

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Sheryl Long

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sheryl Long conducted by Cameron Vanderscoff on July 22, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Sheryl Long

Location: St. Petersburg, Florida

Interviewer: Cameron Vanderscoff

Date: July 22, 2015

Q: Okay, so I'll start us off. Today is Wednesday, July 22, 2015 and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here with Sheryl Long. We are in St. Petersburg, Florida, at the Mirror Lake Community Library in the third floor conference room. We're here for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History project and our main task today will be talking about your involvement on several of the projects, your involvement with Captiva [Florida], your relationship with Bob Rauschenberg. But just to give us a bit of a context to start off, if you wouldn't mind just stating for the record when and where you were born, and then a few things about your early life, with the idea being that we connect the dots to that moment where you meet Bob Rauschenberg for the first time, or you come to Captiva for the first time, whichever happened first.

Long: Okay. I was born in Iowa in 1952. I lived there for a couple of years as a child, lived in Nebraska and then Missouri. As a teenager, I moved to Florida. I ended up going to college in Tampa [Florida] at the University of South Florida. That's what led me, eventually, to Captiva, which is where I met Bob. But I think one thing that's important to connecting the dots is, when I was a kid in Missouri, I lived on farms my whole life, until I came to Florida, and I belonged to a 4-H club. I raised my own steer for the fair and that kind of thing, but I also learned how to sew.

So I was sewing since I was probably about, I want to say, ten or something like that. That was a very important part of when I met Bob.

Q: And who taught you to sew? Or how did you learn?

Long: My mother started out teaching me and she realized she was in over her head. She could sew, but she didn't know how to teach me. So I had a woman in the 4-H club who that was her thing. She taught me to sew, I won some ribbons at the county fair. One thing I made actually went to the state fair. But that's how I learned to sew and I kept sewing my whole life. I've made a little bit of everything, clothing, home goods, store displays, et cetera; I've also made a little bit of everything, as far as working for Bob goes.

Q: And so you were mostly sewing clothing then, at this early point? Things that you're entering in the fair? Or—?

Long: Right. And then as I got older, I made the clothes I wore to high school. We weren't wealthy, so making my clothes was an advantage because it was cheaper. Actually, when I was in high school my parents bought a fabric store. So I worked as a clerk in the fabric store, but also to make money for college, I sewed clothing for people. I took in sewing. One time I made a whole wardrobe for a woman who was expecting. So just by doing sewing you get better at it and increase your skills and all that kind of thing.

Q: So you're doing that as a side job in college. So then what did you go to college for? Where was this? You said it was in Tampa.

Long: I went to the Tampa campus of the University of South Florida [USF]. I had a full scholarship. I didn't know what I wanted to study or become. I had waived all of the required classes except English. So very quickly I got into electives, just trying to figure out what I wanted to do. At about a two-year point I still hadn't declared a major and I was at the point where I had to. I couldn't take any more electives. And I met—it was not my roommate in college, but the woman next door. She was dating a man who was from Captiva; his parents had a business there. They were retiring because of health reasons and the son wanted to take it over. So eventually, my husband at the time, Tim Pharr, and I moved to Captiva with this other couple to run this business. We made a commitment for a year. Very quickly I realized and said, "I don't want any part of this." We had made the commitment for a year, but I knew that I didn't want to buy into this business. It was a maintenance business that had maids and yard workers and office people. We paid the bills, oversaw the maid and yard crews, and took care of the winter homes for people who weren't there year-round. So that's how I ended up on Captiva.

Q: I was just on Captiva today for my first time and it was really quite busy, even though I was there in the morning and it was the off-season. The beaches are already filling up, you had cars, there was a lot of traffic going on. So I'm curious then about the Captiva that you came to in what year is it?

Long: 1973.

Q: Okay.

Long: Yes. It was much different. Now, when you drive along the strip where the road is, right next to the Gulf [of Mexico], it's just solid houses, whereas before, there would be houses with space in between them, big lots that have now been subdivided. Also you couldn't see most of the houses. Now, people want to show off their houses, but before, all you saw was this gorgeous, tropical, fairly natural landscape. But if you'd go down the driveways, then you'd get to the homes and all. So it slowly developed over the years. 'Tween Waters [Inn Island Resort], the big resort, grew and spread. South Seas [Island Resort] probably has grown to ten times its original size in acreage. So it's a totally different animal. I go down there now to visit it and I can barely find the things I used to know because it's changed so much.

Q: So you were a newcomer to this context. Is this a place where most of the people who were there knew each other?

Long: Right.

Q: —year-round? Is this a sense of a small community? Because when I was there today, it seemed that there were a lot of people coming on and off, a lot of traffic, a lot of tourists. And you've talked about these resorts growing tenfold since.

Long: Right. The year-round population at that time, I'm sure, was well below a thousand. I couldn't tell you an accurate number. But in the wintertime, it would grow to—I think it was about eight or nine thousand at that time. So it was huge compared to the summer. But the local people all knew each other; most of the local people on Captiva also knew the local people on Sanibel [Island]. The people I knew were mostly working-class people. We weren't moneyed there in our resort home; we lived there year-round. So there was a certain camaraderie, it was very island-time. [Laughs] It wasn't like living in the city; even though people had jobs, it was a lot looser than my life today is. So it was a great, great time. I made some wonderful friends down there, Bob included.

Q: So you mentioned that in the process of this, you weren't sort of buying into this business in the way that you'd hoped.

Long: Right. No, basically we were taking care of some people who were quite used to being pampered all the time, which I didn't particularly care for. And also, you're always dealing with people's problems. We'd get calls at two o'clock in the morning and as an example, an elderly gentleman would have lost his contact and you'd have to go and help him [laughs] he couldn't see to find it or whatever. We had the strangest things that we would end up doing for people. So I did not want to spend my future just dealing with people's weird problems.

[Laughter]

Q: So it wasn't what you had expected it to be.

Long: Right. Not at all. Not at all.

Q: So then, in this context, how do you come to meet Bob Rauschenberg, who had been living on the island a couple of years then, since '70?

Long: Right. How did I meet Bob? I'm not even sure I really met him the first time I was at his place. There was a gathering of some kind and I can't remember if it was showing art or whatever, but the postmistress was the mother of a woman my age, so a friend also, and she said, "Oh come, you've got to meet all these people." So I went there and it was just odd because it was in the big studio that—I'm trying to think now—I'm getting his houses mixed up.

[Laughter]

Long: Because there's been a lot of—

Q: Well there are several.

Long: —a lot of change.

Q: So there's the one right there on the Gulf coast. There's—not the Gulf House, that was built in the nineties.

Long: It was in the large studio directly east of the original beach house. And it was in the big gallery room there. There were all these people, there was Hisachika [“Sachika”] Takahashi who worked for Bob for years and years. I believe his wife and son were there that time. And just different people, [Robert] Bob Petersen, who was Bob’s partner and printer at the time, he was there. I actually really did meet and talk to Petersen and just remember vaguely being introduced to Bob R. at that point. What happened after that? So we would run into these people on the island, at the store, on the beach, et cetera.

Bob Petersen knew that my husband was a carpenter and he actually engaged him to do some work, some kind of repairs at their house, under the pilings, I think. This would be the original house on the beach. I guess in talking to Tim Pharr, my husband, he found out that I could sew. And so one day, I’m at home and I answer a knock on the door and it’s Bob Petersen, who I knew, but only vaguely. He came over and just chatted and I actually was working on a quilt. I had a quilt frame set up and he goes, “Oh that’s right, you sew,” he goes—and I don’t even remember if he asked me then, but the *Hoarfrost* series [1974–76] was in process by the time this happened. The way it seemed, it was just whoever was currently visiting on Captiva and could sew was making the eyelet buttonholes, which were handmade silk buttonholes that the pieces hung from.



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (*Hoarfrost*), 1975
Solvent transfer on fabric and cardboard
71 x 51 inches (180.3 x 129.5 cm)
Private collection

Q: Right, for the hooks, yes.

Long: And the last person who did it was leaving or had left or something like that. So I got recruited to make these buttonholes. [Laughs]

Q: So as you're—you just were about to do your first work with Bob Rauschenberg at this time. I'm sort of curious about this group of people who you were socializing with when you went to this party at the invitation of the postmistress. Was Bob Rauschenberg seen, as it were, somewhat siloed off from the rest of the island? Or were you seeing people there who you would have seen at any of the gatherings amongst the other locals?

Long: There were a few locals, but most of the people there that first time I went to his place were not people I knew, who might have been down for a visit—Bob had lots of properties and places to put people up, and people came and went all the time because of different projects he

did, and he knew people from all over the world. I will tell you, I was—let me see, 1973, I was twenty-one. I had taken a couple humanities courses, but I was not aware of Bob's significance in the art world. So I can remember just about that time, the first artwork I ever bought was a Charley Harper print. I can remember thinking years later about the difference between Bob's art and that piece.

[Laughter]

Long: Which I don't even own anymore, but—so the whole thing with Bob and the people around him was a total education for me. I think that's part of what appealed to Bob, was that I was like a fresh canvas.

[Laughter]

Long: He would ask my opinion on things because I think he thought—he knew I was honest and I wasn't jaded like many of the people who are around art all the time and they sort of think you have to have a polished opinion. So yes, every day with Bob was like a constant learning process for me. I would sometimes think, you can't put those two colors together.

[Laughter]

Long: And it didn't take me long to get over that.

Q: So for you then, for someone going to work for Bob Rauschenberg for the first time, there would be some people who would have a lot of knowledge about what he had done in the past and this would sort of be like the opportunity of a lifetime sort of a window. And then on the other end of the spectrum, there's well, I'm going to go do a sewing job for someone who lives on this island whom I don't—

Long: Right. Who is a nice guy—

Q: Right, he was a nice guy.

Long: —and I remember thinking that. And it was like oh, this is new and different.

Q: So where did you sort of sit on that spectrum at that point of entry and then if you can go from there into describing working on the eyelets for *Hoarfrost*?

Long: I just started and I don't even remember getting direction from Bob in the beginning. I think we talked about them and I said, "Well, I don't think these buttonholes are very well done; they're not going to hold up." So he actually said, "Well, if they're not, you can redo them." I ended up doing that to make them a lot sturdier and to reinforce them because even though at that point I had never been to a show or seen how a show was hung, I just knew if you're going to hang these on nails or with pushpins or however they hung them, there was going to be pressure from the weight of the fabric. So Bob was very open to my opinion on, "I don't think

you're making this right," because he wanted it to be as good as it could be and to last. So it seemed like a really natural transition. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question or not—

Q: No, it does.

Long: —but there was that—Bob collaborated with everybody. He would want you to do something and if it couldn't happen, you would explain why to him. If he could see a compromise way to do it, maybe you'd end up doing that or he'd go, "Okay, we're going to do this," or whatever. So it was constantly kind of a—even though I was not an artist, I had no art training or anything like that and there would be people coming through there who were serious artists. He would engage them and get their opinions and stuff too. But he was just—he was really open. He liked challenges and he wanted to—how he would do things in certain years where he'd collaborate with scientists and engineers, I guess it was, maybe not scientists. But to do art and that, together. He was like that even at my level. Some of the pieces I worked on later were huge challenges. And he would just kind of go, "Well, figure out a way and tell me what it is." [Laughs]

Q: And so for this early work, are you just being delivered these pieces or are you going over to the studio and mostly independently going there and reinforcing—



Rauschenberg and studio assistant Sheryl Long in the Laika Lane studio, Captiva, Florida, 1977. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Long: I would go to the studio and I was—I'm trying to think if I—I think they still were producing some *Hoarfrosts*; some were new, some had been done quite earlier, like maybe a year before that or whatever. Some I redid, but I think that's spread out over a period of time. But I wasn't involved in the actual printing, that process. I might have seen some of it, but I didn't do that.

Bob liked company. He liked people around him. He was a party guy, so you'd show up at his house at 5:00 or six o'clock in the afternoon and he would be drinking and entertaining and telling stories. You might not start real work until 2:00 in the morning, which meant then you would go over to the studio to work. But that was part of his process. The whole time, he would be absorbing the people around him. He would sort of have one eye on the TV, the TV was always on, whether the sound was or wasn't. I think that was a visual stimulation he needed. And then at some point, some magic moment, he'd head over to the studio.

Q: I've heard that about him with the TV, that he would still be very tuned into the television, but also very, very alert to whatever sort of conversation might be going on around.

Long: Right. Right. Well—he was diagnosed as dyslexic. That’s a known fact. But my granddaughter, who is nine, was just diagnosed about a year ago as ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder]. The whole thing I’ve seen through that, I’m certainly no doctor, but I would swear that Bob was ADD. It’s like everything was stimulus to him and I think he was just constantly like that, where he was just taking stuff in from all around him at one time. But when he focuses, just like a child or any person with ADD, if it’s something they’re interested in, then they could totally focus on it. So that’s my theory about him. [Laughs]

Q: So you would go over and it would start with dinner, with drinks, with socializing, this sort of a thing. So that would be you, that would be him, and just sort of a rotating cast of people? You mentioned that Bob Petersen was around at this time?

Long: Right. Over the years the cast changed. But it would be myself, my husband at the time was Tim Pharr, and he was there quite a bit because he had been working on the buildings, doing carpentry work. But when Bob got into *Spreads* [1975–83] and *Scales* [1977–81], Tim built those when they were on wood frames before they eventually were on aluminum frames. So he was there. Whoever was down visiting from New York or other places. He had people who cleaned his house, but they were also there; it wasn’t like they were the maid or the house person or whatever.



Robert Rauschenberg
Opal Reunion (Spread), 1976
Solvent transfer, acrylic, fabric, pencil, wood oar,
and bird's wings on wood panels, with mirrored
Plexiglas
84 x 194 x 36 inches (213.4 x 492.8 x 91.4 cm)
Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee



Robert Rauschenberg
Miter I (Scale), 1980
Solvent transfer, fabric and paper collage,
acrylic, and mirrored panels with paintbrush
and painted bicycle part on wood support
86 x 96 x 26 inches (218.4 x 243.8 x 66 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: From your company, for example?

Long: The company has dissolved by this time. But people would drop in. I'm trying to think if he was working on a project with, say, Gemini [G.E.L.] or [Sidney B.] Sid Felsen's gallery; the name's escaping me right now, in L.A., Gemini.

Q: Yes, Gemini, yes.

Long: Or Graphicstudio [University of South Florida, Tampa], depending on who was there. That would be probably three or four people. So it was always changing, who was around. That was fun and exciting. So I met wonderful people over the years and some are still dear friends as a result. It was a real privilege to be a part of all that.

Q: So you started out working on the eyelets for *Hoarfrost*. And is that your main involvement, with the *Hoarfrost* project?

Long: Yes, that's all I did. Just sewing the eyelets that they hung by.

Q: Well part of my research for this was just going down from the fourth to the third floor at 381 Lafayette [Street] in New York, and going down and looking at some of your eyelets, because there's a *Hoarfrost* hanging down there.

Long: Oh yes?

[Laughter]

Q: Yes. They're still holding.

Long: And I could tell you if it was mine or somebody else's. [Laughs]

Q: How could—so for you, it's interesting for me, because I do have some questions about when you see these pieces now. So how do you tell the difference between something that you've worked on versus some—you might remember the piece itself, of course, but—

Long: Well and actually with the *Hoarfrost*, I don't remember them individually. But when I look at the eyelet holes—I don't know how many, but I know at least two people ahead of me

did it. One was Elaine Sturtevant and one was Hisachika's [former] wife, I can't think of her name [Penelope Newcomb]. And then there were other people. I would always put a reinforcing piece on the back because the silk that they were printed on, or the cheesecloth, or depending on what the fabric was at the time, was very thin and fragile. So I would put a reinforcing piece of fabric on the back and my eyelets' stitching was closer together; you couldn't see the fabric through my stitching. And with some of the earlier ones, you could. It wasn't as tight, sort of like that. I just felt like—this is silly—but I just felt like they would last longer because of the way that I had done them. That's why I redid some of the earlier ones for him that were already fraying.

Q: And so are you being brought in—is this something you're doing—is this like an hourly situation? Are you billing for this? Is this something you're just coming in and doing? Because there seems to be this whole shifting relationship with people who were in doing work in summer, full-time on the staff, and other people are just kind of popping in and other people are sort of contract?

Long: At that time, I don't think anybody was "on staff"; that happened at a later point in time. And it was more like the time—well, I had a child in 1980 and at that point I didn't do as much for Bob. He would occasionally call me back to do specific projects. But there was a sense at that time that Bob would pay by the project. Usually, when a project was finished, there'd be a party and he would give everybody their check. And you would always think, "Oh wow, this is so much money," it's like, "I'm so lucky to have this job." But the truth of the matter was, there weren't any benefits. And if you really calculated your hours, like you were there, say,

sometimes six or eight hours before any work began. Granted, you weren't working, but it was part of your life that was tied up. So your hourly figure wasn't very big if you really calculated it. —Over time, some of the people realized that they really needed—if they were going to commit to their job with Bob, that he really needed to have salaried people. I don't know if they were hourly or salary or not. But I never questioned what I got from him; it always seemed very generous. But in hindsight when you'd sit down and kind of think about that, it wasn't quite as generous. [Laughs] But again, it was such a wonderful experience and I certainly had other jobs. This wasn't a full-time thing for me. I had employment on the island so it was—

Q: Still with the same company that you came there to run with your first husband?

Long: No, I was out of that about nine months after we moved there and I went to work for the local bookstore.

Q: On the island?

Long: Yes, MacIntosh Bookshop [now MacIntosh Books & Paper, Sanibel Island], which is still there, but it's had several different owners since then. And I ended up managing that very quickly, so that was my day job. [Laughs]

Q: It was evenings you'd go over—

Long: Yes. Mostly evenings or on the weekend, that kind of thing. But Bob was a night person, I think that's apparent to everybody who knows him [laughs] he was a night owl. So that worked out.

Q: Sure. So we've talked about *Hoarfrost* and the next big project that you're involved with is *Jammers* [1975–76]. So *Hoarfrost* runs, it seems like '74 to '76, and then *Jammers* is more like '75, '76. So just as we talk about this, I have a book from the recent exhibition at Gagosian Gallery [London]—which is difficult to tell right side up if you take off the cover. And so just as we talk, if you want to sort of scroll through and see if there's anything in particular there. So *Jammers* is obviously very textile-based and there's none of the—there aren't prints in the same way, it's not the transferred images, the found images, that characterize so much of his work. You just have these big bolts of color. And so I guess my first question in this area is, you mentioned you were sometimes surprised by the colors that he set side by side. And I think when a lot of people talk about his use of color, this is a pretty—this is on the really vibrant end, I think, of the spectrum. So I'm curious, given that you were working with this cloth, you were sewing it, your thoughts on color, just following up on what you said about being surprised at some of his choices.

Long: Right. Right. I loved this project because it was mostly silks and sheer things. It's actually hard to sew those fabrics, but wonderful to touch and feel while you're doing it. I think, if I remember right, he had been somewhere in the transition between *Hoarfrost* and this. I think he was in India.



Robert Rauschenberg
Mirage (Jammer), 1975
Sewn fabric
80 x 69 inches (203.2 x 175.3 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Robert Rauschenberg
Skyfall (Jammer), 1976
Sewn fabric and sawdust
8 x 36 x 67 inches (223.5 x 91.4 x 170.2 cm)
Private collection

Q: Yes, he was there for the *Bones* [1975] and *Unions* [1975]—

Long: Yes. And he came back with a lot of fabric. So part of it was, I think, that he got excited about these brilliant silks that they make and dye over there. That's kind of what inspired him there and seeing a country that has flag-like uses of it or whatever; because these were all very fluid, very bright colors. I loved them. At that point, I was over thinking I'm telling him what to do because he had talked about Josef Albers and all of his color dictates and things like that.

Bob loved to do what people didn't expect him to do. He would talk about that with me sometimes and so at that point I didn't make any judgments anymore.

[Laughter]

Long: I felt this man's obviously brilliant, his artwork sells.

Q: So tell me about those conversations. You mentioned that he was open to collaborating with lots of people; whether someone like Cy Twombly or someone like this. Someone from that New York City art world to people he was meeting in Captiva. So I'm curious about those conversations because he, I think, had some background in sewing himself. I dug something up that he might have sewn maternity dresses for his ex-wife [Susan Weil]?

Long: I think I may have read that somewhere. I knew that when he used to do the Happening-like productions in New York City that there was so much collaboration and he would do costumes and things for that. So that doesn't surprise me.

Q: So is that apparent in any conversations, like any sort of knowledge of sewing on his part? Or is this very much sort of your—he said, "Here, this is what I want to happen," and then it was your domain, just sort of see—I'm curious about that.

Long: Yes. Because he obviously knew his way around a sewing machine. But other than that, he would say, "I want this—" He would maybe have a sketch or sometimes just talk it through, "I want these joined here and you've got to have a panel where we can put this pole through," on the *Jammers*. There were all kinds of things. Sometimes I remember there were drawings ahead of time, but not always. It could be laid out on a table and he would lay the fabric over this and

say, “I want that sewed right there.” But it wasn’t like he ever was at the sewing machine with me.

Q: So he would sort of have the fabric sized and have some sort of a diagram, or some sort of little sketch or a study written out or placed, and then would just give you instruction about, “This is how I would like this”?

Long: Right. Right. Yes. These are—I was hoping there was one included in this book here that I actually had to repair.

Q: Oh.

Long: He came back with fabrics from India, but he would also buy fabrics in New York. I can remember times when he’d give me five hundred dollars and send me to a fabric store, which was heaven. [Laughs] But other people bought them for him too and one of these pieces, one of these *Jammers*, I’m pretty sure it was made with an acetate fabric, which is some petroleum product that just disintegrated, literally, over time. It would just powder. I don’t think silk does that. So I was asked to recreate that piece. And that was a challenge. But yes, these, I just loved them because they were such beautiful fabrics, so much fun just to touch and to work with.

Q: Are any of these pieces in particular jumping up to you as something that you remember seeing being worked on or anything like that? Because I don’t know that it’s every piece and I don’t think it’s every piece in the series, but—

Long: It isn't. Like this one with the—I remember this one. I thought oh, that is—

Q: *Sextant [(Jammer), 1976]*?



Robert Rauschenberg
Sextant (Jammer), 1976
Cloth-covered rattan poles, water-filled plastic
glass, and wire
96 x 42 x 14 inches (243.8 x 106.7 x 35.6 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Long: —so Zen. It's just gorgeous. And of course no fabric, so I wouldn't have had any involvement in that one. But yes, he would work on them and then there would be a show—he would do a show in his gallery and sometimes it was for locals or sometimes whoever was there would see them. He would quite often do that. I think there were multiple reasons; one, so he could see how they might look in a gallery next to each other. But also, I can remember times when David White, a great guy who worked for him, would come and make sketches and do the documentation, like some of these drawings that you have here. So that was a fun time for all the people who had worked on it, to see all those things together. It wouldn't always be everything together.

Oh, here are some more. The particular one that I had to recreate, oh, this is it right here, I believe. It had this stack of one-gallon paint cans in it, so that—

Q: I'll look up which one that is.

Long: Yes, let's see. Oh, it doesn't say.

Q: It's on page eighty-two, the one on the back wall on the bottom, so we'll check against that.

[Note: *Double Standard (Jammer)*, 1976]

Long: Yes.

Q: So that was the piece that you were involved in making?

Long: I'm thinking I don't remember it being quite that big. There may be another one, but it definitely has a stack of cans in it like that, and it was the cream-colored silk or acetate that just totally disintegrated. [Note: Long repaired *Fanfare (Jammer)*, 1976.] So my first thing was, I had to go try to find silk to match that and send swatches to Bob for approval. I sent him a piece of the disintegrated stuff and that, to approve it. Once that was done, I put it back together, recreating the acetate panel.



Robert Rauschenberg
Fanfare (Jammer), 1976
Silk and ten one gallon metal cans
89 x 83 x 17 inches (226.1 x 210.8 x 43.2 cm)
Private collection

Q: So he brought some of these back from India, but so then when you had to go look for a replacement, where were you going to go find—

Long: I was living in Tampa then and I had gone back to school to finish my degree. I looked at every fabric store in the greater Tampa–Saint Petersburg–Sarasota area. [Laughs] I think that—I'm not sure about this, it would be documented; the people who documented the conservation of it have all the notes. Bob might have had fabric sent to me, not liking the ones I had done. But actually, when I did the piece, this fabric is so gentle and I was trimming threads or something on it and I made a little snip in the silk somewhere in the middle and I just about died! I told Bob, I said, "I'm going to have to redo this so it's going to take longer than I originally said," and he goes, "No it won't, just put a patch over it." So literally he told me what fabric and there's a little patch sewn over that thing. So it wasn't conserved like it was to start with, but it's what he wanted to do.

I can remember—Bob would go with the flow. With some *Spread* or *Scale*—it wasn't *Rodeo Palace* [*Spread*, 1976], but it was one of the early ones, big ones. It was laid out flat on the floor because he was still working on it, sort of adding finishing touches—he'd put a pencil line in here or whatever. It was in the gallery and somebody opened the sliding glass doors and his three big dogs came in and one of them ran right across it! And so there are footprints on that. I was just like, "Oh my god," to myself. Somebody said, "Oh, well we can paint over that," because it was a white background where the dog has stepped. Bob was like, "No, that's part of the artwork." That always flabbergasted me, with my non-art background and all. I'm always thinking, oh, things should be perfect. And that was not his thing; it was like the art kind of made itself. I don't know if that's the right term. But he was very open to whatever happened becoming part of the piece.

Q: So speaking of your background, with the sewing you did with the 4-H and all of that, I'm curious to what extent your background sort of did and did not prepare you for this sort of work. Because you mentioned that you have this idea that it had to be perfect and it had to be done, finished, kind of well-made in a certain way, and that Bob had this different idea of process and what happened along the way. So I'm curious then about your own background working on quilts, sewing clothes, that sort of thing. To what extent—was that sort of sufficient training for this? Or how much of this was you learning on the job in terms of his eye and in terms of what he was asking of you?

Long: Well, I was mostly carrying out his designs. So that's what I did. I would do a good job—he wouldn't say, "Do a bad job at it."

[Laughter]

Long: I would do a good job. But those are just two examples. It didn't happen often—it's not like this went on all the time. But those are two things that really stuck out in my mind like oh, you'd think this is for posterity and famous, I'm thinking Michelangelo or something like that. Many times he wouldn't use the right archival stuff to make a piece last forever. But he knew that. He was making the art to make it and I think his theory was that it lasted as long as it lasted and that was it. I can't think of a specific thing, but I know he'd get questioned about oh, this isn't acid-free, or oh, this is going to rust. He's like, "Put gesso under it and over it," or whatever.

Q: There are probably archivists tearing out their hair at this point. [Laughs]

Long: I'm sure. If you look at *Bed* [1955] or you look at *Anagrams* [1995–97], any of those things that have really weird things in them, conserving those, that didn't matter to him. It was making the art then that mattered to him. He wasn't thinking about oh, I should do this to make this last forever. That was just something that I was like okay, that's him, and he clearly knows what he's doing.

I think that *Jammer* in the book is not the one because—it could be, but that would be a photo prior to it being conserved, if that's the one. But it seems to me, I don't remember it being quite that big.

Q: We can look into that too, yes.

Long: Yes. I bet you there is another one that has that column with the cans in it. [Note: *Fanfare (Jammer)*, 1976]

Q: It's a fairly distinctive feature.

Long: Yes.

Q: So you mentioned that somewhere along the line here, you moved back to Tampa from Captiva. So by the time you were working on *Jammers*, are you working—or are you commuting in from Tampa? Where does that happen along the line here?

Long: I did the conservation on that piece after I went back to Tampa in 1986. That's when I went back to school. And Bob and I had sort of parted ways before then.

Q: In 19—when was this?

Long: I was back in Tampa in 1986. I moved back, but I had been living on the island all that time up until then. He and I, somewhere between when my daughter was born in 1980 and '86, we sort of parted ways. I had just gotten to a point in my life where his life controlled the life of everybody who worked for him. You almost had a sense of you don't have your own life. It's

like you couldn't go on vacation unless he was gone somewhere or you were expected to be there from this point, not knowing if you were even going to work that night. I think it was partly that I was a mother at that point and it was just harder to cope with and everything. But I did a lot of things for him up until that time and then even after that time.

I know for a lot of people, if you sort of split from Bob, that was usually a rift that wasn't breachable or it couldn't be healed. I think from what I've heard and talked to people, I was kind of the first person who was able to do that. I don't know if that was because my child was part of the process or whatever. But I did quite a few things with him since then, like the *Casino* [/*ROCI MEXICO*, 1985] piece for ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] Mexico. I did some other things, usually smaller in scale, because my life was more complicated at that point. [Laughs]

Q: So if when there were these breaks, they're usually permanent, so what's your sense as to what that was? If you were some exception to this rule, what was that rule?

Long: I think Bob—I think he felt betrayed when somebody left—and I don't think he thought of it as he was controlling their lives. I think he felt like it was always a give-and-take scenario and it was. But the bottom line was, if you wanted to work with him, his life was so—like any great person—it was so complicated, and schedules and personality and ego and everything were all tied up in that. I don't know, I'm not saying I'm special or whatever, and again I think it was because of having a child precipitated that whole thing, that I just couldn't deal with his lifestyle

anymore. But I was very happy that we were able to remain friends and that he would call me back from time to time.

Q: Sure. So before leaving the island, you mentioned that the work was very much correspondent to his own schedule and his own travel and that sort of thing. How did you know it was time to come into work? With what sort of regularity did that happen? Is this fits and bursts? Would you just get a call one night? How does that work week happen?

Long: I don't remember calls. I don't remember calls, but sometimes, the night before, there would be discussions about, or maybe there was something going on during the next day. Bob's day wouldn't start until noon or one or two or whatever. So that would maybe push back a start time. It was never definite. Sometimes you'd go there and everybody would help cook dinner. Or sometimes you'd go there and you'd go to the studio maybe at nine o'clock and work until two and then dinner would get cooked. Because Bob never started to work then; if you were there most times by, I would say, midnight, you were probably going—



Rauschenberg's print shop, Captiva, Florida, ca. 1978. Pictured: Sheryl Long, Tim Gault, Rauschenberg, Sidney Felsen, Tim Pharr, Peter Wirth, and Rauschenberg's dog Cloud. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

[Laughter]

Long: Maybe not quite that late. But I can't remember. There may have been times that somebody would call and say, "Where are you?" But I honestly don't remember. It was just like you were expected to be there and you knew that.

Q: Are you walking distance away? Or would you just drive? It's a fairly small island.

Long: It's a small island. I could have walked. I think it's about two miles. I lived very close to 'Tween Waters, so it's probably only a mile even actually, to the Beach House and the gallery there—I mean the studio there. The print shop was a little further, but not that much at all.

Q: And so you would just sort of show up; you might show up at four o'clock and you might not start work for six or eight hours after that or you might start it earlier. You might be entering a very social space or you might be hypothetically entering a workspace.

Long: Right, right, right.

Q: Maybe not at four in the afternoon it sounds like, but later, perhaps.

Long: Right. And sometimes it would be in the gallery—I mean in the studio; I call it the gallery because there was this big room that was used like a gallery—or sometimes it would be what we call the print shop, which was where the green Grasshopper press was. He had lots of different

spaces. Over time he got more spaces. He bought the Van Vleck property and that had all these buildings—and all. So usually depending on what was going on, if it was a particular project or if there were people there for a project, you would know where to go, that kind of thing. Or if not, you'd go to the Beach House and find out where to go. [Laughs]

Q: And so if your time there was always difficult to predict and change, how do you balance it then with working at this bookstore? You were working full-time at this place and then also doing this work?

Long: Right. But my work with Bob wasn't constant. With *Jammers*, that was pretty steady. But when he got into *Spreads* and *Scales*, they had a lot of fabrics and textiles in them, but a lot of times they were just collaged so there wasn't a sewing element. Now there was sometimes, like in *Rodeo Palace*, there's a poufy thing there, which is actually a pillow—the silk is glued down around it and this pillow was behind it. That pillow was like an old goose down something pillow, I don't remember exactly. But it had a rip in it so I had to sew the pillow before he would glue it down. So during periods of time where there weren't textile things going on, I didn't have to be there all the time like that. So it wasn't like I was working those hours every night. Somebody was working those hours every night, whether it was a printer or an artist's assistant or whatever you want to call the myriad people who helped him. Or a carpenter or that kind of thing.



Robert Rauschenberg
Rodeo Palace (Spread), 1976
Solvent transfer, pencil, and ink on
fabric and cardboard, with wood doors,
fabric, metal, rope, and pillow, mounted
on foam core and redwood
144 x 192 x 5 1/2 inches (365.8 x 487.7
x 14 cm)
Collection of Lyn and Norman Lear, Los
Angeles

Q: Right. Some of the other names, like Peter Wirth from the time or of course Tim Pharr. And then Marcia Stice.

Long: Marcia Stice. Yes.

Q: So there's sort of this rotating—and when you weren't working there, are you still going there to socialize? Or is this kind of—

Long: Yes. Not as much, not all the time, and particularly if I was working the next day, I wouldn't stay as late. But Bob never wanted people to leave. If he knew you wanted to leave, he would get you in a conversation and just not stop because he did not want you to leave. He loved having people around him. I don't know, somehow that fueled him. So he would—if he could sense you were ready to go—

Q: Edging towards the door, kind of making your excuses—

Long: —yes. I don't know if he was afraid of going to sleep or who knows what it was. But he did not like being alone.

Q: So he would try to sort of, “Have another drink. Hang out.” You'd be there all hours, that sort of thing?

Long: Right. Or he'd bring up something that was about something you were working on, where you couldn't leave.

[Laughter]

Long: Yes, so anyway.

Q: Right. So we've talked about *Jammers* and the *Spreads* and *Scales*. So I looked over Tim's oral history transcript and so he, it seems, was very involved with *Spreads* and *Scales*.

Long: Right. Right.

Q: A lot of carpentry it seems and so forth. Was involved with that. But for you, there wasn't that same level of involvement as there had been, say, relative to *Jammers*?

Long: Right. Right. There were a couple of pieces, like the *Musical Mollusk* [(*Scale*), 1978].

Q: Yes, why don't we talk about—because I think that's an interesting example of what must have been a fairly unusual request for you to sew an umbrella or something like this?

Long: Oh yes. Well and let's see, what year were these? These were—I don't remember.

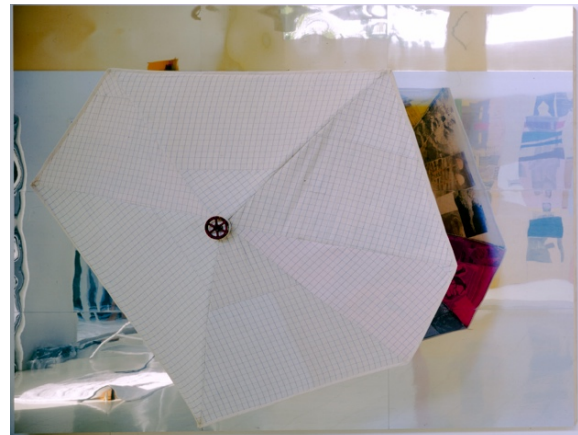
Q: This is '78, I think.

Long: '78. Well actually—

Q: For the *Musical Mollusk* and the *Monarchal Mollusk* [(Scale), 1978]—



Robert Rauschenberg
Musical Mollusk (Scale), 1978
Solvent transfer on fabric on wood veneer with umbrella with solvent transfer, acrylic, pipe, and valve handle
84 3/4 x 110 x 32 inches (215.3 x 279.4 x 81.3 cm)
Nassau County Museum of Art, New York



Robert Rauschenberg
Monarchal Mollusk (Scale), 1978
Clear and gold mirrors on wood veneer with umbrella with solvent transfer, acrylic, pipe, and valve handle
85 1/4 x 110 x 32 inches (216.5 x 279.4 x 81.3 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Long: Well, let's back up just a minute.

Q: Sure.

Long: And can we talk about *Travelogue* [1977] and *Tantric Geography* [décor for *Travelogue*, 1977] now?



Costumes and set, entitled *Tantric Geography* (1977), designed by Rauschenberg for Merce Cunningham Dance Company's *Travelogue* (1977). Collection on Robert Rauschenberg Research. Photo: Charles Atlas

Q: Yes, if we want to go with that—

Long: Because there's this umbrella thing that goes on with Bob. [Laughs] You know how certain images recur in people's art? Bob had this thing about umbrellas. Bob, he was so prolific, so I'm not going to say ten percent was umbrellas. But in my experience, there was a lot of umbrella stuff that came up. So with the work he did with Merce Cunningham in '77, Merce's title was *Travelogue* and Bob called the sets *Tantric Geography*. So the sets were these big silk

flag-like, sail-like things, very reminiscent of *Jammers*, that were flown in on the stage. So those were things that myself and Marcia Stice worked on. Marcia also sewed. That was primarily her thing for Bob. But one of the things of the costumes was this—I don't know if you'd call it an umbrella skirt or whatever, but—

Q: Right. Here we have a—

Long: This was one of those things—oh yes.

Q: This is from a book of the Cunningham-Rauschenberg collaborations over the years with the particular section dedicated to *Travelogue*.

Long: Right, one of the—

Q: See how these tin cans—

Long: —costumes were these umbrella-like skirts that went between the dancers' legs and then they held up the two end pieces. So it was like an umbrella with a split in it. So Bob helped me lay out the fabrics; I've got photos where we're on the floor and he's showing what colors he wants next to each other and all. Later he had Merce Cunningham visit to view the works and he's having Tim Pharr model it so he gets an idea of how the dancers will move because he's got to teach the dancers, tell them how they're going to use this within the dance or whatever. So this was the first umbrella thing that I did for Bob.

Q: Do you call it—I've been struggling with kind of what to call that, is that—

Long: I don't know!

Q: —it's sort of like a fan or a—

Long: Oh, a fan might be better, yes. Yes.

Q: It has a similar effect.

Long: It's like this peacock thing except it's between their legs—and all I could think of was, oh my gosh, somebody's going to get hurt wearing these—because in between each of these gores of fabric, there is a dowel, that is what helps hold this up.

Q: So it's quite rigid.

Long: The ribs are rigid. So that's where it's like an umbrella, if you see this.

Q: Right.

Long: I have this photo, I don't know if you can tell. But see how it's standing out perfectly straight?

Q: Yes.

Long: That's because a very narrow dowel is in it. That's how you could hold it up and make it look like an umbrella if you closed the slit in it. But there was this waistband thing that went around them and I was so glad I wasn't a dancer. [Laughs]

Q: Also just an extraordinary range of fabrics. There are things that are dotted, these vibrant gold—

Long: Right. Gold lamé. And that was a cotton, there are silks, voiles, and sheer things and all. And some of the panels, you notice, are pieced together. Bob would do that quite often, to see two colors together.

Q: So would he sort of then lay them out in this pattern, like this is the sequence in which, "I'd like the gold lamé into the speckle," da da da or was this something where he was like, "Here are all these things, sew them into something"?

Long: See, here he is on the floor and he's holding things next to each other to figure out what he wants to go together. So we're kind of roughly laying it out on the floor and then here's me cutting out these gored panels afterwards. He very much picked out what colors went next to each other and part of that process.

Then here I am sewing the tin can costume [laughs] which was definitely a first in my life. I'm going, "I don't know how to sew tin cans!" [Laughs] But that turned out to be fun. If I remember right, Merce actually wore that for a short part in the dance. It wasn't in throughout the whole dance.

Q: So in a situation like that, where you're given an instruction for something you've never done before and aren't quite sure how to do it—when you receive a request like that, what's your problem-solving approach to these kind of unusual ideas?

Long: I would say, growing up on a farm, you learn about problem solving. Because you can't run into town to the store. So I was used to fixing and making do, or coming up with solutions to problems. Bob basically said this is what he wants, so I would probably question him, "Do you want it to look like a skirt of cans?" And he would probably say, "No, I want it to go down the legs," or something. So we would narrow it down—because I don't think there was ever a sketch for this. I think we were actually kind of doing it on the fly. So I said, "Well, we could have a band around here and a band—" I told him, I said, "I had to have something to connect the cans to." I think ideally, he wouldn't have wanted any connecting parts; he just somehow wanted the cans to be there. But so then, we figured out a way. These bands here were what the string—I don't remember what the material was. But it was like a string or a twine.

Q: Twine?

Long: It was knotted in the can so you've got this loop. And then the loop was sewn onto the bands that held this up like pants. This was like a pair of pants with cans. [Laughs] So again that was something that he had some vague notion, I think, and then we would work through to get it and he might say, "That's not enough cans, I want more cans."

[Laughter]

Long: And we would come to a finished product. In this photo, so here I am sewing cans and here's Bob. He was the first guinea pig for it. That's probably where we worked through it. Bob in his underwear. He loved to just be in his underwear.

[Laughter]

Long: So that was done, I think, before Merce came down, the one where we had the fan skirts, the umbrella skirts. Merce was there, actually, running through them. Anyway, so again it was just one of those things. It evolved. He had a vision and we tried to get there.

Q: So there's a little bit of correspondence and stuff like that in the files, by the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation in New York. In it I found this note from the Cunningham Dance Foundation written to Bob Rauschenberg, saying, "I would like to have some indication from you soon as to what you're thinking in terms of the set and costume for this new work." This is on December 21 and the thing was supposed to debut on January 18, so less than a month away.

[Laughter]

Q: I'm interested in these performances as to whether there is more of—because you're working towards more of a deadline perhaps than in some of these other projects, which might go on for one year, might go on for two. And here you're less than a month away and the Cunningham Company is running around being like—

Long: Freaking out. Yes.

Q: —what do you—

Long: And I know that Bob was—I don't want to say he was a procrastinator, but there were definitely some things that he would procrastinate about. I don't know if that's because he was still formulating in his mind what he was going to do, if the creative process was still churning or whatever. That was part of that whole thing before going to work at his house; I think he was churning through stuff then and at some point it would click. And when he would go to work, it would be very intense and very deliberate. So sometimes I think there was just that, "Oh, I've still got time."

[Laughter]

Long: I don't remember the intensity of the deadline specifically on that, but that doesn't surprise me. That happened a lot on different things. Bob was great about donating works to support

people or causes and a lot of times those would have a deadline because there was a specific event. If it was a poster, it had to get to the printer in time. There would be a lot of times, I'm sure, when it was finished the night before and FedEx-ed out the next day. [Laughs]

Q: So you worked on several of these dance pieces. There's the *Brazos River* in '76.

Long: That was the first one, yes.

Q: Right. Then you have the *Travelogue* and then *Glacial Decoy* in '79. So of course, in this, so you've talked about some of the people who would be typically collaborating with Bob on these things. So was this still all work that you did on-site in Captiva? Given that *Travelogue*, I think, premiered in New York—

Long: Right. On Broadway [Minskoff Theatre, New York, Jan. 18, 1977].

Q: *Glacial Decoy* travels and then *Glacial Decoy*, I think, is Texas. I'm trying to remember, there's some association with Austin, I'm trying to—

Long: Yes, I don't remember where it opened.

Q: Because they filmed that one.

Long: Yes.

Q: That one was made into that little—

Long: Right. *Brazos River*, a video collaboration, all that—Marcia Stice and I did this—they bought leotards, plain white leotards to fit the dancers in the troupe. And we had them and they were labeled, we had names pinned to the one that each dancer had. That was a dyeing process, where there was a gradient of the dye. Bob chose the color for each person; he knew the dancers, he had met them or I'm pretty sure he did, because he spoke of them by name. So he picked the colors. We did the dyeing. Occasionally he wanted a stronger color or something like that. That was all done in the kitchen of what we called the print shop on Captiva, which was where the actual press was.



Still from *Brazos River* (1976), choreographed by Viola Farber. Set and costumes by Rauschenberg, with electronic score by David Tudor. Produced for television by the Fort Worth Art Museum and KERA Channel 13, aired 1977

The *Travelogue* costumes for Merce Cunningham, those were sewn in the studio on Captiva and Merce did come down when they were close to done and saw the sets. I remember that the

dancers didn't hear the music until opening night so I don't know if—the dancers must have seen the costumes because of that fan skirt; they would had to have practiced in that so they didn't hurt themselves. But I don't know how much ahead of time they got those costumes. And then the scenery, we had these big fabric things that flew in. I don't know that Merce would have seen those until they actually were installed in the theater, they were huge. There was this, for lack of a better word, train of platforms with bicycle wheels on them; that was part of the set design. He saw that when he was there; I know that because it's in the background of one of these pictures. So when Merce was there, he was able to—see, they're sitting over here in the—

Q: Right.

Long: So he would have seen that and known that that was going to be for him to decide how to use in the piece. Yes, but I honestly couldn't tell you how far ahead of time that was before the piece premiered.

Q: Right. So the dyeing thing is interesting. In the files at 381 Lafayette, the invoice, your invoice, or rather Rauschenberg's invoice on your behalf for *Travelogue* is still sitting in there. And it specifically mentions sewing and dyeing. So was dyeing something—you mentioned for the *Brazos River* piece, was that something you had any experience in doing? Was that another thing you did often? Or is this just sort of, figure out how to do this?

[Laughter]

Long: I learned that on the fly. And actually, we had dyes that were sent from New York. I don't know who bought them and sent them down. I found out later they're quite strong dyes and you have to use very hot water. We had these huge pots of hot water to do it in. I can't think what it is. But there's some toxin that they give off while you're doing it. [Laughs] I obviously survived that fine and so did Marcia.

Q: Cycling back to the no health benefits with this job!

[Laughter]

Long: But anyway, yes, so we figured that out. There were instructions on the dye. Marcia and I were both how-to, figure-it-out kind of people. [Laughs] So yes, no experience. Bob was trusting. I don't think he would have had us do that if he didn't think we could manage it. I don't remember him coming and saying, "Can you do this?" I think he came and said, "I want you to do this."

Then on *Glacial Decoy*—as weird as these fan-shaped umbrella skirts and the tin can pants were, the *Glacial Decoy* costumes were very challenging. I tried to find it; I have a sketch that Bob drew of how he wanted those costumes to look. It's just a little pencil sketch about that big. All I had was measurements on the dancers. I had told him, I said, "I need a measurement from mid-chest to shoulder." I told him every possible measurement I could think of because I didn't have them there. Then I had friends that I would say, "Okay, I need a model, can you hold still for this." Those were done and they were made out of silkscreen fabric. That was the fabric that was

used. It makes a real crisp pleat; there are one-inch pleats on them. It was very difficult—and they're just sort of, in essence, halter-type dresses. Bob has a sketch, but how you get from a million yards of fabric to that? Because again, Bob didn't think about how dancers are going to be in these, sweating in them. I don't know if you can dry clean that fabric or not. But he wanted that fabric. So those, I actually remade for them down the road.



Sketch by Sheryl Long of costumes for *Glacial Decoy* (1979). Courtesy of Sheryl Long



Set, costumes, and lighting designed by Rauschenberg for Trisha Brown Dance Company's *Glacial Decoy* (1979). Pictured: Trisha Brown. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Alex Mirzaoff

Q: Well, it mentions actually on the chronology on the website that the costumes were sort of redesigned after the first performance.

Long: Yes. Right. And part of the problem is that the pleats—I don't know if it was after the first performance, maybe there was a round of performances. But they were, I think, improved. In the interim, they had figured out how to clean them or what they needed to do. They probably talked

to some true textile person [laughs] to find out what to do with those. But that wasn't even a consideration when we were making them in the beginning. They were beautiful though. They were very sheer and with all the projections that were going on during that piece, you would see a lot of the movement of the body and everything. So that was a lot of fun, it was a big challenge. [Laughs] Trisha Brown, I actually designed costumes for her on my own later, not through Bob.

Q: Oh, independently? Okay.

Long: She asked me, yes. She had a vision about costumes that sort of had interchangeable pieces. So she brought me up to New York and I was up there for two or three weeks to do those. I actually got to meet the dancers and measure them myself, which was a huge plus.



Trisha Brown and Trisha Brown Dance Company performer wearing interchangeable costumes by Sheryl Long. Photo: Courtesy Sheryl Long

[Laughter]

Long: So that was a little bit of a different experience.

Q: So that's later on, this is the eighties or the nineties?

Long: Yes. Yes. I think it was 1978 or 1979—well, actually, I have a program that it says, “Costumes by Sheryl Pharr,” which was my name at the time. And the program was dated 1980. That trip, that's when I got to know her. She was a wonderful person. Her son was born and had the same birthday, not the same year, as me. She was just a really sweet, wonderful person, along with that wonderful creativity and everything.

Q: So that's sort of a secondary thing that happened through this work that you did?

Long: Right. Bob wasn't involved in that. Yes.

Q: This other thing. You formed an independent relation with Trisha?

Long: Right. Right.

Q: Yes, yes. So was that something that happened in other instances in this work? Or is Trisha Brown the primary example of you met someone else and wound up doing something similar to what you were doing for Bob?

Long: Right, that's the only one, yes.

Q: Oh, okay.

Long: The only one, yes.

Q: That's fascinating that carried forward though.

Long: Yes. Like I said earlier, I met a lot of wonderful people and became friends with them and am still in touch with some of them. Although now it's more like when we run into them at some kind of event. And I don't go to New York a couple of times a year like I did when I was working for Bob. Yes, that was the only thing that turned into another job, was that with Trisha. Because I was on Captiva and most of the art world is in New York or somewhere else.

Q: And so talking about these performances, as I told you before when we turned this on, I recently watched this sixty-minute program that they made out of *Brazos River* to be put on public television and to be broadcast. And it's, to my eyes, fairly avant-garde. Kind of like an electro noise sort of a soundtrack [by David Tudor] and things like that. So I'm interested, were you going to the premieres of these things? Are you seeing what becomes of these costumes and sets that you had worked on?

Long: Right. I didn't see *Brazos River* and I have not seen that movie, I should look for that. I did go to *Travelogue* when it was on Broadway. I believe that was the opening, at a theater on Broadway. I can remember sitting a row in front of me were James Taylor and Carly Simon. I

was like oh! [Laughs] But it was wonderful to see it performed. And then Trisha's—let me see, where did I see that one? I can't even remember now. But it was in New York, I want to say it was in Brooklyn—I can't remember. But I have seen those two. I don't think that one was the opening performance, but yes, so that was a treat to see them.

Q: Because I noticed your name's in the program for *Travelogue*.

Long: Right. Right, yes.

Q: For the costumes.

Long: So that was fun, oh, my name in print!

[Laughter]

Q: Right. So you're going to New York several times in a year then. Is that something—are you doing that formally for Bob? Because I noticed that in Tim's oral history, he talks about driving pieces out to openings and things like that.

Long: Right. I did that too, like one year, there was a retrospective in San Francisco. Tim and I made that trip on our own, but were invited to the opening and the parties and that kind of thing. But then we also drove pieces to openings. He and Peter Wirth and I once made a trip across country to Venice [Los Angeles]; Ace Gallery had a show and we were driving work out there

[*New Paintings: Spreads and Scales*, Ace Gallery, Venice, California, 1977]. I was paid to do that. Then let's see—I drove works to Vancouver for a show because I remember going through customs [*Robert Rauschenberg: Works from Captiva*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1978]. Some of those shows we would be there to help install them, but it was more like a perk. I don't feel like I really worked hard. I didn't have white gloves on installing stuff, like some people did.

Yes, so there was a lot of traveling. I went to the Mexico City opening of ROCI [*Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI MEXICO*, Museo Rufino Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo Internacional, Mexico City, 1985], but that was on my own—that was me wanting to go see the piece that I had created. Or I didn't create, that I had made for Bob.

Let me see, I think I wrote down—oh, in Fort Worth, there was the show, the rodeo's bicentennial or centennial, I can't remember. And Bob had done *Rodeo Palace* for that [note: *The Great American Rodeo*, Fort Worth Art Museum, an exhibition celebrating the American Bicentennial, 1976]. So that was one that we drove there to do. It was always interesting when we would have a truck with art. You have to stop at these agricultural inspection stations on the way. [Laughs] And they were like, "What's this stuff?" I remember, I think it was Peter Wirth telling a story as we were going through customs to Vancouver. In the past, there was some piece that Bob had done and it was basically a big rope that tied big flat pieces of foam that had been rolled up. So there was like a knot around this piece of foam and then a length of rope and another piece of foam and some show that it was being taken to. That was the only piece in the back of the truck then. I think maybe it was a customs inspection somewhere. And they cut it apart—they opened it up because they thought there was something in the foam! [Laughs] I

wasn't on that trip; that preceded me. But that was the kind of stuff—because Bob's art—to much of the American population, that wasn't art to them. It was too modern, I guess, and too abstract, that kind of thing. I thought that was a great story.

[Laughter]

Long: They were destroying the art to get through customs or whatever it was. But we didn't have any casualties when we drove through those inspection stations.

[Laughter]

Q: I think a lot of people have that reaction to Rauschenberg and to a lot of Abstract Expressionist art and things like that. And so I'm curious then about your own reaction to this stuff. So you're working on it, you start out sewing eyelets, and then you were making costumes and sets. And you're sewing pieces together. And you're really quite involved—

Long: Right.

Q: —in some of these projects. So I'm curious about your own kind of viewing experience of these pieces. Thinking about your—like how you thought about—you mentioned you thought some of his color choices were kind of strange when you started. But sort of your own tendency or proclivity to relate to that sort of abstract stuff and then how that changed or didn't based on knowing him and based on working with the things.

Long: It definitely changed and I don't know if it was so much knowing him, but seeing the process happen so many times. I think my first impression, which was naïve and again, no art training at all, was that kind of oh, any kid could do this—you hear that from a lot of people. But when you were around him and you see him work and see the deliberation—for me, a lot of times it was fabric, put this next to that and then make a choice. And then you'd see what it would end up with and you could see, oh yes, that's a big difference that I would never have considered. Or if he was doing printing and putting images down, he would lay them down first and then try to get a sense of it. I think this is where his dyslexia helped him, because the images would come out reversed. Or sometimes there would be a finished painting, like a big painting, maybe a *Spread* or something and he would stand there and look at it for a long time, and you would think what else could you possibly do to this? And he would just put some little pencil line in for maybe 24 inches or something. And you would just go wow! Because it really changed it. So for me, I realized that it was not random and no, any kid couldn't do it.

But I will say that if I had been very, very wealthy and had my choice of art to buy, I probably wouldn't have invested in a lot of Rauschenbergs. I love the *Jammers* because they're very Zen and those bright colors and the fabrics and the sort of architectural elements. But a lot of these other things, with me personally—there's so much going on in so much of this work that I just have to zero in on one image at a time or maybe two of them and see how I relate them to each other. So I definitely learned respect for his process and the product that just in my ignorance in the beginning, I had no clue about.

Q: So for you, there's a special connection to the *Jammers*.

Long: Yes. I would say *Jammers* and *Casino*, that one.

Q: And we'll talk about that soon, of course.

Long: Right. Right, yes.

Q: So as you said, you're also—you're seeing this art being made, you're also at the opening. So as a part of talking about this larger world that you're becoming a part of, what were those scenes? Were those new or strange scenes to you? The world of art openings or art parties in New York City or in San Francisco? Obviously Bob had been going to those for a while and was very much expected to go to those things. I don't know whether he enjoyed it or not. So what was your place in those? What was that scene?

Long: Well, Bob did not enjoy it as a rule. A lot of times, he would have to have quite a few drinks and he would sometimes show up at the last possible moment or even late for those. And he liked having his crew and close friends around him; I think it gave him some moral support or something. I don't know if he felt insecure or it was going to be the same-old, same-old every time. But I don't think he enjoyed them—even though people were always praising them.

Q: It was a pressure thing? It was like that—

Long: I don't know. As he got more famous, everybody would want to talk to him and say, "Oh, he talked to me," and that kind of thing. But as far as—I considered him famous when I met him and found out about his history and that kind of stuff. For me it was—I loved it because you would see all these wonderful artistic types so you would have very formal clothing and stuff to very artsy and weird and funky, which—I'm very visual. So that was always fun and exciting. Sometimes I felt like a country bumpkin in those. But people were nice and friendly. I met a lot of artists through Bob and artists always like to talk about their work. It was very exciting. I'm basically, I think, a shy person and so just kind of getting there—but usually then you would find somebody to talk to and get started or people would introduce you and all. Yes, so it was fun.

Q: So a lot of these people, of course, they're sort of luminaries of the art world; they're well-known artists or they're art critics or they're collectors. They run a gallery or something like that. So then how did you introduce yourselves in these situations? You're clearly a part of—you were with Rauschenberg in that way. But I'm curious about, you're not from the New York art world.

Long: Right.

Q: And you said you felt a bit like a country bumpkin or something like that.

Long: Sometimes, yes.

Q: This sense that I'm in a very different league.

Long: I'm out of my league!

Q: Right. Right. And so, I'm interested in that, because it seems that Bob brought so many different people together in a world that I think can often be very exclusive.

Long: Oh, really, yes. He definitely, I'm sure—and I would think almost objectively, would try to blur those boundaries. I can remember Walter Hopps and we'd be giving Walter a hard time about something because he was always kind of staid and everything. And he didn't know us; he had just met us, all the people who worked for Bob. They were just people. What I found out, I guess, is that all of these famous people are just real regular people. They have whatever they're famous for, but they have their own insecurities or they might be homesick, just stuff like that; I think they became more human to me because of all of these experiences.

And the interactions. I wrote down some names, like [Tatyana] Tanya Grosman. In the art world she's very famous. She was fascinating. I was in New York at her home with Bob. I don't remember even why we were there, but it was one of the trips to New York. She didn't think of me as a bumpkin. She knew I was one of Bob's assistants, that probably was what we would all be called, but sitting in her living room talking about whatever and telling some story. So I don't know. Bob knew actors and authors and movie stars and all kinds of stuff. But they just seemed more human, being in this mix of all these people. Most of the people I probably had any kind of a relationship with, however short, were people I had met on Captiva or if I was in New York for a couple of weeks or something like that—it wouldn't have been just at an opening.

Q: And so if you go up to New York for several weeks, would that be doing something like some sort of work for Bob? Would you be visiting 381 Lafayette or something like that?

Long: I would be staying at 381, yes. And work-related—I know that the time I was doing those costumes for Trisha Brown, which she was paying me to do and Bob wasn't involved in, I was staying at 381.

Q: So that was made available? That was open if you wanted to—

Long: Right. Right. But most times it would be for work, it would be sometimes to again, help hang a show, but it was more like, “Oh, you worked on this, you should be at that show.” I think it ended up—never probably more than three times a year and sometimes it might just be for a long weekend or three or four days or something. Other times it would be longer. It depended on what was going on. So you might be working or I might have been on a fabrics shopping spree for Bob, that kind of thing.

Q: So tell me about those. Would he say I want so many yards of gold lamé, for example. Or was that—

Long: No. He would say, “Here's five hundred dollars.” [Laughs]

Q: So it was your—

Long: Yes.

Q: And then he sort of leaves? Or you would just kind of—

Long: I don't remember. I know he went fabric shopping once with Hisachika. And we went to a store that had very expensive, very elegant, what I would call formal wear for women kind of fabrics. I remember that it was a Friday or Saturday. I don't know how this worked, but it was the day that a Jewish holiday started in the evening and the owner was trying to get out by noon and Hisachika, he probably spent about a thousand dollars that day easily. He just wouldn't go and these people are trying to push us out the door and everything. So anyway, I had been on a trip with him and so had a sense of what he would buy for Bob. And then plus at the studio at Captiva, there was a long narrow galley way part of it and the whole length of it had shelves floor to ceiling where he would keep fabrics. So I was familiar with all of that. It was just kind of up to me to think first of all that I'd find it interesting. And then oh, I wonder if Bob would like this? And that would be the point. But it was just knowing the kind of stuff he had used.

Q: So would that be things like if you used silk on *Jammers*, would you be going out and getting—because it seems his color schemes did change from project to project. We talked about comparing *Hoarfrost* to *Jammers*. *Hoarfrost* has some more color depending on the thing, but *Jammers* just being so vibrant.

Long: Right.

Q: And then some other projects being not exactly monochromatic—so for you, as far as what you would go out and get, it would be you would get silk, you'd get this material, you'd get that material?

Long: I would—when I bought stuff I would try to go with the natural fibers. But I know that when he would travel, like for ROCI, but even before that he had projects going on all over. He would come back with fabrics; like there were some—I don't even know where. But they were silks and vibrant colors, but they were a wonderful zig zag weave and it would be, I want to say Uzbekistan or somewhere, the things that you see there. [Note: Rauschenberg sourced fabrics from Uzbekistan for the print series *Samarkand Stitches* (1988).] And so I think he was influenced by what he was exposed to, just like going to India turned him onto those vibrant solid colors. And the other thing is, and this is my theory about him watching TV all the time—there was never sound, it was just the image—I think sometimes he actually might have seen an image and it would just be the way an ad was blocked out or framed, some picture of a video of something going on, and he liked it. I don't know if this is true or not, but I've often wondered about that because just seeing things he's done and the way he puts them together, I think he had something in mind to start with. He's got this room full of fabrics and room full of images and all that kind of stuff. And something that inspired him to start with.



Robert Rauschenberg
Samarkand Stitches III, 1988
Sewn fabric and screenprint on fabric
62 x 41 inches (157.5 x 104.1 cm)
From an edition of 74 unique works
produced by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

So anyway, the fabrics would sort of go through phases. But solid colors were always important because he would maybe paint on them or silkscreen on them or whatever. Then there was some use of things like this polka dot in the *Travelogue* thing or stripes. You would never see anything, when I was working for him, like big floral motifs or something like that. Now when he was doing ROCI and going to some of these other countries where that's what the people wore and that's what you saw, then you would start to see that in the prints or whatever he was doing related to the artwork for that country. But when I was working for him, you didn't see that kind of thing. It was more solid colors and kind of classic things. And then he would do things to the fabric. So I didn't buy plaids or—

[Laughter]

Q: Paisley or—

Long: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Maybe every now and then there would be—but as a rule, that wasn't what he was shopping for or what he was using, I guess.

Q: Was he—I think it's an interesting development because so much of what he was doing was this sort of eye for raw materials. This very eclectic amalgamation—

Long: Right. Right. Right.

Q: —of raw materials. So we've covered several of the main projects that you've worked on—we've gone through *Glacial Decoy* in '79 and we've been talking about ROCI and so you said you had a child in—?

Long: 1980.

Q: 1980. Okay. So after that, into the early eighties, into the mid-eighties, would you mind talking about the sorts of projects that you were working on then? And I have a couple of individual ones that I might ask about as we go.

Long: Well the two that really stand out in my mind were *Casino*, which was this huge quilt-like piece, for lack of a better term, that was for the opening of the ROCI show in Mexico; that was the first show. So I came back to Captiva and worked on it there. I call that piece a quilt because it was two-sided. In the museum in Mexico, it hung from the ceiling suspended. And it had an edging around it, like a quilt border would have. Now it wasn't quilted, the two middle panels

were not connected to each other. They were separate. They were only connected around the edge, which is not quilt-like because normally they would be connected somehow.



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

But that was a huge challenge. It's kind of like making a big quilt, which sounds easy, but the piece was 13 feet wide and, I don't know, about 25 feet high. As long as you're piecing a section, which might be 5 feet by 6 feet or 4 feet by 3 feet or whatever, that's very manageable. When you start putting them all together, as the piece grew, and I remember this when I was putting the edging on it, the piece was so large it had to be rolled up and two, three, four people had to carry it, walking it alongside the sewing machine so I could sew it. Normally when you sew something, you just pull the fabric through the feed, but this thing is huge, it weighs a ton. So that was a big challenge. There were moments when I went, "Oh my god, I can't do this!" [Laughs] Something that big and heavy, sometimes the fabrics would be silk, sometimes they would be canvas, so they were all these different weights. Well, the more layers you got, normally you would pin things. You couldn't pin it, so I learned you could use clothespins and

butterfly clips. There were just all these things that you had to do as the piece got bigger. I have friends who I don't see very often, but they'll bring it up, "I remember walking this big piece of fabric to you sewing it." That would be, again, just whoever was around would get recruited to do that. And that was a lot of fun.

Bob would lay it out in sections. I'm looking at this photo and I don't know if it's called the front or back, but he would do this. This is not a printed fabric; this is patched pieces of fabric. Those are cut and sewn to do that. And then this fabric, he's silkscreened on. This is—I believe that was a pillowcase he wanted attached to the outside of it. In some places, there are these sort of gauzy flaps that hang over it. So we kind of built in pieces as we went along. It was laid out on a huge table in the studio there and he would come in and work on a section. This is pieced together, actually, like a quilt; those are all individual pieces, each color is a different piece of satin—

Q: At the top center, yes.

Long: —yes. And this piece is, those are appliqued black pieces on the red towards the center.

Q: What almost looks like a checker?

Long: Right. Right.

Q: Almost like a panel door or something.

Long: And then so this middle, this piece, except for about 12 inches all the way around the edge, one complete side of that was built that way, if you will. With Bob adding pieces to it and then the other side was done. Then he actually laid it out; if you look at the two pieces side by side, the edging, if you will, carries over. It wraps. It's 12 inches on this side and wraps around to that side. So you had to sew it down one side and the fabric is out here and then it had to be folded over and sewed down it again. So all these people are walking this big rolled up piece of art back and forth. That was the first time I'd used an industrial sewing machine on a job for him because it had to be big enough with the—I don't know what it's called, but the part that the fabric goes under on a normal sewing machine, that's only about maybe 6 inches high. On an industrial one it's probably 18 inches high or something like that.

Q: So there's room to just run that kind of mass of fabric through.

Long: Right. And some of the fabric could be rolled up over here, but depending on where you were sewing, you could still have a mass that needed to go under that.

Q: And all the different pieces of fabric, are you talking about different materials here?

Long: Yes.

Q: So then how—does that require any special accommodations, the fact that you're dealing with different textures, different materials, different tensile strengths—

Long: Yes. And the biggest thing with that was probably the tension on the thread. Because normally, you're sewing the same kind of fabric to the same kind of fabric and you set it for that. But if you're sewing a silk to a heavy canvas it's always changing— So that was constantly a testing and adjusting thing, to do that. Yes, so that was a challenge. But this piece, when the photo of it—and I think I saw that on one of these things here too—this is an aluminum frame that was constructed specifically so we could put this in the air. His studio wasn't high enough to see this in the studio. So we went out—this is on land behind the print shop where the presses are. We laid it out on the ground and then they attached it to these poles and tipped up the poles; in some of the photos you'll see ropes, like guide-ropes, and people holding them so Bob could see the front and back of it like it was going to show in the museum in Mexico City. So that was quite the day. [Laughs] It wasn't windy, thank goodness. [Laughs]



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

Q: And so about how long, would you say, is the preparatory—because it seems like it's requiring this really large team to do assembly.

Long: Yes. The smaller chunks of it were done without help. I could—on one side there are probably one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—there are maybe twelve chunks and they could be built just by me sewing.

Q: Piecemeal sort of.

Long: Right. Exactly. And then I could connect it into where it would be four parts or something like that. But once that whole piece was together and the edging went on it, that's when I had to have people to walk it through. Just keep that artwork coming! [Laughs]

Q: And you mentioned that you went to the opening for that?

Long: Yes I did. Yes. Yes, I went to Mexico City. My daughter was only five at the time and so that was kind of hard because she wasn't used to me not being around. But I did go and it was very exciting. At a lot of the events—it's like old home week, like a reunion or something. You see a lot of people you interfaced with on this project or that project. And so aside from seeing this artwork, which is the immediate thing you saw when you went in the museum it was hanging in—I guess it would be an atrium, but a large atrium. So that was like wow—to see it there was quite rewarding. And then also to see Bob and this was the first ROCI show that was out there so that was new and exciting.

Q: And we're in '85 here?

Long: Right.

Q: Yes.

Long: And then just to see a lot of people I knew from the past. So yes, that was a good experience.

Q: And did you say that you left Captiva in '86, is that correct?

Long: Yes.

Q: So you were still living on Captiva at this point?

Long: At this point, yes.

Q: And so you mentioned that in the years prior to this, you were doing a little bit less work for Bob, you have a kid at this point.

Long: Right.

Q: So just to contextualize this in our timeline, so we've talked about each piece that's going through '79, there's the *Spreads* and *Scales*, which goes through '83. And for you that's more sporadic involvement?

Long: Right. Right.

Q: There's the—I don't know if you want to talk about the *Mollusks* at all, if there's anything to be added in that regard. Just before we leave them behind in our timeline.

Long: Right. Just quickly to say Bob said he wanted umbrellas. Okay, well, I've made a lot of things, but I've never made an umbrella. So I had to chase down umbrella frames which, on Captiva, there's nothing like that. So I found a place in New York and ordered the frames for this. So they come, they're naked frames and then—

Q: You can buy umbrella frames? I guess so.

Long: Right. Right, probably like a place that makes high-end umbrellas or custom umbrellas or something, I don't even remember how we found them. I can't remember which one we did first. One of these is a fabric and it's lined; there are images on the outside. It is this white, sort of cream-colored fabric with a check, almost like a man's shirt fabric. But on the inside, it's lined and there are images. And then the background is a mirror. So you would see them reflected in the mirror [note: *Monarchal Mollusk (Scale)*]. The other one is sheer and so you see through it and there's the double layering of the images that are on the background; there's no mirror on

that one [note: *Musical Mollusk (Scale)*]. So I started doing tests just out of muslin or something similar, to see how you make an umbrella and I found out that Bob didn't want a regular—each triangular pattern the same—umbrella. He wanted it to be not your normal umbrella. Well, what happened with that was that it is the shape of the umbrella, the almost triangular pieces, the way they fit together, that make an umbrella curve like it does. So you end up with the sort of bowl-shaped effect.

Q: Yes and you have the equal tension—

Long: Right.

Q: —because of the equidistant spacing.

Long: Right. But when you get into these different spacings, you lose the curve on the umbrella.

Q: So he wanted the spokes at different angles as opposed to—yes.

Long: Right. He wanted a varying width between the spokes. But he still wanted the ribs to have a curve like an umbrella. And this is almost impossible.

[Laughter]

Long: So this was one of those things we'd sort of go back and forth on, trying it out to make it work. It does have—I don't know if you look from the top of the umbrella to the bottom of the fabric part, there is some depth to it; but it's not even and regular like a normal umbrella. That was a real challenge. Although those pieces are beautiful, both of them and all, but that's one I never wanted to do again.

Q: So you had to cut different sized pieces of cloth and what? So they were slightly smaller than the spokes, so the spokes would provide sufficient tension or something? How do you—because you needed something that was taut and still had the umbrella curvature.

Long: Right. Well, there are little cap-like things on the end of the spokes that you fasten to the fabric, so all of the fabric is just resting above the spokes. And so it was really a trial and error thing. It never had as much arc to it, I guess is the word, as I envisioned. But it turned out Bob was happy with them and I've had people tell me that they were some of their favorite pieces. Not me! [Laughs] But anyway, that was another thing about collaborating with him, because he couldn't describe exactly what he wanted and then when we got closer I couldn't do exactly what he wanted. But they ended up done.

Q: So as far as you recall, would you always come to some sort of good middle ground between what—or satisfactory middle ground between what he wanted, between what you said was possible or doable or what were the—so what was that give-and-take? Thinking about the end product relative to what he wanted, relative to what you said was realistic?

Long: Right. Well, I think part of his process was he would have an idea, a vision. But I don't think he had it down to the square inch. For him, part of getting there, that was the art; part of the process was the art, was that figuring out how to do it. And just the whole thing like when the dog ran across the painting, that became part of the painting. And there were times when he would—I don't think insist is the word, but he would encourage me to try something else or whatever to get to it. Then if I did that and it didn't work we would end up somewhere else. He wasn't driven to have something in an exact way from the get-go. That would be my experience with him. Now maybe on some of the other things he was, but yes, I didn't see that, because so much of what he did had never been done before. So you didn't have any guidelines to follow and he certainly didn't have. It was just something he imagined.

Q: So there are situations where your feedback and your input are impacting the final product in some way.

Long: Oh, yes. Yes.

Q: So talking—

Long: Or my limitations. [Laughs]

Q: Yes, so a part of this process is being open to conversations with you, if he's working on a project that's involving textiles and sewing.

Long: Right. Right. Yes. Definitely. Yes, there was back and forth.

Q: So we have the *Spreads* and *Scales* project, and these are the two that are the most prominent for you and thinking about your involvement with that, given so much was on—well, the *Scales* and the sculptural end of the spectrum or all this carpentry. And so then you have your child in 1980 and we have ROCI Mexico in 1985. In the early eighties are you sort of focusing your own time and work elsewhere? Because he, of course, is still working on a variety of projects, many of them not in textiles. And as you point out, often when he is working with fabrics, he's collaging them in some way there's not stitching.

Long: Yes, so I didn't do much for him after 1980. I remember he called me one time because he had been traveling somewhere and he came back with some—I believe they were some kind of priest robes and he wanted to use them in a construction. I think they might have ended up either in the retrospective in Washington, D.C. that was in '86 or '87 [note: *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991], I'd have to look and see, or they were in ROCI, one of those. So there was actually—not a cabinet, but a form built that was the outline. I don't know if they were robes or something that went over a robe; there was a front and a back and a neck hole on it, so they weren't connected down the side, like under the arm. [Note: *Altar Peace Chile / ROCI CHILE*, 1985]



Robert Rauschenberg
Altar Peace Chile / ROCI CHILE, 1985
Acrylic and fabric on aluminum construction,
with electric light
79 1/2 x 44 5/8 x 15 1/4 inches (201.9 x 113.3 x
38.7 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: It's like a vestment of some sort?

Long: Maybe, yes, it's—this isn't in my religious background so—

[Laughter]

Long: I don't know. But they were old. I'm assuming he got them vintage or something, somewhere, and so they needed repairs where some of the trimming—there was a lot of trimming on them, gold kind of trims. Not lacy stuff, but decorative stuff. So I would go and actually do mending on those. So before they got glued, or however they were attached to this construction, those things were repaired. Then I did a piece that was related to what he was doing with Graphicstudio and I can't remember if you had the name of it there, but—

Q: Right. And it also has something to do with ROCI, too, I believe. And so there is this piece, *Araucan Mastaba / ROCI CHILE* [1986], because you mentioned in our email exchanges that you worked on an envelope.



Robert Rauschenberg
Araucan Mastaba / ROCI CHILE, 1986
Hand painting and silkscreen ink on mirrored
aluminum with cast
sterling silver and lapis lazuli
20 5/8 x 22 x 22 inches (52.4 x 55.9 x 55.9 cm)
From an edition of 25, produced by
Graphicstudio, University of South Florida,
Tampa; only 12 realized

Long: Right.

Q: And at the Foundation, they dug up this exchange where apparently Bob had sent [Donald] Don Saff over at Graphicstudio this envelope and someone at Graphicstudio misplaced it. Apparently then Bob said, “Well, I can make one.”

[Laughter]

Long: Yes, the envelope that he had me make was out of—it was what I would call a manila envelope that has one of those string tags that you loop it around. But he asked me to recreate that out of pink linen, real fine linen. So that’s what I did. And then it was used in this piece; I believe it was cast in a metal or something like that.

Q: Right.

Long: I saw one years ago, but yes. So it's sort of on the top of the piece, between the bookend-like things, which is probably not what you would call it. But yes, so that was again, once more a challenge. Who would think you would ever be [laughs] making an envelope out of fabric? But anyway, he would come up with things like this all the time. I don't know if it was because the envelope was lost that then he called and said he wanted one out of fabric. But sometimes I think—and again, this just may be my ego, but Bob and I, we were close. Sometimes he was like a father figure to me. And also, I think I mentioned earlier, because I wasn't from the art world, there was a certain naiveté there. So I can remember, he'd be dressing for a party or something and in the early years he would come out and he would ask me—he would take a long time to dress. There was a lot of deliberation, because I'm sure it was sort of like creating an art piece for it. And he would come out and I would sort of roll my eyes or something, because he always had on some bizarre something or other. I can remember as time went on, one time in particular, he came out in whatever he was wearing and I said, "Yes, yes, that works," or something like that and he went back and changed because he needed somebody to shock with it, or somebody who would go, "Oh, what are you wearing?" or something like that.

Q: He wanted to jar sort of—

Long: Exactly. He wanted people to go, "Oh, I've never seen this before," that kind of thing. So anyway, what I started to say earlier was, I think that—and I would go visit from time to time,

not any length of time, but when I was down on Captiva, I would stop and say hi. So I don't know if he looked for reasons to have something for me to do, to come down like that, or if it was just part of the natural project. Why would you think of making an envelope out of fabric when you had this other one to start with? But anyway, regardless, I was always glad to be involved because it was never boring. [Laughs]

Q: And so, if he was a father figure, how so? What kind of a father figure?

Long: Father figure? Well, I think that he would encourage me to maybe stand up for myself sometimes, where I was not—that wasn't my nature at that point. And I can't remember exactly, but I can remember several times thinking, yes, that's fatherly advice. He was old enough to be my father. The age thing was right and his son Christopher [Rauschenberg], who was also a good friend of mine, he was not involved in Christopher's life for a long time until Christopher became an adult pretty much. So I don't know if he—it could just be his nature that he could be extremely kind and generous and all, and at the same time he could be hurtful. I think that's typical in somebody with greatness like that, you've got all this creativity and that kind of thing. But at the same time, sometimes his ego was so—that whole thing about controlling your life; that kind of thing was there.

Q: In terms of your time and sort of being on call, I guess?

Long: Yes, your time and he—I don't want to say he wanted you to worship him, but he just took it for granted that you were there for him.

Q: You were a part of this world.

Long: Yes. Yes. And so—but I can definitely remember him at times and I can't think of a specific instance. But where I remember thinking it—I feel like I maybe didn't hear something like that from my father—and thinking that's fatherly advice, that kind of thing. So anyway.

[Laughs]

Q: So you work with him on these ROCI projects in '85, then you move away in '86. And I think the Chilean one is '85, so that might have been after you moved away.

Long: It was around that timeframe, yes.

Q: Yes, potentially, depending on when it was. And so then you come to Tampa and so then do you continue? You mentioned you would go visit, so what then is your relationship after you move away? Are you still working on pieces or are you still in touch? Do you move in a new direction?

Long: Still in touch. When I would go back to Captiva I would still visit. But it wouldn't be that often. I can't remember, the only project I remember in Tampa was that one where I was conserving that *Jammer*, the one that had the paint cans in it.

Q: And this might be later, like some later eighties into the nineties, or something?

Long: Yes. And I honestly don't have a timeframe on that.

Q: That's fine.

Long: And I can't remember when those pieces—I think that was still when I was on Captiva, the pieces with the vestments in it was still there. But—

Q: We'll have to look up what that is.

Long: Yes. And I don't—it's been so long and I went back to college and got real jobs and stuff like that. So I don't remember any other projects that I did after that, I couldn't swear to that. But the ones that stand out are definitely the ones that we've talked about.

Q: Sure. And so then moving forward, we have the nineties, of course he ultimately passes away in 2008. I'm just curious about what, if any—you would visit him sort of periodically—what that relationship was after the time you were working for him, if that was—

Long: Yes. Well, when he had the stroke or whatever and became really ill, he didn't want company or that's what I was told. I really wanted to go visit and connect, sort of reconnect, not knowing how long he was going to be around; because he was older at that point even though his mom lived a long time. But just knowing all the things he'd been through. So when I would go visit him before that, it would be just to go and be there probably an afternoon or an evening and

just chat and all. But not fitting in anymore in the sense of—and also he wasn't—I don't want to say he wasn't as prolific, but he had—things had changed. This was before the stroke and all. He had cut back on his drinking quite a bit and he was trying not—I think he did quit smoking. I think he'd had some health scares. So where he used to drink a fifth of Jack Daniel's a day, he was having white wine then or something. So things were a little bit different.

But I would go and stay a few hours or whatever. Then after he got really ill I was told he didn't want company and then I didn't see him. So I knew from people who I stayed in touch with who worked for him kind of where things were and then I heard he had passed. It was of course a difficult time, but I also felt like Bob didn't want to be alive and not able to make art. He still was doing a lot after the stroke I know, with just one hand and stuff like that. But then as he continued to have health challenges and all, I don't think he would be happy just being nonproductive and a vegetable person or whatever. So I felt that it was okay that he passed. And I miss him.

Q: And so this is 2008 and I guess moving forward towards some sort of a retrospective, so there is this remarkable record of the time the two of you spent together in these pieces that you've worked on together—

Long: Right.

Q: —that exist and that are exhibited all over the world that you played this part in, that he had these ideas about. And so I'm curious then, what it is you see and what it is you feel now when

you look at these pieces that you were a part of. You started out, you entered this world and you don't really have much experience in this world of abstract art, that sort of thing. But now you've become a part of the biography of these pieces and how they came into being through this extraordinary connection that you had with Bob Rauschenberg. So I'm curious then, what do you think and what you feel when you look at them? Now that you look at this thing, which is this very esteemed piece of art and is worth all these millions, but you can also see your stitches. And you also sort of have this story behind it, like these late nights with your friend, with this father figure. So coming towards a bit more of a conclusion or a retrospective—that's my question.

Long: Right. Well, I'll say, anytime I'm in a museum—unless I know that they're having some specific show of Rauschenberg's, when I come across a Rauschenberg and I immediately try to look at the pieces objectively. But the minute there's one that was maybe hanging in the studio when I was there or whatever, it brings up a lot of memories. And then on some of these things I'll go, "Oh, I think I worked on that one," or, "I definitely worked on that one," that kind of thing. So there's a sense of not, I guess accomplishment, but sort of amazement. That I got to be a part of it. So I'm just glad I had that experience. I'm sorry.

Q: Oh no, of course. So then you've gone on, you've worked in other sectors, have you continued sewing in any way?

Long: Yes. Yes, I do. I don't make anything like I made for him [laughs] although sometimes my granddaughter's Halloween costumes might be on a—

Q: Well, right, that can be weird territory sometimes.

Long: —on par with that. But no, I still sew. When I was young I used to sew a lot of stuff. And now I have less—it takes time. I don't sew so many clothes for myself, hardly ever. I sew things for my granddaughter. I have some projects around the house, like I make some drapes or something like that. But it's not a huge part of my life like it was then. But it was—there are lots of good memories.

Q: Great. And so in some sense now, you were sewing these very kind of far-out, abstract pieces with Rauschenberg. So now you've kept on sewing. Things sort of like what you were sewing when you were younger? Clothes or—

Long: That I'm sewing now?

Q: Yes. Or did that thread continue all the way through? Were you doing all that stuff as you were doing this stuff?

Long: Yes, I was.

Q: Because I'm interested in that—how these skills sort of apply across this area, and how you were seeing all these new applications of color, and these strange new ways of dealing with fabric and dealing with a bolt of fabric in a totally different—still in a functional way but not maybe in the conventional sense.

Long: Right. Right. Well, I think the basics of sewing were still there. There were these challenges about what you were sewing to what and size and things like that. But the concept is still the same, about the way you join two pieces of fabric together. So yes, I can remember, living on Captiva I can remember making a bathing suit and different outfits. There's a picture of me in the print shop in one of the Rauschenberg books, and I think it's black and white, so you can't tell. But it's actually a coral-colored sheer two-piece thing and I made, plus I made the red bathing suit that I was wearing underneath. It was what I was wearing. I don't even know who took the picture, but it was just some people in the print shop.

So yes, that's just a skill. I learned it and it's been useful. And it offered me up this opportunity to meet Bob and travel and change my idea of art, period. Beforehand I knew classical art, the kind of stuff like old masters and that kind of thing. And like I said, I had bought this Charley Harper print, which I was so excited about. Like I mentioned before, I loved Bob but I probably wouldn't buy his work. I have a lot of his work that were gifts, some are prints; I have a square, a chunk from the *Yule (Spread)* [1975] piece, which was kind of—I can't remember if it was a birthday or a Christmas card or whatever from him. When my daughter was born, I think it was before she was born, he made a piece, which the top of it was paper and he printed and collaged onto that. And the bottom of it was actually a red napkin from a restaurant that he had taken. On this piece, and it hangs by—it's kind of tied together, there are some metal eyelets, like grommets. So there's a big hamburger, I want to say it's a Big Mac or something on this print [*Flirt*, 1979]. And Bob, when he gave it to me—I was a vegetarian and he said, "I know your child is going to be a meat eater." And sure enough, she is.



Robert Rauschenberg
Flirt, 1979
Silkscreen with fabric collage
31 x 22 1/4 inches (78.7 x 56.6 cm)
From an edition of 75 published by the
Institute of Contemporary Art,
Philadelphia, produced by Styria Studio

[Laughter]

Long: So anyway, of course I treasure these things. Some of them are signed to me particularly. But through Bob I met Cy Twombly, and his wife and his son and his lover, and if I had money that's whose art I would buy. But I could never, ever buy the experiences that I had with Bob. So yes. Yes, it definitely changed my whole outlook on art. I think before, I don't know that I really had opinions and now when I think I have an opinion I sort of back off and go, well, you don't know that artist's process or how they got there, or anything like that. So I don't think I'm judgmental, because of that. Maybe I don't like it, but that's okay. [Laughs] Because it's their artwork. All of that was because of my work with Bob. Yes.

Q: That's great. And I think it's great that this, I guess no pun intended, but that the same thread of aptitude or skill runs through work that you were doing for 4-H and in that context and also in

this very kind of abstract avant-garde world of cutting-edge art and that the same thing kind of runs through.

Long: Right.

Q: So on my end, I'd like to thank you so much for sitting down—

Long: Oh, you're welcome. It was a pleasure.

Q: And for sharing as you have. And before we close out, is there anything else you'd like to say? And if not, that's also fine.

Long: I don't think so.

Q: Great. And with that, we'll close off this record.

Long: All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]