

Interview of **ROSAMUND FELSEN**  
Conducted by **KAREN THOMAS**, Interviewer  
Second Voice is **GRANT MUDFORD**

July 24, 2011

Los Angeles, CA

Interviews with Rauschenberg Friends and Associates. RRFA 08.  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

KAREN THOMAS: It's beautiful. May I make a picture of this?

FELSEN: Absolutely.



[Photo Credit: Sidney Felsen]

GRANT MUDFORD: Well, there's an even nicer one.

FELSEN: Do you want to see the other one? The other one is more revealing, actually. But this one. You can see the affection that we had. We really had the best times.

THOMAS: Yes.

FELSEN: And we got up to mischief.

MUDFORD: Rosamund calls this one her "Bonnie and Clyde" portrait.

FELSEN: No, I think that's what Bob called it.

MUDFORD: Okay. Maybe.

THOMAS: Bob called it ...

FELSEN: Yes.



[Photo Credit: Sidney Felsen]

THOMAS: Oh, my God! It *is* a Bonnie and Clyde portrait. I think I brought my camera. I will take a photograph of them. Those are wonderful.

FELSEN: Now Sid took both of these pictures. The one on the right [the “Bonnie and Clyde” picture] ... We were in Minneapolis. See, I look a little bit cranky, because I was worried. We were on our way to meet Tanya Grosman for lunch, and Tanya was very uncomfortable about Gemini, because she thought -- rather than being colleagues, she saw us as competitors -- like we were taking her artists away from her. Not at all! They loved her and they loved us, but that's how she was.

So Bob was having a show in Minneapolis at the Art Institute. Sid and I went, so we were planning to meet her for lunch. We were late. Bob was always late. Sid was always late. And this drove me *crazy*! I wanted to make the best impression. I wanted to be so nice with her and everything, and that's why I had that expression on my face. We were in a taxi. Sid was in the front seat, and he turned around and took that picture. The other one, that's at Gemini.

THOMAS: When we started corresponding you said that Bob was the most important person in your life. So tell me.

FELSEN: The most influential.

THOMAS: Influential.

FELSEN: Which is a little bit different -- because he helped me to see things, and to think in ways that I had never been exposed to before. About art a lot, but just about -- he helped me see things. I don't really know how to explain it other than that. It was a big loss.

THOMAS: You spent a lot of time together you said.

FELSEN: We did, because he came to L.A. to work with Gemini a lot. So he was here a lot. Less, probably, in New York and less in Florida, but the best times, I think, for me, were when he was here. And he needed us, because this wasn't his home. But he became very comfortable here, I think, and made lots of friends with the L.A. artists and so forth. I had a lot to do with that, actually.

So at this time, during the '70s, in the early '70s, I was working at the old Pasadena Art Museum, which is now the Norton Simon, so in that capacity... I knew a lot of the artists already, but I got to meet a lot more, and Bob was very interested in this because he loved being around artists. He was interested in what young artists were doing, what any kind of artists were doing.

THOMAS: Take me back to the early days of Gemini. I know that you, and Sidney, and Stan, and Elyse ... -- You hadn't gone to art school thinking that you were going to open up a print shop.

FELSEN: No. None of us had gone to art school. What was Elyse studying? I think she was studying education. Stanley was probably taking business classes. I think maybe some side

courses or something. Sid was the only one who seriously was taking ceramics classes, because he liked to do that. But I had never taken anything. It would never have occurred to me. I was always interested in visual things, and I was interested in artists. I was interested in the creative process. Even when I was in high school, I used to read about artists and so forth. But marrying Sid, and then Stanley and Elyse were getting very involved with collecting, and they were involved with the L.A. County Museum, in the support group called -- at that time it was called the Contemporary Art Council.

So they were very involved with the L.A. art scene, so I learned, through osmosis and so forth. But it was really funny -- I had at this point a second marriage. I had four children -- three children from my first marriage, and -- well, I'll tell you what happened.

Sid was a practicing CPA, and he used to come home, and he would be doing his bookkeeping. You know how you had to do it by hand in those days, so he would ask me to help him, so that's how I learned about that stuff. But I remember saying to him one time, "You know, you're such an interesting person, and you have all these other interests in the art world, and we were going to galleries and museums and so forth. How come you're doing *this* kind of thing?" And he said, "I always thought I was performing a valuable service." And I said, "Well, it *is* a valuable service, but you have more to give." So he started thinking about it.

Then Stanley -- well, you've heard this story already, I'm sure that Stanley met Ken Tyler, and Ken was looking, really, for some financial backing.

THOMAS: Sure.

FELSEN: Little did he know that Sid and Stanley would make a whole big thing out of it. Ken was just thinking small-time; he just needed somebody to help finance his projects. He was basically a for-service printmaker. Artists would come in, and he would make prints for them. But Sid and Stanley came in with this idea, "Let's do it in a big way."

THOMAS: It's a big idea.

FELSEN: It's a big idea in 1966. Actually, 1965 was when they started thinking about it.

But anyway, I can remember to this day... -- well, the first year was the Albers project. That took nine months to work on, the Albers. Then Ken, through his connections, met and introduced himself to Bob Rauschenberg, and invited Bob to come to L.A. to work at Gemini.

Now none of us had met Bob at this time. So he was invited to come to L.A., and he was to stay at the Grinsteins. Bob didn't want to come on his own, so he brought his current boyfriend at the time -- who I remember was Dutch, and very handsome and young, but I don't remember his name.

I remember to this day walking into the living room and there is Bob Rauschenberg sitting on this couch with this guy very close to him, and I thought, oh my God! He is so *handsome*! Oh, my God! Artists are supposed to be creative, but they're not supposed to be handsome too! He

was just incredible, with that great personality and everything. I don't remember anything more about that evening except that we -- I just remember seeing him sitting on that couch.

THOMAS: Did you all go see his *Pelican* performance?

FELSEN: No, I didn't. Stan and Elyse might have.

THOMAS: Stanley told me that he had gone to see it. I had been confused, because Jay Belloli, I think is his name, had done the Gemini [exhibition catalogue]--

FELSEN: Jay Belloli.

THOMAS: -- Jay Belloli -- and talked about *Pelican* and the Merce Cunningham Company. And I thought, "Hmmm. Bob didn't do *Pelican* with Merce."

FELSEN: No.

THOMAS: Then when Stanley said, "No, actually, we saw Bob with this crazy parachute -"

FELSEN: I sure wish I could have seen it.

THOMAS: Yes. It would have been a great treat to be there.

Was that the time he made *Booster*?

FELSEN: Yes. Bob, of course, especially in that time, he was just fresh on the heels of the Venice triumph. That was '64, and this was 1967, when he came out. He was always interested in doing something new, and Ken Tyler was interested in anything the artists wanted to do. He was very good at technical kinds of things, so Bob had this idea of making this self-portrait from X-rays. And it just happens that Sid -- well, you've probably heard this story already, one of Sid's friends from high school married this guy who was a radiologist. And he said, "Oh, let's go to Jack Waltman." So he's the one who did the X-rays for Bob. Those X-rays were translated into lithographs for *Booster*, and that was that whole project.

THOMAS: When Bob came to Gemini, had he been aware that Josef Albers was there before?

FELSEN: Yes. But he came anyway.

[Laughter]

I think in the back of his mind he maybe wanted to do a one-upmanship thing.

THOMAS: And he did.

FELSEN: He did, indeed.



THOMAS: I spent a lot of time talking to people about Black Mountain College, and --

FELSEN: Well, you heard about his climbing out the window? One time he was in class with Albers, and he just couldn't stand it anymore, so he just climbed out the window and never went back. [Laughter]

THOMAS: I'm surprised he didn't *kill* him! He was quite abusive, Mr. Albers.

FELSEN: Yes.

THOMAS: And Bob, I think, was quite generous by always saying that he learned so much from Albers. It's one of those things, I think, that you learn as much from looking at a bad documentary as you do from looking at a good documentary.

FELSEN: Absolutely.

THOMAS: So I think good behavior and bad behavior -- you can learn about human behavior that way, too. I thought it was just delicious that he came after [Albers] --

FELSEN: Well, I think that was one of the enticements, actually. Because Bob knew how precise Albers was, and how printmaking, for Albers, would have to be so precise. Bob was very specific about everything, so he felt that he would give it a try. That's a very ambitious project that he throws onto the first time he's ever worked here, you know -- this young print shop. But he had faith, and he was an adventurer. He was always willing to take risks and chances.

THOMAS: He didn't come with a plan. Did he *ever* come with a plan for what he wanted to do?

FELSEN: Well, in this case he did, then the *Sky Garden* -- I'm sure he knew what he wanted to do, based on the space imagery. Then the *Cardbirds I-VII*... I love the *Cardbird Doors*. I always wanted to have a *Cardboard Door* in the house, but I never got around to it. We always had animals. I was always afraid about that.

No, I think he had an idea, vaguely, of what he wanted to do. The *Hoarfrosts*, you know -- *I* was the one, I remember, who went out to the fabric shops to find the fabrics for him. I didn't buy anything, I just scouted them out. Then when he came to town, I said, "Let's look at this, and this, and this, and this," and that's how we bought the fabrics for *Hoarfrosts*.

THOMAS: Really. The two of you went out together.

FELSEN: Yes.

THOMAS: And bought bolts, or yards, or -- ?

FELSEN: Well, no, we ordered it. We took samples, and they tried it out. If it worked out, then he would decide.

THOMAS: The he would decide what he wanted to do.

FELSEN: Oh, but that's not all we did. Let's see -- when he was in his *Cardbird* period, I would drive him up and down the alleys in Los Angeles so he could look in dumpsters, and find cardboard boxes, because he was interested in the printing, and the effects on the boxes, and so forth, of the different cardboard. That's how he incorporated it into the *Cardbird* series.

| So, oh, yes. I was the driver. I would take him around, and I knew all the best alleys in town.

[Laughter]

THOMAS: A fellow scavenger...

FELSEN: Right. No, I didn't scavenge, I just knew -- it had more to do with traffic evasion, I think.

THOMAS: I'm a little unclear about how the *Cardbirds* came about.

FELSEN: Okay. He would find these cardboards [cardboard boxes] that he really liked. Then we would bring them back to Gemini, and then they would duplicate them.

THOMAS: So they would make a multiple.

FELSEN: Yes.

THOMAS: It's not that you had to go through forty different trash bins to find forty of the same [cardboard box] --

FELSEN: Oh, no. No, no. They were printed. That was what was the interesting part about it. They were absolutely duplicated in editions, and the prints -- they copied the print "imagery" from the original source. That's the way they made the editions.

THOMAS: God, that's fascinating. I was wondering about that, because I saw a picture in some catalogue on the *Cardbirds*. I saw this huge stack --

FELSEN: And how could they all possibly be the same?

THOMAS: -- and how could they all be the same? And that's how they could all be the same.

FELSEN: Yes. That was what Gemini did. That was the printing. So they bought a bunch of cardboard [Laughs] --

THOMAS: -- and printed it all out, and made it all that specific. How did the folks in the print room take to Bob?

FELSEN: Oh, are you kidding? They loved him. Now, the thing is that Bob has a different schedule. Bob does not work nine to five, as you know. He would come in maybe midday or something like that, then work on into the evening -- which is why I was able to spend time with him, because after work I would come in and spend time at the shop there. Of course, I did work there [at Gemini] until '69.

THOMAS: You were there for that first --

FELSEN: -- the first series.

THOMAS: -- that first series, right?

FELSEN: Yes. I was there until '69, but then I started working at Pasadena [Art Museum], and I worked there until that [the Museum] ended in '74. Then I came back to Gemini briefly for the *Hoarfrosts*.

THOMAS: So you were there for *Booster*, and for the *Hoarfrosts* and for the *Cardbirds*.....

FELSEN: There was another series.

THOMAS: Let's see. *Bones & Unions*?

FELSEN: No, no.

THOMAS: *Pages & Fuses*?

FELSEN: No, no. That's later. That's much later. I was just doing this for Sid yesterday -- the one that's right after *Booster*. It's between *Booster* and *Sky Garden*.

THOMAS: Let me see what I have here. I have *Reels (B & C)*.

FELSEN: That's it. It had Faye Dunaway in it and Michael J. Pollard.

THOMAS: That's you, right there.

FELSEN: That's right. Yes. [Laughter] Then when I came back, in '74 or '75 -- oh, that's when we went to India and did the Indian project -- with the Sarabhais.

THOMAS: How was that trip?

FELSEN: That was interesting. That was amazing. Bob had been invited to do a project with them, and he had known them from before but there was no way that he was going to go on his own. He said, "Let's make it a Gemini project." That means he can take us. So Sid and I went, and we invited our kids to go. The only one who wanted to go was my youngest daughter, Suzanne. So she came. She was thirteen at the time. Bob's son, Christopher, and Hisachika



[Takahashi]. I think Charly Ritt came on that? Is that right? I think Charly” was there, too. It was one of the printers at the time. Oh, and Bob Petersen.

THOMAS: At that point was Bob Petersen still working for Gemini, or he was “palling around” with Bob?

FELSEN: I think he was out of Gemini at that time. I think that's right. Anyway, so we're there. This is a great thing. Here we are. I'd never been to India before, and we're staying at the Sarabhai's, in this Corbusier house -- except Sid and I weren't staying there, they made arrangements for us to stay someplace else, but Bob and Peterson stayed there -- and Christopher. My job was to work in the paper place. Actually, [the ashram] was started by [Mohandas] Gandhi. This is so unbelievable.

So you know about the history of the Sarabhai family?

THOMAS: No.

FELSEN: It's a textile family. They were in Bombay -- not Bombay, Ahmedabad -- in the early part of the twentieth century, and they started this textile business. I guess, to this day, Ahmedabad is a big textile center in India.

Okay. So along comes this man named Gandhi. He had been working on behalf of the lower caste in those days, called the untouchable.

He had, I guess, come back from South Africa. The Sarabhais, being the liberal people that they are, wanted to support him. So they supported him secretly. They gave him financial support so he could carry on with whatever he needed to do, but nobody knew that they were doing this. Isn't that amazing?

THOMAS: Wow.

FELSEN: Okay. So this is, I don't know, the second or third generation, I guess, of the Sarabhai. Anand's mother was alive at that point. He had a younger brother, Sanjay.

So my job was to work in the ashram where they were making hand-made paper.. This was what Gandhi had started, to give the underclass a skill and some kind of work they could do. So there I was working away. I remember I was just in shorts, and a woman in shorts -- we're talking 1975 now. The men were really wonderful. There were no women working there. I was the only one. Outside -- you would go outside, because it was so bloody hot and humid -- and the women were standing around in their saris with their babies, and they were so beautiful, these tall, slender women from the lower classes. They spoke no English, and, of course, I didn't speak their language, either. But they wanted to know about me, and did I have children? Because Suzy wasn't there; she was at the Sarabhai's. Did I have children? And they wanted to relate to me -- this was really wonderful. They were so nice while we were working.

We went at the worst time we could possibly go in terms of the season -- just before the monsoon started. It gets unbelievably hot and unbelievably humid. So here I am, working in this paper place, where everything was very humid, anyway --

THOMAS: Oh, yes.

FELSEN: -- because of the water and everything. My face started to swell. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before. I was relieved of duty there, so I started working with Bob at the house, instead. But that was amazing.

We all got sick because of what the food was, that we weren't used to, except for my daughter, Suzy.. And the reason she didn't get sick was because she only ate, the whole month that we were there -- she only ate mangoes and yoghurt and rice. That's all she ate the whole time we were there, so she didn't get sick.

THOMAS: That's what she chose to eat.

FELSEN: That's what she chose to eat. She said, "I'm not eating that strange-tasting food." So that's why she was the only one who didn't get sick.

[Laughter]

THOMAS: Oh, my god!

FELSEN: But that was an incredible experience.

THOMAS: What was the project that came out of that?

FELSEN: *Bones and Unions*.

THOMAS: Molded handmade paper, bamboo fabric, silk-screen, dirt, glass, mud, rope made in India.

FELSEN: Yes.

THOMAS: And did the work become completed there?

FELSEN: It was completed there. The reason that the Sarabhais -- they had invited other artists to come and do projects there -- at that time India had these weird rules that didn't allow importation of anything ready-made because they wanted to have the work made by their own people, so that it would support the people, so they would have jobs. So the Sarabhais figured if they invited the artists to come there, then they would be able to acquire art works made there, could have work, and then we'll ship the rest of it back to the US..

THOMAS: Clever. And Bob took that model, more or less, when he did the R.O.C.I. [Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange) project --

FELSEN: Exactly.

THOMAS: -- and went to all these other, different places, and worked with local artists.

FELSEN: He loved doing that. It was very hard. I think Sid had a hard time working business-wise with Anand, but I thought it was a great experience. I think Bob had a good time there. It was tough. It was very tough.

THOMAS: Were there artists there to relate to in that particular -- ?

FELSEN: There was too much work to do. We didn't have time. Occasionally we would go into town -- because their place was outside of town -- we'd go into town, and wherever we went the people would just stare at us, because we looked very strange.

THOMAS: You looked very different -- you in your shorts!

[Laughter]

FELSEN: Yes. I remember one time I had to get some stamps, so I just walked to a post office, and they made such a fuss over me. They had me come into their office and I sat down, and they said, "Now what do you need?" Oh, my god. This was just amazing that they did this. So it was kind of special. It was very special.

THOMAS: Did Bob maintain that crazy schedule of --

FELSEN: Pretty much.

THOMAS: -- not the nine to five, but around the clock?

FELSEN: Yes. Yes. Into the late hours. That's his time. That's his creative time.

THOMAS: Yes, I got that.

FELSEN: So everybody respected that. We would always break at five o'clock to go swimming. They had this incredible swimming pool, a gorgeous Corbusier swimming pool, oval. I'd never seen one like this -- all concrete, with the trees all around it and everything, with the monkeys jumping around from tree to tree, and the peacocks and everything. It was so exotic. Christopher Rauschenberg said, "Only in India. It's like being in a dream. It's such a fantasy here," to be in a place like this.

THOMAS: Disneyland in India.

FELSEN: Yes -- except this was real.

So we would break every day at five o'clock and go swimming. Then maybe have something to eat, and then go back to work again in the evening.

THOMAS: Wow.

In terms of the Los Angeles art scene, was Bob known?

FELSEN: Bob was known all over the world.

THOMAS: Before. Early on in the '60s?

FELSEN: Oh, my god, of course. He was unbelievably famous. Absolutely. Sure. He was known in the '50s, late '50s I think. He was known, certainly, in New York, but by the late '50s, I think, we knew Bob Rauschenberg --

THOMAS: -- who Bob Rauschenberg was, on the West Coast, as well. I know Virginia Dwan gave a show of his *Combines*. Did you see that show?

FELSEN: And that would have been in the early '60s, probably.

THOMAS: Sixty-two, I think. Would you guys have seen that?

FELSEN: Yes, I think we did see it. I think we did. Because I remember it. That was an exciting time, a very exciting time for art, because up until that point it had been the Abstract Expressionists and so forth, and here comes this other stuff. Everybody was very excited about this. So we were open about it. LA was a very unconventional kind of place anyway, creatively speaking. LA is very open to anything new, and the artists in LA were doing their own stuff that wasn't being made anyplace else -- like "light and space" stuff, and all that. Remember, Artforum began on the West Coast, began in the Bay Area, Phil Leider was its editor. Then it moved to LA with offices on La Cienega, so LA was well-informed on the art world in New York and Europe.

THOMAS: And Bob liked it out here, I think.

FELSEN: He did. Well, he came often enough. It wasn't just working at Gemini; he came because he was part of the community. He had gotten to know a lot of people.

THOMAS: Why do you think he was so taken with printmaking?

FELSEN: You know, it's interesting -- he came into that transfer process, and I think he liked the instantaneous thing about it. I think [that] is probably what he liked. It seemed in more ways, it seemed to him more interesting than actually painting with a brush, or drawing. He would draw, but there was something about the quality of the ink, and the collaborative thing. He loved to collaborate with people, and collaborating with a printer -- I think he really enjoyed that.

THOMAS: And what form would that collaboration take?

FELSEN: He would say, "This is what I want to do. What's the best way that you think we can be doing this?" and they would work that out between them. At this point, he'd worked with Tanya Grosman [at U.L.A.E.] quite a bit, and he had experience with printmaking. He was trying... As he always did, he was trying to stretch the boundaries, and go to areas that nobody else had done before. So, "Do you think we can do this?" And "How about if we do this?"

THOMAS: And your Dad, I gather, made a ...--

FELSEN: Oh, yes!

THOMAS: Tell me that story.

FELSEN: Well, my father was so interested in the whole idea. He didn't care much about art -- I mean, he did, but it was really the whole process, I think, the idea of making this [press]. So he was making a lot of "government" stuff. He had an engineer, and was, I guess, talking with Ken Tyler. Ken said, "Gee, we need to make this big press, so Bob can make this great big giant print, this print that he wants to do." "Oh, well, we can do that." So he and his engineer figured out how to do it.

THOMAS: It has to be quite precise, I imagine.

FELSEN: I'm sure it does. I'm sure. This whole thing. The pressure has to be exactly right. And I think the bigger it gets the harder it is to do. You have to know what you're doing -- which is interesting, considering that they had never made a press before. No reason why you can't now.

THOMAS: Why you can't now. That's great. And was *Sky Garden* the first piece --

FELSEN: It was made for *Sky Garden*, yes.

THOMAS: -- that Gemini did. I understand that Bob actually made individual pieces at the end [of the process], that he gave to the printers.

FELSEN: Did he? I don't remember that. I don't know. That's possible. That wouldn't surprise me.

THOMAS: It sounds like a Bob-kind-of-thing to do.

FELSEN: Oh, yes. He would do that. Well, he formed such a relationship with them. It was like party-time -- but not just standing around drinking or anything. He loved to have people around him when he worked, and the guys at Gemini, they just loved him. It was just really a fun thing to do. There were never any bad attitudes. It was just a real give-and-take, pleasant experience for everybody.

THOMAS: Was there a different experience for each individual artist with the printers? Is it always that kind of atmosphere, or does it change?

FELSEN: Of course it changes, yes. I think the artists all want to have a good relationship with the printer, of course, and I think they all appreciate that collaboration. Some are just more outgoing than others. I can remember Frank Stella coming in. Frank is a different person now. I saw him a few years ago at the Meyerhoffs, and he's so much warmer and happier now than he used to be. He used to be very -- well, I'll tell you something that happened. When I was working at the Pasadena Art Museum, Bob Rowan was a collector and a big supporter of the Museum. He had a number of Frank Stellas in his collection. So Frank was in town, and I'd just hung one of Frank's black striped paintings. There was an opening for the exhibition and so I said, "Frank, I want you to come and see. We've hung this painting of yours today." It was in a very prominent spot, and he said, "Yes, Rosamund, it looks really great there -- except it's hung sideways."

THOMAS: Oh!

[Laughter]

FELSEN: Is that the best!? And he was cool about it.

THOMAS: And you got on your high horse and you said, "Well, there was no 'This way up' sign on the back."

[Laughter]

FELSEN: Exactly. He was very nice about it.

THOMAS: That is hysterical.

FELSEN: Isn't that funny?

THOMAS: That's a great story. It's so generous to tell that story on yourself.

FELSEN: Well, those black striped paintings --

THOMAS: How are you supposed to know?

I keep thinking that because of Tanya Grosman and Gemini, there are millions of Americans who get exposed to art because of printmaking --

FELSEN: Sure.

THOMAS: -- it's so exciting.



FELSEN: Well, people collect prints for different reasons. Some people just really like the aspect, that medium. They just love that printmaking quality, whether it's a litho, or a silk-screen, or whatever it is. Lithos, probably, and etchings, too. But other people think, wow, they'd really love to have a work by such-and-such artist, but they couldn't afford a big, major work. An editioned work they can afford. So that's wonderful.

THOMAS: It's just not a work on paper, necessarily.

FELSEN: No, it isn't.

THOMAS: It's fabric, it's tin cans, it's --

FELSEN: Sure. It can be anything.

THOMAS: -- It's a totally redefining what we think of as "print-making."

Does anything else exist like Gemini in the print universe?

FELSEN: Well, there are different print publishers around, and different print shops and so forth. But the difference with Gemini, I think, is that Gemini has always -- the reason that Gemini started working with the artists with big names was because they felt the only way to do this, and make it successful financially-speaking -- to keep it going -- was to work with artists who already had a market. Then not only work with the artist, but work with that artist's dealers, so that they also helped to distribute the prints, and so forth. Gemini felt that no expense would be spared -- I mean within reason- so that's why an artist could really do, basically, absolutely anything they wanted.

THOMAS: The thinking was that whatever expense we front we will more than recover at the back end.

FELSEN: Exactly.

THOMAS: When *Booster* went forward, how did Gemini promote it? I don't know how it got "out there."

FELSEN: Because Stanley was involved with the LA County Museum and the Contemporary Art Council.... At that time, the art community in LA was relatively small, so everybody in the art community knew everybody -- the museum people, the dealers, the artists and collectors -- everybody knew everybody. In fact, we would have parties at our house, and everybody in the LA art community would come. Everybody knew everybody. But you can't do that anymore, because there are too many people involved.

In the early days, Gemini developed a subscriber system -- collectors --, and so there were guaranteed sales. The reason that subscribers agreed to do this is because they knew we were working with first-rate artists, you see. Then the museums were very interested. They were

always there. That's how I came to work at the Pasadena Art Museum because John Coplans -- do you know who that is?

THOMAS: No.

FELSEN: John Coplans had been an artist, then he became a curator. He was kind of controversial because he had a lousy personality. Then he became an artist after -- and he became an artist after -- oh, and he was one of the editors of *Artforum* during the Seventies after he left Pasadena.

Anyway, he was a curator at Pasadena, so I went and worked for him, and it turned out to be a very valuable experience for me, museum experience.

THOMAS: Sure. Because here you are -- at Gemini you have -- what a clever business plan you all developed.

FELSEN: The other fortunate thing was that the times were good. The Sixties were exciting, the Seventies were okay, the Eighties were great, and it wasn't just until recent years that things have gotten tough -- tough for everybody. So all those things worked together. There have been ups and downs, but basically it's been a forward move.

THOMAS: You left Pasadena because Norton Simon was taking it over?

FELSEN: Yes. So I came back to Gemini in '74. I came back to Gemini.

THOMAS: And Simon had no interest in contemporary art.

FELSEN: No. He tried to get rid of all the stuff in their permanent collection. The former trustees brought a lawsuit against him, and prevented him from doing it. So it's still there, thank goodness. Otherwise, he would have gotten rid of it all.

I remember Sid and I going to dinner at Marcia Weisman's house -- and, you know, she's Norton's sister. Norton was there. I'd never met him before. What are the chances of meeting Norton Simon? I was getting hungry, and I remember the food was laid out on the dining-room table, and "When are we going to eat? When are we going to eat?" But there was the Jasper Johns *Map*. In the dining room. So Sid and I are looking at this, then Norton comes over, and he is just putting down this painting. He was just god-awful about this Jasper Johns painting. Later on in the evening we said something to Marcia about it, and she said, "Never talk to Norton about art that came after World War II."

What he had done was he had some David Smiths and some of the big artworks on long-term loan in Pasadena, and the trustees would go to him when they were having trouble financially, and ask him [for help] -- what a guy -- he refused to help them. They'd say, "Norton, we have your artworks here," and he said, "That's okay. I'm sorry I can't help you."

So he waited until the museum was literally down on its knees and could not do anything, and he said, "Okay, I'll take over all your debts if you give me the museum," and that's how he got it.

THOMAS: Oh, what a cad.

FELSEN: Uh huh. Isn't he a good guy?

THOMAS: Well, it sounds like you made the right choice.

FELSEN: Yes.

THOMAS: Was Walter Hopps there when you - ?

FELSEN: Walter was gone. I knew Walter, but Walter was gone. He was already in Washington by that time.

THOMAS: He seems to be a person who was very important in Bob Rauschenberg's life.

FELSEN: He was important in everybody's life.

THOMAS: Was he? Tell me about him ...

FELSEN: He was eccentric. Oh, my god. Well, he grew up here, in Eagle Rock. His father, I think, was a doctor. Somehow or other, the story goes, as I recall, that he, when he was in high school he had already expressed in art -- not as an artist but as a historian, or whatever he thought he might be. He was taken by somebody else and I can't think who that somebody else was, he was taken to visit the Arensbergs, who had a major art collection; they lived in LA at the time. They had this fantastic collection -- which, of course, ended up leaving LA and going to Philadelphia -- who knows for what reason?

But that really was the thing for him. He said, "That's what I want to do. I want to be around art." So when he was a very young man he and Ed Kienholz started the Ferus Gallery.

THOMAS: It's interesting. When I talked to Paul Schimmel, I said, "How did the *Combine* show come about? And how come, essentially, so much later than anything else?" And he said that Walter [explained] "Well, first I'm going to do the show at the Corcoran. Then there's going to be a show at the Whitney..." The way Schimmel described it, there was kind of a pecking order --

FELSEN: I see. I've never heard this.

THOMAS: -- and that Walter said, "Well, I know you want to do a *Combine* show, or Paul Schimmel said "I'd like to do a *Combine* show, and Walter said, "Well, actually, they're going to do something at the Guggenheim, a big retrospective." Schimmel, I guess, was not happy about all that. Finally, after all these things, he was able to go and say to Bob, "Let's do a *Combine* show. It's time."

FELSEN: By the way, did you see the show?

THOMAS: I saw it at the Met.

FELSEN: But you didn't see it at MOCA.

THOMAS: No.

FELSEN: It was really beautifully installed.

THOMAS: Oh, good.

FELSEN: It was absolutely beautiful.

THOMAS: He seemed to be very excited about it.

FELSEN: I remember his going around, that opening night. He was very pleased with it.

THOMAS: Oh, good. "He" Bob, or "he" Schimmel?

FELSEN: Bob was very pleased, but Schimmel did the installation. I don't always like everything he does, but in this case he did a beautiful job.

THOMAS: Oh, great.

FELSEN: The show was great. Yes.

THOMAS: Before I went to see Schimmel [for the oral history project], I went to see the *Combines* that they have, and this little girl was walking around with her mother. She looked at the pictures and she said, "Why did he kill so many birds?"

[Laughter]

FELSEN: Oh, god!

[Laughter]

THOMAS: I felt the need to explain to her mother that he actually did not kill those birds.

FELSEN: You know what that reminds me of? Remember Gina Lollobrigida? There was a story about her in the '60s, and she had, of all things, a tiger-skin coat. People were saying, "How could she have this tiger-skin coat?" It took sixty-three tigers, because they only used the tails. Sixty-three tigers. So they said, "Gina, how could you do this? Sixty-three tigers?" And she said, "But they were dead when I got the coat."

[Laughter]

THOMAS: Exactly the same thing.

I assume that since Bob came back and forth all the time, that you all stayed in touch?

FELSEN: Oh, yes. Oh, my goodness, yes. In fact, I think I was the first one who knew about this trip to India, because he called, and he said, "Well, Rosamund, how would you like to go to India?" and I said, "Okay." Because he was trying to decide -- he really wanted to go, but he was afraid to go. Not afraid, but he really didn't want to go on his own. So that was how. Yes. Oh, yes. We would communicate.

THOMAS: I am interested that Bob Rauschenberg likes to have a lot of people around him all the time. And I'm trying to think, is that about -- not about a family that he didn't have, but that he liked *family*; that he liked being around people. I heard him talk about the people who worked with him at Captiva, and he really talks about them as members of his family.

FELSEN: Absolutely.

THOMAS: "Bradley's going to the dentist today, and we're a little worried about So-and-So, because... -"

FELSEN: Totally. That's absolutely true. I remember being there, staying at Captiva one time, and Sid and I were staying in another house -- was it Sid or was it Grant? I can't remember anymore. Anyway, he said, "Rosamund, why don't you come over. I'm going to cook dinner." He loved to cook, and he was a great cook as you probably found out. Anyway, he said, "I'm going to cook dinner now, but will you come and be my muse?" He needs a muse -- meaning he can't be by myself. He needs to have somebody to play off of. He just needs to have people around him who love him.

THOMAS: Yes. How did he deal with celebrity?

FELSEN: Oh, he dealt with it okay. God, he met everybody. Everybody. Jackie Onassis. Good grief. He met everybody. Oh! One time he had a show in San Francisco. Henry Hopkins did this show. We were up there for that, and Henry, in the worst way, wanted us, afterwards -- to go to a collector's house, or something like that. There was no way that Bob was going to go. I don't know why. I don't even know who those people were. He did not want to go. So he grabbed me, and he said, "Come on we're going," and he called out to Henry, in the middle of the museum, he said, "We're just the riff-raff, so we're not going to go with you; we're going to go someplace else." Yes, he could handle it very well. I think he liked it.

THOMAS: Sure.

FELSEN: It gave him power, too. But he was responsible about it. He didn't use it. Well, he did, but I mean use it in a bad way. I know he thought about, "If I'm able to do this, and I know So-and-So, then why don't we accomplish this?"

THOMAS: And it helped so much with whatever social activism he wanted to have.

FELSEN: Exactly.

THOMAS: He could really bring that --

FELSEN: All he had to do was pick up the phone --

THOMAS: -- and make something happen. And he did use it for good.

FELSEN: Yes, he did. He was a good person. A really good person.

THOMAS: Smart guy?

FELSEN: Extremely smart. You know, like some other artists -- like Frank Stella, for example, who is extremely intellectual -- Bob was just plain old super intelligent.

THOMAS: Yes. There was a particularly good reproduction of a Dante drawing, and I'd been talking Antonio Homem about Dante drawings. I don't know why. But I was then compelled to go and look at a Canto, and then look at Bob's drawing for that Canto. It wasn't an illustration, it was visualizing that [drawing], and I was really knocked out by it. Because there is so much talk about Bob's dyslexia, etc., etc., etc.

FELSEN: That's what I wanted to tell you about his mother. When Bob discovered that he had dyslexia, when was however old he was -- fifties or sixties --

THOMAS: Something not early on, yes.

FELSEN: His mother was still alive, and he was talking to his mother. This is what he told me. He said, "So, Mom, guess what. They've discovered that I'm dyslexic." And she said, "Oh. And all these years I just thought you were stupid." So that's what he had to overcome.

THOMAS: Yes. Being able to have conversations and communicate with people who are operating on another level, and to pick their brains -- that's the part that seems really interesting to me. I'm interested in this combine of ideas that he has going on in his head -- all the references. I'm thinking, here's a guy who absorbs all this information, and all these images, and they can be from the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth century, they can be around the corner. That's a very complicated process.

FELSEN: Absolutely.

Which reminds me of something else. Bob, when he was with Bob Petersen -- Bob had been interested in American native culture -- Native American culture -- and he was supposedly part Cherokee. I never really believed that story. Maybe it's true. I don't know. I think this was Petersen's idea -- that we would go to the annual whatever-it's-called in Gallup, New Mexico, for the pow-wow. It was going to be Sid, and me, and Stanley, and Elyse, and some of our kids -- I



think my daughter Ellen, maybe one or two of the Grinstein daughters, I don't remember, and Debbie Taylor. Who else was in this group? Maybe one or two of the printer guys came along with us.

Anyway, it was this group. Some of us drove by car. I remember we went with Elyse. Then I think Sid and Stanley flew in. So there we are, driving across, and I said, "Now Bob --" I told him beforehand I'm going to be driving. And he and Petersen were coming from Florida, and we were driving thru Arizona, to get to New Mexico. I said, "And Bob, we're going to be driving through the Painted Desert." He was quiet for a moment, then he said, "Oh. Well, you might want to take some brushes along."

[Laughter]

[REDACTED]

FELSEN: But we had fun all together, anyway, staying in these seedy motels and stuff. It was fun.

THOMAS: I was impressed with the way he dealt with his stroke. He seemed to readjust.

FELSEN: Yes. Yes. He did. So there he is with this stroke, with this one arm -- the right arm -- wasn't working well. We were going to dinner -- he was here in town, and we were going to dinner at a restaurant. He's sitting next to me. So what does he order for dinner? Soup. I said, "Bob, isn't that going to be a little difficult for you to manage, eating with your left hand?" [Laughs] He said, "No. Of course, I can do it." But it was a *challenge*. That's what you're saying. So he ate. It was difficult, but he ate the soup with his left hand.

THOMAS: Nothing was going to stop him.

FELSEN: No. Isn't that funny?

THOMAS: What do you miss most about him?

FELSEN: Oh, I don't know. Just him. Just him.

THOMAS: They had a really nice memorial service in New York.

FELSEN: I went to the one in Captiva.

THOMAS: That must have been tough.

FELSEN: Well, there were aspects of it that were tough.

THOMAS: I'm always interested that so many people say to me, "Bob drank a lot, but he never lost his focus."

FELSEN: That's right. Yes. And sometimes we would say, "Oh, there's Bob, doing his drunk act," when he needed to -- so that he could avoid whoever he wanted to avoid. So he did his drunk act. Then he could sober up whenever he wanted to -- or whenever he needed to.

THOMAS: Somebody was telling me of an event in the Midwest -- I guess at the Dayton house - - and that somebody who was with Bob -- not Bob Petersen, somebody else -- had asked for a drink. And the bartender said, "No, I'm not pouring you any more drinks." And Bob said, "I want a drink." So somebody comes with a tray, and Bob just does that, and everything goes flying in the air, a table is broken, and then everything was back to normal.

FELSEN: Yes. Yes.

THOMAS: One person might read it as that's Bob out of control. Another person might read it as Bob saying, "My friend asked for a drink, and I think it would be nice if you'd get him one."

FELSEN: Right. Yes. I think I heard that story. I think I heard about that.

THOMAS: There seems to be several variations in different locations. [Laughs]

FELSEN: It sounds a little bit different, but it's basically the same story. There was some other problem in Minneapolis. It's interesting, because that's where that is -- in Minneapolis.

THOMAS: That one.

FELSEN: Yes. But there was another time -- I wasn't there, but I heard about it -- where he was talking to some students or something, and the students -- this happens a lot with artists of stature. The students, the new young gun wants to take down the top gun. I think I remember his having a hard time with it, but I'm sure he dealt with it okay. I'm sure he could deal with that.

THOMAS: Were he and Jasper at Gemini at the same time? Did they ever cross paths?

FELSEN: There were times when they crossed paths, yes. Yes.

THOMAS: Mayo Thompson had done a film with Bob, and worked with Bob as a studio assistant for a time. He said, "You know, all those guys, they all knew how to deal with each other. Business requires you to go to this opening, and that opening, and the other opening, and you just --"

FELSEN: Of course. You're grownups.

Although I do remember a story about -- Jasper telling me -- oh, this was probably in the '50s -- he was a young artist in New York, and he was at some party or something, and who was there but Salvador Dali. He hadn't been introduced or anything, but Dalí evidently knew who Jasper was -- this hot, young artist. So Dalí was sitting on the couch, and he always had his cane with him, and Jasper went walking by, and Dalí stuck his cane out, and tripped him. He was obviously threatened.

[Laughter]

Isn't that a funny story?

THOMAS: That's a great story. So when [Jasper] writes his autobiography that would be a great opening paragraph.

FELSEN: Right.

No, but I remember running into -- being at parties, more New York, maybe there -- and I remember the two of them standing there, and you could see that there were these little sparks between them, but there was definitely ... -- and one would say bad things to me about the other one. I would just listen.

[Laughter]

THOMAS: Because they wanted you to love them more.

FELSEN: That's right. That's right.

[Laughter]

THOMAS: "She may be straying."

What haven't I asked you that you'd like to tell me?

FELSEN: Oh, I don't know. Let me think. I don't know.

THOMAS: That means I can call you with questions?

FELSEN: Of course, you can. Absolutely.

THOMAS: That would be great. What a pleasure. Thank you very much.

FELSEN: You make it very easy.

[End of Interview]

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