Yes, I always had a feeling that when I looked at Bob's work, "What's the story?" Here he's bringing the story—it's like news, where you're in front of what's going on.

Q: So here we are at Panel 53. It's [Robert] Bob Petersen. Was Bob still working—Terry was already an assistant at this point and here is a tracing of Petersen. Was Petersen teaching at Edison at—

Voytek: Yes.

Q: And so—?

Voytek: I knew Bob Petersen because when I first came to Fort Myers, I took a printmaking class with him. And Bob Rauschenberg helped set up Edison's print department. I think he helped Bob Petersen get a little ranch that was in North Fort Myers. I stayed friends with Bob Petersen. Bob stayed friends with Bob Petersen and he would come out occasionally and do things. I didn't really know that much about their relationship, but I know that Bob always loved Bob Petersen and vice versa Bob Petersen always loved Bob.

Q: So the next figure is [James] Jim Cain.



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

Voytek: Jim Cain, he was at the Edison Community College—he was the director of the music department. He was a friend of Bob’s. The openings at Edison were a real special event—Bob liked Edison, it was his “if it’ll work in Fort Myers, it’ll work in the world.” He used the gallery at Edison as a place where he could have the common man, the normal people see what his work was like. It was an experimental place. He would make all this gorgeous work out in Captiva and basically we were a closed society. There were very few people that got into the studio—collectors and friends and directors and edition houses. But the public was not allowed in.

But the public was allowed in at Edison. When Bob had these shows in town, he reveled in hearing what people would talk about his work and things. And so it was an important laboratory for him and Jim Cain was a big part of that. It was our special child, our special place.

Q: You recall the first exhibition that he had at Edison? By the way we're obviously in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, which is part of what was—

Voytek: The Edison, yes.

Q: —called Edison Community College. You recall the—

Voytek: Yes, we did *The 1/4 Mile* here.

Q: Okay, so it opened here?

Voytek: Yes, the first part of *The 1/4 Mile* opened here before me. That was Eric's work and that was '81-ish. [Note: *The First Footage of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Gallery of Fine Art, Edison Community College, Fort Myers, Florida, 1982] And then the first part that I did was brought in here and that was the first opening that I had helped with. [Note: *The Second Footage of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Gallery of Fine Art, Edison Community College, Fort Myers, Florida, 1983] That was great fun. Yes, you have openings all around the world. Most of the time you're in these really big metropolises and everybody knows Bob's work. In Fort Myers, people didn't even know what Bob looked like. The local newspaper would say, "The famous artist Bob Rauschenberg's having a show." It was real people really enjoying what was going on. It was just a real hoot.

I remember one of my favorite stories was I had an old Porsche and Bob had a white Volkswagen convertible and we had to come into town to see the show.

Q: I remember that, yes.

Voytek: I went to talk to Bob about the show and Bob says, “I’ll follow you in. We’re going to go see how things are going.” And I was driving and Bob was driving behind me and we get up on the causeway and Bob races in front of me and pulls over. He puts his windshield wipers on, spraying water over the windshield. Then he slows down real slow and I go over to pass him and he races up again. He starts doing, lights blinking on and off. And I thought he wanted to talk to me—I slowed down. I was like, “Are you okay?” He sped off. And when we get to the gallery he said, “That was a great dance on the way in.”

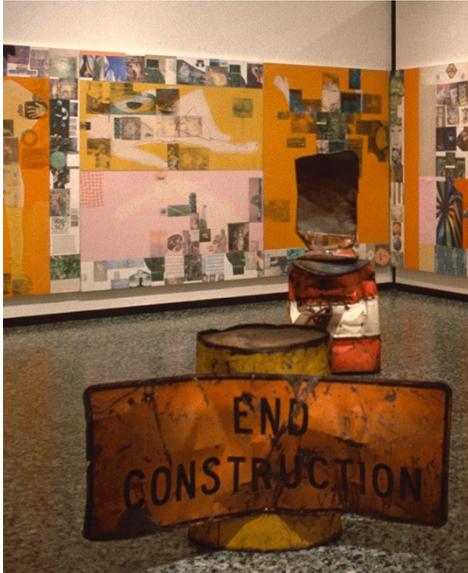
Q: [Laughs] Great story, that’s good. Here at Panel 55 you have David Bradshaw and his daughter, Savannah. So you want to rethink who—

Voytek: Well, I—

Q: Or is this not David Bradshaw and his daughter?

Voytek: So I guess I confused the ones before that? So the one, the top and the bottom, those are different people then. I didn’t really know David and his connection with Bob. He came to town

and had showed with Bob. The ones before were two people up and down. So I guess this looks—



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1998. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) (detail).

Q: So you don't know who the other two are.

Voytek: Yes, I don't know who the other two are then.

Q: Are you comfortable with this being David and Savannah?

Voytek: Yes, yes. I remember his daughter was younger than him—he was quite a strong guy, I think.

Q: David.

Voytek: Yes. He did some strange—he did art that had gunshots.

Q: Yes, right.

Voytek: Targets and different things. That was all before me and when—

Q: And Untitled Press [Inc.] published, I think, some of his work.

Voytek: Some of those. And I guess his wife, the mother of Savannah, was a dancer—Deborah Hay, isn't it?

Q: Debbie Hay was—

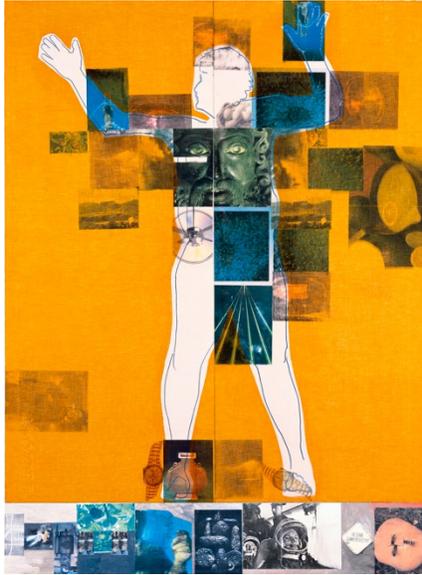
Voytek: I didn't know the history of Bob's friends a lot and I wouldn't say, "Who are these people?" I was just a guy that was there helping down below.

Q: So the path continues and then drops to the bottom. And here's a—

Voytek: There's you, yes.

Q: Yes, Panel 56 is Don Saff. Bob would joke about my interest in clocks and then ask me question after question about—

Voytek: Yes and your watches, yes.



Robert Rauschenberg
The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece,
1981–98 (detail)

Q: —the history and whatever. You can see the image is the watches at the bottom of my feet.

Voytek: And also the god Apollo.

Q: Yes, the Greek figure.

Voytek: One of the things that Bob really loved about you—and he described, before you came out for the first time, Bob told me, “Don wrote the book on printmaking.” The funny thing is when I took the course with Bob Petersen, we did use your book [*Printmaking: History and Process*, 1978]. [Laughs] So I was quite aware of your and Deli [Sacilotto]’s book. He also said

that, “Don knows everything about art on this planet.” He said, “He’s not just an encyclopedia. He’s the Library of Alexandria.” He would love hearing stories from you about the history of art and why things were made and how things were made—things like the Roman frescos and the encaustic works where you would explain how they would have their pigments embedded in beeswax, and how things that are thousand years old were still bright.

I think that Bob not being one that would study and read books, he envied you and others that could study and read. I think the stories that you told him were hardwired to him because he would tell me stories that you had told him. He loved that and he loved hearing stories of people in their studios doing things in the past. It made him feel that what he was doing, this job is a man’s world, a man’s job, “This is what I am—an artist.”

Q: He was fascinated by the likes of [Peter Paul] Rubens and Rubens’s activity in his studio, the group of people he had working around him, and his involvement in politics across Europe. I think Bob always saw himself as an extension of that on a more global basis than Rubens. So yes, he hung on all of those stories and he was—

Voytek: Yes. And to think, when I met him, I used to wonder where did this guy learn all this stuff? He learned it from the people that told him the stories.

Q: Just like any good Eskimo, right?

Voytek: Yes.

Q: An oral history, just what we're doing right now. So next to me [in *The 1/4 Mile*] is the great Lawrence Voytek.

[Laughter]

Q: Why this position and tell me about the images that surround you.

Voytek: Well yes, I'm crouched down with my hands out [see illustration on p. 42]. It's like I'm laboring. Looks like I'm about to be hammering. Working for Bob, he wanted a craftsman to do the things, he wanted things done expertly, and he wanted things done real well. In some ways, I was very, very happy being his Cinderfella, his helper down below. I spent so much time with just metals and materials, laboring at a task to keep up with what was going on. Michelangelo talked about spending too much time cutting stone and he should have spent more time with people.

The images that are in there—there's a space shuttle coming right out of my crotch. There's a rocket in my pocket. This is a strange thing—there's a baby seal. And I had a girlfriend early on, Tina, who was one of the first persons I knew that loved baby seals. I don't know how he would have known anything about that. There are some airplanes and cars. There's an umbrella.

There's numbers on the doors of a racing car. There are glowing containers. It's funny, I spent a lot of time with shade eleven welding goggles on and so glowing objects in front of me, that's something that I spent a lot of time watching. Every weld had to be true and they were. It's

almost spooky for me when I'm in front of that panel because it just seems like somehow he trapped part of me.

Also Bob would always say, "Don't talk about the magic. Don't talk about how we work. Don't tell people what things are because if you explain something to somebody, then they're going to stop looking. If they read the damn label on the wall, they're not going to look at it. They think that's what it is."

Q: Well and that's why he didn't want to describe techniques with anybody. He didn't want to discuss—if someone asked him how was that done, he'd deflect immediately because he felt that that had a deleterious effect on their ability to see the content of the work.

Voytek: He was really intense about making the work as something that visually, it was really well done. But he was also into what wasn't retinal, what wasn't seen, where it would make the jump into something more important than just an object. It had concepts that were beyond what objects just are.

Q: So now we arrive at what I would normally call the commander-in-chief of this army, but I don't know that that's applicable to Bob, as he was so participatory in all the other members of his entourage, that there was a free give and take, and not such a strong hierarchy. People collaborated; people participated in offering ideas and techniques. So he worked with everybody. He didn't just direct.

Voytek: Yes, when he was with someone that was an artist or was a helper, I think he considered everybody equals. That's a funny thing about Bob because he did think everybody was equal. But then it wasn't like that with him.

[Laughter]

Voytek: One thing when I just looked at it: his feet were flat down. He might have traced his feet and then Terry traced his body. Because he did this thing on quite a few artworks where he would put his hand down, trace around it. He would stand on something and trace around it.

Q: Right and there's the early tracing of his feet in a drawing, right? [Note: *Lawn Combed*, 1954]

Voytek: Yes. So I think he might have traced his feet. I wasn't there when that was traced, but I know that the body was done by Terry. Terry was saying that he was really nervous that he wanted it to work. Bob was happy with the way that it worked out. It does have a good Bob feel to it.

Q: The rams, you certainly see that—you see it in *Opal Gospel* [1971] and any number of works. Did he ever talk about the use of that image?

Voytek: The image of the rams and *Monogram* [1955–59] and all that stuff. One of the things—I think we talked about yesterday, I told you that I was really inspired by Picasso's *Baboon and Young*. At one point Bob had told me that he had seen Picasso's goat [*She-Goat*, 1950] and it

was in bronze. I think it was done in '51. And he said that he didn't like that Picasso had it transferred into this precious metal. And he thought that the goat made out of found objects was higher art. It did exist. It's in the Picasso museum [Musée Picasso, Paris]—but Bob had only seen the casting, which he thought took away from the magic of the piece.



Robert Rauschenberg
Monogram, 1955-59
Combine: oil, paper, fabric, printed paper, printed reproductions, metal, wood, rubber shoe heel, and tennis ball on canvas with oil and rubber tire on Angora goat on wood platform mounted on four casters
42 x 63 1/4 x 64 1/2 inches (106.7 x 160.7 x 163.8 cm)
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Purchase 1965 with contribution from Moderna Museets Vänner/The Friends of Moderna Museet



Pablo Picasso
She-Goat, 1950
Bronze
46 3/8 x 56 3/8 x 28 1/8 inches (117.7 x 143.1 x 71.4 cm)
Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund
Museum of Modern Art, New York

So that's the only goat explanation I ever heard from Bob. But I know that he loved Picasso's goat before and he was sort of thinking of it when he found *Monogram*—the goat in the window.

Q: Did you ever hear more discussion about Picasso from Bob? Did he ever say anything positive about Picasso?

Voytek: Picasso? Yes. He was all jazzed up early on because Picasso was this superhero that the world loved that was in *Time* magazine and *Life* magazine. And this was before he ever became famous—this is when he was a young artist. Picasso was the first superstar—and [Henri] Matisse—that was in publication before New York became really big and stuff. And Bob said that at one point he had bought a Seminole Indian jacket and he wanted to get it to Picasso. And there was something about Leo Castelli and some people that he knew and a person that knew Picasso personally. Bob had this jacket and the guy, before Bob even said it, said, “Oh, Picasso has one that’s even better than that.”

Q: [Laughs] Okay.

Voytek: That was some little story, that Bob never tried to get it to him after he heard that. I think he was enamored by his ability to just change all sorts of stuff. I think that he loved that Picasso would just take everything and use it.

Q: Lawrence, let’s return to Panel 52, as it is not David Bradshaw and Savannah.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: And it’s not Bradley. Bradley is in the second panel, right?

Voytek: Yes, next to Terry. Yes, Bradley really didn't want to be memorialized by being next to Terry, but that's where she is. The two of them had a lot of strange connections, I would say. They definitely weren't happy with the way things were at all times.

Q: Were any of the employees happy with Terry being around or—

Voytek: A lot of people were paranoid about Terry. Terry had this personality where he would watch everybody and supposedly record what's going on and have microphones in places. He used to have this trick where he would have his Walkman with him, he would hang his headphones around his neck like he wasn't listening to anything. And he would have the headphones in the microphone jack, he could record conversations with the headphones on his—so that was a trick that I know he did at times. [Laughs]

Q: So was there paranoia? People were aware of that—was there a general paranoia about Terry?

Voytek: Well, he liked to pretend that he was in control of stuff. I got Terry good one time. I think it was April Fool's Day and I had the—those little poppers you throw on the ground. They're cheap, they come from China, it's like a tiny little teardrop of tissue paper and it explodes when you throw them down. I went into his bathroom and I put two of them underneath the rubber stoppers where the toilet seat connects. He came down later in the day and he says, "You got me good." [Laughs]

Q: So here we are, back at Panel 52. What are the possibilities?

Voytek: Oh, yes. Well, the person on top is very tall. It might be Emil Fray. The person on the bottom is very thin—it might be Trisha Brown. I know that if Trisha was out there, Bob would have had Trisha traced. Trisha did visit quite a few times. I'm really not sure.

Q: Okay so then let's go back to—here we are at Bob on Panel 59. And as we move forward, the path continues at parachute. And then you get to—

Voytek: Go back—that's Maybelle.

Q: On Panel 60—



Installation view, *Rauschenberg in China*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2016. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981-98) (detail). Photo: Li Sen, courtesy Ullens Center for Contemporary Art



Maybelle Stamper, Rauschenberg's neighbor in Captiva, Florida, ca. March 1979. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Voytek: Maybelle Stamper. She is a really interesting person. She's an, I think, incredible artist. She lived in an old house next to Bob's print shop. And Maybelle lived like a hermit. Bob had a lot of respect for Maybelle. Maybelle, her work was kind of like Odilon Redon, very spiritual. She did these really strange portraits with faces in flowers. She was showing in New York City and she was doing quite well back in the thirties. Her husband had left her for some younger person and she moved to Captiva. She had friends and she somehow arranged that she could live in this house. Bob had always told me, "She's really a mystic, don't mess with her. Try to make her happy. If she tries to get your attention, just wave to her and smile." One night I was staying at the print shop and it was a full moon. I heard owls outside and I looked out the window and she was naked in the backyard, going through her garden or something. She'd usually never wear clothes. Later in life, when she needed help, Bob arranged that—she couldn't pay for her property anymore—that he would take care of all her bills and give her so much a month. Part of that was the maintenance of the house.

At first, Bob had me go over there. When I first met her—I was told to just yell her name, so I yelled her name. She took a tablecloth and wrapped it around her. I came in and introduced myself. She was a mystic. She knew all sorts of things about the world. She knew things; she had lots of books. She spent time with her cats and her stuff and knew things. She would always ask about Bob, what he's doing, what's going on with Bob. She never wanted to show her work. Bob had a lot of reverence for her. How he got her to come over and trace her, I don't know. But she was an amazing person.

Q: Bob eventually acquired her house and let her live there and covered her expenses until she passed.

Voytek: Yes. At one—

Q: He was very generous towards her.

Voytek: Yes. At one point, Bob said, “Go over and take care of her stuff.” So I went over and the house was old, old Florida, made out of cypress. There were cracks between the boards. There were lots of lizards inside that she said took care of the bugs. She had a problem with a hinge on her door. And I said, “Oh, I could go to Bailey’s [General Store, Sanibel] and buy a new hinge.” She said, “Oh, no, no. Could you fix this hinge?” And so I took the hinge off and re-welded it and re-shaped it and put it back on. And she was very happy that it was the same hinge.

She had her lithos [lithographs] that she used to hand color and every day that she would work on the drawing, she would write a little notation below it. Some of them were started in the forties and then she would work on it in the fifties and she would work on it in the sixties. She kept notating all the times that she’d work on it. She’d ask questions like, “What time you were born, what day you were born?” Then she had these little notebooks, she would write notes down. She would say things like, “Oh, it’s going to be a good storm tomorrow. I’m going to be picking up seaweed on the beach at night.” She grew things in her backyard. She had lots of native strange things. I had a burn once and she gave me some aloe to put on the burn.

Q: So after Maybelle there's, unlike the rest of the army or previous images of the army, you have a respite here as Bob moves into these boxes [Panels 62 to 65]. Was there a reason for the stop? Was the pause a product of what he was working on at the time that he wanted to explore within *The 1/4 Mile*? Do you recall?

Voytek: Just before the boxes, I see a 1-foot-wide gold panel that's—

Q: On Panel 61.

Voytek: Yes, it's connected to—and that was the man that Bob called in from Gemini to do this Byzantine burnished bowl clay gold technique. Why this precious gold bar is inserted right there is kind of interesting. So we got gold, then he goes into cardboard. He didn't explain why he was changing. He was not doing cardboard in his art at that time. And I'm not sure why, but at one point, he said he wanted to seal the boxes so that they would—he talked about, “What could we put on the boxes to make them more permanent than cardboard?” And we used a marine-grade epoxy that—it's a saturation epoxy that they use on boats to saturate into wood. I don't really understand why he wanted to epoxy the boxes. And then he said that he wanted the boxes to curve off the wall and he wanted them suspended in space. And I said, “Well, clear Plexiglas?” And he says, “Yes, yes, let's do it this way.” And—



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



Lawrence Voytek installing *The Second Footage of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Gallery of Fine Art, Edison Community College, Fort Myers, Florida, July 1983. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Clear Plexiglas to create the arch?

Voytek: To create the arch—

Q: Upon which to place the boxes.

Voytek: Yes, he wanted the boxes to be shooting off the wall and you didn't see how they were—and so how do you do this?

Q: Levitating—they're almost levitating.

Voytek: Well, yes. And the only thing that I could—clear plastic. I really, I don't have a clue why Bob wanted to do this. He wanted these boxes—first there are boxes on the wall and then the boxes are shooting off the wall. I know that one of the things he had us get as many boxes as we could and go to different places to get boxes. So we were frequenting different places and their dumpsters and trying to get these boxes, and one of the boxes that I thought was really funny was K-Y Jelly. [Laughs] We had many, many boxes. And he picked that one up and he says, "This is good."

[Laughter]

Q: Well, you said that *The 1/4 Mile*'s biographical, so the boxes go back to a point prior to him beginning *The 1/4 Mile* work.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: It goes back to the *Early Egyptian* works [1973–74], it goes back to the [*Made in*] *Tampa* pieces [1972–73], the prints and the clay pieces—

Voytek: Yes, right.

Q: —and even the *Cardbird* images [1971]. So he's recapturing some history prior to the beginning of *The 1/4 Mile*.

Voytek: Yes. He didn't explain that to me at all. Because I thought *The 1/4 Mile* was just where he was at, when he was at it, now he's going back.

Q: So after the boxes you have this *Glut*-like structure, which includes that wheelbarrow [Part 66]. And of course the wheelbarrow was a receptacle for a plant and so forth. Tell me about this particular piece.

Voytek: Well, that's—

Q: And it starts with “End Construction.”

Voytek: So “End Construction”—for him, he wanted it to be a bench, so it's for your end to sit down.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1998–99. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) (detail). Photo: Erika Barahona Ede © FMGB Guggenheim Bilbao

[Laughter]

Voytek: He wanted a place to sit in *The 1/4 Mile*. There is neon—it's an old TV antenna beam, the part that you sit on, it's like—they used to put antennas on things back then. And we found it at the scrapyard.

Q: A tower. It's a—

Voytek: It's a rusty steel tower and there's half-inch Plexiglas—I think it's about 1-foot wide—that is drilled and tapped and screwed to this. Below it, there's neon. There's structure inside the two garbage cans and the joke of “End Construction” is you sit on it. The wheelbarrow was an old wheelbarrow that he found and he wanted it to be coated with epoxy so that you can put water in it. The first time he showed it, he saw—in a ditch on the side of the road, they've got these water hyacinths that have purple flowers—and we pulled out from the side of the road a water hyacinth. The first time it was shown, it had a hyacinth in it. I think he always wanted to have something alive inside from the outside where he showed *The 1/4 Mile*.

Q: Now we arrive at the image of Merce [Cunningham].



Costume by Rauschenberg for Merce Cunningham Dance Company's *Antic Meet* (1958). Production still. Pictured: Merce Cunningham. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. Photo: Richard Rutledge



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

Voytek: These are a little bit different than the other ones because he didn't have the person lie down on the panel. He took fabrics with him to New York with the idea of getting certain people in the army done. So he had rolled up fabrics and he left with Terry to go to New York. He's got Merce with *Antic Meet* [1958], the chair on his back. That was a performance that Bob did—it was one of the things where Merce worked on the dance piece, John Cage did the soundtrack, and Bob was to do the costumes. Merce didn't want to know what the sound was or what the costume was. When Merce showed up to do the piece, he says, "Okay, Bob, where's my costume?" And Bob strapped the chair onto Merce's back. A lot of people loved the imagery of that and I think Bob really loved the idea so he traced the chair to go on Merce's back for that portrait.

Q: So when he went on the road, he took fabric with him for the people who weren't there. I know when he traced me that—to put it in context—he could have put me on a table, he could have put me on the floor. But instead, he put me on a press bed.

[Laughter]

Q: Though one doesn't know that, for him that context was important. That was part of the process even though no one will ever know it except for this relating—

Voytek: That gets into Bob trying to capture something about the spirit of the portrait.

Q: So the next panel is Hishachika [Takahashi] and Hummingbird [Takahashi], his son. Was that done in Captiva or was that done in New York?

Voytek: That was in New York, yes. That was done in New York. He brought the fabrics to New York and they were done there. Also these are a little bit different because now he's using silkscreens on top. They're no longer press transfers. So we mounted the fabrics that he bought to the panels and then he applied paint and silkscreen on top of them.

Q: The next section that we're looking at here, Panels 69 to 73, are stacks of books.

Voytek: The freestanding books.

Q: Tell me about that. Where did the books come from?

Voytek: Bob, he wanted books. The Captiva [Memorial] Library—and I'm not sure how he knew this, but they were canceling a bunch of books. Bob got them all from the Captiva Library. So all these boxes of books came in, Bob explained that he wants to make stacks of books. It's probably going to get to be about 10 feet tall. He said, "How are we going to do this?" So I said, "Well, we'll drill holes in the books, we'll have a weight on the bottom that we'll put the pole on. And we'll put all the books on the way you want it. Then the very top book, we'll cut a bigger hole, and the pipe that we will be running through the books will be threaded. We'll put a nut on top of it, and then that book will close and you won't see that there's a bar going through it. How tall do you want this stack, Bob?" He said, "This tall." I cut the pipe to that size. We had steel plates, 3/4-inch thick, cut for the bottom, which was more than enough weight. Put the bar on and then he went through the books and he looked at each book and we kept putting the books on until he had his composition. Then we locked it by screwing the top's nut down.

Q: Did he keep subject matters together or—

Voytek: He spent a lot of time deciding which went where. One of my favorite stories, we were showing this in Miami and there were people talking about it. People were talking about *The 1/4 Mile* and things and this woman was there. And she goes, "Mr. Rauschenberg, Mr. Rauschenberg, I'd like you to know that this is my book here." And she pointed to a book in the stack. And Bob says, "Well, it's a good thing I put it there, because nobody would know you if I didn't."

Q: [Laughs] Great, great. He did have the last word.

[Laughter]

Q: Did anybody accuse him of desecrating books?

Voytek: No.

Q: Because I did hear that, someone saying that. I know that Bob made it very clear that these books were going to be destroyed.

Voytek: It was stamped—the books were stamped “To be destroyed” or something. Yes, there was something the library did, it was some kind of stamp on them, “To be discarded,” “No resale value.” It had some kind of stamp on—

Q: Okay. Like an aging person, as time went on, the weight of the books began to make the stack shorter and shorter.

Voytek: Good compression and shipping.

Q: Right. And so what happened with that? How did you circumvent that problem? Were books added?

Voytek: I never—I was never consulted about that at all. I did notice that at times, you could see the top flipping up. That’s the way that Bob didn’t want it. Bob wanted it to look—and another funny side story: Bob did this before *Ghostbusters* [1984]. There’s a scene in *Ghostbusters*, the first one, where they’re in the bottom of a library and there are symmetrically stacked books. Did you ever see that, Don?

Q: I don’t think I’ve seen *Ghostbusters*.

Voytek: Oh, okay. [Laughs] It’s just a funny coincidence, but there are stacks of books in the bottom of this library and they think the ghost had done it—but Bob had done this before *Ghostbusters*. [Laughs]

Q: Were you at the installation at MASS MoCA [Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams]?



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, 1999–2000. Photo: Ellen Labenski

Voytek: Yes.

Q: Okay. What was it like to install the—how many locations did you install—

Voytek: *The 1/4 Mile*?

Q: *The 1/4 Mile*, yes.

Voytek: Well, I installed the sections at the Edison Gallery. I also—

Q: Ace Gallery when we had the Guggenheim show?

Voytek: Yes, at the Ace. We set it up at Ace. We also set up a part of it at the Metropolitan at one point. [Note: *Selections from Rauschenberg's 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1987–88]

Q: Right.

Voytek: That was not—the room wasn't big enough for all of it so it was a section of—

Q: And Thomas was involved in installing the work? Or—

Voytek: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Yes. So what was it like working with Bob during the various installations and configurations of the work? Certainly Ace Gallery, it went through, it wove its way through various individual rooms and back out again.

Voytek: Every time, Bob had great fun how to set things up. He kept adding stuff to it. Like Ace, I think we added the clock. Also *Jellyfish Traffic* [now Part 186 in *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, previously an independent work], which Laury Getford was involved in—*Jellyfish* is three antique stoplights. And Bob had this complicated timing system that was based on actual cams that are on real streetlight controllers, where you have a specific RPM [revolutions per minute] motor and you have a notch with micro-switches and when they rotate, the timing turns the lights on and off. Bob choreographed the three of them in this box, the sequences of the lights going on and off. That was at the Ace thing.



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

Every time he installed *The 1/4 Mile* he was there showing all the stuff. In [Guggenheim Museum] Bilbao every—because it’s such a monster, it’s so big. Unless you built a space just for it, you have to consume 1,500 feet of wall space. One of my favorite stories about Bilbao—we had everything there in the Fish Gallery of Bilbao.

Q: Right.

Voytek: There’s a big [Richard] Serra in the middle of the room [*Snake*, 1994–97]. Bob came up to me, he says, “Can you get this thing out of here?”



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1998–99. Works pictured are *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) (detail) and Richard Serra’s *Snake (Sugea)* (1994–1997). Photo: Erika Barahona Ede © FMGB Guggenheim Bilbao

Q: Well, it’s interesting you raise that because I started negotiating to have the Serras removed—

[Laughter]

Q: —which, as you know, is an impossibility. Because I was sure that Bob would not want *The 1/4 Mile*—and so they could be removed. It was organized to remove it. When I asked Bob whether he absolutely wanted it removed, he said, “No.” He didn’t mind it staying.

Voytek: I think he was joking with me. “Can you do this?”

Q: Right.

Voytek: Because 2-inch plate steel, so tall. [Laughs]

Q: But had Bob insisted—

Voytek: It could have been—that would have been an expense, I tell you.

Q: Bob spared no expense.

Voytek: Yes. [Laughs]

Q: So now we arrive at, I think, the last figure. Do you have any ideas about this, Panel 74?

Voytek: Yes, a man with a dog. Now, that was done—Bob brought the fabric to New York and he came back with it. My guess, I would say if Bob got Merce, he probably would have wanted

John Cage. The dog, I have no idea about the dog. But my guess would be John—and it looks like about the size of a John Cage. I don't know if Merce and John had a dog.

Q: I don't either.

Voytek: I don't know. I really don't know who that panel is.

I want to tell one quick story about *The 1/4 Mile* in Bilbao. So Tup and I were to work on *The 1/4 Mile*. Thomas Buehler had lined up all the panels that were unwrapped. They had to build an additional wall in Bilbao to put the last section that was the real tall panels and things. And Thomas explained that Tup and I were going to work backwards from where they were building this wall and the Spanish crew was going to start on the other side with the beginning. It was day one when Tup and I were there. The guys that were building the wall had a little air compressor with the staple gun that put 2-inch staples in to build this temporary wall.

We learned that they take two-hour lunches in Bilbao. The crew left, Thomas left for lunch. Tup and I were there. Thomas had all the panels lined up exactly where they had to go. We put probably 400 feet up with the staple gun—we put the level up, leveled it, stapled the cleats on, hung the panels up, then we left. So within about an hour and a half, Tup and I ran about 400 feet of panels of *The 1/4 Mile*. Thomas was pissed when he came back. “What the hell have you just done?” It was exactly where it was supposed to be, level and true. It wasn't really a problem until they had to take *The 1/4 Mile* down and it really f'ed up the wall because those type of staples were not made to pull out. They're sort of gummy when they go in—

[Laughter]

Voytek: —and they messed up the drywall all in that section. The Spanish crew, when they came back from lunch, [laughs] were wondering what was going on. I thought you'd like that story.

Q: I do and was there to see it. [Laughs] So now there are a number of panels, screenprints, on plywood. You have this Seminole Indian figure that shows up in the *Seminole Host* [1990] and is shown here. You have any recollections of this section?



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

Voytek: These are just real gorgeous paintings. Bob's got real nice fabrics. He said he's portraying what he was going through. But he wasn't doing works that looked like this at that time in any series. It doesn't seem like anything else—they're just really nice works. Then also his references of the fabrics and the umbrellas and the—this was all before me. It's almost like

he's tapping into what he did before, like with the boxes, and he's just making really nice paintings.

Q: So he's going back to *Charlene* [1954] and other—

Voytek: Yes, he's portraying, and the fabrics and the older fabrics with hand painting—those are just gorgeous paintings. I look at the brushwork, the big blur. That's 8 feet tall, blurred as it's going through. It's just real nice.

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Yes, it's real nice Rauschenberg. All that stuff is just gorgeous. Then now, with his big splashes and stuff, are these—

Q: On Panel 94, 95?



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

Voytek: Yes, it's starting to look like what he was doing in the *Urban Bourbons* [1988–96] and stuff. But these are still works on plywood. These are special works. He wasn't using this plywood up. It's in *The 1/4 Mile* and he was not using this plywood in any other way. This wasn't the plywood that was left over from the first *Spreads* and *Scales* that I was dealing with, I said, "Oh, we need better plywood." We bought a pallet to get a good price. And he was making original paintings on the good wood. These are gorgeous.

Q: And the imagery now in *The 1/4 Mile*, same, similar images in works like *Altar Peace*? He's playing back and forth between the works for ROCI and *The 1/4 Mile*?

Voytek: Yes, after the *Salvage* series and then he got into ROCI—all his silkscreens were fair game to make art. He was using all his screens.

Q: Eagle and the snake in this again from Mexico?

Voytek: Yes. I really like the way that the paint is going on the plywood, rather—work on panel takes paint differently than work on metals. So it's paint on gesso and it's just really elegant. Those pillows are strange, yes. That's some of the stuff that he got in Mexico.

Q: Which is in Panel 104. This construction, what did Bob ask you to do with the suspended bags? What are they filled with, what are their origin—

Voytek: It's almost like a clothesline that comes out into the room. I think he used standard pillows inside. Sheryl Pharr sewed up the fabrics and some of them were found things that he brought back from Mexico. Those are flour sacks or some—I don't read Spanish. When he went to the ROCI countries and he collected stuff from each country, we had crates come back. And this looks like a lot of this stuff they brought back from Mexico. Then there's other stuff too, just from his fabric collection.



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

Then he's got a *Copperhead-Bite* [referring to Panel 105].

Q: Now he's beginning to use images from Chile. The caryatid figure in [Panel] 106 was on the balcony of the [Museo Nacional de] Bellas Artes in Santiago. And of course the tarnish is on copper. So tell me about these.

Voytek: So now ROCI is getting into *The 1/4 Mile*. This is really, I don't understand this at all, why he did this sharp angle.

Q: Sharp angle? You mean on—

Voytek: Yes, on the copper.

Q: On the copper pieces in Panel 107, 108?

Voytek: Yes, both. He said, “I want this to come in like this angle here.” When we were doing all the works in metal, we actually bought a sheet metal jump shear to cut the sheet metal to different shapes. I think this is the only time that I can remember that he had me not have rectangles, but to have angles. I don’t understand why he did that, but that’s the way he wanted this. It angles down and up and down. I didn’t do any other angled panels out of metals ever again. That’s a classic *Copperhead-Bite* so—

Q: Panel 109 we’re talking about?



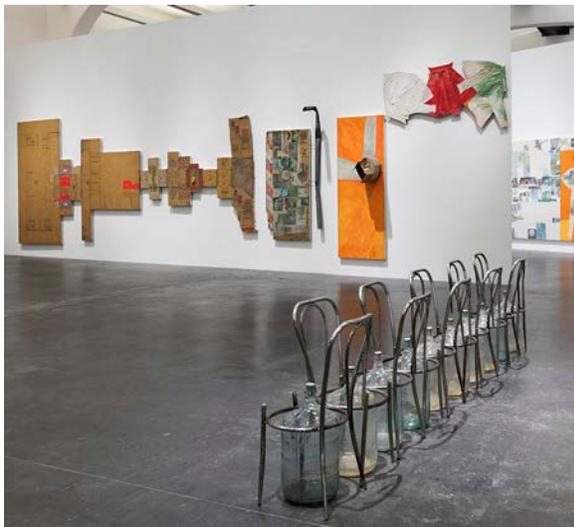
Installation view, *Rauschenberg in China*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2016. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) (detail). Photo: Li Sen, courtesy Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

Voytek: Yes. It almost looks like it could come right out of the ROCI works. It's with a brass frame and it's freestanding in *The 1/4 Mile*.

Q: How was it made?

Voytek: Those are two sheets, 4-by—looks like 4-by-8 sheets of copper. You get the copper from the mill and it has a mill finish, which is a copper oxide. Bob would have us clean and polish the metal. We used to use this German metal polish, Simichrome. We would clean the metal and polish it and then Bob would screenprint on it. It looks like he might have thrown a little bit of patina chemicals on it. I'm not sure if the time period is right, but he's got a patina going. And then mostly colored acrylic images on the copper.

Q: Now we arrive at Part 110, these chairs.



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

Voytek: Is that in *The 1/4 Mile*?

Q: Part 110 shows a series of chairs. How were they made, where were they placed in *The 1/4 Mile*? Were they in *The 1/4 Mile*?

Voytek: I remember making them. Bob had a bunch of old glass water bottles that had certain amounts of water that was in the bottom that had mildew and trash. He said, “I want them all stopped.” I said, “With what?” And he said, “Like a big cork.” We got to the conversation that, “I can make aluminum corks.” I made simple sand molds and made aluminum corks to the size to stop the bottles and we siliconed them in so this organic water stuff was trapped inside the bottles.

Actually the chairs were left over from—Bob had chairs that used to be out in his old beach house that you would sit around his table. They’d gotten really rusty because of salt spray and stuff. And actually, at one point, he wanted me to sand all the rust off and polish them up because Vice President [Walter F.] Mondale was going to be coming to town. And I didn’t want to do that. We had Lexan and some aluminum, and I designed one chair out of aluminum with a Lexan seat. I showed it to Bob and he said, “It’s great. I want eight of them for this coming weekend.” And so that’s why I made his dining room table. I remember making this piece, but I don’t remember any venue that had that in it. It’s possible that I just welded too much aluminum and I’m forgetting something.

Q: [Laughs] Okay. Did he talk about the relationship to *Soundings* [1968], the earlier work?

Voytek: No. It was pretty elegant how the size of the diameter of the rolled chrome that made the seat bottom, the glass bottles, you put the chair over it and it just fit. They were like a strange marriage. There was a sense that there were such a large number of chairs in that rusted antique condition and the bottles in their old pitted glass with something growing—it's just a very nice piece. I liked it quite a bit.

Q: We get to Panel 130 to 134. There's a sign at the bottom with an arrow pointing to all the previous work, which says, "Landfill."

[Laughter]



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

Voytek: Yes. [Laughs]

Q: And clearly a *Glut*-like approach to the creation of the work. So can you tell me anything about the objects that are present here, starting at this point with 130?

Voytek: This was from him running to the scrapyards getting—this is definitely *Glut*. It's the time that *Gluts* were happening. Also, the back panels, these are now 10 feet tall, 4-by-10s. This is the material that we used in *Urban Bourbons*. So this was what he was doing—the series of his life, a lot of this, these were the pieces and the parts. He threw that into *The 1/4 Mile*.

When Bob first started working on metals, we did the *Shiners*, then we went into galvanized sheet metal. This magazine that I used to find stuff, *Signs of the Times*, there was an ad for a company that made enamel on aluminum sheets. I ordered their cards for colors. It's .040 aluminum sheets that are pre-enameled. And they came in little business card samples. And the colors were things like Coca-Cola red, Pepsi blue, canary yellow. Bob looked at all these colors. He loved the names of them. We ordered many, many sheets, four sheets of red, five sheets of blue. They also had anodized—black anodized. One of the things that Bob liked about the black anodized is if you flip the sheet over, you would see the anodizing rounding the corner, but the center was aluminum-ish. So he often used the backsides of some of these panels in his paintings.

This was the heyday of works on metals, where we had a jump shear, we had stainless, we had galvanized, we had mirrored aluminum. We had gold-mirrored aluminum. We had plain aluminum. We had brass, bronze, copper. A lot of these series overlapped, where he would start

doing one, then he started doing another and he started doing another, then he would go back and forth to different things. Then he started throwing everything into *The 1/4 Mile*.

Q: So by Panel 151 to 155, you have this action painting and he's working on aluminum. Once again we see the Musée d'Orsay clock.



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

Voytek: Yes, this is like a *Night Shade*, where we printed with the polyurethane varnish. Bob used aluma-black selenious acid. And this is a mop—this is like a big broad head mop that he's slopping the chemicals around with and he's walking all over it. It's interesting, the red, because most of the *Night Shades*, he just used the chemical. But he's silkscreen printing on top of that after he has done the patina, which I don't think he did in *Night Shades*. But this is *1/4 Mile* so he could do whatever he wanted to.

Q: Do you think he was more flexible with the imagery and the technical approach in *1/4 Mile* than with a specific series?

Voytek: Well, I think that he didn't have to follow the rules. But yes, he said that whatever he puts in *The 1/4 Mile* is portraying what he's doing. But if he did it, that's what he's doing.

Q: And Panel 156 to 159, was it always horizontal, or could it be horizontal or vertical?

Voytek: I've only seen it shown horizontal. And it's got the big window in the center, which is pretty cool.

Q: What did he say when he asked you to construct that?

Voytek: Well, he would do little drawings. He said, "I want a panel here, panel here. I want the window in the center to go around." Oh, those are nice, aren't they? [Laughs]

Q: The "Oh, they are nice, aren't they," you are looking at Panel 173 to 177. Let's return to 173 to 177—you were saying how beautiful these works are.



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

Voytek: Yes, this was a type of galvanized metal that they call bonderized sheet. I worked with a sign painter and I found out about this stuff. If you try to paint on galvanized sheet, it's got mill oils, it's got all kinds of nasty texture, and you have to etch it before you can paint it. The sign industry sold this stuff that is a galvanized sheet, but they called it bonderized, which was it was all prepped, ready to take your paint. Bob found out that, like *Hoarfrosts*, he could run it through the press with solvent and the ink would go into the galvanized sheet. So these pieces that have these color transfers that are transferred onto a medium value gray are like on a piece of paper, but it's on galvanized metal. The colors are muted and the traces are—it has a real nice, almost seeing it through a veil look to it.

Q: Here we are, Panel 179 [to 189].



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

Voytek: So this is very much like the labyrinth [*A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth)*, 1994].



Robert Rauschenberg
A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth), 1994
Acrylic and graphite on 29 panels of bonded
aluminum, anodized mirrored aluminum and
Lexan with aluminum framing
Dimensions variable
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

We have mirrored aluminum in the back and we've got these angled at 45 [degree] windows on Lexan that he's printed. So it's like this rectilinear prism in front of this mirrored sheet. In the *Labyrinth*, he would print on the mirror, he'd print on Lexan, he'd print on Alucobond. You could walk through it. This is a unique—it seemed like *Labyrinth*, it seems like a totally unique work. Yes, that's unique to *The 1/4 Mile*, so once again Bob is doing something in *The 1/4 Mile* that is not like what he's doing in anything else. But it's a portrait of what he's doing.

Q: But he did that screen in Japan, the gold screen that he worked on based on what the audience was saying [*Gold Standard*, 1964]. Did this have a screen-like quality to it?

Voytek: This hangs on the wall so it's up in the air and it has a folded feel to it. Then it has you being reflected in through it, but since there are angled surfaces, it's a unique piece. The closest thing is the *Labyrinth* that I can think of. It was, at the time, where he was doing a lot of work on Lexan and that material was around, yes.

Q: Is the printed side of the Lexan in or out?

Voytek: Both ways. Sometimes he'd print on the inside, sometimes he'd print on the outside, so that sometimes you would see two layers of things going on.

Q: And the images?

Voytek: Well, it's from his world—that's all ROCI stuff. There's another flipping chicken, that big chicken, in various sizes. We used to have this saying that—I think the chicken has the world record for the most times that Bob would use a screen because we would always say, "Not another flipping chicken," when we'd run down to get it. [Laughs]

Q: Well, how many screen sizes did you have of the chicken?

Voytek: We had a big, a medium, and a small.

[Laughter]

Q: Isn't that the way they rate eggs? And so—

Voytek: Here's the small, in purple. Then here's the big, in yellow. I don't see the medium in this one. But if you looked at those screens—when you wash out screens, on the borders it leaves

a little residue. They had just layers and layers of colors around the borders because we've used them so many times.

Q: So now we get to this sculptural form that has numbers on it. How did this come about?

Voytek: Well, that is—

Q: Part 185.



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

Voytek: So that's a sculpture in *The 1/4 Mile*. Laurence Getford and I—I had a lot of my property up in Connecticut and I arranged a truck. And Bob said that he wanted me to bring back stuff for him too. So we had this big box truck, Laury and I drove together, and Terry Van Brunt had lined up that we went to—it was an antique salvage place that was well organized, really big. There were things that Bob had picked out. These giant steel letters were there. Also the two Pegasus that were in *Rodeo [Olympics] Glut* [1988] and there were some other things.

Q: These numbers—?

Voytek: These numbers, yes. Also, Bob did a cover of *Art in America* or *Artnews* for 1985 [note: *Artnews*, November 1987, eighty-fifth anniversary cover]. And he put the “85” from this letter collection, he was working on *Gluts* and stuff out on the deck of his studio. That was the cover of that *Artnews*. So these numbers and things came from that.



Robert Rauschenberg
Artnews cover, 1987
Color photograph magazine cover
32 x 24 inches (81.3 x 61 cm)

Now the way that he made—this is a clock. He had me buy an [expensive] clock tower motor, because he had these two *Glut*-like objects that were the hands—the problem was that they weighed quite a bit. I got in touch with this clock company, I needed to get a motor sufficient to be able to rotate hands that were that heavy. This circular disk is like a 4-foot diameter 1/4-inch plate, aluminum, that I had roll-formed aluminum outside and welded up and grounded it so that it looked like a solid aluminum disk that’s about 6 inches by 48 inches. And the hands rotate and

it's a clock. What you would use to tell what it's referencing, I don't know. But if you were to stand there, you would see that it's moving in a minute and the big one is moving in an hour.

Q: Where are the hands?

Voytek: It's pieces of metal that are on the top of the circle so that the numbers are hiding it right now. It's old signage, cranked up stuff. Then there's a smaller object inside it that doesn't touch the bigger object. The outside is the hour hand and the minute hand rotates inside of it. So you really have to be observant to notice that it's moving.

Q: So it is a clock motor though.

Voytek: It is a clock motor.

Q: So the hands are keeping—

Voytek: Time.

Q: Time. They don't necessarily relate to the numbers.

Voytek: There's no reference, yes, but it's keeping time. There's no indicators to tell—it's just two pieces of old metal rotating in time.

Q: The following section is traffic signals. Do you recall where Bob acquired those and—

Voytek: Oh yes.

Q: —how are the lights set up and how was it choreographed?

Voytek: They made a movie out of *Captiva*. This guy, Michael Mann, that did the *Miami Vice* TV show—it was called *Manhunter* [1986]. They came to town and the conversation came up and he told Bob that, “There’s a place that we buy props on Le Jeune Road, Stone Age Antiques [Miami]. They’ve been there forever. You’ve got to go there, Bob.” So that’s like, okay, great. We had this giant Dodge pick-up truck with dual rear wheels. Bob drove with Terry in their vehicle and I drove with this big pick-up truck. Bob was wearing his cobra skin boots and he had Revo sunglasses on. And we go to this place that is packed to the gills. It’s on a canal and there are three really big old buildings full of stuff—you have to walk down corridors of trash, there’s so much stuff there. As soon as we walked in, this old Miami scrap/antique dealer summed Bob up like “oh”—Terry even had a video camera. “Do you mind if I videotape him while we go to buy stuff?” So this guy’s seeing ding-ding dollar signs when Bob comes walking in. Bob bought quite a lot of stuff that day. He bought a big beat-up tuba [sousaphone] that went into a piece that was in Venice.

Q: *Orrery (Borealis)* [1990].



Robert Rauschenberg
Orrery (Borealis), 1990
Acrylic and tarnishes on brass with brass objects
97 x 181 x 23 inches (246.4 x 459.7 x 58.4 cm)
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Düsseldorf

Voytek: Yes, yes. He bought these three stoplights. He bought a shoeshine box that opened up that he made into this *Glut* kind of sculpture [Untitled, 1987]. There were some other things. When it came time for this owner of the business to tally up what things are, his son was there too. His son came out of the woodwork to do this transaction. We came in this fancy truck and so it came time to, what is this worth, what is this worth? His prices were off the charts for buying beat-up scrap stuff like this. Like the beat-up tuba, he looked at it and he said, “Four hundred dollars.” And I said, “Well, you could never get this thing to work again. The valves are all missing.” “Four hundred dollars.” And Bob’s, “Fine, fine.” And so he gets all these things. [Laughs] The streetlights—normally you can buy streetlights at fifty, sixty bucks. He’s like, “Two hundred apiece.” And so it was all adding up. Then they just wrote a check and took the stuff out. I swear I heard him giggling when we were leaving. But when you think about it, what Bob turned these works into afterwards— [Laughs]



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled, 1987
Shoeshine stand with mirror and mirrored Plexiglas
24 1/2 x 26 x 15 inches (62.2 x 66 x 38.1 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Yes, the last laugh, right.

Voytek: So back to the traffic lights—you see this aluminum box in the back. It's got cords going to it. Bob had this elaborate choreography of the three lights talking to themselves by turning on and off in a sequence that lasted five minutes or something—the way that it was done, we had the old stoplight timer motors that rotate at a specific RPM. We had these Lexan discs that were 1/4-inch Lexan cut to a specific diameter. We had micro-switches. Depending on how long the light would be on or off, you would make notches on these disks. Laury Getford, bless his heart, was called in to take Bob's choreographed time and cut all these disks so that these three lights did their light show. So when you're standing there looking at it, you hear click, click, click, and the lights go on, off, stay on. They're driven by the same motor, so it is a time-controlled piece. It's old analogue. Today, it would be a lot easier to do it with a digital timing device. But part of the charm is also hearing the motor grinding and the clicking.

Q: Well, one of the last panels is in the style of *Anagram (A Pun)* [1997–2002]. So starting from Panel 187—

Voytek: Yes and those are 144 inches so those are 12 feet tall. When we started doing *Anagram (A Pun)*, I built a vacuum table to do 5-foot by 10-foot panels. Bob got a commission soon afterwards in Seattle, the Benaroya Hall, to do a mural that was 12 feet tall by 60 feet or something. So we had to make a new vacuum table press that could do 12-foot by 5 panels. These are the big panels. The last series Bob—it's a long story of Bob developing to the point where he could transfer his color photos onto watercolor paper. This is the last part that he added to *The 1/4 Mile* that's done in this way.



Robert Rauschenberg
The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece,
 1981–98 (detail)

Q: But does *The 1/4 Mile* end with the *Anagram (A Pun)*—was there more to *The 1/4 Mile* than what I'm seeing here? What's your recollection?

Voytek: Bob never said, "I'm done, I'm finished." So if he wanted to put something else in, that was always open-ended. This was specifically made for Bilbao, I think, because he wanted to add something new to it. Actually it was coated by Tup and crated, and the coating was freshly smelly when we were opening the crates in Bilbao. There were—there was something kind of—

Q: But wait, you mean this *Anagram*—

Voytek: The last part, the 12-foot tall, yes.

Q: This part. Okay, so this was, you say, made for Bilbao?

Voytek: It was fresh off the press to add to the Bilbao *1/4 Mile* show.

Q: Okay. All right, so beyond this, what have you not seen in this annotated group of images that was part of—

Voytek: There was one thing Laury Getford had kind of reminded me of—at one point, he made this freestanding structure that we set up in his beach house on Captiva that was probably 12-foot square, that had four corners, that had bars that went across. He was hanging some of the fabrics—I think there were some *Samarkand Stitches* [1988], there were some transparent fabrics. And it almost looked like a laundry that you could walk through the—almost like *Solstice* [1968], it seemed like there were aisles. I don't think that was ever shown. He said it was going to be part of *The 1/4 Mile*. [Note: This element was removed from *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* and has never been exhibited.]

Q: How was it constructed? Tell me again.

Voytek: It had four aluminum posts in the corners. Up on the top those four posts were connected like three-prong drop-in so you would connect all four tops and then drop it into those four posts that went up. There were plates on the ground that held it in—the footprint, once it was all locked in, it was held. The top square that went around had cross-braces. That's where the fabric was hanging on. I'm not sure how we connected the fabric, if it was Velcroed or—it had some way that it would hang. With the doors opened, it would blow around. It was all pretty much—

Q: Much like *Hoarfrosts*.

Voytek: Yes, but it was inside of space.

Q: Inside a closed-off space?

Voytek: No, no, it was open. I could draw it on a piece of paper. We had this coming down and—

Q: Okay, so Lawrence is drawing a box with—

Voytek: And then the fabric was—

Q: —with cross-members at the top and fabric hanging from the cross-members. Any other objects that you didn't see here or—

Voytek: Well yes, there is the milk trough [Part 184, see illustration on p. 148]—I didn't see that. It's an orange trough that's made out of steel and that has a top that's opened up. And he had white opacifier liquid. There was a red jug—no, it was a clear jug that he put red paint in, which had a cork. Below that there was neon lighting up the floor. I didn't see a picture of that. But that was definitely shown—that was in the MASS MoCA show. I talked to an art restorer, Reinhard Bek, and they're restoring that now for *The 1/4 Mile* to go to China [note: *Rauschenberg in China*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2016]. He wanted to know what sort of coating was put on it because they have to repair some of the coating in that steel.

Q: So this trough that you're describing had a jug floating in it much like *Sor Aqua* [(*Venetian*), 1973]—

Voytek: Yes.

Q: —another reference back in time. Tell me more specifically how that was constructed and—

Voytek: That orange steel trough came from the scrapyard. It looks like it was something that somebody might have made for a pick-up truck or something. It was about 1 foot by 1 foot by 8 feet long. It was all welded up pretty neatly and on the top there was a steel lid that could close. The hinges were made out of steel; they were welded onto it. It was painted with an enamel paint. It was a shiny, glossy orange that had weathered—it had some cracks, it had some rust. Bob said, “I want to fill this with a white liquid.”

I found this material. It's used in the boat industry. It's a West epoxy that was designed to coat steel tanks. The manufacturer recommended that I sandblast all the paint off to get the epoxy to bond properly because the paint that was there had failed in some places. Bob said, "Just coat it and that should be fine." That's the sort of thing where you know it's going to fail in time if liquid sits inside of it. It's like, okay, we'll do that. It did sufficiently hold up for a while.

He did have neon—it was blue—that was mounted below the orange. The bottle, it was kind of a gallon-size bottle that has—it was a jug that you put your thumb through the ring on the top. And it had some funny textural thing going on, like it was an imitation jug—it was mold blown, but it made it look like it was more of an antique than it actually was. We had a good size stopper. Bob put liquid cadmium red Golden's acrylic in it and poured it out, and it dried inside. So it was like a ghosting of red that stuck to the oldness of the bottle. He wanted it like milk and I found this chemical, it was called opacifier. It came from a sanitation chemical supply—if you make products and you want it to be white, you add this chemical. I'm not really sure what opacifier was, but we added that to the water and the bottle was floating in the water.

Q: We'll conclude this session now, Lawrence. That concludes the discussion of *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong* for—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: A postscript—

Voytek: All right. One of my favorite stories of installing *The 1/4 Mile*, we're in Bilbao, and the big doors were closed. Bob was there, Thomas, a few others, and all of a sudden, the doors are opening. And I think Thomas starts yelling, "We're closed, we're closed!" And ex-President [James E.] Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn [Carter] come walking in. They said, "Oh Bob, we heard you're setting up your show. We wanted to see this." And they came in and we're shaking hands and talking. I knew from living with *The 1/4 Mile* that there was a picture of Jimmy Carter in *The 1/4 Mile*. While they were talking, I said, "Bob, do you want to show Jimmy that he's in this painting?" "Oh yes, yes, let's do that." We walked over, there was a smiley Jimmy Carter in *The 1/4 Mile*. So meeting a president and seeing him enjoy the work, it was just a special time.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #3

Interviewee: Lawrence Voytek

Location: Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: Donald Saff

Date: April 30, 2016

Q: It's a second session on April 30 with Lawrence Voytek. This is Donald Saff, interviewing him in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. Lawrence, *Salvage* was begun, I guess, about the time you started working for Bob, the *Salvage* series. Tell me about your involvement with that project. Did you start with that project?

Voytek: It was one of the first things that—Bob said that he wanted to set up silkscreen on Captiva and he was going to use his own photography. I built a vacuum light exposure table. I built a screen-stretching table and we set up a room with Rubylith windows to coat the screens. Larry Wright came from New York to explain how we should be doing silkscreens. We set up production to make screens. We bought clear fir 2-by-4s at two thousand board feet at a pop and started ripping the wood for the silkscreen frames. Emil Fray, Bob's photographer, made the halftone negatives—Bob picked his photographs to be made into screens. Some of them, I think, were from his earlier photography.

Trisha Brown got in touch that she wanted Bob to do the dance costumes for *Set and Reset* [1983]. Bob got this gossamer silk-ish fabric that—he wanted it so transparent that you could see the body through the images. We had made up the first batch of screens and Bob—since the fabric was so transparent and so thin, when you screenprinted on it, a lot of information went through and would print on the table behind it. He immediately didn't want to lose any of that so

he put rolls of canvas on the table. This is where the name *Salvage* series came from for the paintings. The *Set and Reset* costumes were the genesis of doing the prints. *Salvage* came about because of what was happening. He turned those into paintings. He also did do silkscreen prints on top of the gossamer prints that were below it and so it had stuff that was really sharp and stuff that was not so sharp.



Set, costumes and lighting designed by Rauschenberg for Trisha Brown Dance Company's *Set and Reset* (1983). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo © Beatriz Schiller 2013



Robert Rauschenberg
Fabric for *Set and Reset* costumes
Silkscreen
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: This bolt of fabric that's been printed, 83.E013, that is salvaged work?

Voytek: No, that is the fabric that Bob sent to Trisha Brown's costume designer. They made Trisha Brown's costumes for *Set and Reset*—

Q: But this is his—

Voytek: —out of that fabric.

Q: This is the screenprints.

Voytek: These are screenprints on that really transparent—

Q: Okay, so this is not the material below—

Voytek: No, this is—

Q: This is the actual—

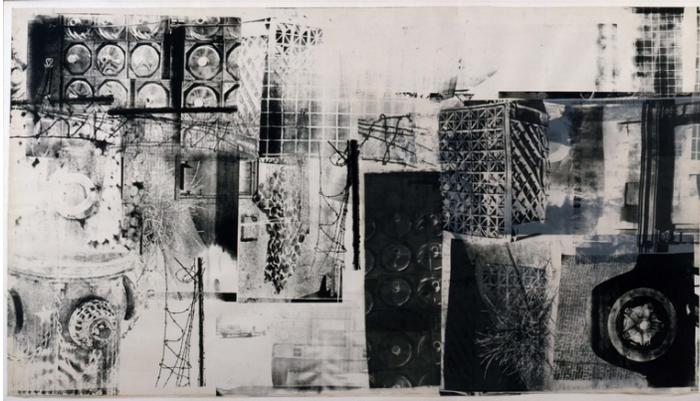
Voytek: This is what was made for the dance costumes—

Q: Okay.

Voytek: —and this is a *Salvage* painting.

Q: Okay and what number is that?

Voytek: 83.042 [Untitled (*Salvage*), 1983].



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (Salvage), 1983
Textile ink and fabric collage on fabric-laminated paper
60 1/2 x 108 inches (153.7 x 274.3 cm)
Private collection

Q: Tell me about that.

Voytek: The ghostly images in the background are the stuff that was underneath. Then Bob took the screens that he had in-house—then he did do silkscreen prints on top of the ghostly stuff so that the traces that were left by the salvage—and this is another *Salvage*, where he started doing colored screens on top of some of the things that were left over from the silkscreen.

Q: That's 84.017 [*Porcelain (Salvage)*, 1984].



Robert Rauschenberg
Porcelain (Salvage), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
34 x 89 1/2 inches (86.4 x 227.3 cm)
Private collection

Voytek: I believe this is still in the—works on canvas from that period, they were called *Salvage*. He had made enough dance costumes for Trisha so there was quite a bit of that stuff—and some of the *Salvage* series, he would put linen-backed paper down, not only just canvas. This one is on canvas. I think this one is on linen-backed paper.

Q: Wait, 84.017 is—

Voytek: Is on canvas.

Q: And—

Voytek: The 83.042, I think it's on the linen-backed paper. He just—when he first started doing Trisha's costume fabric, he saw how much came through and he said, "This looks good, I want to save this." Right then and there, every time we were making—he made a big roll of this fabric to make the costumes. It was 50, 75 feet long or something. He did like the bleed-through. Also the thing is, he was concentrating on making it fit on the bolt of fabric and he didn't give a rat's ass about what was underneath until he pulled it up. It was a composition that was chance.

Q: I know when he worked on the *Airport Suite* [1974], he printed on a lot of cheesecloth and then used what was below it as part of the work. He would then turn the cheesecloth around and position it against—and so he was—

Voytek: Back and forth.

Q: Right, reversing it. Yes.

Voytek: I think when they sewed up the costume, some of that was happening. The fabric was a little bit better than cheesecloth. It was a silk-ish material, the dance costume. The thing that was elegant is you could see nipples, belly buttons, outlines of the figure, if you were staring through the fabric while they were dancing. Trisha said it's like dancing with nothing on, almost like a negligee, it was so revealing.

Q: Who did the stage set?

Voytek: *Set and Reset*—Bob did a drawing. It was one of those little tiny drawings. This is probably around actual size. It was maybe the size of a business card. He said, “There’s a three-sided triangle on one side and a three-sided triangle on the other—and there’s an inverted swing set inside this rectangle in the middle. I want it covered in fabric. We will project black-and-white movies on the shapes. I’ll make a collage of the movies.”

Q: Okay, we’re looking at 83.D059.



Robert Rauschenberg
Set and Reset, 1983
Printed and photographic collage, acrylic,
and pencil on illustration board
16 x 16 inches (40.6 x 40.6 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Voytek: I think that this is Bob's plan for the set. He's also holding a model that was jiggled-up real quickly with wood dowels.

Q: By?

Voytek: We did it. I did it.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: Then I said, "Okay Bob, how big do you want this thing?" He said, "I want it so that the pyramids and the rectangle that has the inverted swing set in it is 11 feet tall, so-and-so wide." It ended up it was 36 feet across and 11 feet high. It was made out of ultralight aircraft tubing.

Terry Van Brunt said, "Let's make it real light." I had to make a custom jig to cut the angles for

the corners. We used clevis pins so that we could break it down into sections so it could be transported to the dance performance. Then we mounted Velcro onto the aluminum tubes and the fabric was some NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] fabric that's—it's a nylon that is very silver on one side and it's a high gain screen, but it is quite transparent. If you were to project on it, the light would make shapes and where the shadows were, you could sort of see what was projected behind it. It almost looked like it was projected on a cheesecloth or something, but it was brighter because of the high gain of that fabric material.

One of the funny things was Trisha Brown had the piece, the first performance was on some great big giant stage. Trisha's next performance was going to be at Tampa, at a smaller theater that had a smaller proscenium arch. Trisha called Bob up, I was in the room, and she said, "Oh Bob, could you make a smaller *Set and Reset*?" He said, "How much smaller?" She says, "Instead of 11 feet tall, let's make it 8 feet tall. I've got to do it on a smaller stage set." So I quickly made an 8:11 scale copy of the first one.

Q: Who screened the images on, Bob and Terry?

Voytek: On the costumes?

Q: On the set.

Voytek: Oh no—the set just looked like giant silver shapes—

Q: Oh, just the fabric with the projection on it. Right, right, right.

Voytek: With—yes. The source for—I don't know where they got these films, but they were old black-and-white film airplanes flying into barns, cars skidding and crashing. It seemed like science educational films. There were 16 millimeter projectors and they hung in the wings around the piece, projecting at various angles. Each film was the same length as the dance piece. I guess Bob worked with somebody on how the films were cut up. One of the cool or special things about seeing *Set and Reset* at BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music], the opening, was you heard the movie projectors running. You could see them up in the wings, shining down like spotlights. The way that the dance started—and it was designed into the piece—was they were on the ground, the movies started, the music and the pieces started to lift, and the dancers came in from out of the wings and danced underneath the floating shapes. Laurie Anderson did the soundtrack.

Q: Did she come down at any point to see the stage set and production?

Voytek: No, Bob was traveling. I made the stage set when they were gone. Then when he came back, this little photograph—Emil Fray photographed out in a landscape—then after it was made—it was a race because we had to make it within a certain amount of time. I made all the pieces and the parts, and then I sent the aluminum frame that broke down with instructions on how to put it back together again. It went up to New York and they applied the NASA fabric there. I never saw that down in Captiva. Later the NASA fabric came back to us and we had

made another *Set and Reset* because the traveling one had gotten so beat-up. This was after Bob had died.

Q: It's a third set?

Voytek: I made—

Q: You made the smaller set.

Voytek: I made the big one and then I made the smaller one. Later, after Bob had died, Trisha was traveling and the smaller *Set and Reset* got so banged up that they could no longer put it together and they had me make another one. We used a different type of aluminum tubing because the ultralight stuff was a little bit hard to get and I used anodized boat tubing. I think that they didn't have to worry about the weight because they had enough strength in their cables and it was easier to make it out of heavy material. But that was something I did after Bob died, during the three-year period I was still working for Untitled Press.

Q: Did you help print any of that?

Voytek: We also had to make new fabric and Laury Getford and I got the original screens sent back from New York to Captiva. We made new fabric because the original dance costumes were falling apart. We have pictures of the fabrics that Laury and I made. We made a little bit extra

too. I think we made 75 feet or 100 feet of it, just so that they had enough to make the costumes again.

Q: Are you saying that you and Laury screenprinted?

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: You both on the squeegee?

Voytek: Well yes and Phillip [Woods] was helping and washing the screens out. It was a team effort to redo it. We did not—

Q: Well, what was the decision on where each of the images would go? What were you using as a guide?

Voytek: We kind of felt like Bob [laughs]. We saw—we had source photos and I was there in the beginning and so we just filled the fabric up in a similar fashion.

Q: What did that feel like?

Voytek: Oh, we had fun. It was great, it was gorgeous. It was—

Q: Did Phillip help as well?

Voytek: Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Did Phillip do any squeegeeing?

Voytek: I think everybody had done a little.

Q: Who's everybody? Who are the other everybodies?

Voytek: Matt Hall was there and Jonas [Stirner] was there.

Q: That's great.

Voytek: It was very nice. Then, after we did it, we set up clothes lines outside with clothespins and they were drying out in the sun, blowing in the wind. It was very nice.

Q: Is that what is being used currently for *Set and Reset*?

Voytek: Yes, yes. Yes, the costumes. I think the big *Set and Reset* structure is too—because they used it in so few venues—it still goes together.

Q: Good.

Voytek: John Torres came from Trisha Brown's to make the new small one—he was the one that brought the pieces and the parts, and he stayed until it was done. It happened really fast. He brought the containers that the first one traveled in. We made the new one and put the new parts in the travel containers and he left to go to the show on time. It was a race.

Q: Could you describe the *Bleacher* series [1988–91] and tell me whether you had any involvement or—?



Robert Rauschenberg
From the Bleacher Series: Chinese Tree, 1988
Manipulated black-and-white Polaroid photograph on
aluminum
27 1/2 x 20 inches (69.9 x 50.8 cm)
Private collection

Voytek: Yes. Well Bob—the dealings with these companies—Bob had something to do with Polaroid and the big cameras. They had so much film left and they wanted Bob to do something. Bob had played with Polaroids before in the past. He knew of—if you didn't put the sealer on and put bleach on it, it would be taking away from things that weren't sealed. It was erasing the Polaroid, in a way. It also made this really nice metallic kind of interface, where it didn't take everything away. Have you seen that in the *Bleachers*? They kind of look like silver prints or

something. Then when he said, “Okay, this looks good,” then we coated the whole thing with that weird pink liquid that Polaroid sent.

Q: Was the fact that it could be bleached foreknown? Or is that something that Bob or you or a combination came up with?

Voytek: I didn’t know of that. I think Bob knew of it, but he didn’t tell me. It looked so Bob-ish to take a big paintbrush of the sealer and [makes sounds] and then let it dry and then throw the bleach on it. Also the way that the bleach was applied, he could do things where he would paint the bleach on it and then hold it up and it would be dripping down. The bleach would drip and bleed. There were different marks, splatters and the hits of the bleach that had made a real elegant mark.

Q: Did you mount the images on aluminum?

Voytek: There was a company that had a heat laminate press that Polaroid used then and we sent them out. We used milled finished aluminum sheets. They laminated the *Bleacher* to the aluminum. I made our aluminum frames that they dropped into. I had the sizes that the *Bleachers* were and then I glued those in when they came back.

Q: Do you know whether Polaroid approached Bob or did Bob approach Polaroid?

Voytek: I don’t know.

Q: Were they shown at Pace/MacGill [New York]? Is that where they were exhibited?

Voytek: I think Peter [MacGill] had a good show of them [*Robert Rauschenberg: New Pictures*, 1988].

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Yes, I think Peter was around at that time. Peter might have been the person that contacted Polaroid and lined all that stuff up.

Q: Peter MacGill.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: Right, okay.

Voytek: Great guy, Peter MacGill.

Q: The *Urban Bourbons*.

Voytek: *Urban Bourbons*. We'll get a picture of a classic *Urban Bourbon*. We were working on various metals for long times—and I was always searching for new stuff—here's an *Urban*

Bourbon, 88.010 [*Cuban Mix (Mezcla Cubana) / ROCI CUBA*, 1988; this painting is not an *Urban Bourbon* but was made using the same techniques].



Robert Rauschenberg
Cuban Mix (Mezcla Cubana) / ROCI CUBA, 1988
 Enamel and acrylic on mirrored aluminum, stainless, and galvanized steel
 84 3/4 x 132 3/4 inches (215.3 x 337.2 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Bob was doing the *Shiners*. Bob was doing the *Galvanic Suite* [1988–91]. I found in *Signs of the Times*, which I got monthly, and they advertise in it products that if you're a sign maker you buy. There's an ad by this company that's called Wrisco [Industries] aluminum and they were selling 4-by-10 sheets of prepared aluminum. When Bob did the first *Glut*, that [*Yellow*] *Moby Glut*, that yellow pile that was in the scrapyard that was originally made with this type of aluminum where I would—if I had a gas station I could order my colored aluminum and do my signage on this material. When I ordered the color samples, it was little business card sized pieces of colored aluminum. On the back they had the colors and they were like Coca-Cola red, Pepsi blue. And these were American standards. So that if you had made a rack to put your cases of Coca-Cola on, out of this sheet metal, it'd be the same red. Bob liked the look of it and it was a good size, a good gauge. He ordered a ton of that stuff. I guess he got drunk on it [laughs].

Q: Looking at 88.010, what were the processes that were used for the images?

Voytek: Silkscreen on enamel on aluminum. What came with Wrisco—not only was it enamel on aluminum, they also had brushed anodized silver and black. They had gold and silver mirror, which was actually silver and gold anodized bright finish. We did get some other anodized aluminum sheets in a smaller size that was 3-foot by 2-foot. That stuff was made for the trophy industry, where they'd make trophies and you would cut things that would fit inside the trophies and you'd bend them. They made red, blue, green, and black anodized that was different than the Wrisco aluminum. Sometimes Bob had some of that stuff in the mix.

When we were doing the *Shiners*, I bought 4-by-10 foot sheets of stainless, I had to drive it to town to have it sheared to size—it cost money. I said, “Bob, we should have a jump shear so that we could cut it to any size on Captiva.” We bought a real nice jump shear that was 5 feet wide so you could put your 4-foot sheets in. You jump on it and it cut—like a big paper cutter.

When we had the *Urban Bourbon* materials—during the day Bob would tell me the sizes and the colors. He'd have little drawings. And he would give us the sizes, we would get everything cut and laid out on the big table during the day. After dinner, when the wild things came out, he would go over to the studio. He had all the silkscreens that he had from the *Salvage* series and then the ROCI screens and then Bob would start working. Bob would do lots of things where he would print in a color and then he would dry the screen off, then he would print in a different color, the same image slightly off register so that you'd have vibration from the color below. It gave it a more dimensional look that—there were things like that. A screen that was a black-and-

white screen was, normally you would print in black so that if he printed in white it looked like it was solarized—if you did that on a black panel. The way that he went back and forth with what is positive and what is negative was all in his bag of tricks. He also—on *Urban Bourbons*—this one doesn't have it. Every once in a while he would do a big splash of color and get texture and things going beforehand and then do—

Q: You mean his underpainting?

Voytek: Yes. He did do overpainting, but a lot of times he liked to start—he was funny like this. He'd have panels on the table and he had Golden in quarts, in the liquid form. What he would do often in these splashes—he would shake up a full quart. This was high quality liquid acrylic. Depending on the pigments it could be fifty, sixty dollars for a quart and I swear, he would wait for somebody to go walking across the room because many times, all of a sudden, swack! You would have paint go across your back or on your side. It'd be on the wall and it could hit a painting that was hanging on the wall.

Q: Fantastic.

Voytek: Then he would do mess-around stuff. Sometimes he would have the liquid pools, he would throw heavy-bodied blobs, he would take things and move the paint around, he would take rags and rub off stuff, he would drop things on the paint and pull it off. He would f- around with this little cosmos of colors. When he wanted it, he would take a heat light—acrylic paint dried too slow for him so he had me make these heat lamps, which were drying bulbs. They were

high UV—I would buy them at Bailey’s and they were 500 watts each bulb and we had six of them on a cantilever arm.

Q: Buy them at Bailey’s. What’s Bailey’s?

Voytek: Bailey’s was a hardware store on Sanibel.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: I think what they were originally for was, people would put them in their bathroom and they would take a shower—

Q: Oh, heat lamp, yes.

Voytek: —then you turned it on and you could dry off under a nice warm lamp. We had these heat drying things. I had a bar that stuck across, it was made out of aluminum, and I had weight on the other side so that we could cantilever it way over on the table. He would roll it right over the painting, drop it down low, and you would see the paint steaming from the heat drying them because everything happened too slow for Bob. He wanted it dried as fast as he could.

Q: Well, when he splashed the underpainting on, what was the waiting time before he could put his screen image over it?

Voytek: It would depend on how big the puddle was and how big the blob and how much stuff was there. But usually within an hour and a half or so. There were also times when he would come over and touch it and it wasn't dry yet and so there were his fingerprints and stuff moving around and—

Q: All right. How long would it take to do a painting?

Voytek: Start to finish?

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Well that's—we had this real big table and it was the 12-foot by 24-foot. In a standard night there would either be a real big, big, big painting—sometimes you would do a 24-footer— or there would be five, six littler paintings. He would get started on the underpaintings of stuff and start drying those while he's working on other ones. And then, when something was dry enough, he'd start screenprinting on it. We did a lot in a night.

Q: A big 24-foot—

Voytek: Could be done—

Q: —painting in a night?

Voytek: —in a night yes, yes.

Q: Or four or five smaller works in a given night?

Voytek: Sure, yes.

Q: How often were the days between—

Voytek: Working?

Q: —the start of a work and the finish of a work, if ever?

Voytek: Well, Bob was a workaholic. Actually at one point I worked seventy-five days in a row, no day off. We just worked.

Q: No, but I'm saying in terms of completion time, was there any point at which Bob would let a work go because he wanted to think about it? Or was the trajectory straight ahead and—?

Voytek: That was pretty rare. He'd go through the night and then next day—he'd get up a little bit late, he'd have a nice lunch. Terry was pretty good about Bob's health, making sure that Bob ate well. Also he made sure that Bob was taking vitamins and getting exercise and doing stuff like that. I was on the same page with Terry, where we wanted to keep Bob so interested in making art that he wouldn't be drinking too much. That seemed to work—if he was having such

a good time, he wouldn't be that much of a bad boy, and he liked working better than anything. If he wasn't working, there was something wrong; things weren't right in his world. The most important thing was to be in the studio working. He would get really upset with me if there was something that was slowing him down or something wasn't there.

One time I remember—I had done a lot of Super 8 films when I was in RISD and I had a camera that had time-lapse. I said, “Bob, could I hang this up in the rafters and just let it run through a night?” He says, “No, I don't want the camera remembering anything. You remember it.”

Q: Okay, I'll—[laughs] very good. I'll ask the question again.

[Laughter]

Q: How often did he begin a work and finish it in subsequent days?

Voytek: Most nights, the works that were there, we would lay everything out—I would leave and I would come back in the morning—most of the time every work was finished on the table. Tup, who was working with me, would already have everything cut out for the frames and I would start welding. We would glue them down that day and Bob would tell us before I left what he wanted to work on the next night.

Q: Meaning the screens would be—

Voytek: That day.

Q: —taken out of the racks and—

Voytek: Well, we would screenprint and then wash them out, put them back in the racks.

Q: Right, but when he planned the evening's work, he had already selected the screens?

Voytek: No, no. That all happened—when it came time to work, he would usually throw some sort of cosmos of stuff going on or screen right onto something. He normally had a world of something going on and then he would have that thinking look on his face and go to the books where we had our images of the screens that were in our collection. Because he would—I wouldn't say see things in what was there, but he kind of had a feeling about what he thought it needed. The way that we had our Golden's acrylics, instead of having colors, he had numbers on the jars. He would say, "Get me screen Mexico forty-two," and somebody would run down and get the screen. Bob would say, "I want sixty-two," and we would grab that quart of paint and stir it up real well to get ready to print. It happened fast.

Q: So all the screens were not in the studio at the time.

Voytek: They were stored below us, yes.

Q: And someone was running back and forth as Bob—

Voytek: Up and down, yes, yes, yes.

Q: —looked through the books, picked out an image—

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: He went down, fetched the screen—

Voytek: Yes, fetched the screen.

Q: —brought it up—

Voytek: And it was like Johnny on the Spot.

[Laughter]

Q: In other words it wasn't preconceived in terms of having all the screens up there.

Voytek: No, no.

Q: It was developing screen by screen?

Voytek: It was—Bob, he would say, “If I knew what it would look like, why do it?” When he did these puddles and splashes and paint things that were really thick and then you would print on top of it, that would be hills and valleys that only the top hills would catch the paints and then there’d be windows where paint would not touch anything. There were times when he didn’t like the way that things were working and he would throw another splash, take a rag, rub—scumbling into the texture. He might take a white and rub across a dark zone and change the value of it that way. It could be with a color rather than—so the wrestle started.

Q: Wrestle started, okay.

Voytek: He was in charge of this world in front of him. The amount of focused attention that he brought to each piece was what he thrived on. The ideas and the possibilities—if he was working with wood in the brain, you would have smelled the smoke. He was thinking—and he was running on jet fuel.

Q: In the late eighties, BMW was producing Art Cars and, I guess, approached Bob. And so began the *Beamers* [1988]?



Robert Rauschenberg
Art Car—BMW, 1986
Silkscreened decals affixed to BMW 635-CSi
Collection of BMW AG

Voytek: That was a really cool time. With that magazine, *Signs of the Times*—and this was before the BMW project. I had showed Bob that the technology was coming up where they were doing vinyl wraps. 3M was the company that was actually one of the leaders in that. They were printing on vinyl. You could advertise whatever by putting vinyl on your vehicle. You see all those wraps of cars and stuff where you own a company, you send them your digital files, and then you could print anything on it. If you had a dog wash business, you could put pictures of dogs being washed on the side of your van. Are you familiar with that stuff?

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Okay. In this *Signs of the Times* magazine, Bob knew of—I was like, “Look at this, Bob! You can put your pictures on cars. We could send them stuff.” So when the BMW project showed up—Bob decided he wanted images from the Metropolitan. He wanted just black-and-whites. He wanted the car to be very elegant. It was not a racing car; it was a luxury sedan. They contracted a company that did do vinyl wraps. The kid that they sent was good—because often what that industry did was—if you were going to wrap a specific car, they had already computer mapping of the shapes of all parts of that car. You could order the car with the imagery the way that you want it. Most people did a wrap of a car. They did the entire car. What Bob did was really unique. He just made images, a ton of images. This kid came that was with his squeegee that you burnish the image down. And Bob said, “Oh, put the [Jean-Auguste-Dominique] Ingres on the door, right here.” The kid would hold it up and Bob would go, “Oh, a little bit farther forward, little farther back. Right there, put it right there.”

Q: You said Ingres?

Voytek: Yes—old-timey artists.

Q: Okay [laughs].

Voytek: He also did incorporate some of his own black-and-white photographs that were made into the vinyl wraps. I think in the Guggenheim book [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, exhibition catalogue, 1997], they said silkscreen on the car. But Bob vinyl wrapped the car. The kid did a great job—or the man, I should say—he did a great job. Because they have little tiny oval holes where the vents are, where the windshield washer—he had to meticulously cut and fold and roll each decal so that it would fit. If you were to buy the custom cut ones, that would be all prepped. So he had a lot of hand work to do.

Q: Where was the car when—?

Voytek: Oh, this was crazy; this was nuts. Bob's old studio—I don't even know why, but Bob wanted to work in his studio, which was an old piling building, the old, round, creosote pilings. The building wasn't really well made. Bob said, "I want the car in the middle of my studio when I do this." Gus Landl, his contractor, had to make this elaborate wood platform that was structural enough that the car could be put on it. They hired a big moving crane that builds buildings to come down to the end of the road. They put the car on this thing, these were

professional riggers—their job is moving houses and stuff like that. They lifted the car up on the platform, put it on the porch. They had to take the railing off of Bob’s studio and they put it on the deck and they opened the doors. Darryl’s father, Dick Pottorf, came over to look at the building and he told Darryl, “I do not want you underneath this building. It’s not structural enough.” And they did temporary pole jacks on the floor joists to reinforce where I was working below Bob during this project. The funny thing was they lifted the car up, they got in position. The big platform was in the air. They had a movie crew there and somebody suggested, “Bob, would you get in the car and drive it into the studio?” Bob gets in the car and windshield wipers start going— [Laughs]

Q: In the studio?

Voytek: No, he’s sitting out on the platform—

Q: Right.

Voytek: And so, it’s like, is he going to put it in forward? Is he going to put it in reverse?

[Laughter]

Voytek: Horn beeping, lights going on and off, and Bob drove the car into the studio.

Q: [Laughs] Great story. Okay, were you involved with the *Photem* series [1981/1991]?

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So the *Photems* began in '81 and Eric Holt worked on it. You were saying that Peter MacGill was involved.

Voytek: Yes, I saw a lot of pictures of Eric working in the old studio. Bob laid out his photographs in—it was one of the first times that I saw this not a rectangle shape. Eric got sheets of aluminum, laminated the photograph to it, and the aluminum was cut to follow the shapes. And then the frame was made to match that puzzle shape on the *Photems*. Later on they needed—I guess they were editioned and they needed more, so I made some later on. But I wasn't involved in the genesis when they made the first ones.

Q: How did you laminate the images to the backing?

Voytek: That was done by the same laminator company that did the *Bleachers*. They did it on full sheets and then I cut it to the shape.

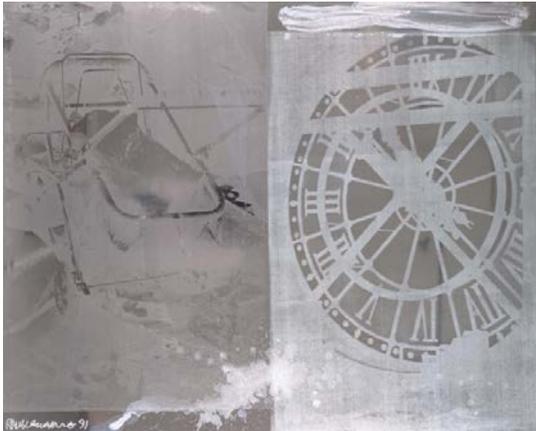
Q: Okay, so you didn't do the lamination?

Voytek: I didn't do the lamination. There was something about—this guy had—it was what Polaroid used to laminate the big Polaroids. It was connected to the Polaroid people. That's how they were done.

Q: Were the *Phantoms* [1991] done at the same time as the *Night Shades*?

Voytek: The *Phantom*—well they might be because he had a lot of overlapping in different series. The *Phantom* was funny. The *Night Shade* started first and to do a *Night Shade* we bought mill-finished aluminum. I bought .040 4-by-10 sheets. I would clean the aluminum because when you buy mill-finished aluminum, it goes through processing and there's usually oily wax on the surface. If I were to throw the aluma-black on it, it would bead up, and it would resist it. So I actually bought aluma prep, which is, I think, a phosphoric acid. That, you could clean the sheet and you knew by the way the water wouldn't bead on it that it was open clean aluminum. Then Bob would silkscreen print his two-part polyurethane varnish where he wanted his images. Then when we—came time to doing the selenious acid, it would—if he did it full strength, it went black as soon as it touched.

One day I came to work and Bob had taken some of our mirrored, anodized aluminum sheet and printed with the pure polyurethane varnish on this mirrored aluminum sheet. Bob wanted to blacken it. I said, "It's not going to work, Bob. It's anodized, the anodizing seals the aluminum." He said, "Well, I kind of like the way you can't really see it." So he started the *Phantoms*.



Robert Rauschenberg
Time Scan (Phantom), 1991
Acrylic on mirrored aluminum
49 1/2 x 61 inches (125.7 x 154.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: I see. So he thought he was making *Night Shades* on the—

Voytek: He thought he was doing a different variation on a—

Q: —anodized aluminum. Couldn't do it and then liked what he had seen.

Voytek: Yes. There's not that many *Phantoms*. I think twenty maybe—I don't know.

Q: Okay, so following *Night Shades* and *Phantoms*, you have *Waterworks* [1992–95].

Voytek: Wow, cool. Yes, well this is a fun chapter of Bob's life. I saw in *Signs of the Times* magazine this ad. It was this company in the Netherlands that made—it was to make four-color silkscreens. It would do it in a computer, the four-color separations. Without having to make the halftone negatives of each color. It would make a screen directly with a—I think it was some kind of a laser. It made pretty good size screens. They're like 40-by-60s or something. Even

bigger. Bob, back in his early silkscreen days, he had some four-color silkscreens in it, like Kennedy and there was a helicopter. There were a few of them that he made. They were really expensive to make. You had to do it in a darkroom lab with lenses and filters, which with the chemistry and the whole process—it was expensive back then in the sixties. If you were making a product like a movie poster or something, you would separate the colors of the screens and then print it. Four colors on top of one another. It would look like a color photograph.

Bob saw this ad or article that you can make four-color prints and Bob said, “I’d love to be able to splash four-color photographs anywhere on a painting. Let’s look into this.” It was all digital brand-new stuff. I’m not a digital tech guy and I called on my good friend Laury Getford, who was helping Bob do some video and stuff. Laury had gone to RISD and majored in video. Bob said, “Yeah, let’s call Laury up and see if he’d want to be in on checking this thing out.” Laury came in and they lined up that Laury would fly over to the Netherlands and look at this machine, which I heard was about the size of a school bus and cost a half a million dollars. It didn’t come to fruition. I’m not exactly sure why. I think Bob was trying to trade art in lieu of the machine or something. Also Laury was skeptical of having a high-quality machine like this out in Captiva. At the time we didn’t have the big studio. We were working out of the small studio. Laury, he pulled this one out of a hat somewhere. He knew about the Iris printers that were doing high quality color prints.



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

I think Graham Nash was involved with doing black-and-white photographs with the Iris printers and Laury had a lot of background in various print processes. There's a process where you do prints on gum bichromate. It's on plastic sheets, a sticky substance that sticks onto plastic sheets, and then when you print your ink sticks to that sticky substance. It needs that to stick it to the plastic. They were making things like lightboxes for movie theaters, where you would have fluorescent lights behind it. You would print up your poster, light it up, and you would see the image through this lightbox.

Laury made a proposal to Bob that he could transfer these digital images. I think originally they had sent away to have some of Bob's files made onto these materials and then Laury made the first samples. Bob liked it so much, he decided he wanted to invest in this expensive Iris printer. At this time Laury was hired because Bob is like, "I want to do this." As far as I know the people that were making the Iris printer were making this for publications to make high quality prints. But the idea of transferring it onto high quality artist papers was Laury's baby.

The *Waterworks*, we did that in the print shop on Bob’s old trusty Grasshopper transfer press. The press bed is 37 inches wide by 8 feet long. Bob would put a piece of high quality watercolor paper down and instead of using the toxic blanket wash solvent, he would brush water on the paper, put his printed plastic image so that the printed side was facing the paper, and then run it through the transfer press. You peel it off and there’s a gorgeous transfer. It was also not the whole thing because it was dependent on where the wetness was. If Bob brushed a painterly zigzag across the paper—if it was a picture of a chicken, you’d only get what was wet, what was in the zigzag transferred.



Robert Rauschenberg
Peekster (Waterworks), 1992
 Inkjet dye transfer on paper
 31 1/4 x 22 1/2 inches
 (79.4 x 57.2 cm)
 Private collection

Q: Did Bob approach this new method for ecological reasons or for the reasons that you suggested, to be able to put a color image anywhere on the canvas or on the support? Or both? Did you hear him discuss the ecological aspects of it?

Voytek: Yes, that came up a lot. I believe Laury was the one that realized how safe this was and how good this was. I don't think Bob said, "I want to do something green and safe." This harkened back to Bob doing early transfers where you used a solvent—like Dante's *Inferno* [Dante drawings]—and you rub it, you burnish the ink out of the paper into the fine art paper. To be able to print his own image on a large scale and then transfer it wherever he wanted, it's so Rauschenberg-ian, this was a gift of technology that was laid upon his table.

Q: This is when Laury Getford became full-time involved with the—?

Voytek: I think Laury was strapped to that machine for quite a while. The nature of scan—Laury was doing computer scans a little bit before that. The system of taking Bob's 35-millimeter color slides, scanning them, and then getting the proper color—now when you're transferring and you watch these things laying their drops of ink on it, they go down in layers. There is a little bit of a translation between the way that the print looks when it comes off the press and the way that the transfer looks when you transfer it because the layers of ink are absorbed in reverse order. The colors that are scanned and the amount of information and how Laury could read the colors to make it look like the color photograph was a complicated thing, to really get it to look right. Bob wanted it to look like a really good color photograph. He didn't want the colors to be wiggled out in any way. There was a lot of research and development on Laury and Bob's part—and the thing that was kind of cool about this is Bob is there watching the press and things. He's the machine that takes this and figures out how to put it down.

Q: Was the ink archival?

Voytek: The beginning—this is like making good books, but the book should be closed. We realized that these were works on paper with—and at that time the industry was not making sustainable pigments because it wasn't into the high-end art market yet. You'd be doing big color C-prints [chromogenic prints] if you're going to be doing good color photographs back then. The digital age of printing at such a high resolution, at such a scale—the Iris printer was like a two hundred thousand dollar machine. People were paying good money to have prints made on this machine. It was the best inks possible at that technology. Since we knew that you put UV light on certain things, you're going to have fading, we always had UV Plexiglas as a glazing system for those works.

Q: Yes. Well, a C-print wouldn't be any less fugitive.

Voytek: Yes, yes. Making things that were color that would last, that would—it took a little bit of time before they started to do these encapsulated, pigmented inks for the supposedly seventy-five year inks and the archival inks. Laury kept abreast of the technology and how that was changing.

Q: Did Bob collect bicycles for his—?

Voytek: *Bicycloids* [1992–94]? Yes.



Robert Rauschenberg
Bicycloid II, 1992
Bicycle with neon light and aluminum base
90 3/4 x 72 1/2 x 24 1/4 inches (230.5 x 184.2 x 61.6 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Well even before *Bicycloids*. What lead into the series of *Bicycloids*? How did it develop and what was your involvement?

Voytek: Well, my wife at the time was doing a lot of neon. Bob had done a photograph that was in his photograph collection from back in the *Salvage* series [note: *Charleston, South Carolina*, 1981]. I'm not sure if it came from Boston or something, but it was a bicycle shop. The bicycle owner took an old bicycle, mounted it up on his roof and had neon mounted on it so that you would see this. I knew of this photograph and Bob used it a lot. We had talked about wouldn't it be cool to see that neon lit. Bob had an old bike that was called the *Rocket* [/ *ROCI USA*, 1990].



Robert Rauschenberg
Charleston, South Carolina, 1981
Gelatin silver print
13 x 19 inches (33 x 48.3 cm)



Robert Rauschenberg
Rocket / ROCI USA, 1990
Neon tubing and quartz light on bicycle, mounted
on aluminum base
54 x 74 x 24 3/4 inches (137.2 x 188 x 62.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Wait, he used that image in—

Voytek: Lots of times.

Q: Well, certainly in *ROCI USA*, I think.

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: I think it was from Boston. Don't quote me on that, but it was an American signage thing. We talked about it would be cool—I knew of this neon artist, Jeannine Goodison, in Fort Myers that was making my wife's tubes. Bob, the first bike that he had was out on Captiva. It

was called Rocket. It was a red bike and it had a headlight on it. I'm not sure where that bike came from originally. We had bomber bikes that we'd ride around, but this bike was more special. It was a nice bike from the fifties.

Q: What is a bomber bike?

Voytek: Balloon tire bikes because of sand. Big one speed Schwinn old bikes. We would ride to the house and the studio on these bikes. But Rocket was a nice bike. I don't know who bought that. Terry might have bought it, somebody bought it. For the Guggenheim retrospective Bob said, "Let's do neon." And he wanted the tubes all white. [Note: *Rocket / ROCI USA* was first exhibited in *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991]

The first one, it was just this red bike. I brought the bike to Jeannine—we had the photograph. She made up all the tubes and I mounted all the tubes onto this bike. He wanted a polished mirror base that the transformers were hidden in. At the time they were the big brick transformers, the old style—they weren't the electronic transformers. They were the ones that if you get a shock, you can't let go of it. Ten thousand volt transformers. When you do neon, you calculate the length of the glass for the size of the transformers. It's a DC [direct] current. It comes in one way, goes through the tube. There's an electrode on each end. When the current goes through it the high voltage makes the gas glow brighter. I think there was over 100 feet of neon on that first one.

Q: But you just didn't put the neon on there. You had to prepare the bicycle obviously.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: So how did you—it couldn't have any movable parts, right?

Voytek: No, no. I would sneak—little TIG [tungsten inert gas] welds on the chain. I'd weld the chain to the sprocket. I'd weld the sprocket to the frame. I'd weld the handlebar—so nothing could rotate, nothing could move. The tires were taken off. Neon tubes were mounted to tube supports where the tire would be. They were half circles, so that one would come from one side and one would come from the other side. The way that I made the stand, it was 1 foot by 1 foot by the length of the bicycle. It had four 1-by-1 aluminum posts that ran up to the nuts at the front tires and the rear tires. I ran my GTO [gas tube only] wires up through those posts to the tubes.

Q: Who positioned the pedals? What position—was that a random—did you make that decision?

Voytek: Well, when Bob wanted more bikes—and we did buy more bikes—he was really adamant about—he wanted to capture the way the person had set the bike up. If this was your old bike, the height of the seat, the tilt of the handlebars, you fit it to your body. Bob wanted us to nail it exactly as it was when we got it. He didn't want us pedaling or moving or riding the bikes. When it came in, he said, "Make a bike out of it," everything stopped exactly the way it was. Bob didn't turn a crank, Frank.

Q: Very consistent. Where did you get the bicycles from?

Voytek: Well, this is a fun story. Bob says, “I want antique old bikes.” I went in search of antique old bikes. On Palm Beach Boulevard [Fort Myers], there was an old antique shop that had been there forever. It was one that was full of stuff. I went into this antique shop and there was, I think, eighty-something bicycles hanging upside down from inside the shop. I asked the guy, “What’s the price of this bike, what’s the price of that bike?” He says, “I’m only going to sell all the bikes in one lump sum.” I said, “Well, what do you want?” He says, “I’m going to be buying a new pickup truck. I want twenty-four thousand dollars.” I was looking and I said, “Can I take Polaroid pictures?”

[INTERRUPTION]

Voytek: So I had my Polaroid camera and I took just the room shot and I took a couple of really sweet bikes that there—there were some really nice old bikes. Aluminum-frame bikes, there was a wooden frame bike. There was one from like 1890 that had a bigger chain sprocket than standard sprockets. There were some real collectible bikes there. I think that if you were a bike dealer, you probably could get your money out just selling the bikes. So I happily went back to Bob, I showed him the Polaroids, and he said, “Buy them.”

I lined up a box truck and I drove to this guy’s place with a check. No, first he wanted the check to clear. I got him a check, the check cleared, and then I rented a box truck. It was a 24-foot box truck. I had to go twice.

Q: Really?

Voytek: We went there, loaded up the bikes in the back, drove it to Captiva, and then I went back to get the last ones.

Q: How many of those were used? How did Bob select from that? Did he use them all? Did he use some of the—?

Voytek: No, he—we had a show at [M.] Knoedler [New York, *Bicycloids, Urban Bourbons + Eco-Echo*, 1993] and I think we had almost a dozen there. Some went to [Galerie] Jamileh Weber [Zurich, *Robert Rauschenberg/Darryl Pottorf*, 1993]. I think three went to Jamileh Weber. Then later when he did the Mercedes-Benz commission, the *Riding Bikes* [1998], two bikes that were in the Renzo Piano–designed fountain.



Robert Rauschenberg

Riding Bikes, 1998

Two bicycles mounted on stainless steel posts with neon lights

73 x 82 x 26 inches (185.4 x 208.3 x 66 cm)

Daimler Art Collection Stuttgart/Berlin

Q: Did you go to Germany for the installation?

Voytek: Yes. I went to Stuttgart with Thomas to work with Mr. Botnar. It was a neon sign company in Germany, Neon Botnar GmbH [Stuttgart] that made all the tubes for Bob's Benz commission. Because they're very German, they wanted the tubes made in Germany rather than have the tubes made in America. Also I must admit they were the nicest neon tubes that I have ever worked with. The precision was like laboratory glass. They would do right angle corners on their tubes, and cut and fused and fire-polished. The way that they bombarded them and the purity of the gases, there were no signs of any contamination. You have mercury in some of the tubes and the amount that is present and how it's—these were the brightest, cleanest burning neon tubes that I've seen in my life. They sent real nice neon color boxes to Bob from Germany, from this factory. It was his color chart of all the different glass and gas possibilities. Neon burns red, argon burns like a blue-white. You can use xenon, but that's a different animal. We just had argon and neon. Bob did things like—most of the time, you want a warm color, you use a warm color glass behind it. Bob did stuff like—he had a dark blue glass and he wanted red gas through it. So normally you don't do that because you would put blue argon through a blue tube to make it more blue. And so he had some complementary things going on that was contradictory to the neon industry. But he did some of that.

Q: How many bicycles did he send over?

Voytek: I think there's a dozen—and maybe the first one, *Rocket*, which was in the Guggenheim retrospective, might be thirteen. [Note: In addition to *Rocket / ROCI USA* and *Riding Bikes*, there are nine *Bicycloids*.] And the two that went to Germany, that was a sculpture with two bikes facing upwards. That was going to be outside so I took great pains—Bob wanted the bikes to be bikes, but anything that was not sustainable, we tried to make it as sustainable as we could. Stainless-steel handlebars, stainless-steel spokes, stainless-steel rims. We cast the seats in a nickel alloy so they weren't plastic anymore. There was a headlight on one of the bikes that had a lens on the top and they actually wanted to use a type of xenon bulb that was in the current Mercedes-Benz in the headlights shooting up. So I had a nickel casting made with heat tempered lenses that looked like the ones that came off of the bikes. We used the original bicycle lights as molds to make those headlights. They were thicker wall thickness and stuff, but from the outside, it looked like what came on the bike.

Q: Where was it exhibited and how was it installed?

Voytek: It was in the Potsdamer Platz [Berlin] outside the back of Mercedes-Benz headquarters, in a fountain that Renzo Piano designed. That was lined, I believe, with black granite. They knew that the bikes were going to be shooting out of the center. I had a high grade stainless pipe that was, I think, 2-inch outside diameter, 1/4-inch wall thickness that they ran the wiring through, underneath to an access point on the side of the fountain. I made fittings that fit on these stainless-steel pipes that the electrode wires came through. The transformers were pretty far away, but there's a way of running high voltage from a distance and all the precautions for doing that, we did, so that they could maintain it from outside the fountain rather than have to deal with

it right underneath the bikes. Most of the time you put the high voltage transformers close to the signage. But you can run it differently.

Q: Were there any questions about safety issues?

Voytek: At that time, no. I think that something happened where—when it got so cold that the pond froze, I don't—I had seen photos of the pond frozen. They did have this German, “*Achtung*, look out, high voltage” kind of sign. I think somebody stumbled out there and might have broken a tube or something. There was worry that somebody could get electrocuted. I don't know if the bikes are still outside. This was just something that I kind of heard through the grapevine. If Thomas told me, it would have happened—I just heard that there was talk of moving of the bikes inside because somebody could get hurt.

Q: In '93, the suite *Off Kilter Keys* [1993–94] began.

Voytek: That was another thing that I found in my research of material. One of the magazines I got every month was called *Architectural Record*. *Architectural Record* informed you of architectural processes and materials that were new. Reynolds aluminum came up with a multi-laminate panel that was called Reynobond. Reynobond had .040 aluminum with a thermal plastic core and then .040 aluminum. The exterior surface was covered with a high quality polyurethane that was a baked polyurethane. It looked like piano keys. It was a nice satiny white. This stuff was made to skin high-rise buildings. You would have an aluminum frame system that—it's a type of barrier when you build—architecturally it's a skin that—it's not a vapor barrier, but it's

sheathing that drains and weathers. This was the first month that Reynobond introduced this material and they had a picture of something that looked like a hospital. It was all white and real clean with really clean minimal edges.

You could make a nice structural building and then sheathe it with this Reynobond and then it looked like a refrigerator. I ordered a sample of it and when it came they also did signage with it. In it, it described that you could take a special router bit that they sold that was a 45—and it had a flat on the nose so it wasn't a 45 to a point. You could rout a groove on the backside of the panel and then you could just easily fold it. The outside .040 aluminum with the polyester coating would elegantly bend. So Bob—this is a good example, 93.077 [*Score XII*, 1993] of an *Off Kilter Keys*. I think that I said that the Reynobond, Bob thought, looked like piano keys. I think that's where the title *Off Kilter Keys* came from. He saw this little sample and this little drawing—you fold this, you fold that. I took the little sample and I did rout it and he folded it and he says, “All right, let's order some of this stuff.” He ordered a full skid, fifty sheets. 5-foot by 10-foot sheets. I think the first batch, they were close to three hundred a sheet. That was with a discount because we got a full skid.



Robert Rauschenberg
Score XII (Off Kilter Keys), 1993
 Acrylic and enamel on aluminum
 88 x 60 x 7 1/2 inches (223.5 x 152.4 x 19.1 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

The company was, “Why are you doing this? What is this for? How did you know about us?” I said, “Well, we’re going to make art with this stuff.” We got this material, it showed up, Bob loved it. Also one of the things that this solved too, for me, was whenever we were working with sheet metal, they would have like an oilcan where they would fold and bend and it wasn’t flat, flat, flat. This stuff was dead nuts flat, flat, flat. Bob started just taking pieces of paper and he had them—I think they were pretty close, proportionate to what a 5-by-10 was. He would fold them and he said, “All right, I want this shape.”

Q: Starting off with sheets of paper.

Voytek: Sheets of paper.

Q: You would fold it and—

Voytek: Yes, an innie and outie. He calculated it all out. I think it might have been from Black Mountain days with folding stuff. If we were going to be making a fold, I had to set up a fence. I had a bar of aluminum that I could clamp onto the table and I set my router so that it would be exactly at that depth. We would mark the lines on the backside of how he’d want it folded. We would make the grooves, but before we folded it, he would paint the zones that he wanted painted.

We had this paint—that was left from an earlier series—when we had to paint the galvanized sheets, like the pieces from Cuba. We bought 1 Shot sign painter’s enamel and we painted the galvanized sheets with this sign painter’s enamel. This was before we got the pre-prepped stuff for *Urban Bourbons*. 1 Shot sign painter’s enamel is a gorgeous paint. It’s made for painting signs. Lasts five years guaranteed outside. There is lead in the paint. When you put it on with a good quality brush, it levels and floats and becomes a really nice enamel paint, the best I’ve ever used—it’s good for hand lettering with the squirrel hair brushes.

Bob would have the zones that he wanted folded, we would paint the color that he wanted with the 1 Shot sign painter’s enamel, and then he would silkscreen print on those zones. After the prints were done, we would fold them, I would make frames so that they would go back towards the wall. The tops and the bottoms were enclosed so I would have to make my aluminum frame taper in and taper back, I put hanging brackets on the top. There would be caps because Bob didn’t like it if you hung the piece and you could look down on something that you would see the structure. On these we would have Alucobond caps on the top and the bottom to hide the structure that was behind it.

Q: Specifically on 93.077, how was that done? It seems like it’s standing off the wall on the bottom.

Voytek: Yes, it’s hanging on the wall. There’s a hanging bracket in the back and it probably comes off the center of the painting. And the thing is, since we’ve got two grooves that are folded in front of us, when you fold a groove, you’re getting angles from what’s left over

because they're not perfectly parallel. It's on an angle—you've got a kitty-wonka-kilter thing going on with these wings.

Q: So that's the off-kilter for the keys.

Voytek: Yes, that's where you're getting your off-ness.

Q: Yes.

Voytek: He came up with many, many, many different ways of folding innies, outies. He did Xs that came off the wall. He did corners where the piece would hang in a corner. He also did corners where it would go towards the corner, then it would fold out and then fold back to the wall, so that there was a column on the inside of the corner. He came up with lots of shapes and forms with the Alucobond. The Alucobond played a big part later when we started laminating papers down—I used that as my panel too, when we were doing the *Anagrams (A Pun)*.

Q: Did the company ever see how the material was used?

Voytek: We bought a shitload of Reynobond. I had many years of conversations with people that I never met that liked me a lot because I bought stuff that was expensive. I think that they all had interest and they would tell me things, but I never really had any documentation that—I did keep all my letters and communications in files out at Captiva of the samples and the tests and stuff like that.

Q: Did they see how the material was used? Do you know?

Voytek: I don't really know.

Q: Okay. Were you present when the *Shales* [1994–95]—you were working, but were you present when the *Shales*, the wax pieces, were made?



Robert Rauschenberg
Splayed (Shales), 1994
Fire wax and transfer on canvas
48 x 36 x 1 1/2 inches (121.9 x 91.4 x 3.8 cm)
Made in collaboration with Saff Tech Arts, Oxford, Maryland
Collection, Ruth and Don Saff

Voytek: Yes. Gorgeous, gorgeous stuff. In some ways you were my biggest competitor, Don. You came with these great ideas—and a lot of that was your knowledge of art history and what the Romans had done with their encaustics way back when. Like the portraits from the Met.

Q: The sarcophagi—fan portraits.

Voytek: You want to see how colors hold up in time. Not too shabby. It worked really well that technique.

Q: Well, around the time of the *Shales* you had the *Quake in Paradise*. Of course I remember seeing it on that island in Venice, which had to be one of the more extraordinary aesthetic experiences I ever had in my life, coming up by boat to see that on the island. [Note: *Robert Rauschenberg*, Monastero Mechitarista dell'Isola di San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice, 1996]



Installation view, *A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth)* (1994) in *Robert Rauschenberg*, Monastero Mechitarista dell'Isola di San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice, Italy, 1996. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Voytek: And that storm that night.

Q: Yes, that's right.

Voytek: The water rising in Venice.

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Thomas Buehler was really good at getting us on Bob's boat. Because of the weather, they weren't going to use public transportation to get people there that night.

Q: This follows the printing on Lexan that was in *The 1/4 Mile*?

Voytek: No, no, I think *Labyrinth* was before.

Q: Was before?

Voytek: I think the genesis of throwing that part of *The 1/4 Mile*—the Lexan came from the *Labyrinth*. Bob had printed on Plexiglas and—before, *Opal Gospel* and things like that and the *Revolvers* [1967]. Having a transparent thing was not that new. In the *Labyrinth* we had sheets of Reynobond as white panels, we had mirror panels, and we had transparent panels.

Bob, the way that he wanted the *Labyrinth*—he wanted to be able to set the *Labyrinth* up differently every time it was shown. He designed the elements so that they'd be free-standing, so that the simplest element would be two panels and that's an L. I came up with a way that we could bolt the panels together on the top and the bottom and lock them in position. We had Ls, we had Xs. You had Zs kind of things. It was all right angles when they were mounted together. I had to make the plates depending on how Bob wanted them to go. You also had Ts, where two panels would go one way and you had another one to go through. Bob wanted it so that you could put them together differently. You would decide if you were going to have an X—you put

the X on the floor. It had stainless steel, 1/4-inch plates that had pins that were aligned to holes that were indexed on the corner of every panel. Up on the top you had a matching plate that was made out of 1/4-inch stainless that was tapped and threaded so each plate would lock the panels together from the top. We also had feet that we were able to mount to the bottom and you could screw those feet down. You could put it together in many ways with many combinations of transparent or mirror or white paintings.

Q: Who was to decide the configuration?

Voytek: First time we showed it was at Bob's studio. He set it up and Bob—"Put this one here, put that one there, and over here, over there." The next time we showed it, it was in the Edison Community College gallery and Bob was all over it. "Put this one here, put that one there." He liked talking about setting up a show. He loved the game—because that just took the room as a whole piece of the puzzle. He played with the entrances reflecting on the mirror and what you saw first. When he showed it in the lagoon [Venice], he had that one image—it was the stripper bent over in high-heeled shoes—so that the monks could see it when they walked up. It was the first thing they saw.

[Laughter]

Q: What he called—what—the hoochie-coochie girl?

Voytek: Yes.

[Laughter]

Voytek: When he was able to, he did decisions of how it was to be set up and how the shapes went. I helped set it up in places—like at ARoS [*Robert Rauschenberg, On and Off the Wall: Works from the 80s and the 90s*, Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark, 2006]. Bob couldn't go to ARoS. I was given the shape of the room. I set up the way the pieces would fit in that room. I talked to David [White]. “What do you think, David?” “We think this might be nice here.” I had the footprint of that room and I had proportional pieces that I could move around. I came up with something and, “What do you think, David?” And David liked that. When it came to the installing, I think there was a little bit of a change at one point. David, Thomas, and I agreed that we should move this over there rather than—but it was pretty much how I set it up.

Q: But it was participatory. In other words, Bob gave you the latitude, with David and Thomas or whoever was there, to set it up the way you thought best and within the constraints of a given room.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: That's correct.

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: The *White Paintings*, going back, could be painted by specific other people, but not necessarily Bob. And then you end up with *Synopsis Shuffle* [1999], which seems like an extension of all of that—

Voytek: Yes.

Q: —where the configuration of the final work is always different and based on the other people and the location in which the work is installed.

Voytek: One of my—

Q: Did you install it in Italy?

Voytek: Yes and one of my favorite—

Q: Were you there when it snowed?

Voytek: Oh Don, I set it up with Thomas Buehler on the deck. I was in Ferrara almost two weeks. [Note: *Rauschenberg*, Palazzo dei Diamanti, 2004] It was a great, great install. It was strange because Thomas—Thomas was very organized and he said, “You’re going to be installing with this guy who doesn’t speak any English.” I was like, “That’s fine.” He said, “He’s only got one arm.” “You’re joking me, Thomas,” I said. “No, he’s got one arm.” This man, he was a soccer player, maybe 6-foot-3 or -4. In perfect shape, like a Greek god with one hand that

was like a vice grip. We would carry panels and I would have my two hands carrying these panels and he would carry it one-handed. We'd be twisting and turning and he never slipped. Always like a vice grip, holding exactly where it needed to be. We just communicated with nods. I was the one that was going up and down on the ladder and screwing the screws on top and screwing the screws on the bottom. But this man did an incredible job working with me, installing it.

But I was not privy to the opening. I had to leave and the morning I had to leave I was on the plane. I saw it snowing on the tarmac, tears welled up, I wish I could've seen it. Bob told me the story of how beautiful it looked. He told me of this elegant woman in black with a black umbrella walking through it as the snow was coming down during the opening. Art can really be an important thing.



Installation view, *A Quake in Paradise (Labyrinth)* (1994) in Robert Rauschenberg, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, Italy, 2004. Photo: Christopher Rauschenberg

When I was installing it—it was funny, I was in the middle installing it and I had these cordless guns. I was inside and there were mirrored panels and white panels, and I put my tools down and I got lost. I wrote a letter to Bob that night that I was lost in the gap between art and life.

Q: [Laughs] Good. Very good.

Voytek: I loved Ferrara. That was such a nice city. Those squash pockets, that ravioli they make with the squash when it's in season. It's like a pumpkin filling. Did you ever have that?

Q: Many times.

Voytek: Gorgeous.

Q: Too many times.

Voytek: Oh yes, yes.

[Laughter]

Q: Bob had a show at the Gagosian Gallery in SoHo [New York]. He showed *Vydocks* [1995] and *Reefs* [1995; note: *Vydocks and Doubleluck*, 136 Wooster Street and *Reefs*, 65 Thompson Street, *Robert Rauschenberg: New Paintings*, 1995].



Robert Rauschenberg
Dormer (Vydock), 1995
Acrylic and graphite on bonded aluminum
97 x 60 3/4 inches (246.4 x 154.3 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Robert Rauschenberg
Voyage (Reef), 1995
Acrylic on mirrored bonded aluminum with electric lights
109 x 48 x 16 1/2 inches (276.9 x 121.9 x 41.9 cm)
Private collection

Voytek: Yes.

Q: Do you recall that exhibition? Did you help set that up?

Voytek: Yes, the *Reefs* were really weird. What the *Reefs* were, we—Bob had some pieces that had mirrored aluminum early on that the mirror had problems with. A lot of that stuff was this trophy mirror that we used to get. Eric Holt had some stock of it. It was not a really, really good mirror. During my time other companies started copying Reynobond and they were making multi-laminate metal panels. There was a company—I think it was Mitsubishi—that made a mirrored laminate panel that was a really nice mirror. I showed Bob samples of it. “Oh yes, yes,

let's have some of that." I used some to repair some older works with this material. But we had a pretty good amount of it. Bob had this idea for the *Reefs*. He did a painting on this high quality mirror that had really thick acrylic underpaintings and it had silkscreen images put on top of it. There were 4-by-8-foot and he wanted bright light shining down from above and bright light shining from below so that the raking bright light would catch this paint that's on the mirrored sides.

It was open on the front and the back. I originally thought because of heat that I would use fluorescent and Bob hated the color of the fluorescent. He says, "I want something really, really bright." I put two 500-watt quartz work lights in mounted to the tops and the bottoms. I had to use a glass that was heat-tempered to handle the temperature of the hot white lights. I also had to mount exhaust fans to try to keep the insides of these boxes cool enough. Those were a problem because of the amount of electricity each one drew, like 15 amps, so we couldn't have two of them plugged into one outlet at a time. The electrician had to run a separate cord to each *Reef* from the electric box to be able to have enough electricity to drive them. The first time we showed them I think there were nine of them in that room.

Q: They were lined up—

Voytek: Yes and no—

Q: Were they meant to be lined up?

Voytek: Yes, he wanted them like that and there were no room lights. It was just them sitting there glowing with this intense amount of light. Now I told him that it's not really good to have high UV light shining on art—and he goes, "It's just hitting it from an angle and this is fine."

Q: Bob said.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: I see.

Voytek: Well one of the troubles of the *Reefs*—there's mirror laminated on all surfaces and Bob wanted it as thin as possible. He didn't want it 1-inch thick. He wanted it 1/2-inch thick. I had to do a lightweight aluminum structure, 1/2-inch thick, and I was running pretty high amperage wires up through the side panels to get to the top lights. The way the wires ran through that was a real pain in the ass. To make them so that they would be true and square was another pain in the ass. But they worked out pretty well. They're hard to photograph and it is a bear that they use so much energy and it is—why mirror, facing themselves, hard to see with a beam of light. He wanted a beam of light. They're kind of mysterious.

Q: We'll end with that for this session. Thank you.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #4

Interviewee: Lawrence Voytek

Location: Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: Donald Saff

Date: May 1, 2016

Q: Let me just say it's May 1. We're continuing our conversation with Lawrence Voytek. We are here in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. Lawrence, yesterday you were talking about *Waterworks*. Why don't you continue your observations about that and the following—

Voytek: All right, the *Waterworks*. It's sort of the real turning point near the end, where we're leaving silkscreen. Bob was enticed by the idea of doing four-color separation silkscreens. Laury Getford, my good buddy, was called in to look into that. It's interesting, I saw an article in *Signs of the Times* magazine about this machine. Bob said, "Oh, I'd love to be able to have color images anywhere I could splash them down." Funny thing, I was talking to Bill Goldston about it, on the phone in my little shop area—I called him up and I said, "Oh Bill, there's a computer machine that makes four-color silkscreens. You don't have to make halftone screens and there is no film." Bill got all upset. He said, "The computer will never be better than film. Film will always be better. There's more information. You'll never get better than that." It ended up that the digital world changed everything and it did get much better than film—we have cameras in space that can read license plates. The digital world is better than film.

But the change that happened with *Waterworks*—Bob went back to doing transfer. Laury found out that this gum coating that was on this plastic film would dissolve—it's water soluble and the computer printer puts little tiny dots of ink onto this gum. You take a piece of paper and you put

the paper down in Bob's press, which he called Grasshopper. He would take simple water—he'd have a high quality watercolor paper—wet the paper. If he wet the whole paper, it would transfer, but if he just did a big brush stroke or something, it was only where the water was which would dissolve the gum, which would let the dots of ink soak into the paper. Paper is hydroscopic. It wants to absorb water. The pigments go in with the water.

One of the gorgeous things about this—printers are getting better and better all the time. You look at them and you'll be lost in the detail. But when you looked at a transfer, what you see is, the water melts the gum and it flows into the paper. If you take a magnifier loupe and look at it, it looks close-up like you're the best watercolor artist ever. You take a look at a digital print and you see little tiny pixel dots. It looks like a machine. So you lose that machine look. Also you lose a lot of information with not all of it transferring. I think Bob loved the look of it not being perfect, but being organic or just a wet water dream of what things look like.

The press works—well here's a classic example that's 93.097. It's called *Fish House* [*Waterworks*], 1993]. It was one that Bob had given me. One thing Bob used to say was that the last color he used was the title. And to him *Fish House* was a very important title. It was a special gift. But if you look at this piece, on the bottom of the image, there's a blur of color. That would happen—when you do a transfer on the transfer press, Bob would have the nice piece of paper, wet it with water, and then he would put his images down that Laury had printed, which was printed on this plastic. After you put those images down, you have a thing—it's called a tympan, which is a piece of Lexan in this case. It's a flat, hard, smooth plastic. There's a scraper bar on the press that was made out of UHMW [ultra-high molecular weight] polyethylene.

There's a cam that had a big lever and when you press the lever down, it puts a lot of force on this—it's not a knife edge, but it's a rounded edge bar that goes 37 inches across. Bob had a motorized press bed that had a 3-inch-thick aluminum block that was 8 feet long. The motorized press would drive this block of aluminum with the print and the tympan underneath this knife edge that's compressing and it exerts a lot of force as it's going along that line. It would squeeze the water along and you would often get these blurry puddles at the end.



Robert Rauschenberg
Fish House (Waterworks), 1993
Inkjet dye transfer on paper
41 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches (105.4 x 74.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: So the rubbing is in a singular direction with the water being pushed in one direction—

Voytek: The motor's driving—

Q: —and ending up with pigment at the very end of the sheet of paper that's being transferred upon.

Voytek: Yes, it's like squeegeeing a glass window. It runs out the bottom when you run the squeegee down it. If you look at it, you kind of feel some kind of force drove this when you look at how the print came out. The artist's hand was there when he wet it and set things up and aligned the images where he wanted to. He could cut out shapes and forms so it wasn't all just big rectangle—he would do a quick collage with these plastic printed sheets and then the press would drive it.

Q: So what was the impetus to change to *Anagrams (A Pun)*? How did you realize that the sheets could be rubbed as a Japanese print would be rubbed with a baren—in an omnidirectional manner?

Voytek: Yes, what happened was Bill Goldston had called Bob. He said, “I found this really nice paper, Bob.” He sent the roll to Bob. It was Saunders—I think 300-pound test watercolor paper. It was machine-made, it was on a roll 5 feet wide and 100 yards long. And so this big roll of paper came. The first time we cut a piece of it off, it was about 6 feet long. So we had a piece of paper 5 feet by 6-foot on Bob's table and we're looking at it. Laury Getford was there and Bob's press bed was 37 inches across. We didn't want to cut something off of this nice wide paper. I said, “Bob, I have an idea. I can make a small scraper bar, let's say 6 inches wide, and you could just put your image wherever you want on this piece of paper and by hand lean into it and rub, and that should work.” And so, of course, he said, “Let's try this.”

I had some UHMW in the shop. I went to the table saw, I cut a 45, flipped it over another 45. Then I made a little radius nose and I brought it back up to him. Laury printed out some stuff.

Bob wet the paper, put the image down and started rubbing, and it looked gorgeous. It just transferred great.

Q: And his reaction to that?

Voytek: He loved it. I don't think he went back inside the print shop forever. He just went full bore into that. Actually because the paper was wide, the tables that we were using before were not optimum size. I had this Reynobond that we were using before in the shop that was 5 feet wide. I made a 5-foot by 12-foot table and I had Bob lean over and figure out what's a good height for him and his build, where he could put his weight and pressure and reach into the middle of the table so that he could reach all around this 5-by-12 table. Those tables were engineered for Bob's height.



Rauschenberg working on *Lilac Role [Anagram (A Pun)]* (1997) in his Captiva Drive studio, Florida, 1997. Photo: George Holzer, Courtesy: Saff Tech Arts

Q: The tables were made out of the same material that *Off Kilter Keys*—?

Voytek: The tabletop, which was a smooth, architectural panel.

Q: The *Off Kilter Key* material.

Voytek: Yes. I made one table to do these transfers on. The piece of paper was 5 feet wide, the table top was 5 feet wide. He could reach all around. Actually Bob was working so hard, he was getting calluses on his hands from him rubbing, rubbing the images down. His sensitivity—the thing that was really gorgeous was he got good at—he had these natural sponges and you would wet the paper and you could see the sheen in the paper. When it would just disappear and the paper was almost ready for embossing—where it's damp enough, but it's still absorbing in—was when Bob would start rubbing. You could take the nose of the scraper bar and just do lines, or you can do the sides of it and do zones. Bob was able to just kiss the colors he wanted and get deeper into other colors. So there's a lot of real subtle hand work that harkened back to the old hand rub burnished Dante's *Inferno* drawings.

Q: Now when he's doing these transfers, the paper that he's transferring the image from is opaque and so he turns that over—he's unable to see the image.

Voytek: Well—

Q: In a sense, he's working blind, isn't he?

Voytek: Well, it's opaque, but you can kind of tell what's there. You definitely see stuff—if you got a pick-up truck, you definitely see where the truck is and what the background is—so you see it, but you don't see any details. You see like maybe you've got cataracts in your eyes. You see shapes that are dark and light.

Q: But you can't see what's already transferred onto the paper.

Voytek: No. Oh no, no, no.

Q: So you're still working, in a sense, partially blind—

Voytek: Partially blind, yes—

Q: —because you can't see what you're setting the image against even though you can see a ghost through the back of the paper.

Voytek: True, true, true, yes. There's also things that happen—like if you're transferring a light, ghostly thing down first and then you're doing darks, you can't see what that's going to be until you pull it up. But Bob—

Q: So with each transfer, there was a surprise element.

Voytek: Oh definitely. Yes, there was. Also another thing that I thought was really gorgeous—because we got this heavy watercolor paper and you wet zones and then you start burnishing and rubbing, it's starting to turn into this skin. It's almost like you're putting tattoos down. You're getting bumps and bruises and the paper's becoming like a potato chip because of the work that's going on. This presented all kinds of problems because now that Bob knew he could go anywhere on this piece of paper, he had us cutting out sheets 12 feet long and 5 feet wide. Now we're talking, "Okay, how are we going to frame this?" Bob liked that the paper was going up and down. He says it's got to be protected—the works in the *Waterworks* were all glazed. [Note: The larger works on paper that were framed and glazed were the *Anagrams* (1995–97), a series chronologically between *Waterworks* and *Anagrams (A Pun)*.] And he said, "We're going to glaze over this." He says, "I want a really wide mat that's really deep." I go, "Okay." He goes, "Half an inch deep and I want it 4 inches wide." So we've got a piece of paper that's 5 feet wide, 12 feet long and he wants 4 inches plus the gap space. There was no acrylic that was this size.

I started shopping around and I found out about this Lexan that they use in the sign industry and they use it for solariums and stuff. It came in rolls and it came up to 7 feet wide on a hundred-yard roll. It had a solar shield on it that was rated for ninety-eight percent UV. Which was good that we had a solar shield built in our glazing material. Bob said, "Yes, let's do this." So I ordered this humongous roll of plastic that weighed six—I think—no, it was like four thousand pounds or maybe a little bit more and I had to weld up an A-frame out of steel. I used bearings so we could roll it out—and I made it high enough so that when we pulled it out, it was the same height as our work tabletops.

Then when it came to the frame, Bob didn't want to see any edges or seams. He wanted it to all seem solid. He started talking about—he liked lacquer, like old cars. He had this old '36 Ford Python and he liked the look of lacquer. He wanted a tone of lacquer that would look good with the paper. The paper, it was ivory-ish and so he wanted a precious mat that had similar tones so that the paper wouldn't seem—he didn't want a white; he wanted this ivory.

I dealt with this guy Terry Sewell at Paint Store Plus [Fort Myers]. He had come up with a waterborne lacquer system that we were going to be painting the frames with. The frames—I tried to explain this to Hisachika, Bob's housekeeper. He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, we weld up an aluminum sub-frame that has a thick wall outer frame so that I can drill and tap into it. We glue down sheets of PVC [polyvinyl chloride]—" It's called Sintra, which is a foam PVC. After we did the foam PVC that's glued down, we bought solid 1/2-inch PVC. I bought a motor-drive unit to fit on our table saws so that it would feed at a consistent rate and make a sharp 45 cut to make the mat out of. The solid PVC mat that was 4 inches wide, we glued that to the bottom mat. We used auto body putty at every seam and crack where the pieces had to be joined together, it was hand sanded, and we put three coats of lacquer on. I had to set up air filters in the downstairs so that air would come from one side of the room and not bring dust in and it would be blowing out the door. We got alternate air so that we could breathe while we're spraying and I bought an HVLP [high-volume, low-pressure] spray system that Terry recommended to spray the lacquer.

Q: For the mat. The frames, the extrusions, how were the frames designed? Just talk to me generally about the frames.

Voytek: I made a custom extrusion for these too. The thing about Hisachika I was telling you about—so I’m still not finished with this story. So after we get the lacquer—I had a custom aluminum extrusion made that I could blindly tap into the outside legs. The mat is done—we would heat seal Bob’s drawing into it. We cut a piece of Lexan the size of the artwork. We compensated for the expansion and contraction, routed it to size, made an aluminum top frame. That was clamped down and then we drilled and tapped and used stainless-steel screws to hold it in compression all around. I told this all to Hisachika and he said, “Why you do that?” [Laughs]

We made these monsters for about five years. In the shop we would have five or six going at a time. I made a lot, a lot of tables with wheels so that we could walk around them and spray them and keep them going—this lacquer was a real bitch to paint. You had to spray it quite thick with the HVLP and then it would level out. It wouldn’t go like glass. It would dry like a really elegant satin.

Q: Again, we’re talking about the mat now.

Voytek: The mat.

Q: So you lost the mat though in the *Anagrams (A Pun)*.

Voytek: Oh yes.

Q: That was no longer necessary. So how did he arrive at a non-glazed, non-matted image?

Voytek: He was doing these monster *Anagrams* [1995–97] for a while. One collector, Paul and Charlotte Corddry, came out to Bob's. They bought an *Anagram* and they had a high-rise penthouse condo in Naples, Florida, which was pretty close. I think they bought two of them actually. The first time that they came, it was like, "I like this, I like that." Charlotte and Paul had a big collection. Charlotte got back with us and she had talked to Bob—and I was there—about, "I really don't like plastic in front of artwork. I'd like to buy one of your *Anagrams*, but the elevator size, we can only get so big. I'd like something bigger than that. Can you do it without the plastic in front?"

I even called you on this, Don. Bob says, "Can we do this?" I said, "Well, we could make a laminate where we could glue the paper down." Bob said, "Well, that would be nice, to get rid of this plastic in front of it." And so I started researching laminating panels. I looked into the composite industry where they were doing composite laminate panels. I saw this company in California that had these large vacuum tables to make laminate panels. I called you up, Don, and I said, "Don, what glue would be good to use to glue this watercolor paper down onto a panel?" You suggested this—I think Archivart made it. It was a bookbinding adhesive. It was a pure PVA [polyvinyl acetate]. It was really nice because they told me that this stuff is non-toxic. Babies can eat it. For me to have an art supply that a baby could eat was kind of nice.

[Laughter]

Q: Yes and rare.

Voytek: I ordered the vacuum blanket so that I could make the 5-foot by 10-foot panels. It's a silicon rubber blanket—and the thing that was nice about this is I didn't have to heat this up like a lot of vacuum tables were because the glue would go into the watercolor paper and on the panel.

At that time we had the Reynobond left over from *Off Kilter Keys*. I called Reynobond; I talked to them about what we were doing. They said, "You're taking an expensive architectural panel and putting paper on the outside of it?" I got, "Yes, we're doing that."

[Laughter]

Voytek: This chemist that worked on the surface was saying, "Well, we have an anti-slough coating so that you can clean your building on the outside—" So we had to abrade the Reynobond, so that we went through the anti-slough coating and it gave a tooth to the Reynobond. Then we would roll on with a smooth glue type—adhesive rollers. Our glue, we would roll out big pieces of paper and we'd vacu-laminate and we made 5-by-10-foot beautiful panels. This now changed the look. Bob started to call these *Anagram (A Pun)* once we were using these panels. It got rid of the plastic and we had used a different frame system that I actually designed for our metal panels that we were doing beforehand. This was very elegant, where I would weld up a sub-frame panel and we would use this Dow [Corning] 795 adhesive

that expands and contracts fifty percent. The different expansion of the frame and the panel was compensated by this adhesive. I go off on tangents, but that's where it came from.

Q: Well, on the frames, did you show a cross-section to Bob of what it would look like or how it would be constructed? How were the various frames for these—?

Voytek: All those frames through the years and stuff?

Q: Yes, yes.

Voytek: Well, this goes back to ROCI days, where he would say, “You went to a good school, you know what you're doing. I want you to design a frame that looks really good. That's your job.” When Bob talked to me about the ROCI frames he said, “I'm going to be making art out of trash. I want the frames to be so nice that a common man would know this art is special.”

Well at RISD I was in an industrial design course and I worked in the machine shop with Ken Honeybell, the teacher. They had these people that would come from companies that tried to recruit smart designers. They would show these films and one of them was from the aluminum extrusion industry. They showed extruders making things and, “You too can design extrusions.” The pieces and parts of the design world, how you make things. So I knew about extrusions. I had designed some stuff in that class.

We were doing all these works on metal, the *Shiners*, the *Galvanic Suites*, the *Borealises*. The way that frames were done then, I would make an aluminum 1-by-2 sub-frame and then I made an inch-and-a-half aluminum angle frame and then I pop-riveted that to the back frame and you have a float gap. We wore out many a pop-rivet gun. And we had the best that you can get. The big two-handed ones. We were going through large quantities of stainless-steel rivets. It was a pain. I was making two frames to do one frame. I'd make the under-frame and then the outer frame, and you had to line up the gaps and you had to have shims to make sure everything was parallel when you were putting them together. The calluses from pop-riveting were not that interesting.

I suggested to Bob—I'm not sure when I first started this. This was in the metal panel days—I designed an extrusion that had the 1-by-2 with the outside frame and a hanging bracket built into it. This would quicken things up and also we could make the wall thickness slightly thicker. I designed the proportions to make the perfect frame. I did do drawings, I showed it to Bob, and he says, "All right, let's try this." The die fee for the first one was like two thousand dollars. Our name was put on the die. I made a deal with this guy that worked in town—Florida buys a lot of extruded aluminum because of the pool cage industry. Bob Krechner from Ashley Aluminum said that his company ordered so many dies a year, "We'll just put us in his company orders." They ordered a million tons of aluminum a year. We were only going to be ordering a couple of tons at a time and we weren't ordering enough to really bother with us. But he says, "I'll put you in with our company dies."

I got to work with their extrusion designer and all the drawings and the radiuses and the wall thickness so that the flow would be straight and true was engineered into it. For two thousand dollars, we had a die—we would get the metal at wholesale prices and we were paying, I think originally about a dollar a pound. We would get a 24-foot stick of our frame for about thirty-five dollars. I could do a 4-by-10 frame with thirty-five dollars' worth of aluminum, four welds, and grind and polish the corners in one hour.

Q: You no longer had the safety feature of UV protection that you had with the *Waterworks*—

Voytek: True, yes.

Q: —and *Anagrams*. So how did you go about protecting *Anagrams (A Pun)* and then the later works that were done with a similar technique?

Voytek: I had a really good relationship with Jim Hayes at Golden Acrylics. Jim Hayes was one of the paint technicians. Whenever I dealt with a new company, I called them up, “I’ve got some technical questions,” and I’d write down the guy’s name and they’d say, “Okay.” So Jim and I became good friends with lots of stuff. Golden was my go-to place for high quality paints.

Actually real quick backwards, in ROCI days when Bob went to Venezuela, the headhunters, and they put mud on their bodies for colors. Bob brought back some mud and we sent that to Golden. They made us a special, custom mix that Bob used to print pictures of the natives with that color. I don’t know if you knew that.

Jim Hayes, I talked to him about the problem that we no longer had the UV plastic to protect the art. Golden makes a UVLS [ultraviolet light stabilizer] mineral spirit-based varnish that he suggested we use. What he suggested and we did—I made some classic examples of how Bob was working and sent it to him. He has an accelerator test machine. He would take his Golden UV coating, put one coat on in one zone, put two coats on in another zone, and have it uncoated in another zone and then run it through an accelerator test. Where the amount of radiation per day of UV is this, they would magnify the radiation, and they could leave it in this thing for a week. That much time with so much radiation, they would say, “This is twenty-five years, this is fifty years, this is a hundred years.” That’s all a science test experiment kind of data. They would send these samples back to us. You could see what the uncoated looked like, what one coat looked like, and two coats looked like after the UV radiation.

Q: Did anybody present the problem of UV protection to Bob?

Voytek: Oh yes. Yes actually—

Q: What was his attitude? Did he direct you to pursue—?

Voytek: Well, I said to make the colors stay and last—this was back when we were using the glazing on the *Anagrams*—now that we don’t have the plastic, we have to do something else.

Bob says, “That’s your job. Make it last.”

Q: I remember there was a little house somewhere where the paper was treated. Tell me what the process was, once Golden provided you with the means for protecting it.

Voytek: Yes. Now this stuff is a real high class coating. It's high grade—the mineral spirit solvent that they sold was like eighty-five dollars a gallon because it was such a high purity. You could take a drop of this and put it on a piece of glass and let it dry out and there'd be no residue, it was so pure. The UVLS coating came in gallon containers and you had to get the proper viscosity to spray it, there was a certain ratio of how much thinner to the paint. The application that was suggested was a high-volume, low-pressure sprayer—again HVLP. We set up a pressure pot system that, you would fill it with a gallon of the UVLS and it had a hose that ran to your spray gun. So we built this building into a spray booth. We had air filters, like auto body air filters, mounted on the intake windows. We had a squirrel cage blower with more CFM [cubic feet per minute] than the space of the building to blow out the air. We also bought alternate air supply suits that were battery-packed that had a Tyvek suit that you would put on, like a bubble over your head. It would be blowing up clean air into this air bubble.

Jonas Stirner, who worked with us, was the one that used to do all the coating. This was one of our jobs that after Bob finished a painting, it had to have two coats of gloss and one coat of matte before we put it in the frame.

Q: This applies to all of the—

Voytek: This applies to *Anagram (A Pun)* and then anything after that.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: All the works that Bob did later in life was a variation of working on this panel.

Q: All a variation of working with this process?

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: Variation in what way? For example *Freaks* [2000], *Scenarios* [2002–06], *Runts* [2006–08], *Short Stories* [2000–02]? What are the significant differences?

Voytek: For the series, Bob would say, “I’m going to be—” A lot of that, in a nutshell, is the size and the shapes. The *Freaks*, I think, might have been the first thing where—they were all rectangles, but they might be L-shaped, T-shaped. [Note: The *Freaks* are all vertical panels with acrylic backgrounds in addition to inkjet transfers; a number of *Apogamy Pods* (1999–2000) were made on shaped panels.] Panels would be put together and then the frames would follow that shape. He kind of freaked out in the shapes. [Laughs] Then when it came to *Scenarios*, *Scenarios* were two panels, side by side, each 5 feet by 7 I think. It was the exact same rectangle size.



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (Freaks), 2000
Inkjet pigment transfer and acrylic
on poly laminate
97 x 41 inches (246.4 x 104.1 cm)
Private collection



Robert Rauschenberg
Triathlon (Scenario), 2005
Inkjet pigment transfer on poly laminate
85 1/2 x 120 1/2 inches (217.2 x 306.1 x 5.1 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Yes, okay. There are some significant differences between *Anagrams (A Pun)*, once he changed the process from *Anagrams* and *Waterworks*. There is a difference between *Anagrams (A Pun)* and later works, such as *Runts* or *Scenarios*. *Anagrams (A Pun)* had very fluid images with bleed and later works do not seem to have that. Can you tell me what the differences are and why there are differences?

Voytek: Yes. Well, I think I talked about the skins of the *Anagrams*, how when Bob was wetting it and rubbing it, it would be up and down. Once the watercolor paper was laminated on the Reynobond, it was a totally different animal. It printed much sharper when it was flatter. I think the laminating process pulled everything down. Bob did this piece for the Benaroya Hall [*Echo (Anagram [A Pun])*, 1998].



Robert Rauschenberg
Echo [Anagram (A Pun)], 1998
Inkjet pigment transfer on
poly laminate
145 1/2 x 537 inches (369.6 x
1364.0 cm)
Seattle Symphony

Q: In Seattle?

Voytek: In Seattle. It was a commission and it was funny—we just made this big vacuum table and we were doing these panels and it was made to do 5-by-10 panels. The Benaroya Hall wanted a mural that—I think it’s almost 60 feet, but they wanted it 12 feet high. Reynobond comes in 12-foot lengths and Bob says, “Okay, make a bigger vacuum table.” So I made a 14-foot by 6 table that we could do 12-foot panels. As you look at it, Bob chose all these—there’s some John Cage scores, there’s musical instruments. He called on [James] Jim Griffith, who was a viola player for the Naples Phil[harmonic], to bring real instruments because Bob thought that—he didn’t want student-grade. He wanted stuff that a real musician would know is a real musical instrument.

Q: To photograph.

Voytek: To photograph. Ed Chappell was called in, we had all these nice instruments. Plus Bob had scores that Cage had sent him and different things. Not being a musician, I didn’t understand

that these were special things. Laury was blown away that these things came to town. They scanned all these musical elements. It was a good thing I made a 12-foot-long table because these panels were now 12-foot-long. Bob hand-transferred all of these. If you look at these hand-transferred by Bob's—there's still a little bit of the *Anagram*—not everything is transferred, but you can tell that they're sharper. They're crisper and there's no push-out bleeding. It's more of a collage of the exact image. Is that what you were—?

Q: Well there's still bleed in this—

Voytek: There's still bleed that Bob had done—yes.

Q: And the later works, many of them have rather hard edges. That's a sort of salient feature between the *Anagrams (A Pun)* and some of the later works. So how did the later works become so hard-edged in terms of a lot of the images?

Voytek: Well the later works—after Bob broke his hip there was a pause of Bob getting back into the studio and things. When the world was working well, Bob was making art. When Bob was not well and he couldn't make art, things weren't really very good. There was a period where it was very difficult for Bob to physically be doing his own work. This is sort of like Matisse with his cut-outs, where he needed his assistants to do the things that he used to love to labor over. A man making art and you see the calluses from him rubbing so hard and now he's directing somebody to do these things. So when it came to the point where Bob was not rubbing down the images and he had assistants cut them out, he would direct when it came to his

compositional sense and what's in front of him and what these objects mean, he was taking much longer to think about things. There was a lot of time—the people that were assisting him in doing the transfers—Bob would say, “Move this here, move that there. Little bit more here.” When Bob said, “I want this there,” they would take blue tape and tape it exactly where it is and then fold it back. They would wet the zone completely to the optimum absorption.

Q: Within the tape outline?

Voytek: Yes, yes. Well, you could go beyond it. But it didn't really matter.

Q: But the transfer—

Voytek: It wouldn't travel farther than—

Q: —to the paper.

Voytek: The apprentice would try to get every piece and part that was printed transferred.

Q: Who were the apprentices doing that?

Voytek: Well at first it was Darryl that was working with Bob. It used to be this special celebration that Bob and his assistant would be making art. There was a point where Darryl decided that he was so good—Darryl was doing the same type of work. Darryl had announced at

one point that, “Bob, I have to be an artist or I’m going to leave you.” Bob was like, “I don’t want you to leave me and of course you can be an artist.” Bob let Darryl use all his materials, all his processes, and all his techniques any way he wanted. You have to think of Darryl as Bob’s wife and so it’s like, “Okay.” Bob would tell me, “Do Darryl’s work first and then take care of my work.” So there was a lot of this going on. At that point Darryl was more interested in making his art than working with Bob. Darryl hired his brother Kevin [Pottorf] or Bob hired his brother Kevin to do what Darryl would do. Bob trained Kevin to do the things exactly the way he wanted them done and Kevin worked diligently in doing it exactly the way Bob wanted it.

After Bob broke his hip and then the works that were changed—if you looked at them, you would see that they do have more of a machine-printed look to them rather than the artist’s hand. But it was Bob’s mind that was making the decisions of where things should be. He did some things where he started having objects cut out, where he would say, “Cut this chair out, cut this wheelbarrow out.” And then you wouldn’t see the background—so it would be just that object—which was kind of strange because with Bob and his photography, he mostly never cropped anything and he left everything where it was. Now it seems like if he had this as some sort of symbol, he wanted it just to be by itself and he would put that down.

It was interesting because at this time also, now Bob couldn’t take his own photographs. After Bob had fallen and had—it’s not really a stroke, but he had damage in his brain from the Coumadin and he lost use of his right hand and his right arm, he could no longer take his own photographs. He had his assistants there working. I actually was the first person to have a photograph that Bob used. My sister Cindy was ill and I had to drive cross-country to pick up a

sculpture in Santa Fe. My wife had a neon piece that had to be picked up. I knew that my sister was not doing well and I was talking to Bob and I was pretty depressed that my sister wasn't doing well. I was going to be driving and I don't know if he suggested it or I suggested it. I just said, "I could take pictures while I'm driving cross-country." He said, "Please do that and I want you to FedEx me the film as you're going." In some ways at a really sad time of my life having the job of looking at the world and seeing what Bob would want to see while I was traveling was very comforting. To drive down Route 66 and see weird hotels and strange things, all of a sudden the whole world was a stage set for Bob. I was stopping, having my film developed and having them FedEx it back to Bob. When I came back he was working on a painting that had images that I had taken on it.

Q: So during this time, in the mid- to late nineties, he also did the frescos in *Arcadian Retreats* [1996].

Voytek: Oh well, yes.

Q: And the glass sculptures. Were you around while he was doing the *Arcadian Retreats*? Were you in the shop?

Voytek: Oh yes.

Q: You were around, but were you in the shop?

Voytek: Well, it's funny, Don. I don't know if I ever told you this story. [Laughs] I thought that was such a brilliant, gorgeous idea, the plaster absorbing the pigments. The surface, the texture, the history of the frescos and things. This is just a funny little side story—Bob had lots of dreams he'd tell me. I had lots of dreams. You were doing the fresco pieces and Bob was just intoxicated with how gorgeous that surface looked. I don't know if he ever told you that.



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

Q: No, he did not. [Laughs]

Voytek: He loved this dearly. It was the most precious antique with the imagery of today.

At one point, this was going on, and I had this dream that I was in Bob's bedroom in Captiva. The ceiling of his room was curved, like vaulted. Bob was lying on the ground and we were putting up wet fresco and putting images into it and Bob was telling us, "A little to the left!"

[Laughter]

Q: That's right.

Voytek: The frescos were the best. When your eye sees a surface and the way the surface reflects light, there's a preciousness that—you look at a precious stone and say, "Oh, this thing is great." We're talking all colors on a stone surface. There's something that's just so precious about it—it doesn't get much better than that.

Q: How, almost the same years as the frescos, did the glass sculptures begin? How did that happen? How did that come about?

Voytek: The glass sculptures were all in the Guggenheim retro. [Note: Four glass works, all untitled, all 1997, were in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, 1997] Talk about dreams. One day I came to work, Bob called on the intercom, "Get your ass over here!" I went to the house and Bob said, "I had a dream this morning. Out of water rose a glass car tire. I want to make a glass car tire." I said, "Okay, we can do this." I said, "Yes, what kind of tire?" He says, "I don't know. Start bringing me tires."



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled [glass tires], 1997
Blown glass and silver-plated brass
30 x 28 x 24 inches (76.2 x 71.1 x 61 cm)
Private collection

At RISD I had worked with Dale Chihuly. I helped make some of the annealers and I knew some of his glassblowers. So on my Rolodex I had Dale's number in Seattle. I called Dale and I said, "Dale, we're going to be doing a glass car tire." He says, "I have a glassblower that can handle this. [Daniel] Dan Spitzer, he's blown some of the largest, human-blown objects for me." He was working in New York at UrbanGlass. They got me in touch with him. I talked to Dan and Dan said, "We're going to need a good mold to blow into." One of my best friends and colleagues at RISD, Matt Porzorski, was a mold-maker extraordinaire; a figurative sculptor who worked in commercial foundries. I had worked in a commercial foundry with him. He was called upon to make the mold.

I was still in search of the tire and a fun side story: I brought one to Bob and it was a worn-out tire. He's like, "No, it's a Goodyear. Everybody knows Goodyear. No, no, no. I want something different." I brought about four tires to him and it's like, "No, this one's not old enough," or, "This is too normal." And this construction worker, Ed Landl, who was Gus Landl's brother, had this little pick-up truck. We were talking, he says, "I got to go get tires. I think I'm going to get a blowout." I looked and the tires that he was going to replace were called Star. Star was the name of Bob's Husky. Star was there when I showed up in '82; a blue-eyed, wild and crazy, strong dog.

I took this tire to Bob and Bob said, "That's the tire." I arranged delivery to my friend Matt Porzorski. Matt used this refractory cement that is like a chocolate to make the mold. He made it in such a way that the mold would be coming apart. On the bottom it would have like a hubcap.

On the sides where the treads were, it was like an octagonal so that they had to pull out because it had undercuts. Then on the top of the mold, we had the top part of the tire with the hole for the blowpipe.

Q: What was the mold made out of?

Voytek: It was this high temperature ceramic—no, furnace cement that molded like chocolate. You had to fuse it at high temperature to use it. It was a furnace lining cement. Matt made it and then he baked the pieces out. You bring them up to casting temp—like you're going to be using it as a furnace. It's a high refractory material. When you were to put the glass into it, you had to preheat it so that when you're blowing the mold into it, it was at a nice temperature, that way you could get the most amount of detail. Also you do this thing with an oxyacetylene torch where you just burn the acetylene and you put on a carbon layer. That carbon black is like a surface resist that can handle temperature and the glass at the same time, but it wouldn't stick to the ceramic or the furnace lining. This mold opened like a big metal flower. Then when you closed it, you could lock it.

Dan Spitzer and his team of eight glassblowers, they worked together to engineer—to blow this big object. It took about two hours to get ready to do one tire. You slowly gather, blow; slowly gather, blow. It was bigger than a basketball and Dan Spitzer was good at calculating how thick the wall thickness would have to be when he blew it so that it'd be consistent through the whole mold. Not too thick, not too thin, and it had to be consistent. It looked like it was over a 1/2-inch thick wall and bigger than a basketball.

The mold was being warmed up by Matt Porzorski, these guys had blisters on their fingers from keeping this giant ball of glass at the right temperature while they were gathering and building, gathering and building. Everybody was preparing for the point where this giant glowing orange orb—and he had this pole that had these ball bearings. They use them at the glory hole for spinning. He had it on that and he spun it rapidly so it started to make a donut shape. Then the mold was opened. Dan laid it into the mold. Matt Porzorski closed up the mold, locked it tight. Dan jumped on top of the mold and blew into it. They rolled him over to the annealer. Dan sort of knew when it sat enough that it was rigid enough to move. They opened the mold and pulled it up, full weight, put it in the annealer and then broke it off the punty in the annealer.

Q: What was their success to loss rate?

Voytek: Good question. It was just a wonderment to see such skilled laborers doing this job. In a period of, I think, like three days, they made nine that were successful. They had some that were lost while things were going on. Problems happened. Of these nine, when they were cutting them out, they had quite a bit of loss. The technique that they tried first—the best ones they tried to cut first were lost. Then there was this woman Pat Patenaude who was a glass artist that—I'm not sure who knew of her. She was connected to UrbanGlass somehow. She came up with a technique where she carefully put wadding inside the tire, through the little glass hole. Totally packed it with wadding and she put a resist rubber on the outside of the mold so that it wouldn't hurt the tire itself. Kind of like when you sandblast letters or something, it's called Buttercut. Then she sandblasted these hubcaps off both sides. She was the one that had done that.

We did have to go back and blow more because of the loss. It was after 9/11 [2001; note: in addition to glass tire works from 1997, another group was completed in 2001]. I remember Bob saying he wanted me to treat the glassblowers really well and take them out to dinner. The glassblowers wanted to have a real meal and we went to eat at a place that was in the closed-off zone that a lot of firemen and workers were coming in. They gave them free meals whenever they came in. It was a pretty intense time to be in New York.

Q: Did the same people do the [glass] pillows and the shovel and—?

Voytek: No, those each had unique problems. Bob started to dream in glass. [Laughs] It was kind of funny because here's an artist that would say a sock is just as important a piece of material to make art out of as a tube of paint. Now he was having concepts that have to be made in a sustainable material by a whole different type of craftsman. He just had these ideas of glass.

After the tire came the pillow. Bob wanted to do a pillow. Then he said, "Let's do two pillows." He had two pillows that were his pillows. He wanted them to be pillows that had contained dreams and stuff, stuff that his head had rested on for many a night. One of them had sort of—we didn't have pillowcases on them, but the surface had a brocade textural thing going on, some kind of pattern. The other one looked like good linen. Inside was the pillow stuff. Bob fluffed the pillows in front of me and he says, "Do them just like that."



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled [Glass Pillow #1 Fancy], 1997
Clear glass, silver-plated brass
17 x 29 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches (43.2 x 74.9 x 59.7 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled [Glass Pillow #2], 1997
Slumped and fused glass and silver-plated brass
15 x 30 1/2 x 23 inches (31.8 x 77.5 x 58.4 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

I called Matt up and I said, “Bob’s fluffed a pillow. It looks like his head is pressed down in it a little bit and he wants me to get them to you to make glass pillows.” I had to come up with a way that I could keep the pillow exactly the way he fluffed it and ship it to Matt. Matt and I decided to put a really light, thin coat of polyester resin on them. Spray it carefully on the top first and then flip it over and spray it carefully on the bottom. It was like a thin eggshell that tried to capture Bob’s essential dreams. Laura Vogler was a glass artist that Matt Porzorski worked with. Her forte was glass slumping, where she made molds and things would be slumped into it. And so Matt Porzorski and Laura Vogler were the ones that engineered how they’re going to do the glass pillow. They wanted to have the line where the pillow was sewn together as the parting line for the two pieces. They’d slump the top, they’d slump the bottom, and they would use a UV-cured glass glue, optical grade, to glue the top and the bottom together.

Q: So it was a two-part mold where the mold followed the—

Voytek: —seam line—

Q: —of the pillow.

Voytek: I did not fly up for that. I did not go there. Laura Vogler had the kilns and the slumping and the expertise. She did stuff for Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut], she fixed a lot of antique glassworks, and she was really good at slumping. Matt was the mold-maker that would make the molds to make sure that there's no bubbles or things like that, to keep everything a perfect impression. Yes, when it comes to moldy old guys, Matt's hard to beat.

Q: [Laughs] Moldy old guys, okay. Then how did the—there was a broom and a shovel, but before you get to that, how was the tire presented?

Voytek: Oh the tire—that came up. It took a while to get these tires and then the tires were made and some were coming out to Captiva that were shipped back to us. Bob was thinking, “How am I going to show the tire?” This one day I came to work and Bob says, “I want you to go to this gas station on Sanibel and he sells tires. I want you to take pictures and do drawings of the way this guy sells tires.” I went there and he had a cheap steel thing that was made out of angle iron that had a little chain and a little thing to close. You put the tire in it and you close the chain and the tire would stay there. That's a tire stand. It was made out of rusty angle iron and so I had

these pictures and Bob says, “I want it made out of silver.” I said [laughs], “Well jeez, Bob.” The thickness—it was 1/8-inch angle iron that this thing was made out of. Then I came back later and I said, “Bob, we can take—I can get brass angle iron and I can make this whole thing in brass, and then we can have it silver-plated.” He said, “All right, let’s do it that way.”

It was all fabricated in brass angle, polished by me before I sent it to the silver platers, and then they silver-plated it. The chain is made out of silicon bronze chain, which closely match the link system of the steel one, but it was a little bit different. I found this silicon bronze latch that closely matched the steel latch. All the nuts and bolts that the original was made out of was standard 1/4-20. All those fasteners, I got them in silicon bronze. So I sent all the fasteners and had them all silver-plated. They were all polished before I sent them out.

Q: There was silver-plating on the broom? Or the shovel? What—?

Voytek: Yes, well in some ways—

Q: How did those projects evolve?

Voytek: Yes and a little bit later, when we did—there was a problem with—silver tarnishes in time and we needed more bases made. I had told Bob—I said, “Bob, if I made these out of stainless steel, they would be silver but they wouldn’t tarnish like the silver.” He said, “Yes, let’s make them out of stainless steel.” I wish I asked him that before we went through all the plating

stuff. Later on we transitioned to make all the bases out of mirrored stainless rather than silver.

But back to—why did I go off on—?

Q: I asked about the—

Voytek: The shovel?

Q: —the broom [Untitled (glass broom), 1997] and the shovel.

Voytek: The broom was fun. Bob says, “I want to do a crystal broom.” “What are we talking? Disney and frigging ‘Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ [note: from *Fantasia*, 1940]?” He goes, “I want a crystal broom and I want a weathered old broom that has had a good life.” “Okay, let’s try to find a good broom.” The conversation went on. Actually I was talking to David White about something and I get where I’m, “Bob’s having me find a good old broom.” David says, “I have a broom that I sweep my steps with and I’ve used it for ten years.” So I said, “This sounds pretty good, David.” David shipped the broom to Captiva and Bob saw it and said, “That’s the broom.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled [glass broom], 1997
Cast crystal and silver-plated brass
63 x 14 x 11 inches (160 x 35.6 x 27.9 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Dan Spitzer was the one that had blown the glass car tires, but [Daniel] Dan Clayman was someone that I got the contact information from Dale Chihuly for cast glass. Dan Clayman had worked at Steuben [Glass] and so this is a true, high-quality cast lead crystal. I had talked to Dan for quite a bit. He had this whole thing about company secrets and how he worked, but his schtick is cast crystal glass and his art is cast crystal glass. Gorgeous stuff.

We sent the broom directly to him because there's something about the purity of the molds. You don't just melt it and pour it in. You have to have chunks that are close to the size and then you bring everything up and it sort of flows, but it can't flow too far. I never saw his shop, I never went there. A little tiny bubble somewhere embedded would piss him off. So he's really good at solid lead cast crystal. It's all cast at one point, the bottom and the handle, which is molded exactly from the broom. He had to build an extension to be able to cast an object that was that big. For some reason I believe he had to do it vertically rather than horizontally.

Dan Clayman made this beautiful lead-glass crystal broom. We made another brass base that was silver-plated. It was going to be in the Guggenheim retrospective and I remember going to Bob's warehouse that was near the Jacob [K.] Javits [Convention] Center [New York]. Dan Clayman had to drill a hole in the top of the handle so I could put my silver screw to hold it in place. He brought his to-go diamond drill set to drill a hole through the top crystal. I'm glad he did that.

[Laughs]

Q: Yes, yes.

Voytek: Then the glass shovel is pretty much the same—Dan Clayman did the handle of the glass shovel. It was an old shovel that was out at Captiva and we actually had the old shovel copper-plated, then silver-plated. The shovel part of it. The handle’s cast crystal, the shovel head is silver-plated steel. I guess that’s it; the glass objects.

Q: Okay. Were you involved with the *Synopsis Shuffle* installation at the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York, *Robert Rauschenberg: Synopsis Shuffle*, 2000] or the experiments in Long Island City [New York] at Pace [Gallery]’s warehouse?



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

Voytek: I made the frames for them. Bob explained, “Okay, we’re going to do fifty-two of these things, fifty-two card deck kind of stuff.” I think they were supposed to make cards. I don’t know if that ever happened.

Q: That was the discussion, that’s true.

Voytek: They were going to have these—

Q: Yes.

Voytek: You could buy the deck and—

Q: Play with the—

Voytek: —you could do it yourself in front of you. Do-do-do.

Q: Explain what the idea was.

Voytek: Oh, the *Synopsis Shuffles*—Bob wanted the people to make the composition of the paintings. I don't know, did he have rules how many could be in it or how many—? He wanted people to come and pick from the deck and make their own painting. Most people had picked three or four things. I don't know if he—

Q: I think there was a maximum—

Voytek: There was a max, I—

Q: Well at least in Long Island City, I got together hat check tags, the ones made out of brass.

[Laughter]

Q: I gave them out in a rotation fashion. Then eventually people could trade a panel with one another if someone's willing to give up a panel. You went in turn and then you went back and selected the next one in order—

Voytek: Oh nice, nice.

Q: —so that nobody had the advantage.

Voytek: Yes, right.

Q: In the end you were able to get five or six panels, which you could then trade off one or borrow one. I remember [Myron Leon] Mike Wallace was there and he wanted a panel from Chuck Close. Chuck Close said he didn't want to let go of that really good panel.

[Laughter]

Q: But he said, "So I'll let you have the panel providing you ensure the fact that Morley Safer will never do another program on art on *60 Minutes*."

[Laughter]

Q: The extension of this sort of participatory activity that Bob always had implicit in his work became very explicit in *Synopsis Shuffle*.

Voytek: Right.

Q: Out in Long Island City, there was that first experiment with how they were going to put it together for the Whitney show. Were you out there?



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

Voytek: My job was to make the pieces and the parts. Bob explained, “We’re going to do this.” He wanted it so that they could bolt together. On my mill and drill machine I set up a jig so that the holes from the top were a specific distance, the holes from the bottom were a specific distance, and so that any panel could bolt to any other panel. Then you bolt it together, you could hang it up as a unit. I did not think of this, but I heard that David Byrne wanted to put one of his panels upside down. The way that I registered the wall frames was that it could only go with the

panels being the right side up. So you couldn't bolt David's upside-down panel to—because the holes wouldn't line up.

Q: He did one upside-down—this was again at Long Island City when he—but someone also did one face to the wall—

Voytek: Oh okay, yes.

Q: —turned it around completely.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: Was that a problem in terms of—?

Voytek: I didn't think of that, Don.

[Laughter]

Q: That's like—

Voytek: I was just told he wanted them to bolt together. Yes, you can hang separate panels level, side by side. It's a little bit more time, but that's a great—I guess he liked the frames. [Laughs]

Q: Well, those were—

Voytek: That was just an inch-and-a-quarter-square stock so that there were no side frames. You could possibly, if you wanted to nail them right there, put a float frame around it. When you looked at them from the front, you didn't see any side frame. The frames were just structured to hold the panel together.

Q: He made fifty-two, but there were jokers as well, were there not? Were there fifty-four total?

Voytek: I don't remember, exactly. I think you're right on that. I know there was a deck of cards and decks of cards do come with jokers. But Bob wouldn't be joking on things like that, would he?

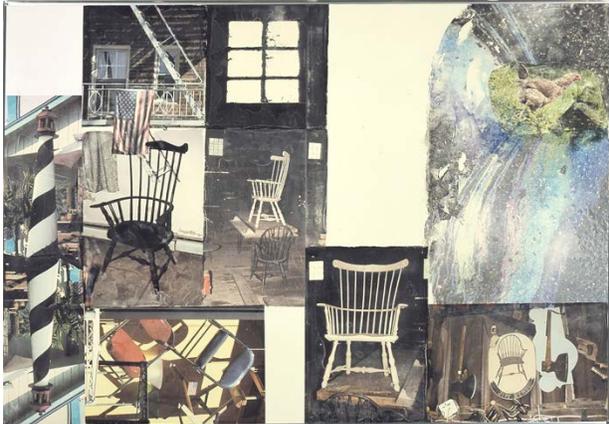
[Laughter]

Q: Yes, he would! [Laughs]

Voytek: Bob always liked the trickster. He kind of liked being able to get people to be shocked into seeing reality by being tricked.

Q: Did he talk about *Scenarios*, how he organized that, when he asked you to make the frame structures?

Voytek: Well, the *Scenarios* was a series where there were two panels side by side. It was interesting. We actually have one in front of us, 203.004 [*Squaters Rite (Scenario)*, 2003]. There's a lot of story in that. When Bob was doing [*The*] *Ancient Incident* [(*Kabal American Zephyr*), 1981/2006, an editioned cast bronze version of a 1981 work with the same title], the pieces and the parts of [the original] *Ancient Incident* were so valuable that we did not want to mold the object itself. Bob said that we're going to have to make an exact copy of *Ancient Incident*, which exact copies don't exist. The chairs that were on the top—I found out about a guy, [James] Jim Rendi, who had a business called Philadelphia Windsor Chair. It was in the back of *Fine Woodworking* magazine, his ad. I contracted him to make copies of the chairs that were in the original sculpture. We had to send the crate with these chairs to Jim Rendi.



Robert Rauschenberg
Squaters Rite (Scenario), 2003
 Inkjet pigment transfer on polylamine
 85 1/2 x 120 1/2 x 2 inches (217.2 x 306.1 x 5.1 cm)
 Faurschou Foundation

Q: Okay, we're talking about *Ancient Incident* now?

Voytek: No, no, I'm just talking about *Scenarios*.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: And about this painting that had—and so that whole project of me going there to his business where he made Windsor chairs by hand—in this *Scenario*, there's pictures of Jim Rendi's shop and his chairs. I took these pictures when I went to this guy's place and Bob is telling a story of this guy's world in a way. He never met or knew—but when I look at this, I'm inside Jim's life and there's things going on. It is a story of a craftsman that was working for Bob that Bob never met. This window in time is through the camera that I had carried.

Q: Is this a lead-in to *Ancient Incident*?

Voytek: No, this— He was making art all around so other *Scenarios* are from other places. Lord knows what the story is. It's Bob observing what was happening and he was in charge of a technique that he completely developed in-house. He was seeing what he wanted to see and telling stories he wanted to tell.

Q: Okay, well obviously *Ancient Incident* goes way back to *Kabal American Zephyr* [1981–83/1985/1987–88]. So we're back at just about the time you began work with Bob. Let's talk about *Ancient Incident*.



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

Voytek: *Ancient Incident*—

Q: The original and then how each of the castings were made and whether the project was finished.

Voytek: Eric Holt built *Ancient Incident* and that was one of my favorite pieces. I think it was '79 that Eric had done it [1981]. It's something like that. Bob had found—there's these steps going up and then there's these two chairs that are sort of Windsor style, but they're actually—it's not that old. It's an Americana mass-produced chair from like the forties. Bob had found these guys. I think he found them in New York. The steps—Bob had said there was a fruit stand or a small store that would sell fruits and vegetables and whatever, that they would drag them outside and put their boxes of wares on it and then they would drag them in at night. So these stands were used for many years in this shop in New York. They were sort of matched, but each one was so beat up and repaired through the years. They were rotted and rusted and there were

galvanized boots that were worn out on the bottom. There were steel straps to hold it together. There were nails bent in to keep things from falling apart. It was a lot of patina from life.

The chairs were repainted many times, cracked. There's a lot of life marks on the chairs themselves. The way Bob had them, Eric had mounted an aluminum plate so that the two chairs kissed. Then the back legs of the chairs touched the top of these stairs. It's like a bridge. It seems like there's a journey where you could go up the stairs and onto the chairs and then the meeting of the chairs and the balance of it. There's a lot of beautiful things going on here.

How it came to the point where I was involved—this was after Bob's accident, broke his hip—well the first cast object came even before this, but this—I think the golden apple might be good to go into that. And then into the chairs real quick?

Q: Okay, sure.

Voytek: At one point—Bob and I would always sit and talk about art and what he wanted to do, what things. When he had his accidents and his hips and things, there was a long period of time where Bob wasn't working. I always thought it's still my job to sit there, talk to Bob about what's new, what's happening, what's going on. There were a lot of times where I would be telling Bob stuff and I used to think that he's wondering, "What the hell is this guy doing? Why is he telling me this crap?" He'd be watching TV and I would just go through stuff and there would be no comment about, "I'd like to do that." We used to have a system of—when he would

say, “File this,” he meant throw it out. If it was an idea he wanted to use, he would take the article—and now he would just sit and listen and not comment.

This one day when it was time to have our conversations, I came up and he was sitting, and there was a little bronze apple on the countertop [Untitled, 1998/2003]. I sat down and he said, “I want to do this in gold.” I said, “Well what is this, Bob?” He said, “I was in New York and we have apple trees up on the roof of 381 [Lafayette Street]. Hisachika brought me this apple and it was the first apple from this tree when it was up on the roof. He goes, ‘First apples, Bob, from tree.’”



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled, 2003
Cast bronze
2 7/16 x 2 1/2 x 1 inches (6.2 x 6.4 x 2.5 cm)



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled, 2001
Cast 24 karat gold
2 7/16 x 2 1/2 x 1 inches (6.2 x 6.4 x 2.5 cm)

Bob ate around the apple, leaving the core. He told Hisachika, “Cast this in metal.” Hisachika went to Chinatown—a jeweler that Hisachika knew, probably owed Hisachika money. He said, “Cast this in metal.” The man burned out the apple and the leaf, and it was cast in bronze. It was not the highest quality cast. There was some porosity. The apple leaf was so thin that certain

things were missing, but it was pretty much there. Bob said, “Oh, I want this in gold.” I said, “Okay, Bob.”

I took it to my scale. I weighed it I knew in the specific gravity of brass. I figured out what it would be in wax and then I figured out what it would be in gold. Bob said he wanted 24-karat gold. I came back and I said, “Bob, we’re talking about 5 1/2, 6 ounces of gold to cast this little apple.” He says, “I want five.”

Q: Five examples?

Voytek: Five apples. I took a rubber mold of the apple. I injected the wax. I called up a gold company that we were dealing with to get 24-karat gold casting shot. At the time I think it was five hundred and fifty dollars an ounce or something like that. All together it was like sixteen thousand dollars’ worth of gold. When the FedEx guy brought the package, he says, “What the hell is this, gold?”

[Laughter]

Voytek: When I was at RISD and we would cast a little bit of gold, everybody’d be standing around going, “Woo-hoo, this is great!” Bob came over for the first time, I had the waxes, we had a kiln. I had a centrifuge casting unit there. I had to monkey-rig to put a bigger crucible on my centrifuge caster because it couldn’t handle that much gold. So I had to make a way that I could hold a bigger crucible. Bob came over in the car in his wheelchair and this was the first

one—you do the burnout cycle so that your mold is burned out completely and then you hold it at the temperature that you want to cast it at for a certain amount of time so that it's not overheated or under-heated. To get a good casting you want to be at the good temperature. There's also a button, which is—there's something where the metal shoots into the mold. You have to have your button calculated so that you have enough gold to push it in and have a complete good casting. So we've got about almost 8 ounces of gold we're going to be slinging here.

Bob's sitting there watching in his wheelchair. And I heat it up with my oxyacetylene torch. One thing that's pretty elegant about 24-karat gold is there's no oxide from impure metals. You heat it up and then when everything is flowing, you kind of rock your centrifuge caster to see that it's flowing. You overheat it just a little bit and then you let it fly and it smacks and spins. Then you let it cool down a little bit and then you grab it with your tongs and you have a bucket of water and you slowly lower it in the bucket of water. It's sizzling and popping, the investment is breaking off. I heard a thud because it dropped to the bottom of the water. I reached down and I pulled up—and there's no oxide at all. It's a perfect gold apple with a button connected to it.

That was the first time that Bob had me cast metal. It was the first time where I'm going to take this object, make a mold, make it in wax. That's good. So now we're getting to *The Ancient Incident*. Well actually before we get into *The Ancient Incident*, I'd like to back up a little bit.

Bob knows now that you can cast metal at Captiva. We've got this burnout furnace and we've got the ways of casting. Laury Getford gave Bob this really beautiful pineapple. It was not real

big. A little bit bigger than a hand grenade. It was like a nice orange and yellow color. Bob photographed it, he used it in one of his *Short Stories*, I think [*Page 1, Paragraph 8 (Short Stories)*, 2000]. I came up to talk to Bob and Bob had the pineapple on the counter. He says, “I want to cast this pineapple in silver.” [Note: *Untitled (cast pineapple)*, 2000/2004] I said, “Okay, we can do that.” I said, “The top is kind of interesting. We could electroplate the top.” He said, “What’s that?” I said, “We could paint a good lacquer on the top of it and once we have a little lacquer, we can copperplate it and then we can put silver plating on top of that.” He says, “Cast it solid.” I said, “Well most of the time, you cast it thin wall,” but Bob wanted it solid. I said, “It’s going to take a little bit of silver, Bob.” [Laughs] He says, “Oh, that’s fine. We’ll cast it solid.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (cast pineapple), 2000/2004
 Silver
 9 x 5 x 4 inches (22.9 x 12.7 x 10.2 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

You make a solid wax and then you can calculate how heavy the specific gravity is of the wax and then how much silver. We ordered a lot of silver. I don’t remember how much silver. Actually we did have a problem at one point. It was shipped and the crate wasn’t designed really well. I’m not going to mention who made it. The top that was silver-plated over an actual

pineapple got destroyed. I suggested to Bob that we do an organic burnout top for the next one. And so I went hunting for pineapple tops that would look good on the already cast bottom.

Q: Explain what an organic burnout is.

Voytek: An organic burnout, you take an actual organic object and you invest it in your castable refractory—your castable investment, which is like a plaster with refractory elements engineered into it to withstand the shock of metal being cast into it. I chopped the top off of a pineapple that Bob says, “Oh, I like the look of that top.” I had a vacuum casting unit that I had gotten because now we were doing all this stuff. Vacuum casting is good for getting things that were bigger than your ring sizes, your apple sizes. I took the top of the pineapple off. I put it onto this rubber bottom that has the pouring cup built into it and then I poured my investment into a stainless-steel flask. Then I put it in my vacuum chamber to get all the air bubbles out of all the nooks and crannies. When the investment kicks off, you flip it over, take the rubber top off. There’s the pouring cup shape and buried inside the plaster is your pineapple top.

I put this in the furnace, I bring it up to 1350, and you hold it for a long time at temperature. You have it so that the vapors and all the stuff is going up in smoke and things like that. Ash will form inside the cavity. And so when it’s at temperature, it’s a good thing that you do an oxygen lance every once in a while, where you have your oxygen from an oxyacetylene torch. You take your tong and you wear your gloves that handle heat and you can puff oxygen inside to try to blow out your ash. Then you can heat it up longer.

Once it's burned out and you see no sign of ash anymore, you bring it down to the casting temperature. On silver, it's a little lower than a gold cast. I think we wanted it to be about 800 degrees. Then you melt your silver. With the vacuum caster that we had now—what the vacuum caster does is basically there's a rubber mat that can handle temperature and there's vacuum being sucked through your table. You take your mold out of the furnace and you put it down and it sucks vacuum through the porosity of the investment. So when you pour your metal in, it sucks the metal down, drawing it down. Your gating system is designed differently for a vacuum cast than a gravity cast.

Q: Okay, so what—?

Voytek: So we made the silver pineapple and we got the new silver pineapple top.

I think there was something with also—Felissimo wanted Bob to do a cup, a teacup. Bob says, “Let's do a silver apple.” I said, “Okay.” I went to Bailey's, I bought a whole bunch of different apples. I called, “What kind of apples you like?” He didn't like any of the Bailey's apples. And so we actually called New York and I called David White. David White went to Dean & DeLuca and bought a bunch of apples. I guess they're better in New York, I don't know. So we get this big apple from New York and he wanted a specific wall thickness. So I made a rubber mold from the apple as we got it. You can pour wax into the mold, let it cool a little bit, pour the wax out, until you get the wall thickness. We had about an 1/8-inch wall thickness apple bottom with the top—cut in the wax so that the top fit into it and we made the Felissimo silver apples. [Note: The project did not move beyond the prototype phase.]

Q: He'd want an apple from New York because of New York and apple and—

Voytek: Bob will be Bob. I couldn't second guess his—

Q: You didn't hear—

Voytek: —this guy.

Q: [Laughs] Okay.

Voytek: When he said something wasn't good—

Q: If you're going to have an apple, you have it out of New York.

Voytek: And they were delicious-looking giant apples from Dean & DeLuca that were four times as much as the apples I bought him. [Laughs]

Q: But from the Big Apple.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #5

Interviewee: Lawrence Voytek

Location: Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: Donald Saff

Date: May 1, 2016

Q: Okay, so we were discussing *Ancient Incident*.

Voytek: Yes, all right. *Ancient Incident*. We just cast all these little things and I came to work one day and Bob had the Guggenheim retrospective book open to *Ancient Incident*. Bob said, “Look at this.” I’d installed it quite a few times. I love the piece dearly. Bob said, “Doesn’t this just look like metal?” I said, “Well, the color—” He goes, “I want to cast it in bronze. How do we do this?”

I had this long conversation with Bob how you have to make a mold of the object. Like we did this little apple, we have to make waxes, we have to make the waxes look exactly the way they should be. We have to burn it out. After this long conversation, he says, “Well, let’s look into foundries and find out where you think the best place to cast this would be.” I looked into Tallix, [Seward] Johnson Atelier was still up and running, and there was a small foundry, Bronzart [Foundry] in Sarasota, Florida. I contacted them too. Bob and I talked about the value of the object was so much that we could not take the rubber molds from the actual existing objects because it would damage the objects, taking them apart and molding them. Most of the time when you have a pattern, you don’t care about the pattern—but the original *Ancient Incident* was going to be going to the Guggenheim, the new Guggenheim that was going to be built.

Q: Right.

Voytek: If that new museum was to be built that Frank Gehry designed, Bob was going to give them the largest collection of art ever. There was going to be a Rauschenberg wing and the Foundation would be there.

Q: That's correct.

Voytek: This piece was going to be in that collection and so it was a valuable thing. Bob said, "Let's make an exact copy of *Ancient Incident*." I started—the two stands that—I think we talked a little bit. Bob found them in New York. They put boxes of vegetables and stuff on them. This store would drag them in and out, in and out, and fix them whenever they broke, and they would add things to them. This was made out of—when you make houses, they have these truss plates that hold 2-by-4s together. And there were also these corner plates that were made out of galvanized steel boxes. And there were some straps. I also started looking for old lumber that had similar grain. Some of the steps were made out of boards, some were made out of plywood. There was rot, there were nails that had curves and bends. And I spent a lot of time trying to find wood that looked like wood that would match the grain and the knots and the holes and the rot and the bases.



Robert Rauschenberg
The Ancient Indicent (Kabal American Zephyr),
1981–2006
Patinated cast bronze
86 1/2 x 91 x 20 7/8 inches (219.7 x 231.1 x 53 cm)
From an edition of six produced by Bronzart Foundry,
Sarasota, Florida

At this same time I realized that there's no way I could do this with the chairs. They were bent formed, turned. I actually found in the back of *Fine Woodworking* magazine an ad for Jim Rendi at Philadelphia Windsor Chair. I called Jim up and Jim taught classes on how to make Windsor chairs. He was up in Philadelphia. I told him that we had these two Windsor type chairs and, "I want you to make copies of them." He said, "Get the chairs to me. I can do this."

We had the official ROCI crate, which was a big green monster crate. I arranged the shipment with Thomas to ship this crate to Jim Rendi. I told Jim, "I'll be there when we open up the crate." I flew into this town and I went over to Jim's shop. He had a house that was built like when George Washington was around. Everything in his house—all the glass was ancient glass and all the art was pictures of ancient people. He thought the best thing in the world was Philadelphia chairs and that was the epitome of American chair design, and that what they added to what the English started— Jim—he made Philadelphia chairs. I took pictures of his shop.

He took me to his shop and there were wood chips all over the floor. He had hand-powered tools, lathes that you pump with your legs. He was a seventeenth century kind of guy. The time came where we were to open up this crate. We unscrewed it and we opened it and he was dumbfounded. He saw these—what he said looked like American cheap chairs. I said, “Well, these are really special chairs and I want you to try to make copies of it. Every crack, every split, everything that’s off, try to make it.” Jim made bending molds. There’s three different woods that he used and he meticulously copied it in wood, which he was directed to do. The only thing that he did that I didn’t ask him to do—on the bottom of both chairs he had wood burned his signature.

We had the wood patterns. I made the steps and then it came time to dealing with the foundries. Johnson Atelier and Tallix had put in quotes. They just gave me lists of all the people that they’ve already done. But Rick Frignoca at Bronzart, when he saw the project he said, “I can do this.” They had two number thirty bronze furnaces and he said, “On the bigger pours, I can do two crucible pours.” He said, “I’ve been in business thirty years and we have an expert crew here. The thing that we will bring is caring and loving of what we’re doing.” I talked to Bob about the three possibilities. Bob said, “Do you think the Sarasota man can do it?” I said, “I really believe in Rick.” He heard of all the labor and all the things that had to go into it and he said, “There’s one thing I want you to do is make sure that they really love working on this.” I said, “How can I do that, Bob?” He said, “Buy five bottles of Moët & Chandon in a cooler. And I want you to talk to them all and tell them that they only can work on it when they feel like working on it. If they’re in a bad mood, not to work. I want them to take as much time as necessary and do the best job they can do.”

I called Rick and I says, “Rick, I’m coming to your town. Bob wants me to tell the crew some stuff.” I opened up the cooler and took out the bottles of champagne and explained, “Bob wants you to love what you’re working on.” The crew—Kendell, Wayne, Scott, Tam—there were quite a few of them. It was a labor of love for them. Most of the time, if you are an artist and you go to a foundry, you’re making something, the artist goes and looks at the waxes and looks at the molds and the castings to review things. Bob was in his wheelchair and stuff. I wish he could have gone there to see how inspired they were—and how much they loved working on this piece. Rick Frignoca actually took me out to lunch once right near the foundry and when he put the truck in park, he looked at me and he says, “I want to tell you, this is the most important job I ever did.”

Q: You had constructed the base?

Voytek: I constructed the base, yes, and all the parts.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: So he had all the pieces that he needed to mold in front of him. It was a lot of problems because when you pour rectangles, it’s kind of a trick. When you put pieces together, you have to hide how the pieces go together. Roman joints are complicated. Nowadays they could weld things. They had to accurately duplicate the textures wherever pieces and parts were put together.

Rick tried to make the pieces and parts as large as he could. We came up with an idea. We had these nails—

Q: As large as he could so he could work it back down into the right texture? Is that what you're saying?

Voytek: So that he would have less places that had to be worked to match.

Q: Okay.

Voytek: Now the boards he had—he had me make my pattern with screws rather than nails so that we could take everything apart. And then we molded each board individually. Then we got silicon bronze nails and we actually drilled the holes and nailed the pieces together. Some of the nails are bent and come out—and formed and shape. Everything is silicon bronze. What was galvanized steel plates, I made in same gauge silicon bronze sheet. The pockets on the bottom that had to be—the originals were spot-welded together. I made everything out of silicon bronze, pieces and parts, folded it like the machine that made the original parts and spot-welded it together to match the look of how they were put together. Those were not cast, they were fabricated elements. Also they're—

Q: The truss—

Voytek: Truss plates and things.

Q: The truss plates were out of sheet—

Voytek: The truss plates were cast.

Q: Oh cast, the truss plates, okay.

Voytek: The pockets were fabricated. There are some banding straps that are crimped together with steel banding wires. I had silicon bronze, same gauge sheet, cut to the width of the bands. I made the little clips the same size as the banding clips and I used a bander to pull it tight and band it together after the castings were done.

There are some stainless-steel pins that were added—there's pins that are drilled and indexed into the chairs so that the chairs—where they kissed together, there are three pins. Rick Frignoca had an old machinist that he knew that had an indexing table that made the holes for the stainless-steel pins. There's also pins on the top of the stairs that go into the legs and the legs taper up on an angle. Those were machined so that you slide the two chairs together and we had a way of lifting them and then you lower it onto the four pins of the stands, which locked it together. We were looking at the strength of the material and how strong it was. Actually I saw a picture from the Foundation that somebody—a dancer was standing on top of the chairs. They didn't tell me, "Is it strong enough to stand on it?" But when Rick Frignoca and I were dealing with it, you could put about a thousand pounds on those chairs before there would be any deflection. The whole thing weighs close to fourteen hundred pounds.

Q: They finished the first casting. Had Bob decided on the edition size before it began—

Voytek: Yes, Bob was kind of funny. He said, “What’s the smallest edition I can do where everything is an original?” I didn’t know what he was talking about, this edition-ing and original and stuff. The first one—now the colors of *Ancient Incident* all fall into pretty much standard patina-looking colors. The first one was zero of five. It was the artist proof. Everything was done. They had the original *Ancient Incident* sent to them and they meticulously photographed it and they tried to copy the original objects as they looked. Now there are things like weathered paint—there was some spray paint on the original ones and things. The man that was doing the patina tried to duplicate that. And the first one, which is out at the Foundation in Captiva, which is Bob’s, which has been living outside forever—Bob was not that happy with the patina. He loved all the textural-ness and how it existed. He had long conversations with Rick about how he wanted the next one to be patina-ed.

The next one, they started it and Bob sort of said, “I want it to be that it is—instead of patina-ing wood or patina-ing the paint and the chips and the stuff like that, I want everything to appear as if it is a wood object that has this weathered patina color that’s similar to the *Ancient Incident*.” Each patina was slightly different as they went along. Each time Bob would talk to them about how to do the next one. It did become—the castings were meticulously copied, but the patinas changed slightly to Bob’s orders as it went along.

The first time that they were shown, at the show at Pace [Wildenstein, New York, *Robert Rauschenberg: Scenarios and the Ancient Incident*, 2006]—and Arne had the first one there and it's kind of a funny story. There's lots of rumors that—it might have been [Pamela] Pam Schmidt, but Bob had heard that it had cost over a million to make this thing. We're about to get ready to fly to New York for the opening and Bob says, "Lawrence, I need to talk to you about something." He goes, "Could you sit down and talk to me. How much did this damn thing cost to do?" I said, "Well the flights to—and to make the pieces and the parts— The foundry was eighty-five thousand and I figured with all the other bells and whistles, it probably was another twenty thousand." He says, "Oh, good. I heard it cost a million to make it."

Q: A single one.

Voytek: Yes. The first one sold for three point something million dollars at the opening. Then I heard that Arne sold a second one at the same price. He called Bob up to celebrate and Bob said, "Don't sell any more at that cheap price."

That's the story of slowly building probably one of my favorite pieces. It is sort of strange because it is like a bridge into another life or something. There is something that is—and working with the foundry and all the men, trying to make little tiny pieces and parts perfect. It's like making jewelry, but it weighed fifteen hundred pounds.

Q: Do you recall any plans to place it at the White House?

Voytek: Bob had talked about he wanted it to go there. This is before [Barack] Obama was elected. Bob had talked about that, that he wanted it to go to the White House. I'm not sure who he told this to—that was one of the things that had come up. I heard him say if a Democrat is elected, I want it to go to the White House.

Q: A Democrat was elected, but there's no *Ancient Incident* at the White House.

Voytek: I was not involved in any of how things should go and who should organize these things.

Q: But they did acquire other works that are in the private dining room. Well, in the public space actually.

Voytek: Yes. I remember Phillip talking about, it'd be nice to have a barbecue and set up *Ancient Incident* at the White House. Because there was talk that it was supposed to be going there.

Q: You did a kind of shrine out in Captiva. What was that?

Voytek: Well, artists have always been important to me and why we're on this wet dirtball spinning in space. I think that there's—for me, being in the trade, there's something about where somebody's resting that—I went to [Vincent] van Gogh's grave, I went to Matisse's grave. I wanted there to be some sort of spot that wasn't a gravestone, but was a marker that Bob's presence could be felt at. I was given some of Bob's ashes when Bob passed away.

Rick Frignoca, who died of cancer—during the makings of *The Ancient Incident*, in the beginning when he was trying to do one of the chairs, the first chair top he cast in a complete cast, there were some problems. There was some shrinkage, there was a few problems. I went to the foundry to review the waxes and we were talking about how things could be changed. Rick says, “I want you to have this.” It was silicon bronze. It was probably 150 pounds of silicon bronze, which is six dollars a pound plus the labor of making it. This was something special that I owned.

After Bob had passed—chairs had always been a big part of Bob’s art through the years. He would talk about thinking about the person that owned the chair in this painting or who used to sit in this chair. On the anniversary of Bob’s—

Q: You want to stop for a while?

Voytek: No, it’s all right, that’s all right. The anniversary of Bob’s birthday was coming up. I had some of Bob’s ashes and I had this chair. I decided to make sort of a marker for Bob on Captiva. I welded up—it didn’t have legs on this chair. It was just a chair top. I welded up some stainless steel that was leftover material from the neon bike project. There’s 2-inch diameter stainless pipe and it’s sort of like an oil derrick that was below the chair that I had made. I made a small titanium cube—it’s like 1/2-inch square with RR stamped to it. In the stainless below ground—it’s mounted to the stainless, this titanium cube. I wanted it to be electrically conductive so that if you’re sitting naked in the chair, you would conduct to the titanium—

[Laughter]

Voytek: —cube on the bottom. On Bob's birthday we mixed up seven hundred pounds of concrete on a little ridge that we could see the setting sun. And we put the chair into the seven hundred pounds of concrete and adjusted the chair to point towards the setting sun on Bob's birthday.

Q: Tell me about the rings. Time to time, I would see Bob wearing either a titanium ring or another type of ring, usually, I thought, stamped RR. What's the history of that?

Voytek: Well Bob—early in the eighties, '85 or—yes, somewhere along that time, his birthday was coming up. Bob's got it all; he has everything he wants. I was thinking what can I make him—something special for Bob. I noticed on the periodic table that twenty-two, which was Bob's lucky number—Bob was born on October 22—was titanium. I like working with new metals and I like the way they taste, I like the way they melt. I ordered 25 pounds of titanium. There was a minimum order from this company. 25 pounds of titanium, 1 1/4-inch diameter rod. I got the commercially pure titanium not the military alloy. This came in and I had my ring bending pliers. I knew what Bob's ring size was. I made the first titanium ring for Bob's birthday that year. It's sort of like the “one ring to rule them all, one ring to guide them.” I got to the point where Bob's special friends were always coming to town. I could quite rapidly take a piece of my titanium rod and with my ring-bending pliers make a titanium ring. So I started making rings and I would tell everybody the story, “This is Bob's lucky number, it's a lucky metal.”

Q: At Bob's request—for you to do this or—?

Voytek: Well, I guess he didn't mind me doing it. I'm kind of a pain in the ass and so he's like, "Okay, whatever." But I think that it made people feel special. I also told them, "You're part of Bob's family, where you're connected to Bob in the circle of life." One of the strangest things—a lot of people that I have made rings for, the night after they wore it for the first time, have talked to me and they said that they had the most intense dreams. Somebody tells you that, it's like, fine, that's interesting. But after about fifteen people telling me that, I thought there was something strange about that.

Q: After the first titanium ring you made for Bob, did you make him others?

Voytek: Yes, yes, we—then I was into bling—that Bob liked something. When we were doing the *Shiners*, we'd go to the scrapyards, pick up Bob's shiny objects. I found a piece of stainless-steel pipe. It was just his ring size—when you ring size people, you find out what is the size of their ring. I took a hacksaw and I sliced—I can shake people's hands and kind of make a ring for them after I do that. I just kind of know what size fingers they have. This piece of pipe, I took a hacksaw, cut it on a slight taper, like a pie taper, and I stamped RR into the stainless-steel ring. It fit Bob perfectly and he liked that ring a lot. So it started that I would make him rings at special times—and it didn't have to be his birthday anymore. I just made rings for him. I'd find something that I liked. I made another one out of a PVC pipe, which was the same standard size as the stainless-steel pipe, but it was white plastic and I had to heat up my stamps to get the RR

into them. Then I put a little bit of black paint into it and rubbed it—so it was a white ring. I had made one out of aluminum and I was dealing with an anodizing company and I had them anodize them black. So he had a black anodized one. So we had various metals.

Also I'd find—I had a rough, natural occurring diamond that was like a greenish color cube. It looked like a little crystal. I made a silver ring that was like two rings together that I welded on the bottom and then I put it in the vice and I scrunched it so that it would hold the diamond in between the top. They were just experiments with pieces of metal and things. I had also gotten a meteor from—I was in New Mexico and it was iron meteor slabs. This guy had cut pieces of it. I cut off a piece of the slab and on a stainless-steel ring I welded a piece of the iron meteor onto the top part of the ring.

Q: Bob wore that for—

Voytek: It was in his collection. I think—

Q: Yes, it was in his collection.

Voytek: Ed Chappell, his photographer, actually at one point took a picture of Bob's hand wearing Bob's rings. I think he had about a dozen photos of stuff.

Q: So there was a moth that was—? What is the genesis of that project?

Voytek: Darryl had one of his artworks in Bob's house. I'm not sure if Bob bought it or Darryl gave it to him. A moth had landed on it and it died. I came and Bob said he liked it—it was this grey—really pretty elegant shape. Pretty nice moth. It looked like it was wearing a grey Joseph Beuys felt suit. Bob says, "I'd like this cast in silver." The body was pretty corroded and so I had to do a little wax injecting to fill it up a little bit. Then I burned that out and it—the wings weren't in the greatest shape so I cleaned up the wax and I—it looks a little Art Deco-y, but Bob approved the way that it looked. The eyeballs had to be rebuilt. Then Bob said that he wanted me to make them into pins. It was stamped with the small RR underneath and we had lapel pins. I had a wax injector and I had a rubber mold made. So when we needed more I would inject them and make some—I have no idea how many—I think there's about twenty-five of them.

Q: Were you aware of the small—the flies, the dead flies that he placed in the *Scatole Personali* [1952–53] series of—

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: Did you discuss that with him when he asked you to do the moth or—?

Voytek: No, no.

Q: So what became of the mold?

Voytek: The mold exists. I have the mold. Darryl actually asked if I could inject another wax and make him one because when he was at the White House with Bob, Hillary Clinton—Darryl gave Hillary his moth. And so he asked me if I would make him a new one. So I do have the mold in my studio. [Note: Following the interview, Voytek said he could not cast the moth and returned the mold to Pottorf.]

It's kind of interesting that Bob got into casting later in life. I wish that he could have met Rick and had started a little bit earlier because a lot of fun things would have come out of Bob's mind because of his attitude of what object is important and how it should be portrayed. He did seem to want things to last longer. Later in his life he seemed to want to know that things are going to be around after him.

Q: Which is quite a change from that *Nightline* program and his attitude expressed at that time.

Voytek: Yes.

Q: There was another sculpture at the end—

Voytek: There's a funny thing that he said—we saw something of—he was watching some TV show and it was about some plant that lives like a hundred years and then a flower comes out of it and it dies. Bob said that he would like his art to be the most precious thing you've ever seen and die rather than something ugly that'll last forever.

[Laughter]

Q: There was another sculpture that he was working on, a ball of twine and a ruler. [Note: Untitled, 2008 editioned work based on an untitled, 1997 sculpture]



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled, 2008
Patinated and painted bronze
4 1/8 x 11 13/16 x 3 3/4 inches (10.5 x 30 x 9.5 cm)
From an edition of 6, produced by Bronzart Foundry,
Sarasota, Florida

Voytek: Yes.

Q: How much of that was done while he was alive?

Voytek: Well—

Q: Was it completed posthumously?

Voytek: Oh yes, okay. Bob had done a sculpture. It's in Darryl's collection, which is an actual ball of twine with a ruler across the top of it. [Note: Untitled, 1997] Bob says, "I want to cast this. So let's have Rick do this." Once again we have a precious object that you can't mold itself so we had to make a copy to mold. I had to make another ruler. If you felt the actual original

ruler, it's smooth, smooth, smooth. The way that the ruler markings are, it's just like printed on this maple surface. It says Louis A. Lew, tailor. And so there is no real texture. You can't really touch it. I said, "Bob, do you want it just printed on?" He says, "No, I want it cast so that there is a texture." I said, "Well, I can make something that has the impression of where the printed is done. I can take a piece of wood and I can make two press plates and press the impression that's on the ruler into it, and then when we cast it, we can patina it so that where the impressions are, we can have it dark." He says, "Yes, let's do this."

I worked with an artist called Lucas Century who has done sandblasting forever. Friend of mine. I knew that Lucas had this process where he would Xerox stuff and use it as a stencil to be put on a photo resistant emulsion and then he would sandblast. I brought the ruler, we Xeroxed the ruler, we made copies of it, we cleaned it up. I brought some brass plates and we coated it. He tried to sandblast the brass plate and it didn't work well. It wasn't etching into the brass well. We made another one. I suggested using ferric nitrate and we'd etch it. I picked up ferric nitrate at RadioShack, where you etch your electrical plates. I knew that when you do circuit boards, you could get premade copper plates and then resist it and you etch with the ferric—

Q: In ferric chloride.

Voytek: Ferric chloride.

Q: Yes.

Voytek: I got the ferric chloride. Lucas did another photo resist emulsion and I etched it. It worked out really well because I could leave it in, rock it around, pick it up, and see how deep we were going. It made a nice even, smooth depth etching. Then I removed that and I made two of them. I made out of similar wood that had the grain of the original ruler—I used maple. Maple was too hard and so I used poplar, which was similar to maple and had similar grain. I shaped it just like the ruler. I bought a 20-ton hydraulic press and I rammed the two plates together and I had a nice wooden ruler with indentations that I sent to the foundry.

Rick Frignoca made the mold from it. They made a wax. They cast it. They told me that they had the cast and to come and review the piece. We had problems with the original castings, and so I actually brought my vacuum caster and made an extension so that we could get a little bit higher quality cast with the vacuum so that there were no bubbles or porosity in the—and so, we did get one really nice ruler. I brought it and I showed it to Bob, and he's looking at it and he says, "This is good, I like this."

Almost leaving, I said, "One funny thing, Bob." I took out Bob's tape measure and I measured it, and I said, "It's not a foot." Because you get shrinkage when you cast in metal, it's about 3/16 of an inch shorter than a foot. He says, "Use this ruler on the first one, but I want the last rulers to all be a foot long. I want it to be exactly a foot long." This meant I would either have to make a press plate proportionally larger that would calculate how much shrinkage down—I was talking to Rick Frignoca and I actually called Tom Pruitt at Graphicstudio. I said, "Tom, if I made a really accurate silicon bronze bar that's the right size and we photo emulsion coat it, could we etch it in—and we could do it the other way around, so now the lettering is the thickness of

something printed on it?” Tom said, “Piece of cake. We could do that.” Only Tom, Rick, and I knew that. The ball of twine—now get back to the ball of twine—

Q: So was it ever done?

Voytek: Bob had passed. I was under the impression that I was going to be finishing Bob’s work, since Bob was the one who told me what he wanted and how it should be done. When the Foundation took over, they gave me a two-week notice. They contacted the foundry—Rick Frignoca had passed and they just had them do it again. They did not know what Bob had told me to do.

Q: The name of the ruler was Lew?

Voytek: Yes, I’ve got a picture of it.

Q: Are you aware that we used it in the *Shale*?

Voytek: No.

Q: Now see, you have to look at that *Shale*.



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

Voytek: Louis A. Lew.

Q: Louis A. Lew. Where did Bob get that ruler, do you know?

Voytek: No, I don't. That was a precious thing to him. It was in his—for him to say, "We're going to make this sustainable, forever," that was a precious thing.

[INTERRUPTION]

Voytek: I like the idea of making the etch sculptural ruler. I thought that was just an elegant solution. The ball of twine, we did it vacuum cast. One of the things that we did—I could not mold the ball of twine that Bob had found, which was this ancient string ball. So I did have to make my own ball of twine. I found similar twine and I modeled a clay out of the—just

modeling clay, the oil-based clay, smaller than it was—and then I figured out how the ball was rotating when it was wound onto it. And so the last 1/2-inch of winding I did by hand.

To get the metal to flow through the strings, what we did was when we made the rubber mold—and Rick Frignoca was in on this—first we had to seal the string slightly so that it wouldn't let the rubber permeate into it. We vacuum cast it so that it was very, very close. Then cutting it out, these channels had to be carefully done so that we wouldn't be breaking the channels. To get the wax, we ran a harder wax than just the micro-crystalline. It was more like a jeweler injection wax. It was a plastic wax. We vacuumed the rubber mold while it was hot to get all the air out of those channels where the strings were going. That worked out quite well. I didn't know of anybody vacuuming a rubber mold to get the detail that way.

Q: Yes. I've never heard of it.

Voytek: Bob never did see—he saw a ball of twine that was cast that had problems in the back side of it. He said for me to do it again and make it perfect. Bob never saw a perfect ball of twine. He did see the first ruler, but that—it was kind of posthumous, where Bob never saw it finished. He saw the parts, almost finished.

Q: The final ones were the diminished size rulers? It was never corrected?

Voytek: Every ruler was the diminished size ruler. Bob did say the first one that he approved, that was stamped, “Use that for the zero—the artist proof. And the last five, I want them to be 1-foot long.”

Q: So again at the very end of his life, he worked on a series called [*The*] *Lotus* [*Series*, 2008].

Could you tell me about that?



Robert Rauschenberg
Lotus III (The Lotus Series), 2008
Inkjet pigment and photogravure on paper
45 3/4 x 60 x 1 3/4 inches (116.2 x 152.4 x 4.4 cm)
From an edition of 50, published by Universal
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Voytek: *Lotus* prints, that was Bill Goldston, ULAE. They were almost the exact same size as the *Runts*, which were the last [painting] series that Bob had been working on. Bill wanted to edition these pieces. Bob told me to show Bill how we laminated the panels. Bill wanted to do it just like the *Runts* and he wanted the vacuum laminated paper. Bill had a different paper that was much whiter than the Saunders that he wanted the prints to be done on. Bob wanted to just—he didn’t want us to use the Rauschenberg frames that I designed on Bill’s edition. He wanted Bill to have wood frames on it. Bob made the originals like he was making *Runts* and Bill took them

to ULAE and high-res scan sort of thing. He printed them up and laminated them on panels. So it looks very close to a *Runt*.

Q: Who helped Bob at this point? How did he do the originals? Who helped him?

Voytek: Kevin and—well, Laury Getford—the conversations of what images should be used to do the transfer was—Laury had printed all those up. Kevin had done the transferring. The *Lotus*, the embossing—I wasn't in on that, but Laury was in on the imagery and how Bob wanted it.

Q: Yes, photo reviewer, I guess, was made for—

Voytek: A photo reviewer?

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Yes, right.

Q: So Bob used pictures that he had taken in China in '82 when we were there?

Voytek: Yes, yes.

Q: For the photo for the *Chinese Summerhall* [1982] Graphicstudio project. As well as photographs taken subsequently in his travels back for the show?

Voytek: Actually some of them are some of my photographs. There's one that has rubber cones. Bailey's were re-tarring their parking lot and I took pictures of the rubber cones and the new asphalt. There's these giant floating lily pads. I took my daughter, Alexa, up to Duke [University, Durham, North Carolina] and it's in the Duke Gardens. They're my photographs. That one, every picture is something that I photographed in that edition. But I was one of Bob's chosen camera boys.

Q: Not the only one. I had to carry a Hasselblad through China.

[Laughter]

Q: Which was not very easy. There was the occasional, "You see the bamboo?" "You want the camera?" "No, take the picture."

Voytek: Oh yes.

Q: But he'd complete direction in terms of what should be done.

Voytek: Right.

Q: So the series was complete. How did Bob sign it?

Voytek: Bill bought some presidential signing machine. It was so funny. I never saw this machine, but I remember Bill had done some machine signing. A piece of paper came and you could have different hardness pencils. Each hardness pencil had a different signature on it. So this was 2B, not 2B. [Laughs]

Q: A 2B pencil, right, okay.

Voytek: 4B or the 6B. This page showed up and it had like a dozen of Bob's signatures with the different types of pencils for Bob to approve which hardness pencil he'd prefer. Bob was staring at it. This was a machine and I guess you can—it's not a program, it's an actual—a mechanical copying device—interesting mechanical thing— A copygraph or—?

Q: Yes.

Voytek: Yes, there's—I'm not sure if it optically follows something and then it mechanically does it or—I'm not sure how it works. I've never seen it. But I heard that presidents will have form stuff signed by it—or they had in the past. It's not a new thing. It's something that the technology has been around for quite a while.

Q: Yes or the principle of it—Thomas Jefferson would make copies of his letters by using that kind of device.

Voytek: Right.

Q: Bob was quite ill. I came down to visit him for a couple of days. He was in the hospital in Fort Myers and things were not going well. The plan was for him to go back. I guess he wanted to be in the studio, is that correct? I remember you talking about the possibility of rigging up a device so that Bob, in his bed, could look up and possibly produce a work if he wished. You wanted to facilitate that for him. What were you thinking?

Voytek: Well yes, we—Bob was in the hospital and Dr. John [B.] Fenning there was—Bob was having multiple organ failures and they had to put him on a ventilator. Bob wanted to be back on Captiva. I believe Bob wanted to go to his house. But the way that the elevators were and the size of the ventilators—Bob had to be on this machine. Bob’s studio had a giant elevator that could bring all the machines upstairs. Basically I think Dr. Fenning lined up that a ventilator IC [intensive care] unit could transport Bob out to Captiva and set him up in his studio. They brought Bob out to the studio and set an ICU unit in his studio.

He was in a bed in the room, in his studio, on this ventilating machine. The first thing I did when Bob got there is—since his bed was really up high and all the tables were really low, I welded up a quick table that would make the TV set high enough so that he could see it. The last series that he was working on, the *Runts*, had a standard size panel. And so I decided to make the table—and I did a little drawing to talk to Bob. I said, “Bob, I’m going to make a table that is the exact size of the *Runts*. It’ll be hinged so that we can tilt it up and you can see it and we can hold up images and then when you decide where you like it, we can put it down and transfer it and then we can show it to you again.”

He agreed that I could make the table. He had had a trach and things like that so communicating with him at that time was very hard. It's usually you just sort of tell him something and he could nod yes or no and say things and—with only his left hand working. He couldn't write really well. It was a lot of trying to understand what he was trying to tell you. All my tools and shop stuff was below Bob in the shop. Bob was taking naps and doing different things while he's on this ventilating machine. I asked Bob—I said, "Bob, if I'm going to make this table, I'm going to be making a lot of noise below you. Is that okay?" The last thing he said to me was, "Music."

Q: That the noise you were going to make was music.

Voytek: He just said, "Music." I knew what he was talking about, that he liked hearing it. He always liked to hear me down below.

Q: Thanks, Lawrence.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Postscript?

Voytek: Yes, one time—this one day, I came to talk to Bob about making art and doing stuff. We're in the house near sunset, which was "have a beer with me" time. Bob just said, "I really want to thank you for all you've done. You never let me down." I said, "Bob, we're not done yet.

You have dreams, you have ideas; [if] you want to do something—” I said, “If you dream of a titanium bridge to the moon, you’re going to have it.”

We had the best of times making art together. There’s something about someone that you believe in, even though—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Just being able to serve someone is sort of a gift, where it’s more important to take care of other people’s problems than try to solve your own. I was blessed to be in the position where—trying to solve Bob’s problems. If he was made out of metal, he’d have a titanium heart and he’d be running well today.

Q: Thanks.

Voytek: Thanks, Don.

[END OF INTERVIEW]