

## RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Bound Compilation of Robert Rauschenberg Interviews, 1985-1987 /  
McClintock, Cathy / Interview with Robert Rauschenberg, 1987

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RR WINK, INT

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RR INTERVIEW WITH CATHY MCCLINTOCK  
MARCH 25, 1987  
CAPTIVA ISLAND, FLORIDA

CM: When is the article coming out in the paper?

RR: It depends. You know that woman that writes for theater...and that other one that does quilts? She wanted to come to the show while we were hanging it. She gave Darryl such a terrible review...she took Mary's place, the new one...Mary was very sweet, maybe too kind, but she didn't recommend that people skip this show...she never said things like that. That's what she said about Darryl's show. "I would advise you not to waste your time in coming." She might have been trying to encourage people that weren't going. But she's so new that she can't have enough enemies to be that influential.

CM: Well somebody else was mentioning her to me just recently and I guess I just haven't read any of her articles. She comes out probably in the Sunday paper and I don't read that.

CM: What was the creative process that you went through to come up with your Gluts?

RR: The first move was to go to the Fort Myers junk yard. We did have, up until yesterday, a great allie there. Now he's been transferred or bought a junk yard in Atlanta and that's a little far to drive for inspiration. I had no preconceived idea about what Gluts were supposed to be and they weren't named until the whole mess of them were made. The name Gluts also came from not only our economical crisis that we were having because of the oil greed, but because I found a whole bunch of crushed filling station signs and one of them...well, nearly all of them, had these variations where you could change the price every day?...and so I used that and that's where the name Gluts came from. I mentioned earlier that it might also be some kind of reaction of being from Texas, which has been, of all the states I believe, most hurt by the oil glut.

CM: That filling station sign, do you have that in any of your pieces that...

RR: They're on their way to Germany.

CM: Is that another Glut that you've sent over there?

RR: It's lots of Gluts. I have...it must be at least fifteen that are based on the local filling stations that have been bulldozed.

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CM: How do these fit into the overall picture? In other words, why did you select these to be displayed here at the Barbara B. Mann Hall?

RR: Because these are the latest that I've done. I was looking around the studio and I was thinking that the Pottorf show was on just about long enough. The next exhibition is going to be contemporary dancers scores and diagrams but it won't be ready until May the first. I don't know...when I showed the 1/4 Mile at ECC...I enjoy being able to share the information intimately, with the students and the people in the area.

CM: You actually assemble these pieces...when you get this stuff back from the junkyard, how do you go about that?

RR: Well, I have this garden down here...it was called the sculpture garden but now the lizards have taken over totally. Now it's the lizard garden because they love my taste. There's millions of lizards down there of all sorts of sizes. Of course, I separate them into categories of color, information, with or without lettering...I think I have a sign for every street in Fort Myers by now. If I don't I'll probably get it next week. I just go down and look around and start pulling out things. We wash them out here on the porch with the pressure hose. Then we come in here and I get somebody to help me rivet them together.

CM: And when you just play around with them here and put them together and see how you like it the best?

RR: Yes.

CM: Are some of the them welded together?

RR: Only in emergencies. Some of the mixtures of metals have to be welded or they won't hold up. Our big problem is shipping. I like working in the environment. I like, fresh as the meat you eat...going out every day and picking up things and bringing them home and making an art "stew" out of them.

CM: Where are your things displayed around the world? What countries?

RR: I have, what...right now I have six one-man shows. Including one at the Metropolitan. In Finland, Helsinki. New York City, in two places...early drawings in one and the other is the 1/4 Mile which was premiered right here in Fort Myers and is at the Met now for the opening of their new 20th Century Museum. Corpus Christi, Texas. And Stockholm, Sweden. And we're opening here tomorrow.

CM: You personally are going to be here tomorrow?

RR: Oh sure.

CM: What do you see as your next projects? Are you going to

make more Gluts?

RR: I'm not into the Gluts far enough yet. I usually change what I'm doing if I get too familiar with it and if I feel I'm getting too good at it. And then I switch. Because I don't want to be the kind of artist that sets up territory in his style. I love it when people copy me because it just helps me quit doing that sooner.

CM: What would you say your art as a whole mean to you?

RR: More often than not I have said that I really didn't care if I was considered a fine artist. I would rather be a good reporter. My interest in making any kind of art is to make people aware of their own lives. We're working now around the world on a bankrupting tour...it's called ROCI. We're trying to...we've amassed a show that shows different countries how other countries live. Eight years ago I was living in China. One of the things that upset me the most was that the Chinese...it wasn't the moral thing; it wasn't the censorship; it wasn't the lack of religion or any of those things which are upsetting enough. It was the fact that they couldn't travel. So they didn't know...they would have to get five people to decide if they could visit their family thirty kilometers away. And I thought, God, these people are never going to know about good hot chili, or different kinds of dances, or other religions, or what people look like any place else. I think I helped them open it up. I went back over there to Beijing. I had the entire National Museum. Cost me a fortune in shipping and insurance but it certainly was worth it. Because that's where I am. I'm not crazy about galleries and museum prestige. I mean, if people want that I think they can have it but I want to go to Russia next. We had an invitation yesterday from Cuba which as Terry said...yes, the same full show. The show comes with a video that Terry makes in all these countries. We probably have employed eleven video monitors to show the people about the rest of the world. The only thing is that financially it gets a little bit heavy on me. I had to sell a Warhol and a Twombly in order ...

Exhibiting in Cuba might lead us right in there. At the National Gallery, it was about a week and a half ago, we had an opening there. We had five ambassadors...Russian, Chinese, Chilean, Venezuelan and Japanese. And Ted Kennedy.

CM: Like, in Cuba I'm sure the government wouldn't have it there, but do they defray any expenses at all?

RR: We have to fight for it all the time. Even Japan, which has to be the third richest country...if not the second?

CM: So we'll just...

TVB: You could go outside and see the lizard garden...

RR: One of the other pieces is in the living room hanging up

over there.

CM: Do they all hang on the wall?

RR: No, this is a floor piece and this. They're right now downstairs finishing the pedestal. This one, and this floor piece and the one hanging in the living room over at the beach house.

CM: And you'll be at the opening from 5 to 7 tomorrow night?

RR: If my new pants come back. They're supposed to come back tonight. I thought you might want to get up on the table and look at that. I'm an old frustrated stage manager myself.

CM: Are you still doing the costuming?

RR: I work with Trisha Brown.

CM: Do you still have your house in New York? How often are you here? Do you keep going back and forth?

RR: As much as I can. I don't know which it is...all my equipment or my taxes that keeps me down here. Both are pretty heavy.

CM: The first I knew of you was through Sheryl Pharr. And it was really funny...it was the bicentennial year I guess. I used to play softball with Sheryl...yes, the Foxes. I worked for Walter Chronkite at that time, I was his secretary for a couple of years up in New York. I had come down here to visit my family and I flew back to New York and it was snowy and who do I see that had just gotten off the same plane but Sheryl. I said what are you doing here? She said I'm working for Bob Rauschenberg and I've done some dyeing of costumes for him. There were no cabs to be found. Sheryl had another woman with her as I recall so we took a cab together to Soho and dropped her off at your place and then she said...it was just about the time that your picture was on the cover for the bicentennial exhibit and I went in and got that article and read all about you. And I just saw Sheryl recently. I hadn't seen her in years.

RR: We sent her to college.

CM: I saw her at a career fair over at ECC. It was good seeing her.

RR: I think it's so courageous. Not to just sink into the fact that you're almost middle aged. Your husband just left you. You had a child and you're starting a new life. That's gorgeous. Don't you think that takes extraordinary courage? She said that she had to work so hard to keep up with all those young people that don't have any of these things on their mind. She's in Tampa now.

CM: This is really a thrill for me to come up here and see your studio.

RR: Aaron Siskind, the photographer? He's one of the all time greats, like Matthew Brady except he happens to be alive...and one day he got so mad at me in my studio. He had to make a living by photographing documentaries still pictures...and he said, God Bob I really hate you. Do you know that I could do my lifes work with just one of your pictures? Because he was into these details with torn edges and paint.

We really have a good time when we do these. We just did the Van Cliburn poster for the piano competition.

CM: Do you have a favorite artist yourself that you feel was most influential?

RR: That's hard to say. When I get into somethings...it's usually a really early artist. It probably goes with my feeling about nature, I really loved Leonardo da Vinci and the way every little piece of grass and bugs flying...he wasn't to be pinned down in fixed form. I usually like the restless ones...not the young and the restless, but I like them too!

CM: Some of the stuff, the really fine engineering stuff;...

RR: And the way water flows, and the energy there. And the fact that even though it's the Virgin Mary or some other big dude there, he spent as much time on a blade of grass that might be two and a half inches high, as he did on her wings. I really like that.

CM: Do you ever do any straight painting at all? Or put straight painting in any of your works?

RR: No closer than that. What I do there is that I take all the photographs. We make silkscreens down under there. Emil, Bradley's husband, usually does the positives that we need to make the negatives on the screen. Then we have a print shop over here.

CM: Is the Gulf coming up to take over your house over there?

RR: It's trying.

The pig has already been cast in aluminum. One of the variations...it's going to be like six unique pigs but each one is starting off as an aluminum cast pig. It's not a glut. It looks like a pig. You'll see. It's big.

#### DISCUSSION OF TERRY'S ROOM

His room is like a contemporary Collier's brothers. These guys, they were brothers, and they died, they smothered from the amount of things that they collected? And they just absolutely filled

up the space and nobody even missed them. They didn't do it deliberately it just happened. They had tunnels going through the stuff. They found one right away and it took them about three more days to find the other brother.

CM: What do you use this for?

RR: Photographs.

TYE: It's a great article. It is gorgeous. I think that the illustrations inside that new article. It's a beautiful article. Sometimes all those political things can get so accusatory that you almost get on the bad side, you know, defending them. And this was dealt with so gently. Even though they pointed out certain weaknesses and acts that Reagan is totally responsible for...and his staff and all that, but it was very soft. It was dealt with clearly, poetically, sensitively. They pointed out, gave evidence and proff that there is about a thirty year cycle in American history where the rights have it and it goes back to the left. It feels very up to me because I'm on the compassion side...and it said that all the things that have happened like the homeless sleeping two blocks from the White House on the heat grates, no education any more. He really did cut all that out and the budget is three times as much as it was when he went in, which he promised to balance. They really don't get onto that and just ride it to death, you know where you feel sorry for the guy. That would get him reelected if he could be. There was so much sympathy. Something really brand new is happening. They give evidence of how it had been before, like the FDR days. I thought that like, yes, we have a President and it's FDR. Because he had what three terms and by the time I noticed it I was practically full grown before we changed presidents. I thought he WAS the president. But forget the illustrations. I didn't do the illustrations. I don't know if they'd been any better if I had but they...

WALKING OVER TO THE BEACH HOUSE. DOGS BARKING.

CM: How long have you been in here?

RR: It's aluminum. But I had the real stuffed one that the Tibetans gave me. I thought I was in bad luck you know when they give you the heaviest coffee table or something like that or something glass...easy to carry...

CM: What do you mean they gave you a real one? They gave you a real pig?

RR: That one, stuffed.

CM: And then you made a mold of it? What is this made of again?

RR: Aluminum. This particular one is going to be...this is from Miami, I just picked it up off the street. It's sort of like a column of love. Heartbreak. When I get the patina on it. I'm

looking for a chemical to go back in here and paint out the color  
in this aluminum that this has corroded to. And this will go  
right up here.