

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Kotz, Mary Lynn / "Interview with Walter Hopps," 1987

MARY LYNN KOTZ, INTERVIEW WITH WALTER HOPPS

MLK INTERVIEW WITH WALTER HOPPS,
DIRECTOR, MENIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION, HOUSTON, TEXAS
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MLK: I'm interviewing Walter Hopps at the Remington Hotel at Houston, Texas. Walter Hopps is the Director of the Menil Collection. He organized the 1976 Retrospective of Rauschenberg's work at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C.

WH: At the NMAA (National Museum of American Art), you get to Linda Hartigan. Explain who you are, and say I referred you and she'll lead through the bureaucracy so you can see installation shots of the show. Linda Hartigan's office number is 357-1790. She can help you with whatever you'll need out of that place.

WH: It was around the fall of 1957, early '58, when I actually met Bob. I'd first heard of his work in 1953. I'm a Californian and I lived east--I lived in Chicago in the midst of ____ school years, but in '53 in Los Angeles, Wallace Berman, who was very special to the art world--he's dead now--a truly underground artist, poet, publisher, etc., he had somehow heard of Rauschenberg as early as '53. And in the circle, Berman as an artist was one of the direct inspirations for Edward Kienholz. These are contemporaries of Rauschenberg in the west, an irascible batch of people. And then, around 1955, the actress Rachel Rosenthal turned up in Hollywood. She's someone I and friends of mine came to know. She had work, she had come west. She was very much part of a sort of avant-garde, or underground--or in an earlier day one would have said

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Bohemian--but she had some extraordinary work of Bob's and Jasper Johns and Cy Twombly--they were all friends of hers.

Outside of New York City, only the very small gallery in Rome had shown Bob's work. There weren't collectors like you could even begin to think of in the last twenty years, there weren't galleries showing the work. So, for Heaven's sake, in a city as cosmopolitan as Los Angeles is, you really needed a very perceptive and brilliant underground artist to be the one who knew of his work early on. The little bits of mention that he had received in the art magazines, wouldn't have meant anything to anyone outside the New York scene. It didn't mean anything to anyone, really, elsewhere in the country at all. It wasn't illustrated, wasn't--but Berman was in touch with artists throughout the country, and poets, et cetera. He was very much affiliated with what you'd called the Beat--these were my friends in that movement--writers--and there was a lot of information carried around the country, and there you would hear of it.

MLK: Did you know Ferlinghetti?

WH: Indeed I knew Ferlinghetti. He had nothing to do with Rauschenberg, he wasn't particularly sympathetic to an eastern group of poets that would have been around Bob and Jasper. There are all sorts of factions in the art world that know of each other and in many cases have very little to do with each other.

But Rosenthal is, I guess, English by birth [she's still alive]. She had in those days developed books called the "Instant Theatre." She taught acting in Hollywood--had acting classes, I think to make a living. And she ran her own

experimental theatre that she called the Instant Theatre that was improvisational, stage set. Her activities were precursors--one of the crucial precursors, really, of what later were called Happenings, in some cases--much more close actually to what would be called Performance Art in more recent times. So here she had this work that film people were engaged in and that sort of thing. Like a very close friend of mine, Dennis Hopper, was part of that circle. He became aware of her work. So the first private exposure to Bob's work out there stems from her, really.

So about 2 years later I met Bob in New York, with a collector friend. In those years I was still in school at UCLA, and at the same time I was in school I began a set of art galleries with various partners and associates. There were about 4 galleries, 3 in Los Angeles, 1 in San Francisco, they were low budget, avant-garde galleries for the time. Some of us couldn't abide what was the officially presented state of modern art in our part of the country. There were no non-profit artists' spaces in those days. We just had our own tenuous commercial galleries. We didn't sell anything, we didn't speak up, but there they were. The best known of them, I suppose, is Ferus Gallery. At that time, up through about 1956, I'm variously working and in school and a proprietor of a gallery that I hired people to operate.

I met an extraordinary collector, in 1957, named Edwin Janss, who lives there, from an old southern California family. And he became interested in what I was up to with others at the

Ferus Gallery. We travelled together often. He liked to travel--with his father he travelled all over the world when he was a boy. It's an old ranch and real estate family, and development. For a business man he was uniquely adventurous and independent. I've had the great good fortune to know a number of such people in my life. Anyway, I wanted to meet Rauschenberg, who by then had just become represented by the Castelli Gallery--a brand new gallery, Castelli is a public gallery, comes in 1957. It was right at that time we went back together to New York [WH and Edwin Janss] and sought Bob out, and we met him.

ML: How did you seek him out?

WH: I don't remember if it was through artist friends or directly through the gallery or whatever. I'm trying to remember the studio Rauschenberg was at--it was Front or Pearl--it was one of the ones in the Fulton Area there--the Wall Street Fulton area. I'm trying to remember the order in which they came, we could look it up. I think Front came after Pearl. Anyway, it's one of those. Jasper's studio turned out to be nearby--

ML: So they were no longer in the same building--

WH: I think when I first met Bob they were in the same building; shortly thereafter Jasper was in a different building. [Pearl Street studio] But it was in that same time frame when I met them both. Going first to seek out Bob--

ML: What work of his had you actually seen before you sought him out?

WH: By then, I'd seen a fair amount in reproduction. Tom Hess in ARTnews had done an ARTnews annual where some was published, I somehow saw pictures that had been in that very first Jewish Museum show, I saw, of course, pieces that Rosenthal had--she had a very important early combine painting that's in there [NCFA catalog]--I don't remember the title, I'll show you the one. The first--what's important is this one, it's Untitled of 1953. Now that's owned by the Bernheims [?] in Paris. That was not brought to America, since it went away to Paris. I certainly know these people--but it stays in Paris. We illustrated it here without showing it. It's important, it's one of the very early combines. So that's the first combine picture of Bob's that I saw, and the first important one. [Referring to another illustration--]--another little small thing she had as well. Anyway, going to the studio, some of the most important combines were there. We were very excited, struck by it--it was quite new to Janss. In the reproductions I'd say I'd seen a fair amount of combine work, but what Janss let me talk him into buying right on the spot, what we consummated shortly thereafter, was this one here, called Interview, there on the studio wall just as we see it. And he was going to buy that one and this very important Untitled combine of 1955. So, it's extraordinary: Bob was willing to sell them both, but we decided on this one. For some reason Janss decided he wasn't going to be greedy. He could've perfectly well bought them both, but this was enough to live with [MLK: 55.7]. [Number 40 in the NCFA catalogue.] So what happened was that Janss bought it and took

it out to his sort of ranch home/headquarters out in the valley up in the north valley called Thousand Oaks. Turned out his wife couldn't stand having it in her house, so he turned it over to me and I lived with it for some years.

So from then on out we had a friendship and we'd see each and so on. In Los Angeles--

ML: What about Bob himself at that time: how did he respond to you and how did you respond to him? What was he like?

WH: Well we got along fine. Immediately he was completely warm, outgoing, giving of his time. Obviously had a tremendous energy. Terrific--I mean you could tell that behind his good spirits and great wit and humor, there was a great intellectual curiosity. His kind of warm and outgoing nature was a curious mixture of being very proud, not vain, but a very proud sort of person--short of being vain or arrogant in any way, not at all. He had a kind of boyish quality--of course people say that, but one of the things that struck Janss, who was a very shrewd rancher/business manager, was how self-assured Bob was. He was tremendously sharp--a friend of mine said that there are people who are at home in their own skin--and he was. Immediately there was this sense of his interest in other people. Now this is part of why that show happened. There are certain artists you know who early in their career have a kind of appetite for things other than just what they make: They are endowed with great eyes, and collect work by other artists--their friends, their peers, their contemporaries. Large or small--they have an extraordinary sense of the context in which they work, themselves. It's not

just their own work that they're centered on. Some of our very great artists, it turns out, when you read art history, often are the most interesting of collectors. Like Rembrandt, who lost it all. Out west, the irascible Edward Kienholz had a great collection. Rauschenberg himself was a terrific collector, and you saw that immediately. That meant a lot to me, I could sense what that was going to mean in his character.

ML: I saw him at Guy Dill's studio, and he was responding to another artist's work.

WH: Anyway, I went, as it turned out, in Los Angeles [I was living in Los Angeles at that time] and Janss decided--I forget what year--sometime later when he separated from his wife, or just before, they divorced--and he sold it back I suppose through Castelli to Count Panza--whom he had met--Panza bought the piece and we were there seeing it in '64. By '64 it was with Panza. Sorry, it's after that. He went off to the Venice Biennale in 1964--but it was right around that time.

Now, something about Rauschenberg then: he was very very close to a younger artist, colleague, Jasper Johns, who Rauschenberg admired enormously. As a matter of fact, it's really thanks to Bob Rauschenberg that Castelli took him on. Most of the data is true that's written about--but it's hard for me to say what I am going to say now because it's counter to how it's officially presented by Leo Castelli. But let's just simply say that it's true that Johns would not have been in the Castelli Gallery when he was without Rauschenberg's urging. The Castelli

Gallery was a new public entity in '57, and Bob gave up his own exhibition slot to give it to Jasper.

Bob had been known through the art world, from the time he appeared at Betty Parsons' Gallery, and he knew artists prior to that. He had been an underground figure, a known entity in the east, and as I say beginning a little bit throughout the country all the way from '49 forward. Being all the way in California, you see I didn't really focus on him until '53. There are people who knew of his presence in the New York art world from 1950-51 out. '51, really.

So, but Jasper was another story. He just was totally unknown--almost totally unknown, except to a very few artists--and he just appeared overnight in that show at Castelli in '57. And he had a shocking effect up and down the line. I mean artists all over the country were struck by it when they saw it.

Anyway, in Los Angeles, a good friend of ours ended up representing Bob, so I didn't show his work in the Ferus Gallery. A woman my own age named Virginia Dwan, with the Dwan Gallery. That's her maiden name, and the name she's assumed now--she's gone through a couple of marriages and she's retired really, from all the gallery business in the world. She's a wealthy woman. I didn't quite know how wealthy she was in those days--complicated life story. Anyway she showed Rauschenberg in '59 or '60, '61, there at her Dwan Gallery. As it turned out, over at the Ferus Gallery, I showed Jasper Johns.

With that all behind me, I began part time museum work at what then was the Pasadena Modern, now the shell of what it was is now the Norton Simon Museum.

ML: I saw the neon piece, Green Shirt, there.

WH: That all comes much later. I just was seeing them through the course of the years. Later, in museum work, in old Pasadena, a friend, a colleague Alan Solomon who did the great Venice Biennale in 1964--that was a major event. Now something about Bob in those earlier years: by around '57, '58, Rauschenberg began to be able to sell his great work, and he held not much of it back. My colleague Pontus Hulten bought the great Monogram, there it went off to Stockholm. Ganz bought that Rebus, piece of its iconography, the Janss Untitled of 1955, Odalisque is bought, Canyon is bought by Ileana Sonnabend, Leo Castelli's first wife and his partner even after their divorce. So work begins to flow away from Bob. Charlene, the great red combine painting, is bought by Stedelijk. It begins happening in the late '50s, at the time of his retrospective that Alan Solomon did at the Jewish Museum. More [art] is out in the world. By '64, at that extraordinary Venice Biennale [ML: Were you there? WH: Oh yes.], Bob's first really comfortable success. But when Bob set up his studio on Broadway around 1962, the whole art world shifted gears. By 1962 the art world changed so dramatically.

The key historical moment is August 1956, when Jackson

Pollock was killed. Things were one way in America prior, and they started changing after Pollock's death very drastically, very radically. The new art began to find its audience and get out in the world. Very very much more. And then by '64, it's as we know it now. '62, '63, '64 years, those years were when not only were the moderns--Pollock, Gorky, Rothko, De Kooning and all--but the younger artists could suddenly become celebrities overnight. So it seemed. The younger artists associated with Pop Art. They're a celebrity in the early '60s. Bob was the outstanding celebrity, of course. Quite incidental of winning the prize--prizes don't mean much anymore, but they still meant something in a funny way: for example, in 1960 when the American artist Franz Kline I think was in the Biennale in Venice, Jean Fautrier, French, there were terrible antagonistic feelings, he wanted to have a fist fight, it was all sort of sad. Quarrels over, and tensions over the prize. Rauschenberg's was the last year, really, in the international art world, where these ridiculous prizes meant--he won the prize, it was a grand event, lots of Europeans felt that it was an American conspiracy engineered by Castelli, and so on. That was all hoey, but it was an issue that then was over. I think Bob came at the moment when the prize system broke its back.

ML: You were with him at that time--

WH: Yes, I knew him, and a secretary of mine was the mistress to Alan Solomon who was running the Biennale--a former secretary of mine. So it was a sort of familial complication. It was wild and wooly times.

ML: How was Bob at the Biennale?

WH: First of all these things are exhausting, they were completely chaotic, semi-controlled bit of show business. The conditions to handle anything in Venice are primitive at best. Although our government was throwing more dollars in those years than they've done since. I mean for example--I don't know what the budget was for the Venice Biennale in '64--I did the Sao Paolo, the new world one in '65. In '65 an overall budget might have been 300,000 or 400,000. When I did Venice Biennale in '72, the budget was down to maybe 50,000. The kind of cultural constriction--there are some things on this to say that are absolutely relevant about Bob--has been very pronounced on the part of the government. Part of it had to do with the embarrassment of the America in southeast Asia, and alot of the cultural events abroad would be protested, picketed and so on and the government said "Well you know, if we're gonna go over there and our own artists are damning the government and we're going be picketed by people, why put the money in?" There's far more political agenda there than there is any real dollar out by--to the Federal Government it matters not a bit whether they put a million dollars or 50,000 to the Venice Biennale. It nothing in any real dollars, it just becomes what presence they want us to have, and you see enough of the corruption and dirty business when you're close into Washington on that score.

In any event, '64 was all flags flying and a very grand event. Some European countries, as always, accusing whoever won of engineering some sort of conspiracy to steal the prize.

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ML: How did Bob celebrate?

WH: I don't remember, it was wild. I wasn't--at that time I was not immediately with his entourage, I was business. And not part of that batch of people that were with him at the time. There are stories of the handling, mounting it, what went on, moving artworks--extraordinarily fragile artworks in a gondola or a barge through the canals. Alan Solomon underestimated the space so that some of it was in the old Consulate building next to Peggy Guggenheim, and some was in the miniature Montecello at the Biennale Park. When he won the prize, they had to move pictures from the Consulate building out to the fairgrounds at the last second, where they had an Italian ceremony that took place--it was just chaotic.

This combine painting work--the combine painting and the combine sculptures of the '50s--pretty much--this is an interesting footnote. This isn't a major point, but unlike some artists, they were almost all out there in the world and he had none of them. What I'm saying about this is that he didn't, through most of his life, ever hold back. He would draw so much from the world and then he would let it just run right back out in the world. As fast as anyone wanted it, he would do it for any occasion, always had faith that he could replenish, and as long as he had energy there was an endless wellspring of new ideas. His own work with the photosilkscreen image was extraordinary. It came in the early '60s and also became one of the major techniques. It was used by Warhol and others. The kind of

imagery going into Pop Art. Rauschenberg is not a Pop Artist in this sense; he is more than just a precursor of it. But he is a bridge between 2 extraordinary eras in American art. On the one hand, you look back at him now and, I mean, major young figures in the abstraction of the mid-century New York School, and suddenly much to their dismay, he introduced, he literally depicted in representational material, the stuff of real life that's going to include all of the photoimagery that turns up in the mass media so he's a kind of grandfather, father and grandfather to a major part of anything that's come since.

[slight break in tape?]

WH: --effectively involves something very much their own, I guess in general that's true. It's not quite fair to say, but in some ways it seems as though any number of artists have taken a special limited facet of what Rauschenberg has been up to and base their whole career on it. And that isn't altogether true, but it seems that way sometime.

ML: Well there are some who actually say it. Ted Victoria sawy Nine Evenings and it blew his mind and he started to work. But I don't know of any major young artists whom I have met--maybe you can think of some--

WH: Well certainly you should talk to Brice Marden who has much to say, but-- The very greatest artist who owes Bob a great debt of course is Jasper Johns. Now there's confusion about that: Jasper Johns was a very accomplished artist, however unknown, before he met Bob. Rauschenberg himself used a beautiful phrase when they discovered each other's work, so few people were

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interested in it, they were thrilled by what each of the other was doing. And Bob, he said, "It's as though we gave each other permission for what we were doing." That was something other than even speaking of cross-influence--they were well on their way. But Johns himself who had a very special admiration for Rauschenberg, I mean they were close, beyond any personal relationship, this aspect of feeling reinforced in what they were up to, by the sort of courage and innovations and daring of the other. That's the most important part. [I'm not even sure that they "bounced off each other,"] I'm not even sure that they critiqued or specifically traded ideas in their work at all. They just had--it gave each a special courage to see what the other was doing. It's more of that.

ML: Have you talked to Jasper Johns recently about Bob's work?

WH: Not recently specifically about Bob's work, no. He's a very reticent person, the first sort of formal interview he granted was one that I did, which was in Artforum and it's reprinted in their anthology. I had occasion to interview him again a few years ago, not so many. That's not released, that's not published.

ML: Did he speak about Rauschenberg at all?

WH: No, we didn't get into that. Until the time of the '76 show, between--I don't know--when they went their separate ways, there were, whatever, reasons, they really don't matter. I just choose to ignore. People that know them both know they went their separate ways and they didn't talk or get together. I

don't know when it was, '73 or so.

ML: I think it was earlier than that, was it not?

WH: Well, perhaps, when was it... '71 or '72. Right at the beginning of the '70s.

ML: Bob told me in California, he took Christopher and me on a walk around "the man with the white shoes" and, at that time, he told a story--not for the book--about something in the Ganz collection--Victor Ganz just died--that had hurt his feelings. The Ganzes had sold a Rauschenberg to buy a Johns, and Rauschenberg was saying that "and Jasper wasn't speaking to me at that time, and this hurt me." But just the way he said "Jasper wasn't speaking to me" indicates--

WH: I don't know, it may have been late in the '60s, or let's put it this way: by the beginning of the '70s they went their separate ways. Johns is a very reticent and private person, I've never heard him speak if on the one hand, being hurt that they were estranged--I've never heard him comment one way or the other. Rauschenberg did and has. Anyway, by '76, when the show was at the Smithsonian, is when they began speaking again. Bob told me there was one attempt in Paris. Jasper was invited to the show in Washington and he never goes to openings, so he didn't come to that. But he made a very particular point of coming to see it I think the very first weekend after it opened, or very shortly after. He was very generous in lending his art to it, and Johns made it quite clear how much he admired Bob and from his own collection of works __ let anything we wanted. And

he was very cooperative and Bob appreciated that and I mean that was in the middle of _____ between them and Johns came and they began to speak thereafter, and Bob of course attended Jaspers show that then turned up a year later at the Whitney and then toured in the world. Bob toured America, Johns went overseas. So they've had--they don't totally ignore each other since then.

ML: Sid Felsen had made the most wonderful photograph, which we are not using in the book--we're using a black and white instead that I think Terry Van Brunt made--but it is a very wonderful color photograph of the two of them, just kind of head to head, last year at Gemini--'86 or '87 at Gemini. And it's a photograph that you ought to know about--it's just wonderful.

WH: There's not the problem there was.

ML: I note also, that John Cage told me, it was thrilling to him to go to a meeting at Jaspers' and discover that the door to the dining room was a Cardbird door. And when I did the piece in ARTnews in 82, I was down in Captiva and the only picture on the wall in Captiva was a Jasper Johns, called High School Days--it's a little black painting of a shoe with a mirror in it. And I know it was put there--maybe it lives there all the time, I don't know.

Anyway, it's not a kind of personal book in that way, except as the relationship affects the art--

WH: One of the things I hope you really do is chronicle the names of all of the people that were around Bob in the different years. That would be terribly useful. Just try and sort it out:

there were, you know--[ML: "I've got Cage and Cunningham"] Yes, when they were involved, when he worked with them, but I mean in the more recent years as well. That's less publicly known, it's less clear to people, when he begins, when Bob works with--another thing happens at the beginning of the '60s that just enlarges the life beyond his own studio work and combine painting. But let's look carefully at when he puts together the Broadway studio and when he's working with Alex Hay and others, and the more elaborate--that's when the situation opens up that he needs a kind of working colleagues with him in the studio--for example all of the silkscreen work, some of the more larger and elaborate works. He builds a kind of cadre, if you will, a working cadre. That's what needs to be chronicled. The working cadres that develop in the early '60s, let's say the Alex Hay period. Then another thing that opens up is the exploration into printmaking with Tanya Grosman and the people that were on her staff. And then when you see the Tamarind Fellowship open up in Los Angeles, it gives us master printers like Sid Felsen and Ken Tyler who were both there. And then later, when they found Gemini G.E.L. etc., just think of all of the working cadres as the media developed. Then with his friendship also in the '60s with Billy Kluver, when he starts all these art and technology works.

[End of first Walter Hopps tape, HOPPS PART I:
Mary Lynn's Tape #6, Side B]

WH: --involves when the streams of activity get going, based from the Broadway Studio: On the one hand all of the new, large scale, silkscreened image paintings, and constructions that relate to that; the other thing that gets going then is his work with dance, people connected with the Fluxus movement, all the Rauschenberg performances--with Alex Hay, particularly. This is post-Cunningham, quite separate, where he's doing his own dance and performance work, and it's brilliant. Then, around the same time, meeting Tanya Grosman. There's a whole sort of academic world of printmaking in this country that's been around through the whole century, and there's a whole kind of world of specialized artist printmakers--good, bad and indifferent--but Grosman ignored all of it. She ignored everything that had to do with any of the cliques or worlds of printmaking in America. Without ever saying so, she in effect just said, "Well to hell with all of that." She ignored it totally. And one by one, she went after artists that were new--most adventurous--and had had nothing to do with printmaking. Rauschenberg fit that. He had never made any prints per se. Nor had Johns really, in no important way. Anyway, it became a new adventure for them, and they explored it. So she went after people she thought were great artists first, to learn printmaking, rather than trying to get great prints out of printmaking artists, which was very different situation. But just on that stream, June Wayne [x?] starts up the Tamarind workshop out in Los Angeles with some very

different, more traditional set of printmaking disciplines, but it spawned some master printers who left that eventually and started things like Gemini, and then later Tyler going his own way with the Tyler workshop. But it's after--

ML: Where is Tyler--?

WH: Upstate New York. And he did a lot of work with Bob there back when he was with Gemini--he was with Felsen, they split up. The Grinsteins, as the sort of business patrons and angels of Gemini, have been with it right the way through--Stan and Elyse Grinstein. These people have a way of becoming friends and all involved with Bob's social life, apart from professional. All the way along, the way he works his life, is very much in the structure of a big extended family, and so throughout, the boundaries between professional and personal life, he just erases. It intermingles.

So, as you say, Kluver coming along and later with that activity, which was very important. It's hard to present publicly, expensive to make--and of course Bob's success allowed for a lot of resource to go into that. It's not so much in the public eye now, but it's very important. It will be seen as such again in the future.

ML: Back to the performance period: we've got Kluver, we've got Alex Hay, we've got Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay.

WH: You should follow his sort of companions, his personal life. There's always--Bob has his own, in the midst of his working situation. Obviously to do that, there's a whole string, too.

ML: Do you know Steve Paxton? Do you think it would be worth my giving Steve Paxton a call?

WH: Yes, oh yes. Oh of course, absolutely. He's family, companion, very much a part of Bob's life. Paxton was in one of the more beautiful dance performances ever created, called Pelican. I thought it was beautiful, it's amazing. I saw it in New York, as well as at the big Kalorama Roller Rink in Washington, D.C. Alice Denney, who's had a close relationship with Alan Solomon--he's deceased now--this woman in Washington, Alice Denney--her affair with the late Alan Solomon was critical in her history, inspiring her NOW Festival. He was her mentor, Alan Solomon was Alice's real mentor in her activities. But she loved dance and performance and she set up her own little foundation to do that. This is not being totally indiscreet--her husband, George Denney, is a real trooper. We'll put it that way. They survive.

ML: Well she's had brain surgery, she seems to have recovered nicely.

WH: She's had a rough life. After Alan Solomon died, her alcoholism became pretty severe, and she lost her son, and she's had this very extreme surgery--so she's been through a lot.

ML: The WPA has kind of renewed itself, now--

WH: Well we'll see if it can buy its ways back into the building. WPA will make or break in the next nine months.

ML: I'm not sure if Alice Denney has a role in it--

WH: None, none, for years. In fact she's probably more than a little bitter about it, privately. But she's supportive, generally, publicly--generally.

ML: So we have Steve Paxton, we have Alice Denney.

WH: Alice Denney was the impresario of helping present some of this pioneering dance performance material outside New York and in Washington, and it had a major impact there. I travelled across the country just to see it in Washington, knowing that the level and enthusiasm and commitment she would have to these presentations. She was totally devoted to Bob in making presentations then. She's a terrific woman who's had one hell of a life.

Anyway, by that time too Bob begins to be appearing abroad. I think in '57 or so, he was in a Paris Biennale, the Daniel Cordier Gallery, I believe. You know he's touring some with Cunningham, often a performing group interestingly will move further abroad. Musicians, sometimes, we've found, and the dancers get out there further in the world ahead of the visual artists. That's changed now. But in those days, when Bob first was in Europe he's a secondary figure with the Cunningham Dance Troupe, helping work with that. And his celebrated role as an artist abroad comes a little later. But after '64 he was everywhere in the world, just everywhere in the world.

The burden of it all was--some of his relationships were pretty crushing by the early 70s were very rough years. They were not rough in terms of his success and all, but just on the

personal part. And his companion, the artist Robert Peterson, was a great boon when he set up--by then of course he had Lafayette Street, building and all, the old orphanage, appropriate--and when he set up Captiva Island studio and house, and was with Bob Peterson, a whole re-flowering occurred. And that, the fruits of which I had great joy to present with the Smithsonian retrospective. By the time that came in '76, there had been these just gloriously flowering years with the Hoarfrosts, and then all the other--Jammers, and so on, the works with the fabric and clothes.

ML: Do you like the Spreads?

WH: Yes, yes. That series began--often a Series will begin with a very major statement--and the first, actually the second, but the first great Spread was called Rodeo Palace and that was--

ML: Mr. Nicholas unfurled it--

WH: Fred Nicholas has it? Set it up? Fred Nicholas in L.A. owns Rodeo Palace--? So that came about in a curious way: it was a commission for Fort Worth, for a museum there, for a show about the rodeo. I was with Bob actually when he made all the final parts of that painting. So I stayed up night and day when he was working on it.

But anyway that gets a little bit into the story of that retrospective. Having ended up in the Smithsonian at the urgings of an old college professor, Joshua Taylor, whom I knew from the University of Chicago. A great art historian, a very conservative man in many ways--open to the new, but by lifestyle and

personality, a very conservative man--not all the bad senses--a kind of repressed man, too, in a way. He was one of the great modern art professors in the post war years in America. His great teaching role was across the 50s and 60s--more than twenty years earlier or so, at the University of Chicago. He's one of the world experts on Italian Futurism, and the beginnings of modern art in Italy, even well before. And he was brilliantly knowledgable about the 19th century, aesthetic philosophies and so on, and what sets up modern art. He was one of the great academics, and of course all of our western art history. And for a number of reasons he accepted the inducement to go to Washington and run the American Art Museum of the Smithsonian. Because he wanted to be closer to art. Ripley--Secretary of the Smithsonian--wanted him there. He put a lot of teaching programs within the Smithsonian, too, and furthered the pre- and post-doctorate fellowships etc. But he also was disenchanted with what the University of Chicago, as far as he'd ___ it, he said-- and he came there in the great golden days, later days, of Robert Hutchins--a very great time for the University in humanities, and science as well, by the way.

So there he was, in Washington, and he persuaded me to go there. Now, it was a highly bureaucratized thing, which he wasn't used to. Actually I took leave from the Corcoran where I'd been, to do the Venice Biennale in '72, and at that point Taylor persuaded me to come there. The Corcoran was broke, then there was labor strike--it was found out that I was sympathetic to the labor movement and they asked for my resignation. I was

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seen as a fomentor of Union activity, which was totally counter to the positions and policies of that Board. So they quite correctly asked for my resignation. I got found out, and Taylor, who had known what I was up to all along, said "Look, why don't you just come over to the Smithsonian?", which I did. I don't like working for the government, but I liked Taylor and there I was. And there were about six year from '72 early on until '78, I was there and then I was part time to help the Menil Collection here, and eventually accepted a full time position. For a while I was doing both. Taylor knew--even though he sanctioned it, he wasn't happy, but since much of what was going on here in Texas had to be secret that I was involved with, he was always good about that. (Buying land and things around here--plans that couldn't be done publicly.)

In any event, shortly after--I came to the Smithsonian in '72--there began to be a discussion of what the important events within the Smithsonian and the nation's capitol for the Bicentennial would be, and I started lobbying that we as the nation's Museum of American Art should choose a living artist and celebrate that artist for the Bicentennial. I had Rauschenberg in mind all along. And in '73 I think it was, some curious occasion came up for a number of us to be invited to go to Stockholm. Some event happening at the Moderna Museet and the cultural apparatus of Sweden. So Kluver, Rauschenberg, all sorts of--I don't know, 20 or 30 artists. Dan Flavin I remember went, and stayed in his room the whole time. Kluver was involved with it, and Howard Adams, then with the National Gallery, was

involved. [Pontus] Hulten at first, he's no longer there. He has gone on to the Centre Pompidou in Paris--

ML: Is he still there?

WH: No, and yes. He's in Paris. Make sure that I have your address in Washington and I will send you his numbers and so on. But anyway, I guess in '73 we go there. He [Hulten] had just left shortly before, and part of the occasion was a show, an exhibition honoring Pontus Hulten who had left to go on to Paris, so-- Anyway, it's on that plane ride over, which was a very boisterous plane ride--it was an exciting time, I went over with a friend, Jean Stein and _____. You know Jean? [ML: Yes] You weren't at Wellesley when she was there? [ML: No] And that's when I first--so '73 was when I first proposed it to Bob, and he said he'd think about it. And when the plane ride over was over, he was, I think quite--he said yes. So I had quite an uphill push lobbying to get that idea established. It was very hard.

Now, I don't know how you handle it in the book, but one of the things that made a great many problems was that Joshua Taylor was a deeply closeted homosexual. Now here's a man of intellect and vision, who understood that Rauschenberg was a great artist. And it was a never-spoken-about undercurrent. You couldn't talk to him openly about it, but there is this kind of countercurrent of ___ [tape skips] about that side of Bob's nature.

ML: Those were very different years, weren't they?

WH: It isn't all that different, it could come up again. It's an issue today throughout institutions ___ in all ___.

Not--something you shouldn't go into. But that issue, turn your
tape off.

[pause in tape]

End of Part I

MLK INTERVIEW WITH WALTER HOPPS,
DIRECTOR, MENIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION, HOUSTON, TEXAS
NOVEMBER 9, 1987

[Part II]

MLK: You said Joshua Taylor was conservative.

WH: Very conservative-- All that put an undercurrent to it all. I loved Taylor as a mentor and as a great art historian. I hated the constraints of working within the Smithsonian. I had good fortune to be there with all sorts of aberrant behavior and curious projects that Secretary Ripley sanctioned. I find myself at very great odds from his values, so there was a constant strain, I felt, being in that context. Ripley's attitudes, his behind-the-scenes policies, vis a vis the Cold War, and any number of things. His values and public policies that were quite veiled and not part of the visible aspect of the Smithsonian operations became a great burden. And I had known, of course at the time of the 1970 Venice Biennale when it was involved with Henry Hopkins with a great show of printmaking which Bob participated in.

Bob had led the way in taking a stand as an artist and citizen against all of the Southeast Asia wars. He was well into it--and I supported all of that. I came to Washington to be a visiting fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. I'd been on the Board for a while. So you have a sense of what my politics would be. So it was a strain--a joy and great strain to be even in the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian is not neutral. It should be as apolitical as any university, but in terms of Ripley's attitudes and so on, I knew it was not. Nonetheless, any

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institution transcends who happens to be heading it at the moment. America transcends--I suppose in my values, its worse sins. As Marcus Raskin would say, "a nation founded on genocide and slavery can't be all bad." He means that in reverse irony.

But it was uphill to try and get Rauschenberg, who had led all sorts of stormy sessions for arts rights on Capitol Hill, particularly who had been a conspicuous leader in the anti-war movement among artists, who was--when people say "gay," I don't know Rauschenberg isn't gay, he's pan-sexual, this is a man who will make physical love to the very earth itself. I think he's one of the people that I have no problem who would have absolutely physical loving relationships with his animals. He has with women, he's a great father, and with men indeed.

As far as I'm concerned, Rauschenberg is one of the truly pan sexual beings.

MLK: He loves.

WH: He does indeed. But one can love, and then there's having physical, engaged, intimate relationships with all things and beings. And in that case, he goes beyond just loving things with a kind of proper distance, he's engaged with it.

You can quote me on that. This is a pan sexual man in the just most wonderful sense.

Allright, so the kind of pitch I was making is that the Smithsonian, the Bicentennial, needed to honor in some way an individual working American artist, not a dead one--many dead events and people would equally honor it--but, and since it was

Washington, it was the place to stick its neck out and do so. Also the program _____ life and vision. It could be very stodgy.

And I said you want the kind of artist who is a great citizen--who is a great citizen, an engaged citizen, who cared about civitas, who engaged in the political dialogue and discourse, took public stands, was a benefactor and philanthropist, who believed in not just his own art, but the fate and lives of other artists. And I said there is no one of that level and that breadth of engagement other than Bob Rauschenberg. Just within his own art, the range of materials and techniques and experimentation and exploration--it's right for the Smithsonian. He was a great citizen, he was a philanthropist, he put his own resources, privately--for example what he did for John Cage later, I mean he and Jasper put up the money and helped carry any number of other younger, experimental musicians. He had a foundation set up called Change. Change was their emergency aid to working artists, et cetera.

So, clearly on the strength of his art, and the sort of intellectual acumen of Taylor, he bought it. It was slow going, but he bought it. And I don't know for a fact, but I have no question in my mind he had some curious discussions with Charles Blitzer, the Undersecretary for Arts and Histories and so on, to get such an idea--it had to be approved, but get it sort of approved behind the scene. So with a certain amount of nervousness, all of this was entered into. But once into it, Taylor gave it full backing. Not that we didn't have lots of strength-- The working methods and procedures to get all of it going with

Rauschenberg means a style that would be very open and free-flowing, and that his whole immediate entourage getting involved, that was against the grain all the way.

My own working habit--we had lots of strain with the publication, which Taylor was forever wanting to meddle with and worrying about. Yes, we had disappointments there: he insisted that it go through the Smithsonian press. Terribly stodgy. The idea of working with an outside publisher so that it could have been a more ample book, Taylor vetoed. We did get an outside designer, but not one of Bob's choice, not one of my choices. The only affect of the book we had control of as far as design was that dust jacket or cover, which I got Taylor entirely to Bob. That was I think the only time in the history of the National Collection of Fine Arts, NMAA, where they'd give design control to the artist for the cover of the book. We didn't have any control of what went on inside--

[NOTE: Tape in poor condition here--speeds up quickly and slows down--difficult to hear accurately.]

TAPE 7, SIDE A

Now as to--I had wanted Thomas Hess to write a very special essay for that book. And Tom and I went up and down some very strange hills. Again, a kind of--I'm gonna have to say it, because it's very interesting, the issues in terms of a kind of homophobia that came up. Tom Hess had a terrific background championing the New York school, and aesthetically, he had a very prevalent regard for Bob's work and Jasper's. He saw it essentially as coming out, of being thrown in the face, violating

the great canons that would let us know--the great Post-Impressionist masters: Bracque, De Kooning, Pollock, with _____ like Giacometti, along the way. Tom felt like something was breaking down, and it scared him, with the likes of Rauschenberg, Johns, Warhol and _____. One night Tom and I were lecturers in a very wealthy person's sort of private art salon; we were giving a kind of lecture to an elite group of people. And Tom got very drunk and we openly had to disagree. He was saying really what Rauschenberg and Johns were up to was a kind of joke art, it wasn't serious. Now part of that was effective _____. Tom Hess is _____, a great man, a great editor, a brilliant mind, _____. Likewise with his colleague Harold Rosenberg, I have _____ regard for Clement Greenberg whatsoever. I have a great deal for Harold. There are all sorts of value judgments that Clement Greenberg makes that I think are correct and I agree with, but I think he's terrible, and _____ thinking and crypto-fascist, whereas Harold Rosenberg is a wonderful man, and he agrees with all sorts of things I believe in. It's not just the art opinions.

Anyway, Rosenberg, during his life, when he was writing The Anxious Object and so on, he tends to view with alarm the consequences of what he would see as a sort of aesthetic [?] devaluation of art based more and more on _____ and little transformations. The kind of issues that were open to Bob and Jasper as well. Some of that too. He has privately admired--part of his nature admired this work very much. But for the most part, he wasn't taking any public stand for it. He had

early on, and less especially as Rauschenberg's sort of pessimism with the new deepened late in his life.

I wanted very much the essay by Tom Hess, who was old enough to have felt the emergence of the French avant garde's role and impact spread throughout the country; also he's ___ with his intellectual life and his own physical life, what Alfred Barr called the newer art, the great--later thirties on--_____ [crossing into the?] Fifties, began with the De Kooning generation, let's say. And ___ was aware of Bob's ___ and growth. So I wanted Hess to write about Rauschenberg as--

[tape breaks off here--TAPE 7, SIDE A]

MLK: Side 2 with Walter Hopps, I'm checking the batteries.

WH: I just want to go back a bit and set the stage a little more. By around '74, Rauschenberg's an enormously successful artist. He's an absolute hero, within his own ranks, and beloved throughout the world. Many things have put him from quite center stage. Let's say, he'd gone through some problems. But there's this extraordinary flowering of new work, primarily coming out of Captiva--beautiful work. It's as though he'd gone back to the special waters and flowerings of his roots on the Gulf Coast, but in a new triumphant way. A very private triumph. And he's not on the tip of everyone's tongue, but at grand stature so it seemed appropriate, okay-- Now this is at a time when, as I say, a great disenchantment--malaise, almost--was not there in art at all, but in the intellectual climate, ranks--

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Some of my old colleagues and contemporaries had lost their way, and were faltering.

The kind of great energy and full voice of Barbara Rose began to dampen, let's say among the younger ones. Max Kozloff was disaffected and removed from criticism, bitter and worried about the kind of ___ and nice neo-Marxist religion a little later in life. He's having a crisis, wondering what he's gonna do with himself. Michael Fried over in the Greenberg camp, who would've have hated Rauschenberg's work, and Johns's, and all of the Greenbergian formalists, it was anathema to them. They virtually ignored it, there was no way they could deal with it. And why that's the case in any theoretical basis hasn't been fully explored, even to now, it begins to be. Newer younger voices, not that much newer, but somewhat younger voices like Rosalind Krauss and her gang, that you have a radical aesthetic coming forth in the Fox, you have Kraus and Annette Michaelson forming the Fox. It was a minor, not minor but very limited, somewhat limited art journal, very serious but low circulation. The one that's known is October, which continues on, Krauss and Annette Michaelson founded. They're not, at that point in the 70s, I think critically engaged with what Rauschenberg's up to at all. You find, I found, the very people who should be engaged in championing, like Tom Hess and Harold Rosenberg-- Harold, older, sort of sinking into a bitter pessimistic concern about a lot of the new art, and the kinds of things in direct ancestry from Bob.

So, further background, working in a place where I had a lot

of strain, a complicated personal life, dealing with putting the show together physically, dealing with Bob, and getting the detailed information which was never straight. The only publication on Bob heretofore had been the Abrams book by Andrew Forge. It was out of print and full of--I mean it wasn't very useful as a reference book. So, I really had in mind not doing a major essay on Bob myself for this book. That's just background.

Taylor would write something, I would do a little acknowledgement/introduction, but I wanted an important essay, and the one that I wanted was Tom Hess to look at Rauschenberg as an emergent figure within this, the first real international, major manifestation in American art, et cetera. All of that we take for granted. Some of us can argue that it was a kind of tool of the Cold War, like these statements that Max Kozloff makes, which I think are wrong-headed, not that art can't be used in any number of ways outside its own values--it is all the time.

MLK: Right, and Rauschenberg does it.

WH: Uh, well, no that's not what I mean: that Kozloff makes the argument that the very success and public nature of art has nothing, is beyond the control of what any artists do whatsoever. That's not even the point.

Anyone that's--there was a kind of malaise in critical thinking, and it was very much because Hess was in that, I wanted him to come out of the closet for Rauschenberg, which I knew he had response to. I would visit with him in New York, and we had serious talks about it, and he really considered it, but finally

declined--rather late in the game. At another point I really wanted to get Barbara Rose engaged and revived, and that was vetoed by Joshua Taylor. She was already, in his eyes, seen as sort of lacking, had given up her true intellectual and academic commitment. By that time she's writing for Vogue. It seemed frivolous to him.

Lawrence Alloway, who had written early on and most incisively, quite brilliantly about the whole emergence of British and American pop art, was our final choice. Sadly, it was a somewhat difficult time in Alloway's life. He did a very fine job under terrible deadline, but there was more that we wanted. So that's a background on that. So there was lots of strain with the text.

MLK: That's interesting to me to note, because I have trouble with the text.

WH: I don't want to say on the record--that's okay, it's alright, I'll say it to the tape, but I was, you know-- Lawrence Alloway and I were very close at one time after he came to America and we were very good friends, you know it's sad. He and I have not spoken since he turned in his text for that show. This happens, while he's alive, while we're both alive, I hope we will. But he, I don't think, was entirely happy with the circumstances, or his endeavor here, it's just one of those odd things. There was enough unspoken disappointment, that we have not said anything to each other since he turned it in. I don't think he came to the opening, what is that now? That's about 11

years. We haven't spoken in 11 years. He did his job, he was paid, that was that. But it was late coming, and hard realized. Alloway has not been well--that's sad--and it was at a complicated time when he already had another assignment, when he tried to get this done. If Hess had written on Bob in the context of the New York School, et cetera, I might have been inspired enough to try and say what I felt Rauschenberg boded for the future, but I didn't have a context, and I felt let down to try and crank out an idea I had for another sort of afterword, if you will. There was a kind of Afterword, if I felt inspired, I was going to write for that show. What I felt Rauschenberg would mean to the future, especially future working artists. But it never was said. Maybe someday.

The processes of working with him--we travelled around, and I visited him in Captiva--as I say, I knew that he was supposed to get a painting done for the rodeo show out at Fort Worth. It was right down to the last minute. It was for it when he coined the word "Spread" and yes, I think the best of them are really marvelous works, especially that painting. Interesting, buried in the iconography of that painting [Rodeo Palace] is an elegy, or tragic nature, buried in that great sort of honky tonk monument to the entertainment industry.

Rauschenberg took "Rodeo" as a kind of metaphor for more than just the cowboys in the arena, but as one of the aspects of where people have to go out and perform in show business, which can mean the artist himself, an artist having a show. To do something for a show is like having to get out there and do your

dance or ride your bucking bronco or get up in front of the cameras or whatever. Bob has great empathy for that; it's his first great reflection back.

Many, many of Rauschenberg's major works--or quite a number of them-- are reflections on the role of the artist himself, and this one was yet another one of those. Buried in its sort of "private" text are references both to Marilyn Monroe and Montgomery Clift from the film the Misfits, which was a tragic film about people having to do with--I mean Clift was a performer, Monroe, not in the film, but--iconically, the characters in Arthur Miller's story, later made film, The Misfits, they all have iconic roles. We can scarcely take Clark Gable other than as Clark Gable, Monroe is quintessentially the tragic Monroe, Clift was soon to die and he's playing out his kind of role. It's a very fascinating film and-- The polka dots of the cloth [of Rodeo Palace] is taken from Monroe's never-to-be-forgotten costume in the Misfits, and then in another part there's a kind of striped men's cotton shirt.

This is not the time to get into it, but for a hundred years to come, people will be identifying the various levels of personal subtext--a great part of which is quite conscious on Bob's part--that are buried in his works. For many years to come. So that's a little bit of it. It came at a time of a crazy success in the movie industry. People in Texas were wondering "What is that big shark doing in a picture about rodeos?" There's not a great bucking horse--one of the major

animals there is the big shark. Something of its immediate moment is always in Bob's work, and that was the moment when the film Jaws was being a smash success in the entertainment industry. And a new kind of animal, in a new piece of entertainment, happened to be a shark and it's put in as the element that's just there and of the moment.

So there are all sorts of things to read in that work, and it was fascinating to watch him work on it. The little running shoes in it have a particular place in it--they're just placed there--I think if you bother looking you'll see how footprints or shoes, are one of the attributes of artist/performer. Can anybody else put themselves in his shoes? Being in those shoes? Just begin to work with it poetically. Anyway, shoes fascinate Bob. Shoes and socks and they come up in a lot of his work. From real shoes, as are in that combine ["The Man in the White Shoes", 55.7]--it's not just the man in the white buck shoes. Then there are a pair of shoes actually inside the combine as well. But let's not get involved with that.

So it was really interesting seeing him finish [Rodeo Palace]. One of the important gestural things about Rauschenberg: and it's often a line that doesn't quite finish its length. The last thing he did before finishing the painting was, with great tension in the early hours of one morning as the finishing gesture, take the soft pencil--Conte or very soft graphite pencil--and with great force and terrible slow deliberateness, not quite complete the line going from left to

right across the top of the painting. There are any number of those lines that come just short of finishing the full distance in his works, whatever that might mean. Anyway, that was the last final gesture on that. It was done at the last possible minute to get off to Fort Worth for its show, in the tumult while it was going on. I was doing everything I could to pray for the completion of that work because it was the first major work beginning something new. Obviously, if it got done, it was of a kind of work that was very new. It echoed, and had a kind of closure or look-back at some of his most famous earlier work. He had literally found the way to retrieve his most celebrated work in the combine paintings.

Having had all of this extraordinary flowering of Hoarfrosts, Jammers, and so on, and some adventures abroad, (the special fabrics in India, and working with the handmade papers and many things), it was just like a garden of work--then he turns back to all of the elaborate imagery and so on that were in the combine works, with a new series. So in ending on something that was complete, it was very important to me to see the beginning of something at the end of the show. And with that work, I decided on the structure of the show that would begin in the present and work its way backward. This was very important to the presentation in Washington, and unlike how it was handled elsewhere. But here it was, a retrospective survey, and there was only one entrance, and you had to go the end of the show, and then come back out. So we decided--they thought I was a little crazy, but Taylor got the notion okay--that the show would

basically be presented from the present going backwards in time. So it struck me that it's just the way you spoke of your book the other day. So you came in on Jammers and the beginning of Spreads, and then went on back through Hoarfrosts and the sort of rope and strange kind of quietude of Sor Agua--the bathtub and strange floating metals--and those works, and then back to silkscreen, and back to combine paintings, and then back to the very earliest things. The book is arranged in a conventional order, but the show itself very deliberately worked the other way.

One of the things that Taylor subscribed to was really customizing the spaces and qualities for each exhibit. He had worked in theatre earlier on--enough, I think. In fact I think he came from a rather modest background and up in Portland, Oregon had found his way into the arts, working in kind of regional theatre and later became the very serious student, scholar and so on. But with exhibits he had a great flair and appreciation of stage craft; so he let me get away with all the spaces being specifically designed for the works that were going to go in them. That isn't always the case. And we chose to make smaller rooms. You could build a house from the lumber we used in that show. Very simple, clean, loft-like rooms--no elaborate tricky colors or devices, but the proportions and sizes of the rooms were critical.

Neil Printz was a Smithsonian fellow at the time, who stayed on under contract--the Smithsonian fellows are handpicked from the universities--he had come from the University of Michigan. I

found him, figured he would be perfect to work on this, got him a contract, and he stayed with staff to be my assistant with Rauschenberg. We stayed up night and day, once the works were finally chosen. In some cases choosing works to fit the quality of the show, rather than just choosing what all the best works would be, and then designing a show for it. We literally, in many cases, chose the works to fit the impact of the presentation. You have choices with Rauschenberg, which, especially in later years, run in many different directions. Bob was tremendously patient with this. So we worked it out--as is my normal way of working. Long before any work was anywhere near the Smithsonian--within a quarter of an inch, we knew exactly where every work was going. It was all worked out on plan and model, and then built to specification, and then the work arrives and goes, in almost every case, precisely where it was destined. We went over and over and over it. It was to feel very spontaneous, but we worked that thing out like a Hitchcock movie. We knew what every angle, every position would be, before anything was put in place.

Now having made such a to-do with this, with all the different staffs and divisions of the Smithsonian Museum, mostly trying to keep these people at bay--and not winning many points in that--then suddenly, here comes the work and then Rauschenberg arriving and all his entourage for the installation. And having made such a case of pre-planning and structure that would all look very spontaneous, then it suddenly seemed to the Smithsonian officials, the deputy directors, that it was chaos. Like who are

all these people that want to be there at all hours of night and day, and look at the work and play with it, and so on? There were officials that were trying to tell Rauschenberg and his immediate staff to not touch the work. In effect "you aren't professionals, you don't work here." So it was quite wild. It was like an Indian tribe and a bunch of their cowboy friends moving in, an encampment. They saw no reason why they couldn't eat and drink and live in the galleries and be there all night or day, whatever they wanted. We had some good conservators; Bob was terrific in sharing. Finally, once an artist has made a work, in most cases they shouldn't be any more involved with trying to sew it up or stitch it back together later in life than a doctor should be operating on himself.

There's a famous story: When Sidney Janus tragically had messed up some early Franz Klines in his gallery in the 50s--somehow they'd been damaged in the racks--and not knowing any better, talking with Franz Kline he [Kline] said "Look, send them back to the studio and I'll fix them up." So this was by then about 1960. So here Janus sent back some vintage 1950 Franz Klines for Franz to fix up--fine. Franz was not all that upset, [his attitude was] "I can fix it." Janus, finally getting impatient after maybe a little longer time went by than he would have hoped, finally got them in. Here they came, and they were all repainted. And Franz said, "Not to worry, I made them better." Of course Janus, knowing the difference in value both for the artist and himself, between say early 50s Klines and 60s Klines--

So, for any number of reasons, this was, I think, the first encounter Rauschenberg had had with really serious conservators, who were very good people. Conservators are like good chemists and physical chemists and doctors and they just don't want to do anything--the good ones, the new breed of them, are very cautious about how they proceed. But the best of them are really curious about what artists are up to. So anyway Bob spent some very interesting time, particularly with the Odalisque combine, which had come in from Germany, working out any number of problems with that. They worked together: he learned things from them and vice versa.

When the opening came, the sort of freewheeling or divergent lifestyles of all these people were beginning to get as I say very much under the skin of a lot of establishment types there, including Taylor himself. By the way, in the course of this, this is a digression, but not a major one. In the course of trying to figure on the essay, Rauschenberg knew that the younger critic Robert Hughes at Time was interested in his work. I had known Bob Hughes when as a kind of over-colorful hippy type he showed up in America. He left England and left art history--sort of a protege of Henry Luce himself, I suppose, to come work for Time. And he is a writing fool. He can just write on anything--beautiful exposition. Some of his best essays are buried in odd Time articles. You should reread his thing on Samurai Swords. Sometimes he writes better exposition in Time than he writes in The New York Review of Books. I hope he writes more books following Australia, by the way, I'm sure he will. He

will continue with Time. But anyway, the idea was to see if we could entice him. Now I knew Bob Rauschenberg is putting me up to get to him to see if he would do an essay for the book. Now this was a shaggy dog. I was sure that Hughes would not, but it gave me a chance--I didn't say anything to Rauschenberg--but I had an absolute hunch that if I went full boar at Hughes to work on the catalogue, which I don't think he would have felt at liberty to do, being with Time, it would get him engaged and intrigued and we might get a major story out of it.

And not only would it do that, but early on Hughes said "This is terrific. I'm going to go all the way for a cover story." Hughes fought the battle at Time magazine that Rauschenberg would design his own cover. And Rauschenberg very slyly built all kinds of things-- Rauschenberg did a curious thing: if you look at the Time magazine cover, he tried to do a good Rauschenberg montage, collage of images from his own life-- now it's in a way a kind of-- how does an artist step outside of himself and have the guts to make such a celebratory and glamorous image? Rauschenberg ran the risk of showing himself as a terribly glamorous figure, in a way. He's not all that self-serving, but he did a very interesting thing of kind of saying "Let's imagine that I'm Rauschenberg now, the cover illustrator, and I want to really make Bob Rauschenberg the artist look great." So he went at it in a curious way like that. It's not an altogether modest portrayal, but he had the guts to not worry about being modest, which is an interesting twist on it. Now there's another little thing in there. He very slyly--

this was at a time where all sorts of the issue of gay rights is beginning to come up in more advanced circles, and Bob, knowing quite what he was doing, very slyly, included the picture of a beautiful young man in a very abbreviated bikini bathing suit with long braided hair being caressed by himself. There's this very sensuous, loving, hands-on thing of older Rauschenberg on a young person. Just happened to be his own son. It's not spelled out that it's his son--it isn't going to read that way for the great American public looking at Time magazine covers. What happened is that Hughes having fought the issue through that Bob would do the cover--and this was the issue that shocked them--and the way it was finally resolved, the thing was almost completely thrown out, but there's this shifting of getting part of that scene behind the letter, the "T".

MLK: So that the young man looks like a young woman--

WH: Yes. Curiously, Taylor--whom I'm not sure ever knew that it was Bob's son, to the day he [Taylor] died--Taylor was the kind of reticent man who found public success or clamor somewhat more than suspect, he found it a bit reprehensible. Unseemly, perhaps, is the best word. Never once did Dr. Joshua Taylor comment whatsoever that our show had made the cover of Time magazine. Never once to any of us who put that show together.

At the opening--it was far and away the largest opening that the National Collection of Fine Art has ever had up to that time or since--it was just a crush. Now as there'd been so much strain between Joshua Taylor and Rauschenberg's staff and crew

and all, and Harry Lowe who was another Southerner who was Taylor's assistant director, and endless confusion, that Bob felt their dinner was going to be all too staid and just not enough fun, and there were the kinds of people that weren't going to be invited and so on, so at the last minute, without making a great to-do--he was staying over at the Hotel Washington nearby, up in the old restaurant at the top, and their terrace looking toward the White House--Bob just went ahead and I think with the likes of Sid Felsen or the Grinsteins, set up their own kind of counter-dinner. Fortunately, to save face for Dr. Taylor and all the Smithsonian types, I think there was enough invitees and audience so that it wasn't conspicuous that the artist himself and all of his world attended their own dinner atop the Hotel Washington and that reception, rather than being involved with the official dinner over in NCFR. Somehow it orchestrated-- Rhodes Tavern-- it was astounding how the levels of party generated. There was the one in the NCFR itself, that was the official Smithsonian dinner, then Rauschenberg had his own official dinner that began a little later, which he never left really at the Hotel Washington, and then a kind of bunch of younger artists in Washington set up in the old Rhodes Tavern which has been torn down now, nearby on Pennsylvania Avenue yet another young artists' party. Again, in typically Rauschenberg form, there were wonderful celebrations going on right next to each other that could have managed to encompass every element: dissident, official, unknown--and it was fun to kind of go around between all three.

In the course of it touring in the United States, there were some funny incidents with the Museum of Modern Art. William Rubin, the Director of Painting and Sculpture there in the exhibit program, came into power as William Paley's man. That's been the new regime across the 70s and since at the Modern. Paley is chairman of that board, and Rubin is heading the exhibition programs and the painting and sculpture acquisitions. McShine preceded Rubin on that staff, and has been kept on. Rubin does not really care for Rauschenberg's work at all. He's essentially Greenbergian and Formalist, but felt it was of such stature that when we offered it to the Museum, and it was being organized elsewhere, it was of such stature that he wanted the museum to take it. And they did indeed. Well he turned it over to McShine, who's tradition it is under Rubin to deal with the shows with the kind of art that Rubin respects and feels the Museum should deal with, but doesn't care for. So here, [Kynaston] McShine was involved with the logistics of getting it in there. We were very honored that the Modern--which rarely takes shows organized elsewhere--would accept it, and more than willingly so. The whole tour worked out very well. Washington, then New York, Albright-Knox, Chicago and San Francisco. I would have liked to have seen it in Los Angeles, but that was the tour going too far. And Albright-Knox is a wonderful museum even if its immediate audience is small, and they were the first museum in the country to acquire a major Rauschenberg. Ahead of the Modern. Well, the Modern actually--through Edward Steichen in the photo department--had acquired really early on Rauschenberg photographs, I mean that's a nice quirk. Post Black Mountain,

but work done in those days. Actually they didn't acquire it while he was at Black Mountain, but it was work done there. One is Quiet House, and the other is maybe one of the carriages, the strange back end of a car with a carriage.

Anyway, there was a lot of strain put upon McShine in getting that show installed. There was an awkwardness to the installation which was not McShine's fault. First there was some work installed in the old Philip Johnson wing where they did exhibits then, the 1964 building that Johnson put on that's not altogether successful. And they had a curious corridor that you used to troop down and there was a bit of disjuncture. Anyway, the great Matisse decoupage work called The Swimming Pool, that Rubin had acquired first was going to be out of the way, and then it wasn't and so on. So in the course of all of this, Bob was unhappy how the Museum of Modern Art was treating McShine and the space. It all worked out fine. But there were some kinks there. And at one time Jean Stein, who had become close to Bob through me, seeing him and all, introduced him to Barbara Paley. And Bob always had a sly way of expressing his displeasure--sometimes very openly, sometimes in sly ways--and somehow a little of conspiracy with Stein--he was taken away when he was supposed to have been at a reception for William Paley and bigshots at the Museum to preview the show, which Rauschenberg knew fully well it had nothing to do with it and it was just the sort of pro-forma business. And he was perhaps annoyed at Mr. Rubin a bit. He chose to take tea with Mrs. Paley, who was a more than willing co-conspirator in this little thing. So he sort of tarried just

long enough to miss everything at the Modern for this special preview. And a sort of grumpy Mr. Paley arrived back at his flat, discovering Rauschenberg there with his wife, having lost track of the time, so that nothing really could be said about Bob being impossibly rude to fail to show up publicly.

The grandest thing they did was the whole idea of chartering the Staten Island ferry. Bob, when he was poor in New York, no air-conditioning, would pay two bits to take a Staten Island ferry ride to cool off. So now, in his full success, he wanted to charter the whole damn ferry boat and mount a party on it. And thanks to Sid Felsen, Grinsteins and all that western gang, they were able to pull it off. And all sorts of people who didn't get to go to the official opening at the Modern were more than welcome on the ferry boat for that party. And it was glorious.

The late James Speyer in Chicago did an inspired installation. But he was a kind of flamboyant--kinky, even--installer of art, a grand, almost dandyish man, a wonderful empathy with the art of his time. And I worked with some, the various museums where it was installed. The Albright-Knox, the Modern had to deal with the kinks of the Museum of Modern Art building and the vicissitudes of some other work being in the way. They tended to install it somewhat along the lines that we'd had in Washington, but with some digressions because of space. The Albright-Knox handled it pretty straightforwardly, in other words earlier work leading to later--it was very well done. Chicago was formidable in that Speyer gave a terrific presence to

the huge painting Barge. In some ways, Speyer chose for a contrast between very big spaces and some smaller more constricted. He worked--I would defer to him totally to work out his own sense in presentation. It was interesting seeing it presented in different ways. But up there in the land of the Great Lakes, Speyer had the insight to feature Barge as sort of a climax of the show. Because that's what it's really all about. One of the great artworks [Barge is] to industrial America, in a way. And they almost acquired it. Lee Bloch, then a major figure on the board of the Art Institute, an American collector, was--publicly and officially--a pretty severe, almost grim man, and not involved with contemporary art at all. Nonetheless, I think he fell for Bob. Speyer himself presented that painting, that even Lee Block--whose great modern love would've been Picasso--could see its power and quality, and meeting Rauschenberg at that opening and in the dinner in a private club, was very taken with him, and wanted to acquire that painting for the Art Institute. He made an offer that may have been the highest offer I'd heard of anyone ever offering Rauschenberg for an art work, and Bob turned him down.

MLK: Why?

WH: And Block was shocked and taken aback, and recoiled like "who is this younger man that he has no idea who I am?" And Rauschenberg perhaps had thought the offer a little too casual, or coming from someone who really hadn't paid his dues. Rauschenberg's pride was such that he wasn't going to just accept an offhand offer by someone he had never met before, who clearly

wasn't the sort that was projecting real understanding or love of the work, that's just on the surface. Who knows what Bloch felt underneath?

[END OF TAPE #7]