

Interview of **JAMES REID**¹

Printer, Gemini GEL (1979 -)

Conducted by **KAREN THOMAS**, Interviewer

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

JAMES REID: I could never work on enough projects [with Bob], but was fortunate to have been involved in a lot.

KAREN INTERVIEWER: In 1979...

REID: We were just finishing off "Rookery Mounds."

INTERVIEWER: So you arrived ...

REID: in the fall of 1979.

INTERVIEWER: Where had you been before?

REID: I was going to school in Vancouver, Canada. I was training under Bob Evermon, who was one of the original graduates of Tamarind, and who was a huge Bob Rauschenberg fan, and who had also taught Bob Petersen. I was just another in a long line of printers trained by Bob Evermon.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I remember.

REID: Bob Evermon called Sidney and said, "I've got this kid," and so on. I came down, and it's been fantasy ever since.

INTERVIEWER: And it's been fantasy ever since... .

REID: Unbelievable. I mean, what other job could you walk into and have your heroes, the people you studied when you were in art school, come in? In the beginning it was "Mr. Rauschenberg," "Mr. Johns," and within half an hour it was Roy, and Bob, and Jasper. My wife would give me such a hard time. But that was the only way it could work. It's the most fortunate position to be in, because you need that relationship for the project to work. And all of the artists I've worked with, to a one, are engaging, and draw you into their world. I used to have this

¹ Mr. Reid has reviewed and revised his remarks (11.15.11, 12.8.11)

concept of the prima donna artist, who would be a pain in the ass to work with. They have all been 180 degrees from that.

INTERVIEWER: You haven't found anybody like that.

REID: Not a one. The artists I've been fortunate to work with are the most engaging people. Bob may well be, because I'm thinking of Bob right now, one of the top. He would draw you into his world, as I'm sure he draws everybody into the world that he is in, at any one time, and you just feel like you're at home. It's unbelievable to be with him.

INTERVIEWER: So there isn't any situation where you feel like you're working *for* somebody; it's really you're working *with* them. Or are their gradations?

REID: Yes, there are some gradations. You're always working *for* them, and sometimes you're working *with* them. There is a hierarchy, but you're not beat over the head with it. I've often heard people say, and I've even heard Bob say, that the world is filled with givers and takers. Bob was a giver. Anytime you were in a studio situation, you were always very much an equal. Obviously, when dealers or other people would come in, it was a whole other world. So then there was just this strange emotional feeling, like, "Gee, you're talking to *my* Bob!" [Laughter] But it was fantastic. Unbelievable.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know exactly what the process might be, so, for something like Rookery Mounds -- would Bob show up and say, "Well, you've received the blueprint," or, "I've had a plan and *you've* received it." Or did he call up and say, "I got some ideas, and I'd like to come out on such-and-such a date. And is that possible....?"

REID: Well, there are a couple of steps there. First of all, all the arrangements for timing are Sidney's responsibility. He will make all the arrangements as to when an artist is going to come. Sometimes there is some preparatory work that comes out. In the case of the *Borealis Shares*, Bob had made a piece already as a prototype at his studio. Then that was sent out one time, and we continued to work on that. For any of the print projects that I've worked on -- and, in fact, "Rookery Mounds" had already gone through a proofing session, the editions were being printed, and I came in at the end of the editioning period. I didn't really have any involvement other than the cancellation. [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Why are you laughing?

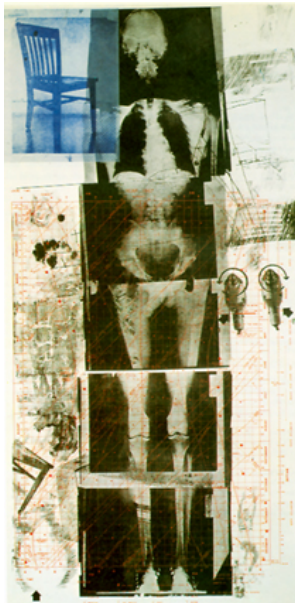
REID: Well, typically, at the end of all the edition printing, we take one of the key elements, and the artist scores it in some way to assure collectors that it can't be reprinted. The artist signs it as a cancellation proof on the day that the edition is signed and that's our proof to the world that we don't do anymore.

I was the new kid on the blocks, and, of course, the printers in those days thought it was funny to -- I don't know what the word is, "Just give the new kid a hard time." So they said "Oh Jim, you have to go over and cancel this thing of Bob's", and I said, "Well, I don't know what that is." And they said, "Well, you just do a drawing or anything you want, on there." I thought "Oh.

Okay.” Like a dummy I fell for it. It was a print that had a front end of a truck, with a big windshield. Rookery Mounds *Steel Arbor 1979*. So I did little drawings of these characters sitting in the windshield, sort of waving out, and Bob just went ballistic when he saw it. And I thought, "Oh, Jesus! I haven't even been here long enough to be fired, and I'm going to lose my dream job.”

So Bob had a rubber stamp made up that just said, “CANCELLATION,” and for the next edition we used the stamp.

My first introduction with Bob's prints was when I was between Art Schools. My girlfriend at the time, later to be my wife was working at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver Canada. At that time in the late 60's and early 70's very few college professors had received their degrees in Canada since there were few graduate programs available. The faculty was therefore made up of American ex-pats mostly political opponents to the ongoing war. This created a very lively progressive community on many campuses. In 1972 the Political Science Department had been shut down for being too political. So the Faculty became the Geography Department. -While walking through the Geography Department I saw this massive print on the wall, it was *Booster* and it was hanging in the hallway of the geography department. And I'm going, "What is that? It was a print that had been done at Gemini. I didn't even know about Gemini at that time.



Booster, 1966-67

I had finished my first round of art school, and I was just sort of between things in my life then. I remember buying this book while at art school in Calgary Alberta. New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970 by Henry Geldzahler. It was all about Bob Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein. People who would help form my personal aesthetic, and all who I would eventually work with. At the time I thought Who *are* these

people?" Art, in western Canada, was very regional. I had no real contact other than nice landscape paintings. The first real show of Bob's that I saw was in the Vancouver Art Gallery. It was the one with all the little pieces that were zippered together.²

INTERVIEWER: I love that piece.

REID: And I thought, "I want to be an artist. This isn't about painting landscapes. This is something very different."

I asked Bob about it. I think it's still somewhat intact. I think the idea was that you could unzip it by section but I don't think it ever got broken up. I hope it didn't, anyway. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: I saw it at the Guggenheim Retrospective. It made me smile -- which is a nice way to be responding to art.

REID: I think Bob had a tremendous sense of humor. Obviously, there's more than just humor there. There's a lot to Bob. In fact, one of the comments I always make when people ask me about Bob is I contend that you can walk into any art school, in any city, in any country in the world, and you're going to find someone who's emulating Bob's work; someone who's making something that they think is original, but Bob wrote that language before there were computers. Before there was Photoshop. He did it. He wrote that language, and made it acceptable for everybody. It's universal. He will be, certainly, one of the remembered artists from our time, no doubt in my mind. He changed things, he wrote a visual language that didn't exist before. Every kid who sits down with Photoshop. What they're making wouldn't be acceptable without Bob having already given it a voice. They are making quasi-Rauschenbergs and believe they are the creator.

INTERVIEWER: I keep hearing about Bob with respect to printmaking, [that he was] always pushing the boundaries.

REID: Totally.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about that.

REID: Well, there was one project we worked on, and we thought we would be very clever. We spent a week in advance -- we knew Bob was coming, and he wasn't really sure what he wanted to do. There were maybe six of us in the shop, and we spent the entire week thinking every wild, conceivable way of making a mark that we could come up with. We just had some crazy stuff. We completely filled the shop, the artist's studio, with all these examples of things that we had done. Bob walked in -- and he probably took a good hour, at least, looking at each piece, considering everything, asking questions -- "What did you do here?" -- very politely -- and then he said, "But this is what we're going to do." [Laughs] But he didn't just come in and sort of brush his hand away and say, "No, no, no, no, no." He was very open-minded to see what we had come up with. Clearly, he had a very different direction of going, and *where* he went none

² *Hiccups*, 1997

of us had ever seen before. Obviously, he created a *new* way of making a plate. Bob's work was primarily photographic based, and in those days we worked with a negative emulsion that you would wipe on the plate, fan it dry, and then expose a piece of negative film, and you would get a positive image. It was a reversal process. Almost everything photographic these days is direct positive, so if you have a film positive, you project that, or you contact that, onto a plate with positive emulsion, and you get whatever the image is.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have to do it in a dark room?

REID: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So you have another room in here that does that, or you can make it light tight.

REID: We have a dark room where we put the emulsion on the plates. It's always very fussy to get that emulsion down so you don't get any streaks, or marks, or impurities in it. Well, instead of putting the emulsion on that way, Bob decided to take the emulsion and just paint it, randomly, onto the plate. In fact to accommodate the plate making process for *Illegal Tenders 1991* we expanded our dark room so that Bob could paint directly on the plates. The only place where he had brushed emulsion was where there would be image. He made two exposures of the same image, on two different plates with different brush strokes, so that when printed the overlapped areas would produce a third color, where they didn't you'd have the two single colors. That's printmaking! It was the most incredible way of making a plate. The photo image looked like it had been painted on in some fashion. Fifteen years later I saw an ad on TV using that kind of visual effect where there would be a brush stroke that became a car driving across the horizon. That idea was created so many years earlier in Bob's work. I constantly see references to so many Artists I have worked with being hijacked by the world of advertising. Maybe that's a compliment to the Artist.

INTERVIEWER: And was it your sense that he anticipated how it would work out? Did he ever say, "Hmmm. Bungled that one. Pitch it?"

REID: There were plates that he made that he didn't like and he would re-make them. That's true. But he was very open. He responded to things visually. In fact, when we first started this interview you mentioned that you would give us a transcript of our interview, and it reminded me of a time when I got caught in an awkward situation. The interviewer said she would give me a draft before it went to the press, and she called me up on a Wednesday morning, at ten o'clock and said, "I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to press in an hour." I said, "No, no, no, you can't do that," and she said, "Well, I don't have time. We're just going to do it." She had so misconstrued what I had said. *What* I had said was that often Bob would be working on something, and maybe something didn't work out quite right -- maybe the printer laid the film down upside down by mistake, or something happened that was not part of what the artist had intended -- Bob would look at it and -- not all the time, but sometimes he'd say, "Yeah, that works." He would refer to that as "free drawing." It was something that came to him during the collaborative process, but it still had to work for him.

So the interview comes out, and it says, "Well, Bob Rauschenberg would come into the shop and work, and the printers might screw up on his stuff, but Bob would just say, 'Oh, that's okay.'" That's not what I said. That's not at *all* what I said. On *Borealis Shares*, Bob laid all the panels out through the courtyard, and he painted them with different patinas. He'd paint for a few minutes on each one, go to the next one, and go back and forth. We had maybe half a dozen different metal patinas. He'd let it sit for a while on some, and he'd hose off others, and he created all these different panels. Each one was a brass panel that was -- I'm guessing the size-- was 30" by 70" or 65", or something like that. There was one on the front and one on the back of each "chair." So there are two distinct panels to each chair.

But we made all those panels, and we said, later, "Do we need to match these up to different chairs?" And he said, "No, they'll work." And they just *did*. When we printed the panels, there was no set order, but in his mind he already knew what the images were going to be that he was going to put on there, and he was able to lay out those patinas in a way that he knew they would all work.

Bob just seemed to know what appeared to us as random brush strokes would fit with the screen-printed images. It was magical to watch what looked so arbitrary become married to the printed images.

What I started to say earlier was -- while he was working on those -- that was the day that Sidney mentioned that Gregory Peck had walked in. I remember being in the courtyard and hearing this voice. I didn't know that he was there. I hear this voice, and I was, "Oh, my God, Gregory Peck is here." It was this unbelievable voice that you heard. The two of them, they were buddies, all day long, just talking away and having a good time. Sidney has many photos of Bob and Gregory Peck working together on these plates.



Borealis Shares I, 1990

We screen-printed those pieces with an epoxy ink. You only have a little bit of time. The ink will dry if you're not on top of it. So we had two people putting the plates on the press, a printer screening the image, and then two different people taking that plate off, while the first two were putting the next plate on. They were big, heavy plates. We made these racks to put them in, to dry and quite often -- they must have weighed thirty or forty pounds -- so a lot of us got little cuts on our fingers from holding these plates. Bob seemed *horrified* that he had subjected us to something that might hurt us. For us it was no big deal, but he cared that much -- about -- *us*.

Maybe the best thing -- It's a tough one to tell. I haven't thought about this for a long time [chokes up] -- I'm sorry. Boy, I haven't thought about this for a very long time. We were at the National Gallery for a Gemini opening -- black tie, in the main rotunda, in Washington, dignitaries, all the artists who had worked at Gemini. It was a big deal. Bob starts the whole thing off -- I'm sorry -- he stands up and he says, "Before we start, I want to toast the *printers*." It was amazing. We were just happy to be there, to be acknowledged by Bob. That was special. He really cared for people. I'm sorry. I haven't thought about that for a very long time.

INTERVIEWER: I always thought that Bob, in whatever world he was operating, considered the people around him family. I was going to ask you whether or not you all felt that "love," to use an overused word. I have had the opportunity to listen to some of the audiotapes that Calvin Tomkins did with Bob, and at some point Bob is saying, "Well, you know, I have to check on Bradley, because she had a dental appointment this morning." "Laurey [sic] is going to the doctor, and I just want to make sure everything is okay." All of this was his world and his family. I ask people who work with other artists whether or not that's the way it is all along, and I don't get that feeling.

REID: I would say that Bob is probably one of *the* most caring individuals I know -- not just in the art world. We will have some artists who will come in and work, and they may prefer to work exclusively with one printer; they may be in the artist's studio, and periodically come out and talk to the other people who weren't involved in the project whatsoever. With Bob the door was always open, he would just go from one person to another and find out who they were and what they were doing. There was *never* a time when you felt not welcome. It was a big umbrella and everybody was inside and having a great time.

INTERVIEWER: Chris Rauschenberg described it as Bob having just one big parade, [that] life is one big parade, and he wants everybody to join it.

REID: Yes, well, I would agree.

INTERVIEWER: What would a day be like when Bob was coming to Gemini? What did you all talk about? Was it all very serious- "We're going to do this, this, this, and this"?

REID: Oh no, there was a lot of storytelling -- a lot of storytelling. We would start later in the day -- eleven o'clock, maybe ten-thirty Bob would come in -- we would have gotten some preparatory work done before he came, or we'd try to finish off something that we didn't finish at midnight the night before. We'd do whatever we could to be ready for him again. It's kind of hard to think back to any specific project.

INTERVIEWER: You [first] saw him -- in '89?

REID: Seventy-nine. Rookery Mounds was done in 1979. Thirty-two years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Seventy-nine. 32 years ago. And he worked at Gemini through --

REID: Bob would come every couple of years. There was a kind of rotation -- Bob would come here, and then Roy would come here, and Ellsworth [Kelly] would come, and Jim Rosenquist, periodically -- David Hockney -- the crème de la crème. -- art geek heaven.

INTERVIEWER: What a tough job.

REID: Yes, I know.

INTERVIEWER: Did Jasper ever come?

REID: Yes, a few times. Not a lot, but a few times. In fact, one of the first projects I was working on with Bob.... There was a phone call that Jasper was passing through town and he was at the airport. He came over, and the two of them hadn't talked for quite a few years. There was sort of a reconciliation/get-together. To be in the same room with the two of them was pretty outrageous. Pretty outrageous.

INTERVIEWER: Did they talk? "This is what I'm doing, what are you doing?"

REID: No, they were very friendly. [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Missing each other. Having missed each other?

REID: I think so. I'd be interpreting. They certainly enjoyed each other's presence; I'll put it that way.

INTERVIEWER: That's very nice.

REID: And I learned later that they hadn't spoken for years before that. So it was a historical moment in the middle of a proofing session.

INTERVIEWER: What exactly is a proofing session?

REID: You were asking earlier how it plays out. Typically, an artist will come maybe with some notion of what they want to do. On rare occasions, the Artist will come in completely cold, and create with whatever they encounter. Since Bob works with photography, he would generally have to come out with a fair amount of photography in advance, and maybe some idea of how he was going to put it together. For a lot of the photography work, the big, main table in the shop would be completely cleared off. He would lay all his photography out, very much like I think how he probably worked in his studio at home. I was fortunate to work with Bob in Captiva on two separate occasions.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you did.

REID: I know the layout of the big studio, with the big, massive table. In fact, when I built this table [KT: where this interview was conducted] the other day for Ann Hamilton's project, I was thinking of Bob. I was thinking, "That's what I want in my studio." In the early 80s we worked on negative photo plates where you coat the plate with an emulsion, then you expose the image onto the plate using film, with both negative and positive images. Later, Bob started doing photo transfers where he would print his images onto paper that would allow the image to be transferred then later on a Mylar. I think he worked with ink manufacturers, and certainly people in his studio, to develop an ink that would transfer when it got wet.

The technique changed by the mid 90s. Bob would take a piece of paper, and almost in the same way he was applying the emulsion to the plate in *Illegal Tender L.A.* he would brush clear water over the paper. This reminds me of another painting project. I hadn't thought about a lot of this before, but that's another story – on top of these water brush strokes Bob would lay one of his photographs face down, and using his hand, a small squeegee or a little piece of plastic, he would rub on the back of the photograph, lift it up, and rub it some more until he got the transfer that he wanted. Then he would walk around the big table with as many as 150 different images – the first image might be that of a chicken. He'd poke around for a little while, and then he'd find an image maybe like a bicycle wheel. Then he'd come back to the first transfer, put some more water down, and apply the second transfer. He was creating this work right in front of you. We were so privileged to see that creative experience; unfortunately few people will ever get to enjoy that.

We would watch these *fantastic* transfer drawings being created. When the transfer matrix was completed we would then have a high-resolution photograph made then have the image photo-mechanically separated into the four-color process CMYK. We would first print the CMYK colors, which was just like getting to first base.

Then Bob might come back and he would say, "Okay, now, this orange over here -- I want you to enhance that orange." So we would go back to the color proofing --

INTERVIEWER: Not come back the next day, but come back a couple months later?

REID: Well, if he were here working, then it would be right away or maybe the next day. In some cases, he would leave work and we would re-proof it and ship it to Captiva. Then he would give us further advice. But typically -- the four-color transfer would just get it close to his transfer; then Bob would continue to manipulate the image. He might say "This black here needs to be a little bit bolder" -- so we would go and find -- it might be the magenta screen that carried more information in that area, so we would print the magenta in a "touch" (printer's term for slight color adjustment) maybe transparent gray or something, to enhance that area. He would then walk us through the piece again, enhancing or reducing separate areas of how he wanted to change it.

It was not just a straight-on photographic process -- "Here's the photographs, and I'm going to print these" -- he was constantly responding to what was in front of him, constantly creating a new visual answer to that particular problem.

INTERVIEWER: It seems to me there's just a whole other kind of technology that, as an artist, you need to learn --

REID: Very much so.

INTERVIEWER: -- in order to get the most out of it. And meanwhile, if you're somebody like Bob, as I understand, you go, "Well, yes, but can we also do *that*?" Or, "How big *can* we make it?" I had not understood that so many of the pieces that I saw -- like the Tibetan series [ROCI Tibet] that Bob did -- that those were prints. I thought, when I saw them at the ROCI show, that they were unique pieces. In fact, they're not unique pieces. Or -- *are* they unique pieces?

REID: Are you talking about the *Samarkand Stitches* or the Tibetan boxes?

INTERVIEWER: The Tibetan boxes -- these three-dimensional pieces. That wasn't a print in my head, until --

REID: Okay. Well, they were screen-printed images that were then transferred onto the metal boxes. In fact, that was the --

INTERVIEWER: That was the story that you were going to say?

REID: Yes, when we were putting those prototypes together -- this may not be something that you can use, but I'll just tell it for your own interest. There's a piece that's sort of square, with a triangle up on the top. It's about twenty-five inches high and it's rectangular for most of the way up, and then it slants off. On the one side is a photograph of a faucet, and it looks like it's wrapped in cloth or something like a slab of meat. Titles are rarely assigned during the proofing stage so the printers will often come up with their own working titles. This became known as "the meat faucet." I can't think of its final title.³

The panel on one side was to be painted. Bob said, "Okay, I want you to paint this section here in pink." So I've got the pink paint, and I'm painting away and Bob looks at it and says "No, no, no, no. Don't paint like Jasper, you've got to paint like me." [Laughs] I was applying the paint loosely in a crosshatch fashion. Bob then directed me in how to correctly apply the paint. What a compliment, me painting like Jasper Johns? (Yes, I know it was not meant that way) and coming from such a teacher. It's one of those stories that has always warmed my heart. [Laughter]

Bob knows printmaking *so* well, he would really teach us a lot of stuff. In fact, I have said before many of the older printers have little tried and true "nichey" kinds of cures to a problem

³Mr. Reid has identified the work as *Tibetan Keys and Locks, Tibetan Keys (Bevel)*, 1987 10" x 10" x 18"

that they would keep to themselves. A kind of job security. I have experienced this on the receiving end more than once, and hopefully I am not guilty on the giving end. Most of the truly great artists today work in more than one print shop, probably to the chagrin of the owners, who would prefer exclusivity. But it is precisely the interaction of so many great Artists in this “circuit” of highly skilled Master Printers that has expanded the knowledge of printmaking. Artists of the likes of Bob, Jasper, Roy, Ellsworth, or David to drop a few names, would regularly visit Gemini. During the course of a proofing session one of them might ask for “an eight-sided sponge”. You would think, “what’s that” and it would be explained how eight sides worked better than six. A light would go off in your head and you would realize I’ve never thought of that before. I use the sponge as an example; as far as I know it doesn’t exist, but what if? I’m sure there were processes and techniques that we would share with the Artists who would then introduce them in other shops. I see this as a service of cross-pollination of information that the Artists provide. Sometimes the idea came directly from the artist. I mentioned earlier the series *Illegal Tender* from 1992 where Bob painted the photo emulsion directly to the ball grain litho plates.⁴ This was something none of us at Gemini had ever seen before. Sometimes it might be the missing link of information or an opportunity to do something you had been working on.

I had heard of artists painting on Mylar and transferring the image on to a positive photo litho plate. A process we had not begun using in the early 80’s I was staying in the shop in the evenings trying to make the process work for me. Roy arrived to begin a new series of prints and asked for some Mylar to paint the washes. As luck would have it I had almost worked out all the bugs but I needed Roy’s help to fine-tune the process. At the time I saw it as a feather in my cap, a new tool that could be offered to artists, but in hindsight today it may have led to a decline in the use of stone lithography.

I learned so much from Bob and not just technical kinds of things. As for the aesthetics you don't get that any other place. I mean, how many young artists, how many mid-career artists -- how many *artists* would like to have an hour with Bob Rauschenberg? And I had a bunch of those.

INTERVIEWER: Most of us, I daresay, work nine-to-five jobs, where you sit down at a desk, pick up the phone, you do your business, but it's pretty solitary. It is hard to imagine a workspace where -- which is why I asked about "the day" -- where everybody goes in, and they have a task to do; yet, I can imagine there is energy in the room. In Bob's case, of course, there's probably a television set or a radio, or something.

REID: Absolutely. Some soap was on.

INTERVIEWER: When I watched him do some transfer drawings in Captiva I was really struck by the concentration on his face. He would make a transfer, then he would pull up the paper, and he'd say, "I think we've *got* it."

⁴ A ball grain is for direct drawing like a stone. A photo plate is for printing Mylar or a photo image. (Reid)

REID: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. No, there was tremendous energy and focus. His time was extremely valuable. Sure there was partying, there was camaraderie, but there was also intense work. In fact, I remember one time asking Bob -- this was towards the end of the year -- I asked him what he was doing for Christmas, and he said, "I *hate* Christmas. I can't get anybody to come into the studio and work." Bob was an artist all his waking hours. I think that was true with Roy, too. I think the two were very similar in that way. You don't get up in the morning and have breakfast and then go to work, then come home and watch TV. You get up in the morning, and you're making art until you go to sleep at night -- whether you're actually sitting there painting, or drawing, or thinking of something, you're doing it all of the time. There's no down time. Susan Rothenberg explained to me that daily studio time is a way of life. Even if you were sitting reading the paper over a cup of coffee, that first moment when you look up at piece on the wall is like seeing it for the very first time. Painting has a lot to do about looking.

INTERVIEWER: Someone asked me, when I said I was working on this oral history project -- they said, "What I'd really like to know is what his hobbies were. [Laughter] What did he do after he stopped painting?"

REID: He slept. [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: It was such an odd question, I thought, simply because it never occurred to me that Bob would do anything other than work -- because for him it wasn't work it didn't seem to me. It seemed that he really enjoyed it.

REID: A lot of the great artists, I think are artists all their lives. Right until the very end. I think when an artist gets a physical disability and it deters them, that's probably the end at that point, because that's all they've been living for all their lives and that's all they've done. There is no down time.

INTERVIEWER: You worked on -- what was it called? *Ten Till Too*?

REID: It was a tiny little print, wasn't it?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. I think it was the last piece. Or was that *Tap*? 2004.

REID: Well, the funny thing is -- like I said before -- we knew a particular piece as "meat faucet." I don't know what the actual piece is. It's not titled until after, so you can tell me titles --

INTERVIEWER: Well, if it's the same one, I thought when I saw that piece, "Well, Bob and Lady Gaga would have had a good time together."

REID: [Laughs] I was going to say -- I don't know how you would not enjoy looking at Bob's work. Another really remarkable thing -- and maybe I shouldn't say this -- I think not everything Bob did was fantastic. But he wasn't afraid to show it. The racehorses are easy to pick out but the ones that were a little bit more challenging -- there's something there, just the same. What's the expression -- "a bad day of fishing is better than a good day at work". A bad Rauschenberg is better than anything most artists make in their career.

INTERVIEWER: [Laughter] Did you get the sense that he would know that? And would that be within a series, or an entire series?

REID: Oh, no, never. No. If he did six pieces, and he came back and did six pieces again, there might be one of those that was maybe questionable -- maybe. He had a pretty good record. [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Lawrence [Voytek] told me that Bob would put his pictures up on the wall [of the Captiva studio] when he finished a series and he would always mark the ones that he wanted to keep, that were not going to be for sale.

REID: Yes. Oh, I believe that. I remember being down in Captiva one time, and there was this incredible piece of sculpture on the ground. This was the little house, before he built the big, fancy place. His studio, at that point, was behind the house up on stilts. It was right on the beach; the sand came right up to the front of it. There was this gorgeous piece on the floor. I was with Sidney Felsen at the time and he remarked, "Oh, is this yours, Bob?" Bob said "Yes." [Sidney said] "It's not signed." And Bob said, "I'm not going to sign it. If I sign it, some dealer will come in here and talk me out of it." [Laughter] He liked it, so he kept it.

INTERVIEWER: Lawrence was talking about Arnie Glimcher, and he said that Arnie had a very good eye; or, at least, he had the same eye as Bob -- and he would come around, and he would say, "Well, I like this one, and I like this one, and we'd like to have that one," and the pieces he chose were the pieces that Bob had marked for himself.

REID: Oh. Interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Then Bob would say, "That one's not available. I'm so sorry."

REID: Yes. Good. Good. Yes, well, I think that's great that artists can enjoy their own work, and be able to keep it. I had heard stories of Richard Diebenkorn going to visit somebody, and having one of his pieces up on the wall, and asking to take it back so he could change it -- because there was some more work that he wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: I think Bob did that to John Cage one time. He gave John Cage a piece; then he went over to John Cage's, when John Cage was out of town, and when John came back, Bob had totally reworked the piece.

REID: [Laughs] That's funny.

INTERVIEWER: I guess at the Betty Parsons Gallery, or for this woman, Betty Parsons -- Betty Parsons and Clifford Still had come and made selections of what Bob was working on, for a show she was going to give him. And she said, "Well, in six months why don't you bring these pieces down, and we'll hang them." And apparently, when he took those down, they weren't the same pictures. [Laughter] He said, "Well, I thought I could make them better."

REID: Oh, my gosh. [Laughs] Well, maybe sometimes it's never finished.

INTERVIEWER: He would be out here for weeks at a time, I guess.

REID: Never long enough for us, but for a couple weeks at a time.

INTERVIEWER: I think he really liked L.A.

REID: He did, and he and Sidney were kindred spirits. They very much enjoyed being with each other.

INTERVIEWER: I've met a lot of people out here who were Bob's buddies, and several of them are sort of big, expansive personalities, like Bob's. So it's really interesting to me that Sidney is not that way and that there's this kind of nice spoon-and-fork relationship between the two of them. It really seems very nice. It must have been really dark here, when Bob died.

REID: Yes. It was tough. You know, the closeness that Bob and Sidney had I think comes out in Sidney's photography. I think one of the most stunning photographs Sidney ever took was a picture of a young Bob and a young Rosamund in the back seat of a car.

INTERVIEWER: She showed it to me.

REID: Oh! That's one of my favorite photographs. It was like Bonnie and Clyde. It's bigger and better than Bonnie and Clyde. Even if that's the only photograph you ever take in your life -- you don't need to take another one. It's just spectacular. He caught both of them in another world. It was just amazing.

INTERVIEWER: She told me "Well, I know I look a little pissed off in that picture," and I'm thinking, "No, you look like Faye Dunaway."

REID: You look like you're on top of the world. [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: She said, "Well, we were on our way to Minneapolis," and she said, "I have to say, I was a little out of sorts. Because we were supposed to meet Ileana Sonnabend and we were going to be late. And Sidney's always late, and Bob's always late, and I'm *not* always late. And we were going to be late, and I was really irritated, and Sidney turns around and snaps that photograph." [Laughter]

REID: It's brilliant. It's one of the best photographs of human interaction. It's perfect. Perfect.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. He's an extraordinary photographer.

REID: He's got a great eye, a great eye. I'm glad he's still doing it. It's something he does all the time, and he really enjoys it.

INTERVIEWER: And he's always around, snapping pictures.

REID: Always. Always. Always. There's a book that they put out and I remember him saying how frustrating it was, going through that editing process. He just finally threw in the towel, and it became what it became. He really needs a show somewhere. He needs more than just a book. The book doesn't cover Sidney's ...

INTERVIEWER: ... you want more.

REID: Oh, and he's got more. He's got lots, and lots, and lots. Did someone say Guggenheim?

INTERVIEWER: I wanted to ask you if there was one project that stirs up the most memories for you.

REID: You know, when I knew you were coming I was sort of anticipating that question -- I don't think I could limit it to one -- it was just another holiday going on, and that was it -- and they're all great. It's like, going to Paris again. Okay! [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: So when somebody calls you up and says, "Will you come talk about Bob Rauschenberg, and his contributions to printmaking?" What do you say to them?

REID: What I said earlier today; that he wrote the visual language for the next fifteen generations. He gave all artists another tool in their arsenal. He opened up the world to a vision that wasn't there. I don't know how to compare him to anything else. He was just --Boy, I'm struggling for words -- he was amazing.

INTERVIEWER: A giant?

REID: Yes, he was a giant. Yes. Bigger than a giant. Bigger than King Kong. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: When you talk about him, there is this nice generosity of spirit that keeps coming through, again, and again, and again, about what he would do for people.

REID: I'll bet you would be hard pressed -- if you took it upon yourself to go and find somebody that Bob pissed off -- there are probably some out there. But he was the most giving person, from his Change, Inc. program -- that nobody knows about -- and how many people benefited from that? A fantastic amount of people benefited from that.

INTERVIEWER: Were you here when there was that lawsuit about photography?

REID: No, I came after that.

INTERVIEWER: I was curious about if [the lawsuit] changed [Bob's work]--

REID: Well, Bob started shooting his own stuff after that. I don't know all the details of that -- What's public domain? How do you protect the integrity of the original photographer? Are they reimbursed? Should they be reimbursed? I don't know any of those answers.

INTERVIEWER: There was, at that time, being mapped out an entirely new realm of intellectual property, and even today, I'm sure, who knows how one would deal with that in a contemporary setting?

REID: Well, photography was always looked at as -- not even the bastard child of the art world, it was just like not even part of it, in the same way that screen-printing wasn't. Bob gave me *my* eye in terms of how *I* photograph. I eventually went through, and I got my undergraduate degree in photography. My father was a cinematographer, and between both my father and Bob, I learned to look at stuff. I still frame everything that I shoot, the way I learned it from the very first time I started looking at his work. There's been no need to change. [Laughs] It's perfect. I am a student of Bobs. My father's name was also Bob. His initials were also R. R. Maybe I'm twisting whatever I do now into my own kind of unique vision, but that direct, straight-on approach of seeing the world in an absolutely real sense, that's the way I approach all the work that I do, personally. In terms of copyrighted imagery -- I don't know. I'm not sure what's the right answer.

INTERVIEWER: I spent some time talking to a man called Andy Oates, who went to Black Mountain College with Bob, and they took photography classes together. Hazel Larsen Archer was their teacher. He said, "Well, she basically taught that you needed to --"These are my words, not his -- "Let the camera do the work, so that you edit in the camera. You make that image, and that is your image. It's not something that you're going to then manipulate further in the darkroom. It's going to be what you shoot." I thought that was really interesting.

REID: Yes. I like that.

INTERVIEWER: Is that what [Bob]...?

REID: I think so. I don't do very much with mine. In fact, my father said, when I first got into photography -- I'd ask him for help in what I was doing, and he said, "Well, when you've taken 10,000 photographs, then we'll talk." So photography is all about doing a whole lot of it, until you get to the point where it's second nature, and you're not thinking. I think one of the biggest insults, I would think, for my father -- when we would see a documentary that he'd worked on, and there would be mountains in it, a moose or something running across, in front of it, and I'd say, "What a great picture," and he would get so upset, because he didn't shoot "pictures," he shot experiences, and sequences. So to isolate it -- then you've lost the whole meaning of the thing, because he's shooting that entire sequence, he's not shooting just the moose, standing in front of a lake. Context.

It would have been fun if Bob had ever gotten involved with computer work himself, but at the same time... I remember once -- this maybe is a similarity, and it may also be something I can't repeat -- or you can't repeat -- but I asked him one time about smoking marijuana, and he said he didn't really get much out of it. [Laughs] If you could put him down in front of a very high-powered Mac computer, with the best Photoshop and operating system, he might say, "Eh, I didn't get much out of it."

INTERVIEWER: [Laughter] That's great.

REID: He was an amazing character.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you for sharing.

REID: Okay. Well, thank you. I hadn't thought about Bob for a while. I was off doing other things. But I'm glad you've brought me back to thinking about Bob.

REID: I can tell you one more thing. This is a wonderful story. I came back to New York from working with Jasper one time, and my youngest daughter had yet to be born (this was just before she was born). He was asking about my daughter (we knew it was going to be a girl), and he said, "Did you pick out a name yet?" My oldest daughter had my wife's initials ECR; my middle daughter had my initials JAR; my wife had lost a younger sister whose name was Robin. So I said to Jasper, "There are just so many fantastic people in the art world who have the same initials, so we're going to call her Rachel Reid, like Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns," so we're going to call her Rachel, Robin, Reid, RRR. He looked at me, and I think he thought I was goofing on him. [Laughter] But my daughter's name is Rachel Reid, so she's an RR and coincidentally attending art school at PNCA in Portland Oregon. Home of Blue Sky Gallery.⁵

[End of Interview]

⁵Mr. Reid is referencing the gallery of Christopher Rauschenberg.