

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Robert Petersen

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Robert Petersen conducted by Brent Edwards, Gina Guy, and Debbie Taylor on October 24, 2014; Edwards, Guy, and Lena Petersen on February 9, 2015; Edwards and Guy on May 20, 2015; Sara Sinclair, Christine Frohnert, and Guy on May 21, 2015; and Edwards and Guy on October 23, 2015. These interviews are 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: Robert Petersen

Location: Tivoli, New York

Interviewers: Brent Edwards (Q), Gina Guy (Q2), and  
Debbie Taylor (Q3)

Date: October 24, 2014

Q: Okay. We seem to be recording. Are you ready, are you okay?

Petersen: I hope so.

Q: We've already been talking.

Q2: For hours.

[Laughter]

Q: We have been. I am thrilled to be here. We're at Tivoli, New York and it is Friday, October 24.

Petersen: 20 North Road.

Q: 20 North Road, looking at the slightly tilted birdhouse out the window with Robert Petersen. I'm Brent Edwards and we are sharing a microphone with Gina Guy and Debbie Taylor. So thank you, first of all, for being willing to take the afternoon with us and for being here.

Petersen: Oh, you're welcome.

Q: I think there are a number of things that we can talk about, and that we've already started to talk about today, but if you'd be willing to start this way, I would like to move relatively chronologically. The first thing we wanted to try to get you to talk about was Gemini G.E.L. [Los Angeles] and the *Stoned Moon* [1969–70] collaboration; then we'll move towards New York and Florida, but it seemed like the obvious place to start would be Gemini. Is that okay?



Rauschenberg, Robert Petersen, and Ron Adams working on Rauschenberg's *Stoned Moon* series (1969–70) at Gemini, G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen

Petersen: Of course, yes.

Q2: So, I brought this as a visual aid. [*Stoned Moon: Robert Rauschenberg* by Jaklyn Babington, 2010]

Q: Well, I first wanted to ask you to tell us, and Gina told me there was a story behind this, how you got involved with Gemini. I know you had been at Cal State Long Beach [California State University, Long Beach] studying printmaking, but how did you get the job at Gemini? How did

you start working there? I know there were a few of your fellow students, three or four of you who ended up moving to the Gemini shop. How did that happen?

Petersen: Well, it happened—I kind of bugged them. [Laughs] I kept—

Q2: Persistent.

Petersen: Persisted, in my way, telling them that I would love to work there. I had been trained in college by the instructor Robert [“Bob”] Evermon, who studied at Tamarind Institute [Albuquerque, New Mexico] with Kenneth [E. “Ken”] Tyler at the time, and I was a student with him. I fell in love with lithography. I was exploring to kind of go back—Cal State at Long Beach at the time. It’s a university now. I was walking around the hallways and walked by this one door and I looked in and I saw all these numbers on a rack and I went oh, that must be the telephone connections for the college. So I continued walking around and what courses would I like to take. I was in art history, freehand drawing, different courses, and one night I was out in the parking lot, kind of at a distance behind that room, and I looked over and I saw a man going back and forth like this through the window. I was maybe 80 feet away in the parking lot and I thought oh, the janitor is—it’s like midnight—mopping the floor. So I continued on my way, but I observed the man. Then, maybe two or three days later, I walked by the room and I saw that man instructing a class. I looked in and I went, god I thought he was a janitor [laughs] and I instantly thought, if he’s in a classroom at midnight, I want to take the course. I felt, he’s not a janitor, he’s an instructor teaching and he’s there at midnight. I’m used to, when the bell rings, everyone disappears. So I said I’ll sign up for that. So I signed up for lithography and fell in love with it.

He would work until two or three in the morning and the students would make dinners on a hot plate.

So then time went on. You go through a semester and another semester and around the third semester, a few students graduated and got jobs at Gemini G.E.L., including my friends Daniel [B. “Dan”] Freeman and Timothy [“Tim”] Isham. Of course we kept in touch because Daniel still lived in Long Beach. I just felt it would be nice to go to Gemini because I was in contemporary American art history and you learn about [Roy] Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg—this is in the early seventies and they were already in the history books. Jasper Johns. And they’re working at Gemini. I went wow, maybe I could just go drive up there and see them.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Not that I would work there. So I would drive my pickup up and park in the parking lot across the street and just not bother anyone, but maybe I would see Frank Stella.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Or Roy Lichtenstein. It’s 1969, ’68–69, actually. I hope this isn’t too long, the story.

Q: No, this is great.

Petersen: Time went on and I was still enrolled in the college with Robert Evermon, and my friends Daniel Freeman and Tim Isham, who were in the class, were employed by Gemini G.E.L. So I thought it may be a possibility. I spoke with the instructor, Robert Evermon, and I said well, I'll put together a portfolio and take it up to show, to present myself. I went into Ken Tyler's office and showed it to him. He said, "Oh, beautiful prints, technically." Not aesthetically.

[Laughter]

Petersen: But well printed. Then a little time went on. He said, "Well, we can't really employ you right now because you're at the age of—" I was twenty-three maybe—because of the Vietnam War.

Q2: Oh geez.

Petersen: The draft number was up. He actually told me, he said, "I don't want to employ you because if I have you as an intern—to instruct as a printer, to work with, and you work here six months and you're gone, I don't want to—" He told me, "I don't want to really involve that time."

Q2: He didn't want to invest that—

Petersen: Invest. Yes. So I said, "Okay." But then as time went on, I went back again to bother him about—

[Laughter]

Q: You were persistent.

Petersen: Not really bother him, but just to present myself again. I think it was on maybe the second or third visit that he said, “Okay, Petersen. I’ll hire you as a carpenter because we’re building a new shop down a block or so from the old shop. I’ll hire you as a carpenter and you can work with the contractor. You’re not working with me, but you’re working with the contractor.” I said, “Okay.” At least I have my—

Q2: Getting a foot in the door.

Petersen: My foot in the door. So I’m out there and it was actually so much fun because the Gemini G.E.L. was an old hardware store, with the store there and the loading dock for lumber. My job was to tear apart the loading dock. I have a crowbar and I’m pulling up all the nails out of the wood and taking it over and making a big stack and I’m pulling all the nails out and I go— even then, I went, god, these are beautiful nails!

[Laughter]

Petersen: They’re copper! They were copper nails. I saved them. I don’t have them now, but I remember going, god, what beautiful nails! God, it goes on, but I tore up a lot of blacktop with



the wheelbarrow, pick and shovel. [Laughs] I had some kid helping me and we made a pile on the other side. I said, “Okay, since we’re going to pile all this up, let’s make it into an object.” So we made an airplane.

[Laughter]

Q: Sculpture.

Petersen: Wings with the black asphalt and the tail—kind of like an airplane set. It was kind of fun.

That time went on. Inside the building I was digging trenches for the hydraulic tubing for all the presses and the plumbing, digging everything. Plus I studied architectural drafting in high school and college. I was going to be an architectural draftsman so I knew studs, foundations. I studied it in college before I got into the printmaking. So as they were building I knew where the hydraulic lines were—I couldn’t really do a map, but I knew the plumbing went up through the studs before the drywall and everything. I thought it was kind of interesting that I knew how the place was built.

The place was near finished and they started moving the presses in and it was incredible. You’ve been in Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: 20- or 30-foot presses, wheeling in there. These guys hooking up to hydraulic and everything and then one day Ken said, “Well, would you like to grind stones?” I said, “Yeah, sure. I’ll grind stones,” because I knew how to levigate limestone with a carborundum or whatever. Time went on and I was hired by him.

Q2: Well, you did your apprenticeship.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Right. Yes.

Q2: The hard way. Dishwasher.

Q: Busboy.

Petersen: Yes, you work on the bottom rung, going up.

Q2: You weren’t drafted, thank god.

Petersen: Yes, that’s a whole book. That’s a real book.

Q: Do you remember how long that period actually lasted? You were there by the summer of '69?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: So how long was that building, grinding stones apprenticeship?

Petersen: Well let's see, not very long. Then they announced that Rauschenberg was coming for a project. I can't recall the month, but I would say October. [Note: Rauschenberg arrived at Gemini for the *Stoned Moon* project on August 23, 1969 and worked through mid-October.] Ken Tyler took us into the front gallery, which was brand new, and had a talk. He said, "Our first artist is Robert Rauschenberg and he's going to arrive—" I can't remember the date, but in two to three weeks. "So we have to get the shop all ready, stones ground, presses ready, everything."

I knew about Rauschenberg from my history books. I kind of liked Robert Rauschenberg, Stella. I took twentieth-century art history in college and I remembered the name. He said, "Rauschenberg is going to be here next Tuesday and he's going to start work and he looks like he's forty —" no, wait, "thirty-two, say, but he's actually forty-four."

[Laughter]

Petersen: In a way Ken said that and I thought oh how great.

He arrived and—oh, actually I had seen him before. I'd have to go back. I would go to retreat in college in '69. Daniel Freeman asked me, "Oh, would you like to go to an opening in Hollywood? On La Cienega [Boulevard] at the Ace Gallery [Los Angeles]? They're having an opening of Robert Rauschenberg's *Carnal Clocks* [1969]." [Note: *Robert Rauschenberg: Carnal Clocks* opened April 24, 1969] I said of course I'd like to go. Nice. Daniel Freeman, a wonderful man. So we went up in this little VW bug. We got there and it was a beautiful show. The *Carnal Clocks*—have you ever seen a *Carnal Clock*?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Acorn (Carnal Clock)*, 1969  
 Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on Plexiglas  
 in metal frame, with concealed electric lights and  
 clock movement  
 67 x 60 x 18 inches (170.2 x 152.4 x 45.7 cm)  
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: I've seen reproductions.

Petersen: Yes, oh god. They were on both sides of the gallery. I walked by and I went, god, they were beautiful. Turtles, fire hydrants, breasts, and whatever.

Q3: Dicks, pussies.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes, dicks and pussies. I didn't recognize the pussies yet.

[Laughter]

Petersen: In a way.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So it was a great meal. I was studying art history and I thought to myself well, the artist is here. Maybe I'll just say hi. I was kind of nervous and I walked back into the side room there and I went, "Oh hi Mr. Rauschenberg. Beautiful show." I remember he was so smashed. He came out all—he was very polite, but I went, god, what an alcoholic!

[Laughter]

Petersen: I didn't think alcoholic, but he was having a good time. It was his opening, but he was out there. He just said, "Aw, thanks." So I turned and left and went on back home with Daniel Freeman.

Q2: At the show, did they have the clocks set to actual time or did they have them set to different times so that you could see?

Petersen: I think they were actually set. I don't really know.

Then we stayed a little late and then later they closed the gallery because they got a call. The police came over, closed it, censored.

Q2: Oh, why?

Petersen: Because of the cocks and breasts.

[Laughter]

Petersen: The show was closed down.

Q: They shut down the show?

Petersen: Yes, they shut it down. It wasn't seen again.

Q: Wow.

Q2: So it didn't reopen? It wasn't just for a day? They shut it down?

Petersen: Oh, they shut it down. I don't know—I don't think it would be reopened, no, because of the obscenity.

Q2: Wow.

Q: So you had some prior experience with the artist.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: But at Gemini this was going to be your first experience. Can I ask—because I haven't seen the space and I'm not that familiar with it—how many people were on staff there with you? How many people worked at Gemini?

Petersen: Oh, let's see. I would say thirteen, just thinking of a number. That's including the janitor.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Who was a great guy. Let's see, Daniel—

Q2: Was [James L.] Jim Webb there when you started?

Petersen: Not then, no. He was there before, but he came in later after I left, kind of back and forth. Jim Webb is incredible. He printed a bunch of Johns's *Numerals Series* [*Black* in 1968 and *Color* in 1969], he and [Charles "Chuck"] Charlie Ritt.

Q: How big was the working space there? I think it's in the Tyler oral history ["Interview with Kenneth Tyler, Master Printer," Interviews with Rauschenberg Collaborators and Friends, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives], where he says at one point we thought about inviting two artists to work at the same time, but we didn't have enough space. People were on top of each other. We can only have one person coming in.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Is this the main working space or are there multiple rooms? Can you give me a—

Petersen: Well at the time, there was only one for *Stoned Moon*. But then later, in the seventies, they expanded to a building next door.

Q: Your new boss says, "Our first artist is going to be Rauschenberg." You'd seen the show the year before, I guess it would have been.

Petersen: Yes.



Q: Did Tyler set you up—in terms of did he say this is the idea, he has a plan to do this, he's going to come with photos, with documents, this is how it's going to work? Or was it just cold, he's going to walk through the door?

Petersen: Oh, to me, it was cold.

Q: There wasn't a plan, there wasn't—

Petersen: That's between him and the artists. One of the things Tyler said is okay, Rauschenberg is coming. You say hi and that's about it. When he's working, you don't say anything—in a way you don't—

Q3: Don't interrupt his thoughts.

Petersen: Yes, you don't say cool or oh wow. You can say, "Hello, I'm Robert Petersen," and that's about it. But I understood that.

Bob was there working in the studio, which was about the size of this room actually, maybe a little more, and I was printing. I walked by one day without Tyler's instruction and I noticed the ashtray was overflowing. So I walked in, took the ashtray, took it to the trash and cleaned it and came back with a cloth and wiped the table and reset the flowers, and didn't say anything. Bob was actually there working—or maybe he wasn't? He must have been because he told me later, he said, "That was so nice of you to come in. No one's ever cleaned the table and picked up the

ashtray and emptied it. Would you like a drink or—” I don’t think I said that because I didn’t know about alcohol then.



Rauschenberg working on *Horn (Stoned Moon)* (1969), Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Malcolm Lubliner

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway, Bob mentioned that—

Q3: That’s when he noticed you.

Petersen: He mentioned that as a first memory, “It was so nice of you to come in and clean the table.”

Q: Can you describe the working process? We know that NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] gave him the material, the photos, really an archive that he used in

producing it. Can you describe the process of putting it together? Especially just a sense of the working days? My understanding is that this was extremely labor intensive and there were issues around the scale of what you were doing that were challenging—I don't know if it's right to describe them as unprecedented.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: But it sounds like there were difficulties that were a little bit out of the ordinary, if not quite out of the ordinary. Can you describe what going on there? For a day's work with Rauschenberg, what would the process have been?

Petersen: Well, I just observed. I followed Tyler's instruction. I wasn't involved with the scale, the print could have been 40 feet long.

Q: You were just one of the multiple people around the table—

Petersen: Yes, I'm just a printer.

Q: —rolling, pressing, whatever.

Petersen: Tyler said—I'm looking at this image, which is beautiful. I don't remember that photo.

Q: Aren't there a few photos here?

Petersen: Oh god, that's a beautiful photo. Malcolm Lubliner. Wow. That's neat.



Rauschenberg and Gemini printers, including Robert Petersen, moving the lithography stone for *Waves (Stoned Moon)* (1969), Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Malcolm Lubliner

[Laughter]

Q3: Pete, I have to ask you, the Bob I know would have engaged with, I would think, someone like you, others that he felt soulfulness in or that he was attracted to. I know Bob worked very hard and very focused—

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: —but I also can't imagine him only working directly with Ken Tyler—

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: —because he was the master printer. He needed to.

Petersen: Right.

Q3: But I can't imagine he wouldn't have engaged with the others who were helping Ken Tyler and Bob do the thing. Did he not have conversations on the side with you? Or would that not have happened during the printing and work on the press with Ken?

Petersen: Actually, nothing to me. He would just say, "There's a stone ready. Would you like to print it?"

Q3: So he was very professional.

Petersen: Yes. The stone is there, it's done, it's strong. He has etched it, I get it prepared for printing, and ink it up and print it. That was my—

Q3: So actually what you had when you were first with him, to me it sounds like you truly got to experience a great artist at work in terms of his process working and his focus.

Petersen: Right. Yes.

Q3: You learned that before you actually knew him.

Petersen: Oh of course.

Q3: The rest of him, as—

Petersen: Without any interruption. I never said anything, from the original Ken Tyler—

Q3: Instructions.

Petersen: You don't pick up a stone and go, "Oh, how beautiful."

[Laughter]

Petersen: You just don't say anything. You're the printer. You print it.

Q: Did he mention anything—because this is such a timely and topical piece, and arises out of him actually seeing the liftoff, did he talk about that experience? You all must have been very aware of the space program and had some sense of it as a big historical event—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: That didn't percolate at all? It didn't come out in even incidental conversation?

Petersen: Not with myself actually, because I was just—see? I'm working.

[Laughter]

Q: You were waiting for instructions.

Petersen: Right. It's interesting to go back. I don't recall Bob saying—he would talk about the puppies. His dog had puppies so he had to go back to Florida and take care of them. That's about the only thing. He didn't actually mention much to me. We weren't that close then. I was just a printer in a way.

Q: This is asking you to go back a long way, the first step in a long working history too, but if you remember—because this was such an intensive work period, it was about a month straight—the chronology says that it was thirty-three working days straight.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: The great artist is in town for a limited amount of time and there's a very intensive work period—

Petersen: Right.

Q: Do you remember the day-to-day, week-to-week sort of arc of that? Because this is a series—would he say I want to do this one first, and by the time we get to day five, I want to be doing the one with the rocket ship? By the time we get to day ten—

Petersen: No. He never said anything.

Q: He didn't say that?

Petersen: No. No, that's—the printer—Ken Tyler does that. Bob does the image and then the stone is brought to the press. Bob didn't ever talk to the printers about, "Do this." The boss did that. Ken Tyler did that.

Q2: Is that typical or was that just the way Ken Tyler ran the house?

Petersen: Um—

Q2: Did the artists ever interact directly with the printers, other than with the master printer?

Petersen: No. Bob Rauschenberg came over to me once. I was printing one of his stones. He was very quiet, standing at the press, and he said, "Oh, beautiful. Good job." And he left.

[Laughter]

Petersen: And gave me a wink, of course.

Q3: I bet he did.



Petersen: Flirter.

Q: Did he ask you technical questions about it?

Petersen: No.

Q: Because he had done work there and—

Petersen: No, never. Well maybe at Untitled Press [Inc., Captiva, Florida], because I was the only printer there.

Q2: Right.

Petersen: This is in Florida.

Q3: It would have been with Ken Tyler. It's like you were saying, he was the master printer so—

Q: One other thing that seems to have been unusual about this series is that there were photosensitized stones, right?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Was that new? I think Tyler actually says it wasn't new in his interview. Was it your sense that this was a very unusual technique?

Petersen: Oh, it was new to me. I had never done it and actually I didn't do it. The other printers collaborated with Ken to do that. The names—I should—I'm embarrassed—I can't remember his name.

Q: Was he another printer?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: One of the ones in the picture?

Petersen: Charlie Ritt and Daniel Freeman—

Q2: Was James Reid there then?

Petersen: The name has left me. A wonderful man. I can't think of it right now. Oh wow. Where'd that come from? That's my photograph.

Q: That's from your book. This is a copy of your book [*Stories from Solar Winds: Recent Work by Robert Petersen, 2013*].

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Another thing I think Gina had wanted to ask about was the experience of working with broken stones—stones that break during the process.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: How often does that happen? What was Rauschenberg's attitude toward that happening? I don't have a sense of how usual that is in lithography, but I know that Rauschenberg had interesting reactions to these accidents.

Petersen: It's very rare. What'd you say?

Q: It's a rare occurrence?

Petersen: Yes, very. I think in my many twenty-some years or more—before I knew Bob a stone broke at ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York] and it's called actually "Break," I think.

Q2: That's *Accident* [1963].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Accident*, 1963  
Lithograph  
41 1/4 x 29 1/2 inches (104.8 x 74.9 cm)  
From an edition of 29, published by Universal  
Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Petersen: *Accident*? Yes, the stone, they put it back together. But at Gemini I was quite amazed. A stone did break under the press and Ken Tyler was in his office and none of the printers heard it. The door was closed and he ran out of the office and said, “Where’s that stone?” He heard the high-pitched bang. I’ll never forget that and Bob was quite amazed that he heard that too. Ken ran out of the—and there was a crack. I don’t know what happened to that stone.

Q2: Was that on Bob’s project or was that somebody else’s project?

Petersen: Oh gosh. I can’t recall that really. I don’t believe it was one of Bob’s *Stoned Moon* stones.

Q: Is it much harder to print if a stone is broken? It makes it much harder to print the image?

Petersen: Well Bob would save it—you put a simple band across it, screw it back together.

Q: You sort of brace it.

Petersen: Like a tension, like a band, as I recall; put it together and keep printing. It's very unusual for a stone to break. That's why grinding, graining, the limestone is so important because you're always checking it for level with the level bar, with a tissue back and forth this way, that way. I've ground stones for hours to get them level because if they're high in the middle, then you grind in the middle. Get it lower.

Q2: How do you grind them and what do you grind them with?

Petersen: A metal levigator. A 3-inch thick circular levigator with a handle and carborundum. You start with, oh what are the numbers now. I haven't done it for a while. Eighty grit, which is coarser, then down to 120, then you finish with 220, sometimes 240, if you want it real smooth.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Which I used to do. Because grinding, to me—if you have never done it—it's such a—you're alone and it's going whow, whow.

Q3: Like a Zen—

Petersen: And it's water and the grinding and it's stone, whow, whow, whow, into it.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because the handle is up here. It's circular, but the handle is on one side of the circle so as you rotate it, it's hard to get—you use water, of course, with the carborundum and then it gets going and it's an amazing process. When a stone is finished, to actually draw on it, there's, I find, such a wonderful surface. Just to put that wax crayon onto, or pencil, or wash, tusche, or whatever, onto the stone, it's amazing.

One time, to kind of go ahead a little bit—I was doing not really a litho stone, but I was working on a piece of paper in Florida and Bob saw it and he said—I didn't show it to him—he saw it and said, “Let the paper alone!” He said it's like a stone. Let it breathe. Let the paper and stone, let it—he never gave many—what do you call it—

Q2: Directives?

Q: Instructions?

Q3: Art tips.

Q: Hints?

Petersen: Tips. Tips, right. But I'll never forget that. He said, "God, you covered up the paper!" Then he mentioned the stones. You let part of the stone come through. That's his way, which I find very beautiful.

Q: My understanding is that he made a present for the staff members at Gemini after this piece. What's it called? *Local Means*?

Petersen: Yes, *Local Means* [(*Stoned Moon*), 1970].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Local Means (Stoned Moon)*, 1970  
Lithograph  
32 3/8 x 43 5/16 inches (82.2 x 110 cm)  
From an edition of 11, published by  
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: Do you remember how that came about and what your reaction to it was—or the group's reaction?

Petersen: Well, after the project we had a wonderful party at Ken Tyler's house with his wife and child, a wonderful party. Bob, during the party, announced, "I have a gift for you," and all the printers were there sitting around. Tyler got us into a room and he said, "Bob has an announcement." Bob said, "Well, I thank you so much for a wonderful project," and probably

other words. I can't remember [laughs], you know the way Bob talks, but he said, "Here's a print, detail from *Sky Garden* [*Stoned Moon*], 1969," and he said, "This is a very limited edition. It's not included with the suite. There's eleven of them and you have the only ones."

Q3: Wow.

Petersen: He said, "And someday a museum is going to wonder where—" That's the way I can remember him talking. I don't know if he said exactly that, but he said, "This is outside of the edition. It's not included in the suite. So, for you, sell it when you need the money."

[Laughter]

Petersen: In a way, not "money" money, but just sweetly. It's for you. If you want to—it's for you. It's outside of the suite. I don't think he said more valuable. He didn't consider value valuable. Bob, you know? He didn't mention that. It was a beautiful print, *Local Means*. I sold mine when Lena [Petersen] was born, to Leo Castelli.

Q2: You held on to it for quite a while.

Petersen: Yes. For twenty thousand dollars. I was at the Odeon [New York] in '89 with [Pat Marie] Patti Caporaso.

Q3: Who worked at Castelli Graphics [New York].



Petersen: She was with the band guys of 54, right? What are they called? The 54— The singers.

The group.

Q: The B-52's.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So Cinda [Sparling] and I—I was taking her out for her birthday or something. I love the Odeon. She said, “Bob, come here. Cinda. I want to introduce you to the B-52's.” So I got an autograph and whatever, but Patti looked over to me and she said, “Oh Bob, you have *Local Means*? I have a client who will give you sixty-seven-thousand dollars cash for it.” I went, “Oh. Really?” But Cinda didn't hear this. So we got home to the loft and I said, “Cinda, Patti just said we could sell *Local Means* for sixty-seven-thousand dollars cash,” and Cinda said, “Hold on to it.” Anyway, but then after —'91 was the kind of—whatever.

Q3: I don't believe Patti Caporaso anyway.

Q2: I don't either.

Petersen: What?

Q3: I don't believe Patti Caporaso anyway. I don't think you could have got that—not meaning it wasn't worth that.

Q2: No.

Petersen: Oh really?

Q3: But she was probably trying to get you. She was a bit of a shark, I'd say, so she was probably trying to get you to release it and it would have come down by the time the sale happened.

Petersen: Oh, I see.

Q3: Don't feel bad about it, is all I can say.

Q2: I was just going to ask about the drawings for the *Stoned Moon*—Bob did drawings for a *Stoned Moon Book* [1970] that Gemini was supposed to do that never ended up happening.

Petersen: Right.

Q2: Were you familiar with those drawings at all or the circumstances about why it didn't happen?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Stoned Moon Drawing*, 1969  
Collage and crayon on illustration board  
19 7/8 x 28 3/4 inches (50.5 x 73 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes, I'm familiar with it. I don't know why it didn't happen. Bob was a little disappointed that it didn't happen, kind of vaguely. Actually, I think I took some of the photos that are included. I'd have to see it again. What's the date of that? If it's '70—

Q2: All of those were from 1970. It was apparently done in one day, is my understanding.

Petersen: Oh no. It took longer than one day.

Q2: The drawings for the book.

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: In Ken Tyler's interview, he said that he did it all in one day, but he also didn't recall precisely why it didn't happen.

Petersen: That was with [Edward A.] Gus Foster, I believe. I'm guessing at the name.

Q2: Henry [T.] Hopkins.

Petersen: Hopkins.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Oh, Hopkins. Hopkins. San Francisco.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Right. Yes. Wonderful man. I don't know why it didn't get off the ground really.

Q3: Backing, probably. Had to be, right?

Q2: I don't know. It was these beautiful drawings, a suite of twenty.

Petersen: Does the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation have the originals?

Q2: Yes. They only exist as originals. They were never made into prints. The drawings for the book.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: But it would have been something he would have, not made at the time, but come back the next year to do?

Q2: It was 1970 so it was right around the same time that—

Petersen: Yes, it was during the project.

Q: It was during that month-long period when he was there working on some—

Petersen: Well, he went back to Florida, came back again.

Q: Right, that's what I mean.

Q3: Because then they probably printed and he was proofing, right?

Q2: Yes. So it must have been one of the times he was back.

Q: Must have been. Do you have more *Stoned Moon* questions or should we keep moving forward?

This is a broader working conditions question. Did he have radio or TV on while he was working in the studio? Do you remember just the conditions in that sense?

Petersen: Not at Gemini.

Q: No, not at Gemini?

Petersen: No, not at Gemini.

Q: So later when you would get to Untitled, maybe that—

Petersen: Oh, in his own studio he always had TV on, radio, whatever, but not at Gemini because it was Gemini.

Q3: I have a question, which I'm very curious to know.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: Did Ken Tyler make the shop and his crew available? Would Bob work through the night or was it really on a, we break at seven—

Petersen: Oh, we never broke. Never a time.

Q3: And would Bob work during the night?

Petersen: Until he finished. Then you'd leave. It could be sunrise.

Q2: That's what I recall reading of Ken Tyler, he said you couldn't believe Bob's stamina and that everyone else was sort of exhausted and Bob would keep going and going.

Petersen: Yes. Well, the printers, as I recall, we kept up with it. No one complained or hesitated. I mean, it's Bob Rauschenberg. And it's beautiful work.

Q3: Yes, I would think it would have been exciting to work.

Petersen: The energy there, the adrenaline, kept you—

Q2: Was that typical—not just working with Bob, was that typical of working there? That energy level and that you'd work those hours? Or was Bob an exception?

Petersen: No actually, I wasn't there with, maybe Roy Lichtenstein for a brief time, but yes, that energy never left. No one ever complained.

Q3: But other artists, did they have the same stamina and energy that their focus was so intense?

Petersen: Actually, I only worked with Bob at Gemini.

Q3: Oh, you did.

Petersen: Roy Lichtenstein and Frank Stella, I printed the prints or the sponge.

Q3: But did not work directly with them.

Petersen: Not directly, no. I was kind of afraid of Jasper.

Q3: Join the club.

Petersen: Well, when I met Bob, oh, Jasper Johns. That's another story.

Q2: So you worked at Gemini on Bob's project. Was it the first project that you worked or had you worked on other projects?

Petersen: I had done Stella and—Lichtenstein was the first, but he wasn't there. I just actually was a sponger not a printer. Sponging is keeping the stone wet.

Q: So that would have been that summer? Those two would have been the end of the summer and then Rauschenberg came—the Foundation's chronology says it's in September.

Petersen: Yes, because September, October, November, and December, Bob invited me to Florida for Christmas. Would you like to come to Florida for Christmas and I said—



Q3: He had a litho stone he would like you to sponge.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes, I need a little sponging.

Q2: So did he stay out there because of the fire?

Petersen: Oh right! Yes. Yes. They called—no, that was after. Actually that was—

Q: That was in October.

Petersen: That was after December. Then we came back.

Q2: The fire was in October of '69. I think it was the twenty-fifth [note: At Rauschenberg's New York home and studio, 381 Lafayette Street].

Petersen: Oh really? Was it October?

Q2: Yes.

Q: So it would have been soon after *Stoned Moon*. My understanding is that he—as you said—needed to go to Captiva for the dogs and then the fire happened the next month. Isn't that the chronology?

Q2: Yes, I think so because actually, in the *Stoned Moon*—I wish I had the captions for the *Stoned Moon* book—there's something about the dog having puppies. It's written in the *Stoned Moon* book.

Petersen: I think I took those photos of the puppies. That's in Malibu.

Q3: Was it Laika who had the puppies?

Petersen: God, that's in Malibu.

Q3: Is that when Cloud was born?

Q: Did you go to Florida with him when he left? When *Stoned Moon* was opened?

Petersen: No, I didn't go with him.

Q: You didn't go right away?

Petersen: No, no. In December of '69 I went to Florida. Bob got me a first class ticket. I'd never been on a jet plane. It was so exciting. A real napkin? Real silverware?

Q3: First class.

Petersen: First class. You don't see that anymore.

Q3: Even in first class.

Q: My sense of the chronology was that because of the fire in late October, Rauschenberg relocated to Malibu and you started working with him that fall on what would become the *Currents* [1970] project and then you went for Christmas to Florida. Am I recounting the chronology correctly? [Note: The concept for *Currents* was developed in fall 1969, but work did not begin until 1970.]

Q2: Yes.

Q: That's my sense of the chronology.

Petersen: Oh.

Q: The chronology could be wrong, I suppose.

Petersen: Maybe he knew about the fire before so he decided to go to Florida then back to California, right?

Q2: Well, the fire was in October and my understanding is that Brice [Marden] called and said don't come back to 381.

Petersen: Right, in October.

Q2: Yes and the house was rented in Malibu.

Petersen: Oh right. But we didn't live in—well we lived in Malibu, but at a Las Tunas [State Beach] hotel. Motel, hotel.

Q2: Oh, that's right because the house was actually rented in January in Malibu.

Petersen: Yes, the house is later. We stayed in Las Tunas. Oh Las Tunas was incredible. Bob said, "Okay, we're in Las Tunas motel. I want to show you something." So we went upstairs, down the hallway, and there was a door and it was open, and he said, "Look at that." I went, "Wow." He said, "That's Claes Oldenburg's tiger room." Do you know the image of Claes Oldenburg where he did the tiger room with the lamps and the spread? [*Bedroom Ensemble*, 1963]



Claes Oldenburg  
*Bedroom Ensemble*, 1963  
Wood, vinyl, metal, artificial fur, cloth,  
and paper  
Installation space: 3 x 6.5 x 5.25 m  
National Gallery of Canada  
Purchased 1974

Q3: But did he do it in the Las Tunas—

Petersen: No, he copied that. He copied it.

Q3: I love it. I love it.

Petersen: We have to Google it or whatever you call it. I was so amazed. I said, “Oh thanks, Bob.” And Bob was thrilled too. He said, “Oh look. There’s Claes’s inspiration!” In the Las Tunas motel in Malibu.

Q3: And he probably had stayed there working at Gemini.

Q: He had just walked by another room in the motel that reminded him?

Petersen: Yes, it was on the second floor. We were actually on the second floor, ocean view. And that's where Bob made *Earth Day* [22 April, 1970]. We made it together on the bed, cutting out images. Bob would work on the bed with a piece of plywood or cardboard or whatever.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Earth Day 22 April, 1970*  
Photo collage, photo acetate, kraft paper on illustration board  
40 x 29 7/8 inches (101.6 x 75.9 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q3: Nothing would stop him from working.

Petersen: He was amazing. We'd have a nice dinner, of course.

Q: In the house or in the hotel—the motel?

Petersen: That's Malibu.

Q: That's the house or the motel?

Petersen: That's the house.

Q: So that's not— We're going to have to do some research on the Oldenburg tiger room.

Petersen: Bob showed me through the door, oh there's the tiger room. Oh god, what is this? Yes, that's it, pretty much. It's bigger than the room at the Las Tunas.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes, they called it the tiger room—or I don't know if they did. Is it called “Tiger Room”?

Q2: No. That just says *Bedroom Ensemble*.

Petersen: Yes, it had the lamps and Bob said, “Look, this is Claes's inspiration for the tiger room.” Amazing.

Q: Well, I guess we just unearthed a part of your memory here, so this may be a lot to ask, but do you remember starting to work on *Currents* and the cutting and pasting collage work on the bed, what that process was? There are a lot of newspapers. Were you buying newspapers every day?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Study for Currents #26*, 1970  
Cut-and-torn newspaper, solvent transfer,  
and gouache on illustration board  
30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes, we would go out—

Q: My understanding of that, I think it's from this book, is that you were doing the cutting and he was doing the pasting? Do you remember what the division of labor was?

Petersen: Oh, we would collect—we both did. I didn't do much cutting actually. I would cut the mat board for the area with the X-Acto knife and we would go out in the morning and get the newspapers. It was quite a wonderful experience. I think about it as time goes on. We would just go to a local grocery or wherever and buy a few newspapers. Then I believe Bob decided—I think it was through Gemini, but he would need a *Chicago Tribune* or *New York Times*, which we could get locally. I can't remember how that came about, but it seemed like there were a lot of newspapers around.

Q2: You don't recall how the project—did someone ask, suggest something to him? Was it just his idea?



Petersen: Material available. Like the—

Q2: Did he ever talk about the idea behind it or he just worked?

Petersen: He just worked. Yes. Bob was amazing in that way. He didn't direct anything. He wouldn't tell me to do anything. It's amazing to think about now because it just evolved in some way. He never directed me as to what to do.

Q2: So your working process—

Petersen: It's quite amazing to think about now. He wouldn't say, "Petersen, do a 30-by-40 rag board cutout." He never directed anything.

Q2: So how did you—

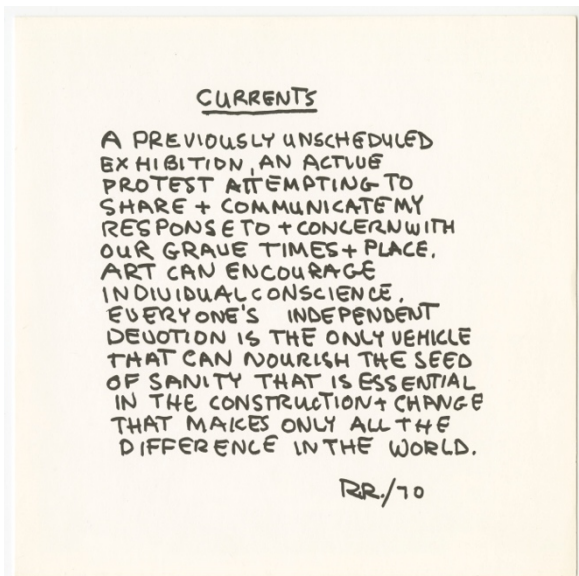
Petersen: I'm trying to figure out how it happened.

[Laughter]

Q: You would be together, buy newspapers, he'd bring them back and start cutting?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: In some of the interviews that are in the Foundation website, he describes the series as, “an active protest attempting to share and communicate my response to and concern with our grave times and place. Art can encourage individual conscience.” So that implies that there’s a very clear political responsibility in responding to current events and the news.



Rauschenberg’s statement on *Currents* (1970), exhibition announcement, Castelli Graphics and Automation House, New York, June 1970. Robert Rauschenberg papers. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Petersen: I lost my breath there. Oh god, what a genius, this guy. I’m getting emotional.

Q: Well, it’s almost—it’s powerful in a different way, that he wouldn’t—

Petersen: I was there, you know? He didn’t say anything. He didn’t say anything. He just did his work. Anyway. He never really described—he didn’t say let’s do this, let’s do that. There was—I don’t know. In Malibu we didn’t have a TV, I don’t believe. That was with *Currents*. We didn’t have a TV, only the newspapers. And the puppies. The puppies kept us busy.

[Laughter]

Q: And so you were, even if not directed, a full participant. If you cut a board, he would do the collage on the scale that you had cut the back to.

Petersen: Yes, right.

Q: He didn't tell you to do it a certain size.

Petersen: I just would cut the board. I don't recall any—well maybe there was a good—cut the board 30-by-30—but I don't recall that measurement. I just cut them. Because we worked in such a casual, free-form way. It's not like there was a time to be done.

Q2: Were you working on multiple drawings at the same time?

Petersen: Oh yes. I made tables with sawhorses and a beautiful house he rented in Malibu. I have photographs. I don't know if I took photographs of the whole living room. The house belonged to a famous child actor. Bob used to laugh because he left his sneakers at the front door. You know what they're like. He would come in and he would say, "Oh, there's—" I can't remember the name. Excuse me. A very famous child actor.

Q: TV actor?

Petersen: Movie, in the thirties—maybe forties. Late forties? I don't know.

Q2: It's funny, I actually found the file at the Foundation on the rental of the house and the security—

Petersen: Oh really? A file on the rental?

Q2: It was basically just—

Petersen: Who's it from? It must have the name.

Q2: Well it was rented through Gemini, so it didn't say that, but it was about why the security deposit wasn't going to be returned.

Q: The puppies?

Q2: Because of the puppies. It was because of the puppies, about having to clean the—

Petersen: But it doesn't say who the owner original—

Q2: It did not say. It was just from the agency that it was rented from.

Petersen: Oh, interesting. Wow.

Q2: So if he had all the sawhorses and was working simultaneously on the drawings, did he just take newspapers and go around from one to the other? How did he work on multiple things at once?

Petersen: Oh yes. He just put the newspapers around and actually I showed him a technique, where you paint a light acrylic matte medium on a paper and when it's not quite dry, you take the newspaper and rub it down, and peel it up, and it leaves an impression. He liked that. He used it. It's something I learned in education. Ha! Oh god, I took that photo. Oh, there's our truck. This is the truck we used to use to get the *Times*. This is in Malibu. Yes. Malibu, California.



Ford pick-up used by Robert Petersen and Rauschenberg to collect newspapers for *Currents* (1970), Malibu, California, 1970. Photo: Robert Petersen

Q2: Whose truck? Was it your truck or was it his truck?

Petersen: My truck, yes.

Q: You were taking a lot of photos very early, is that right?

Petersen: Oh, I took photos quite a bit, yes.

Q: Why were you photographing so much?

Petersen: I don't know. I just—to kill time. Something to do. No, I didn't take photographs for— well, I admired the truck so— A '47 Ford, ton and a half.

Q: Must be documented.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Bob gave me a photograph of this truck, oh, from Gemini, and he took a photo of this turn signal. I have it in the archive. Just a turn signal and left it in my printer's box at Gemini. In the old days of Polaroids.

Q3: I was curious, when Bob arrived—because I did not know him at that point, although I can't believe I finally did cross your path because I was still—

Petersen: What's that?

Q3: I probably did cross your path because I was in California at that time, and knew Stanley [Grinstein] and Sidney [B. "Sid" Felsen].

Petersen: '69?

Q3: Oh yes. That's exactly when I started getting into the art scene in California—

Petersen: Oh wow.

Q3: —and knew Stanley and Sidney. I never knew Ken Tyler. But anyway, what I'm curious about, when I did know Bob after moving to New York, whenever he did travel—

Petersen: And did—excuse me. How did you go to New York?

[Laughter]

Q3: Well, I told them that story in—

Q: It's a long story.

Petersen: Is it?

Q3: It was a weird job trying to escape [Michael] Mike Balog. But through Balog is how I met—

Petersen: From California?

Q3: Yes. That's how I met Stanley and Sidney. But what I'm curious about—because when I did get to know Bob, he usually traveled—

Petersen: I was wondering, I don't remember how Debbie got to 381.

Q3: Janet Webb.

Petersen: Oh, Janet Webb. Oh, that's it.

Q3: Yes, she invited me over to have dinner one night. But Bob always traveled—I don't ever remember him traveling alone from the point that I met him. When he came to Gemini to work, did he come alone? Was he on his own when you first met him?

Petersen: Oh yes. He was—yes, he traveled alone as far as I know.

Q: Maybe we can go back to that Christmas, to the December? We can follow *Currents* to Malibu and the working process.

Petersen: Right. Oh gosh.

Q: In the meantime you went to Florida for I guess the first time when he invited you—was it for Christmas? Over the holidays?



Petersen: Yes, Christmas 1969.

Q: And that was when he sent you the plane ticket or did you fly together?

Petersen: Oh, Gemini did it. Gemini gave it to me. “Here, this is from Bob.”

Q3: But it was from Bob.

Petersen: Call TWA.

Q: And what were your first impressions of the place in Florida?

Petersen: Oh, it was very overwhelming. I’d never been south. Flying on the plane from L.A. International Airport, I had my ticket. I’d never been on a jet plane. So I go up and first class. Oh wow. First class and that thrill of taking off and looking out the window. It just overwhelmed me. Nice lunch, dinner, whatever, and I asked the stewardess, “My god, what beautiful silverware. Can I have a set?” She said, “Of course you can have it.” I didn’t want to steal it, but I said god what a—I don’t know. I just liked it. So I put it in my little bag there. Then the plane went to Tampa, Florida. The plane kind of slowed down, coming in, and I looked down at the airport and I went, “Oh wow.” The plane landed and I took the stairway down and went into the airport and I went, “Oh god, where’s Humphrey Bogart?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because there were fans everywhere, low ceiling, it's mission style.

Q3: Wow.

Petersen: I went god, Edward G. is here! This is Florida! No, really. I really felt they were there because—what's that Florida, Edward G. Robinson movie? The fans are going. I went god, Florida. Because I'd seen that movie. Anyway.

So it was a transfer from a jet because the jets didn't go into Fort Myers yet in '69. So I got on the—what do you call them, B-10s? With the two—a real Humphrey Bogart plane.

[Laughter]

Q3: *Key Largo* [1948]. Was that the movie?

Petersen: It was winding up and I was so happy. God, I'm in a movie! Props going around, I walk up to the plane, go up the ramp to a two-seater sitting there. Go to Fort Myers and Bob met me. What was the question?

Q: What you just said. I was just asking for that first experience and what your first impressions of the island were.

Petersen: Yes, the Tampa airport and then obviously it's gone of course. But actually I found a postcard—I collect old postcards—and it says, "Florida International Airport, Tampa, Florida," and it's the old mission—

Q3: Architecture?

Petersen: Now it's five miles square.

Q3: So was it daytime when you landed? Did Bob drive you in the daytime to Captiva?

Petersen: It was daytime. Yes, it was.

Q2: Did Bob pick you up or did someone—

Q3: He said Bob met him.

Petersen: Yes, Bob picked me up.

Q: And who else was there that first time? Was anybody else staying there?

Petersen: No, just Bob.

Q3: Did you feel like you were being driven into the wild jungle when he finally stopped the car and got out?

Petersen: Well, Bob described—it was a nice drive, but then when you get to Captiva, it's so beautiful. He just explained the trees and I think we saw an armadillo cross the road. In those days, an armadillo. Oh, there's an armadillo! [Laughs]

Q2: I thought he didn't buy Captiva until '70.

Q: I thought he had it, but then consolidated it.

Q2: Got more, yeah.

Petersen: Oh, he bought Captiva in—

Q: He had been buying more and more property—

Petersen: —way before '70.

Q: —and he established it as a kind of permanent—

Petersen: '68 maybe? [Note: Rauschenberg purchased his first property in Captiva in 1968, establishing permanent residence there in late 1970.]

Q: And built the studio spaces in '70, but I think he had been buying property before. I'm going by your narrative.

Q2: I was going to say, I have to check that because he didn't move into 381 until '66. So I don't know. I'll have to check that. Maybe it was that he didn't actually move down to Captiva until '70.

Q: That's what the chronology says.

Petersen: I think he was there before '70.

Q3: I'm sure he was—he's right in that sense, but you also are right.

Petersen: Long before '70 because I was there in December of '69.

Q2: Yes, so I think he just didn't make the permanent move from New York until '70.

Q3: Right.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Oh, permanent, like legally or whatever.

Q3: Or spending more time there than—

Q: Having it be the primary residence.

Q2: Right.

Q: Like what it says in this book. In November of '70, you two left for Captiva. You made your primary residence Florida rather than New York. But he already had Captiva. He didn't buy it right then.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Right.

Q3: I wouldn't even say that was your primary residence then. How could that have been your primary residence in '70? Because I didn't even get there until '71 and you guys were in New York most of the year.

Petersen: Well, Bob changed it for tax reasons.

Q3: But afterward. Yes, in '71. In my memory that's why I got hired because you were leaving for the summer and going—but it was the summer place versus New York was—

Petersen: Oh.

Q3: —where he—

Q: Was still the main place?

Q3: Right.

Q: Well, maybe this is tax language that we're talking about.

Q3: That could be true.

Q: Clearly, it's not like they're leaving one place behind.

Q3: Right.

Q: Had you been to New York before?

Petersen: No.

Q: Do you remember when you first came to New York?

Petersen: Oh, absolutely.

Q: What were your first impressions of New York and 381?

Petersen: Well, Bob and I left Malibu and we flew to New York City with I think [Hisachika] Sachika [Takahashi] and Penelope [Newcomb]. We landed at the airport and got out at 381. My first impression was, the limo door opens. It's a limo. Wow, a limo [laughs] in front of 381 and I'm standing there and the wind comes up and I went, "Oh god, what's that?" Because I had never experienced the subway, as a California boy. Bob said, "That's the subway."

[Laughter]

Petersen: So that was my first impression in New York. And then going into the house that first time, up the stairs in the mansion.

Q: Who else was there when you came? Were there other people in the house?

Petersen: On the first visit, Sachika and Penelope were with us, as I recall. I don't recall who was there. I can't recall.

Q3: But only Sachika lived there.

Petersen: Maybe Brice was up in the kitchen.



Q3: Brice worked there.

Petersen: Yes, right. I'm sure someone was there.

Q3: That liquor cabinet had to have been stocked.

[Laughter]

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: Oh, I love this photo. I don't know if I have a copy of that.



Rauschenberg's dog Laika on Laika Lane, Captiva, Florida, 1971. Photo: Robert Petersen

Q3: You must. It's your book.

Q: You took it didn't you?

Petersen: Yes and Lena put it in the book.

Q: You took the photo. I think she got it from you.

Petersen: I told Laika, “Stay.” Oh gosh. So many stories. Laika Lane.

I hope our daughter, Lena, gets home before—look at that. She did this for her thesis paper.

Q: It’s a very nice book. Very well done.

Petersen: Yes and the professor came to the opening. I’m so pleased you have one.

Q3: Me too.

Petersen: I think I did five—four studies, but study one—is Columbia doing Cy Twombly?

Q: I don’t know. There’s a gallery at Columbia, but I don’t know.

Petersen: The oral history of Cy Twombly?

Q2: He died before—

Petersen: God, I have tons of stories from Cy.

Q: Oh, you mean as an oral history subject?

Petersen: Yes, right, just to record. God, Cy and Bob were of course so close.

Q: You're the representative of the Foundation so I shouldn't speak for you, but my understanding of the project is that it's really partly because his whole orientation was collaborative. It is a Rauschenberg project, but it's Rauschenberg and all of you who were part of that world. So it's not that a Cy Twombly story is not welcome.

Petersen: Cy is gone, so—

Q2: Right.

Q: It can totally be part of this, but there's not a separate project.

Petersen: Oh, it can be part of it.

Q: Yes, because Twombly came and stayed with you at Captiva.

Petersen: Oh yes.

Q: It's part of the story, if that's what you mean. If things are occurring to you about Twombly then go ahead.

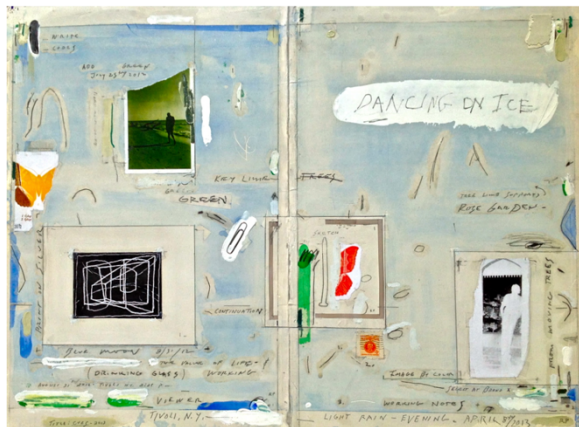
Petersen: No, I'm just curious if there is—

I think this is one of the most beautiful drawings I've ever done. It sold. It's called *Cues* [2013].

Bob told me once, he said—he gave me a book of—am I being recorded still?

Q: Yes, do you want to stop being recorded?

Petersen: No, it's okay. But Bob gave me a book once. He said, "You'll need this one day." It's all about theatrical stage work. So that's why I called this *Cues*. It's a cue to go on stage.



Robert Petersen  
*Cues*, 2013  
Mixed media collage on paper  
22 3/8 x 30 1/8 inches (56.83 x 76.52 cm)

Q: Oh, a cue in that sense.

Petersen: See and here's Bob in negative and Cy and little me. Anyway.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q3: Because I never got to experience that focus that I can only imagine must have been so electrifying and inspiring to anyone who was working with him or around him and you got to experience it all the time.

Petersen: Well, it was just a normal day. It wasn't, at that time, inspiring.

Q: Actually that might be—

Petersen: It was just a normal day working. Let's do this, let's do that, or whatever.

Q: That might be one question to ask is what you're describing about the working process, did it change over time as you got to know him better and have a much more extensive track record working with him or was there much more verbal communication or did that working method—

Petersen: Not at all.

Q: It stayed constant.

Petersen: Not at all. Bob just did his work.

Q3: It was a true focus.

Petersen: Yes. As time goes on—you can't go back of course, but—well, we're all older. I think back on it and he never said, "Do this, do that," or, "I don't like this, I don't like that." Once in a while he would say, "Take this paper over to curating," on Captiva, the other house—he would say, "Take this over and put it with drawings to be completed." I wonder what happened to that pile.

Q2: Oh, there have been some that—

Petersen: Actually I was thinking of asking the Foundation if I could complete them. Bob would like that.

[Laughter]

Q3: And better you than Darryl [R. Pottorf].

Q2: It's interesting—I think I heard this both from Christopher [Rauschenberg] and from [Laurence] Laury Getford, that Bob never gave up on a work of art. He may have had to leave it for a while, but he never gave up on it.

Petersen: Yes. There were a few things—maybe two a year—when he would say, "Oh, put this over. We'll do it later." There's a little stack.

Q2: Did you ever see him actually go back to any of that or no?

Petersen: No. No, not when I was there. Maybe later, after '80, '81.

Q: In a particular series would he discard things or leave things behind? If you were in the middle of *Stoned Moon*, would he make a first attempt and say no this isn't working at all. Forget it. Let's start this one over.

Petersen: No, never. No.

Q: He would keep trying to recalibrate it to make it work?

Petersen: When it was finished for him, it was done. He never mentioned it to other people.

Q: So even on Captiva when you were working with him and the other people in the studio there, in *Untitled* and otherwise—I had imagined, I guess, these long intense all-night sessions with a lot of banter and talking.

Petersen: A lot of what?

Q: Banter. Chatting.

Q3: Banter, back-and-forth.

Q: I think it's because my idea of collaboration—maybe because the collaboration I've been involved in has been more in dance—but there's a lot of checking with the other person; what are you doing, why did you do that, can you do this? Wait, did that work? No, I don't like that?

Petersen: Oh.

Q: There's a lot of talking, but the way you're—

Petersen: Not that way at all.

Q: And that was true—

Petersen: Bob never asked why.

Q2: Interesting.

Petersen: Actually, I recall him saying, "I don't want to direct—I don't want to give directions." That's from Aspen, Colorado, with the collaboration there with the students. He said, "I'm not going to ask them what to do."

[Laughter]



Petersen: We're just going to do it. I mean, that's with us walking.

Q2: That was the [International] Design Conference [Aspen, 1973]?

Petersen: In my sense now, that may be like a John Cage thing. I'm not going to ask or give them a direction. He also said that about Trisha Brown. As I recall, she asked for a set or collaboration with the dance and he said, "I'll do mine, she does hers. We don't know. When it comes together, it's done."

Q2: That's how he worked with Merce [Cunningham] too.

Q: That, to me, is very Cage, Cunningham too.

Petersen: Yes. To me it gives me tingles because you're not collaborating—

Q3: Risky, yes.

Petersen: —like what are you going to do? They do it, they do it, it's there and Trisha would go with what he'd done or he had done it and it's for her.

Q: Are you thinking of *Glacial Decoy* [1979]? Is that the collaboration with Trisha Brown you're talking about?

Petersen: Mostly that because I was there. I recall.

Q3: Forgive me because maybe I'm way off base here, but collaboration, what I think, I felt like I witnessed every night at his table, of talking to other artists and exchanging—it wasn't to work on a specific work together, but it was in a constant exchange of thinking, ideas, without pretension of—and in fact if anyone in there had tried to promote themselves or their idea, they wouldn't have fit in the group.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: It really was an exchange that could include humor or I don't know.

Q2: Were they talking about specific series they were working on or were they talking about art that they were working on specifically or just more generally?

Q3: I'm sure both happened. Both. Both would happen through conversation. That's real conversation between artists. And he did, as you said, always ask, "How's the work?" But if you respected the artists at the table, they were—I don't think he ever treated anyone like he knew more than they did—

Petersen: Right.

Q3: —and if anything, he was hoping to learn from them, through what they were looking at.

There were a lot of personal stories. A few personal stories that I remember. And all over a situation where everything was shared. Bob was providing his generosity at that time, he had more money than a lot of the people at the table, so it was over shared meals, definitely shared drinks. It was a nest of—to me—maybe collaboration is the wrong word, but I'm sure Bob took things from those conversations, as I know my husband Al Taylor took things and went into his studio from those conversations.

Petersen: Oh.

Q3: So in that way, collaboration it's not. It's exchange.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: Artistic exchange.

Q: It may be collaboration too.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Then the question becomes where does the collaboration end?

Q3: Right.

Petersen: And I still do. I have conversations with Bob now, in my own—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —because the memory comes back. Wonderful.

Q3: Yes, nobody was trying to impress anybody else is my memory of those days.

Petersen: Yes. Right.

Q2: I wonder if that still would be the case [laughs].

Q3: And it wasn't just artists at the table. That was the other thing—from my own experience, I feel so lucky that by chance, when I landed, I always think I hit the tail end of the great days. I'm sure it was also really great in the fifties and sixties, but I happened to get there during the times where money had not become the focus of the art world.

Petersen: Right.

Q3: And the rest of the world certainly. So at that table it could range—and this wouldn't be that it was a big party, it would just be a night at the house. Chance. And there could be actors, dancers, always artists, and the artists would range from very young artists new in the scene to Cy Twombly's in there with Bob Rauschenberg and [James] Jim Rosenquist. It ran the gamut of artists, for sure, but there would also be great writers, always. There were actors.

Petersen: William [S.] Burroughs would come by.

Q3: Filmmakers. Yes.

Petersen: He came by quite often.

Q3: Musicians. I'm positive [Randolph Denard] Ornette [Coleman] was there, but at any rate, there also would be the business end of the art world, but as friends. So you would have museum curators, you would have collectors.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: You would have gallery dealers and there was never a hustle going on.

Petersen: Right. Yes.

Q3: There was never a hustle. It was an exchange, where by chance, someone might meet someone who might say, “I’d like to come to your studio and see the work.”

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: Stuff that just doesn’t happen anymore, I don’t think.

Petersen: Like what can we do? Let’s do it.

Q3: And Bob facilitated it and it would often end in very much fun. Silly fun.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: So it’s his purity, like a child forever; he had that child-like purity in him and love. I really do feel that about him; that he provided a home for all these people who would come, that you all wished—I don’t know, your family. I’m hoping you have a wonderful family and childhood, but it was like the family you wanted to be born into. [Laughs]

Petersen: Kind of indescribable, the way Bob worked that way. It’s kind of abstract, but—

Q: That atmosphere, was it especially around meals? Was it especially around dinners that you would have these kinds of gatherings?

Q3: Well because he did work during the day.

Petersen: Oh the whole day—

Q: People would come in through the day?

Petersen: The whole day.

Q3: Oh yes, there would be people there, but because he was working—

Petersen: People would come in and out.

Q3: He did get up late, but that was because—

Petersen: One until four or five in the morning.

Q2: He stayed up late.

Q3: Oh yes, usually until dawn.

Petersen: Yes. I recall one night—I can't remember the name of the dancer who was ill and Bob said—he was on the phone and I can't remember her name.

Q2: Was that Yvonne [Rainer]?

Q3: Yvonne, with the rubber bands. Are you going to talk about the rubber bands?

Petersen: Yes, he said, “We’re not going to sleep until I hear good news,” and we just sat up all night. It was probably around sunrise. I nodded and he went, “Petersen!”

Q3: He’d tell me I had to put a rubber band on, a tight rubber band on my wrist, because he said you have to—that’s to remind you to be thinking—

Petersen: Oh yes. He put rubber bands on quite often—

Q3: —about her, that she gets well.

Petersen: —he’d have a rubber band. Yes, get well.

Q: A rubber band to remind you of something?

Q3: So you couldn’t forget because you could feel something.

Q2: So that you always feel it, yes.

Q3: And she did. Thank god, she recovered.



Q2: This is unrelated but somewhat related. [Charles] Charlie Yoder once told me that Bob had given Gordon Matta-Clark a painting and I have no record of what that was.

Petersen: Oh.

Q2: But he said it had one of those boxes that Bob often put in his silkscreen paintings, that perspective drawing of a cube.

Petersen: Right.

Q2: And he said that Bob regarded that as a healing square.

Petersen: Oh.

Q2: But I didn't know—I'd never heard that before and—

Petersen: Really?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Who said that?

Q2: Charlie Yoder told me that.

Petersen: Oh, Charlie—he said Bob said that?

Q2: He said that Bob regarded that as a healing square.

Petersen: As a healing square.

Q2: And that the painting that he gave Gordon had one of those in it.

Petersen: Yes, because I've often looked at that in the silkscreens, because it doesn't have a perspective. It goes either way.

Q2: Right. I just didn't know if anyone knew anything more about it, if Bob had ever mentioned anything like that to you.

Q3: I know he was—

Petersen: No.

Q3: —a believer of healing in terms of through—

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: He asked me, when Al got sick, to send him something of Al's so he could keep it in his pocket.

Petersen: Oh he did?

Q3: I'm sure he was constantly rubbing it, yes.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: But I have to ask you, because I'm thinking that probably the first time I was in Captiva would have been late '71. '71 or '72, but by then you guys already had the press, right?

Petersen: Oh yes. Untitled Press, late '70, '71.

Q3: Right because I was in the print shop. I remember I loved that shop.

Petersen: Yes. Oh yes, wonderful.

Q3: And you set that up. That was your idea to get the press, wasn't it?

Petersen: No, it was Bob's idea.

Q3: Oh, it was Bob's idea.

Petersen: Well, together. He said, "Petersen, maybe we could look around and get a press." We looked at different properties and with a real estate agent. Bob said we'd get a little garage, thinking of [Tatyana] Tanya [Grosman]'s. The garage studio. And—oh wow. Excuse me. My writing. That's my heart. What is that, '72? Oh gosh. I have some of these calendars out in the—

Q2: That's what I was wondering because I see sometimes your name is on them—

Q3: Oh really?

Petersen: Oh god. You have these calendars?

Q2: Yes, so we have a number of these calendars.

Petersen: Excuse me. I interrupted the story.

Q2: I just was putting it out there. I didn't mean to pull your attention.

Q3: That was in '72 when it was there.

Petersen: Did you see this? Al's opening. Al's opening. That's Bob and I—our calendar. We had a big one too. I don't know.

Q2: Yes. I haven't seen those.

Q: You were keeping these calendars? Would he make entries into these calendars?

Petersen: Oh yes. He would write and I would write, during the seventies.

Q3: But that, I'd have to say, couldn't be Al Taylor.

Petersen: Excuse me?

Q3: That couldn't be Al Taylor. That A-L-S has to be something else because he wouldn't have met Al yet.

Q: Oh that's right. You didn't meet him until—

Petersen: Maybe it's Al—oh, what's his name? A friend of Janet Webb, a friend of Al—I forget his last name.

Q: There's an [Alvin D.] Al Loving, Jr.

Petersen: Right. Al Loving. Excuse me.

Q: He would have been there around then.

Q3: I think actually Janet Webb was with him.

Petersen: Yes, for a while.

Q3: So that's probably how Bob met Al Loving, I bet, through Janet.

Petersen: Yes. I always liked Al Loving. That's a nice calendar, '72.

Q3: So the Debbie is probably [Deborah] Debbie Hay in this, I bet.

Q2: Well, there's Deborah in there and there's Debbie Hay. There's Debbie and there's Deborah, so I didn't know if one was you and one was somebody else.

Q3: Well, photos of Debbie dance has to be Debbie Hay and here where it says, "David, Debbie, Savannah," Savannah [Bradshaw] was the daughter of David Bradshaw and Deborah Hay.

Petersen: Right.

Q2: Oh.

Q3: Anyway, these are fun. I'd like to look at them too.

Petersen: Oh right. Does it say, "To Captiva," or—

Q3: Drive to Tampa.

Petersen: Drive to Tampa. What's that heart for? I'm kidding.

Q3: Tampa work. Big heart.

Q2: I'm sorry. I've taken us off—

Petersen: That's my heart, I wrote that.

Q3: But I have said to you on the phone that I really think you had an influence on Bob and his work, as I think Bob was someone who, again, through his—whether the word is collaboration, but closeness with—if it was an artist that he's with, but obviously, Cy, Jasper, you can see an exchange going on in both sides of their relationship.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: I felt of course, I was there when Bob and you were together, and I feel like you did have—

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: —in many ways, the two of you exchanged. I think Bob took a lot from you, in the good sense. I don't mean he stole it.

Petersen: He didn't ask or anything—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —that way.

Q3: But you were starting to say, it was the two of you decided to look for a press?

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: Because I thought it might have been your idea.

Petersen: Well, it was Bob's original idea. "Petersen, you're a printer. We're both artists. We'll set up a little print shop." So we started looking around Captiva for a space because the Beach House was a little small. And we looked around. We went to a few through the local real estate agent, but they weren't that right. And then about a week and a half later, the real estate agent



phoned and said, “Rauschenberg, I have a property available that connects to your 16 acres up north on the curve.”

Q3: Through that Jungle Road.

Petersen: Yes. And it’s available. It has a four-car garage—on Captiva, who makes a four-car garage? But the man who had lived there was going to make a machine shop for a hobby when he retired. As I recall, they had a tragedy in some way where their son was killed in an accident, and the mother had a breakdown, so she kind of went off course, and so they put the property up for sale. We went over to look at the property with the real estate agent and the price was whatever, I can’t recall, say \$32,000 for the house. I’ll never forget. We were in the garage part with the real estate agent and the owner. His wife was in the house, but the real estate agent got down to, well, what’s the price, and the owner said, “Oh, \$32,000.” Bob said, “Okay. I’ll take it.”



Aerial view of Rauschenberg’s original Captiva beach house and beachfront property, prior to further development on the island, Florida, November 1972. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Huston Photos

[Laughter]

Petersen: The real estate guy actually kicked Bob in the ass in a way. I saw it from the side. “I could have gotten it lower. You don’t say okay right away.”

Q: Immediately.

Petersen: You know, you bargain. But anyway, it went through. That’s a story I haven’t told. I don’t do drugs really, but Bob and I and maybe David Bradshaw brought down a little mescaline tablet, so that night, I went back. I saw it and I went, “Oh, that’s a nice—” one of those misty Captiva waves. So I took the mescaline and I’m out there and I made a chinning bar and I’m up there doing chin ups, out there in the sea grapes, and Bob comes to the front door of the Beach House and he goes, “Hey Petersen, Bob, take a check over to the neighbors to pay for the property.” I go, “Okay.” You know, I’m there, but I go, okay, I’m fine.

[Laughter]

Q3: I’ll float right over.

Petersen: I’ll float right over there. So he wrote a check. I got on the bike, went over, and rang or knocked. It was okay. I gave him the check. So that’s Untitled Press. He bought the building.

Q: And then you actually cut the road. You made a path?

Petersen: Oh yes. Yes. That was all natural jungle. What do you call it, a natural jungle. So wonderful—Bob had a local gardener, [Buddy] Gavin, and Bob and I got out front. Well Bob led the trail through the Jungle Road.

Q: How far was it from one to the other? How many minutes would it take you to walk from—

Petersen: I would say from here to the stop sign. A little more. Up to the corner, maybe a little more.

Q2: That sounds about right.

Petersen: An eighth of a mile.

Q2: That's not that far.

Petersen: Yes because Bob wanted to—as soon as he saw a nice tree growing—

Q3: Yes, it wasn't a straight through road.

Petersen: —we'd go around it, so it was all just the brush. He didn't cut any trees, I don't think. Another story about Bob—I don't know if you want to go off here. But one day Bob and I were in the kitchen in the Beach House, looking out the south window at the end of the counter there, and he goes, "Petersen, you know that property there across the sand road is for sale." He was

kind of concerned about it. So he kept, in his way, just looking and I was feeding the dogs, whatever. He came back in the kitchen and was looking out the window. You know the little drawers there to the side, if you remember? He kept his wallet in the kitchen drawers and he opened the drawer and he took out his wallet and went through it and he said, “Oh.” He pulled out a few dollars, and he held it against the window, and he said, “You know, this can save those palm trees.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: He was concerned about the trees. He didn't want it for whatever. He wanted to save the trees. “No one's going to cut down my trees.” So he did buy it. Then after that he said, “Okay, let's go to the studio,” which we did every day. Almost every day.

Q2: So when he started Untitled Press, did he have inviting other artists in mind? Was that always—

Petersen: Oh yes. Instantly. He wanted, as I recall, a place for his friends or artists that he would invite to work because they weren't invited to Gemini, because they're not a Frank Stella, Lichtenstein. I don't know if that was the reason.

Q2: And were there people he invited who didn't come or did—

Petersen: Oh, everyone came. Can you imagine?

Q3: Get a holiday and a print.

Petersen: Bob says, “Come. Would you like to do a print?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Are you going to say, “No, thanks”?

Q2: Well, I just was curious because sometimes people would have a—

Petersen: Oh, I’m kidding in a way.

Q2: —the timing is wrong, I wondered, did he invite Jim Rosenquist and he just couldn’t fit him in or—?

Petersen: Oh, first was Cy. Then Brice. Susan Weil later.

Q: We have the whole list.

Q2: Sue was at the tail end.

Petersen: Robert Whitman.

Q: Cy Twombly in April, David Bradshaw, January, March; Brice, February through April; Robert Whitman in 1973; Susan, 1974.

Q2: At some point, Sachika was there.

Q: Yes. And you did your work.

Petersen: Yes, I think I have the catalogue here somewhere [*Prints from the Untitled Press, Captiva, Florida, 1973*].

Q: Can you tell us the story behind Janis? Is that the name of the—

Q2: Little Janis [note: name given to lithographic printing press acquired by Rauschenberg].



Little Janis at Untitled Press, Inc. print shop, Captiva, Florida, 1971. Photo: Robert Petersen

Q: Little Janis?

Petersen: Janis. Oh god.

Q: I was wondering why—my impression is that he was someone interested in continually pressing past the limits of what the medium could do. Looking for the latest thing, how can I collaborate with an engineer, how can I do something that's never been done before? Why choose something that's not the most sophisticated, that's a pretty simple—

Petersen: Oh, I don't think he was thinking about something that had never been done before. I mean that's my own—he just collaborated.

Q: With Untitled?

Petersen: No, with anyone.

Q: Oh, in general.

Petersen: Yes. In my mind, he didn't think, "What can we do that's never been done?"

Q3: Exactly.

Petersen: Because he didn't ask, "What can we do that hasn't been done?"

Q3: Right. Yes, I think I could—

Petersen: He just did it, in the collaboration.

Q3: And you're thinking with his own work—in his own work.

Q: Yes.

Q3: I definitely can see how you're going that way, but I think it's less that there was any motivation in him—and that's what I think you're responding to—to do something that hadn't been done. That was not a goal.

Petersen: Yes. He didn't—

Q3: What it was, was that he never followed rules.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: So he broke rules in the process of working, but it wasn't because he was trying to do something that hadn't been done.

Petersen: Yes, he didn't want anything new, new.



Q3: The broken stone is a perfect example. That it was looked on not as, “Oh this. Now it’s screwed up my print.” It was like whoa! This just opened up something he couldn’t have controlled, so as an artist, it made it more exciting that it opened more doors and possibilities. I agree with you. It’s the same. I think many artists would love to work with a scientist because they’re very closely entwined, art and science and math, and so that E.A.T. [Experiments in Art and Technology] situation with [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver was perfect for Bob certainly, with so many ideas to think about.

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: But how could you do it? And then suddenly this guy comes, “Well, I can find a scientist who knows how to do the sound controls you need to—”

Petersen: Right. Yes. They had the technology. You give them an idea, they have the technology.

Q3: Billy would match with a scientist.

Petersen: And they could—amazing. I think we should continue that some way.

Q: So it was about invention, but it wasn’t in relation to the canon; what other people were doing.

Q3: Yes. No, I think it was totally for himself.

Q: Like with *Stoned Moon*—

Q3: Challenging himself.

Q: —let’s make a lithograph that’s bigger than one that anyone has ever made before.

Petersen: Oh, he didn’t want to think of doing bigger.

Q3: I really doubt he ever thought that. I think he was always challenging himself. I’d say with the scale, it had to do with something inside of him—I’m not an art historian—the scale of the real project that he was using images of and the monumentality of the space program.

Q: Yes.

Q3: He could have made it little, but I think that’s where he might have approached, well what if it could be this big? I would say he would always be in a collaboration with printers, where they would have known things Bob didn’t know, just like with the scientists. I would say the collaboration would have been intense and so it may have been more with Ken Tyler because he was the master printer or out at Tanya’s, whoever the actual person was with him, but where he could say, “This is what I’d like to do,” and it could present a challenge for the printer or the printer would find a way to try and do it, but then Bob might say, “Well is there a way to do this?”

Q: Right.

Q3: I would say the printers loved working with him because of course they know how to do it by rote and make art, beautiful art, but for them to be challenged as well in the process—that's true collaboration. I think Bob was always like that.

Q: There's another way that that's pushing the limits of the medium.

Q3: Yes, absolutely.

Q: I didn't phrase it well. But in any case, going back to Untitled and Little Janis, can you tell us the story of that and why—did you talk about what should go in Untitled? What do we need?

Petersen: Can we take a four-minute break?

Q: Oh sure. Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Well, so back to the question, which was just, how did you get the equipment for Untitled?

Petersen: Oh, that's a wonderful story. Is that okay? There. Hand me that little object there.

Q: This?

Petersen: Yes. This is from Bob when he came back from China. This is not about Janis, but—well, I keep it, but Bob completed his China trip in, what was that year, '94 or '95 or '96 or maybe earlier?

Q2: It was earlier. [Note: Rauschenberg traveled to China in the summer of 1982 and the winter of 1985.]

Petersen: I went to 381 Lafayette and I was visiting and he said, “Petersen, I have a gift for you.” He handed me this and he had a little tear in his eye in a way. I hold it very—that’s from Bob from China.



Gift to Robert Petersen from Rauschenberg’s travels in China. Photo: Gina Guy

Q2: I love its expression.

Petersen: Isn't it beautiful?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: He said, "Here, Petersen. I brought something from China for you." I still get the chills when I look at it. A silly little thing.

Q3: And heavy.

Petersen: Yes. Okay. Getting back to Little Janis. Little Janis is a lovely, lovely story. Bob and I were at the Beach House on Captiva early in the morning and we had been looking for property for Untitled Press to open up a little print shop. I told you the story about—

Q3: Finding the garage, yes.

Petersen: —we found the garage, the four-car garage. So he purchased that. I took the check over.

Q3: With that mescaline.

Petersen: It's all going to be edited here. And so then Bob said, "Oh, we have a space!" I said, "Oh, it's wonderful!" So, I ordered catalogues from Graphic Chemical [& Ink] and print places,

where to get presses and stones and everything, and I was looking at that and about ready to make some orders, because litho presses aren't—of course Bob could afford it, but they're hard to find. So we were in the house with Laika and Kid and Cloud running around, feeding them, the daily routine. Bob said, "I'm going to walk to the post office." So you go out the front door and you walk to the post office on the beach. Can you imagine?

[Laughter]

Q3: The straight away.

Petersen: You've done that, right?

Q3: Yes, yes.

Petersen: And the post office is right there. So I'm feeding the dogs and mopping the floor, getting the kitchen cleaned up, and about a half an hour later or more, Bob comes walking up the front steps and he walks in and his little brown eyes are circular. He goes, "Petersen, you know what just happened?" I said, "I don't know, what happened?" He goes, "The lady next door to the property I just purchased wants to give us a printing press."

Q3: What?

Petersen: Yes, Maybelle Stamper [née Richardson].

Q2: Oh.

Q3: Oh my god, I didn't know that's where you got it.

Petersen: Right next door. She was a lithography teacher from Pennsylvania or Philadelphia, wherever. I should remember.

Q3: Wow.

Petersen: So his eyes are like, you know, "We have a press!"

Q3: And it's already on the island.

Petersen: And stones. She said, "It's from the postmistress, Dodi Booth." I don't know if you ever met Dodi Booth.

Q3: Oh, of course. Yes.

Petersen: Bob said, "So we have a press," so god, the next morning or that afternoon we went over and got a wheelbarrow and went in—

Q3: I can't believe it.

Petersen: Went into Maybelle's house—

Q3: You didn't have to wait for it to be shipped from Europe or for the stones to come from Bavaria.

Petersen: Yes. We had never been in Maybelle's house. Maybelle, god, a wonderful artist. She's a great artist. So she showed us the press and the stones there and I disassembled it, put it in the wheelbarrow and took it across the lawn to the print shop next door and reassembled it, oiled it. Actually we took it to Fort Myers, had it sandblasted and repainted—you know, cleaned up.

Q: Refinished?

Petersen: I repainted the whole thing and put it back together and polished the rollers. A very beautiful press. And then in the shop, I cleaned the whole area. Painted the walls, painted the floor gray, and set little gems right under the light.

Q3: The holy temple.

Petersen: Yes. And oh, she looked so beautiful. Actually she wasn't named yet. I think it was one of Bob's first projects. When he first came in, he was looking at the press, and Janis Joplin had passed, was that '69, I think? '70? [1970] Somewhere in there. Bob always kept the TV or a radio on and Janis Joplin was playing "Mercedes Benz" [1970]—



[Laughter]

Petersen: —beautiful song, and he looked at the press and he said, “Little Janis,” because they were friends.

Q3: I know. I remember him telling stories. He met her at Max’s [Kansas City, New York]. You know, they were from the same town by chance.

Petersen: Port Arthur. Yes. He said, “That’s Little Janis.” So anyway, Bob came back to the house and he said, “Well, call Dodi Booth,” she’s the postmistress at the post office. There was a telephone booth out in front of the post office and I went in. I put a dime in. I called information and I said, “I’d like the number of Booth on Captiva Island,” and they gave me the number and all of a sudden I realized I had my bathing suit on. I didn’t have anything to write it down and said, “Okay—” I can’t remember the number—762, 1462—and I went, “Okay, thank you.” Anyway I’m getting mixed up, but that’s the first time I’d heard her name, Dodi Booth, so I looked at the booth and I went, oh, sandy booth. It’s not like dirt, but it’s a dirty booth. Dodi Booth.

[Laughter]

Q2: And you were calling her for what reason? What about?

Petersen: Oh, to make contact with Maybelle Stamper for the printing press because they were best friends.

Q2: Oh, okay.

Q3: Did Maybelle own the house that was on the bayside? Was that Maybelle's house?

Petersen: No, right next door to—

Q3: To the print shop.

Petersen: —Untitled Press. That house right next door to the south. Yes. A wonderful lady. God, Maybelle Stamper. Wonderful artist.

Q2: And so—you of course knew—she just showed you how to work that press or was that a pretty basic press?

Petersen: Oh, I knew how to work a press, yes.

Q2: Well, I figured you did.

Petersen: Oh, yes. She was going to miss it in a way. She said, “Oh, there are some more things up in the attic.” So I took the attic door off and all the rollers were up there. She said, “Well, I

haven't used them in years." Leather, beautiful rollers. God I wish I still had that one because I printed the Twomblys with that one. Beautiful leather roller, but it had colored ink dried on it, so it took me months to clean it, rotating it in a tank of solvent, kind of scraping it.

Q2: She never did anything with Untitled Press though?

Petersen: No. No, she didn't. Actually, that's a good idea.

Q: What, that she should have?

Petersen: Yes.

Q3: Why didn't she?

Petersen: I think Bob may have mentioned that at one point. It kind of rings a bell. We should do Maybelle. So many things you want to do, you know?

Q: And do you remember particular collaborations with the artists that have come through? With Cy Twombly or with Bradshaw or with Whitman?

Petersen: Oh, yes.

Q: Are there any memorable—in terms of the particular work that you helped them produce, memorable collaborations?

Petersen: Let's see. Cy didn't really want to do lithographs or prints because he always grumbled about it, that the image is reversed. It's always reversed. But I believe, being that Bob asked him, I ground, oh, six maybe seven stones, beautiful big stones, put them out on a table and he started working on them. I showed him how to do the caran d'ache and the tusche and what you do with a litho stone technically. I guess maybe a day went by and Cy and Nicola [Del Roscio] were staying in the print shop, and Bob and I were at the Beach House down the Jungle Road. One afternoon Bob said, "Get the Polaroid and go over and take some photos of Cy working." So I got the camera and got over and I asked Cy, and he's working, and I said, "Hi Cy. Good morning," or whatever and I took a few photos. So I have some beautiful photographs of him working on the stone. Recently looking at those photos, I've read there's no photograph of Cy Twombly working. There's no photograph of him actually painting. Can you imagine that? He was so, like, no interviews, whatever.

Q3: Wow.

Petersen: Yes, but I have a photo of him drawing. Bob and I do, because Bob asked me to do it.

Q2: Are all of your photographs in the studio?

Petersen: They're everywhere. There are some in the studio upstairs and I did lose one album.

Q2: I know, you told me that heartbreaking story.

Petersen: Yes, from when we moved in '97 from Greene Street. Heartbreaking story. Anyway. It still may be out there somewhere.

Q: Could be.

Petersen: It's a long story because, oh, going back, the photo album, it's a three-ring album with negatives and proof sheets, about that thick, and it was all of Bob working, that kind of thing. I always kept it in a private area, my private area. We were moving from 66 Greene Street in 1994—'93 actually and Cinda got home from work and Lena was two years old. She's in her crib there and I'm in the back studio of the loft and I walk up—it's later at night and I walk up to the studio, to the loft, and I say, "Cinda, there are three things I want to move from this loft. You, Lena, and this album." A couple of days pass and by some mistake it got put in with my art magazines, *Art in America*, *Artforum*. I put them in that box. Three days later Cinda came home—she was working at Brand X [Editions, New York]. She came home from work and said, "Bob, what are all these?" I had eight boxes lined up with all my books. We have a whole loft full of stuff. She said, "We have two U-Haul trucks. Two loads. It's not going to fit." So I opened up one box and she said, "Art magazines." So it was that complication of, "Okay, I'll put them out on the street." So I take them four flights down, box by box, and put them on the street. About half an hour later I needed a quart of milk or something and I wanted a beer. I'm going to the corner deli to get a beer and milk. So I walk downstairs and there are a lot of people under

the streetlamp going through all these boxes. Which I figured magazines and we put out Lena's first baby changing table, which I made with beads and everything. A couple picked that up because they were going to have a baby and I was very proud. So they took that. Anyway suddenly the street lamp went out and it was dim. So I walk to the corner and I come back and I see people going through the stuff, which is fine. We're throwing it out. Then I walk up and there's two young men standing there and they have an album open and they're going, "Oh!" One guy said, "Look at all these photographs!" It didn't register with me, I kind of went up on my tiptoes, and I kind of saw—because the back of a proof sheet is black in the dim light, I just didn't connect that that album was with my art magazines.

It's 1993. Is there a lost and found report we could look in?

[Laughter]

Petersen: I was reading Rosanne Cash's book where she lost a guitar her father gave her with a note inside the guitar. It was lost at JFK [John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York] in the baggage. In the book she says I'm going to find this guitar. I don't know. Anyway.

Q: Sometimes things do turn up.

Petersen: Oh, yes. Am I talking too—is this being recorded?

Q: We are still recording. How are you doing? We have been going a long time. We probably should—

Petersen: Anymore—well we could go on for—

Q: There are many more things we could ask you, Bob.

Petersen: Would you like to stay for a month or so?

Q: We could come back.

Petersen: Oh, you can?

Q: Maybe we could find—

Petersen: Because I have so much information. Well, you do too. We all do.

Q3: Oh well. Mine's different.

Petersen: I've been making notes of everything, plus I have quite a few photos.

Q: At some point, if you were willing—

Petersen: I'm willing. What do you want to do? [Laughs]

Q: Well, it would be fun to—

Petersen: Well, let's have fun.

Q: —to sit down with—I don't know how they're housed, but to sit down with some of your photos and to have you narrate.

Petersen: Oh god.

Q: Because the photos that we were talking about today—

Petersen: That's where the clues come from.

Q3: That's a really good idea.

Q: —you remember.

Petersen: Because if you look at a photo—

Q2: Yes. Yes.



Petersen: —the mind. Luckily my mind is still clear.

Q: You know things that no one else will know. You were there. You took a lot of the photos.

Petersen: It's too bad that one album got lost, but it could be found. I don't know.

Q: When you say photos all over the place, do you mean a box? Do you mean twenty boxes?

Petersen: Oh, there are probably eight or twelve boxes upstairs.

Q3: Oh my god.

Petersen: But then there are boxes out there I haven't gone through and gifts from Bob that I've had in storage since, well, we moved from Greene Street.

Q2: So since '93—or '83?

Petersen: '93. I could get the objects, some of them. I should have gotten them out today. I don't know if you have time. I could go get one.

Q2: Sure. Is that okay?

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Bob gave me a box in 1981.

Q2: Can I help you?

Q: Why don't we stop now? Would you give us a tour?

Petersen: Let's never stop.

[Laughter]

Petersen: We're not going to stop.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2

Interviewee: Robert Petersen

Location: New York, New York

Interviewers: Brent Edwards (Q), Gina Guy (Q2),  
and Lena Petersen (Q3)

Date: February 9, 2015

Q: It is February 9, 2015. I'm happy to be here, where it all began, well not where it all began, but at the mother lode at 381 Lafayette Street, to continue to do a second session with Robert Petersen. I'm Brent Edwards and I'm here with Gina Guy and Lena Petersen to continue our conversation from last time. Why don't we go through these questions and then if you want to go in other directions or other issues come up, we don't need to stick to the outline. It was just to make things easier.

Petersen: I'm Robert Petersen. I would like to add we're at 381 Lafayette Street, which is a former home of Robert Rauschenberg and studio. I lived here with Bob as his companion from 1970 to 1980, '81, in there, so, wonderful. Great time. Of course with Bob a lot of history. You can imagine the people who came through that kitchen. [Laughs] Just dropping in. Anyway.

Q: Can I ask you one of the questions that the Foundation—

Petersen: Yes, go ahead.

Q: —staff had asked, listening to our recording from our last session. I remember that we started out that day, you made us lunch. [Laughs] You made us hot dogs, but in Twombly's special recipe—

[Laughter]

Q: —or is that the method?

Petersen: I did, oh, I'd forgotten that. Oh gosh.

Q: One of the questions they asked is that, you were saying in our conversation last time, that you had a lot of stories about Cy. We actually didn't record when you were telling us about that at lunch, but the hot dogs were one of them and they were asking if you remembered other things about Cy coming by here. Cy cooking for you. [Laughs] Or going to museums with Cy. That might be a good place to start.

Petersen: Oh, many, many, many memories, wonderful. To think of it now in 2015, this is back, well in 1970 through '80. With Cy. When he would come visit Rauschenberg in Bob's studio, home, on Captiva Island in Florida. Bob had, at the time, Untitled Press studio and another house. Cy had a place to work, and then Bob and I would go work in his studio, and oh god, there are so many stories.



Nicola Del Roscio, Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Robert Petersen working in the Untitled Press print shop, Captiva, Florida, 1971. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Hans Namuth © Hans Namuth Estate

There was a time when Bob had, maybe, business in California with Gemini. He would travel alone once in a while. So Bob wasn't there, and Cy and I were at Bob's house on Captiva Island, I'd say for a couple months, staying together. That's when I found that he would be in his studio working and then he would come over around lunchtime and he would say, "Are there any hot dogs?"

[Laughter]

Petersen: He would, you know, very simple. He said, "Well, I love hot dogs," and he'd just put them in the pan and a little water. Because we didn't have an assistant, we were there alone. Not that I minded working or making lunch. Or doing whatever. But he said, "I like hot dogs," so he—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —would make a hot dog. He said, “Another thing I really like is black-eyed peas.”

[Laughs]

Q2: And did he say angel food cake too?

Petersen: Oh yes, he loved angel food cake.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Cinda made a few when we lived—skipping around here. In the later eighties, Cinda, my wife, Lena’s mother [laughs] of course, lived in SoHo on Greene Street and Cy was staying I guess on Greene Street at, I forget the name of the gallery. He would call me and say, “Do you want to come over and visit?” I asked Cinda, I said, “Oh, do you have time to make an angel food cake,” [laughs] “and I’ll take it to Cy for a gift?” She would. She makes great angel food cakes.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway, Cy was so thrilled. Okay. Other stories. God, let’s see. Cy. Then when we were there alone, he was over in the studio and the studio was just behind the Beach House, oh maybe a hundred feet or so through the palm trees. You could see it from the Beach House. The Beach House is on stilts and so he was over there working. Cy tended to just work alone. He didn’t say, “Leave me alone,” but I just sensed he’s working, I don’t want to bother him. One

afternoon he came in [laughs] to the Beach House and he walked up into the kitchen and the liquor cabinet was there and Cy wasn't really a drinker in a way. He came in and I could tell he was a little nervous and he said, "My god, Petersen, it's so hard to do a good drawing."

[Laughter]

Petersen: So he opened up the liquor cabinet and took out a quart of vodka and went, "I'll see you later."

[Laughter]

Petersen: And went to the studio. And I didn't see him for three days.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Plus he asked me if I had a radio he could borrow. I had a little radio, which Bob gave me for Christmas once. So he set it up in the studio and he turned that radio up so loud, I mean louder than loud.

Q2: Was that typical of how he worked?

Petersen: Well, at that time. But I was just like, wow.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It didn't bother me at all, so loud. He's working. I didn't see him for a few days.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway, wonderful artist. There are other stories.

Q: The outline that you gave us mentioned the museum. Did you write that or did Julia [Blaut] write that?

Q2: You mentioned going to the museum with Bob and Cy.

Petersen: Oh yes. We went to, we went to the Louvre [Paris] together. We went to the Museum of Modern Art [New York] and the Metropolitan [Museum of Art, New York] through the years. Bob and Cy loved, well we all loved [laughs] going to museums. One time, I think it was at the Museum of Modern Art and we were through with the tour, observing, enjoying the works. Cy came out with us and he was kind of emotional and you could tell, he said, "My god, the [Claude] Monet *Water Lilies* [1914–26] are just so beautiful," doesn't the Museum of Modern Art have that big one? [Note: There are two large scale *Water Lilies* of 1914–26 in the museum's collection.] I don't know, that of course impressed me that because I would look at it and go, "Oh yes."



[Laughter]

Petersen: Or, “A Monet,” but he had that sense of what was going on with that kind of painting. The brush and the way—and then—I don’t mean this negatively or whatever, but as I recall, he mentioned it to Rauschenberg. He said, “Bob, did you like the Monet, the *Water Lilies*?” And Bob, this isn’t really a quote, but I don’t know how Bob took it, but he just went, “Yes.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: But I could see Cy’s reaction. I don’t know why I tell this story, but Cy was very into that painting. Not that Bob wasn’t, it’s just Cy gave Bob a second look like, “What?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway. I don’t know if this is good for oral history.

Q: No, it’s interesting.

Petersen: Another time we were in the Museum of Modern Art, and I don’t know if I told this story to Lena, but we walk in and we’re looking at Franz Kline and whoever and Bob goes, “Oh, I want to go over and say hi to *First Landing Jump* [1961],” you know that painting. So he’s walking up to it and he says, “The bulb’s facing the wrong way.”



Robert Rauschenberg  
*First Landing Jump*, 1961  
Combine: oil, cloth, metal, leather, electric fixture,  
and cable on composition board with automobile tire  
and wood plank  
89 1/8 x 72 x 8 7/8 inches (226.4 x 182.9 x 22.5 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of Philip Johnson

[Laughter]

Petersen: The blue bulb is supposed to be on the cloth bag below. You know that light in the can? It's supposed to be on the little tobacco pouch kind of thing below. So he walked over and adjusted it. [Laughs] He's like turning the can to hit the bulb—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and the guard instantly, no alarms went off, but a guard—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —came over of course and he just yelled, “Sir,” and Bob says, “Well, I’m the artist.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: And the guard actually kind of cooled down. He believed Bob.

Q2: Which is kind of amazing.

Petersen: He just said, “Well, I’m the artist and the bulb’s supposed to be on this bag.” [Laughs]

Bob told me as he was doing that, he said, “Petersen, do you know what’s in this bag?” Of course I don’t. He said, “It’s Christopher’s first hair trimming.”

Q2: Kind of interesting.

Petersen: Yes. I always thought that was kind of a nice memory.

Q: Did he do that? Did he have a habit of as you said he said, “I want to go visit my own artwork?”

Petersen: Oh yes, he loved his work—

Q: But he would go periodically and see this—

Petersen: I remember we were at the—Washington, D.C.

Q2: National Gallery [of Art, Washington, D.C.] or—

Petersen: The National Gallery. With Walter Hopps. There was a show of Bob's there, probably around—oh, '80, no, not eighties, '90. When was the show at the National? Tanya Grosman was there; a lot of people were there. Bob's mother Dora [Rauschenberg, née Matson] and his sister [Janet Begneaud, née Rauschenberg].

Q2: '76 [*Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.].

Petersen: We were installing the show with Walter Hopps at the National. He was the curator I mentioned and in charge of everything. We were in this big open gallery and the assistants come in pushing a wheeled cart and on the wheeled cart is *Monogram* [1955–59], the goat with the tire around it. They wheeled it and kind of got it in the installation space and the tire wasn't on it. That came in a different crate, I guess. Bob said, "Hi *Monogram*," and he—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —went over and kissed him on the nose.



Rauschenberg with *Monogram* (1955–9) and, in background, *Estate* (1963) at the retrospective exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., 1976. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni, [www.gianfrancogorgoni.it](http://www.gianfrancogorgoni.it)

[Laughter]

Petersen: I mean actually kissed him.

Q2: I think we have some footage of his—

Petersen: He would bend down and [kiss], “Hi *Monogram*, love you.” [Laughs]

Q2: I think they have footage of it being installed and of course no one was wearing white gloves.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Oh right. Actually I saw those photos somewhere and I was there. But no one had white gloves. I’m over there pounding nails into the wall.



Rauschenberg and others installing a *Jammer* at the retrospective exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., 1976. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni, [www.gianfrancogorgoni.it](http://www.gianfrancogorgoni.it)

[Laughter]

Petersen: It was like, yes.

Q2: It was a different time.

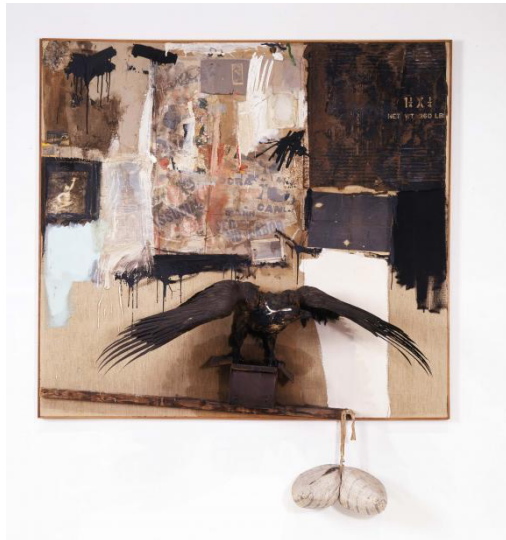
Petersen: Yes.

Q: I guess so.

Petersen: Yes, a different time. Anyway then, excuse me.

Q: No, go ahead.

Petersen: With *Canyon* [1959], with the eagle in the front, we saw that, I forget whether at the museum or the Sonnabend Collection show, and he went over and kissed *Canyon* on the beak.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Canyon*, 1959  
Combine: oil, pencil, paper, fabric, metal,  
cardboard box, printed paper, printed  
reproductions, photograph, wood, paint tube,  
and mirror on canvas with oil on bald eagle,  
string, and pillow  
81 3/4 x 70 x 24 inches (207.6 x 177.8 x 61 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of the family of Ileana Sonnabend

Q2: On the eagle? Yes.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: I was just thinking in terms of museums in general, living here in the city, did you go regularly to museums? Was it a spur-of-the-moment thing? Wake up on a Saturday and that afternoon he says, “Let’s go to the Met. Let’s spend the afternoon with the Impressionists,” or was it more that you were going to a particular exhibit of new work in a gallery? Did he have habits about going to museums and galleries?

Petersen: Well, at the Louvre in Paris he would just want to go and Cy, if he were there, he went with us, we walked over from Ileana [Sonnabend]’s gallery, which was very close to the Louvre. We would just walk over. In New York City, as I recall, it was usually—well, it could be different situations, but I remember once, Bob wanted to go see Jasper Johns’s new painting of

the world, *Map* [1961], which was being installed at the Museum of Modern Art I believe. This is in '75 or so. I'm not sure of the date. So we went up for that reason. He wanted to see that. Another time he said he heard the *Guernica* [1937], [Pablo] Picasso's painting, was leaving the museum and going back to Europe and he wanted to see that before it left. It was with the Museum—I think—of Modern Art and it went back to Spain, I guess. Anyway. There was usually a reason to go in that way. I don't think Bob—it's kind of a small detail because he was always working so much and had appointments and was busy, he never said something like, "Oh, let's take the day off and go to the museum."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He never said, "A day off." I don't think he ever said those words.

[Laughter]

Petersen: "Take a day off." [Laughs]

Q: Another one of the details that the Foundation staff was asking about, since you mentioned Jasper, listening to our recording the first time, we were talking a little bit about Jasper, and they were wondering whether you wanted to tell a story of how you met Jasper, if you remember meeting Jasper the first time.



Petersen: Yes, I recall meeting Jasper. Bob introduced me to Jasper. It was probably, oh god, I remember, 1970, I imagine. Barnett [“Barney”] Newman was having an opening of *The Stations of the Cross*[: *Lema Sabachtani*, 1958–66] at the museum. Bob and I arrived in front of the Museum of Modern Art and I think Bob got, it seemed like it was a limo at that time because it was bigger. Bob looked out the car window and, remember when the Museum of Modern Art was more glass in front? In the seventies you could see inside, it had those revolving doors? So we got out of the car and he goes, “Wow, there’s—” not wow, but—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —he, maybe wow, yes, he goes, “Wow, there’s Annalee [Newman, née Greenhouse] and Newman,” or Barney and Annalee. In the lobby there, the entranceway. I’ll never forget the sight because Barnett Newman was standing in front with his wife Annalee, in front of his huge red, I don’t know the title of the piece, but red painting. It must be, oh, longer than this room—18 feet by 8 or 9. It’s all red with a white edge stripe [*Anna’s Light*, 1968]. To see Barnett Newman, in a way alone, and his wife in front of that red—I’ll never forget that image. Then at that opening we went out on the courtyard, the back sculpture area that was there in the seventies. It’s probably still there, the open area, where they keep the outdoor sculptures. [Note: Newman died on July 4, 1970. *The Stations of the Cross* were exhibited in a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1971–72. *Anna’s Light* was exhibited in *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940–1970* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1969–70.]



Barnett Newman  
*Anna's Light*, 1968  
Acrylic on canvas  
108 5/8 x 240 1/2 inches  
(276 x 611 cm)

Q: In the garden, yes.

Petersen: In the garden, yes. Bob introduced me to Barnett Newman and standing right next to him was Jasper Johns. Like just right there, standing. And Barnett Newman. Bob said, “This is Bob Petersen. Bob, Barnett Newman,” you just shake hands, that’s about it. In a way. Well, I was very pleased to meet him. Jasper was there, and Bob turned and introduced me to Jasper. But I knew Bob and Jasper’s relationship, and he probably in a way sensed our relationship. So Bob introduced me to Jasper. I don’t know if you’ve ever looked Jasper Johns in the eye, made eye contact. [Laughs]

Q: I can’t say I have.

[Laughter]

Petersen: But Bob introduced me and then he turned and got involved with the—so I’m standing there alone with Jasper. I looked at him and I just froze. I just went—[laughs] because he looks right through you. He just looked and that was it.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Then I said, “Nice meeting you,” and turned away. Then Barnett Newman was standing there and I looked at him and he, wonderful, wonderful man, he’s smoking, everyone smoked in that time, even Jasper. I looked at him and I just, in my mind I went, boy, he’s too white. He was as white as this paper. I thought my god, he’s really no flesh color at all. I said to myself boy he doesn’t look good. Of course he was smiling and with his monocle, giving attention to people, and upright, but I’ll never forget that.

Later that night Bob and I went back to Lafayette Street, to his house. The next day we had a flight out of Kennedy to go to Los Angeles because Bob was having a show at the Pasadena Art Museum [California; *Robert Rauschenberg*, 1970, opened July 7]. I can’t recall what that show was, maybe it was *Currents*, but I don’t recall. But anyway, we were at the Pasadena Museum and we were in the office, Bob was speaking with the director, I can’t recall his name right now, at the—

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: The director said, “Oh, I just got some really bad news for you.” He said, “Barnett Newman passed last night.”

Q2: Right after the opening?

Petersen: Right after that opening, he went home and then Bob, of course, Bob was really upset. Bob, at the museum, made a piece for him. At the Pasadena Museum. It seems like he just pinned it up in the hallway.

Q2: Do you know what the piece was?

Petersen: No, I can't recall. At all. I just remember it was about this big. Of course he knew Barnett Newman, they were friends all those years and he made that little memorial piece for Barnett.

Q: Since we're in L.A. [laughs] maybe we should go back and ask a couple of follow-up questions relating to some of the L.A. stories you were telling us last time. Going back to *Stoned Moon*, do you want to ask this about the *Arena* stone? Because maybe you know much more in detail than I do. Do you recall the decision to reopen the *Arena* stone and why did Rauschenberg want to revise that image? It's a pretty simple informational question, I guess.

Petersen: Let's see.

Q: Sorry. It's a very minor detail.

Petersen: Do you have a photo of *Arena*? I read this at home and see it doesn't say *Stoned Moon*, so I didn't realize it was from the *Stoned Moon* series.

*Arena*. See, he had so many titles.

Q: These are *Arena*.

Petersen: Oh wow.

Q: I'm sure she has a better reproduction than that, but—

Petersen: No, these are fine. A lithograph printed in one color from one stone, okay. Right to print. Edition of twelve. *Arena I* [*State I (Stoned Moon)*, 1969], *Arena II* [*State II (Stoned Moon)*, 1969], lithograph printed in one color. Stone on Arches paper. Same size. Right to print. Proof. Edition of fifty. Now what is the question?



Robert Rauschenberg  
left:  
*Arena I State I (Stoned Moon)*, 1969  
Lithograph  
47 x 32 inches (119.4 x 81.3 cm)  
From an edition of 12, published by  
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles  
right:  
*Arena II State II (Stoned Moon)*, 1969  
Lithograph  
47 x 32 inches (119.4 x 81.3 cm)  
From an edition of 50, published by  
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q: They said you reopened the stone—

Petersen: Reopened it.

Q: I assume it means that he wanted to revise something or redo it. But I had not known he wanted to do—

Petersen: Yes, it looks the same to me. From looking at your—

Q: At the reproduction.

Petersen: Reproduction image here.

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: Yes, *Arena I State I*, edition of twelve. And *Arena II State II*, edition of fifty. Well, it looks to me—the word “reopened” is—

Q2: Maybe not the correct word?

Petersen: Well, right. In some way. I mean you can, what they say, counter-etch stone, which Bob never did because counter-etching will deface part of the original print. If you add to it, it's taking the gum arabic out of the limestone, counter-etching. Then if you add new work, it tends to be more intense, when it's reprocessed. Bob never counter-etched.

Q2: But do you know why he decided to do this in two different colors? Was he unhappy with the first state?

Petersen: That could be. I would say the word “reopened” is not—

Q2: A correct word.

Petersen: I would say he’s printing this and maybe, it would depend. If there’s an artist’s proof of this, then you could actually—I don’t know if it’s—it’s a long time ago, but look in the documentation, who printed *Arena*.

Q: I think Ken Tyler. Didn’t he print all of these?

Petersen: No, he didn’t. He processed everything. But he didn’t print editions. We did that. Yes.

Q: Okay. I could pull the doc sheets and see who did.

Petersen: Yes. Say, well, Daniel Freeman. You know, or Tim Isham, Charlie Ritt. I didn’t print this one. I printed this one.

Q: *Air Pocket* [(*Stoned Moon*), 1970]?

Petersen: Yes, that's a large print, right? I think that's it. I get kind of depressed when I see that.

Yes, I printed that.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Air Pocket (Stoned Moon)*, 1969  
Lithograph  
36 x 51 inches (91.4 x 129.5 cm)  
From an edition of 47, published by Gemini G.E.L.,  
Los Angeles

Q2: Why do you get depressed?

Petersen: Well, it got misplaced in Florida.

Q: Oh. Was there any way—

Petersen: It's quite a large print. It's about this big. I printed that. I had it framed in Florida and I had it in storage and it just vanished, someone took it. Which really upset me. And I printed this one.

Q: Which one is that?

Q2: *Post [(Stoned Moon), 1969]*.



Petersen: This is, this one. *Post*. This is a nice catalogue [*Stoned Moon: Robert Rauschenberg*, 2010].

[Laughter]

Petersen: I printed *Brake* [*Stoned Moon*], 1969].

Q2: How was it determined who would print something in—

Petersen: Oh, that was up to Ken Tyler. He gave you the—

Q2: Okay. Was there some sort of hierarchy or anything? Or was it just whoever was available?

Petersen: No, it was just who was available. This is, I printed this. This [*Post (Stoned Moon)*] is at Jim Kempner's gallery [Jim Kempner Fine Art, New York] and it got—that last storm, what was it?

Q2: [Hurricane] Sandy.

Petersen: Sandy. This got water damaged. The frame did, but the print's fine.

Q2: Oh good.

Petersen: So Jim Kempner had insurance and he reframed it and so it's at Jim Kempner. I had it there to be for sale. But now I'm thinking, I can't sell anything. I want to leave Lena something.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So I told Jim I'll pick it up. So we can pick that up. Maybe we could pick it up tomorrow. Because the Al Taylor show's very close.

Jim's going to shoot me because I was supposed to bring in new work. But he said it's wrapped in storage. And it's not that big. I think we could take it on the train. Well, we'll decide that in the morning.

Q: See how the weather is.

Petersen: Yes. And then I used to have *Local Means*, which is on the front here. I don't know if anyone really—I imagine they do know the story. Am I getting off track here?

Q: No.

Petersen: *Local Means*, you phoned me the other day.

Q2: Right.

Petersen: If I had one available.

Q2: It was the one made in appreciation for the printers. Yes.

Petersen: Right. The party at the end of the project was at Ken Tyler's and Kay [Tyler]'s, his wife at the time, house in Hollywood, California. It was a wonderful party for all the printers. We didn't know, the printers, it was just a party. Not just. It was a nice party. But at the party we all gathered in the living room and Ken Tyler got up and thanked everyone for the wonderful project and printing stone; we did, we worked hard, we worked until sunrise a lot of evenings because Bob tended to like to work at night. Ken Tyler thanked all the printers for doing such a wonderful job and then he said, "Bob Rauschenberg has an announcement to make," or, "would like to speak with you." Bob got in front of us and said, "Oh, thank you so much," I can't quote exactly but he said, "I have a gift for you and I want to give you a print that's not included in the suite and this print edition is only for the printers." He looked at us and said, "Now when you have this print, but feel free," because he said, "Collectors are going to want this print." He understood the business end of it. He wasn't into taking advantage of anything. But he appreciated us with the hard work. He said, "I want to give you something that's going to be valuable," because it's not in the suite and people are going to go, "God, I have the whole suite of," what? Thirty-eight prints or more, I can't remember the exact number in this.

Q2: I think it's thirty-four?

Petersen: Thirty-four. But they won't have *Local Means*. "So feel free, when you need a little money, if you want, sell it." He actually said that. That's the only time I ever heard him—well, he wanted to give us something, but he was letting us know that it's not just another print. It's outside—

Q2: That's why I called you the other day.

[Laughter]

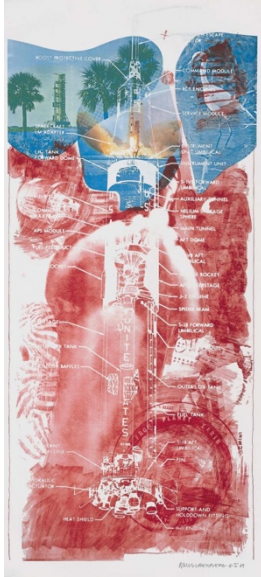
Petersen: Right. There are only ten or eleven of them.

Q2: I think there are eleven.

Petersen: I had one at Uncle Ronnie's for, well, I sold it when you were born, '91, to Leo Castelli. He bought it for twenty thousand dollars, which is not bad. Of course I wanted to keep it, in a way. Because it becomes part of the history and of course it's hard to part with—but being Bob, he said, "When you need a little," to help out with the bills and payments and whatever.

Q2: So you had told me that part of this one was done at Styria [Studio, Glendale, California]?

[Note: referring to *Sky Garden (Stoned Moon)*]



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sky Garden (Stoned Moon)*, 1969  
Lithograph and screenprint  
89 1/4 x 42 inches (226.7 x 106.7 cm)  
From an edition of 35, published by Gemini G.E.L.,  
Los Angeles

Petersen: Oh yes, all the white of the rocket with the lettering.

Q2: And that was because it had to be silkscreened rather than lithographed? Or what was the reasoning?

Petersen: Well, Bob wanted it in white and with hand stone lithography it's virtually, I'd say almost impossible to get a bright, stark white. Because in hand stone lithography the white, it'll drop back or look just not as bright. But a silkscreen is choo!

Q2: Right.

Petersen: You lift the screen, the ink is there. So Ken Tyler, I think, did the first proof of it at Styria Studios in Pasadena, California. Bob loved it and so he had the edition done that way.

Q: Is that *Sky Garden*?

Petersen: Yes, that's *Sky Garden*. Bob gave me one of these when I lived here.

Q2: And do you still have that or—?

Petersen: No. I rolled it up and put it in our closet.

[Laughter]

Petersen: In the Gemini tube. Then I moved, and I moved on good terms with Bob. I didn't want to do it in a hurry. Because I came back, picked up other things.

Q2: This is getting off the topic of *Stoned Moon*, but when we were downstairs you were mentioning about the paper that that one artwork was done on and you said it was the same work that had been on the *Currents*. I just wanted to show you, this is the—

Petersen: Oh wow, what a nice brochure [*Robert Rauschenberg: Currents*, 2011].

Q2: This is the piece that had been sold at Dayton's [Gallery 12, Minneapolis] and was brought into Peter Freeman, Inc. [New York]. You can see the signature right underneath the hand there. Are you familiar with—

Petersen: Wow.

Q: We were talking about *Currents* last time, but I haven't seen this.

Petersen: Is that the edition number or is it just, yes, it is.

Q2: It is numbered. So that's what I was saying, we were unaware that these had been signed and numbered and not consistently. *Currents* is like a series of works that were done, one part of the series is called *Surface Series* [(from *Currents*), 1970] and one is *Features* [(from *Currents*), 1970] and so *Features* looks more like this, whereas *Surface* has overprinting on it. And then this was, not all of them but a bunch of them, all put together and is 54 feet long—



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Surface Series 48 (from Currents)*, 1970  
Screenprint  
40 x 40 inches (101.6 x 101.6 cm)  
From an edition of 100, published by Dayton's  
Gallery 12 and Castelli Graphics, produced by  
Styria Studio



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Features (from Currents) 61*, 1970  
Screenprint  
40 x 40 inches (101.6 x 101.6 cm)  
From an edition of 50, published by Dayton's  
Gallery 12 and Castelli Graphics, produced by  
Styria Studio



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Currents*, 1970  
Screenprint  
72 x 648 inches (182.9 x 1654.9 cm)  
From an edition of 6 published by Dayton's  
Gallery 12 and Castelli Graphics, produced  
by Styria Studio  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Riva Castleman Endowment Fund

Petersen: Yes, on the rolled one piece of paper, but each screen is—

Q2: Right, so it was a laborious process, to take it screen-by-screen and roll it out on this large piece of paper.

Petersen: And plus to get it registered that beautifully.

Q2: Yes. So the work that was downstairs right now that Bob saw and he said, “Oh, this is the same paper that *Currents* was done on.” That’s why we got talking—

Petersen: Yes. That’s why that paper was made.

Q2: So it’s a fabric, it’s a fabric-laminated paper.



Petersen: Actually that paper, I was moved, I told you downstairs. I had moved to the horse ranch. When I was moving, Bob said, “Oh, would you like a roll of that muslin, the rag paper from *Currents*?” And I said, “Yes, thank you, I’d love a roll.”

Q2: Did he have a lot of that left over or—

Petersen: Well, he had I think, I’m saying in the early seventies, three, maybe two, maybe one, I don’t know, not many left. One day my phone rang out on the horse ranch and it was Bob. He called me and said, “Hi Petersen, hi sweet.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Oops. He said, of course, I recall he said, “That paper I gave you when you moved to the horse ranch, the roll—” We call it “linen-backed,” but it’s actually muslin.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It could be linen. No, I think it’s a muslin. But anyway, he said, in his sense of humor, even though he’s a quarter Cherokee, he said, “I’m not an Indian giver, but can I have a roll of that paper back?” See, he gave me two.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because he found he was using it.

Q2: Using it, yes, yes.

Petersen: And he ran out and it was beautiful paper.

Q2: Well, I think that work that we were looking at was from '84; it was early eighties. The work downstairs. Yes, so— [Laughs]

Petersen: Right. That's about, well, he came to pick that up and well, '82, '83, in there. He drove out. Picked up the roll. Of course, I'd give it to him.

[Laughter]

Petersen: My god.

Q2: [Resuming discussion of *Currents*] But it's signed right here on the pen and Bob told me that's [Richard M.] Nixon's hand.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes. As I recall.

Q: Oh yes.

Q2: But Peter Freeman is a gallerist here in New York, where somebody had come to him with one they had bought at Dayton's and it had never been out of the tube so it was in pristine condition and they sold it to him—

Petersen: You see my picture, honey?

Q3: Oh yes, yes.

Petersen: I have this image out in the studio. A proof of it.

Q2: Oh, was that done for the Foundation for Contemporary Arts [New York] or—

Petersen: It's just a proof. Bob gave it to me. I came back—

Q: No, go ahead.

Petersen: From—I was having, with the draft, the Vietnam War and all that, I had my physical call to pass the physical, to be inducted into the Army, and I failed because of bad hearing. It was actually in Fresno, California. Coming back, I took the bus back to L.A. and Bob met me at the bus station and he gave me a proof of that, what is the image?

Q2: *Score (Stoned Moon)* [1970].

Petersen: Well, there's a name for that.

Q2: *Score*, I think is—

Petersen: No, I mean the image, it's—my art history, it's okay. Some kind of nymph, what's it called? Art history, this image of—

Q2: Isn't that [Leonardo] da Vinci?

Petersen: Yes, anyway, it's just that top half he gave me for a welcome home gift.

Q: Do you remember when that was exactly?

Petersen: Oh yes, that would be 1970, I think.

Q: Well, that coincides right before—

Petersen: Maybe '69, late, I don't know. Yes because he was still doing the project *Stoned Moon*.

Q: When you were called he was still in residence? Is that what you mean?

Petersen: Or he may have just come back to sign. It was just right at the end of *Stoned Moon* and then I had to leave to go do that physical thing for the Army.

Q: It reminds me that along with the *Group Light Show* [July 1970, Baldwin Hills, Los Angeles], one of the other events from this period that was on the list of things to ask you about was that Rauschenberg was one of a group of artists who withdrew works from the Venice Biennale in protest of the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.

Petersen: Yes, I recall that. But I don't know the actual details.

Q: You don't remember him talking about that in—

Petersen: Oh, just like on the corner phone downstairs. On the phone. He would mention something about—

Q2: But it wasn't anything you discussed.

Petersen: —removing works from Venice. And that was about all. I don't know who he was speaking with, Leo or Ileana Sonnabend, I don't know. Probably one of those.

Q: Well, maybe I should ask you to go to the *Light Show*, which we keep [laughs] almost getting to and not getting to. Can you tell us about that event and how it came about? I think it was July

1970? With Dan Freeman. How did that happen and what was the *Light Show*? Can you describe it?

Petersen: Well, the *Light Show* was in the Baldwin Hills in California. The Baldwin Hills are very close to Hollywood and when you get up in the hills you look down on the film industry. The big film where they have—

Q: The lots? Where the movie—

Petersen: Yes, where they have filmed old frontier towns and anyway—

Q: Movies lots, yes.

Petersen: Baldwin Hills were close to there. And it was all, in a way, my idea because I had fallen in love with, I've always loved lights. I purchased a Sperry 60-inch carbon arc searchlight in California, which they shine, oh, for car sales or movie premieres, the big searchlights. The searchlights were army surplus from World War II because along the whole West Coast, the military had made searchlights after Pearl Harbor to spot enemy planes. But then after Japan was defeated they had all these searchlights—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and they would use them for Hollywood movie openings or car sales or whatever. I used to see them around California with the beams and they always fascinated me. They'd circle and go through a cloud and the cloud would get white and then back out and shoot a beautiful beam of light.

I was in college and this was probably around 1967. I went to Cal State Long Beach and I had a wonderful apartment I rented with two friends, Jay Steel and Robert Coyle. One night I was out on the porch and I saw a beam of light. I had a bike that I would use to go back and forth to school, so I hopped on the bike, it was night, and I went, "I'm going to go look at that light."

[Laughter]

Petersen: So I got on my bike and I must have rode, oh five, six miles, and I got closer and closer to it and I finally got there. Here's a parking lot with the searchlight going around and there was a man there running the searchlight.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I started talking to him. I said, "God, I love your light."

[Laughter]

Petersen: It was like really, “It’s beautiful,” and he started talking about it and this and that and so I kind of let it go. Then sometime after that, it must have been a few months or so, I was driving my ’56 Ford pickup down the Santa Ana Freeway, close to Anaheim, Disneyland, the first Disneyland. I was going up over a bridge, kind of an overpass thing, and I looked down and there’s a whole yard, a big acre of searchlights.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I go, “God, how beautiful,” so I get off the next exit and go around and I stop there and start talking with the man.

Q2: Was it the same guy?

Petersen: It wasn’t the same man but it was one of his lights, he rents them out. He had assistants who would run them. I got talking to him and I kind of needed a part-time job. I said, “Well, if you ever need someone to, I’ll run it.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: And so he taught— Actually, oh god, when I went up into the searchlight yard, I didn’t see anyone. So I’m just kind of looking around and all of a sudden I look inside one of the searchlights, 60 inches, big, round glass with a convex mirror in the back, beautiful mercury mirror, and inside this light is a man and he’s cleaning—



[Laughter]

Petersen: —the inside of the searchlight. I walked up and introduced myself. Anyway, that's how I got connected with searchlights.

Q: And did he hire you?

Petersen: I said, "Boy, I love these searchlights." We got talking and he said, "Well, I have one for sale." So anyway, it took time because I didn't have the money. I think I paid \$1,200 for it. I'd give him a hundred, go do some odd jobs, come back and give him eighty.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Nice guy, he didn't mind. I finally purchased the searchlight. Then I got the idea to use it as paint, an artist's tool, and make a sculpture out of it. Yes, I started working at Gemini, yes. I think I was just interviewing for the job. But in the meantime I just would drive around kind of looking and I got up into these hills and it's really beautiful, the view overlooking Hollywood. I said, "God, it would be neat to have a light show up here." There was a lot where they had leveled earth to build a new home, but it stayed just vacant for a long, long time and I found myself going back to that lot. Then I met some printers at Gemini, I must have just started working there. I started saying, "Oh, would you like to do a light show with me?" And I did one in 1969.

I just barely remember it. I have photographs of us installing the light, me and my friends; it's a long time ago. I don't even remember what kind of piece I did. I've been thinking of this. What did I do with the light that night? Oh, one thing we did is one of the young men I got introduced with—I spoke with the man with all the searchlights and he brought out two extra. So we put a light down at the valley and then a light up on the hill and made a pyramid, connected them. So we had this brilliant idea, brilliant?

[Laughter]

Petersen: Of putting Venetian blinds over the searchlight, so if you pulled the cord the Venetian blinds would open and close.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So we could turn them off and on, off and on, whatever. That kind of fell through because—oh we had a lot of fun.

But to get back, another year goes by, 1970. So then I was working, I worked at Gemini and met artists in Venice, California and I met Bob and actually Bob and I were staying at the beach in a motel called Las Tunas motel. I have postcards of it in my collection that they have at the front desk, anyway. Nice little motel. Bob made the first *Earth Day*, no. He did a drawing one night, I'll never forget, he did it on the bed, a large drawing, and he would go in the kitchen and he was

doing, rubbing with the lighter fluid, and then a little collage on it. It's called *Brick* [*Syn-Tex*, 1970]. He gave it to, I think, I don't know if he gave it, but as I recall, it's in the Ileana Sonnabend—



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Brick (Syn-Tex)*, 1970  
Collaged newspaper, printed reproductions,  
watercolor, gesso, and graphite on paper  
40 x 27 1/2 inches (101.6 x 69.9 cm)  
Sonnabend Collection and Antonio Homem

Q2: Isn't that part of the *Syn-Tex* [1970] series?

Petersen: I just remember it's a large drawing. It's just beautiful. Really beautiful drawing. But he did that drawing there. Anyway, get back to the *Light Show*, so I was speaking with printers at Gemini, got to know people and I said, "Oh, I have a searchlight at my mom's house. Let's have a show up in the Baldwin Hills." So we—Laddie [John] Dill, Tim Isham, Dan Freeman and then I asked Bob, "Would you like to?" so he wouldn't feel left out.

[Laughter]

Petersen: This is Bob Rauschenberg and I said, “Oh Bob, we’re going to do a light show up in the Baldwin Hills. Would you like to do a piece? Or collaborate with us?” So he said, “Of course, yes.” We had a couple meetings at Jim Webb’s house, with Tim Isham and Dan Freeman and Laddie Dill. I don’t know, we got it together and I called up my searchlight man, friend—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and I said, because Laddie Dill wanted two searchlights; he got two searchlights and parked them beside each other on this dirt lot in the Baldwin Hills and just beamed them together. He just made a point and let the lights run and that was his piece, which is very beautiful. Simple. [Note: Dill’s account of the event appears in “The Reminiscences of Laddie John Dill,” 2016. *Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project*. Conducted in collaboration with INCITE/Columbia Center for Oral History Research. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives]

I had, at the time, a 1947 ton-and-a-half flatbed truck that Bob and I drove around Hollywood while he was doing the *Currents*. That was my car, wonderful truck. So it was the night of the show and I had gotten my piece together, which took some time. I’d made a 6-foot piece of plywood and I had found at a garage sale boxes of little mirrors, about 6 inches in diameter, in a wooden box, say five hundred in a box; heavy, glass is heavy. I did the piece in Gemini’s parking lot and Sid Felsen took photos of it. I don’t know if I have any. But I’m out in the parking lot and I have this [laughs] piece of plywood laying in the parking lot and I’m using duct

tape and I'm putting the mirrors on the board. I would take maybe, oh a foot of duct tape and make kind of a reverse sticky ball out of it and just stick it on the back and then put another one, but the other one would be at a different, so it was all these mirrors in a 6-foot plywood and each mirror is at a different angle. I had a friend help me put it on the back of my flatbed truck to take up to the light show. Another friend of mine is a welder, Lloyd Novak in Whittier, California, wonderful welder and Jay Steel's friend, he made a tripod metal to put the 6-foot piece of plywood with the mirrors on. Then he attached a motor to the back with a pulley so the wheel rotated.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Like a pinwheel. I don't know if I have sketches of drawing that out. At the dirt lot I'd notice viewing space and kind of get the feeling of the area. There was an abandoned truck, an old dump truck, older, probably a '45 Ford or '42, just all rusted and windows, kind of a shell just sitting there. Weeds are growing out of it. I went god. I just thought it was a beautiful object. I said, "Well, that's a good place for the mirrors." So I took the mirrors and put them behind the old rusted out truck and then put the searchlight in front and just shined it into the truck and with the mirrors in the back rotating and each mirror would shoot off a little beam—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —at different angles. A lot of people came to that show, but on the way that night, I don't know how I got all this together.

Anyway, I had the lights up there, the motor, the stand. Bob hadn't really mentioned any project he would like to do. So we're on our way up and I think we're leaving Gemini and I said, "Well, it's getting close to dark. We'd better go up to the hills," because the *Light Show* has an announcement, it's going to be that day, the opening at seven or eight o'clock, whatever it was. Bob said, "You think there's a shovel around here somewhere?"

[Laughter]

Petersen: So we found a shovel somewhere, I can't recall. But we got a shovel. I said, "Yes, there's one over there," we're looking around, put the shovel in the back of the truck, and then on the way to the show he said, "Petersen, could you stop at, is there a hardware store on the way?" So we did. We found one; they didn't have Home Depots then.

[Laughter]

Petersen: A little hardware store or maybe it was a Rexall Drug, I don't know. Anyway, they had flashlights. Bob went in and he bought I'd say six flashlights. Six to eight, I don't know, around six. He had them in a bag and put them in the truck. Went up. And he must have gathered some materials somewhere because then he went over to an old dirt mound that was in this lot of just dirt and he dug a hole and oh, I just remembered another piece he did there. It was really beautiful. Anyway, he dug a hole, and he had sheets of Plexiglas about this long, about 24 inches long, 8 inches wide, and he made a plastic-lined box in this mound of dirt. And then he attached

something to the top and he in some way, I don't know how—see, I was over with my piece kind of setting it up. So I didn't really see how he constructed his piece. But he put a light in it and then he filled it with water. And there was a light on the bottom and then he had a stick at the top that did something. I didn't actually see the piece at the performance. But I heard a couple of my friends came down, John Hertzberg I don't know if you ever met. Yes, when you were at Grandma's and he said it was really beautiful what he did with that. I said, "God, John, I never really actually saw it that night." [Laughs]

Another piece Bob did was kind of down the hill, which I didn't notice. Just over the bank was a little gully and there were these big 5-foot, 6-foot cement cylinders, like for drainage under a bridge, just culverts, kind of big cement and they were just laid at different angles. Someone had just dumped them over for the landfill. He took probably at least five flashlights and I just remembered this piece, I saw this one. I think I've seen photographs of it. He just went back in this cement cylinder and he laid the flashlight down. So as you look over the bank, it's just a faint little light coming out of all these circles. That was his piece. But it was quite beautiful. I didn't expect any compliments for mine. I thought it was pretty cool.

[Laughter]

Petersen: In a way. But Bob never said anything. I was not expecting him to, I wasn't friends with him for praise [laughs] but I kind of thought well gosh. Maybe I said something like we were closing and it was running late and I mentioned, "Oh, I wish my piece were a little better," and he said to me, he said, "Yes, why don't you take your light, see that bush over there? That

little miniature tree? Take your light and shine it into that tree. As a piece.” That’s it. I thought, this is kind of brilliant. Because you don’t have to go through all these little mirrors and rotating.

[Laughter]

Petersen: No, he didn’t say that. But anyway.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I kind of understood what he meant. You can be simple.

Q2: Did Bob often comment on your work? In general?

Petersen: No, not often at all. But a piece I did in 1979, he and Dodi Booth were working at Untitled Press on Captiva Island, wonderful print shop, and I had a little studio just maybe a hundred feet away, back in the jungle. It was a little tin, old fisherman’s garage that I had. I asked Bob if I could put a drawing table over there. Because when he purchased the property there, the little shed was full of old fishing nets and stuff, which is kind of neat. I made it into a little drawing studio, a wonderful space to work in. Bob called it my million-dollar shed.

[Laughter]



Petersen: He had a little nickname for it. Because I bought an air conditioner to put in the wall and I had it insulated. I had a cement floor poured over the dirt. I had a little patio put on the back with a little roof. So.

[Laughter]

Petersen: When Bob would take company on the tour, he loved taking people up Jungle Road in his Volkswagen convertible, little 1967 VW red convertible that he called—this is a whole other story. He called it That. The name of the car. Anyway, Jungle Road went from the Beach House, wound through the jungle, and ended up at Untitled Press. Right before you got to Untitled Press was my little drawing studio. Bob and his company would be in the car. He goes, “Oh, there’s Petersen’s million-dollar shed.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway. It was a laugh. He loved just having fun.

Q: But you were saying that the car had a nickname? Is that what you meant?

Petersen: Yes, he called it That.

Q: The car was called That. [Laughs]

Petersen: Yes. And then, I don't know if I—

Q2: There was another car called This. So there was This and That.

Petersen: Yes. Then we needed a VW, well not a VW especially, but we needed a larger van for Untitled Press because we were hauling materials and things, and so we went into Fort Myers and he purchased a VW bus with the sliding side doors. When we got back to Captiva after picking the van up at the car dealership, we pulled in the drive and he would say hi to the cars, “Hi That. This is This.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: When company would be there he would kind of chuckle, like Debbie Taylor. Were they married? Yes, it was Debbie. They'd be visiting with Al Taylor and Debbie would say, “Oh, I'll run down to the market and get something for dinner,” down to Bailey's General Store on Sanibel. Bob would say, “Oh, you want to take This or That?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: That was kind of funny. People would look like, “This or That?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway. The *Light Show*, was that clear enough?

Q: Very clear.

Petersen: I don't know if this information is so historical for—

Q2: How long did that actually, was it for about—

Petersen: Oh, just the evening.

Q2: That one night. Just one night.

Petersen: Yes, one night. One night performance.

Q: And did you really advertise it? Or was it just word of mouth?

Petersen: We made announcements. Well, the word of mouth being that we were working at Gemini, we got to know a lot of people, and Sid Felsen and Stanley Grinstein and Elyse [Grinstein]. They would tell friends. They're the shining, well in the art world around Hollywood, the Grinsteins, the word got out. I wasn't taking advantage of it, I just said, "Oh, I'm having a light show up in the—" and I don't know, god, I don't believe— We did an announcement, but I don't think we put Bob's name's on it. It says Isham, Petersen. I have some at home. I think Bob decided right at the last minute to be involved. I think I was feeling like or

Bob maybe mentioned, I don't know. Anyway he got involved after we did the announcement. It could be that I just felt like, "Oh god, I forgot to ask Bob."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He's right here.

Q: Don't want to hurt his feelings.

Petersen: Right. Yes. And so one more point. Oh, I don't know if this is historical, for the archives. But I'll say it. At the *Light Show*, to get permission to use the property, I saw a house up the hill. So I thought well gosh, someone's going to see lights down here and I'm moving around. There are going to be people and I'd better go up and ask them. This was long before we had gotten together. I thought, I'd better get permission to use this property. So I went up the top of the hill with my pickup, wound up, went up to the top and pulled in the driveway. It was a beautiful Spanish kind of 1930s house, just beautiful. So I go up and a big watchdog, Doberman Pinscher type, big black with a spiky collar—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —runs. I kind of caught, I'm kind of, I'm not really afraid of dogs. If you bend down they tend to, if you run, forget it.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I learned you never run from a dog like that. Anyway, I introduced myself, walked up to the door and knocked. A lady came to the front door. I said, “Hi. I noticed the empty dirt lot down the hill. I’d like to do an art light show there in a few weeks and just wondering if I could speak with the property owner,” and so forth and she said, “Oh yes, that’s my husband. I’ll go get him.” So she said, “Oh, he’s in the pool out back. Do you mind waiting?” I said, “No, I don’t mind at all,” so I sat in the living room with beautiful sculptures and little things from Africa and Brazil and Spain, just really nice stuff. I’m looking, I thought god, these are quite beautiful things. So this man comes in, comes through the door and he has a white towel around him and he has the most incredible suntan and looked just like Picasso.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I didn’t tell him that, but [laughs] I about—he had little slippers on and Picasso, you’ve seen photos with his shirt off, and he had the head and the Spanish black eyes. I went god, oh god.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Picasso. For myself, enjoying it, but a wonderful, wonderful man. So elegant and gentlemanly. I was talking to him and of course I mentioned art, what’s surrounding us but art. He said, “Yes, that would be wonderful.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: “Whatever you want to do.” I didn’t mention Rauschenberg or me and some friends. He said, “Oh yes, go ahead. When’s it going to be?” And I said, “A few weeks. I’ll let you know.” So time went on and I was leaving to go back to the house again and then he said, “Oh, excuse me. There’s one thing. You cannot have any flame, any fire.” You can imagine hills with this dry grass all over. He said, “I do not want flames, any kind of fire.” I said, “No.” A carbon arc light has a fire inside, but I didn’t mention that. But to me it was quite safe.

So the night of the performance, Daniel Freeman saw in this landfill a big mound about oh 30 feet long, where they had dumped manure, fertilizer. I was involved with my piece and he was over there with a shovel. He takes something, a long cord, and he lays it through the stretches down the manure pile. Then he had a shovel and it buried it about oh an inch deep, all the way along. I didn’t realize it, but it was a dynamite fuse.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He got at the other end and lit it and it went—as a piece, it was beauty, but it was fire. I about really—

Q: And manure is not the safest thing to light on fire.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes. Actually I didn't notice it until it was almost over. Oh god, that's the *Light Show*.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Oh we had a wonderful time. Hundreds and hundreds of people came to that show.

And then the roads—

Q2: I guess it was well advertised.

Q: So you did advertise—

Petersen: Well, just word of mouth. We handed out a few announcements. But what attracted people was maybe the lights and my rotating mirror. Because the Santa Ana Freeway or Santa Monica, a freeway, is right below and then there's another highway that goes to the L.A. airport through the valley and people at night were curious, "What's all the lights up there for?" They went to check it out.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Actually this one fellow stopped and he said, "Oh I was driving down the freeway and I saw these lights. I had to come up and look."

[Laughter]

Q: Replicating your experience with the lights, trying to ride to find the source of the light.

Petersen: But then as soon as I look over and I notice Dan Freeman's piece is flaming—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and then it extinguishes, it's out, I turned back like this. You know who's standing there?

Q2: The guy.

Petersen: The owner. [Laughs] And his wife. He had put a suit on. A suit and tie. And she had her mink. Very elegant.

[Laughter]

Petersen: They're holding, she has his arm, and they're walking through—

Q2: Did they see the fire?



Petersen: No, god, luckily no.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I about passed out though.

[Laughter]

Petersen: And he just walked by and he says, “You have my compliments, very beautiful,” because he just saw the lights, the beams, and maybe Bob’s lights down in the cement culverts. But then a friend of mine, who was that? Oh. Anyway a friend came up and he said, “Petersen, the fire department’s here,” or, “The police,” the police, yes, it was the police.

Q2: Did you have to get any kind of permit or anything?

Petersen: He said, “The police are here,” it was the highway state troopers. He said, “They want to talk to whoever is running this operation here,” and it’s me.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I had actually just gotten—I don’t want to get into that story. Anyway, police and I don’t—

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway, that made me very nervous. So there's an officer standing down there and I have to do this. So I go, "Hi, my name's Robert Petersen. I'm in charge of the art light show opening here tonight." He said, "Well, you have to shut it down because there's too many people blocking the road out of the hill on both sides," and he said, "If there's a fire, a fire truck can't get through," so he wasn't against the *Light Show*, but the street is—

Q2: The rubbernecking, yes—

Petersen: Is kind of half-barricaded there. He said, "We have to get these autos out of here. Because if there's an emergency, an ambulance or fire truck can't get up this hill."

Q2: Had you had to get a permit or anything for that?

Petersen: No. Just permission from the—

Q2: Those guys.

Q: Just Picasso.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Picasso.

[Laughter]

Q: Picasso's permission. Do you power a searchlight with a generator? How do you power a searchlight?

Petersen: It has a generator.

Q: You had a portable generator?

Petersen: Yes, it's a DC [direct current], huge generator. It's that big around.

Q2: Sixty inches is pretty big.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Yes. I have photographs of it.

Q2: Cool.

Petersen: In my collection there.

Q: How are you doing? Do you want to take a break?

Petersen: Oh yes, let's take a little break. I hope I'm doing something here.

Q2: I think you're doing fine.

Q: I think you're doing great.

Petersen: Well, I get off on these stories and—

Q: You have an amazing memory.

Petersen: Well, thank you. But I tend to get into the details. A little too involved, but—

Q: I think that's great. That's what we're trying to get down, are all those details.

Petersen: There's so— I could talk more about Cy, just keep going on. Oh yes, let's take a little break.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Your memory is extraordinary. I can hardly remember what I was doing last week. [Laughs]

You have a very precise memory.

Petersen: Well, I just worry that it's not; well, it's my life. But for the archive, like in the future, if a student is going to read this, it's kind of boring in a way. What do you think, Lena?

Q3: Excuse me?

Q: I don't think it's boring.

Petersen: I might talk a little too many scattered, boring—

Q3: No, it's fine.

Petersen: Okay. I—

Q3: Just let it flow.

Petersen: Yes. But I get worried about the time and—

Q: Don't worry about that at all.

Petersen: Because they can edit, we're recording now, right?

Q: Yes, I just turned it back on. But you can always edit the transcript later or edit the recording. The thing is, we don't know the utility of it ten years, fifty years from now, but one of the things that's hardest, maybe the hardest to bring back, to get any detailed sense of, is process. You were there, in the making of these things. So for someone fifty years from now who might just have the artifact, just have the painting or just have the lithograph in front of them, to be able to read your memories of, "That day I remember this is what happened when we came into the studio," or, "This is what Rauschenberg said," that's invaluable information. There's no other way to get that information.

Petersen: Yes. Yes, I was there. But—

Q: That's what makes all that detail valuable to me. So what—

Petersen: Well, I was there at the time, you can't go back in time, of course, but—I kind of took it at—we worked hard but I didn't realize the historical moment I was in at the time. I knew Rauschenberg was Rauschenberg, but for twentieth-century art history, it's like having dinner with Picasso or [Andy] Warhol, which we did—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —with Warhol many times [laughs] have dinner with him. Oh, just to get back to Picasso, I think it was around 19—oh god, what year? Do you recall when Picasso passed on, what year? [1973]

Q: What year he died?

Petersen: I can't recall it. I've read it, but I can't recall. But anyway, Leo Castelli phoned Bob, which he used to do; a few times a week, Leo would call, and Ileana. Leo Castelli, wonderful, wonderful man. I loved his voice, that French. He would say, "Oh Petersen, is Bob available?" So Bob, of course, wanted to get on the phone with Leo and he'd go, "Oh hey, hi Leo," and Leo said, "Oh Bob, I'm going to France, Picasso has invited me to come visit. Would you like to come along?" I don't recall what Bob was doing at the time, but he had some other business to do and he thanked Leo very much but he said, "Thank you, but maybe next time."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He could talk that way with Leo because Leo would probably be invited again. But then I think it was that same year and then when Bob heard the news that Picasso had passed, he really got upset. He went, "Oh my god, I could have spoken with Picasso." You can imagine, anyone, but especially an artist like Rauschenberg. It really hurt him. He just said, "Oh god, I had the opportunity to go to Pablo's with Leo." He just walked away, took his Jack Daniel's and—

[Laughter]

Petersen: Before Leo left, Bob said, "Oh, I would love to go. I have to go to L.A., a business— But I do have a gift for him, if you would please give it to him." In Florida, Bob and I would go

down south to the Seminole Indian reservations because Bob loved going there. We stop at a little souvenir stand, Seminole Indians, and he's looking at a Seminole Indian patchwork, beautiful things. He's looking in the gift shop at things. He starts speaking with the lady behind the counter and her son or a family member comes in the back door and he has this Seminole jacket on, but it's incredible. It's more detailed. Bob said, "Oh, do you have any coats like that in the tourist, in this section?" And she goes, "No, we don't sell those, we don't sell those."

[Laughter]

Petersen: She said, "Well, this is the chief's son, that's made for him." Bob, he's a very wonderful man. He'd pause for a second and said, "Would you happen to have anything similar available?"

[Laughter]

Petersen: The son heard that, so he goes back in the little grass where they're made and he comes back and he has a stack of Seminole handmade for the families, kind of a little bit worn. I don't know if you've seen photos of Bob in the Seminole jackets. I think I have some, but—

Q2: I think I may have seen some.

Petersen: He bought oh, I'd say all together close to eight of them. But off and on we'd go back to Captiva and then another two months would go by and he'd go, "Petersen, let's drive down to



the Seminole Indian village,” because he knew, this is going to be quality handmade beautiful Seminole Indian clothes. He gave Helen Marden [née Harrington] one. Oh, I was talking about Picasso.

[Laughter]

Petersen: And Leo Castelli.

Q: It became a very interesting story, it's okay.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Well anyway, so he had an extra and we folded it up and mailed it to Leo Castelli in New York and he said, “This is my gift for Picasso,” and it's a Seminole chief's jacket. Leo came back from France and he said, “Oh, Picasso loved your gift.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: He knew, Picasso, they have that eye and he said, “He put it on instantly,” and started parading around like, “Ooh!”

[Laughter]

Petersen: “Look at my Seminole Indian—”

[Laughter]

Q2: Did Bob know Picasso?

Petersen: He’d never met him personally. But I was telling Brent—

Q: That’s right, we were talking about, he had a chance—

Petersen: Leo had invited Bob. Leo said, “Oh, Rauschenberg is on the phone,” said, “I’m going to go visit Picasso. He’s invited me to come visit. Would you like to come along?” And Bob had business somewhere and he told Leo, “Well, possibly next time,” but then Bob was so upset when he found out that same year or very soon after that Picasso passed on. He was really upset that he had missed that opportunity. But after Picasso passed, I kind of vaguely remember Bob saying, “Well, at least he liked my gift.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Which is true. He loved it. These are beautiful. Anyway.

Q: So since we’ve been talking a little bit about Florida, we wanted to get you to talk about some of the particular works that Rauschenberg was working on, on Captiva, if you have particular

memories of the making of some of these. Now I don't know, you brought out all these photos, you might have to explain what's what—

Q2: Okay, this is from the *Tablet Series* [Untitled (*Tablet Series*), 1974, 74.D004, see p. 402].

Petersen: Bob had the most wonderful titles. *Tablet*. Beautiful, beautiful.

Q2: So this is two pieces of paper and there's stuff sandwiched between the paper.

Petersen: See Lena, this is what we were doing with [Robert] Bob Mattison on Little Janis. Bob Mattison, I don't know if you were part of that or, he was writing for a show in San Francisco. He was doing the introduction—

Q2: The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has a Rauschenberg research project online and I think he wrote a piece for it, so it might have been in connection with—

Petersen: Yes. And he wanted to know the process here. Because he was saying according to his archives or research that it was two sheets of paper of collaged together. He said, "Do you know how that was done?" And I said yes, I helped Bob make them. He took the same size paper, we laid it on Little Janis. And then we brushed Liquitex matte medium on one sheet and then Bob laid down the cardboard on that top sheet and then we put matte medium on the cardboard and then laid another sheet over and then ran it through Little Janis under pressure. And so it made this embossment because the press gives pressure.

Q2: The signatures are embossed as well. I don't know if you can see that.

Q: Oh yes.

Petersen: Oh wow. Wow.

Q2: Did you have a plate made for that or?

Petersen: Yes, I can't recall. There was a reason. Bob had this made. I can't recall what he had it made for. I'm not sure of this, but I don't think it was made just for these. Maybe [Donald] Don [Saff] would know where that embossment came from originally. But I know it's his. He actually worked on these with Peter Wirth and Dodi Booth.

Q2: Peter Wirth worked at Graphicstudio?

Petersen: No, he worked for Bob; well, to begin with he worked at, yes, Graphicstudio at the University of South Florida, Tampa. He was one of the printers that worked for Graphicstudio and Bob did projects with Graphicstudio. We were doing some printing up in Tampa. We were printing, my mind's kind of on something else I skipped over. The grove group?

Q2: Oh the *Crops* series [1973].

Petersen: Or *Crops*, like watermelon and anyway, you don't have to go to that, but we were printing that and Peter Wirth was running one. Oh, they're so beautiful. Peter Wirth was running one of the presses and I was cutting, I had a paper cutter on the side. I was trimming—slide the paper over, bring the bar down, slide it over. I had paper bags full of shrivels.

Q2: Shredded, yes.

Petersen: Bob would have the bags there and before it was run through the press he would sprinkle, he did the composition on the piece. Anyway, to get back to these, *Tablets*, Peter Wirth maybe assisted in some of those. I recall doing a few. But I don't recall, actually Peter Wirth passed on, I heard.

Q2: Yes, he did.

Petersen: God. I can't believe it. I was going to say ask him. [Laughs] He may recall.

Q2: Get the Ouija board out. [Laughs]

Petersen: Sorry, it's not funny, but Peter Wirth's a wonderful fellow. I want to go back, you mentioned, oh maybe some time ago, if Bob ever complimented my work.

Q: We were talking about that before.

Petersen: And then I got off onto the million-dollar shed, my little studio back in the jungle.

[Laughter]

Petersen: One night I finished a drawing. I never used to, in the whole ten, eight years, announce my work. But I finished this drawing and I was looking at it and then I looked out my little front screen door and I could see the print shop through the palm fronds, beautiful coconut trees in there. I looked over and the light was on in Untitled Press, the back porch. I saw Bob and Dodi Booth through the window in the shop alone and I just had the drawing and I thought well, I think I'll go show it to Bob. I walked in and I said, "Bob, would you like to see a drawing I just finished?" He was by Little Janis, the press, and Dodi. I can't remember what they were doing. Something. Anyway, I came in and I said, "Bob, here's a drawing I just finished," and he said, "Petersen, that is beautiful," and that's, not that he was being, he just, that's what he said. But he only said that to me once. Maybe he said things like, "Oh, that's good," but I never announced work like, "Look at this." [Laughs] "Look what I did. Look what I did."

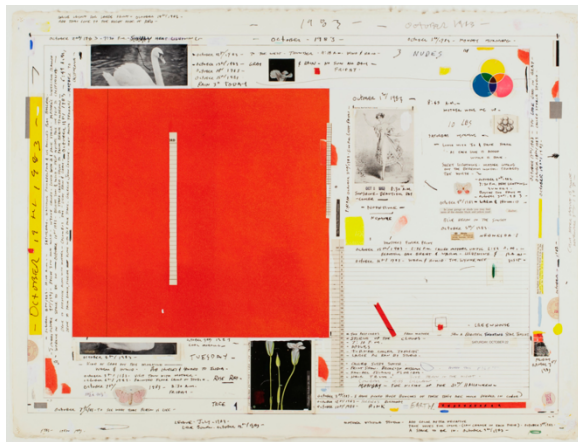
[Laughter]

Petersen: He just said, "God, that is a beautiful drawing," then I said, "Thanks," and I went back and—

[Laughter]

Q: To the million-dollar shed.

Petersen: Yes. And anyway and then another, no, that's the only, I don't know. He would comment on work like, "Good job." But this particular drawing really struck him. Another time was that one, I called them "Calendar Drawings" in the eighties, I had that set and it was the September 1980 monthly journal written on a page [*Journal Drawings*, 1976–88]. It was an etching printed and then I hand-colored them.



Robert Petersen  
*October 1983*, 1983  
Drawing collage on paper  
22 x 30 inches (55.9 x 76.2 cm)

No, this is the original. Yes, I was working on the original drawing. I was working at the time in the Beach House, which had the first studio underneath. Then when Bob had the other next studio built, next door there, he said, "Petersen, you can have this studio to do your work," which was great. I said god—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —thanks. Of course I said thanks but three sliding glass doors that look out onto sand, facing west looking at the Gulf of Mexico and the sun sets right there. [Laughs] God. Anyway. I was working on that original down under the Beach House. I heard Bob upstairs and I think Agathe Gonnet was there visiting and Sachika, and I went up the back steps into the kitchen and I walked in and I don't know how I got this, I just, I just felt Bob should sign this. I've never asked him to sign my work before—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —but it would be kind of, I don't know, it wasn't like I didn't, it just came in a split second. I didn't hesitate, I just walked in and I went, “Oh,” I put it down, I said, “Bob, I just finished this journal and I'd like it if you could sign it,” and he said, “Yes, I'll sign it,” and Agathe Gonnet was sitting on the other side of the kitchen counter, stool height up and she was doing her nails in red with the polish and Bob looks over and he goes, “Agathe, can I borrow your nail polish?” [laughs] and he signed it in red nail polish.

[Laughter]

Rauschenberg. I had the drawing for years. I sold it about two years ago. Through Jim Kempner. Actually to a wonderful collector whose name is, I've put this in the documentation and actually where the collection is. Oh no. I can't think of his name right now. It's one of those things, so it's right— [laughs]



Q: On the tip of your tongue?

Petersen: Yes, tip, tip of my tongue. Anyway—

Q: Can I ask you about these, about working on these kinds of things? As you were working on them did you have the titles? In other words, were you just working with materials or did you know, I'm working on a series called *Tablet*? Did you get the titles and the words because the words have connotations with them?

Petersen: I would say that generally the titles came later. The *Hoarfrost* series [1974–76] Bob did, that went on for a few, couple years. So we'd be at the Beach House and he would say, "Oh Petersen, let's go to the print shop and do some *Hoarfrost*." But these, I don't think he said—

Q2: These are much smaller.

Q: Right.

Petersen: Let's go do *Tablets*.

Q: No, I just mean in terms of the way he worked—

Petersen: And he would do, I would say they're titled at the end, these, because it's not a big, this was probably—

Q2: There are six of them I think or seven.

Petersen: Yes, completed in, not that fast is better, but maybe just a few weeks or he would do four. The next week he'd maybe do eight.

Q: I just mean that it might change the way you approach process if you have that set of metaphors or connotations associated with it. Because *Hoarfrost*, if I understand it right, it was his reaction to that material, he said, "This reminds me of that word 'hoarfrost.'" And then that gives you a set of ideas about how you're going to handle the material. If you say we're going to make, whether it's six or three hundred artifacts that we're going to think of as a tablet or that crops, this kind of organic material that's emerging out of the process, you think about it in a different way. So I just meant in terms of his process, would it be, it's just dealing with the stuff and then later I'll think about it and say, "Well, that looks like crops," and put the metaphor on it at the end. But it sounds like the word wasn't necessarily there.

Petersen: No, I don't believe, as far as I can recall, I think it just came later. Because he didn't say, "Let's go do a *Tablet*." But he did say *Hoarfrost* because that went on for a year.

Q2: I was going to say, there are like 150 of them.

Q: That's much longer.

Petersen: Gosh. '74. I did the edition called *Pyramid Series* [1974].



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Pyramid Series*), 1974  
Embossed paper and fabric  
72 x 29 1/2 inches (182.9 x 74.9 cm)  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
Purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis

Q2: That's actually not an edition.

Petersen: But these, it seems like I'd remember something like that. I think Peter Wirth ran these through the press.

Q2: So the *Pyramid Series* is the next thing coming up, yes, so that's the *Pyramid Series*.

Petersen: Yes, this is with the cheesecloth. Yes, I did these. But is that a different year? I don't know.

Q2: No, that's right, '74. Yes.

Petersen: '74? Yes, '74. Yes. This is cheesecloth. They used it in the print shop. For processing the litho stone. Or a plate. It depends.

Q: Do you remember things like that coming about? Was it just that one day Rauschenberg would say, "Hey, let's put the cheesecloth in." [Laughs] This cheesecloth in?

Petersen: Yes, he never gave directions or anything.

Q: Yes, we were talking about that too.

Petersen: We were talking about that in the last interview.

Q2: I was going to say, when you went into the studio with him, what would generally happen? Would he just say, "I have an idea," or would you just start working and—

Petersen: He'd just start working. He may say, "Petersen, go over to curating," which was the house next to my million-dollar shed.

[Laughter]

Petersen: And we kept all the papers in there. Because it had a dehumidifier and air conditioner running most of the time. It would go off because we'd lose power on the island and I was quite concerned because if it's a summer storm in July, with the Florida humidity, it was very intense.

But anyway, he would say, “Petersen, go over to curating, please, and get twelve sheets of—”  
what did they call this paper? Darn. I don’t think it’s German etching.

Q: Is it there?

Petersen: It could be. Could be. He would just go say, “Get about twelve sheets of paper,” the heavier pound. He wouldn’t say this, but like this is a 300-pound paper, I guess, I don’t know how they weigh it, but it’s thicker than 90-pound hot press. This is like a 200-pound rag paper. Bob, because he bought a lot of that paper because that’s the paper he used to do the—

Q2: Transfer drawings?

Petersen: To do the lighter fluid transfer drawings on. He loved that paper. In fact when I first moved to Captiva in the Beach House, there was a three-bedroom house that is, but in one of the bedrooms was a bunk bed, just a bunk bed. We didn’t use it, but on the bed was a pack of this rag paper, two hundred sheets wrapped, you’ve seen paper in reams. He would say, “Petersen,” or sometimes he would go get it. Or I would go get the paper and the press would be there and he’d just lay it out, and he’d go over and get a piece of cheesecloth and get some matte medium. He didn’t ever tell me to do anything. I think I just got the idea [laughs] it’s just—

Q: You’d watch him do it.

Petersen: Paint, put the medium on. That's one thing about Bob. He didn't say, "Let's do this," or, "Let's do that," it just generally evolved in the working.

Q2: Say you took a break to eat or whatever, did he ever talk about what he thought about the work or whether he felt it was working or not or anything like that?

Petersen: No, not in that way, no. No, he didn't, he just let it alone, he didn't comment on it.

Q: About the way he worked?

Petersen: Yes, that's it, the way he worked. And we were working on the first floor here, on a beautiful— Well, the whole chapel and that first floor were full of cardboard boxes. It was his palette. We'd go out and walk around the block, pick up boxes—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and that's another thing. If he saw a box across the street, he wouldn't say, "Petersen, get that box over there." He'd just walk along and he'd pick up a box and he'd go, "This is a nice box."

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and we'd take some back. I would see a box and I'd say, "Hey Bob, what about this one?" He'd go, "Yes, fine, take it to the studio."

Q2: Did he ever reject boxes? Did he ever go, "I don't like that one," or?

Petersen: No, Bob loved everything.

[Laughter]

Petersen: No, he didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, even a box.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He was that way. Oh gosh. And there's another story about when he got pneumonia. Remind me to go back to the pneumonia. So we're working downstairs on the cardboard boxes and it's a beautiful piece. I have the photos, you probably have them too; the show at Leo's with the cardboard boxes [*Cardboards*, Leo Castelli, New York, 1971]. They had titles, but he would get the titles from the boxes. Like "Title 74-D009," on the box. Anyway he did give me, on that series for just a few nights he did, oh god, beautiful. Here, Lena, did you see that?

Q: That's the book of all the *Cardboards* [1971–72; referring to exhibition catalogue *Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboards and Related Pieces*, 2007].

Petersen: He gave me directions on that piece because at the top, there's a big tall cardboard box and at the top, some way he had pierced them, not pierced, he hated knives [note: referring to *Gun Tackers / Skin Pack / Brushes / I.T.T. / Glass (Cardboard)*, 1971]. But anyway, there was some opening at the top. He said, "Petersen, go up there, get the stepladder and drop that string or twine down through the box and I'll pull it at the bottom," that was, he was directing me. Like, "Get up." Nicely, not ordering, whatever, he never did that. He said, "Would you mind, get the string," and then it intertwined, it went around another box some way, but it wasn't going down and so I kept moving it, as I recall. Bob and I were talking together. I said, "Do you see it yet?" and he'd be down below and he'd be looking up and he'd go, "No, Petersen, I don't see it yet. Pull a little harder," or, "Let up, not so hard. No, back up."

[Laughter]

Petersen: And you know what? Brigid Polk [a.k.a. Brigid Berlin] was recording it. I don't know if you keep in touch with her, but I would love to hear that recording.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Gun Tackers / Skin Pack / Brushes /  
 I.T.T. / Glass (Cardboard)*, 1971  
 Cardboard, wood, and string  
 114 1/8 x 175 1/4 x 28 3/8 inches (289.9  
 x 445.1 x 72.1 cm)  
 Private collection



[Laughter]

Petersen: Because Brigid Polk brought it over to the kitchen. Brigid Polk, she was a Warhol superstar back in the Factory days. A wonderful girl, lady now. [Laughs] She's related to the [William] Randolph Hearst family in San Francisco, the newspaper, so she has a little [laughs] I mean she's nice. So she was recording artists and she came over one night in the kitchen and she said, "Rausch and Bob, you have to hear this recording," she said, "I love it, I just love it as a recording," and the recording is Bob's voice and my voice and Bob's going, "Pull a little harder," and I'd go, "Okay, okay."

[Laughter]

Petersen: But on the recording you don't know what we're doing.

[Laughter]

Petersen: "Drop it in over there. No, pull it back up," and I go, "Yes, okay, I'll pull it up and drop it again." It just kind of, this rhyme of a song, back and forth. "Okay, I'll drop it again," and he goes, "Okay, that's fine, oh, there it is, I see it!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: We were all laughing. Brigid said, “I love this recording,” I’d love to hear that recording again.

Q: I wonder what she did with it.

Petersen: And another time he directed me—

Q2: I think she has a lot of the recordings still.

Petersen: Yes and she took Polaroids, well, Warhol, a lot of artists, Warhol mainly. And another time we were actually working on the *Cardboard* paintings and we came out of Leo Castelli’s at 420 West Broadway and there was a huge cardboard box laying on West Broadway, just down from 420 West Broadway, Leo’s gallery and Sonnabend Gallery’s there [Leo Castelli and Sonnabend Gallery, New York] or it used to be back in the seventies, eighties, nineties. Bob said, “Oh, that’s a—” Maybe it’s in here.

Q: Is that Castelli’s?

Petersen: No, this is some, oh, we were going to open this [*Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboards and Related Pieces*, 2007]. Now see, there’s a string. That’s beautiful. See, Lena, it’s tied in the top and it just goes down to the, I kind of remember that. Beautiful, god. Really beautiful. And it’s called—

Q2: Is that the one that's called *Castelli / Small Turtle Bowl* [(Cardboard), 1971]?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Castelli / Small Turtle Bowl (Cardboard)*, 1971  
Cardboard fragments stapled on cardboard  
94 1/2 x 145 x 2 inches (240 x 368.3 x 5.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes, I was just going to say that. Yes.

Q2: I'll find it for you.

Petersen: Yes. And show it to Brent. It must be in there. That's a beautiful book, God. Oh, no, see, the string's here, god, beautiful. There it is. That's another thing, he told me to do, gave me directions. See, he had purchased or does it say Leo's something, *Turtle Bowl* right there?

Q: No, that just says Leo Castelli gallery.

Petersen: Yes, and then Bob probably, I don't know if it's—

Q2: Here it says "small" and it says it's *Castelli / Small Turtle Bowl*, so it says small there and "turtle bowl" must be somewhere—

Q: Oh, it is on there somewhere?

Petersen: It's probably in there somewhere.

Q2: The titles for these came from—

Petersen: As I recall, he got basically almost all of them off of the—

Q: Off the boxes.

Petersen: Yes. And anyway, I don't recall if I purchased it, but in the studio, see these brass staples?

Q: Yes.

Petersen: That's kind of a carton. I don't think they use them so much anymore, but they used to take them and to fold the two cardboards—

Q2: With really heavy—

Petersen: Brass copper staples. And we had that gun. I don't know if I bought it; no, I didn't buy it, or Bob got it somewhere. It just appeared, as I remember. I think I bought the staples for it. Because I was trying it out and I tried it, I don't know if I did it on this piece, I mean initially, to

start with. Then Bob said, “Put some in this piece. Just go around and staple,” see, this wood— because there’s wood, there’s a quarter inch or—

Q2: Plywood under—

Petersen: Eighth inch, nice wood behind it, so that the staples would bend. And so I put a few in. Anywhere, that’s my eye. Then he said, “Oh, put a few more over there, a few more down, yes, a little more there,” and so I was really enjoying it. At the time I didn’t realize what I was actually doing—I realized it, but I’m actually helping develop a painting, by my staple. A piece of cardboard and a staple?

[Laughter]

Petersen: Did you see that, Lena? All the staples. They’re about this wide.

Q: Are the staples actually in it? Or did it—all the way into it?

Petersen: Oh yes, it’s the real staple. Yes. The staple had some kind of mechanism where it’ll go through and another tool goes with it and closes it. I don’t know if there’s a sample. See, here they’re using tape. I don’t know if they still do it anymore, but you used to see them on the bottom of boxes, to seal the bottom.

Q2: They do still use them. Not as frequently.

Petersen: You can see it.

Q: I've seen this, yes.

Petersen: And it'll go through. It doesn't go like a staple stapler. It has something where it actually, it closes the staple on a very thin surface. I wonder what happened to that stapler? I'll have to look for one again. It used to be in the bathroom by the chapel. [Laughs]

Q2: Might still be.

Petersen: It could be, yes.

Q2: Probably not, but it could be.

Q: You never know.

Petersen: Anyway, you asked if he ever directed me and that's the only time where—

Q: So there's an instance—

Petersen: He said actually, "Do that," yes. And Bob was back looking and David Prentice came over, David Prentice just lived over on Broadway. He'd drop by almost every night.

Q2: Oh really?

Petersen: Yes. Oh yes, all the time. So he came over and he'd help out around the studio, help hang stuff. Bob would give him a little money or friendship basically. David Prentice was there and Bob and he, I can't recall what they were, but they were talking about this piece and I recall Bob just really admiring it in a way, I don't remember the exact details, but—Bob really liked that kind of—I believe, just I'm not sure, but in a way, I think a mattress came in this, I don't know what came in it, but it looked like the size of a bed mattress when we saw it on the street. The measurements are probably in the back. It's a beautiful book. They're all—

This piece, at the time when Bob was making it, well, they weren't very popular, in a way. Ileana would come over and she would say things to Rauschenberg like, “When are you going to paint again?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Like the Combines [1954–64] and—he didn't answer, as I recall, he didn't give an excuse. But at the time he did this, I had in my mind, it's not that it's not good, but I thought, not a big deal. It just didn't seem popular to me. I wouldn't mention that to him. But when he put these together he said, “Bob,” he would have me cut the wood, he would lay the cardboard out, the wood's out, an outline, like the pencil outline, he would do that. Then I would take the

copying saw and cut it out and then we'd put the glue on, weight it and press it down. I always liked this piece.

Q: We should say for the recording which one you were talking about, what is that one?

Q2: *Volon* [(Cardboard), 1971].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Volon (Cardboard)*, 1971  
Cardboard  
55 1/2 x 147 x 10 3/4 inches (141 x  
373.4 x 27.3 cm)  
Private collection

Petersen: *Volon*. Wow. At the time, but now it's like, well, it's just beautiful. Okay, I was going to—

Q: You didn't immediately think of them as collectible art objects. Is that what you mean?

Petersen: Well, in a way. It's hard to describe. But I just, I didn't get excited. Or that kind of like—

Q2: Was there a series that you were working with him that you did find exciting?



Petersen: Oh yes, all the transfers. I don't know if that's the right way to put it. I'm getting a little too—I just see it now. Like the composition. I didn't notice the composition before.

Q2: Do you think that's from your background as a printer? That the transfer stuff interested you more? Or?

Petersen: I think it's just age. Your eye kind of—if you're walking down the street and you just pick up four boxes and you bring them in and lay them out on the floor and you take a pencil and glue it down—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and you do that like eight a year or so.

[Laughter]

Q: That's basically what you did.

Petersen: Anyway. Oh, to get back to the pneumonia. I was saying that Bob wouldn't hurt a box or something when we were talking earlier.

Q: Yes, you were saying.

Petersen: I said he wouldn't want to hurt a box's feelings. I called him up, I think it was around '96 or so, '97, and he used to call me too. I called him and I said, "Hi Bob. Bob Petersen," and he knows who I am.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He was always so sweet on the, he'd go, "Hi sweet. How's your work?" That was the second line, "How's your work going?" I said, "Bob, I heard you're recovering from pneumonia." It's kind of a, not dumb question, but I said, "God, how did you get pneumonia?" He said, "Well, I was riding in the limo uptown with a friend."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, "We had a wonderful time, we went to the opening, and we were coming back in the limo and I looked out the window and there was cobblestone up on the curb." He saw it and he got about a block away, the car is moving, and he told the driver, he said, "Sir, excuse me, but let me out. I'm going to go—" He didn't say actually what he was going to do. He said, "Let me out," he wasn't that far, maybe up on Fourteenth Street or somewhere, not too far from this building. So he got out and he walked back and he picked up that cobblestone and carried it to Lafayette Street. He said he didn't realize it was kind of cold and it was half raining and, "I got wet and I got the chills and I caught cold," and he said, "I went by that cobblestone and suddenly I felt so sorry for it, I had to get it."

[Laughter]

So he went back and picked up the cobblestone. You know those stones, you see them, they used to make street pavement out of them, I think.

Q: A lot of the streets around here. Bond Street used to be—

Petersen: Yes. So he said, “I got chilled and cold and got pneumonia.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: But he chuckled. He said, “I love that cobblestone.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: That laugh he made, so good.

Q: So that’s what is amazing to me about the *Cardboards*, they’re not just compositionally beautiful, but it’s a kind of sympathy for the material. He’d take cardboard seriously. This thing that everybody thinks of as disposable and it’s just used instrumentally to carry this or that, but to say, “Wait a second, that’s a medium too,” and there’s a kind of love for the medium that is amazing.

Petersen: Bob actually started the *Cardboard* series on Captiva, Florida. He had the new studio built and what year are the *Cardboards*?

Q2: They're from the mid-seventies [1971–72].

Petersen: Yes, anyway, '70—

Oh god, the bike.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Oh, I'm changing subjects now. Oh, Bob got the idea for the—

Q: You were going to talk about before the *Cardboard*—

Petersen: *Cardboards* series on Captiva, because you were saying—

Q2: His sympathy for materials.

Petersen: Yes, for the materials. Bob said, I don't know exactly how he said, "I work with what's available." We had just, oh, say a block away up the Sand Road—you've been to Captiva, the little Island Store—and a man owned it named Parker and his wife Pen. [Laughs] They used to walk down the beach shelling at night. I'm getting a little off of the story, but they'd go in front

of the Beach House. It's a great shelling beach and they're picking up shells. Bob and I are laying on the beach and sunning and maybe fishing, what we did all the time out front and I said, "Bob, I've forgotten his name," because I'd just moved there. I said, "I've forgotten his name but he owns the Island Store, right?" And Bob goes, "Oh and that's his wife Pen," and he said, "It's very easy, Petersen, Parker Pen."

[Laughter]

Petersen: So I never forgot their names again. Because I always think of the Parker Pen

[Laughter]

Petersen: —and it was Parker and his wife Pen.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway, he saw the cardboard boxes at the Island Store and he just said, "There's something to work with." Yes, this is probably from the Island Store. *Plain Salt* [(Cardboard), 1971].

Q2: This one has Captiva in the—

Petersen: Yes [*French Fried* /] *Captiva Tile* [(Cardboard), 1971]. I don't recall picking up that box of—

Q2: *Captiva Tile*?

Petersen: Yes. But Bob would go to the store by himself too, he would drive around. So he may have picked it up somewhere. But every time I see that I went, “God,” actually I don't even recall him making that one. I said, “God, where do you find a box that says Captiva?”



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Plain Salt (Cardboard)*, 1971  
Cardboard  
80 1/4 x 37 x 10 1/2 inches (203.8 x 94 x 26.7 cm)  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
Gift of Martin Peretz



Robert Rauschenberg  
*French Fried / Captiva Tile (Cardboard)*, 1971  
Cardboard  
72 1/2 x 61 1/2 x 7 3/4 inches (184.2 x 156.2 x 19.7 cm)  
Private collection

[Laughter]

Petersen: In nice print, *Captiva Tile*. Beautiful boxes. Oh, then it went from the *Cardboard*, they were before the *Egyptians*, right? These are sand, *Early Egyptians* [1973–74], yes.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Early Egyptian*), 1973  
Cardboard, sand, Day-Glo paint,  
wood, fabric, and fabric belt  
54 1/4 x 35 x 78 inches (137.8 x 88.9  
x 198.1 cm)  
Hess Art Collection, Switzerland

Q2: These are the *Early Egyptians*.

Petersen: Yes. This is when we would take these boxes out on the beach and we had a little— sawhorses usually. We'd put the box, have gallons of matte medium and brush, I'd brush and Bob too and Dodi Booth helped, we'd paint the top with Liquitex matte medium and then the sand's right there [laughs] just start throwing sand on it.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Beautiful little Captiva shells get collaged in some of them. You'd let that dry and then turn the box on the end or side and do the other side.

Q: And why *Early Egyptian*? It's like a pyramid stone? Why was it called *Early Egyptian*?

Petersen: I don't know where Bob got that *Early Egyptian*. Oh gosh, I don't know.

Q2: And the painting of the fluorescent color on it, where did that—?

Petersen: Oh right, thank you. Yes, see that fluorescent green? Actually that's my paint.

[Laughter]

Petersen: One day we were in the Beach House and I was gathering some art materials in one of the bedrooms. That's how I am, I collect stacks. On the counter there, I had bought or ordered phosphorescent—was it paint? I think it was powder. Anyway, not phosphorescent, fluorescent, I think. It sat in there a long time and I just didn't have any—like what am I going to—I always liked bright, I just didn't have—so months went by and we were in the kitchen and Bob said, “What about that fluorescent paint in the bedroom back there?” He said, “Do you mind if I use a little?” I go, “Of course not. Use as much as you want.” So he turned one of the boxes with the back up and put the fluorescent paint on and let it dry and then put it up against the wall. He loved it. They are not all painted with that. Some. But he was quite amazed because there's one, the first one I recall, it was in red and it was in the living room in the Beach House and look at this cloth coming out. Beautiful book. Well, beautiful work.

[Laughter]



Petersen: Let's see. What was I saying?

Q: You were saying that the paint, that the first one was red.

Petersen: He pushed the box up against the wall and that red halo around it, he just went, "Wow." [Laughs] He said, "Thanks for the paint, Petersen."

[Laughter]

Petersen: This piece, that's a Captiva found piece on the beach. They were doing that construction around, so Bob would look through the refuse from the building. He'd maybe pick up a few things. God.

Q: Is that a *Venetian* [1972–73]?

Petersen: That's a coconut, I think. [Note: discussing *San Pantalone (Venetian)*, 1973, see p. 369]

Q2: Do you remember Bob naming these? Ealan Wingate told me that some of these, like this one, have names that Michael Sonnabend gave them.

Petersen: Oh yes, I recall that.

Q: You mean Rauschenberg would give the series name like *Venetian* and then the gallery owner would give individual names? What does that say, *San* what?

Petersen: And what's the one, *Sor Aqua* [*Venetian*], 1973] or something?

Q2: *Sor Aqua*. Both of those—

Petersen: Is that Italian? *Sor Aqua*, is that Italian for water?

Q: On water?

Petersen: Or *Aqua*, *Sor Aqua*. I think that's from—

Q2: But I know that Ealan said that Michael gave all the, he said, “Oh, Bob wouldn't have come up with those names,” he said—

Petersen: Oh yes, he and Michael would talk. I know one time in the kitchen Michael Sonnabend and Ileana were visiting and Bob was at the kitchen counter and we had just started *Untitled Press* and Bob looked down at Michael Sonnabend, he was in a beanbag chair. We didn't have furniture, but those beanbags, big, giant leather, really comfy. He's lying down. Michael Sonnabend. Bob's up on the counter and he looks over and he goes, “Michael, what is the most popular name in Europe for art?” Michael looked up and he said, “*Untitled*?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Bob laughed. He went, “Unteetled?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Then Michael went, “Well, Untitled, Unteetled—”

[Laughter]

Petersen: “—that’s the most popular name in Europe for art.” So Bob went, “Untitled Press!”

Perfect, you know.

[Laughter]

Q2: How interesting. I never knew that.

You were talking about Brice Marden and he was working—

Petersen: Oh, how long he worked there.

Q: How long he was working for him.

Petersen: So then we started—Bob suggested he wanted to work and I said, “Well, I’ll make some sawhorses,” and—

Q2: Oh, this was because of the fire. In 381.

Petersen: And get plywood and make, because he wanted to, he was working on the *Currents*, the original drawings. Maybe when we were at the Las Tunas, Brice called Bob and said, “Well, there’s been a fire at 381 Lafayette and everything’s okay.” Rauschenberg wasn’t happy about that but he thought, “Well, I’ll stay here, I’ll stay in California ’til the renovation is done down in the basement.” Brice worked here then. I heard this story, I’m sure it’s true, but Brice was working and the firemen came and they evacuated the house, everyone got out. Brice was out in front of the house, building here, and smoke is coming out, and Brice said to one of the firemen, “Oh, I forgot the cats in the kitchen.” They used to sleep in the bathroom down there. Brice said, “Can I borrow your helmet?” And he put on a fireman’s helmet and ran back up the stairs and got the cats [laughs] and brought them back down to the street. I thought that was a sweet story. Get the cats out. Maybe he grabbed Rocky too. I’ve forgotten. I’ll have to ask him.

[Laughter]

Petersen: But I heard that story somewhere. I think right after that I came to live here, after the *Currents* was done. I was only here maybe three months, it could have been a little longer, but

then Brice didn't work here anymore. Then Dorothea Rockburne worked here; yes, Dorothea, I think was here when Brice was here, I think.

Q2: I think so.

Petersen: Yes. But they were both here, working, yes.

Q: That was another point I'm not sure we fully clarified was the founding of Change, Inc. I think that was really your question.

Q2: Yes. Was Change, Inc. founded in 1970? And I didn't know if that was a response to his own experience with the fire.

Petersen: Oh right, you had asked that. No, it didn't have anything to do with the fire.

Q2: Okay. I didn't know if—

Petersen: Change, Inc. came about in the kitchen downstairs, a lot of things came about in that kitchen—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —when I was here, I'm sure a lot of things after too, but from when I was actually there. So David Prentice came over, which he did quite often because he only lives a block away, a block and a half, Broadway up Great Jones Street. He came over and was talking to Bob in the kitchen, kind of upset. Bob, well, what he could do to help out he would and David asked for a loan for one thousand dollars or whatever it was. Bob wrote him a check. But then David said, "Thank you," and they had a little, a couple drinks and a lot of laughter and David left. Then after David left, Bob said to me, I think I was the only one there, "Petersen, I need to do something about this because I just can't keep writing checks," he said. "I will—" But he has his expenses too. We all have expenses. So he said, "I need to do something about this."

I don't know where the word "Change" came from actually. I should in a way. Bob thought of a lot of titles while flying and he loved to fly in jet airplanes on trips. He thought of *Currents*, well, we're getting off of the track. But that was my first experience of Bob just saying, "I have to do something, I have to—" He didn't say, "start a foundation," but he called that accountant, I don't know if you—

[Laughter]

Q2: Yes.

This is *Noname (Elephant)* [(from the portfolio for Meyer Shapiro), 1973], but it's like the *Crops* series. It's too bad we don't have these in color. They look much better, but they are really wonderful.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Noname (Elephant)* (from the portfolio for Meyer Schapiro), 1973  
Solvent transfer, embossing, pochoir, and tape  
28 x 20 inches (71.1 x 50.8 cm)  
From an edition of 100, published by The Committee to Endow a  
Chair in Honor of Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University;  
produced by Untitled Press, Inc., Captiva, Florida

Petersen: Oh, they're so beautiful.

Q2: So this series was called *Crops* and there are names like *Mangrove* [1973], this I think is *Coconut* [1973], *Peanuts* [1973]. But each one is—and this is something that almost every time they come up for auction nobody really indicates each one is really unique. So it's not like Bob did a lot of editions to stuff like that where—



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Mangrove (Crops)*, 1973  
Silkscreened gesso and solvent transfer  
60 x 38 inches (152.4 x 96.5 cm)  
From an edition of 20 Roman numerals and 20 Arabic  
numerals, published by Graphicstudio, University of  
South Florida, Tampa

Petersen: He may lay a sheet here, but then the next print, this sheet would be maybe there, but a different—

Q2: Yes, the general composition would be—

Petersen: Because it's a transfer from the newsprint, newspaper— It's an edition, but each one's unique in a way. And what were you saying about the auction?

Q2: Oh, I was just saying when they come up for auction the descriptions don't indicate, they just say an edition of however many.

Q: Unique.

Q2: They don't really indicate that each one, and Bob is somewhat unique in that way, that he does a lot of this; like this group too, *Tares* [1972], it's the same, this had some fixed imagery, it was the same composition, but there was fixed imagery and then it was different.

Petersen: Yes, each one, same composition, but different imagery.

Q2: And they're wonderful, if you see them all; this is just the one we have photographed, but if you laid out all of them, they're so wonderful to see, the differences in them.



Petersen: Yes. Yes, I cut; well, we all cut. Dodi Booth, at the Beach House.

Q2: And how did you go about doing that? Did you just have a template of—?

Petersen: Yes, there was a template, I believe of Plexiglas. You just have your magazine and maybe I would do this cutout and just turn the page and do another one. We had stacks of magazines. Dodi Booth might have this shape and then we just kept cutting for days and days.

Q2: And did Bob give you, I know you said he didn't really give instructions, but when you were cutting these out, was it just entirely random or was it like he said, "Oh, I want this kind of imagery or that kind of imagery." Or was it just entirely like, "Just cut stuff out?"

Petersen: Oh yes, "Just cut stuff out." Yes.

Q2: Then when he was assembling them, did he rifle through them all? Or how did he put them together? [Laughs]

Petersen: I'm not certain because, let's see, those were printed—let's see. Bob didn't place the imagery, as I recall. Oh, this is so beautiful, this print. That's a quote from William Burroughs. He was visiting down in the kitchen. No, Bob did the initial pattern. But I'm not really certain. I mean Bob would—for each print Bob wasn't there.

Q2: Okay, so he didn't like—

Petersen: The printer, I think—actually, you could call him. I’m pretty sure, does it list the printer?

Q2: Well, this was an Untitled Press edition.

Petersen: I can’t think of his name right now. Anyway, I’ll get his number or I’d even call him. Because he printed the *Tares*.

Q2: But it wasn’t like Bob went through them saying, “Oh, I like this with this,” he wasn’t looking at each composition—

Petersen: I don’t believe so. I’m not certain about that but his name is Richard Wilke. He was a printer at Gemini. And then Bob invited him, he printed the Brice Marden edition [1972].

Q2: I’m sure in the UPI book it says who—

Petersen: The Brice Marden prints were Richard Wilke, right? He stayed with us, isn’t it? Right?

Q3: Yes, Richard Wilke.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: The *Horsefeathers* [*Thirteen*, 1972–73] I think I told you about—

Petersen: Bob did a very similar set with Gemini, right?

Q2: *Horsefeathers*.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Horsefeathers Thirteen I*, 1972  
Lithograph, screenprint, pochoir, collage, and  
embossing on paper  
28 x 22 1/2 inches (71.1 x 57.2 cm)  
From an edition of 76, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Petersen: Yes, *Horsefeathers*. I had a complete set of *Horsefeathers*. Before they were even in the gallery. Because Bob and I were going back to Florida and Bob was signing the edition and curating and I don't know how this happened—I didn't ask for it, as I recall, but I was given a set. Because the price hadn't been set yet or anything. For some reason I had, and it was given to me, a set, what's in the suite *Horsefeathers*? Probably eight different ones.

Q2: I think it is eight [note: fifteen].

Petersen: Yes, the one with *Noname Elephant*.

Q2: No, *Noname Elephant* is separate. That's close to being a *Crops*. *Noname Elephant* is like the *Crops* series. But *Horsefeathers*—

Petersen: There's an elephant in— Yes, there's one with the elephant in it. I have the whole set. Bob and I were going back to Captiva from Gemini in Hollywood and I took a set with me. Then for a few days we were at the Beach House and Ileana Sonnabend and Antonio Homem came to visit and Bob said, "Oh, I have a set of prints, Petersen has a set." He said, "Petersen, can you show those to Ileana?" Of course, they're in the bedroom. I get them out of the portfolio and lay them out, I think right on the floor, well, I cleaned the floor, but just laid them out. We had white tile in that house. Anyway. Ileana said, oh she loved them, she said, "God, these are beautiful. Can I get a set?" And Bob said, "Petersen, can you give Ileana your set and we'll replace, we'll get another set for you," and so I said, "Yes, fine," so I packed them up, gave them to Ileana, but we got busy doing other things. I never got my second set. [Laughs]

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: I really apologize. I'll try to be more focused.

Q: No, you've been very focused.

Q2: No, they're great stories.

Petersen: Well, you know—

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #3

Interviewee: Robert Petersen

Location: New York, New York

Interviewers: Brent Edwards (Q), Gina Guy (Q2)

Date: May 20, 2015

Petersen: The Beach House was our viewing place. There's one piece—I don't know if it'll be in the warehouse. I meant to tell you about it. It's a *Cardboard* piece that angles. It's not that big. It has louvered cardboard and a broomstick on the side [*Canary Stick (Cardboard)*, 1971].

Q2: Yes, I know which one you mean.

Petersen: A beautiful piece.

Q2: It's probably crated.

Petersen: Bob and I were in the Beach House alone. He had finished it and I helped collage the cardboard down and cut the wood. Bob and I put up the piece and Bob was trying to figure out where to put the broomstick. We would put it on that side and we put it in the middle and we put it over there. Hours spent just looking at the broomstick, saying, "Not really. Oh no, maybe over there." [Laughs] Then suddenly, Bob goes, "It doesn't matter."

[Laughter]

Petersen: “It could be there, it could be here.” We laughed and then put it on the side.

Q: Well, can we start? Are you ready?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: I’ll follow you around so don’t run across the room away from me. [Laughs]

Petersen: Let me get the list here. I wouldn’t usually carry it, but being that it’s not filmed.

Q: Today is May 20 and we are doing an oral history interview, a semi-technical session with Robert Petersen and Brent Edwards, here with Gina Guy at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. We are in the chapel looking at some works. We thought we’d ask you about the *Hoarfrost* series, since it’s up; how it came about and some of the particular materials—really, how you did it, how you put it together, how you helped them assemble it. Do you want to start with one of these or talk generally?

Petersen: Well, the first untitled *Hoarfrost* was in 1974. Bob would collect the fabrics, the cloths and silks. This really brings back a memory. I was printing at Gemini G.E.L. in Hollywood, California with Sidney Felsen and, at the time, Kenneth Tyler, the manager. I was printing there on the *Stoned Moon* series in 1969. Bob was doing his project after the Apollo—I believe 13 [note: Apollo 11]. I should know. He was walking through the print shop one day and we had a line across the print shop, like a clothesline, with cheesecloth hanging—in lithography, you use

cheesecloth to process the litho stones or aluminum plates. But Bob mostly used the stones in that project. He looked at the cheesecloth and he just admired it. He said, “It’s so beautiful,” just hanging. He had photographs of clotheslines, of towels hanging on the clothesline or something. But in this piece, 1974, you see—I thought that was cheesecloth when I first looked, but that’s a fabric—I’m touching it, uh-oh!

[Laughter]

Q: Well, you’ve probably touched it before.

Petersen: This one doesn’t really have the cheesecloth in it, but it’s very similar—just the cloth. Going back to the process, we were working at Untitled Press on Captiva Island, around ’72, I’d say. Bob never asked how to do something. He observed. He would just observe what was going on around the print shop. At that time, we were doing an edition of Cy Twombly prints, a suite of six. I was cleaning a leather nap roller by the press using a chemical called roller blanket wash. It’s a solvent that they use in removing ink from the rollers in offset printing. It’s quite pungent. In the early seventies, we were not so aware of different kinds of chemicals being used. We would just open a window and deal with it. In those days, we didn’t really wear the respirators so much. In the later seventies, we did. But Bob never really did. I think I saw him once with a respirator and he took it off and kept working.

[Laughter]



Petersen: We decided to put the roller blanket wash in a plastic sprayer bottle. I think the first time was just with newspaper and Bob laid a fabric down on the press. We put newsprint down first, laid it on the press, and spritzed the roller blanket wash on the newspaper. Over that we laid another piece of cloth and more big sheets of newsprint.

This was a Griffin press, from San Francisco, I believe, which we ordered around that time, '72. It had a press bed size of 38 inches wide and close to 8 feet long with a 3-inch aluminum block press bed. Over the newsprint, we put the tympan, which runs through the press under pressure, and it has grease on the top with the leather scraper bar in the press. You apply pressure, feed the press bed up to the scraper bar, bring down the pressure, and adjust it so it's not too much or not enough. Actually this press was motorized, the Griffin. I would flick the switch, get the pressure set, and it went through. I would release the pressure, reverse the press, come back and take the tympan off and the newsprint and put that in a big trash barrel. Quite amazed that it worked. The roller blanket wash dissolved the ink in the newspaper.

Then Bob started trying images from any magazine. *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, a local subscription, other magazines. We subscribed to the *New Yorker*. He didn't use the *New Yorker* much. Magazines just seemed to appear. I never recall Bob saying, "We need more magazines."



Rauschenberg working on a *Hoarfrost* (1974–76), possibly *Groundings (Hoarfrost)* (1974), in his print shop, Captiva, Florida, 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

[Laughter]

Petersen: This was before recycling paper and the neighbors on Captiva would bring over their magazines and after dinner we would be in the Beach House. Bob had about 16 acres then with the jungle. Untitled Press was on the east end of the property and the Beach House was at the west, right on the beach. The front door opened into the sand. It evolved from that. We would go back to the print shop the next day and he was, of course, quite thrilled. He never really oohed and aahed about his own work. He just worked.

[Laughter]

Q2: How did he select the images? Did he have any kind of system?

Petersen: Oh yes. The counters we had built in the litho shop, the stones were stored underneath. The stones, actually, were given to Bob from Gemini G.E.L., from Ken Tyler and Sidney Felsen. Stanley Grinstein also sent Bob some litho stones, which we started using. I designed the storage

racks. I had designed galvanized steel on top because it wouldn't be affected when some of the edge from the stone got onto the surface. It was easier to clean up and didn't etch the galvanized steel so much.

Q: But with the images that are featured, would he pre-select a bicycle or a piece of fruit? Or was it a much more intuitive, in the moment—just grab a piece of paper?

Petersen: Well, I'm getting back to the table. On top of that table, we took cardboard boxes that we would collect from the island store, mainly: twenty-four cans of Campbell's soup or beans, or four six-packs of beer, that kind of box with the cardboard trays on the bottom.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: In each box, he had a different category: nature, landscape, animals, trees. Scientific. They weren't labeled. You just knew which box. The room to the side in the print shop—it's a property that Bob purchased in 1971. I'm going back now. It was a three-bedroom house with a guest room in the back and a four-car garage attached because the previous owner was a machinist and he was going to retire and set up a shop there in the bigger space. It had a garage door in the front and when I first moved to Captiva, Bob came up with the idea. He said, "Petersen, it would be nice—we could have a print shop here. You're a printer, I'm an artist."

[Laughter]

I'm going back in time now. I was describing the print shop. That's a long story. We looked around at different places for a few months and we stopped at a real estate office on Sanibel Island and one day the realtor phoned Bob and said, "There's a house for sale on Captiva and it's three bedrooms, quite nice, but the main point is that the back of the lot attaches to your property, to the 16 acres of jungle." So the rear of that lot joined the natural jungle. Bob didn't ever want to touch the jungle.

Q2: He wanted to conserve it?

Petersen: Yes.

Petersen: What do you call it when land is original earth? [Laughs]

Q: Original earth? [Laughs]

Petersen: Yes.

Q: You mean undisturbed?

Petersen: Undisturbed.

Q: Unsullied, yes.

Petersen: A natural jungle from dinosaur days. [Laughs] Or before.

That was Untitled Press. It was a nice, large space. We put the presses in there and designed the shop, got the stones, and did the Cy Twombly prints in 1970, '71. Bob asked Brice Marden to come down and did some prints for Brice. That was around '72, then in '73 Robert Whitman came and Susan Weil came for a project. It was a wonderful print shop, the Untitled Press. Then around '74, when Bob got involved with the fabrics, the print shop turned into his studio more.

Q: In terms of narrating that transition, the first time you started to use the solvent in the spray bottle, when you were working on a Cy Twombly—was Cy Twombly actually there when you tried that experiment?

Petersen: No.

Q2: The spray bottle was on this series.

Petersen: Not at the beginning, no.

Q: But I thought he was saying he got to this idea first working on Cy Twombly.

Petersen: Yes. I was cleaning a nap roller because over time the ink will dry into the roller. This roller was actually given to us by the neighbor, Maybelle Stamper, in 1970. We were living in the Beach House and Bob said, “Well, now we have the space, we need a press and stones to

make a print shop.” No big hurry. It just evolved and the word got out. Gemini found out Bob was going to do some prints so they sent some stones and a few other things, cans of ink. One day, we were in the Beach House and Bob said, “Well, I’m going to walk down and get the mail.” To get the mail you could walk on the beach because the post office was about an eighth of a mile down the beach. Wonderful walk. On Captiva there’s a curve that comes out and the post office was right down there. We’d walk down the beach almost every day. If the tide was high or there was a storm or something, we didn’t walk, but would take the car or bike down.

I was in the Beach House doing chores. Cleaning, sweeping, doing the dishes, and feeding the dogs and whatever you need to do to take care of a house. He came back up the front steps into the Beach House and said, “Petersen, you’ll never guess what happened down at the post office!” His eyes were so big. He was very excited and he said, “I went to the post office and the postmistress,” Dodi Booth, who became a dear friend, “she said, ‘Oh, Mr. Rauschenberg, I hear you’re going to start a studio print shop next to Maybelle Stamper. She’s your neighbor.’” We hadn’t been introduced—we were new to the neighborhood there. “She happens to have a Fuchs and Lang proofing press and some stones, and she would like to give them to you.” [Laughs] Bob was quite excited—that sensation of you need a press and it’s right next-door.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Went over the next day or so and Dodi Booth introduced us to Maybelle Stamper. I have photos of moving the press from her house. It’s right next-door. We went to the hardware store and bought a wheelbarrow [laughs] to carry it. I disassembled it in Maybelle’s house

because on a Fuchs and Lang proofing press—beautiful little press—you can take the press bed off and the sides come off, and the press head, you unbolt it and it'll come off, and then the roller. It comes in parts. That was fun. Then I took it to Fort Myers, Florida, had it sandblasted and repainted it. I worked on the print shop, painting it all white, painting the floor light grey, like Gemini. [Laughs]

Q: In terms of the fabric, how did he choose? Did he start talking about wanting to layer fabric? How did that part of the process come about?

Petersen: I think just through Bob's working. He worked in total silence. If he laid down one piece of fabric over, say, crumpled newspaper or a torn page from a magazine or the paper bag—yes, here, Gina Guy's pointing out a paper bag in a *Hoarfrost*—yes, and the silk up there. It just appeared.

At Untitled Press, the large four-car garage we turned into the print shop, right between that and the house was a little doorway, where the water pump was for the well. We had built a long counter table over that and that was Bob's fabric room. Suddenly fabrics appeared in there. He didn't say, "Let's make a fabric room."

[Laughter]

Petersen: There was an empty counter and over the year or so, there were just stacks of fabrics. We'd go to fabric stores all over. We'd go to Manhattan, Fort Myers, Florida, thrift shops, wherever. There were no instructions on what to do. Bob laid out everything.

Q2: Like this piece, which is, I assume, glued on?

Q: Or sewn?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: That one's glued, yes.

Petersen: Yes. We used Liquitex matte medium. I'm trying to recall. When Bob and I first met, Bob did the *Currents* series in Malibu Beach. He rented a house down there, thanks to Rosamund Felsen, who found a house. Bob was asked if he could stay in California because there was a fire at 381 Lafayette, in the basement, and while it didn't really damage the building, there was a lot of smoke damage. They wanted to refurbish the basement and clean up. I guess some things in the basement were burned, like his old tax forms and stuff like that. I hadn't been to 381 Lafayette yet.

During that project with *Currents*, I was doing my own work. I had a little table on the side and I was using matte medium. One day, in college, there was a girl in art class who discovered a process that I showed Bob and he used it quite a bit in the *Currents* series. You put down a thin



layer of matte medium and let it dry—not completely dry, but just brush it on the paper, say a rag paper—and you took an image and laid it down, burnishing it or just rubbing it into the dampened matte medium. You didn't let that dry. After you burnished it, when you peeled up the newspaper, it left an image. I showed Bob that process and we went out and bought some Liquitex matte medium and I remember him responding once, right at first, when he first started using it. He said something like, “Wow! It works!”

[Laughter]

Petersen: From then on, he just did it.

Q2: What about with images like this? This wasn't originally that size.

Petersen: Oh yes, this is the diver from Bob's *Hoarfrost*, from the prints at Gemini G.E.L. [note: discussing *Untitled (Hoarfrost)*, 1974, 74.075].



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Hoarfrost*), 1974  
Solvent transfer on fabric with paper bag  
and fabric collage  
84 x 48 3/4 inches (213.4 x 123.8 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Pull (Hoarfrost Edition)*, 1974  
Offset lithograph and screenprint transferred  
on fabric with paper bags  
85 x 48 inches (215.9 x 121.9 cm)  
From an edition of 29, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q2: This is what the lawsuit was over?

Q: Right.

Petersen: Sidney Felsen and Ken Tyler had leftover proofs from that project [note: diver image appears in *Pull (Hoarfrost Edition)*, 1974].

Q2: Ah, now that's interesting.

Petersen: I was on the side and it was a long time ago, but I recall they mentioned to Bob that they had some proofs that they didn't really know what to do with, which they couldn't combine with the edition and asked if he would like them. He said, "Of course I would like them."

Q2: Okay.

Petersen: The diver here is from that series. This whole sheet is a proof from Gemini that wasn't accepted.

Q2: Okay.

Petersen: See? That's in the Gemini edition and the diver—I don't recall—yes, this is added.

Q2: Okay.

Petersen: The paper bag was in the Gemini edition. You could check that. That's an unusable proof that they gave Bob.

Q2: That's interesting too, that he put the bicycle on both layers.

Petersen: He added the bike. It was laid somewhere in there. It could've gone through both surfaces under the pressure of the litho press.

This image of the diver is the one he got sued for. That was quite an experience. I was there. Sidney Felsen told Bob that they had a lawsuit for copyright for the diver and that it involved court and settlements and all this. Bob just used what was around and available. He would never impose on someone else's copyright or he didn't realize it. They had a discussion about it. I can't remember all the details, but they made him an offer of a print and maybe a settlement. Sidney and Bob handled that. I was not so close, but I was around. I overheard. Not on purpose, but I couldn't help it.

Q2: Yes. Well, it got press too.

Petersen: The feeling I got was—I shouldn't say this—that the guy should be proud Bob used his image!

[Laughter]

Petersen: I'd be pleased. God, if Bob used one of my images? I'd go, wow, god! Rauschenberg used my image!

[Laughter]

Petersen: But I can't recall what the settlement was.

Q2: I think he got a print of the *Pull* [(*Hoarfrost Edition*), 1974] and maybe a small amount of money.

Petersen: Yes, that's what I recall.

Q2: I think it was work for hire that he'd done anyhow. It was originally for a Nikon advertisement.

Petersen: I do recall that it turned out okay.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: But it was kind of tense there, at the beginning.

Q2: He was supposed to credit the image if it was ever used again.

Q: Was this the same size as the original image?

Q2: No, the original image was in a magazine.

Petersen: It was in *Time* magazine.

Q: How would he blow up the scale?

Petersen: Gemini G.E.L. did that.

Q2: That's interesting. I didn't know it was a proof from the Gemini edition.

Petersen: I don't know how Gemini enlarged it. I sort of do: with a copy camera. I don't know that process. But see, the diver does have color—the blue and the skin tone.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: From my experience, when you enlarged something in the early seventies, it would be black-and-white. But they did it in color somehow. Maybe offset enlargement. It had the three-color process and would transfer it. The image of the diver I do recall. Also after the settlement was resolved, I swear, Bob said something like, "Well, I'll show them, I'll take my own photographs."

[Laughter]

That clicked into Bob taking his own photos; he wouldn't have to worry about copyrights. Plus, he's a wonderful photographer, artist, and so forth.

Q: Do you remember an assembly stage with these, where you would have printed multiple layers of fabric and then you would be gluing them together in these assemblages? Were you participating in that? Were you gluing these? Or was he doing it?

Petersen: He would place it and I'd take a brush and the matte medium and go along the edge. It could have been gel medium, which is more of a glue. I use that today for collaging cloth. I don't know. It's a puzzle. I think we just used matte medium back then. I never heard Bob say gel medium. Matte medium will do the same thing in a way. Matte medium is stronger, but it takes a little longer to really dry. We had fans, the old fan on a wooden stick, from lithography. You twirl it. I love those.

Q2: Okay.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I don't think we had a hair dryer.

Q: Did you print layers singly or with multiple layers? This looks like it had something over it and you printed it and this came out just here, but not underneath. I don't know, there's a strip there.

Petersen: Oh wow, look at that! Well, I'm not supposed to touch—I did just wash my hands.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Oh wow! Look under here. See, the diver went all the way through.

Q2: Oh yes.

Q: So you would've laid out multiple layers of fabric? Is that what you're saying?

Petersen: Oh, Bob did, yes. Bob placed the fabric.

Q: You laid out three layers of fabric, not just one layer at a time.

Petersen: Oh yes, they're all done at the same time.

Q: Okay.

Q2: But this would have gone afterwards, so these two would be at the same time, but this was afterwards?

Petersen: Well, that's kind of hard to say. Let's see.

Q: Because the fruit doesn't go through.



Petersen: But the bike is there on this, but the diver's not on there.

Q2: But also the bike looks off-center.

Petersen: Oh, yes, right.

Petersen: Yes. What's this?

Q: Maybe you should lift it.

[Laughter]

Q: I don't think I can lift it up.

Petersen: Let's see. Now, we're kind of curating here, the *Hoarfrost*. I noticed that too, that the bike looks a little different.

Q: It might have been run through twice? Is that what you meant, Gina? That they were done differently?

Q2: Well, yes.

Also, if this was a proof from Gemini, I'm assuming it came to Bob already printed, but then how did this guy get there?

Petersen: Oh, this came from Gemini.

This isn't from Gemini. The back part.

Q: So, how did he get on the bottom one?

Petersen: Well, the print from Gemini probably had ink in it and Bob spritzed it and ran that through the press with blotters and newsprint on top.

Q: I see.

Q2: Oh okay, well that would explain why it's so painterly down here and runny down at the bottom.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: I see.

Petersen: Yes, he sprayed it and the chemical squished out the bottom there.

Q2: Well, that makes sense. But this definitely looks like it would had to have been printed at a different time, this red one. The bike and the fruit.

Petersen: Yes, the bike is completely different—

Q2: This and this would have been run through the press at a separate time.

Petersen: Yes. I'm thinking, maybe this piece was hanging in the studio and then this being dried, he laid the bike down—the bike wasn't on there—let's see, yes.

Q: Or just put a little solvent over the bike?

Petersen: And then this one—yes, it's there too. He just put a little solvent on the magazine image and transferred it. But it wouldn't have been done at the same time as the diver because it would be here.

Yes, so I think the proof from Gemini was full of ink and that was done separately.

Q2: Okay.

Q: Very interesting.

Petersen: Yes. We never talked or tried to figure anything out. It just happened in the process, the way Bob worked. Now that I think back on it here in 2015 or really since 2008, when Bob passed on—I miss him terribly—I recall the experience and was so fortunate to have met and known a man like that. Around 2008, 2009, I started thinking god, it's really amazing to have been in the studio for twenty-four hours a day with Bob. He worked in total silence. He never said, "Okay, let's put this over here." I never heard him reject his work. Once in a while, he'd say, "Oh, that's beautiful."

[Laughter]

Petersen: Or he'd go, "Ah! I'll have another Jack and water."

[Laughter]

Petersen: "That's a good one." And then we'd work until three, four, sunrise.

Q: Shall we go to the next one?

Petersen: Yes, this is another *Hoarfrost*, here.

Q: So that first one was the untitled one. This is *Spoke* [*Hoarfrost*], also from 1974.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Spoke (Hoarfrost)*, 1974  
Solvent transfer on fabric and cardboard with  
red thread  
80 1/2 x 49 inches (204.5 x 124.5 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Solvent transfer on fabric and cardboard with red thread. Where's the red thread?

Q: Where is red thread?

Petersen: Whoever finds it first gets a sip of coffee.

[Laughter]

Q: Or gets to take it home.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Red thread.

Q: I don't see red thread.

Q2: I don't see red thread either actually. We may have to correct our entry.

Q: Can you lift up the layer? Is it a layer?

Q2: Well it is a layer, but it's attached by this cardboard piece.

Petersen: To go back to the other piece, I think the reason the bicycle looks different is because that fabric stretched more.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: The red fabric went at an angle. You can see on this piece, the "A" is under there.

Q2: Right. You get the 3-D effect.

Petersen: But see, there are other things under. Yes, that's on top too. This just transferred a little more, being that the paper is crumpled. See, on the press bed the papers would be this high sometimes because the paper is crumpled but not flattened. There were maybe more crumples under this, so it got more pressure. Here, it was flatter and didn't get as much pressure because you couldn't apply pressure to, say, an inch high of crumpled newspaper. It's not good for the

press. Too much pressure and it wouldn't go through so easily. So there's just lighter pressure here because there's an indentation in the surface. Yes, beautiful. This is fun.

Q: Would you have put matte medium on the cardboard between these layers of fabric and then pressed it and that's why the cardboard looks like it's glued in there?

Petersen: Yes. This fabric is laid on the press and the cardboard is laid down and—

Q: And there's newsprint over the cardboard to get these stock quotes? That's transfer, I think.

Petersen: Let's see. Yes, that's a transfer. I'm just thinking here. Let's see, it goes off, but that image is under there. Yes, that's part of that newspaper, I think. Yes, it goes into here.

Q: Yes.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: So the fabric and the newspaper were laid over this. The cardboard has matte medium on one side for the pressure to adhere it through the press. Then, this side is also coated, but maybe—like I was saying, back in Malibu he put it on, but didn't let it completely dry. Yes, see, the image comes off.

Q2: Oh yes.

Petersen: It's on the cardboard. But this is a little damp so it picked up the ink a little more intensely. Plus there's a thicker surface here. I would think this had been maybe just a little damp even from the other side because that has to be still damp to collage it. If it's dry, it won't stick. Yes, that's matte medium. Oh, there's the red thread.

Q2: Oh!

Q: Oh.

[Laughter]

Q: Okay, you win.

[Laughter]

Petersen: A sip of coffee.

[Laughter]

Q: A tiny red thread.

[Laughter]



Petersen: Yes. That's a nice detail. Someone saw that. [Laughs] It's really exciting and fun to look at the work this closely and actually touch it.

[Laughter]

Q: You're touching it.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It reminds me, I went to the Museum of Modern Art—Bob and I would go to many shows and museums. I don't know if this is a repeat from our past interview.

Q: You told us a little about going to museums.

Petersen: *First Landing Jump*—did I tell you that story?

Q: Oh yes.

Petersen: He walked up to *First Landing Jump* at the Museum of Modern Art and he looked at it from about 15 feet back and he said, "The can's facing the wrong way." The blue bulb in the can.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It's supposed to be on that little bag, tobacco pouch-type bag.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So he went over and took the can and pointed it down to the bag. Of course the guard came over—security wasn't so heavy in those days. Bob just backed up and said, "Well, I am the artist," with a little smirk.

[Laughter]

Petersen: The guard believed him, of course.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, "Well, Mr. Artist, don't touch the work anymore."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He didn't say that. I made it up.

Q: Mr. Artist.

[Laughter]

Q: So did you sometimes go with him to buy fabric?

Petersen: Oh yes.

Q: You were in the store with him? Do you remember how he would select fabric? It looks like he was looking for things that were translucent or transparent.

Petersen: Oh, he'd just go through and the only thing he said was, "I'll take 12 yards of that."

[Laughter]

Petersen: "And I'll take 6 of that."

Q2: So he didn't go and say, "I'm looking for this." He just had to go see.

Petersen: Oh yes, we'd spend hours in Jerry Brown's, the fabric store up on Fifty-seventh Street and Madison [Avenue] around Tiffany's [Tiffany & Co., New York]. I'm sure that's it. I don't know if it still exists. We'd take a taxi up usually.

Q: Did you use cheesecloth in some of these? In the *Hoarfrosts*? Or no?

Petersen: When we first looked at that untitled one, I thought that layer underneath was cheesecloth. It's similar, but it isn't cheesecloth.

Q: That's why I'm asking. Did you actually use cheesecloth in any of them?

Petersen: Oh yes. Bob loved cheesecloth. It initially started with cheesecloth. His first transfers were with cheesecloth. Then it went to silks and other materials.

Q: Just to be sure I understand, as someone who's not trained in this area, you use cheesecloth to clean the stone, right? Because you have a little ink on it and after you've done a print, you clean it with the cheesecloth? What is the cheesecloth for?

Petersen: It's not for cleaning. On a litho stone—it's the same with plates, but mainly I did stone lithography—you do the original drawing on the stone with the grease substance, a crayon pencil or a wash. Then you put resin and talc on the stone over the original drawing material and then brush that down smooth with a nice soft-haired brush. Usually printers will have a cigar box at the edge of the stone where you save the resin. Some printers make their own little tray. There are different ways; everyone has their own little homemade style. Then that's brushed clean and you apply gum arabic and a few drops of nitric acid to what's called the etch. You have that in a beaker with a brush and you brush that evenly onto the stone, brush it around, using different strengths depending on how much grease there is; or if you want a little more black over here, you have a stronger mix, maybe twelve drops per ounce of nitric, and when it hits the stone it foams up a little bit. They call it spot etching. The nitric acid doesn't really etch the stone. It's

bonding the gum arabic to the litho stone where it's water-loving. The gum arabic doesn't like grease. But you have to be careful. If the etch is too strong, it will under-bite that heavier grease mark on the stone. Then you take that and brush it smoothly. You keep brushing it, then you put the beakers away with the gum arabic and you brush and brush, but you don't let it dry.

Depending on the climate, right after the brushing, you take the dry cheesecloth and fold it into a pad and start buffing the stone. You want a very thin film of gum arabic on the stone. A printer will usually have three different piles of cheesecloth. He'll start with dry cheesecloth that maybe had been used more because when you first hit the stone, buffing that gum arabic into the litho stone, the cheesecloth will pick up a little of the grease, depending on the thickness. If an artist does a very heavy, concentrated layer of litho crayon, it's going to be a little stickier there. Sometimes the grease will streak and other parts will get, not dissolved, but—because you're really applying pressure. You go down the different piles of cheesecloth—right at the end is a newer pile. They rotate. Maybe that one that's gotten a little darker, so it will eventually get thrown out and you move them down. With the final one, you buff that pretty hard to get the gum arabic bonded to the stone. Sometimes the grease will look like it's disturbed, but it's not going where the gum arabic is because that's protected with the gum. Sometimes people, if they're not really experienced, they'll look at the printer and go, "Oh god, my drawing!" Then you go, "Don't worry, it's okay!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: You buff that dry, then take a fan, fan it, and let that dry. A lot of printers will leave that etch on overnight. I do it myself, depending on the time limit. It's like letting yeast rise in dough.

Q2: Okay.

Petersen: Plus, you're a little tired.

[Laughter]

Petersen: You've got to put it away and go have dinner.

[Laughter]

Petersen: You come back later that night or the next day. This is another time when, if the artist is visiting and not familiar with the litho stone, you can do it within an hour or two, just get it dry. It's called the wash out. You take Lithotine, which is like mineral spirits, but different—it's not as greasy. The can usually has a spout on the top with a little plunger. You dribble it around and then you take a rag—in print shops they collect rags, we'd cut up old cotton t-shirts and whatever—and the whole stone, depending on the amount of grease on it, turns black. You buff that down smooth and dry. Then you have a bowl of clean water and take the first sponge and wring it out so the water falls on the stone. That's where the magic comes in because that black

goes to the original drawing and the gum arabic underneath loves water. It's going, "Oh god, finally! Water!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: Gum arabic is a water-loving substance and grease isn't—oil and water don't mix. So where the oil is, the water beads up.

When I was in college, I had a wonderful instructor for my first printmaking course, Robert Everman. He lives in Canada now. In those days, '66, '67, people avoiding the Vietnam War went to Canada. He was a wonderful instructor and man. The first lesson in the print shop is—have you had the experience of hosing down your driveway with a garden hose and where the car's parked, the water doesn't stick? That's lithography.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes. So that's the cheesecloth story.

[Laughter]

Q: That's very clear.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: When you were saying that during *Stoned Moon*, Rauschenberg saw the cheesecloth and said, “That’s beautiful,” did you mean he saw those piles?

Petersen: No, he saw it on the line.

Q: You would hang it to dry?

Petersen: Yes, the line in the print shop was long, 30 feet. The gum arabic dries in the cheesecloth, so you take it over to the sink and do your laundry. You clean the cheesecloth.

Q2: You wash it out and then you hang it to dry.

Petersen: If it has some black marks on it from the grease in the stone or the plate, then you just hang it up. Then after lunch or later that afternoon, you see if there’s a dry one and take it down and reuse it. And the whole process keeps moving.

Q: That’s what Rauschenberg was reacting to.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: I’m sorry to make you walk through all those details, but it’s very helpful.



Petersen: I was so fortunate to have been there with such a famous artist. When I first got my job, I bugged the hell out of him at Gemini. I must've gone at least four to six times for interview. The main reason was that I loved printmaking. Ken Tyler said, "Well, you're twenty-three years old and eligible for the draft and I don't want to really go through this training for six, eight months and then you're sent off to Vietnam." Which makes sense. I just kind of went, "Yes."

[Laughter]

Petersen: So then another month or so went by and I made a call and I said, "Mr. Tyler, I'd like to have another meeting with you." I brought up some new prints that I did in college. Also my instructor, Robert Everman, went to Tamarind Institute with Ken Tyler, who was, say, a class or two ahead in experience. In my class, Robert Everman would talk about Tamarind, which is a wonderful school for training in printmaking—mainly lithography. He would say, "Well, I worked with Kenneth Tyler. I used to sponge for him on a litho stone." You keep it damp all the time because the roller is ink and has to be wet so it resists the oil when you roll across the image. "Sponging for Kenneth Tyler, when the printer's at the slab," he said, turning to the stone, "if you're still sponging, he'll take the roller and roll it up your arm."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, "Boy, he's hard to work with."

[Laughter]

Petersen: I always thought he was kind of amusing, but it's true.

Q: He would sponge your arm.

Petersen: To get back to Ken Tyler, I went through interviews with him and then finally one day, he said, "Bob Petersen, I do have an opening." I went, "Oh!" He said, "Gemini has expanded and purchased a new building down on Melrose." I still remember the address, 8365 Melrose Avenue. He said, "I have a contractor building the new building and he needs someone to dig ditches for the plumbing."

[Laughter]

Petersen: I said, "Okay, I'll do it." At least I was there.

Q2: Yes, a foot in the door.

Petersen: Gemini was built quite fast. God, in three months they had that building up. Ken Tyler was incredible at getting projects going. Within three months they had the plumbing in, the walls up—a building! A press was moved in and then he had a meeting with the other printers and I was standing around and listening, and Ken finally said, "Well Petersen, I need an extra sponger. I need someone to grind the stones." In lithography, you grind the different carborundum grits to

get the stone ready for the artist to draw on. So I was in the door. I was grinding stones and then sponging and so forth.

Q: Then you were in.

Petersen: Yes. My first sponging was working with Daniel Freeman. He was working late at night, after hours, because Frank Stella was doing a project. Freeman said, “Could you stay after work tonight and sponge the stone for me?” Actually these were aluminum plates. I said, “Of course, Dan, I’ll help you out.” So I was sponging a Frank Stella, beautiful little litho prints. Then I worked a little bit on Roy Lichtenstein, the [*Rouen*] *Cathedrals* [1969], sponging.

I was there for three or four months when Ken Tyler had another meeting. I was in with the printers now. We had a meeting in the front room, in the gallery area. We all sat on the carpet there and Ken said, “Robert Rauschenberg’s coming in August and he’s going to do a project, so we need to get thirty to forty stones ready, get the shop ready.” I think Bob did the first major project in that studio, the christening of Gemini G.E.L. The Frank Stellas and the Lichtensteins were from the first building.

Q: Right.

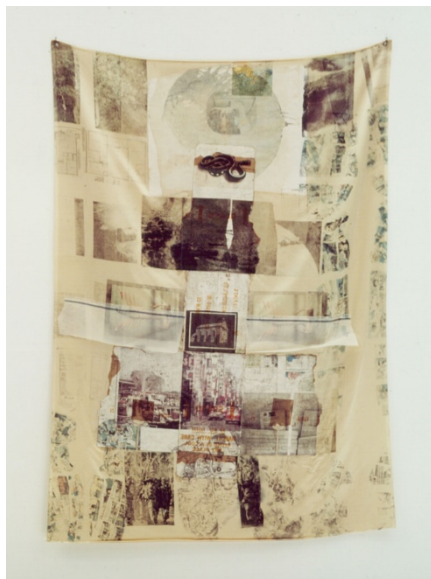
Petersen: They brought those plates down, but Bob was the first one to start a project there. That was the *Stoned Moon* series in August, September. It took quite a while. We had a wonderful

time. All the printers worked overtime because Bob liked to work until two, three in the morning. He'd come in around noon, one evening and work until three, four in the morning.

But at the time, when Ken Tyler mentioned that, in my mind, I went god, I was just in college a year ago and Rauschenberg was in my twentieth-century art history book and now I'm going to meet him. In my own mind I was quite thrilled. [Laughs]

Q: It would be thrilling. So we made our way over to *Brew* [(*Hoarfrost*)]. The year is '75.

Another one with cardboard stuck on it.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Brew (Hoarfrost)*, 1975  
Solvent transfer on fabric and cardboard with  
fabric collage  
67 x 47 3/4 inches (170.2 x 121.3 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes. Oh, beautiful. Yes, different images—see, the cardboard matte medium down—there's more pressure here—oh, that's beautiful. Wow. We're looking at it and seeing so many beautiful things. Oh and here you see Bob uses the same image twice.

Q: The same photo.

Petersen: If we went to the store, he'd come up to the cash register with not just one but a stack of magazines. That's quite an image, wow.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Wow. All of it is so beautiful. That's a snake there obviously. See, on the side in the print shop would be a category of animals, insects, and butterflies. Beautiful.

Q2: This is a lot less gauzy fabric and it's just one piece except—well it has additions—this is something laid over it, as are these.

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: Did he just work and didn't say, "Oh, I'm going to do—"

Petersen: It looks like this was added later. Because, see, that would be transferred on there.

Q2: Sure.

Petersen: So this was added after the transfer.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: This white—

Q2: Right, whereas this was added before the transfer.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: And the cardboard. The cardboard looks like it's over the fabric here.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: It pushed up a little bit through the press. Beautiful. Wow, it's so wonderful to study them this closely. I recall actually doing them with Bob, but he was so prolific in production. He'd probably do at least two or three in a couple days, laying things out.

Here on the side are comic strips from the newspaper. The march looks like maybe Korea or something and the big ship here looks like Chinatown in—it doesn't look like Manhattan. Oh, here's a stop sign. It's probably really in China, I guess.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Is this '80—what was the date of this one?

Q2: This is '75.

Petersen: '75, oh. Yes, beautiful. Yes and this little piece was added—let's see, that little piece of silk, right there. And over here too.

Q: Isn't that the packing tape?

Petersen: Yes, the tape from the packing.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Here's the packing tape on the cardboard. The matte medium helps preserve it. Actually after the cheesecloth I was using a fabric very similar to this in my paintings. Jim Kempner mentioned it this morning. He said that someone sent in a photograph of an early painting of mine. He said it's all white with a square of—I said, "Well yes, that's a square of fabric on a rag paper," which was the rag paper Bob used in *Currents*, the 60-foot piece. We shared the same paper. I did a series of caran d'ache on the fabric because as the fabric is collaged to the rag paper, it has a tooth so it will pick up. I'd make a square about 2 1/2 feet by 2 1/2 feet, or a rectangle or other shape, but with caran d'ache, a crayon made in Switzerland, and

I'd go this way, then that way, and build up a really beautiful surface. Then I would polish it. The wax would get hot from the rubbing, for hours and hours of wonderful work. I don't know, actually, why I did it. It's just something I was doing. [Laughs] One day Bob asked me, "Petersen, do you have any of that extra fabric laying around?" [Laughs] It was very similar to this. This isn't a piece of it, but very similar. I would get it at the fabric store. It's called, I think, some kind of sheer. They would put it behind the drapes in houses. I don't know if you ever recalled that. It was a diffuser for the sun. The light would go through it, but it was some kind of lining behind drapes, as it was explained to me. I liked it because the bolt of fabric was 60 inches wide and I could unroll it.

Q: Another line of questioning we wanted to ask you about were the *Hoarfrost Editions* [1974]. So you went with Rauschenberg to Gemini to do the editions.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Can you talk about how that happened and what changed from when you went back to Gemini to work on these?

Petersen: Let's see. Bob did the *Hoarfrost Editions* at Gemini around '74. He was asked to come to Gemini for a project. But, of course, they didn't know what he was going to do. Bob did a lot of his thinking or concentrating on airplanes. We'd be flying out to California from JFK and he would decide what to do on the airplane.



[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, “Well, I’ll get to Gemini and do some *Hoarfrosts* there.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: We were doing *Hoarfrosts* in Captiva in the studio, Untitled Press. But when we got to Gemini, there were about six to eight printers who had never done a *Hoarfrost* before. I had done one with Bob, the original *Hoarfrost*. So Bob went into curating. He selected a rag paper—no, he didn’t select the paper. Where’d he get the fabric? I don’t know if we brought it with us. He got fabric in some way, but he wanted me to show the printers how it was done. He worked with me. He said, “Okay Petersen, we’re going to do a *Hoarfrost*.” [Laughs] I knew how to do it. Ken Tyler had that beautiful, long press. I think it was 9 feet by 4 feet, his hydraulic press. I think there’s a photo of Bob and me working at Gemini in many catalogues. I’ve seen it in the National Gallery show. The photo says, “Rauschenberg, other printers, Petersen doing *Hoarfrost Editions* at Gemini.” That was the first one we did. The printers were watching how it was done.

I crumpled up paper and Bob always placed it. You never put the paper where you wanted.

[Laughs] He did all the composition, always. You never touched the composition. You’d wad up the paper and make a pile, maybe on a little table to the side. I got talking to the printers and got some spray containers and some roller blanket wash, put it in and sprayed the newspaper and magazine clippings, and put the newsprint on top and the blotter. The tympan is about 6 or 8 inches above all the crumpled newspaper. The press is all by hydraulic, pushbutton pressure. I

ran that press during *Stoned Moon*, but another printer ran this project because I no longer actually worked there as a printer. I was with Bob at the time. I ran it through and the printers got the idea. It's pretty simple.

[Laughter]

Bob did all the compositions of the *Hoarfrost* and Ken Tyler enlarged the diver and the automobiles. I don't know how that process was done though.

Q2: That's what I wondered about.

Petersen: I don't know. Ken would just go off and a day or two later, he'd come back with these rolled-out, big images. It'd probably be in the Gemini archives, how that process was done. I'd say they're offset printed, but with slow-drying ink because in offset, they have a fast dry, which isn't as soluble with the solvent.

Q: Can I ask you about the title—the word *Hoarfrost*? My understanding is that there was a gift from James Rosenquist of a piece of fabric that reminded Rauschenberg of hoarfrost, the actual thing. Were you there for that exchange?

Q: Was that in Florida?

Petersen: Yes, that was in Captiva. Thanks for bringing that up. Jim Rosenquist would occasionally just appear at the door. Not that often, but once in a while.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It seemed like it was close to Bob's birthday and Jim Rosenquist came in and in his lively spirit said, "Rauschenberg, I have a gift for you."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, "I couldn't decide to get you a case of Jack Daniel's or—I saw this bolt of fabric, so I got the bolt of fabric."

[Laughter]

Petersen: I'm trying to go back to the moment. They were laughing and Bob really appreciated it. As I recall, the name *Hoarfrost* came at Gemini. I recall that he and Rosamund Felsen used to sit down on the side and go through the dictionary for titles. She would read certain words from the dictionary and Bob would say, "Oh, that's a nice word."

[Laughter]

Petersen: It's fun, I do it myself now. I go through the dictionary and see a word like god, what's that mean?

[Laughter]

Petersen: It's fun. I do it quite often. I recall a discussion Bob having about *Hoarfrost*. I don't think he was asking the definition of a hoarfrost, but maybe he was explaining it. A hoarfrost is a fake frost, right? It looks like a frost, but it's not. We'll have to get a dictionary out and see what a hoarfrost is. I'm just guessing. It's not really a frozen frost. It's kind of a fake frost and they call it a hoarfrost.

Q2: I guess my understanding was, it's like when on glass, you get a frost over—

Q: Yes. I don't think it's fake.

Petersen: Not fake.

Q: I think it's just light.

Petersen: It's just not frozen, frozen.

Q: Like on a tree, when the branches are covered in that very, very thin, delicate layer of crystals. Seeing these, that's what I imagine the association would be. It's very delicate and it melts very

quickly. As soon as the sun comes up and gets really bright, that little layer on the branches vanishes.

Petersen: Yes, right.

Q: It has that shimmering, ephemeral quality. That has something to do with what I associate with this group of works.

Petersen: Bob said something like that—the images are subtler beyond that frost on the glass. Yes. You can see it in this piece here.

Q2: Yes.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: We're looking at a *Spreads* series [1975–83] on the opposite wall. I actually didn't do the printing with Bob on that. He had other assistants do that.

Q: But clearly that idea or that interest remains even a few years later.

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: You said it was your paintbrush too.

Petersen: Yes, I just made that up.

Q2: Oh.

[Laughter]



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Rose Pole (Spread)*, 1978  
Solvent transfer, acrylic, and collage  
on panel  
85 x 146 inches (215.9 x 370.8 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: It's not actually mine, but I recall Bob with that paintbrush. He did different things every day. Things kept moving and nothing actually lay around for very long. Bob was always using something.

There was one piece that confounded him. At the Beach House, he had a tub outside the kitchen window in the sand. He put an object into the bucket, filled the tub with water, and kept looking at that piece for days and days. I think that's the only piece he ever mentioned to me. "Petersen, what do you think of that?"

[Laughter]

Petersen: “What do you think of that one?” He was confounded with that piece.

[Laughter]

Petersen: “God, look at that!” It eventually didn’t turn into a piece. I have photos of it, though. He said, “Petersen, would you take some Polaroids of that?” It’s the only piece I saw him hesitate on what to do.

Q2: Christopher Rauschenberg said, “Bob didn’t give up on pieces.” He might put them aside but—

Petersen: Yes, that’s the only one. I think that’s what was bothering him. You don’t think time’s going to move on. But it does. [Laughs]

Q: It does, whether you want it to or not.

Petersen: You’re in a frozen moment in time. Then you find yourself forty years later. Life, nature, we all go the same route, I guess.

Q2: So you said you didn’t work on the series, but you were around while it was being made.

Petersen: Yes. Bob was using the presses at Untitled Press to do the transfers and I had a little studio just out the back door, about 10-by-12. It used to be a fishing shack for one of the local fishermen back in probably the thirties, forties. It adjoined the Untitled Press property on the corner. Bob purchased that property and I asked if I could turn it into a studio. It was called the Roadhouse. We moved curating into one of the rooms. We had it insulated and put in a small dehumidifier, a little air conditioning, and there was a little shed out back full of old fishnets and oars from boats and things—beautiful. I think Bob used some of that. I used that house as a studio.

I would pass through and see what Bob was up to. Obviously—we all lived together there. He would also come over to what he jokingly called my million-dollar shed because I put in a little air conditioner, a window unit. He loved taking guests on Jungle Road from the Beach House. In the early seventies Bob and I—or Bob mainly—planned the path for a road, 16 acres long, winding through the jungle. He wanted to make a little road to the print shop called Jungle Road. He had a 1967 Volkswagen convertible, a Bug he called That, and he'd take guests with the top down through the jungle road. It was a beautiful road, through the natural jungle. It came out at the print shop and right before the print shop was my little studio and Bob always pointed it out—Marion Javits in the front seat and Senator [Jacob K.] Javits and me in the back—“Oh, there's Petersen's million-dollar shed!”

[Laughter]



Petersen: We'd all laugh a little bit. I'm scattered here in a way. Getting back to the *Spreads*, when Jim Rosenquist brought the fabric over as a gift to Bob. Bob loved that fabric. I think that evolved into the silks. The gauze and cheesecloths were first, and then the fabric I was using, he would ask for some of that. Then Jim brought that bolt of fabric down and he used that. Then I think he just went off—he saw silk and the neighbors would bring over different fabrics.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Spread*), 1983  
Solvent transfer, fabric collage, and  
acrylic on wood panel with crab trap  
74 x 96 3/4 x 15 inches (188 x 245.7 x  
38.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

I started using old sheets for my collage, for the *caran d'ache* project. I liked worn-out sheets that had been washed many times sheets because they collaged smoother. They didn't have all that starch like new sheets did. I would ask the neighbors if they had any. Maybelle Stamper would come over and visit and I said, "Maybelle, if you have any sheets, I'm looking for old sheets to use in my painting. If you have an older sheet, I'll buy you a new one in exchange." She said, "Oh really?"

[Laughter]

Petersen: So I'd go to the store in Fort Myers and get some new sheets and give the neighbors a new one for their old one. Maybelle brought over the most beautiful sheets because she would patch her sheets with little fabrics hand-sewn into it. I was over there with these sheets in my little studio and Bob came over and he said, "God, can I have that?"

[Laughter]

Petersen: He loved that sheet. I don't recall what piece it is, but he used some of Maybelle's sheets in his work.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Going back to Rosenquist again. When Jim brought that fabric over as a gift, he said, "Oh, I discovered this fantastic new material. It's called door skins." The way Jim talks, his personality, he has to yell. Really cool guy. "Door skins! Rauschenberg, you got to get some door skins. Get some door skins!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: "You get them at the hardware store! 4-by-8 feet! Trim them up—door skins—what they put on doors when they resurface the hollow core doors."

So we went to the hardware store. Door skins ran through the press. I think we would first put on a thin layer of matte medium and then the gesso because the gesso would absorb into the door skin so much, you'd have to coat it three, four times to get a nice, smooth coating. But a thin coat of matte medium would seal the wood, then we would gesso over it. After the gesso dried, we would sand it a little bit to give it a nice surface.

Q: You're talking about the right-hand panel on this one? [Note: referring to *Rose Pole (Spread)*, 1978] Or are they all door skin?

Petersen: They're all door skins mounted onto a hand-made wooden stretcher bar. I don't know who made the stretcher bars because Tim Pharr made the wooden stretcher bars in the seventies, maybe early eighties, but this is '85 [1978]. I guess Eric Holt would've made that.

Then Eric Holt started the aluminum.

Q2: Did Eric or Lawrence ["Larry"] Voytek start the aluminum?

Petersen: Eric was doing aluminum. Then he met a wonderful girl, BettyAnn Lenahan [Holt].

They fell in love and Eric moved on with her. Did you ever meet BettyAnn Lenahan, Gina?

Q2: I think I did. She passed away last year.

Petersen: Yes. I still can't comprehend all this.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Yes. Getting back to these—these aren't aluminum. They're wood. I shouldn't get off onto the aluminum. I was instructing printmaking at Edison Community College [Fort Myers, currently Florida SouthWestern State College] from 1980 to 1984. A student of mine was telling me after class about how he was building an aluminum boat. I asked, "Oh, how do you make an aluminum boat?" He said, "Well, I get my welder and I weld the aluminum," and so forth. Just the next day, Bob called me on the phone out at my horse ranch studio and said, "Petersen, would you happen to know anyone who can weld aluminum?" I went, "Bob, you won't believe it, but just the night before I was speaking with one of my students and he welds aluminum." So the next class meeting I told Larry Voytek and he was quite thrilled. I said, "Larry, Bob Rauschenberg's looking for an assistant who can weld aluminum." His eyes went—[laughs]—"I can weld aluminum!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: So he went out and worked with Bob for many years. But getting back to the *Spreads* here.

Q: It's fine. We can jump around.

Petersen: Yes. All that experience, your memory goes back and forth and around in different directions.

Q: It might just be my naiveté, but I had tended to think of the work in series as being radical breaks, radically different, one material to another. Part of what listening to you is making me see is that materials aren't left behind. So in these and the *Hoarfrosts*, we haven't quite left the *Cardboards* or the *Cardbirds* [1971] behind. When we get to the *Spreads*, we haven't quite left the *Hoarfrosts* behind.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: There's still the *Hoarfrost* technique and that translucency. That shimmering quality is still there. So it's not like he's throwing one material out the window and going into a totally different medium.

The other one I wanted to ask you about or was instructed to ask you about is that the other thing that happens in this period—the *Hoarfrosts*, I think, you're making from about '74 to '76—is the trip to India, which leads to *Jammers* [1975–76]. I believe, if I understand right, that he kept making *Hoarfrosts* after the trip to India. I'm wondering how the trip to India affected what a *Hoarfrost* was for him. Is that chronology right?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Did that affect the way he thought about fabric and about *Hoarfrost*?

Petersen: Yes because we went to India in, what, '74?

Q2: Yes.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Bob had a project with Gemini G.E.L. Gemini lined up a project with a paper mill in Ahmedabad, India, at Gandhi Ashram paper mill.

Q2: And textile mill.

Petersen: Yes, the textile mills. God, they were something to take a tour through with Suhrid [Sarabhai] and—oh, changing the subject, but that reminds me, Asha [Sarabhai] sent me an email.

Q2: Oh!

Q2: They actually just sent us a CD-ROM with some pictures, but of course I didn't see them because they don't all have slots for CDs.

Q: [Laughs] They don't have CDs anymore.

Q2: Yes. I just gave it to Francine [Snyder].

Petersen: Yes. Bob did *Hoarfrosts* after India. Going into *Jammers*, they were seventy—*Spreads* and then *Jammers*—

Q2: '72?

Petersen: '78 or so.

Q2: No, the *Jammers* were pretty early.

Petersen: They're earlier?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Yes. I don't know—

Q: I thought the *Jammers* were after India.

Q2: They are, they are after—yes, right.

Q: Yes, I thought they came out of India.

Petersen: Yes.

Yes, Bob—I'm trying to figure out how to say this. He wouldn't announce that he was going to a new series or, say, dropping anything—for instance the images into *Jammers*. I think he just followed his change instinct. It's hard to define. But I recall that when Bob did the *Jammers* or even some of the *Spreads*, Ileana Sonnabend would come over so Bob could show her new works and she would get me on the side and say something like, “What's—what—where's the paint?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: “Bob's such a great painter.” She used to say that quite often. She missed the Combines—that paint, that quality of his work. “Can you get Bob to paint?” I'd go, “God, get Bob to paint?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: One thing I never ever did was—you couldn't.

[Laughter]

Q2: Trying to get Bob to do something—



Petersen: I used to take Bob a gift. A lot of people did. I actually had a project in my early work with BettyAnn Lenahan, doing the etchings. I was driving back from Tampa. I went up alone and was driving back alone and I saw a barrel down on the side of the road, rolled down, all bent up. I went oh, there's a gift for Bob. I pulled over—it was not on a real main throughway—and I picked up the barrel, put it in the back of the jeep, a little station wagon. I gave it to Bob and he liked that barrel. He used it in the *The 1/4 Mile [or 2 Furlong Piece]*, 1981–98—that one barrel with the board hanging off and the hoop. He used barrels once in a while.



Installation view, *Rauschenberg in China*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2016. Work pictured: *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) (detail). Photo: Li Sen, courtesy Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Objects. But to get back to prints—how'd you word that? He'd—into different series—

Q: That they overlapped—

Petersen: He didn't really leave the *Hoarfrosts* because you see it in the later works, the transfers. But then you see more of an open color field of fabric. This is just my own thinking, but I think that looks—looking at this *Spread*—what's the title of that one?

Q2: This is called *Rose Pole* [*Spread*].

Petersen: *Rose Pole*?

Q: And that's 1978.

Petersen: 1978. Beautiful. *Rose Pole*.

Q: Yes, I was really thinking about the India trip because you were there.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: That's what I meant. Did you see a transition where he thought about fabric in a different way or he thought about what a *Hoarfrost* might be, in a different way, coming back from the trip?

Petersen: Well in India he got involved with the rag-mud pieces [*Unions* editions, 1975].

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Then in some of the India pieces, he used fabric with the bamboo and the little runs of bamboo inlaid between the paper and we placed the fabric into the little rectangles [*Bones* editions, 1975]. We had a lot of assistants there. He selected the fabrics. He laid the first proofs, showing us in the paper mill where they pour the pulp into the vat. It's poured onto a screen. What's the screen called? I forget. The first layer of paper pulp is poured and then the bamboo is placed in. Then I guess he had cut them himself. Rosamund Felsen was there and Hisachika Takahashi and Charlie Ritt—Chuck Ritt then and myself. Bob would lay the little pieces of fabric down, just plain fabric. Then more paper pulp was poured on top. Then that was lifted up and the burlap was put over and put under pressure and then laid to dry. In the drying, the paper would dry and shrink, and the bamboo would curve a little bit, bend, so they had an arc to them, which was very beautiful. Then we went to fabric stores in Ahmedabad with the Sarabhai family, Surhid and Asha and Anand Sarabhai. We went to a shop where they sold—excuse me, I forget the name. In India they wear a wrap, a sarong.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Little Joe (Bones)*, 1975  
 Handmade paper with bamboo and fabric  
 24 x 28 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches (61 x 72.4 x 8.9 cm)  
 dimensions variable  
 From an edition of 34, produced by Gemini  
 G.E.L, Los Angeles

Q: A sari?

Petersen: Sari, yes. Saris. They had beautiful fabrics in there and Bob purchased some. I had the feeling myself that's where Bob saw these beautiful silks of blue and red, and then later started the *Jammer* pieces, from the trip to India. That's just my own intuition, I guess you'd say.

I guess we take a break?

Q: Yes, we can take a break. It's going very well.

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: The transfers for me look pretty—the intensity, they weren't—'84—I mean '74 [note: referring to the *Spread* series].

Q: You remember them as having this same sort of intensity? They don't seem to have faded?

Petersen: No.

Q: No?

Petersen: Not these. Yes, they were always that subtle—*Hoarfrosts*. Yes.

Q: No, it's extraordinary. That color transfer for these photos, that was done the same way with just that solvent and the press on the solvent?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: That got that quality of transfer?

Petersen: Yes. It releases the ink in the magazine paper. I'm not so certain, but I think the inks they use now are drier—instant dry, harder or something. Maybe. I'm not sure.

Q: Well, one thing we said before that we said we should've recorded was what you were saying about the door—the material that's used in at least this *Spread*. You were explaining how you did it.

Petersen: Door skin, it's called.

Q: The door skin.

Petersen: The wood panel.

Q: You want to say that a little more—again?

Petersen: Did we record about the Rosenquist story?

Q: We were recording when you said that he came in and said, “You need to go to the hardware store and get some.”

Petersen: Oh yes, that’s recorded.

Q: But then we stopped recording and you walked over and said a little bit more about the backing—and how thin the material was, but it was glued.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Was it gesso? Is that what you said?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: On both sides, I think you were saying.

Petersen: Yes, it’s gessoed on both sides. You can get door skins at the lumberyard, where we did in Fort Myers, Florida. They’re used to resurface hollow core doors in homes. Sometimes doors get damp at the bottom or they’ll get that curling effect and they resurface them with a door skin. They’re made with that material called door skin. It’s very thin, way less than an eighth of an inch and a little more than a sixteenth. It’s 33 seconds. [Laughs]

Q: By this period, when you were in the million-dollar shed—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: —did you mean that that was a transition, that you were working less with Rauschenberg, collaborating less? Or was it just the *Spreads* in particular—you were doing your own thing, you just happened not to be collaborating with these? I didn't understand whether something had changed?

Petersen: Oh. Let's see. I never really collaborated with Bob.

Q: Well, assisted.

Petersen: Like that kind of collaboration. I was just helping. Like with the *Hoarfrosts*, running the press and cleaning up and getting the solvents and helping crumble the newspaper and tearing images and sometimes cutting them.

Q: Well, put it that way with the *Spreads*, were you no longer helping by that time?

Petersen: Oh, I would assist.

Q: You were—okay.

Petersen: Because my studio was only 60 feet away out the back door. I would come through quite often—like on this *Spread*, it's called *Rose Pole*? '85?

Q: No, earlier.

Q2: '78.

Petersen: Oh, '78, excuse me. On the left panel there, I recall that burlap piece of gauze. I may have helped collage that down or helped Bob hold it down over the panel. They were laid flat on sawhorses with a 4-by-8 panel. We laid those flat. Maybe collaged that down. I recall the paintbrush, just a memory of it. Beautiful on that pillow really.

Q: This is another question from Julia about the *Spreads*. There's the 1976 retrospective in Washington—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: And at the same time there was the King Tut exhibition [*Treasures of Tutankhamun*, National Gallery of Art, 1976–77].

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Do you remember that? Do you remember going to see the King Tut show in D.C.?



Petersen: Yes.

Q: Apparently Rauschenberg said later that that show had a big influence on the *Spreads* and the *Scales*. Do you remember anything about going to that show with him?

Petersen: Well I recall going to the show and the director of the museum was very, in a way, exciting. He took us through a secret passage into the gallery, where a false door opened into the King Tut show so we didn't have to go through the front lines.

Q: You didn't have to get in line. [Laughs]

Petersen: It was just this secret panel. It's kind of dark in there and this panel opens and there's the King Tut show. We looked at the show, kind of separately. I'd get involved with this and Bob would go off and look at what he wanted to—more on your own. I don't recall Bob mentioning—of course it must have had an influence on him. I just took it in as a beautiful show. But for myself it didn't really inspire me to—of course it helped—I don't know how to explain that. It didn't inspire me to do new work. From my feelings now, Bob seemed to abruptly change, in a way, from series to series—but I think—oh gosh, I don't know. He mentioned being inspired by the King Tut show. You can kind of see it in the second painting there with the mirror, as a surface of gold or something [*Ruby Re-Run (Spread)*, 1978].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Ruby Re-Run (Spread)*, 1978  
Solvent transfer on fabric collage with split tire,  
colored mirrors, and graphite on wood panels  
84 1/2 x 88 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches (214.6 x 224.8 x  
14 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: By abruptly change—are you thinking about this series in particular, that he would abruptly change into a new series?

Petersen: Well, I was walking with Bob through Washington Square Park [New York] one time. We were walking with Cy Twombly and maybe Peter Wirth. We were walking along and Bob was in front speaking with Cy. I overheard him say, “I tend to change every seven years. It’s in my horoscope.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: That was it, you know?

[Laughter]

Q: And that was more or less accurate for—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Or sometimes more rapid, I guess.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: —depending on what that means, yes.

Petersen: I don't know if he was speaking of his—well of course, I don't know—but of his artwork or his personal life—may have been.

Q2: You said that you and he would go to see an astrologer regularly?

Petersen: Oh yes. Yes, Zoltan [S.] Mason. Bob went many years earlier, before I was introduced to him. When I met Bob, we went up and—but it was probably in the late fifties, early sixties. Bob told me he was in a stage in his life where he couldn't speak. He was having difficult—problems. He didn't really explain what it was. But he did mention to me that he lost his voice. I don't believe—he went to Zoltan Mason, astrologer. Zoltan Mason told him, “You need to be close to water.” And so Bob decided—he had a white Jaguar. I forget what year. There's photos of it in the [Harry N.] Abrams book [*Rauschenberg*, 1969] at Jasper Johns's house in South Carolina somewhere.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled [Edisto, S.C.], 1961  
Contact sheet  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: A car? A white Jaguar?

Petersen: It's a white Jaguar, with the long hood? Beautiful car. He was at a party uptown and got talking to the maître d' or hostess, and they started talking about a car of hers. She mentioned, "Oh, you have to see my new car." So they went and she said, "Would you like to drive it?" Bob drove the Jaguar and he said it was the most wonderful car he'd ever driven. He said to her, "Oh, I'll trade you a painting for this car." [Laughs] So I guess they did. Bob got the car.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Zoltan Mason told him he needed to be near the water. So he decided he would get in his new car and leave Manhattan and take every road to the left that went to the water. He did that. He went every exit, all the way down to Florida. I guess he stopped in Captiva, took that

exit, took the ferry across to Sanibel—it was a ferry then, not the causeway—and discovered Sanibel and then Captiva Island. He found the Beach House property was for sale and purchased it because it was right on the water. [Note: Rauschenberg purchased this property in 1968] He went with—I always forget the name of the animal he had with him.

Q2: Oh, the kinkajou?



Rauschenberg with pet kinkajou, Sweetie, in his Front Street studio, New York, ca. 1960.  
Photo: Giulia Niccolai

Petersen: A kinkajou?

Q2: Was it? Yes, Sweetie?

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: Sweetie the kinkajou?

Petersen: They're nocturnal.

Q: Kinkajou?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: What's a kinkajou?

Q2: It's a little—

Petersen: There's a long tail—

Q: Monkey?

Q2: —rodent-y kind of—yes.

Petersen: Yes, they're nocturnal. They'd sleep in the day—

Q2: Big eyes.

Q: Oh, okay.

Petersen: He said, “Boy, this is—” I forget the name. He had a name for her.

Q2: I think it was Sweetie.

Petersen: Sweetie?

Q2: I think that was the name of his kinkajou.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I don't know if there are photos. I think I saw one photo.

Q2: I think there may be a couple photos.

Petersen: Yes. He said he and Sweetie got in the Jaguar and took off.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said it was hard to stay in the motels because she tended to climb the Venetian blinds [laughs] at night, because she liked to be awake at night and slept in the day.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It was so sad, I said, “Well gosh, whatever happened to Sweetie?” He said, “Ileana and Michael came over to visit and she bit Michael Sonnabend.” So he had to get rid of her, which he didn’t like.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Something like that.

Q2: I think I recall that she was not that sweet an animal.

Petersen: Yes.

[Laughter]

Q: Sweetie was not so sweet. [Laughs]

Petersen: So that’s how Bob—speaking of the astrologer.

Q: Zoltan Mason was where? In Manhattan? Where would you go to consult?

Petersen: Oh yes. In Manhattan.

Q: Where was the office?



Petersen: I went there a few times actually with Bob. Then I went—I think around '82, after I moved from Lafayette Street. I went there to just—and I kept a file in Florida—there's so much stuff, if you're moving, you can't—but I had a Zoltan Mason file. When he would do the charts, I would put it in the file. I had Zoltan Mason RR and RP. They do that astrological chart. I don't know—now it's a long time ago with the—

Q2: Well Francine and Kayla [Jenkins] are processing all the archives so they might come across it.

Petersen: Yes. I left a lot of things there. I left a *Sky Garden* in the closet upstairs in a Gemini tube.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I thought oh, I'll pick that up later. And then I came back in the—

Q: And how did he find—

Petersen: Actually, I—oh, I'd better not mention this. David White might read the transcript.

[Laughter]

Q: Well—[laughs]

Petersen: But I had work in the storage unit. I shouldn't get into personal— I moved kind of quickly because of relationships and—I had a lot of work here that Bob gave me, but at the time, I was here, so it just got put in the drawer and—

Q2: Yes, that was absorbed back into stock, yes?

Petersen: I knew it was mine, but—then a couple of years go by and I mentioned it to Bob. I said, “Bob, when I moved, I left some things on the fourth floor in the archives I'd like to pick up.” He said, “Well Petersen, just make a list of what you left and give it to David White.” [Laughs] And so I made a list. I made an appointment with David and went to see him and he looked at the list, he got out the books, and he said, “Well, it's not here. It's not in the books.” I said, “David, in those days, we were lucky to get the work upstairs.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Besides in the book. Then the phone rang and he said, “Excuse me, I have to get that.” And I left.

Q2: Oh.

Q: Were you about to say something?

Petersen: Yes, to get back to the *Spreads* here—other work. So many things cross my mind. In a way, I’m trying to grab them right now. But usually when I’m in my studio or—I’ve mentioned this before, I have folders of notes. When I’m working and I go back through, I’ll write this down, write that down. But I don’t have them—I have to put all that together.

Q: You kept notes on the process as you were in the middle of the work?

Petersen: No, experiences with Bob. Inspirational, feedback things. Good memories, they’re called. That may be interesting for his archives. I’ll get that together. I’m trying to think of how—I just thought of it upstairs. When you try to do something, it doesn’t come to you.

Q: [Laughs] It doesn’t come back. You were thinking of a particular good memory? Is that what you mean?

Petersen: Oh yes, always. Yes. I was working with Bob once on a piece and I was walking through the print shop and I said, “Well, I think I’ll try this.” He said, “Don’t try, just do it.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: You know his way of thinking.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: One other question about the *Spreads*—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: I'm not sure that you would have been directly involved. But apparently the Fort Worth Art Museum [Texas] commissioned some of the *Spreads*?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Do you remember anything about that commission coming through?

Petersen: Would that have been *Rodeo Palace* [(*Spread*), 1976]?

Q: Yes. According to the notes that you all gave me. [Note: Rauschenberg made *Rodeo Palace* (*Spread*) for the exhibition *The Great American Rodeo*, Fort Worth Art Museum, 1976; the museum commissioned *Whistle Stop* (*Spread*), 1977]

Petersen: Yes, *Rodeo Palace*, god.



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

Beautiful piece. Oh, that's true. That was a commission.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Yes, I remember going out with Bob and collecting screen doors. I forget exactly where we found the—

Q: In Florida?

Petersen: Yes, in Florida. He just gathered some screen doors and I remember he lined it up in the studio and just kept adding to it. So that's in Fort Worth now?

Q: I don't know where it is now.

Q2: No, it's—I don't think so.

Petersen: No?

Q2: Offhand, I don't know where it is. That might be the one that—I'm trying to think if that's the one that Norman [M.] Lear owns.

Petersen: Oh. I know it was in the Smithsonian show. Gosh, was that '76 with Walter Hopps?

Q2: Yes.

Q: What I have is that the Fort Worth Art Museum commissioned *Rodeo Palace* and *Whistle Stop* [(*Spread*), 1977]. But that doesn't tell us where they are now.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Whistle Stop (Spread)*, 1977  
Solvent transfer, fabric and paper collage,  
screen doors, and train signal light on wood  
support  
84 x 180 x 9 inches (213.4 x 457.2 x 22.9 cm)  
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth Museum  
Purchase and commission, The Benjamin J.  
Tiller Memorial Trust

Petersen: I don't recall *Whistle Stop*.

Q2: It's another large one. I can bring down pictures, if that would be helpful.

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: I'll be right back then.

Petersen: Okay. What a nice title, *Whistle Stop*. [Laughs]

Q: That is a good title.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes. Bob always loved titling. He was asked once, "How do you think of a title?" He said, "Titles to me are like adding a color." I thought that was a nice thing to say. Someone asked him once, "How do you know when a painting is complete?" He said, "When it starts looking like the next one."

[Laughter]

Petersen: I thought that was pretty nice.

I overheard many of Bob's interviews, oh with Robert Hughes and the *New Yorker*. Robert Hughes, the *Time* magazine art critic.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: And the *New Yorker*—Calvin Tomkins. And many other interviews. I would be in the same room, usually doing the dishes or something, or making appetizers or making drinks for the guests. I would hear behind me, Bob conducting the interview. It dawned on me once—I went, gosh, every interview he does is different. I haven't heard that one before. [Laughs]

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Different parts of his life come out.

Q: Different observations?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: I was reading this morning the transcript of a question-and-answer session in Israel [1974], which you must have been at.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: And it's very—it's awkward. There's some hostility and some of the questioners feel that he's showing them, Israelis, something ugly about themselves—especially the way he used water towers.



Petersen: Oh!

Q: They're saying—are you bringing out the water tower to show us how ugly we are? And he said, “No, why is a water tower ugly?” [Laughs] “How do you define beauty? I thought that I was pulling out something that was beautiful.” It's a very interesting exchange, but awkward and hostile sometimes.

Petersen: Yes, I was at that interview. I don't recall the many different interviews. I always thought to myself how brilliant his answers were—totally flipped from what you would expect, for me. Because he was such a genius. Smart, intelligent.

Q: With language as well as with images.

Petersen: Yes. See, I'm in a way slow that way, I guess you'd say. But I'm just guessing at it, whereas I think he does it before he thinks, something like that.

Q: Does what before he thinks?

Petersen: An answer. He doesn't categorize or go over it. No, I shouldn't say the way he—but that's the way I think about it.

Q: He answers in the moment, he doesn't reflect—

Petersen: Yes, in the moment. Like he surprises himself so it's not so boring.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: That is something he would say. "I like to surprise myself so it's not so boring."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He would say these things like god, where'd that come from?

[Laughter]

Q: Do you remember him ever having trouble coming up with a title? You were talking about him going through the dictionary and being interested in words. But do you remember him ever having a work or a series and he knew it was something but he couldn't come up with the right word?

Petersen: Well yes, the only time I remember where he was trying to really come up with a title—oh wow—oh and is this *Whistle Stop*? Oh I remember it now.

But Brent was just asking me if Bob ever had a problem trying to decide or coming up with the title for his work. The only time I recall is when we were flying from JFK to Gemini. The printing was being done for *Currents* at Styria Studios in Pasadena [note: Glendale, California].

He couldn't come up—he was trying to—it went on most of the flight. He said, “Gosh, I—this new series—” And then just all of a sudden, he went, “*Currents*, like water. Flowing. It's a current.” Maybe he said news, but *Currents*, so they're called *Currents*. He was making notes on paper and crossing things out. That's the only time I saw him—and other times trying to think of a title, but without problems, in Gemini late at night or any time during the day. As I recall, with Rosamund going through the dictionary. He also would look at—what's it called? The book of synonyms or—

Q2: Oh, thesaurus?

Petersen: Yes, he liked that book. At the time in the seventies—I don't know if he did it later, in the eighties, but he did the *I Ching* quite often. In fact, I did it too back in the seventies, where you'd take the coins and—he did that quite often.

Q2: Can I just interject here?

Q: Yes.

Q2: So when you were with Bob, were you aware or was he aware of a problem with reading or dyslexia? Did you see him read much at all?

Petersen: Oh yes, Bob read, but he wouldn't sit on the couch and have a book or—

Q2: Right, that's what I was wondering. You were just saying that he liked using the thesaurus and going through the dictionary—

Petersen: Oh yes, he would look that way. He liked the *New Yorker*. He would sit down and read the *New Yorker* or *Time* magazine, a Robert Hughes article. But that was about it.

Q: I'm just curious about when he was aware of having a learning disability and whether he was diagnosed or—

Petersen: Well, I don't know if he was diagnosed for it. But he mentioned that the reason he liked printmaking and working composition on the stone is that it's already the right reading for him. It's not reversed because see, when the print comes off—

Q: Oh yes.

Petersen: —it's a mirror image. So he would say, "Oh, it's the right way."

[Laughter]

Petersen: Let me get my reading glasses. Yes, those. I have three different pairs of glasses for sun and close-up and clear. Oh that's better, 1977, boy. Beautiful.

Q: So this is *Whistle Stop*?

Q2: Yes.

Q: And the other one—

Q2: The other one is *Rodeo Palace* and it is owned by the Lears, by Norman Lear.

Petersen: Wow. Imagine having that in your house!

[Laughter]

Q: I'd need a bigger house. [Laughs]

Petersen: Yes, I recall Bob making the piece. I didn't—it was Tim Pharr and Peter Wirth at the time. Peter Wirth ran the press for the transfers and Tim Pharr installed the doors and did all the carpentry work. There's a pillow underneath the silk collage. Wow. Oh thanks, Gina, for bringing these down. Beautiful. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, this is it.

Q2: That's who owns that one.

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: So you don't recall how the commissions came about, though?

Petersen: Oh no, no. Maybe Anne Livet would know. Maybe Walter Hopps was involved at the time because he was in Texas with the Menil Collection [Houston].

Q: I had one other question about *Hoarfrosts* that I didn't ask you before. Was there ever an instance where there was a damaged *Hoarfrost* and Rauschenberg had to decide how to deal with damage, how to repair a *Hoarfrost*? And if so, how did he approach it? Do you remember that ever happening?

Petersen: No—not once. He didn't stop working. He accepted, in a way, whatever happened—like when doing a litho print at ULAE, Universal Limited Art Editions, one of the stones came off the press and broke.

Q: Right.

Petersen: Or it broke during printing. I can't recall. I guess during printing, the stone cracked, and I think it's called—what is the title of that print?

Q2: *Accident*.

Petersen: *Accident*, yes.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, “Just keep printing it.” [Laughs] It shows the break. Yes, Bob—I don’t recall once where he rejected a work. We had over in curating—not *Hoarfrost* or larger pieces, but drawings. They just weren’t complete and they would get put on a table to the side. He said, “Petersen, go in curating, make a shelf for works to be completed.” So I took the drawings over, put them on the curating shelf, and it said, “Works to be completed.” Then, maybe not so often, but he would say, “Take this one over, put it in works to be completed.”

[Laughter]

Q2: Did he ever go back to that and pull them out and work on them?

Petersen: Maybe after I left, but not when I was there, from 1970 to 1980. I was wondering if the Foundation, in the archives, ever came across the “works to be completed” and I would do it. I would complete them for him.

[Laughter]

Petersen: No, it would be fun. Works to be completed, completed by Bob Petersen.

Q2: Well, there is a Rosenquist painting that Bob owned called *Waiting for Bob* [1979], and it was a very realistically rendered picture frame and then it was blank inside. And Bob was supposed to—

Petersen: Oh!

Q2: —paint the inside. He called it *Waiting for Bob*.



James Rosenquist  
*Waiting for Bob*, 1979  
Oil on linen  
36 x 36 inches (91.4 x 91.4 cm)  
Private collection

Petersen: Bob called it that or—

Q2: Rosenquist did.

Petersen: Yes, I remember that painting in the bigger studio, up by the Beach House, the Sabiel studio. Bob bought that house from the Sabiels. Yes, that painting was there—Bob just didn't do the collaboration as I recall.

Q2: Yes.



Petersen: I think—just from memory—it seems like Cy mentioned once, “Why don’t you work on that painting?” But he didn’t. He never did it, I guess.

Q2: No.

Petersen: So Jim has it still?

Q2: No, no—it was in Bob’s collection.

Petersen: Oh and it’s signed on the back or—

Q2: It was called *Waiting for Bob*. That was the title of the work.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It’s a Rosenquist?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: But Bob never—

Q2: Never did his part on it. [Laughs]

Petersen: Yes, I remember that—

Q2: It should have been on the “to be completed” shelf.

Petersen: Yes. Yes, I remember that painting in the studio in the seventies.

Q: Can we move in one other direction?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Are you okay? Can we talk about Tampa a little bit? That’s a whole other avenue or a whole other period—or not a whole other period, but a whole other space. Can you talk a little bit about Graphicstudio in Tampa and how that arrangement came about and the *Made in Tampa* [1972–73] series and the *Tampa Clay Piece* series [1972–73]? I’m assuming you were involved in going there.

Petersen: Oh yes, that was a really exciting time.

Q: How did that come about and what was it like to work at Graphicstudio?

Petersen: Well, let’s see. Jim Rosenquist was doing a project with Graphicstudio at University of South Florida in Tampa with Don Saff. Bob got a phone call that Jim Rosenquist had been in a car accident with his wife and son in Tampa. So the next day, Bob and I flew to Tampa to visit

Jim Rosenquist in the hospital. It was a really serious accident. His wife had a very serious injury. I forget what it was. Their son had a concussion. You've met Jim's son, John [Rosenquist]?

Q2: No, I never have.

Petersen: He's fine. I've spoken with him at Jim's, thirty, twenty years later. He was only maybe five or six at the time. Bob and I went to visit Jim Rosenquist in the hospital and we went into Jim's room. He had many broken ribs and was all bruised. Don Saff was there and I believe [Ernest] Ernie Cox and someone else—I can't recall his name right now. Bob was talking to Jim and it's very serious and Jim Rosenquist was up in the bed and he said, "Rauschenberg, don't make me laugh."

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because of the ribs—

Q: Yes.

Petersen: —you can't laugh. [Laughs] I remember that part.

[Laughter]

Petersen: They smiled. But it was really serious.

Q2: Had Bob met Don Saff before?

Petersen: No.

Q2: Or was that the first time they met?

Petersen: We met Don Saff in that hospital room. From there, Don got in touch with Bob and invited him—it was some time later, maybe three, four months or quite a bit later. We flew back to Tampa, and Bob started a project there. I helped the printers. Bob would do a composition on a flat cardboard, like in the *Hoarfrost* here, and at Untitled Press, I'd mix up some liquid tusche wash and Bob would brush it on the backside of the cardboard with that corrugated surface. Then we would put it onto a ground, fresh stone, and run it through the litho press under pressure and peel up the cardboard that left the impression of the grease from the cardboard on the stone. So I was showing the printers there at Universal and Don. It was pretty simple, in a way, for a printer to understand that technology and Bob was right there. Then Bob was in the print shop and he noticed the trash containers had big paper bags in them that would open for the trash. He asked if they had some extras of those big paper bags. He took the paper bags and put the tusche on, let it dry overnight, then the next day transferred it to the aluminum plates—that was all done on plates, as I recall—and then printed it as an edition. He called that series *Seasonbags* [from *Made in Tampa*, 1972]. There are four of them and each one's a different color. Beautiful set. That's another set I left upstairs.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Tampa 7 (Fall)*, 1972  
Lithograph on paper  
40 x 22 inches (101.6 x 55.9 cm)  
From an edition of 20 Arabic numerals and 20  
Roman numerals, published by Graphicstudio,  
University of South Florida, Tampa

[Laughter]

Q: [Laughs] In one of the chronologies, I read an anecdote where there was material from that work left in the studio overnight—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: —and the janitors threw it away?

Petersen: Yes, the janitor picked it up—

Q: And you actually went to the dump to try to find it? Were you there for that?

Petersen: Yes and we found most of it in the dump.

Q: So what happened?

Petersen: Can you imagine? In a landfill? Finding those boxes? God!

Q: But that was what it was, that they took it out by mistake?

Petersen: Yes, the janitor thought it was—it looked like trash. It was a pile of cardboard boxes.

[Note: original forms for *Made in Tampa Clay Pieces Suite*, 1972–73] We walked in and Don’s eyes—and Bob said, “Where are my boxes?”

[Laughter]

Petersen: Don tracked it down. So we got in the car and went to the landfill. I found a few because—this might sound silly, but I like dumps.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I was raised on a farm in Iowa, I’m used to stepping in stuff.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Which is true, out in the pasture.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: You think it's hard and as a kid, you go, "Oops! It's not too hard!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: I did that once—I went, "Oh god, stupid!" It's baked on the top, but it's not baked in the middle.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway, we found most of the boxes and took them back to Graphicstudio. I remember one of the printers, Charles ["Chuck"] Ringness, he was up in the heap there, by the bulldozers off to the side and suddenly he came down gagging, "Oh!" I said, "Chuck! You okay?" He said, "Maggots! Maggots!"

Q: Ew!

[Laughter]

Petersen: It didn't bother me. I grew up with maggots all over the place.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It was an amazing Iowa farm. Cows and pigs and horses—the things you see growing up on a farm. I don't want to get—oh god, I'll never forget—oh I shouldn't—well—my dad, he had the hog shed and one of the hogs was ill and died during the night. He called the vet and my dad pulled the hog out and the vet kneeled down and goes [whooshing sound]— [Laughs] Yes, anyway.

Q: [Laughs] Wow.

[Laughter]

Petersen: What about the clay work in that series in Tampa?

Petersen: Oh, the clay.

Q: Do you remember how he started doing that? Where that came from?

Petersen: Yes. Don Saff took Bob on a tour through the university—we saw printmaking and then went over to ceramics. Bob had a wonderful time speaking with the students there because one of the students had made, as I recall, a shoe. A very realistic work boot with the laces and



Bob said to the student, “This is beautiful.” I didn’t catch most of the—I looked at it—beautiful, the boot—and from there, he thought oh, clay, ceramics. His name is right on the edge—I’m embarrassed I don’t remember.

Q: You’re talking about the ceramics person?

Petersen: He worked with Don Saff. A fellow—he helped so much with the clay. In fact he made the—

Q: I think I have the name over there. I’ll go get it. Let me look it up. Keep telling the story.

Petersen: Okay. So he went into ceramics and brought clay over to—or no, maybe we were in the ceramics room and Bob said, “Do you have an old bike tire around?” He started wheeling the bike tire through the clay and it left a nice mark. And then he mentioned oh, a car tire, and then the beautiful piece—I have a beautiful photo of Bob under the one that mounts on the wall where the track comes out.

Q2: Oh, you’re thinking of the *Tracks* series [1976]. I thought you were talking about the cardboard boxes.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Realm (Tracks)*, 1976  
Cast dirt with resin binder, fiberglass,  
and wet soil patina  
36 3/4 x 30 1/4 inches (93.3 x 76.8 cm)  
From an edition of 18, produced by  
Pyramid Arts, Ltd., Tampa

Petersen: Oh. Yes.

Q2: But those are both Graphicstudio's [note: *Tracks* were produced with Pyramid Arts, Ltd.].

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: I think the clay pieces followed the *Seasonbags* and—

Q2: Right.

Petersen: —all that.

Q2: Yes.

Q: How about Alan Eaker?

Petersen: Yes, yes, that's it. Alan Eaker.

Q: Is that the name you were looking for?

Petersen: Yes, thank you. Yes.

Q: There's a mold for one of the—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: —*Made in Tampa.*

Petersen: Julio Juristo, wonderful.

Q: And [Daniel] Dan Stack?

Petersen: Yes, Dan Stack. Dan Stack worked with Jim Rosenquist for some time. Oh gosh. Yes, Julio Juristo and—god, you just said his name.

Q: Dan Stack? Or Eaker?

Petersen: Alan Eaker.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I hope he doesn't hear this interview.

[Laughter]

Petersen: In the [*Tampa*] *Clay Pieces* that you just showed me there, the boxes cast in clay, they did an incredible job of reproducing the fiber tape.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Tampa Clay Piece 3*, 1972–73  
Fired and glazed ceramic with tape and  
silkscreened decal  
19 1/2 x 24 x 5 1/2 inches (49.5 x 61 x 14 cm)  
From an edition of 10 Roman numerals and 10  
Arabic numerals, published by Graphicstudio,  
University of South Florida, Tampa

Q: Yes.

Petersen: I don't recall how that was done. And the labels, they're just incredibly—

Q2: There's some decal.

Petersen: —beautiful.

Q2: They were done with some decals or something.

Petersen: Yes, decals of some sort. There's just beautiful craftsmanship in that. Bob and I went back and forth. Bob went up to look at the—god, look at that incredible bag, the gunny sack.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: I hadn't seen these for some time.

Q: Sorry, these aren't great reproductions, but—

Petersen: Wonderful.

Q: Michelle Juristo.

Petersen: Yes, Michelle. Actually Michelle—oh, this is a couple years ago, but she sold her whole collection to Jim Kempner.

Q2: Oh.

Petersen: Jim Kempner bought it.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: I helped Jim unpack it. The one with the tie—there's one with a necktie in it.

Q2: Oh yes, *Airports*.

Petersen: Oh, that's *Airports*.

Q2: That is the *Airport Suite* [1974].

Petersen: Yes, *Airport Suite*, a beautiful series. I have one of those Bob gave me. I did retrieve—I saved it. It's called *Sheephead* [*(Airport Suite)*, 1974].

Q2: Right.

Petersen: So Bob and I went back to Bob's—they wanted to look at the ceramic boxes. Bob looked at them and they weren't quite—he said, "Well, I'll come back later," or something like that—I don't know what he said because I was on the other side. But I remember Bob looking at them and looking at them, so we went back to Captiva. Some weeks later, we went back to

Tampa. They took us into ceramics and Bob walked in and said, “Oh god, really nice.” Being Bob, he said, “Oh, this is beautiful, really beautiful.” Julio and Alan Eaker, they were very proud of the series. Julio said, “What do you think we did to get that patina on the clay?” Did you hear this story?

Q: I was reading—what I think you’re going to say. Go ahead and say it. [Laughs]

Petersen: Oh, this is probably documented, but they took their oil on their nose and rubbed it into the clay.

[Laughter]

Petersen: They said, “Boy, our noses are so sore!”

[Laughter]

Petersen: For a big piece like that, they’re going—

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes, it’s perspiration from the face, oil on the face. They were all laughing.

Q2: Yes.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Did he talk about what he was trying to do with that medium? I don't think I've ever seen one of those. But he wanted the clay to look like cardboard?

Petersen: Yes, yes.

Q: It seems unusual—

Petersen: It's, of course, not cardboard, but—

Q: Yes.

Petersen: —just to give that little hint of—if you'd come across— In my feeling, I've seen them at Jim Kempner's, who had some beautiful ones two or three years ago. I walked in and said, "Oh my god, it's so beautiful."

Q2: Yes, I love those.



Petersen: At the time, being with Bob and working, we would go project to project, so steadily, not in any rush or anything, but things would just keep moving. Now I kind of think god, I should have—you can't go back in time. I sure would like one of those now.

[Laughter]

Petersen: But at the time, it was just rolling with life.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: What's next? What's next? That's great—okay, let's go! [Laughs] Oh, that's nice.

Okay, let's go.

[Laughter]

Q2: Yes.

Q: Were you there when the *Crops* [1973] series was made too?

Petersen: Yes. Yes.

Q2: Those are going to be discussed tomorrow.

Q: Oh, that's what you're going to talk about tomorrow?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Well, maybe you should save that for tomorrow, when you actually have them in front of you.

Petersen: Oh, I can say this tomorrow, but I ran the paper cutter table, the big one, and I'd do little strips with newspapers, make a big pile of strips, and Bob would take the strips and make the composition. He did all the compositions on those, as I recall. That was filmed by a French film crew. I have photographs of them. They filmed a lot in Captiva. I wonder if those—I always want to go—speak with Antonio Homem. Whatever happened to all that footage they shot of Bob?

Q2: Was he responsible for it? Did Antonio set it up?

Petersen: Well, Antonio and Ileana were from Paris and they had the gallery in Paris.

Q2: Right.

Petersen: We went to Paris and saw the screening of it.

Q2: Oh.

Petersen: There was some beautiful footage, but it was not done well at all.

Q2: Oh.

Petersen: Ileana didn't accept it and Bob didn't either. They wanted to remake it, and then it kind of dissolved. [Note: *Mostly About Rauschenberg* (1975), directed by Rauschenberg, Christine Kozlov, and Mayo Thompson, begun under the direction of Jacques Clemente. Produced by Michèle Arnaud and Reiner Moritz for RM Productions, Munich, and Technisonor, Paris.

Unfinished] I don't know what happened to that footage. I remember once—oh I shouldn't really say, but—they worked late at night in a smaller studio under the Beach House. They had the camera on the floor and Bob was on the floor and totally smashed in a way I very rarely saw him, and Ileana was very upset about that. “Don't film Bob drunk.” [Laughs] But Bob was smiling. But very rarely—never have you seen him—I only saw him once before like that and that was in Aspen, Colorado at the beer concert with Aspen Design Conference. Because at that altitude, if you drink—he was doing a piece of sound on stage. He was the conductor and he had a quart bottle of beer and the students were behind him. He said, “When I drink, you blow. When I blow, you drink.” [Note: *Untitled (Beer Bottle Band)*, 1973]

[Laughter]

Petersen: “When my quart is gone, the concert's over.”

[Laughter]

Q: That was the concert?

Petersen: Yes, that was the concert. Did you say you had a—you sent me it.

Q2: I sent you—

Petersen: I didn't see it yet.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: It's in my pile.

Petersen: Oh, the sound of it was just beautiful on the stage, that [whooshing sound] through a bottle. You'd know the sound—

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Thirty of them going and the tone would change as the beer got lower.

Q: That's kind of a great idea.

Petersen: Some students—I say students, young kids—they didn't have to—they weren't—Bob didn't instruct them what to do. “When I'm drinking, you blow. When I blow, you drink.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: That was the piece.

Q: But it made him drunk at that altitude? Is that where you were going?

Petersen: Yes, the altitude. If you drink at that altitude—plus he probably had a little before and after of Jack and whatever.

[Laughter]

Q2: Your talking about the filming of the French film reminded me that at the exhibition in Israel, there was a film crew filming the whole setting up of the exhibition.

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: Did you actually see the footage?

Petersen: No.

Q2: Oh because I know they had screens in the catalogue. It's diary form and so it talks about three screens being set up for this film.

Petersen: Wow, I don't recall that at all.

Q2: I've been trying to track down film footage of it and I just keep hitting walls.

Petersen: I wonder, is Yona Fischer still in Israel? God, that's a long time ago.

Q2: Yes, I don't—

Petersen: Yona Fischer, wonderful man. Oh, he must be Bob's age or maybe even a little older.

Q2: I've written to the museum, I've written to the Israeli TV archive. It was done with people from the university.

Petersen: Yes, Yona Fischer. Oh, Nahum Tevet was there.

Q2: Oh, he was there for the—

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: Oh.

Petersen: And I have his email and I got to answer him. You did that with me, with—

Q2: Right, yes.

Petersen: He's a wonderful—you met him.

Q2: I did meet him, yes.

Petersen: Wonderful man and great artist. Bob and I went to his studio in Israel, and Bob purchased three of his works on glass and I purchased two. I gave Nahum one. It's still in my collection. He said he had a show in a museum and I said, "Put it in the collection of Lena Petersen,"—or Petersen, whatever. He offered that amount for—

Q2: Oh, that's nice.

Petersen: He said, "Bob, what do you want for it?" I said, knowing me, "I'd like to say you can have it, but I do have an electric bill."

[Laughter]

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: I said, “God, I want to just give it to you.” He called me a couple days later and I said, “Well, whatever.” He said, “I’ll give you four thousand dollars for it. Both of them. Each.”

Q2: Right.

Petersen: I said, “Nahum, that’s so wonderful.” I said, “You can have one for three and I’ll keep the other one, but you can take it.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: That’s the way I do business.

[Laughter]

Petersen: God. I’m terrible at business. Just awful.

Q: Many of us are.

Petersen: I got taken so many times. Anyway.

Q: The Aspen conference was another thing on the list that I didn’t have much information about and maybe while we have it in the air, we should say a little more about it. Do you remember how that came about? It was a design conference?



Petersen: Aspen Design Conference.

Q: He was invited to conduct a concert at a design conference? What was the event?

Petersen: Well, Aspen Design Conference with—oh, I know his name. He's a designer—not an architect, but—do you remember? [Note: Milton Glaser was co-chairman of the 1973 International Design Conference, Aspen]

Q2: It's on our website because I know that I've read it.

Petersen: Yes, I say it all the time to myself, those things that are right there. Anyway he was the head of the conference and he invited designers, industrial designers, fine art artists, furniture designers—just designers. It's a designers' conference—people that make show windows, like the windows at Saks Fifth Avenue, in department stores.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: I'm just trying to think of his name. I wish I wouldn't do that.

Q: So Rauschenberg was invited to participate in the conference?

Petersen: Yes. Oh and he was given a space to do a sculpture outdoors [note: a three-day untitled participatory installation assembled in the conference parking lot].



Rauschenberg, Robert Petersen, and others with a piece of Rauschenberg's environmental construction for the International Design Conference in Aspen, June 1973. Work destroyed after the conference, but an image of it appears in Rauschenberg's print *Untitled (For Man Ray Portfolio)* (1973). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Barbara Kulicke

Q: That's what I was remembering—that's what confused me because I thought that he did some sort of installation in a parking lot?

Petersen: I don't know how he got into conducting.

Q2: Was that '74?

Q: I thought it was '73.

Petersen: Well, it was a performance. It was a performance.

Q: '73.

Q2: Okay.

Petersen: '73, wow.

Q: So that may have just happened on the spur of the moment, but he was invited to do an installation or sculpture.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Do you remember what he did for the sculpture?

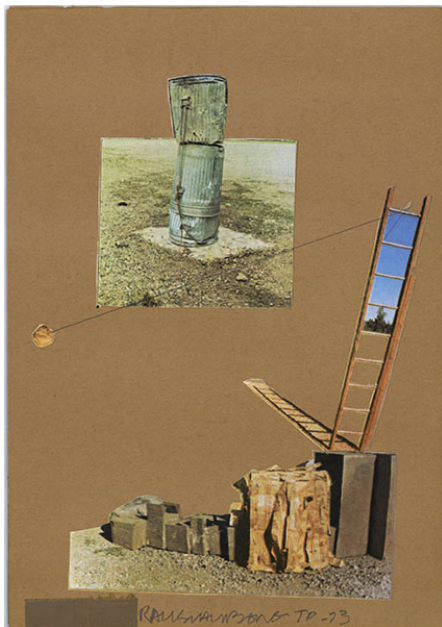
Petersen: Oh yes.

Q: What was it?

Petersen: I have many photos of it. He did cardboard. We put the matte medium on, covered it with local dirt. It was a dirt parking lot, sandy. We would put the matte medium on top of a square cardboard box and just sprinkle, throw the sand on it, let it dry. Then we would rotate the box and coat that side. It took time because we had to let it dry before we turned it or all the sand, dirt, little pebbles, and whatever would fall off. [Laughs] But up there, it was nice and sunny—it was summer. We all got really sunburned out there because at that altitude, the sun is more intense.

Q: How big was the sculpture?

Petersen: One piece of it was a wooden ladder, maybe 10 feet long. They gave him a space—a dirt parking lot and it had a wooden light pole right in the middle. So we climbed up with a ladder, put a string up on the wooden pole and took the string out about as far away as that door, and then Bob tied the string to the ladder so the ladder was at an angle, just out in the parking lot. And the string was there—it kind of became invisible at a distance. So you would see this ladder just in the dirt, floating, kind of at an angle. Then he attached the cardboard boxes to each other and made almost like a train, like a kid would make out of boxes, a train set.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (For Man Ray Portfolio), 1973  
Lithograph, screenprint, and printed collage on paper  
19 3/4 x 13 3/4 inches (50.2 x 34.9 cm)  
From an edition of 100, published by Anselmino,  
Milan, produced by Styria Studio, New York  
Includes images of Rauschenberg installation for the  
International Design Conference, Aspen, 1973.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: But they were covered with sand and dirt. Another really beautiful piece was—he found two dented trashcans—the larger 32-gallon size with the lid and that corrugated edging, and they were bent in. He found an old piece of flooring. We went up to the landfill in Aspen, looking for materials. As we were going to drive up there, I told Bob, “Well, I’m kind of familiar with dumps in a way.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: I said, “Let’s stop at this store here, I’m going to get a six-pack of beer.” So we stopped. When you go up to the landfill, you stop at a little booth to dump your stuff. I was driving. I pulled up and said, “Well, we’re artists and this is Bob Rauschenberg. We’re doing a piece down at the Aspen Design Conference. We’d like to pick up a few objects.” I reached down and got the six-pack of beer. I said, “Here, you can have this.” Gave him a six-pack of beer.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He goes, “Wow! Go ahead! Pick up whatever you want!”

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, “Usually people come here to dump.”

[Laughter]

Q: “You’re going to take stuff away and give me beer?”

Petersen: Yes.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So he was pretty happy.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because you just made the situation happier. I kind of sensed that you had to take him something.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Or he’d get grumpy, you know?

[Laughter]

Petersen: So Bob found a beautiful piece of old linoleum from oh the forties, from the kitchen, like your aunt's, flowers and whatever. A little piece. Then he took the trashcans and—I have photos of it.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: One trashcan is inside the other, sitting on this linoleum, and then he scooped dirt around the edge so you wouldn't see the edge of it. Suddenly the parking lot turns into this linoleum with these two trashcans. There was a rope through the handles, attaching them together. One can was going like this and the other—

[Laughter]

Petersen: I think it was beautiful. I think that was about it. Then he did another [untitled] performance out there—I think I told Gina—

Q2: You told me about the rocks.

Petersen: About the rocks—

Q2: You told me about it on the phone, about him getting rocks—

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Oh no, he didn't say it in an interview.

Petersen: He was standing there speaking with—I call them students, but I don't know if they were from a school. Maybe they were part of the Aspen design school. Really nice kids. Actually Gina asked me, from the photos, if I could identify some, but I can't remember. I think I may have some letters from one of the students in the Captiva box in my studio. I was looking in there oh some months ago. I should just bring that down because it has—well, letters from Fujiko [Nakaya], stuff like that. I don't know how it got in that box. Well, Bob and I would file stuff, go fishing, put the letters in a box, and they got mixed.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Anyway, Bob was out in the parking lot there and he had the students, and I didn't really hear how he approached the performance. Part of it was that you would start walking and hit the two rocks together and as soon as you only heard your own sound, you'd stop, turn around and come back. Something like that. Each student went and picked up rocks—there are a lot of rocks in Aspen. You heard this banging sound but then it would travel at a distance. I didn't do it. I stayed by the sculpture, but I remember back in the woods, you'd see these trees and the grass getting higher and you'd hear this click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click. A bigger rock would make a blink, blink, blink.

Q: Yes.



Petersen: And then a dip-dip-dip.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It was a beautiful piece. I'm going oh god, I wish that one had been recorded. That's why I go back—I could have filmed so much and documented more. But piece went to piece and by the time you're on the other piece, you're going to the next piece. Not in a rush or a hurry, but—that was just the way Bob worked.

Q2: Right.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: He loved working. Probably still does.

[Laughter]

Petersen: That comment Bob made—of course it's documented somewhere. It's probably in the Museum of Modern Art memorial. He said something like, "Well, I'm not going to go to heaven. I can't wear the golden slippers. My feet are too ugly."

[Laughter]

Petersen: “The golden slippers won’t fit. My feet are too ugly.” I mean, he has beautiful feet.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Well, when you get older—

Q2: Yes. [Laughs]

Petersen: Like mine, I won’t take my shoes off now.

[Laughter]

Q: Well, I think we should probably stop for the day and let you continue tomorrow. I’m not sure the golden slippers is the right note to stop on, but I think we should stop and—

[Laughter]

Petersen: Yes, that was—

Q: —let you get some rest and then—

Petersen: —edit that out.

Q: —keep the conversation going tomorrow.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: No, it's a good little anecdote, but—

Petersen: Oh, there's so much. I really need to get it together. My file of folders that Bob—

Q: Well, it sounds like organizing that box would be useful.

Petersen: There are certain projects that—well, just one. Bob would talk about a project he wanted to do quite often. In a way, it's very simple, but he couldn't figure it out. He said, "I want to make a deck of cards that are only color without faces." He said, "Well, the ace of spades would be what color? The king of hearts would be what color?"

[Laughter]

Q2: Oh, interesting.

Petersen: He quite often would say, "Okay, the two of clubs would be—" he'd get off on—  
"Okay, what color would the two of hearts be?" [Laughs]

Q2: Wow.

Petersen: It would be a deck of cards by color so when you're playing—

Q2: Yes, so when you were playing, it would take you a minute—

Petersen: It's just color.

Q: Yes.

Q2: Yes.

[Laughter]

Q2: Wait, is that fuchsia or is that—

[Laughter]

Q: Mauve.

Petersen: I got a pair of twos!

[Laughter]

Q2: A pair of pinks—[laughs]

Petersen: A pair of kings. I have a full house. What's the highest thing in poker? Royal flush, I think? I don't know.

Q2: I don't play poker so I don't really know.

Petersen: Well, I'm from a poker family. I miss playing poker. I grew up on the farm and in California too. My aunts and uncles and my mom—well, my dad. My mom didn't play poker games—she played once in a while.

Q: Yes.

Petersen: It's a nice game actually.

Q: It is a nice game.

Petersen: I only bluffed once.

Q: [Laughs] In your life? You've only bluffed once? [Laughs]

Petersen: Yes. I caught my cousin, second cousin or somehow related—kind of a tough guy in the family. Not on our blood side. But anyway [laughs] we were playing cards and I didn't have anything. I said to myself, I'm going to bluff. I've never bluffed. I'm talking to myself. He put in the bid and I said, "I'll raise you fifty cents," which was a lot in 1961. He looked at me and he said, "I'm out." [Laughs] I took all the coins and pulled them over and he said, "Robert, what'd you have?" I said, "Nothing." He said, "You never bluff!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: I said, "I know I don't!" Actually he was upset.

[Laughter]

Petersen: A dollar and a half in '61 is, in a way, a lot of money. Minimum wage was a dollar and a quarter.

[Laughter]

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: It's over an hour of wages. Overtime.

Q: Well, you're allowed to bluff. That's the whole point of the game. All right, we will stop there. Thank you very much.

Petersen: Oh, thank you! I'm just getting warmed up now!

[Laughter]

Q: Well, you've got all day tomorrow.

[Laughter]

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #4 (video)

Interviewee: Robert Petersen

Location: Mount Vernon, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair (Q), Christine Frohnert (Q2),  
and Gina Guy (Q3)

Date: May 21, 2015

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with Bob Petersen. Today is May 21, 2015 and we are at the Rauschenberg warehouse in Mount Vernon, New York.

Q2: This is Christine Frohnert, conservator for contemporary art, and we are standing in front of *Cardbird V* from 1971, a collage print with corrugated cardboard, tape, steel staples, photo offset and screenprinting. This sounds like a rather ambitious combination of materials for a print. I'm curious to learn more about the production process and the prototypes that were involved in the creation, and possible challenges that you were facing during the process.



Robert Rauschenberg

*Cardbird V*, 1971

Collage print with corrugated cardboard,  
tape, steel staples, photo offset and  
screenprint

34 x 40 inches (86.4 x 101.6 cm)

From an edition of 75, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles



Petersen: Yes, let's see. The year is 1971. Bob was working at the time with cardboard paintings in New York City, 381 Lafayette Street and also his house and studio on Captiva Island in Florida in 1970 and Gemini G.E.L in Hollywood, California. Gemini G.E.L. is lithography etchings, silkscreen print, limited print editions. Bob was asked by Mr. Ken Tyler and Sidney Felsen and Stanley Grinstein to come do a project. Bob had done many previous projects there. I think his first print was at Gemini in maybe 1968. He did the Bonnie and Clyde series there [*Reels (B+C)*, 1968] and then in 1969 he did the *Stoned Moon* series with Gemini G.E.L. [Note: Rauschenberg's first project with Gemini G.E.L. was *Booster and 7 Studies*, 1967]

That's where I actually met Bob. I was a printer at Gemini G.E.L., hired by Kenneth Tyler and Sidney Felsen. Wonderful, wonderful—I can't believe I got that job. I did eventually. I started as a carpenter at Gemini, digging ditches actually, because Gemini was building a new facility to expand from the first original building, which was smaller. So I was working at Gemini on the *Stoned Moon* project, and Bob and I became friends. I eventually ended up in New York City, in Florida, working with Bob, and we actually lived together for about twelve years and were very dear friends afterwards forever and still are.

In 1971 Bob and I flew out to Gemini from JFK to L.A. International, and Bob never had, as I recall, an idea for what he was going to actually do at Gemini. It was a 6-hour, 7-hour flight from New York to Los Angeles, and Bob seemed to always do a lot with his quiet time on the plane. Well, in those days you could smoke on the plane still. We of course had a little drink along with the dinners. He'd be working on his yellow legal pad. Bob, in a way, didn't talk so much about what he was going to do.

We arrived at Gemini and Bob started to work and asked if they had some cardboard boxes around the shop, and he started gathering materials and I helped. We got in the Gemini van and drove around Hollywood and we'd go behind the supermarkets. In those days, they didn't recycle cardboard and paper. So we picked up boxes and took them back to Gemini.

Bob originally started working with cardboard on Captiva in 1970 and he tended to use what was available around him. He saw the cardboard boxes at a little shop called the Island Store, just, say, a city block away up through the jungle on Captiva Island. We took his little 1967 Volkswagen convertible bug and put the top down and went up and filled the back seat with boxes and brought them back to Captiva. He used what was available.

We'd have neighbors come over on Captiva to visit and we became very close friends with a neighbor, Dodi Booth mainly and Maybelle Stamper would come by and Dodi's husband, Ray Booth. They were postmaster and postmistress on Captiva Island. We'd go into the studio and in the corner was a big pile of boxes and Bob would say, "Well, that's my palette of color."

At Gemini Bob was working on the tables there and he would actually take the box and flatten some of them, doing his composition for the piece. Bob did all the composition, of course, and all the tearing and flattening, and I just brought the boxes over to assist.

Q2: Did he have certain shapes in mind already? Or did the whole process just develop eventually?

Petersen: Well, Bob worked in silence. I've been thinking about that recently, through the time I worked with him from 1970 to, say, '82, 24 hours a day, traveling all over the world. Bob's work, it just appeared. He would have the TV on in the studio, or a radio, listening to that, and he just did his work. He never really complimented or would say much about the work. It just seemed to appear. He did beautiful things with his hands of course. Actually, a friend of mine, a fellow printer, he works with Universal Limited Art Editions, had worked with Bob in the seventies. I went to visit John Lund, and he now prints for Jasper Johns at Jasper Johns's home in Massachusetts [note: Connecticut] and studio. Beautiful home and studio. We were talking about Bob because we worked with him so much in the past. John just said simply, "Bob could do amazing things with his hands." It was so wonderful to watch him move—what he did with his hands. He had beautiful—or has beautiful hands. Bob never used past tense. Like he's a wonderful artist and person.

Anyway, to get back to the *Cardbirds*, I was in the studio at Gemini with Bob and he suddenly just said, "Cardbirds." I didn't know if I heard him correctly. I felt like saying, "Bob, it's cardboards." I didn't say that, of course, you never say something like that to Bob. Not that he wouldn't mind, but it's his work. Then again he said, "Cardbirds," and stepped back and had a little sip of his drink. And he said again, "Cardbirds. Cardbirds." It's like cardboard, of course, but cardbirds.

Ken Tyler would come in, of course, and assist Bob in the process to edition—this was, at one time, this is all printed. This is a real, say, a piece of cardboard. This was silkscreened at Gemini.

This is possibly what I would do when Bob would lay out the original. Then in the edition of the multiples, I would cut this shape out from a pattern from the original. The original is put away, the original is up on the wall. I'm sure I don't know if the Foundation has the originals in the collection or maybe Gemini has the originals. This is an original, but it's a multiple edition. This is cardboard. This piece here, kind of die cut I would think or maybe hand-cut; that is offset, photo offset, I believe. I'm not definite about that, but Gemini G.E.L. would, of course, have all of that information in their documentation. But me just looking at it, this looks offset printed. This is silkscreened—or that could be offset too. And then this is a collage of fiber tape, kind of a packing tape, with the threads. That is the real fiber tape collaged over the print.



Rauschenberg assembling a *Cardbird* prototype, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1971. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen © 1971

Q2: The collage elements were both adhered to the surface?

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: And you also used staples to—

Petersen: Yes, there are staples, thank you, here—to reproduce from the original as close as possible, in a way, to expand to have a multiple so it can be enjoyed by more people or other institutions, museums, and galleries. That’s what I like about printmaking. It’s how I actually, myself, got involved in printmaking at a very young age. In elementary school I was always doing drawings, draw the backyard, the tree in the backyard, or my relatives would come over, I would do my aunt sitting at the kitchen table. One day my Aunt Ethel Martin said, “Oh Bob, Robert,” I was probably about ten, eleven, and she said, “I’ll give you twenty-five cents for that drawing. I like it.” So I gave it to her, I said, “God Aunt Ethel, you can have the drawing.” Then some years later—maybe ten, twelve years later, we went to her house for a family visit and had a nice dinner. I went into the living room and there was that drawing of her, framed. I went god, that’s kind of nice. But there’s only one. It’s the original.

Then I got involved in printmaking. Well, in elementary school you do linoleum cuts or a woodcut. Or you start with a potato, you cut it in half and make a design and do a potato print. But you can make an edition. So I could have one and give one to Aunt Ethel, but I still have one. That’s the way I think about printmaking. It lets more people enjoy the piece. *Cardbirds*.

Q2: Were all prototypes made at Gemini? Or did Bob bring some markups from Captiva already?

Petersen: No, they were all done at Gemini.

Q2: They were all done, right.

Petersen: Yes. In stages. Bob did the originals and that would take the suite size of the *Cardbirds*, I'm sure it's in the studio here, in the warehouse, the *Cardbird Door* [1971], he made a door that actually functions as a door. I don't know if you've ever seen that *Cardbird Door* and many other pieces in the series. After Bob completed that, we would go back to New York City, fly back and then go to Captiva Island or maybe Bob had a show and we traveled all over, mainly to Europe, Italy and Rome, Paris and Germany, Berlin, just endless travel and work. It wasn't a vacation. It was his work, but enjoyable work. We had a lot of fun. And then time goes on, say oh, close to a month or a month and a half or two, Gemini would mail proofs to 381 Lafayette. Bob would check them and maybe say, "Okay, this is fine," and we would send it back.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Cardbird Door* (front), 1971  
 Door of corrugated cardboard, Kraft paper, tape,  
 wood, metal, photo offset and screenprint  
 80 x 30 x 11 inches (203.2 x 76.2 x 27.9 cm)  
 From an edition of 25, published by Gemini  
 G.E.L., Los Angeles

Q2: Were there certain technical challenges involved in the process?

Petersen: Oh yes. Yes. Let's see, in the *Cardbirds*, I would say—Gemini would have the documentation. And Ken Tyler was in charge of all the technical—and then with his staff, the printers there would lay out and the printers who did the silkscreening would do this edition. This is hand-silkscreened right here and probably this red line, the pencil, I would think—there's a pencil line right here, I would say that's put on there some way. It doesn't, from here, look like an original pencil line. But this little red line, the silkscreen, to duplicate as close as possible to the original. This area and this could have been silkscreened. I'm sure that's offset printed to match the color, like this tear line here, to duplicate that and to duplicate all this color, 846 white, shipped to, all these—that would be quite difficult to—like this is silkscreened, this number here. This is an original, the fiber tape again. This is packing tape, the brown. This is a handmade mark. It looks like—it's just a little scrape and someone just very gently duplicated that by hand, I would say. Then it's coated over the top with—actually I showed Bob—he never asked, he observed from what was going on around him.

When I first met Bob, I was working with him in Malibu, California. He had rented a house there because there was a fire at 381 Lafayette Street in 1969. And Brice Marden was working with Bob at the time and Dorothea Rockburne, and they called Bob at Gemini and had the bad news. Everything's okay, but there was a fire in the basement and it needs to be taken care of, rebuilt, the basement. But the building, it's a five-story building with a chapel in the back, which Bob used for a studio. And the whole building had—drawing floor, curating on the fourth floor. Third floor is the kitchen and viewing loft, a loft to put works up and have guests and parties and company. So Brice said, “Well, the house is really smoke damaged—all the work is okay. But it

would be a good idea if you stayed in California for a few months and you could do your work out there.” So thanks to Rosamund Felsen, Sidney Felsen’s wife, she found a house in Malibu that was for rent and Bob rented it. We turned that beach house into a studio. I made the plywood tables and I was using matte medium on one of my pieces.

Q2: I was just going to ask. Yes. And this was the material that was also used—

Petersen: And Bob kind of observed me using the matte medium. I had a friend of mine in college who was using matte medium as a magazine transfer, where you coat the paper with matte medium, a thin layer, and you let it almost dry, not completely dry. It’s still a little tacky. Then you take the magazine cover and lay down on the matte medium and you burnish it, flatten it down, and then before that’s dry, you peel it up and it leaves a very nice, delicate impression of that image. I showed that to Bob. He never approached anything like, “What are you doing, show me.” I just said something like, “Bob, this is quite interesting. You can put Liquitex matte medium down and do a transfer.” So he said, “Well, let’s go to the art supply store and get another gallon of matte medium.”

In Malibu he did the series called *Currents*, which is made of newspapers. The originals are about, say 3-by-3 feet [note: 40 x 40 inches] and newspaper collage and then the transfer with the matte medium and that’s called *Currents* series. From the originals, an edition of silkscreens were made and he did one print, it’s 60 feet long [note: 54 feet]. Each silkscreen is connected for the *Currents* series.



We were working in the studio in Captiva and I mentioned to Bob, I said, and mainly about the cardboard paintings, which are really beautiful, “Well Bob, do you mind if I coat the painting?” Maybe 9-by-12 feet of different boxes, beautiful paintings. They were shown first at Leo Castelli, 420 West Broadway in probably ’71 or so. I said, “Do you mind if I coat it with matte medium?” He said, “No,” I said it would kind of help the cardboard in case it gets—it would protect it a little bit. Bob was never really concerned with preserving, but this one is coated with matte medium. You can see the brush marks on it. This isn’t coated—well maybe—yes, it is, I think. No, I don’t see it on the original cardboard though. It is something on there.

Q2: It is.

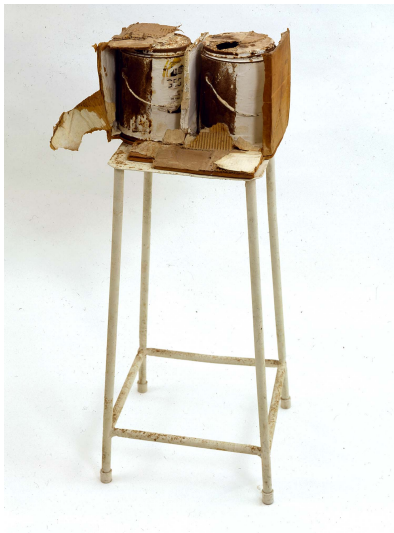
Petersen: It’s not the matte medium though. It looks like it may have been sprayed with something. Gemini would—because this is protected with something. Oh, you can see it down in here, in the corrugated part; there’s a little white there.

Q2: It appears to have a slight coating, yes.

Petersen: Up here. See, there it is, right there. Yes, it is coated with matte medium. The original cardboard, I think the brush marks soaked in a little bit. But on the offset, it’s not a porous piece of paper. It’s a little shinier, in a way.

Q2: Did you always use matte medium as a coating material in the series?

Petersen: Yes, Liquitex matte medium. It used to come in cans in the early seventies, gallon cans. On Captiva we ordered a couple gallons or we'd probably get at least four gallons at a time—well we were always reordering because he used it so much. Bob worked every day and loved working. One time a cardboard box came in this shipment, UPS, and matte medium was oozing out of the bottom. It got dropped and the lid popped or it got dented. Bob and I started opening the box and took the front, it's about so big. Bob took the front and tore the front down to see what was in there and the two gallons of matte medium had popped open on top and overflowed. As soon as Bob tore that front off and put it level with the table, he looked at it and he said, "Oh, let's leave it." Just leave it. And it's this piece of his now. I'm sure the Rauschenberg Foundation has that piece. I'll ask Gina Guy if it's in—I'd like to see it myself again. After Bob tore the front down, we put a—these don't have a door skin behind.



Robert Rauschenberg  
 Untitled, 1971  
 Paint cans, gesso, and cardboard on metal stand  
 40 1/2 x 19 x 17 inches (102.9 x 48.3 x 43.2 cm)  
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

These are just cardboard—not “just,” but on the cardboard paintings, we would apply a wood called “door skin,” thanks to Jim Rosenquist, who mentioned that to Bob. Jim used to visit Bob

quite often in New York and Florida. Rosenquist had a studio in Aripeka, Florida and he would drive down to Captiva and visit Bob quite often. Jim Rosenquist would just appear, “Hiya, hi!” And we’d be in the studio and he’d walk in and say, “Rauschenberg, I brought you a gift.” One time, probably around ’74 or ’75, it was a bolt of fabric about 5 feet, nice big size, beautiful fabric, because Bob was involved with fabrics at that time. They got talking and I made Jim a drink, welcome, in Bob’s studio, actually in Untitled Press, Incorporated on Captiva, the print shop. Jim said, “Oh Rauschenberg, I found this wonderful material. It’s called door skins.” He said, “You can get it at the lumber yard and put a little gesso on it and sand it, put the front and the back and paint on it.” So we went to the lumber yard and got some door skins, I gessoed them, both sides, sanded them a little bit, and then with kind of a contact cement behind, on the back of the cardboard and then on the gessoed door skin and then working on a table. We’d take the box and adhere it to the wood and put weights on it, let it dry. I started using door skins in my work. Make the wooden stretcher for it and you have a panel, gesso it and collage—a surface to work on.

To get back to the matte medium, Bob had a show in Berlin in 1980 and actually that’s where we met Thomas [Buehler; note: *Rauschenberg: Werke 1950–1980*, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Berlin, 1980]. He now manages the warehouse. We were installing the show and there were *Cardboard* paintings there. There was one *Cardboard* painting, quite large, say 8-by-10 feet, attached to the wall the same way as this. This is a roofing nail. That’s how this is installed. That’s how we hung up the—here’s another one, here. It’s a roofing nail for putting down the roof, tar paper on the wood. Yes, that’s a support. So the pieces installed in the museum in Berlin. I’m embarrassed I

don't remember the name of the museum, it's a famous museum. Thomas, of course—he's here somewhere.

Anyway, the big painting was coated with matte medium and I noticed it was a little dusty. So I went to the restroom and got a basin or something and found a sponge and cleaned it out. I got a stepladder and I'm over on the stepladder and I have water and a sponge and see, matte medium is water-resistant. I'm cleaning the painting and it's brightening it up. The water, I didn't put it on heavy, just to get that dust off, and I had a nice clean cloth and dried it. Someone in the museum, a curator or something, walked by and he just panicked. He says, "Oh my god, what are you doing?" I said, "Don't worry, I helped Bob make the work. I know what the surface is." He didn't quite understand, but I explained that it's water-resistant and it won't hurt the painting at all. But that's matte medium. It's here, you can see the brush. Beautiful pieces.

Q2: Thank you so much!

Petersen: Any other questions about that?

Q2: You covered all our questions.

Petersen: But the thing about the project is where the laughter comes in, of *Cardbirds*. When you first hear that title, Bob smiled a little, "Cardbirds. Cardbirds." And you kind of get a feeling of the bird. Of course I'd never ask Bob did he intentionally, tur-, tur-, turkey? In looking at the work, it could be maybe a wing—you know, *Cardbird*. Thank you.

Q2: Thank you.

Petersen: Now you can say the name of the piece. I kind of forget the title and the year.

Q2: We are now looking at *Sant'Agnese*, a *Venetian* from 1973. And this artwork is a very nice example of the *Venetian* series [1972–73] that Robert Rauschenberg started in 1973. The entire series was inspired by his visits to Venice, when he started to identify using three-dimensional objects, used objects, and turn them into artworks. So we are looking at two chairs. We have two glass jars and fabric in between. Can you tell us how the production process evolved for that piece?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sant'Agnese (Venetian)*, 1973  
Mosquito net, wood chairs, and corked  
glass jugs  
32 x 103 1/2 x 16 inches (81.3 x 262.9 x  
40.6 cm)  
Private collection

Petersen: Yes. You mentioned Bob was working on a series; he was going to have a show at Leo Castelli gallery in SoHo and he was doing the *Venetian* series. We traveled quite often to Venice. Bob loved Venice. Ileana Sonnabend and Michael Sonnabend have a beautiful apartment there in Venice very close to San Marco, just a block away. In the mornings in Venice, Michael

Sonnabend arose early. He liked to get up early and he asked Bob if he and I would like to go on a walk with him because he liked to walk early in the morning around Venice. So while we were there for that week or week and a half, we would go on morning walks with Michael Sonnabend. He's a historian of the period and would point out things, the architecture, and go into chapels and go into back rooms with the priest and discover a small, little painting that the public doesn't really go that way. But Michael knew where these treasures are in Venice. Bob and I loved going on walks with Michael Sonnabend and observing. We had a wonderful time. Of course, Venice, many of you who have been there, you just fall in love with it, the beauty of it.

We went back to the States, back to New York City, and then on down to Captiva. Bob worked on the *Venetian* series in Captiva. I believe all the work was created there for the *Venetian* series. This piece, I have quite a memory of. Bob and I were in his studio alone with the dogs, three dogs, Bob, and myself. Bob made this piece I would say instantly, within minutes. He took the two chairs, he put them like this, separated. And then he had a piece of cloth. And he said, "Petersen, would you hold this end up and I'll hold this end up, and then I'm going to tie it here, and then we'll—" He went over here and tied it here. Then he got at one chair and I got at the other and he said, "Okay, slide it back until the cloth becomes taut, slightly." Bob never really told you what to do, but in a way that memory comes back. He would say, "Petersen, move the chair back until that—" And then he moved the other one. These gallon glass bottles, we would collect wherever—thrift shops, local island things in people's yards. Bob had gardeners, the Buddy Gavin crew who had been there for generations homesteading and they took care of Bob's property, trimming the palm trees and trimming the Jungle Road Bob made through his sixteen acres of jungle.

To get back to this piece, then Bob attached the bottles and within 5 minutes, that was done. Bob got back, looked at it, and that was it. It was done. The chairs were just in the collection of materials to be used. But I find it just amazing, this piece, well, mostly all of Bob's work, it kind of grabs you in a way. And plus myself, now thinking of that time past and actually being so fortunate to have worked with him. It's kind of an emotional piece.

Q2: There's something in the right jar. Do you know what it is?

Petersen: Oh well, that has always been in there and I would say it's just—at the time, it didn't have the cork, I would imagine. Just sediment from rain, just sitting out in the yard at the Gavins'. Buddy Gavin had a homestead place down on Sanibel Island. Bob was out in the yard talking with him one day and he said, "Buddy," he's a black man from generations there on the island. Bob loves talking—oh, he would talk for hours if the plumber came over. He would stand in the yard and talk with him. He asked Buddy Gavin if he had any objects around his yard that he could buy from him or use for his artwork. Buddy said, "Yes sir, Mr. Bob, I have lots of things." Bob looked at Buddy and he says, "Buddy, you can just refer to me as Bob." Buddy goes, "Yes sir, Mr. Bob." [Laughs] So he always called him, "Mr. Bob."

At that time, Bob had purchased a Volkswagen bus, a 1972 or '73 that we needed, the little '67 VW convertible bug was small, especially if you put three dogs in the back seat and all the luggage to go to the airport because Bob liked to travel with the dogs. He would take them back and forth to New York. I guess the airport had the kennels because we didn't travel with the

kennels. They would put Laika, Kid, and Cloud in the kennels and arrive in New York and put the dogs in the limousine. Anyway, to get back to the Volkswagen bus, we got in the bus and went down to the Gavins'. To kind of go back a little bit, Bob, when he purchased the VW bus in Fort Myers, Florida, we were driving it home and we pulled into the back Jungle Road by the Beach House and we parked next to the '67 red convertible bug. Bob liked to name objects and he called the '67 bug convertible That. So as soon as we pulled up, he named the bus. And he named it This. So when company came down, like Brice Marden and Helen and a lot of different guests would visit Bob, and Brice would say, "Oh, I'm going to go down to Bailey's Market on Sanibel and get some things for dinner." Bob would say, "Do you want to take This or That?"

The names of the cars.

Anyway, we got in This or That, I forget which one was That and This, and we went down to Buddy Gavin's house and collected objects. Bob saw in the front yard of the property was a large, just nice pile of objects, 2-by-4s, old chairs, a bed frame just sticking out, and kind of halfway up or on the side was a bathtub, a claw leg bathtub. Bob walked over to it and he said, "Buddy, that's a beautiful bathtub. I'd like to buy that from you." I didn't hear so much of that conversation. I'm sure Buddy said, "Oh, you can have it, take it." Bob hesitated and he said, "Well, it doesn't have the claw feet on the tub. I don't know if I would use—" He loved the—well anyone would like that type tub with those claw bird-lion foot on each section. Bob said, "Buddy, would you happen to have the legs for it?" Buddy said, "Oh sir, I don't know where those legs would be." It was quite amazing, I don't know what you call it. Something just came to me, inspiration, whatever that word is—and I pointed at the pile and I said, "Bob, the legs are right there." But they were under things. I had a sense, I don't know, it's quite magical. I walked



over, I moved some plywood and things around, and there were the four legs. It kind of makes me shake. I don't know—because what told me the legs were there? I didn't see them, it was all intuition or whatever that is.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sor Aqua (Venetian)*, 1973  
Water-filled bathtub, wood, metal, rope, and glass jug  
98 x 120 x 41 inches (248.9 x 304.8 x 104.1 cm)  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
Gift of the Caroline Wiess Law Foundation

Q2: Is this also where you found the fabric or was the fabric already available in the studio?

Petersen: Well Bob had a fabric room where he would just have fabrics. It was his little palette, like he used the cardboards. He had a room of fabrics that went into the *Hoarfrost* series and *Spreads* and *Jammers* and so forth, he loved fabrics. Bob's always used fabrics; in the Combine series, you'll see a trouser leg collaged to the canvas and a shirt or a pocket or part of a shirt, anything. Bob just appeared with the fabric. Now that I think of it, suddenly, he'd be holding a piece of fabric. Like for the piece out front I saw on the way in, it's in the crate still, but the top's open and when he put the fabric on that, I don't know where he got it. He had these little piles. In

his mind he's working with the—because he never told me to go get him a piece of fabric. That was his palette, that was his color.

He especially loved cheesecloth from the print shops. The printers would hang up cheesecloth on a line after processing the litho stones. Bob, one day, was standing there at Gemini G.E.L., and there was a rope, a twine, or a cord across the print shop, and all this cheesecloth hanging to dry after the processing of the lithography stones and aluminum plates; the printers put them up there to dry. After they're dry, they reuse them, clean them a little bit. Bob just looked and he said, "God, they're so beautiful, hanging there." He used cheesecloth quite—well, in Untitled Press on Captiva, I did the same thing. I had a little line and put up the cheesecloth.

This is really beautiful. Any other questions on this?

Q2: Thank you.

Petersen: It's a beautiful piece. I'm just curious, Gina Guy is here; do you know if this is signed underneath?

Q3: I don't know if it's signed.

Petersen: Yes. I'm just curious myself—I want to look—[laughs] But I don't recall Bob signing—he may have at Leo's, I don't know. Thomas would know, I think.

Q2: Thank you!

Petersen: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So now you are standing in front of *San Pantalone*, another artwork that's representing the *Venetian* series. It was made in 1973 and consists of a barnacle-encrusted tar paper across the top, paper, wood, metal, rope, and coconut. You chose this piece to talk about. I'm curious, what came first? Was it first the barnacle-encrusted tar that is obviously a gift from the sea? And how did the process evolve of the creation of the work?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*San Pantalone (Venetian)*, 1973  
Barnacle-encrusted tar paper, wood, metal, rope,  
and coconut  
70 x 92 x 8 inches (177.8 x 233.7 x 20.3 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes, this is another piece from Bob's *Venetian* series. Bob made it in Captiva Island, in his studio. On Captiva Island, there was a little bit of building going on. Bob worked on buying

up as much jungle as he could, to save the trees from development. We would walk the dogs down the beach; he had the house there, it's called the Beach House. The front door opens and the steps, it's a house on pilings, and you go out the front door and that's the beach, Captiva Island. We would walk the dogs every day down the beach. They would just walk with us, Laika, Kid, and Cloud at that time; we never used the leash, they just walked with us. We'd run and we would pick up a stick and throw it, and they would go chase the stick, like we all do with dogs, throw a ball or—we usually threw a stick. Sometimes we would throw it out into the surf and the dogs would jump through the surf and swim.

We would take a walk down, maybe down the beach going north towards South Seas Plantation at the north end of the island. They had a little bit of construction going on there. I would say that's where—I don't really recall—but I feel that this piece was from a construction site and basically found in that shape. I don't recall actually taking this piece of—it's black tar paper. I'm sure that's the original shape it was found in, but I don't recall actually taking that piece back to the studio. I'm sure—well, not sure, but I would think Bob picked that up by himself on a walk up the beach and saw it up into the jungle by where they were building a new building. Because you can kind of sense that it had been lying there for a while. It looks windblown and it was up against something. Maybe it was just up against a palm tree on the ground and weathered in that position because, I would say, I'm not certain, but I have a feeling it was found in that shape.

In the studio, it was laid flat on the studio floor, this shape. Then Bob would take a pencil and go around and outline it. There's an 1/8-inch plywood behind this; it's a little heavier than the door skin. Door skins are thinner. This is 1/8-inch mahogany veneer plywood. Then take the jigsaw,

after he has the pencil line—see, it's laid on a 4-by-8 sheet of this 1/8-inch plywood; you can kind of see it right here, appearing. Then I would take the jigsaw on sawhorses and a table and go around and cut this all out. Then there would be a contact cement applied to that surface. This hadn't been gessoed like the door skins we gessoed. This isn't gessoed, it's just cut out. And then the contact cement would be applied, lying flat on a large worktable. Then the black tar paper is laid flat and weighted and pressed down. This is coated with the contact cement also or just kind of tacky dry like a rubber cement when they hit each other, it's adhered.

Then we would hold it up on the wall and position it and maybe make a little mark. There are holes drilled here and here where the roofing nails go through to attach it to the wall. One up there and one here at the end. This is all wood behind it for support. As I recall, it was leaning on the floor when we adhered it to the wood and just stayed there maybe for a day or two, and then we positioned it on the wall in the studio under the Beach House and the ceiling in there was a lot lower. It was only about 8 feet high so this was lower; this was probably down in here somewhere, this piece. Then this was added later. Bob probably did this himself while I was upstairs in the Beach House washing dishes or mopping the floor. I don't recall, Bob just had things around and I came back and this was attached with the rope. I had helped him many times tie certain things to a painting; I'd hold it up while he did the tying and he would adjust it. But I don't recall, he did this, I'm sure, by himself. Then he attached the rope here. Oh the end of the rope is right here, attached with a bent nail. Then the rope goes down. On Captiva there are many coconut palms and coconuts laying around and this is a coconut that Bob picked up on his property and attached to the end of the rope. In the jungle it's like that, what's that name of the movie, Tom Hanks, where he's on the island? It's a wonderful movie, where he's delivering the

UPS package and the plane goes down and then he's a survivor on an island for years. When he first arrived on the island he goes up on the beach and into the edge of the jungle and when the nighttime comes, he hears a sound in the jungle. He thinks it's an animal or someone and he's going, "Hello? Hello?" Then he finally realizes that that sound in the jungle underbrush was coconuts falling from coconut palms. We would hear that on Captiva. Every once in a while a coconut would ka-punk on the ground; you'd hear it back in the jungle. In fact one time I was walking through the jungle and one just missed me. Coconuts, when they're green like that, they're not light, anyway. You have to watch the coconuts. Beautiful piece.

Looking at the piece brings back, for myself, the beauty of nature, of Captiva Island. Bob purchased that property, I think, around 1962, I'm kind of guessing [1968]. An astrologer in Manhattan, Zoltan Mason, who Bob went to see to read his chart, advised him at that time that he needed to be near water; he'd be happy near water. He was happy on Manhattan because it's surrounded by water, but he took a drive from Manhattan and took every exit to the left toward the water and it went all down the south, south in Alabama there. I think Jasper Johns's studio, he has photos of that. Then he went on down and eventually found Captiva Island and purchased that property, which was right on the beach. I was talking about the nature and the environment because in that, it brings back to me right now that environment of the Gulf of Mexico and that breeze and the sound of the rustle of the palm, cabbage palms and the palm trees, and the mist on your skin, and everything about it. It's just a beautiful piece.

Q: Thank you so much!

Petersen: Any other questions?

Q2: Thank you. Wonderful, thank you!

Petersen: Gosh, I think that's pretty clear. I don't know—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So back here now, looking at three impressions of *Watermelon*, which is representing the series *Crops* that Bob made in 1973. And this is an edition series where the artist combines the solvent transfer process with screenprinting, but he's also creating slight variations within the edition. It was published by Graphicstudio and I would like to know what Bob's thinking was behind creating a unique edition.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Watermelon (Crops)*, 1973  
Silkscreened gesso and solvent transfer  
60 x 38 inches (152.4 x 96.5 cm)  
From an edition of 20 Roman numerals and  
20 Arabic numerals, published by  
Graphicstudio, University of South Florida,  
Tampa

Petersen: Bob's thinking?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Yes. Well, you never knew what Bob was thinking. He was just creating. I haven't seen this work for a while, I was involved with it. I'm just looking—you mentioned silkscreening?

Q2: Screenprinting.

Petersen: There's a white layer here, two shades of white. One's a little buffed. Yes and it goes through the image transfer. I was involved myself, trimming from a newspaper these thin strips that Bob applied. I was at a large paper cutter with a blade that comes down and we purchased a lot of newspapers. Bob requested, just trim it to a 1/2-inch—so I did that. On the side on another table we'd have a large pile of the trimmings and then Bob was on the other side. This was run through a litho press and he would do the composition of the strips. This is transferred with that sprayer, with a roller blanket wash of solvent that dissolves the ink in the newspaper.

At that time, at the University of South Florida in Tampa, the director of fine arts for the university, Don Saff, they had the print shop at the University of Tampa. But Don and Ernie Cox, I remembered the name from yesterday, Ernie Cox and Alan Eaker, they rented another building off-campus, not a big building like a factory or anything, a smaller warehouse. They set up printing presses there; the litho press was in there and tables. That's where Bob made the



*Crops* series, in that room. There were quite a lot of other assistants, students from the University of South Florida. I recall that Peter Wirth was a student there and then he became an assistant with Bob on Captiva. He was there and Dan Stack, someone cut the little orange and red shavings, little chips out of a paper. I don't recall what that paper was. Bob would do the composition of scattering the little chips of red here, then that was run through the press with the solvent. The image also—let's see, this is the image of trees, probably from a magazine. Underneath is a layer that I just realized I don't recall it, but you mentioned silkscreening. It looks like that was silkscreened in two colors of white, that's what makes these brush marks. That was screened. They would have the documentation at University of South Florida in the process. Then the color is transferred also because this shape is a little different than this one. This one over here is narrower so that, I don't recall what type of paper that would be, to transfer that vivid of a color, because Don Saff was working with it and he was collaborating with Alan Eaker and Ernie Cox and other student assistants. They were all working out the technical part of it. Yes, that is silkscreened, the two whites. It's not hand-done because they're very similar. I can see it in the light. I did the trimmings for the piece for the transfer. Any other questions?

Q2: What was the solvent that was used for the transfer?

Petersen: Oh, it was called roller blanket wash. They use it in offset printing for cleaning the metal rollers on the offset press. I was using it on Captiva Island when we were printing the Cy Twombly edition, I was cleaning a leather nap roller, from a roller given to us by Maybelle Stamper, a neighbor right next door to Untitled Press, who instructed, in her past time; she had retired. A wonderful artist and person. When Bob purchased the property for he and I to

establish Untitled Press, it turned out, without us knowing, that the neighbor who we hadn't been introduced to, Maybelle Stamper, had a litho press she wanted to give Bob, and the equipment, the rollers. So when we went over to Maybelle's, she said, "Oh, there's more supplies up in the attic." So I went up, opened the little attic door, and there were leather litho rollers up there in a rack. They weren't laying flat on the rafters or whatever. They were supported, wonderful rollers. But over time, that ink that was left on the rollers had dried. So actually when I was printing at Gemini, I was cleaning rollers there and I found that roller blanket wash would dissolve the ink. Bob observed me cleaning the rollers and through his working, he put some in a spritzer and spritzed something and I ran it through the press and he picked up the magazine and there was the image. Yes, it's roller blanket wash.

Then around, oh gosh, maybe 1994 or '95, I went to an opening of Bob's up at Pace Gallery [New York] and he had done some frescos with Don Saff [*Arcadian Retreats* series, 1996; *Robert Rauschenberg: Arcadian Retreats*, PaceWildenstein, New York, 1997]. That's a long time after these. I'm getting on a different subject. But going back to the solvent, which is quite pungent, you get a little—with a chemical like that. It was before the days of the mask, the respirator. We did eventually get them, but down in Captiva it was usually so humid and nice. But they would get sweaty so we would just open the windows and the doors and had a screened-in porch on the back and let the ventilation go through.

Oh, to get back at that opening of Bob's work, I believe at Pace, '95 or so, and I went up to Bob at the opening and I said, "Oh Bob, beautiful work," and I said, "Beautiful transfers on the

paintings.” Bob said, “Petersen, guess what I’m using for a solvent now?” I said, “Bob, I don’t have any idea.” He taps me on the shoulder and he goes, “Water!”

[Laughter]

Petersen: “Recall the days when we were using roller blanket wash? I’m using the water now,” with the process which he found on Captiva and working with Don Saff. I’m sure the inkjet dissolves in water and it used to in the transfers that way. These are really beautiful. Any other questions on that?

Q2: There are two chops embossed in the paper on the lower left that, one to the far left, I believe, is one from Graphicstudio and there’s also a hand right next to it. I’m wondering what your thoughts are about, if this is just a chop of the brand of the paper?

Petersen: No, that’s a shop chop. Let’s see, I’ll change glasses. Oh yes, that’s—the one on the left here, the circle, I’m sure that’s the Graphicstudio.

Q: Studio, yes.

Petersen: University of South Florida. The hand, I’m pretty sure it’s one of the printer’s chops, a printer will use a chop once in a while, like a master printer. Part of their training is to design a chop. I never had one myself; actually I didn’t have the schooling or the diploma to be a master printer. But one day at Untitled Press after printing the Cy Twombly edition, which I printed the

untitled suite of six [1971], Bob came in and he said, “Petersen, you’re a master printer.” So I’m a master printer. If Rauschenberg says I’m a master printer, I’m a master printer. It’s kind of a little fun—but that chop there is the printer and the one to the right is a copyright, I would think. It’s a circle with a C. Yes. Anything else on that?

Q2: You don’t remember the master printer using the hands? You don’t remember who that was?

Petersen: I think it would be Chuck Ringness. But I’m not certain.

Q2: Thank you so much.

Petersen: Because I never noticed the chops before. I was looking at the image. Oh, you’re welcome.

Q2: Thank you.

Petersen: That’s nice!

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So now we are looking at *Pages, Page 1* [(*Pages*)] from 1974, which is handmade paper and fabric to the right, as well as *Page 2* [(*Pages*)], also made in 1974, and it consists of molded natural fiber and handmade paper. Bob started this series entitled *Pages* [1974] and *Fuses* [1974]

in Paris first, but completed the process with Gemini. Can you walk us through the entire production, creation process of those works?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Page 2 (Pages)*, 1974  
Molded natural fiber handmade paper  
22 inches (55.9 cm) diameter  
From an edition of 11, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Link (Fuses)*, 1974  
Handmade paper, pigment, and screenprinted  
tissue laminated to paper pulp  
25 x 20 inches (63.5 x 50.8 cm)  
From an edition of 29, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Petersen: Yes. Bob and I arrived in Ambert, France and met with Ken Tyler there, for Bob to do the project with Gemini at a paper mill. Richard de Bas Paper Mill in Ambert. What's the century of the paper mill? Fourteenth?

Q2: Fourteen.

Petersen: Fourteenth century. Yes. Beautiful paper mill, all stone with the waterway going down the side, with the wooden wheel turning, which is connected to a shaft that goes into a room inside the mill where this just incredible cam shaft mechanism with big, large stone hammers on

a pendulum, and the hammers. There are about five or six of these huge vats made of stone and these huge hammers rotating and the sound in there, in the stone building, with the hammers coming down onto rags, cotton rags of old shirts and just cotton material, and they would mix that with water, and these hammers just keep pounding the cloth with the liquid—with the water until it turns into a pulp. Then they have these big, huge stones, these thick, big vats of this pulp. They would come in and have buckets and they would dip in to get the pulp to take to the separate room where they poured the paper onto a screen. I forget the name of that screen in paper-making. Then it's transferred into a stack, between each stack is placed a burlap wet cloth, and it gets about this high and then that's connected to a large wooden shaft that has the levers coming out where you push and walk around. It's all hand-done. That turns down a vice, a pressure comes down and approaches the wet pulp, and then water is squeezed under the pressure, water comes out onto the stone cement floor. In fact the whole mill is about maybe three, a little less, it's all water, the whole mill. So before you go into the mill, they give you a pair of wooden clogs, the wooden Dutch shoes with the little point and you take your shoes off outside because they're going to get soaked and the water wouldn't come through that wood. On the stone, it makes that sound. It's quite a wonderful experience, that whole process of how paper was made.

Then Bob started working with the different pulps and made, instead of the rectangular sheet which they made at the mill, they had a gift shop separate from the mill where you could buy Richard de Bas paper. Beautiful paper, I bought a few little tablets of the handmade paper. Then Rauschenberg, he, in his working on the screen where the paper's pulp is poured, he, let's see, I think he had a local tinsmith make a form with a circle where you would—it's actually tin, about

this high, in that form. He had a pitcher to dip in the bucket of pulp and then he actually poured it around and it lay flat. It's all, of course, wet pulp. Then he had another container that was a little shade different, it was a darker pulp. And he had another pitcher and took that, poured it around the tin circle here and then I think they took from the screen with the wet pulp on it and let that cure for a little bit.

But while it's still wet, then they have another table—I'm not really certain I'm correct, they take the screen and flip it and rock it a little bit. That wet pulp comes off onto the burlap and then there's this stack made with another burlap, another piece of paper and another burlap and maybe two and then another paper, and it gets a stack, then it's placed under the press.

We had so much fun, Ken Tyler and Bob and myself and the director of Arches paper, Andrew/Nelson/Whitehead, I don't recall her name. Wonderful lady. We were all at one of the arms at the press going around, feeling like a mule or a horse, the way they would have a donkey or something like in Mexico pulling the big stone around and around to make flour, and there is usually a child on the donkey or something, going around. But we had a wonderful time making the pieces.

This *Page*—Bob called them *Pages*—the other made there also was called *Fuses*, *Pages* and *Fuses*. *Fuses*, is that the one with the images, the silkscreen? Yes. Then Bob went back into where the hammers are making this sound in that stone and the water—kaboom—I can't do the sound, but the echo of it, the “Boom! Boom!” You can imagine stone going into water with pulp, the rags. Here's a piece of the rag from the pile before it's put into the vat and there would be a

big bend of just cotton, old shirts and beautiful cotton things. In fact during the project, Bob—I have photographs of it and Gianfranco Gorgoni was there also. I'm sure he has photos, many photos of the project, in his archives. Bob went over and he found part of a shirt that had patches on it. In Europe, if a pocket is torn, they would put a patch on it, different fabric. And he put that on. It didn't have sleeves; it was a raggedy-looking vest. He wore that during the whole project. Then from that pile of cloth, that's where this piece came from, from the cotton fabric before it's made into pulp. So he salvaged this piece—I'll hold it up—it's fabric. A beautiful piece of fabric. It looks like part of a shirt. Then this was poured without the tinsmith, I would believe. He just, on the screen had the pitcher and poured the wet pulp down. And then he had a little pile of cloth there from the cotton rags and he laid that on there into the wet pulp and then took another pitcher and poured another over, so the cloth is embedded—you can see where it stopped, here—between the two layers of wet pulp. Then it's taken from the screen onto the burlap and then the edition is put between the burlap bags.

Then we walked around again with the mill, with the vice that comes down like a big platform, the size of the paper; it's big. And the pressure. And it's wound up with some kind of a rope screw, so the more you turn it down, the rope did something to bring the pressure down, and then the water oozes out. The workers there, the local mill men, would take that stack and put it into a rack and let it kind of sit for a day or so, so the water keeps coming out. It's eventually taken from between the burlap and just laid into a screen to let air dry. On these pieces Rauschenberg had made, I imagine that Gemini—I don't recall this, he probably did it in curating while I was on another errand, but he had his name, Rauschenberg, made into a chop, because there was, I imagine, a discussion in curating like where to sign these. I kind of recall that discussion. With a



pencil, usually like a print, like this *Crops* series, it's signed in pencil, lead pencil. I guess these are so subtle that he didn't want to disturb them with a pencil; it would stand out. So this was the first time I'd ever seen this in an edition; he had his name with a paper chop, with Rauschenberg, from his signature. That's his signature cast into a chop and then the curators at Gemini—well he would place where the signature goes and then they press it into the paper, so it's actually a signature chop. It's beautiful.

We don't have a sample here, but the *Fuses*, they were made with the tin form and different shapes. And then Ken Tyler brought from Gemini previously printed silkscreens onto Japanese rice paper that was laid, as the pulp is laid down, the very thin Japanese tissue paper image, one is a bird, the other one is a telephone pole. It goes up, as I recall, and that is just laid into the pulp and then pressed. The Japanese paper is so thin, it becomes part of the wet pulp; adheres to it and becomes part of the paper.

Anything else on that?

Q2: Who developed this signature chop? Who did it?

Petersen: Well, I'm sure Ken Tyler did it at Gemini because I don't recall that chop in Ambert. In fact the project wasn't dry enough to be signed or chopped. It was still wet. We were there about a week and the paper was still curing. So I imagine after it really dried, then it was packed in Ambert, of course, archived between tissue and the edition of—it's a small edition, in the twenties, maybe thirty-two of these. It seems to me this edition of the circular image is very

limited. Maybe ten, I don't know. Fifteen? Beautiful. Yes, I'm sure that embossed chop was done—I mean I'm not sure, but like I just said, the paper had to be dry to receive that and it wouldn't have been dry for a month or two. Then they were at Gemini when Bob went back to Hollywood there and then applied the chop.

There should be a Gemini chop on here somewhere, I don't want to turn it, actually. It's probably something on the back there. Gemini always puts their chop on pieces. But this one, I'm going to turn it, is it okay? I'll just flip it over, see—yes, here's the Gemini—oh, it's a rubber stamp. Beautiful. On the back, reverse, AP2, 1974, copyright and then Gemini rubber stamp, and then in pencil '74 with the registration number E003. Beautiful.

Anything else?

Q2: Thank you so much. They're indeed beautiful.

Petersen: Oh, you're welcome.

Q2: Thank you.

Petersen: It's wonderful to see these. Ambert. Actually I was given a set of the prints for helping.

Q2: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So we are now looking at another work that is representing the *Venetian* series, it's called Untitled from 1973 and it consists of four cardboard boxes, a tree branch, and a lace curtain. And you were there when Bob made that piece that day?



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Venetian*), 1973  
Cardboard boxes, wood branch, and lace  
curtain  
93 x 29 x 108 inches (236.2 x 73.7 x 274.3 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes. I was with Bob on Captiva Island. Usually every day we'd walk the dogs a little before sunset down the beach on Captiva and we were taking the dogs up for a little walk on the beach going north out of the Beach House. Bob at that time had heard that the South Seas Plantation had sold sometime earlier, maybe close to a year or so, and they were doing a lot of building up there of new units for the plantation to house guests. They have a golf course there and they started putting in swimming pools at kind of a condominium larger two-story unit. At the time, a year or so before the building was going on, South Seas Plantation was for sale and Bob mentioned he would like to purchase the property because the original South Seas Plantation

had a restaurant for the guests and then bungalows built probably, oh I'd say in the 1940s, beautiful little wooden bungalows for the guests to stay in. It had the lawn with—I don't know if it was actually a golf course. It may have had a little area there; it wasn't like a big golf course, just a small area, maybe, to the side. It had a tennis court there.

Bob mentioned, maybe a year or two before it had sold, that he was wanting to purchase the property because he thought that would make a wonderful place to invite dancers down to rehearse and to stay in the bungalows, a kind of an artist colony; a dance school for Trisha Brown or other people, choreographers to come down. But that didn't really come through because of the expense. Bob was trying to get the money to purchase it, but mainly to save the jungle around it.

So he mentioned to me, "Petersen, let's walk on up a little farther north and see what's going on at South Seas Plantation." We went up, it was a beautiful day, and looking at the piece here I actually go back to that day walking on the beach with a bathing suit and the mist on your skin and the beauty of the jungle and the beach and environment. We walked up and it was sad to see because they had leveled some of the jungle for the new buildings and they were putting in power lines for the new electric to go to the new units there. These boxes here were lying by the new construction; they're boxes that had porcelain insulators in them, about so big. They were empty, of course, but they had put the insulators up on the poles. Bob noticed the boxes.

After we looked at the building there, it kind of made you ill to see the piles of palm trees piled up because Bob really was watching the island. It's a very small island, it's only about three

miles long and about a half a mile wide at the widest point, very small little Captiva Island. Bob actually purchased land around the Beach House. One day there was a lot out the kitchen window to the south and he looked out and he kept looking out the window and he said, “Petersen, that lot over there, across the sand road, is up for sale.” A day or two went by and he’s looking out the window again. He reached in his back pocket or in his drawer there by the kitchen counter and he got out his wallet and he was looking through it and he pulled out a few dollar bills or a five and he said, “Petersen, this paper can save those palm trees.” So we went back to the studio and worked. Bob spent a little money to purchase that. He did buy that lot and he was so happy because the trees there are still there now.

To go back to the piece, Bob noticed the boxes up near the jungle with the debris of the new building and Bob picked up a couple of the boxes and I picked up a couple. We were walking back to the Beach House, the studio, and on the way back, in the surf, Bob noticed this beautiful piece of wood, a branch in the surf washing up on the sand and he picked that up and put it over his shoulder and we went back to the studio and he said, “Bob, can you carry these other two boxes?” So I carried the other two boxes back to the studio and then Bob carried the stick and the dogs went with us back to the house.

As soon as we got to the house, right on the beach under the Beach House, the sliding glass doors, that was Bob’s first studio that he had built there, just an enclosure and then put cement under the pole house up on stilts because so close to the surf there, and opened the sliding glass doors, went in the studio, it has a lower ceiling, about 8 feet. Bob made the piece right there, as soon as we got back. He took the stick, it has kind of a sharper end here, where it’s narrower. At

the other, the length of it, there's kind of a base where it maybe broke off of the tree, kind of a fork angle there. It's a piece that leans up. He put it against the wall. In that lower ceiling, it was at quite an angle, but that's the way he had it because it couldn't go any higher, because of the low ceiling. He decided to put the boxes, I don't know if you can see the length, they're about this long there and so square, rectangle shape, it says "porcelain" here. They're a box that's coated with kind of a wax into the cardboard, probably to preserve the insulators so the box doesn't fall apart if it gets wet or something. So I would imagine these boxes were laying up in the debris there by the jungle for oh, I would say at least two to three months with the weather and rain. But there is still not the cardboard itself, they weathered, but it has that waxy oil coating on them, which preserved them.

Bob, right away, wanted to put—he just, in his working, took one of the boxes at the tip up here and started turning it to puncture the box to get it to slide down the branch, here. Then I helped him, I think I went upstairs in the kitchen and maybe got some little small knife to get it started, but not to cut a circle, but just to get it so it would start going down the branch. There are one, two, three, four boxes on the branch. And then he leaned that up against the wall. He didn't say anything about it, but I could tell he liked it; he would just look at things in a silence. It was left there at an angle and then I guess I went upstairs. It was sometime later, but the same day because I don't—there's a hand-knitted or a knit cloth here. I think in the filming, they'll edit in the full view of the installation of the piece, so you can get an idea. I came back and Bob had attached this piece of beautiful knitting to the piece that hangs straight down. Then the pole comes up, the boxes, and the gauze hangs straight down behind. It's just a beautiful piece. It was done within hours.

Q2: So Bob attached the lace curtain to the top?

Petersen: Yes. I was looking at it with Gina Guy earlier, after lunch. I was looking and gauze is attached with a large stapler that they used in packing boxes; it's that large copper, kind of copper brass, copper color staple that you have, and it closes the cardboard. They don't use it so much anymore, maybe they do. But Bob, we had bought one at the hardware store in Manhattan. We used it in Manhattan in the studio on that one *Cardboard* piece called *Castelli / Small Turtle Bowl*. And on the first floor at 381 with the chapel in the back, that first floor, Bob was making the *Cardboard* paintings and that one, *Castelli / Small Turtle Bowl*, we started using that stapler on the piece. That's the way this is attached. But I don't recall—I use the stapler, but Bob must have attached that himself because it was just he and I there at that time, at the Beach House. And Laika, Kid, and Cloud, the three dogs.

Q2: Do you remember where the lace curtain came from? Do you remember?

Petersen: Oh, it just appeared from Bob's fabric area. Like he never asked me or anyone, "Would you go get that piece of lace," because his fabric area was at Untitled Press, which was a little less than an eighth—sixteen acres away through the jungle, a winding road that we made in the early seventies with saws and machetes. Bob guided the way through the natural jungle because he wanted to avoid a beautiful tree so it was just mainly the underbrush, so the Jungle Road twists and winds, a beautiful road. He actually made it so we could drive the VW bus over, the '67. It's narrow, but the little Volkswagen would fit down the road.

Q2: And since we are now looking at the piece in a crate and not installed, I think we can just mention again that it's supposed to lean, the branch is supposed to lean towards the wall and then the lace curtain is falling to the floor.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Just touching the floor. So when you saw the piece again with the lace curtain attached, did the positioning slightly change in the meantime from its original positioning? Or did the diagonal change?

Petersen: Oh, let's see, well see, in that first studio, the ceiling's lower, so that front is down lower. It's more at an angle so the cloth probably was quite a bit on the floor. And the floor was white, we kept a pristine studio. In fact I painted that floor, the cement floor, I painted it white. Enamel.

Q2: And when installing the piece—

Petersen: To keep it kind of clean, every week I'd mop it.

Q2: And when installing the work initially, do you remember if the cardboard boxes were always rotating around the tree branch a little bit? Or were they still pretty much in place?



Petersen: No, they were pretty much just even. As even as they could be. They never—one was like this and one was opposite, they were always in a row, yes. And they were tighter at that time. I know we spoke earlier, over the years, about how the hole through the cardboard had gotten worn from being shipped and installed and off and on. The boxes started rotating or actually slipping down. So you, with the restorers, installed a beautiful wing-shaped bracket inside the box with a clamp around the stick that tightens and it put the boxes so they don't slide. I believe he worked from an earlier photo to kind of really see where Bob had placed the distance from the top.

Q2: Correct.

Petersen: That looks pretty right. I had forgotten how long the branch is. I thought it was a little shorter, but it's quite long. It's, let's see, oh gosh, it's almost 12 feet. What a crate, for the shipping. Of course the sides have been removed and the top, just so we can get a view of it a little bit and edit in the full installation view later.

Q2: Do you remember when you first installed it? Was the branch leaning to the wall? Was the bottom part of the branch secured in any way? Or—

Petersen: No, it just—

Q2: —was it just leaning and holding by gravity?

Petersen: Yes. Yes, Bob never wanted to attach things. He liked things moving [laughs] in a way. Over at Untitled Press, when Maybelle Stamper gave Bob and myself the little Fuchs and Lang litho press and I was printing the Cy Twomblys, Bob named the press Little Janis because he was very good friends with Janis Joplin, who I met with Bob. We went up to Max's Kansas City [New York] one evening and another evening we met at Remington's, which was an early-late sixties bar down in the village, Remington's, and Janis was there and had a wonderful time. They were both born in Port Arthur, Texas so they would talk about Port Arthur. Why am I talking about that? Oh, about Little Janis. Bob called the press Little Janis because Janis sadly had passed on and really Bob was, of course, really touched, upset about that. He got the news in Los Angeles. Actually Janis passed in Los Angeles at the Landmark Motel. Anyway, so I'm printing the Cy Twomblys on Little Janis and I told Bob, I said—well Little Janis, it's a smaller litho press, it's a beautiful little press. But when you put the pressure down, the scraper bar on the stone, the press would kind of—and then you hand crank the bed through, Janis would move a little bit. So I mentioned to Bob, I said, "I could secure Little Janis to the floor. I'll drill a hole in the feet and put a lag bolt down so it doesn't move." He got upset. He said, "You're not going to drill a hole in Janis's feet!" So that solved that.

Q2: Sounds like the—

Petersen: In fact, he didn't like razor blades or any kind of a cutting—he always tore paper. He'd never take scissors and cut it in half, he'd always just tear it. So this was, he wouldn't attach it, no, at the base.

Q2: Did the work remain installed in the studio for a little while? Was he living with it?

Petersen: Oh yes. Yes, it stayed there for just a little while because the *Venetian* series went very soon to Castelli gallery on 420 West Broadway. We got a U-Haul truck and drove it. I think Charlie Yoder drove it up or Peter Wirth or Tim Pharr maybe. They would drive the truck. I did it maybe once, I think, myself.

You mentioned securing the base, but Bob liked things on wheels. It's always things that move. So it just leaned there with the sense of the gravity. At Leo's gallery, it was up more. Of course, that's a 10-foot ceiling, so it was up more and the cloth would come down. I think Bob would just place it where it was comfortable and it didn't matter where the cloth ended, I mean to me. That's his decision. I don't recall him saying the fabric here is too high or too low, it's just wherever it was, it was. It's a beautiful piece. What is it titled again?

Q2: Untitled (*Venetian*), 1973.

Petersen: Oh, Untitled. Yes. Well, I'll never forget the afternoon that Bob made this. It was amazing now for me to think, he made this piece in, say, four hours. And it was done. And the same with the chairs that we looked at earlier, with the cloth between and the water gallon jugs.

Anything else on that?

Q2: I'm just impressed that you were able to use a combination of a knife and the tree branch itself to penetrate the branch through the cardboards.

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: That must have been a labor-intensive process.

Petersen: Come to think of it, I didn't go up to get a knife. Bob would have flipped out if I put a knife in the box. I think we just kept turning it.

Q2: Yes?

Petersen: Yes, I didn't cut it. I remember poking something in there, but it wasn't a knife. Bob didn't like knives, that kind of sharp stuff. I think we just started puncturing it and working it down the branch and finally got them on there.

Q2: That's nice.

Petersen: It was a lot of fun, that time; we were never rushed, in a hurry or—just doing his thing and see how beautiful it is to create something like that, the way he would combine different objects together, like there's three different materials here, but visually, it's so stunning.

Q2: It certainly is.

Petersen: The delicacy of it and then the weathering of the boxes and then the beauty of the long branch, the stick. Very beautiful.

Q2: Thank you so much, Bob.

Petersen: Oh, you're welcome. That's nice.

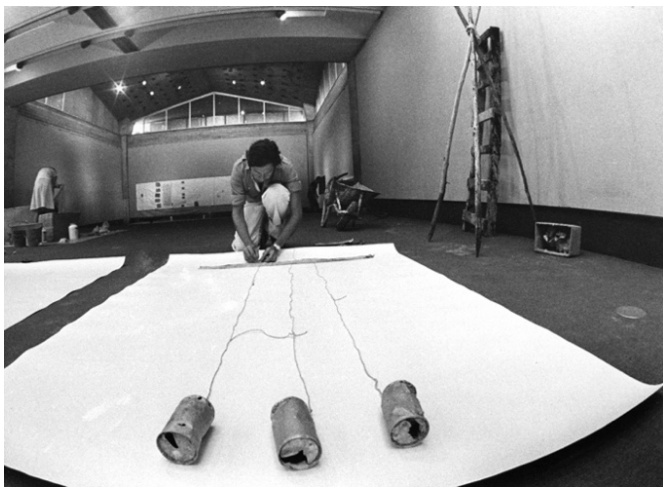
[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So we're now looking at a work of the *Scripture* series [1974]. It's called Untitled, 1974, and the creation of the series is related to a trip and exhibition to Israel. And it also serves as a tribute by the artist to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Israel's religious heritage. The series *Scriptures* incorporates drawings, paper bags, cardboards, and ghosts. And Bob, do you remember if all the *Scriptures* were made in Israel?



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Scripture*), 1974  
Solvent transfer on fabric and paper bag collage,  
and paint on linen-backed paper  
81 1/8 x 47 1/2 inches (206.1 x 120.7 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes. The whole show was done in Israel and installed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in 1974 [*Robert Rauschenberg in Israel*; note: not all the *Scriptures* were made in Israel, the Untitled work illustrated above was completed in Captiva prior to the Israel exhibition. All works for *Robert Rauschenberg in Israel* were made on site.].



Rauschenberg working on *Scripture* (1974) for *Rauschenberg in Israel* exhibition, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1974. Works in background are *Scripture I* and two untitled works (all 1974). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Nir Bareket

Q2: So can you tell us about the production process of the entire work? We have paper mounted on linen, we have the transfer drawings, we have paper bags attached to it, as well as this light fabric in front of it. So can you explain how it was made?

Petersen: Yes, this is cheesecloth. It comes in a roll. They use it in lithography printing, the cheesecloth for processing stone. Bob has this paper, he bought reams of it for his series *Currents* in 1970. But it's mounted on the back, it has I believe a linen or a muslin, I haven't decided. We called it linen-backed paper. But someone years ago, a friend looked at it and he said that that was muslin. But a curator at the museum will know how it's backed. But Bob had purchased, for the *Currents* series, big reams of it. He had the minimum he could get of that paper. I think it's Aquabee paper. It kind of comes to mind. And the muslin was adhered to the paper in Germany; it was the only mounting machine existing at the time that would handle a large roll of paper and actually archivally mount the cloth to the back of the paper, because in the *Currents* series, Bob did a silkscreen, it's about 60 feet long, the whole series of the *Currents* editions from the original drawings that were shot and made into silkscreens. Then he worked with them, overlaying different screens with other screens. But that's where this paper is from and Bob used it for years because you can imagine five rolls that big; I think they used not even half a roll or not even near half for the *Currents* series, for the long 60-foot print. And Bob had, at the time on Captiva, other assistants, see that's '74, so I think Peter Wirth would have been there, Tim Pharr. I did recall, I may have done it myself, being a time ago, from that large core of rag paper, we rolled off quite a bit of it onto a core and had it sent to the museum in Israel so Bob would have it available. I imagine some of the cheesecloth from Untitled Press was sent to Israel,

to Jerusalem, and then we had some matte medium sent to Israel, but all the other materials we got in Israel.

In Jerusalem at the museum we actually used the museum space for the exhibition about maybe three weeks before the show. The works were actually made in the museum space. We spread out large sheets, rolls of plastic to protect the rug in the museum because of the matte medium on the cardboard boxes, and the sand Bob collected, we'd go out and collect sand and dirt from different parts around the city of Jerusalem. And the landscape changed, you'd find a finer sand, maybe a red, more reddish sand. If you went towards Tel Aviv, the soils changed a little bit and Bob liked that, different colored soils for the boxes. And then the paper bags are adhered with the matte medium, the paper bags he found in Jerusalem. And the newspaper is from Jerusalem, you see the different writing, Arabic, and the transfer, which is—now this transfer was not done with the—before on some of the earlier pieces—with the roller blanket wash because we didn't take that to Israel, it's too dangerous to put in your baggage or even to have shipped because it's flammable. And so this transfer is actually done with matte medium, where the matte medium is brushed on and left just a few minutes, until it just becomes a little tacky, not dry. Then the newspaper is laid over and just on the reverse side, burnished down into the dampened, wet medium. Before that dries, the newspaper is peeled off and discarded. Sometimes when Bob would peel off a paper, he would adhere it to somewhere, usually opposite—not on this piece, but he would use the newspaper also.





Rauschenberg, Robert Petersen, and Hisachika Takahashi working on a *Scripture* to be exhibited in the *Rauschenberg in Israel* exhibition, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, May 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

I'm going to move this a little bit. Here's another transfer. Actually, these transfers could have been done—Bob was invited to the print shop at the Jerusalem University, into their print department. We went in and Bob actually worked on the press there. I didn't run the press, the students did. This really looks not like a matte medium transfer. This is done through a press, I'm sure, with some kind of solvent. They may have had some solvent in their department. It worked pretty well. You can see here how it transferred from the reverse—the image here is reversed from, like the mirror image. And then this cloth is done separately. And of course, that can't be matte. That's a solvent transfer because you can't put matte medium on this, it would adhere it, or it would get all, well full of matte medium. It's just plain cheesecloth. I'm sure—it just dawned on me. I hadn't seen this piece for maybe forty years, but this transfer must have been done at the university. But this was at the, I would say, at—well, maybe you can kind of see the—oh that's what it is. This transfer right here, this image was over here.

Q2: Right.

Petersen: You can see the transfer of it. So it is a solvent transfer, it's not matte medium on that. See I didn't notice that that image here is the mirror image of this. So the writing here—well, it's reversed. But it's not reversed here. See it says "growth quickens" and here it's "growth quickens" in the mirror image, reversed, which wouldn't be reversed for Bob because he's dyslexic. He loved printmaking because—I think I said that yesterday, but working on the stone, he said, "Oh, it's already right reading for me," because of the dyslexia. That's beautiful, I'm glad I saw that. This at one time was laid here and over the paper bag; see the transfer? So the paper bags were adhered before it was run through the press. Yes. Yes, Bob would usually adhere the paper—there are some samples over here of where he put the cardboard or paper bag on first and then transferred. It's quite beautiful to discover the technique of the way that was done. The cloth at the top is adhered with matte medium, just brushed into the rag paper. And here, Bob went over this area with paint. It looks like a gesso, just to give it a nice whiteness—see, it's lighter there. Yes, it's beautiful.

Anything else on that?

Q3: In the catalogue for the show, there's a diary and it indicates—

Petersen: Oh, it mentions a university and—

Q3: Well, it says, "Working on transferring newspaper text on paper. Unsuccessful attempts, (quality of paper? of press? of solvents?) In the presence of students, and with help and advice of

academy teachers Cohen Gan and Arik.” Do you remember dramatic problems transferring anything or—

Petersen: I do kind of—it was quite a while ago. But I do recall there were discussions around the press because Bob was explaining how things were done. I kind of stood back. Actually I didn’t get involved. I was there; there’s a photo of me in the background. Because I let the students—I didn’t do it on purpose, I wasn’t being obnoxious or anything. I just thought well, this is their room and if Bob called me over, of course I would step in.

Q3: Do you recall Bob’s reaction to you, whether that upset him that it wasn’t working? Or he just rolled with it?

Petersen: I remember there was some discussion, yes, and the time went on. And they were trying to work something out. But I didn’t really go up. I felt I’d stay back. I didn’t want to interrupt unless Bob asked, “Petersen, can you do something?” [Laughs]

Q3: Thank you.

Petersen: But I’m glad it mentioned that in the—let me show the camera, is it running? This is Bob’s catalogue from Israel for the show that he collaged and all the works in the Israel Museum. This is a beautiful book. And collecting soils out in the desert. Yes. It’s all laid out by Rauschenberg, the different—from our filming, 35 millimeter, he collaged the photos. Here’s a picture of Bob working in the museum.

Anything else?

Q2: Thank you so much, Bob. Thank you.

Petersen: Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So you are now standing in front of a work that was made for the *Tablet Series*. It is again called *Untitled* from 1974. We are looking at a piece of cardboard with stamps that is sandwiched between paper and there's also an embossed signature on the upper right. Can you walk us through the process of creating this piece?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Untitled (Tablet Series)*, 1974  
Embossed paper, tape, and cardboard with stamps  
35 3/8 x 22 3/8 inches (89.9 x 56.8 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: Yes. This piece was done at Untitled Press on Captiva Island on the litho press, the Little Janis, the Fuchs and Lang proofing press. We had some paper in the print shop, Arches paper from France. The cardboard was coated with matte medium. There are two sheets of paper here, sandwiched like Christine said, together. So the first sheet is laid on the press bed of Little Janis. The press bed is about 28-by-36. Then with a litho stone on the press bed and the Arches paper; a clean ground litho stone probably covered with a sheet of newsprint, just in case some of the matte medium would squeeze out under the pressure of the printing press. The cardboard is coated with matte medium on both sides and then Bob coated the cardboard. Then he took the cardboard, laid it flat, he did the composition, put the cardboard on the first sheet of paper. Then, he got a second sheet of paper and lined it up pretty evenly here on top of the cardboard. Then the paper is covered with newsprint and then the tympan and put under the press and the pressure is adjusted—pressure bar down and then cranked, ran through the press, and under pressure the leather scraper bar over the tympan puts pressure on so you get an embossment here of the cardboard underneath, an embossed line, and corrugated little lines from the surface of the cardboard. Then the pressure is released, the bed is pulled out, the tympan is taken off, the newsprint is taken off, and you have the piece. Bob later put in his embossed signature in the upper right.

It's a beautiful piece of cardboard with probably a box that Bob received mail in; it has the postage stamps and the cancellation labels on there from the post office. Quite a beautiful piece.

This is the *Tablet Series*, correct? Yes. *Tablet Series*. Yes.

Anything else on that?

Q: Do you remember the tool that was used for embossing the signature and who made it?

Petersen: Actually I remember a discussion about it, of Bob speaking with Don Saff possibly or Peter Wirth or Eric Holt. But I don't know who made it and I don't recall looking at the embossed stamp, just barely. I may have been doing something and looked at it quickly; that's close to forty years ago. I have a pretty good memory, I think. But I would remember if I actually looked at it and felt it. If I had seen it, I would have really looked at it. But I do recall a discussion—it's kind of coming back now. Bob spoke of the embossed signature. I don't recall actually seeing it. He may have done the embossment with Peter Wirth or Dodi Booth or maybe by himself in the print shop.

I think in the *Tablet Series* there's probably, I'm not sure, maybe it's in your documentation, a series of eight and different cardboards, and in the print shop we had a wall, we would pin them up with the push pins and look at them. They're really beautiful. Bob worked pretty much every day and one project would move into the next. Now that time is passing on, at the time this was made, I was just—not just, but assisting. You do the piece and it's done. I think now, going back, I think at that time, possibly Bob did, but I didn't really absorb it as looking at the detail or actually noticing how really beautiful it is; I don't know exactly how to say it, but at that time it was just another piece Bob was doing in his process of working. But now, 2015, looking at it here, I'm quite amazed at how beautiful the idea is, just the creativity of making something in a way so simple, but not simple. [Laughs] Thank you.

Anything else on that?

Q2: I'm just curious if you see it's technically related to the *Scripture* you worked on in Israel.

Was it just pushing the whole process a little bit further?

Petersen: Yes. After the *Scripture* series—well the idea of sandwiching came in *Captiva*, the two papers with the subtle embossing. The two pieces here, I don't think they're on camera, but the *Pyramid Series* and the *Scriptures*—oh that's part of the *Scriptures*? We'll see those maybe in a minute. But the *Scriptures* were done first, then the *Pyramids*, then the *Tablets*, as I recall. I think that collage there is one of the first ones where Bob put two papers together. Are we going to film that one? No? Can the cameras span—oh, it can't with the light, it has to be changed. But that piece, it's not on camera? Yes. But anyway, that was one of the first. Bob shocked me quite a bit when it ran through the press and it wasn't quite in register and the paper was a little tip and he took the paper and, not saying anything, just pulled it down. In my mind I'm going, "Oh god, he's ruining it!" [Laughs] I mean in my mind. I wouldn't ever say that. It's really beautiful.

Anyway, anything else?

Q2: Thank you so much. Thank you.

Petersen: You're welcome.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Now you are standing next to *Sheephead* from 1974, it's part of the *Airport Suite* series that Bob started right up on his return from Israel in summer 1974. So the work is made of a multicolor relief with intaglio on fabric and with collage. It has a wooden ruler attached on the upper right. So you asked to have this work being on view so can you tell us about the creation process and the involvement of Graphicstudio? However I understand all the work was performed in Captiva, correct?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sheephead (Airport Suite)*, 1974  
Multicolor relief and intaglio on fabric with collage (wooden ruler)  
35 1/4 x 51 x 1/8 inches (89.5 x 129.5 x 0.3 cm)  
From an edition of 20 Arabic numerals and 20 Roman numerals, published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa

Petersen: Ah—no, incorrect.

[Laughter]

Q2: Okay.



Petersen: Oh wait, no, you're correct. Yes, it was printed in Captiva. The signing was in Tampa, at the airport, the University of South Florida, Don Saff reserved a suite in the hotel there at the airport, motel suite, and we all went there, Bob, Peter Wirth, Marcia Stice, and myself, Alan Eaker was there, Don Saff of course. And Julio Juristo and Michelle Juristo, his wife. Bob did the signing there. But before the project was just beginning, Bob and I went up to Tampa and Bob spoke with Don Saff. I recall that we went to a facility where they print the newspaper in Tampa. I recall going through that on a tour. Bob saw at the newspaper where they have a mold form; I don't exactly know their process. But it's a mold that they would pour, I imagine, the zinc into—I don't know how it is really done. Then the plate is taken out of the mold. It's a very thin mold, as I recall, and that is put onto the press, bent around the offset press to print the newspaper. But these flat molds are, as I recall, some kind of a waxy paper that would take the heat of the metal. They discard those, I believe, and Bob thought you could ink the molds and run them through an etching press, which University of South Florida, Don Saff, had sent down an etching press to Untitled Press on Captiva. And that's where they were printed. I didn't print them. I believe Peter Wirth and Bob printed them. Maybe another printer was there at the time. They would ink the mold with a roller and put it on the etching press. There was a cotton sheet laid over the mold with the ink on and run through the etching press and then it was lifted off and that's the impression.

Here on the right side is a piece of cheesecloth that, let's see; I would say the, let's see, the cheesecloth was possibly—now that is right reading, mason jars. This is reverse mirror mason jars, backwards. So from the mold, I think it would be—I'm sorry I'm so technical here, I'm trying to figure it out myself. Let's see, this cheesecloth was laid over, let's see—I can't see the

back of this. I'm sure the ink didn't come through here. How did that get reversed? Darn.

[Laughs] Bob. He didn't like technique, he just worked so smoothly.

Okay, this is an impression of that peeled off and put over here. So this was over that piece. I would say the mold was there on the press bed, the cheesecloth is laid on the mold, and then this piece was possibly laid over that, but it wouldn't be reversed. It would be the same reading as that if they were both on there. How was that done? Well, this is an impression of this, this was laid over this. You can see the cheesecloth in this inking here. So that cheesecloth was on top of this when it was under pressure. But where did the ink come from? I'm sorry I'm getting so long on this because I hadn't looked at it and I wasn't really involved with the printing. I was there, but I was with Sonnabend Gallery and I had my own little studio, I was probably—well Bob had help and assistance so I would go through the Untitled Press and see them running prints through Atlas, the etching press. Bob called it Atlas. Eventually Don Saff, through the university, gave it to Bob to keep it for Untitled Press and it's still there. I'm sorry, I can't really figure that one out right now. I just know this is from this. Let's see, that's black, around '61. I don't know. Peter Wirth would know, but he's passed.

Q2: Do you remember if the ruler was the last element that was attached to the surface and if so, how?

Petersen: Oh yes, that would be towards the end of the project. Actually, at the University of South Florida they had these frames made because in the making of the frame, these were wooden, kind of a button that's actually part of the backing wood. The piece is mounted on some

type of wood that is gessoed and then there are actually buttonholes sewed here, which was done by Sheryl [Long] Pharr and Marcia Stice, neighbors. Sheryl Pharr was married to Tim Pharr, who helped with making the wooden stretcher bars; he's the carpenter there. Marcia and Sheryl were so good at sewing beautifully, sewing buttonholes. They helped Bob out sewing all kinds of things—well mainly a lot of sets for Merce Cunningham, the dancer, designs Bob made, and they would sew that together. Here is another buttonhole that's sewn into the fabric. This polka dot is not a print, it's a print made in the fabric. Then this image here from the newspaper printing facility, that's one of the molds that was just inked up and ran through the etching press and the same with this dark area here, which is kind of a building here, and ran through the press on the cotton sheet. So at one time, this cheesecloth was over here. This wasn't on here. This was probably done separately and then sewn. After it dried it was sewn onto the piece. But this one sheet, the cotton bedsheet, was—Atlas is a fairly good-sized press. The press bed is wider than this sheet. And so this cheesecloth was laid on top of that. And possibly the mold—yes, the cheesecloth was laid on the sheet and maybe the mold, I would think an etching plate is usually under the paper. But I don't know. Don Saff would know. But I think the mold plate was inked and laid on top of the gauze and then as it's ran through the press, the mold pushes into the cheesecloth and through the cheesecloth because it's so thin—not transparent, but what do you say, like a screen. Ink will go through it and you can see the cheesecloth in here because this would be a solid black on the printing plate, which I think now is above everything.

I didn't observe the actual printing. I would walk through the Untitled Press and visit for a little bit and I would see the press running. They had the pressure on and turning the press bed through. After that's taken out, the press bed's pulled out and the cheesecloth is taken off and

flipped over as a mirror, and then this is added later and printed separately. I think what caused this white here is the edge of the cheesecloth. Yes, the cheesecloth is turned a little bit here and it's darker on the reverse side. So it is darker under there, which makes sense because the opposite side of this is laid over here and the actual inked mold is on the other side.

Q2: Yes, that's what this is.

Petersen: Under the pressure, it pushed through this onto the sheet because if this is over here, you get the plain—and if you flip it, it becomes the right reading. Seeing that dark on the opposite side of the cheesecloth, I picture the plate on top of everything.

Q2: Makes sense.

Petersen: Then probably newsprint was put over that and a felt blanket on the etching press and run through with quite a bit of pressure. Now that I think back at it, the molds for the newspaper to put the metal in and I believe they discard the molds because they don't reuse them, I don't think, maybe they do now with technology different, everything changes. But I think that's the way that was done.

Q2: Do you remember what kind of pens were used for the signature on this kind of surface during that time?

Petersen: I don't recall what sort of pen, it's sort of a brownish color. I have just a vague memory that maybe there is a suite of the *Airport* series; Bob titled it *Airport* because it was signed at the airport. [Laughs]



Rauschenberg signing *Switchboard (Airport Suite)* (1974) in a Tampa airport hotel, Florida, 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York

Q2: I see.

Petersen: *Airport Suite*. I would say it's a Sharpie marker, permanent ink. I'm going back, but maybe there were different colors. I remember a little discussion about different colors because it would be difficult here to sign in pencil on a bedsheet because it kind of moves.

Q2: Exactly.

Petersen: Probably one of the assistants, Marcia Stice or someone held the sheet a little taut as he was signing and he signed it with a Sharpie marker. It seems like he did one in red, that's vague, but choosing the colors.

Q2: Thank you so much!

Petersen: Yes and the ruler was added after all the printing. Beautiful composition.

Q2: It is.

Petersen: It's called *Sheephead*, I guess you said that. Right?

Q2: Yes. Thank you!

Petersen: You're welcome! Beautiful.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So now you are in front of the *Glacial Decoy Series* [1979–80]. To the left is a lithograph, it's called *Lithograph I*. And it was made in 1979 and to the right it's *Etching III* of the same series. It was made in 1979 as well. So those works also maybe trigger some memories why the entire series was performed in both as a lithograph and also as etchings. Do you recall why both techniques have been chosen for this series?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Glacial Decoy Series: Lithograph I*, 1979  
Lithograph  
32 x 48 inches (81.3 x 121.9 cm)  
From an edition of 28, published by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Glacial Decoy Series: Etching III*, 1979  
Etching and photoetching on Swiss hand-made paper  
24 5/8 x 16 3/4 inches (62.5 x 42.5 cm)  
From an edition of 22, published by Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

Petersen: Let's see, the lithograph, the images, they're actual photographs that Bob had taken for Trisha Brown's *Glacial Decoy* performance [1979]. Bob staged that. It was large screens with projected images onto the screens that would rotate through the slide projections. Actually, reading your notes a little earlier, I didn't realize that the sound piece, the soundtrack for the dance was the clicking of the slide projectors, changing—there's four to five, as I recall, slide projectors—oh, they must have been close to 10-by-10-foot screens, 9-by-9, on stage behind the dance scene. Bob also did the costumes for the dancers. But to get to Trisha's dance performance, Bob, while doing the stage set, he had taken photographs on his own in the early fifties and through the fifties and then kind of left photography. He eventually got interested in taking his own photographs again because of a print at Gemini, the *Hoarfrost Edition*. He had

used an image from a magazine that he didn't realize was copyrighted, he just kind of used what was available. But that led to a little mishap. That was resolved nicely. But Bob thought well, I can take my own pictures, so he really got back into photography and all these images were taken around the Fort Myers, Florida area in 1978, early '79. He was asked to come to Universal Limited Art Editions to do a project and took along his photos. At ULAE they took the photographs and probably enlarged—they made photo etching plate—or not etching, that's the etching over there, correct?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Photo plates and enlarged the negatives onto the plate. So getting back into technique, this looks like the negative of a positive. I actually wasn't in the print shop with Bob, I came along because they have the printers there at ULAE doing the work. I was probably out maybe in the library reading or working in my own sketchbook. But I would go in the shop and observe and help out when I could; sometimes I would mix ink or something for one of the printers. Let's see, so this is a photo onto plates and then lithographically printed. Of course Bob would select the colors, they're beautiful green, well, as you can see, the greens. This also looks like a negative of the positive plate, that he reversed the negative. I don't know what the edition size is, probably twenty-eight, thirty-two, somewhere in there.

Anything else on that?

Q2: Were different papers used for lithographs versus etchings?



Petersen: Oh yes. And then we go over to the etching—

Q2: Maybe you can elaborate a little on the differences of the processes?

Petersen: Oh, the differences between the two? You mean technically, in a way?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: Well, etching is done on a copper plate and photographically put on the plate. I don't know the exact process of that. And lithograph is more planographic, it's a flatter surface. An etching plate has a relief, it has low and high points in the plate. You can see here on the litho, it's just more planographic, flat. In the etching plate you see the embossment of the plate and the paper and then photographically etched into the plate. I was looking at this a little earlier and I'm not sure if this is correct, but to my eye I would say that this etching was inked in relief with a roller because this is a positive image. If it was processed as an etching plate, the sky would be light here; this is kind of trees in the background and some steps. But the trees are white. So I think instead of the ink into the plate and then with tarlatan they smooth the surface. So this would be white. I think it's printed and relieved, there's over the plate, it's just rolled ink. And here they reversed the photo, another negative and reversed it down and shot it so it's a mirror image again. And going through the works here I didn't realize Bob did so—he did quite a bit of that—

Q2: At that time?

Petersen: —kind of butterfly flipping of images. Let's see, yes. Here you can see just a faintly little line of the negative where they were joined together and then shot with the light with an emulsion on the plate, that photosensitive emulsion that is processed. After that process, I would say this is, like I have said, rolled with a roller. But I'm not positive in a way, getting into printmaking there's a lot of techniques. Is that clear enough?

Q2: It is, absolutely. Thank you.

Petersen: I'm not definite on my vision of how it's done. But my little experience in printmaking, I would say, like I said, it's rolled. The top surface picks the ink and where it's etched in, where the trees would be dark if it was ink was pressed down and then the surface wiped clean. But this seems to me the reverse.

Q2: Thank you so much! We've certainly got an idea of the two different flavors.

Petersen: Is that okay? The difference?

Q2: Different techniques. Thank you.

Petersen: Yes, here the—well I'm getting back, but planographic, it's all on one surface level.

It's just that when it's inked, the plate is wet with water and processed with the gum arabic

solution. They have another one for aluminum plate. This is stone here. You can see the edge of the stone, where it looks like they just inked a stone actually and printed the flat surface. And then you see where the negative is off from another plate printed separately from this; this would be run through this red kind of a box, rectangular box. First the orange color behind is printed from, I would say, just a flat stone; you can see the edge of the stone and it comes off of the paper so you see the deckle. The stone could have been this big. They just let the paper overlap and when it's run through the press, they lay the newsprint there to pick up that ink. And then that's dried and then these, the green is printed from a plate and registered. And then another plate there, added later. That could have been printed at the same time as this because some printers, there'll have a small roller and they'll just ink very carefully, just ink this area. I don't know if that's how it was done, it could have been done separately. And this is a different green actually than this one, to my eye. And also, I would say this part here is printed in negative or shot in negative.

Q2: I see what you're saying.

Petersen: Where this is a positive image. This also looks like a negative print to me. This is an image of an easy chair from a living room that's been sitting out in the yard and deteriorated. That looks like a positive—and of course this is positive print. This also looks negative because the white here would be a shadow, I think.

Anything else?

Q2: Thank you so much, Bob. Thank you.

Petersen: Thank you! It was wonderful. Beautiful.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #5

Interviewee: Robert Petersen

Location: New York, New York

Interviewers: Brent Edwards (Q2) and  
Gina Guy (Q)

Date: October 23, 2015

Q2: I'm Brent Edwards. It is Friday, October 23 and I'm here at 381 Lafayette with Gina Guy for yet another session. What is it, the fourth or fifth?  
Interviewer: Brent Edwards and Gina Guy Date: October 23

Q: Fourth, I think.

Q2: The fourth, with Robert Petersen.

Petersen: Fourth, fifth.

Q2: We were going to go back to our discussion about the *Hoarfrost*. I didn't see what you were sending, so maybe you could explain it to me.

Q: The National Gallery, at present, has an exhibition on Gemini. I think the title is called *The Serial Impulse*, Robert Rauschenberg [note: *The Serial Impulse at Gemini G.E.L.*, 2015–16]. It's on all of Gemini's—they have Rauschenberg obviously because he was one of their artists.

Petersen: Isn't it the fiftieth anniversary or was that Washington?

Q: It's in celebration, I think, of their fiftieth anniversary.

Petersen: Because that's what I heard.

Q: That opened early this month. I think it opened in the very beginning of the month, or at the end of September. Anyhow, they have a very nice section on making the *Hoarfrost Editions* at Gemini on their website. If you flip through here, I didn't know if you wanted to comment on some of the process at all or take a look at—I know we discussed this to some degree in the chapel when you were here—

Q2: In May.

Q: But I didn't know if seeing these pictures might bring up anything. This is on the National Gallery website and on the exhibition in Bob's *Hoarfrost Editions*. [Note:

<http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/features/the-serial-impulse/robert-rauschenberg.html>,  
accessed April 19, 2017]

Petersen: You know who these people are.

Q: This is the first picture.



Rauschenberg, Charlie Ritt, Hisachika Takahashi, and James Webb at Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1974. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen

Petersen: Jim Webb, Sachika, Chuck Ritt—or Charlie. I think he changed his name to Charlie.

Q: I think he was going by Charlie.

Petersen: And of course Bob. I don't recall—there's a bucket back here.

Q: That's from one of the editions.

Petersen: Was it ever editioned, do you know?

Q: I believe so.

Petersen: Anyway, I don't recall that.

Q: It appears there, but—

Petersen: Oh here.

Q: It's the same image, I think. This is *Rodeo Palace*. I think that appears in *Plus Fours* [(*Hoarfrost Edition*), 1974]. I'll have to check that for you.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Plus Fours (Hoarfrost Edition)*, 1974  
Offset lithograph and screenprint  
transferred to fabric collage  
67 x 95 inches (170.2 x 241.3 cm)  
From an edition of 28 published by  
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

Petersen: I just didn't recall it. Now, since you showed me in *Rodeo Palace* here, that it's there—I helped Bob making it and printing it. But I always focus on the doors and the pillow coming through. I think that's so beautiful. There's a pillow underneath of the silk or it could be the cheesecloth. I don't know from right here. I should get my other glasses on.

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: This is a photograph here at Gemini of Bob and myself and another printer, partly off the photo, putting newspaper down and putting the solvent on. Then we put the cloth over and ran it through the press. The solvent released the ink in the newspaper and magazine images.





Robert Petersen and Rauschenberg at Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, September 1974. Photo: Daniel B. Freeman

Q: Was Bob particular about what images he used for these? Was it just random or did he select?

Petersen: Oh, he selected them without speaking about it. This is in Captiva, in his studio, a kind of flat box with hundreds of images. We'd go through magazines and have nature, animals, trees, people, whatever. Categories.

Q: Is that the way he worked at Gemini as well?

Petersen: No, at Gemini we'd mostly just go down and get the daily newspapers from the newsstand. Let's see. With the other printers, I'm kind of not really involved. I was just working with Bob here because Bob and I were showing the other printers how we did it on Captiva. Then Bob collaborated with the Gemini printers. They came up with larger images like the automobile in the edition and the Egyptian figure [note: kouros]. Is that on here somewhere? Oh here it is. Here's the bucket again. I don't recall. See, at Gemini I wasn't really involved with the

collaboration. I was there with Bob. See, here are the printers. Sachika was working more closely with him. Look at the paper bags on the wall. Is that what that is? I'll put on my reading glasses.

This is Jim Webb.



Rauschenberg examines the translucency of a fabric, while curator Bettina Webb and printer James Webb look on; a selection of brown and white paper bags are arranged on the wall nearby, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1974. Photo: Daniel B. Freeman

Q: So there you see the buckets.

Petersen: Yes, there it's in the—

Q: So I think it may say.

Petersen: Yes, this is in the artist's studio at Gemini. God, beautiful. It's quite some time ago and I've always loved the work, but I don't recall that bucket for some reason.

[Laughter]

Petersen: After seeing it, the shape of it—but I don't know how Gemini did that. Because it wasn't a found image. I think they did it in the silkscreen. I don't believe it's silkscreened on there. It's transferred some way.

Q: I don't know if this shows any of—

Petersen: This is Charlie Ritt.

Q: I think it may actually say who everyone is.

Petersen: Oh, that's [Douglas] Doug Christmas.

Q: I think it may say down here who everyone is.

Petersen: Oh. If you don't mind, I should get my reading glasses.

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: Here it says—I can enlarge it—Charlie Ritt. Begins arranging newspaper on the press bed. Curator Tim Isham. He was also a printer, but then he went to curating. Wonderful printer.



Rauschenberg demonstrates his preferred crumpling technique for printer Charlie Ritt and begins arranging newspaper on the press bed, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1974. Curator Tim Isham is crouched on the counter to the left, taking detailed notes on the steps the printers will follow while producing the edition. The magnitude of production involved the whole shop, including Douglas Christmas, Ron McPherson, Ed Henderson, and Bettina Webb, who are also pictured. Photo: Daniel B. Freeman

Petersen: Crouched.

Q: I actually thought that was Sachika who was crouched on the—this person here. I thought that was Sachika, but maybe not. Just because of the headband.

Petersen: Oh, right. Yes, there. Well, it does look like Tim. Because see, he has a beard. Mustache and a beard. And that's Doug Christmas.

Q: Yes, it is.

Petersen: This is wonderful. Let's see just for fun here. I don't know who that is, but it's the back. Anyway.

Let's see, this one.

Q: Isn't that you right there?

Petersen: Yes. I think the printers gave me the mask because I usually didn't wear it, because Bob didn't. Oh, I'd use it once in a while. Now I kind of remember, Charlie Ritt said, "Here, wear this."



After multiple passes through the press, the flattened and solvent-soaked newspaper and lithographs were removed. Printer Robert Petersen is pictured wearing a respirator in the solvent-filled air, Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1974. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because it's a solvent.

Q2: You would wear a mask because of the solvent you were using to do the transfer?

Petersen: Yes, the solvent to dissolve the inks. Here, these are magazine images. Yes. Maybe in the Gemini documentation—is there a sample of a *Hoarfrost Edition* in here? Because if it's transferred from a newspaper, each *Hoarfrost* would be a little different. I don't recall. Because

see, Bob collaborated with the printers. This is the only time I was involved, just showing the printers that one day and then I probably left and went to visit my family, my mother, because they lived near Gemini in Irvine, California.

I recall at Gemini, after the project we came back to Gemini for Bob to sign the *Hoarfrost* prints and Sidney Felsen approached me and he said, “Oh Petersen, I would like to give you a printer’s proof. Which one from the edition would you like?” I looked around and then Sidney was going to mostly all the printers involved and they could choose which one out of the suite—they’re different—they would select. At the time I thought—well I still do—but I hesitated and I thought well, let the master printers or the Gemini printers select first. I love the one with the two automobiles and the figure in the middle and I went, oh god. They’re all good, but I picked, in a way in my mind, the least popular because I wanted to let the other printers have—I didn’t want to be a hoggy piggy about it.

[Laughter]

Q2: Which one did you pick? Which one was the least—

Petersen: *Sand* [(*Hoarfrost Edition*), 1974]. I still have it. It’s a beautiful print. Of course it’s beautiful. Wonderful working times. It was all just so much fun.

Oh. That’s Ron McPherson—no, that’s Dan Freeman, isn’t it? Oh gosh. Photograph by Sidney Felsen. He did beautiful photos—or still does. It doesn’t say who the printer is. Yes, that’s Dan

Freeman. Daniel. I went to school with him, where I studied printmaking. That's Ron McPherson and Jim Webb. I keep in touch with Jim Webb.



Ron McPherson, Jim Webb, and Rauschenberg look on as fabric-covered images and newspaper are sprayed with solvent for the top layer of *Scent (Hoarfrost Edition)* (1974), Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, 1974. Photo: Daniel B. Freeman

Petersen: Brent, does it have the documentation down here? It will say title, mixed media print or—

Q2: It says, “Wall-mounted panel. Ink, transfer image, pencil, fabric, cardboard, acrylic, emulsion glue on foam core with redwood supports, metal, rope, three-hinged wood doors, pillow.” [Note: medium for *Rodeo Palace (Spread)*, 1976] But it doesn't say how each individual—

Petersen: Like this bucket. I'm still trying to figure that out. It would be in the Gemini— You can check that with—

Q: This is not Gemini. This is—

Petersen: To me, I'm not certain, but this could be—well, this was at Gemini. Maybe they gave him some extra proofs, silkscreens, from the series.

Q2: It's that same image.

Petersen: Because Bob used some of the, say, leftover materials from the *Hoarfrosts* and put them in original paintings.

Q2: So he would have been at Gemini doing the *Hoarfrost* and then taken maybe the image of the bucket and used it in—

Petersen: I can't recall.

Q2: —something like *Rodeo Palace*? Used it in the *Spreads*.

Petersen: Gemini would know that.

Q: It's called *Plus Fours*.

Petersen: It's called what?



Q: This one, with the buckets, is called *Plus Fours*.

Petersen: *Plus Fours*. Beautiful. It's strange how my memory's not going back to that. Wait, this is one bucket. This is two. But it looks like it was trimmed. Because we worked every day, things just kind of flowed and images appeared and Bob worked. They're beautiful when he's done.

Q2: Clearly he liked the bucket.

Petersen: Oh yes.

Q: See, that's what you were talking about.

Petersen: This is the one I really wanted as my printer's proof, this one.

Q2: The one with the two cars?

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: What is that called?

Petersen: What's that one called?

Q: I think that's called *Preview* [(*Hoarfrost Edition*), 1974].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Preview (Hoarfrost Edition)*, 1974  
Offset lithograph and screenprint  
transferred to fabric and paper bags  
69 x 80 1/2 inches (175.3 x 204.5 cm)  
From an edition of 32, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Petersen: *Preview*.

Q: There's the one that you have. *Sand*.

Petersen: Yes, *Sand*. Here's *Sand*, Brent.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sand (Hoarfrost Edition)*, 1974  
Offset lithograph transferred to a collage of fabric  
84 x 41 inches (213.4 x 104.1 cm)  
From an edition of 30, published by Gemini G.E.L.,  
Los Angeles

Q2: Wow.

Petersen: It's a subtle one.

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: So this is an edition. I don't recall the technology on that. But being that it's an edition—I don't know the edition number. Twenty, thirty-eight or so. That image would be silkscreened on there. Or it could be paper-transferred, but how would they get it on—I don't know. Because with the *Hoarfrost*, like I said, I was visiting family. I'd go see a friend, come back and kind of—but Sachika stayed with Bob.

Q2: You weren't as directly involved by that point.

Petersen: Yes. I was involved for the first few days. Bob said, "Well Petersen, let's show them how we do it at the studio in Florida." [Laughs]

Q2: Show these guys how we do things. [Laughs] Were there more with the *Hoarfrost* or should we keep going?

Q: No, I think we can keep going.

Q2: We wanted to keep going through the chronology and try to get through more of the 1970s. We still haven't [laughs] gotten all the way through the period.

Petersen: Oh wow.

Q2: I did want to try to ask you to talk about some things in the mid-seventies and one in the *Spread* series was the *Yule (Spread)* [1975]. Do you remember that? It was a *Spread* that he cut up and sent out.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Yule (Spread)*, 1975  
Ink transfer on silk on cardboard and foam  
core, two silk cords  
46 3/4 x 41 1/2 inches (118.7 x 105.4 cm)

Petersen: I recall the title, *Yule*.

Q2: But he apparently cut it up and sent it out as a Christmas present.

Petersen: Oh, *Yule*. Now it's back. Yes, I have one.

Q2: Do you remember how he got the idea to do that?

Petersen: No. It's one of his daily creations. He just said, "Well, let's make a large piece on silk." I don't know if we transferred it. He said, "Let's do it on foam core." Collage the image to foam core. So it's about this big. He had it up in the studio and he just said, "Well, let's divide it and cut it." He didn't like the word cut.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He said, "Let's make forty-eight different divisions."

[Laughter]

Petersen: Bob didn't like razor blades and sharp knives, you had to kind of—well, I'm getting off on the details. With foam core, it's on the fabric. What's the edition? There are how many pieces in that?

Q2: Fifty-six.

Petersen: Fifty-six. I was saying forty-eight, but fifty-six. Bob just went to them. He sent each one to a friend, a family member—

Q2: Did you put the pieces in the mail?

Petersen: Oh yes, we would mail some.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I think Dr. [Marc] Vechsler. Dr. Vechsler had one in his office and Ileana must have had one. Then Bob gave me one, Hisachika, and he gave one to my brother, Clifford. He'd come down, my brother, and visit from California. He worked with Boeing Aircraft and another aircraft company as an engineer. He would get employed in Florida for maybe eight months, doing design engineering, and he would come over and visit and stay. He'd stay a couple weeks and he'd help out in the studio.

Q: Did Bob basically enlist anybody who was around to help in the studio?

Petersen: Yes.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Maybe I've mentioned that. After the completion—an edition, not an original. Well yes, he did give—let's get back to the—

Q2: *Yule?*

Petersen: *Yule*. Oh, I was talking about my brother, Clifford. Bob gave him one. Very nice. And then Dodi Booth. I'm trying to remember.

Q: Did Dodi actually work on it? I know she sometimes helped on things. Did she actually work on that?

Petersen: She would be in Untitled Press or the studio on Captiva. She would assist. She was just a friend, a neighbor. She would come over. She would watch the sunset with Bob sometimes—well, quite often. They'd have their sunset drink.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Bob would say, "Oh, let's have a sunset drink." You go out on the beach and the sun. Dodi, she just helped out. She's a postmistress on Captiva. She of course had her daily job and took care of her family. She lived just down the beach, not so far, right behind the post office. She's just a very good friend. Not "just," but you know. She came over quite often.

Q2: Can I ask, with *Yule*, whose idea was it to reconstruct that for the retrospective in Washington?

Petersen: That was Bob's. Maybe Walter Hopps.

Q2: So you or he called everybody or wrote to everybody? It just sounds logistically complicated.

Petersen: It went through the National Gallery [note: National Collection of Fine Arts].

Q2: They did it.

Petersen: I still have the letter with the piece. My brother, Clifford, he sent his—I believe it was the National Gallery show or—

Q: Yes.

Petersen: We had so many shows.

[Laughter]

Petersen: The Smithsonian. But Clifford kept the letter, the original documentation. I haven't read it for a long time, but it seems like it said, in some way, that they wanted to recollect the *Yule* sections. I don't recall if I mailed it or maybe I just gave it to Debbie Taylor, Debbie's group at the time. I can't recall all those little details because every day things happened. I recall quite a bit. Thinking of the idea, I guess it was between the director, who may have been Walter Hopps—



Q2: It was Hopps [note: curator].

Petersen: Yes and Bob. Maybe they were working together and Bob said, “Oh, *Yule* will be in—”

Q: Should be in there.

Petersen: So they collected all fifty-six and there was one missing.

Q2: I was about to say, did they get them all?

[Laughter]

Petersen: Well, it’s kind of a—Michael Balog was given one and his is the one that—

Q: Is missing.

Petersen: I don’t want to get into gossip, but he kind of—

[Laughter]

Q: Well, he killed himself.

Petersen: Wonderful fellow at the time. Anyway.

Q: I was going to ask about another show and another piece that ended up being in the D.C. retrospective, which is this piece. Do you remember the commissioning of *Rodeo Palace*, which was for the Fort Worth?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: So we're talking the end of 1975. *Yule* is Christmas 1975. *Rodeo Palace*, this is early 1976. Chronologically, we're moving towards the D.C. retrospective. But this one is interesting because it was commissioned for this celebration, *The Great American Rodeo* [1976].

Petersen: Right, I recall that now, since you said it. Bob was saying—

Q2: Do you remember how he reacted to that?

Petersen: He called it "Radio Palace," right?

Q2: *Rodeo Palace*.

Petersen: What did I say, radio?

[Laughter]

Rodeo. What was the question?

Q2: Do you remember that episode? Because it's not only a monumental work and in the D.C.—

Petersen: I just recall that Bob was very excited about the—

Q2: He was excited to do something in Fort Worth?

Petersen: To deal with the—what was it, rodeo?

Q2: It was called *The Great American Rodeo*. That was a kind of bicentennial show at the Fort Worth Art Museum in Texas.

Petersen: I just recall that he was very pleased and went to work. We started looking for doors or Bob did. These could be just found—I'm not certain—around Captiva. Neighbors. They had an old door out in the garage. This was a screen door. Then Bob had the white silk made to look like the screen. It's kind of transparent. Beautiful. Then all the doors—well, of course, they opened. See. Then you can view inside. Beautiful piece.

Q2: Were you helping him gather these? We were talking about the bucket before, but were you helping him gather these images or scraps or fragments that ended up being part of it?

Petersen: Yes, we would pick up a cardboard box at the market. In '76 or so, -5, they didn't recycle cardboard. Now they bundle it. There was less of it. Bob just seemed to collect the boxes. We would just stop. I've been thinking about this recently, by kind of going back. We'd be in the car or something and he never really said, "There's a nice box. Stop," at the market or wherever, or along the road. I'm trying to recall that.

Q2: He would not?

Petersen: He wouldn't direct you to stop. He may just say, "I'd like to look at that. Let's pull over." Something like that.

Q2: And sometimes he would pick it up?

Petersen: Everything was done so casually. No pressure. If he saw a nice box, walking around here or around Lafayette—well, in New York City boxes were available.

Q2: I don't remember whether we talked about this in the previous sessions. I don't remember whether I asked it in such a simple way. When was the first time you went with Bob to Texas? Would it have been for this show or had you gone—

Petersen: No, that was to visit family, his sister and his mother. His sister, Janet Begneaud and his mother, Dora. I don't recall a reason for going down. This was in the early seventies.

Can we take a little break if you don't mind?

Q2: Yes, sure.

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: It's called *Narwhal*, I think. *Narwhal* [(Scale), 1977].

Q: Yes, I think that is.

Petersen: There are so many details. Speaking of *Narwhal*—we can check this later, but Bob had a narwhal tusk.

Q: Oh, I've never seen that.

Q2: He had a narwhal tusk?

Petersen: A tusk, yes. I believe Doug Christmas gave it to him.

Q2: Is narwhal a fish or a mammal?

Petersen: They're about 6, 7 feet. Beautiful.

Q2: Just the tusk is?

Petersen: Just the tusk, yes.

Q: I've never seen that. I don't know.

Q2: He had it in Florida? Where did he have it?

Q: It might have been in Captiva.

Petersen: Maybe we could check. I'm just curious where the narwhal tusk is. Bob loved it. You wouldn't have a magnifier, would you? These are quite small.

Q2: I just reached for those because you were talking about the family.

Petersen: You want to know if this is Bob's mother or who that—

Q2: But it's not so crucial that you identify them. You were just mentioning them and I was just thinking oh, there's a picture. They just printed out that picture. So you had gone to visit the family at some point before? You had gone to Texas with him before this period?

Petersen: Right, we were speaking of Texas. [Note: Rauschenberg's mother and sister lived in Lafayette, Louisiana] Yes, that was the first trip. It could have been later '71, '72. It seemed a

decision by Bob just to go visit his family. I don't remember on that trip, going to a museum director's office and talking about a show.

Q2: It wasn't a work trip, it was just a family—

Petersen: We stayed with his mother, and then we went—his sister and his brother-in-law lived maybe two, three miles away. We'd go over and see them and [Byron Richard] Ricky Begneaud [Jr.]. He was a little guy. I have photos of that trip. During that trip, Bob made a cardboard piece for his sister and his brother-in-law. We stopped at a construction site where they just had a pile of boxes and we were collecting them, putting them in the car trunk and taking them to his sister's house. We got some wood at the hardware store, a jigsaw. Made the pattern with the cardboard and glued it on.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Baton Blanche (Cardboard)*, 1971  
Cardboard  
67 1/2 x 130 3/4 x 16 1/2 inches (171.5 x 332.1 x 41.9 cm)  
Private collection

Q: You did that right on site at his sister's house?

Petersen: Yes, we did it right there. He was doing it for them. It was wonderful. But now I kind of go back and think god, how nice of him to take—he just loved working. He didn't announce, "I love working."

[Laughter]

Q: You had mentioned on the phone just in recent conversation that you owned the first cardboard piece and I wasn't sure—

Petersen: It was around '72. I looked at it. I'll check it when I get home. He gave it to me for my birthday. As I recall it was just at the beginning of transferring. Because on one side, it's a ten-cent bag from a five-and-ten back in the early seventies. It's mounted on wood and then you turn it over and the back has a transferred newspaper.

Q: I'm not familiar with it.

Petersen: I'll show it—I'll check it when I get home. Actually I just moved it a few days ago.

Q: You think that was the first time that actually Bob had mounted stuff on cardboard like that? Cardboard on wood like that?



Petersen: Yes. I think it was around '71. Jim Rosenquist came down to visit because he lived in Aripeka, Florida. He'd come by because he worked at Tampa University with Don Saff in Graphicstudio. Jim Rosenquist would just drop in. Door would open. "Hey!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: He stayed a day or a couple days overnight or in the studio. I don't know if you've ever met Jim Rosenquist, but he's very exciting, wonderful. He goes, "Oh Rauschenberg, Bob, I have this great material I found. I'm making big paintings. Ten a night. They're in sections. You get them at the hardware store. They're called door skins."

[Laughter]

Petersen: So we went and got some door skins and that's where he started putting the cardboard on and traced around with the pencil and cut the shape with a jigsaw and collaged it on.

Q2: But that early one you said you had is a paper bag? It's not cardboard, right?

Petersen: It's a paper bag adhered to the wood.

Q2: Oh, the paper bag is mounted.

Petersen: It's cut too. Bob must have done it by himself because it was a gift for my birthday.

Q2: So the bag is cut?

Petersen: No, the wood.

Q2: The wood is cut.

Petersen: You would lay the bag down and take a pencil and wherever it curves and then take the jigsaw and make a—and then adhere it on.

Q2: You don't know this work, Gina?

Q: I don't. I'm not familiar with it.

Q2: We don't know this work. We would love to see it.

Petersen: Didn't I show it to you?

Q: I don't recall you showing it to me.

Petersen: Oh, I showed it to Debbie Taylor.

Q: Possibly, but I don't recall it.

Petersen: You came up with Debbie Taylor.

Q2: We all came up.

Petersen: You came up.

Q2: You showed it? But I don't remember seeing it.

Petersen: I mentioned it to Debbie last night. I don't know, it just came up, something.

Q2: Is it in one of the rooms of your house?

Q: Or was it in the studio?

Petersen: It's on the second floor of the studio.

Q: I don't recall that, but we were off-tape then.

Q2: When we were in your studio we weren't doing the oral history anymore. We were just—

Petersen: Looking around.

Q2: But I don't remember seeing that.

Q: Nor do I. But it certainly would be interesting to see. I know a lot of times, Bob gave gifts to people that maybe he didn't consider art. He was just like oh, here's a little present for you. So it might not have been catalogued as art.

Petersen: Bob would give gifts away on his birthday. He'd go, "Here, it's my birthday. Here's a gift." [Laughs] He would laugh.

Q2: While we're on the subject of his family—well, we've moved around a few different subjects—but another episode that—is that them? I thought Kayla said that that is—is that his mother? Can you see?

Petersen: Yes, sitting down.

Q2: One of the episodes that Julia and Gina had asked me to ask you about is a trip to Lafayette, Louisiana to see Dora.

Petersen: Oh, that's the trip. That's his mother.

Q2: I'm just thinking, since we're talking about his mother and his sister, it might be an opportunity to get you to talk about that trip. Do you remember going to see them and that in the closet there were old paintings?

Petersen: Yes. It was Bob's bedroom when he was at home with his parents. He was so proud of the bed. He said, "Look at my bed." It was an old kind of style, wooden, carved bed. He just said, "I've always loved this bed, but my mom didn't like it."

[Laughter]

Petersen: There was a little closet on the side. Didn't I mention this before? He said, "Bob, I want to show you a painting I did in college." He pulled it out. It was about so big. It's a painting of a nude from his life modeling class. He leaned it up there and he kind of smiled a little bit. I looked. I went, "That's beautiful." And he goes, "She really looked like that."

[Laughter]

Petersen: She's, you know—

Q: A big woman.

Petersen: Big, big. Then he laughed a little more and he said, "When I did it, it didn't have bras on." He went into the Navy or something and his mom painted a bra.

[Laughter]

Q2: To protect her dignity.

Petersen: As I recall, did that painting ever show up?

Q: I've never seen that painting. There are a lot of things that you mentioned about—

Petersen: Seems like I saw a photo of it somewhere.



Dora Rauschenberg with her “storm shutters” made from Rauschenberg’s early paintings, Lafayette, Louisiana, 1992. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Philip Gould

Q: I know there are many things that you mentioned seeing in the house and you even mentioned that you'd taken photographs of some of them, that we don't know where the whereabouts are.

Petersen: I've got to get those together.

Q: Yes, we would love to see those.

Petersen: This is a detail about the work at his mother's house. We were walking on the first floor, came down from the second out of the bedroom walking down the hall. There's Bob's early work. He said, "Oh Petersen, look at this one." I don't know if he said it was a first, but it was from the gold leaf series [*Gold Paintings*, 1953/1955–56/1965]. He said, "I was home and I didn't have any gold leaf, so I went in the bathroom and took—" It's made out of toilet paper. He took a little and put a little glue and kind of made just a white gold—re-laid it. Beautiful piece. Didn't you send a photo of—

Q: I sent a picture of something that's in the Walter Hopps early fifties catalogue [*Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, 1991]. It was a tissue paper piece and you said you didn't think it was the same one.

Petersen: Oh, I did tell you.

Q: So I wonder what became of the one that was at Dora's house.

Petersen: Is it documented where the one came that was shown with Walter Hopps?

Q: I don't think the location of that is known. We don't know where that is either. We just have that photograph of it.

Petersen: You don't know where it is? Wow.

Q2: But he had already been working with gold leaf and was there and didn't have it, so—

Petersen: That's what he told me.

Q2: —the tissue paper was a substitute?

Petersen: He said he wanted to do another one, but gold leaf was—

Q2: The notes made it sound like the tissue paper was a precursor to the gold leaf.

Q: That's what I had thought, that the tissue paper was a precursor. But you're saying that it was after he'd already started doing the gold leaf?

Petersen: Maybe he had the idea of gold leaf.

Q: So you don't know whether this was the first—

Petersen: He was just saying this is related to the gold leaf so meaning the gold leaf was done later—because I knew the ones that were here.

Q: So this was a precursor? The tissue paper [Untitled (paper painting), ca. 1953].





Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled [paper painting], ca. 1953  
Tissue paper in glass display case with  
wood base  
18 x 14 x 4 inches (45.7 x 35.6 x 10.2 cm)  
No longer extant

Petersen: Yes, right.

Q2: You think the tissue paper came first? Or toilet paper.

Q: Tissue paper sounds better.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Even if it was toilet paper.

Q2: They're slightly different.

Petersen: Toilet paper, tissue paper.

Q2: You could use one for the other.

Petersen: I'm not certain.

Q: You can't definitively say.

Petersen: Bob just mentioned that the gold leaf wasn't available so he started with that tissue piece and then when he got back to New York—I guess he lived on Broadway then—did the gold leaf. Which are really beautiful. I remember when—well early seventies—Ileana Sonnabend came over and we couldn't locate the gold leaf paintings on the fourth floor. We did eventually find them, but Bob was just like, "Where'd they go?" [Laughs]

Q: You had mentioned that Bob had designed the house?

Petersen: Oh yes. When we first drove up to it from the airport—I guess Bob's sister picked us up. I can't recall. We were just going up and he said, "This is my mom's house, and dad's, and I designed it."

Q: I wasn't aware of him doing any kind of architecture.

Petersen: That's what he said. He maybe didn't do the actual drafting plans. Like in Florida, when he had the first studio built, we would just sketch it on a yellow pad.

Q2: And then have someone realize it? Have an architect or an engineer come in and do it, build it?

Petersen: Yes. A local carpenter. He did mention that the house—his parents weren't, say, so happy with it because it didn't fit with the neighborhood, because it was more modern. Rectangular, white shape.

Q2: Was there anything unusual about the way it was laid out, about the way you moved through the house or the way the floors were—

Petersen: I remember Bob did point out from the living room, the balcony, and then his bedroom was up around that corner. That's about the only thing. It had a small kitchen. The living room was a little bigger. I have photos of—I think just one photo—the house from the backyard. A Polaroid. I was out there and I just snapped a picture.

Q: We'd love to see that too.

[Laughter]

Q2: When was that house built? Do we know when? When would he have done that? When would he have designed that house?

Petersen: Let's see. I would say—well after the Navy because Bob was in the Navy. I guess you've heard this story. He went back to Port Arthur to the original house.

Q: They had moved.

Petersen: He was just going to walk in and someone else lived there.

[Laughter]

Petersen: They said, "Your mom and dad moved to Lafayette from Port Arthur."

[Laughter]

Petersen: But they didn't let him know. He always laughed about that. Speaking of houses, when Bob married Susan Weil in 1950—they met at Black Mountain [College, North Carolina], I believe.

Q: They met in Paris.

Petersen: Actually it was so nice seeing Sue last night at the opening. She was of course at the dinner, as was Christopher. Susan Weil's family—mother—lived in Maine, the island up—

Q: Outer Island [note: Connecticut].

Petersen: That's right, Outer Island up there. Bob and Sue were there, and Bob said they got a little upset because her mother came back and he had painted the house black because he was probably into his black series [black paintings, 1951–53].

[Laughter]

Q: I guess that would be upsetting.

Petersen: Just black. You don't see a black house.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He didn't do it for a joke, I'm sure. He just thought well, I'll paint it black.

[Laughter]

Q2: Can I ask you about another family-connected one from this period? Do we have that easily?

*Whistle Stop?*

Petersen: It's nice on the dark paper, the photo. Wow.

Q2: This is the next year and another commission from the Fort Worth Art Museum.

Petersen: Oh, another!

Q2: And this is dedicated to his father, another *Spread*. This is when he's invited to do this work and named an honorary citizen of Fort Worth. Were you there? Would you have gone to a ceremony?

Petersen: Yes, I went.

Q2: What did they do? I have clichéd images of giving people the key to the city or something. What do you do when you're an honorary citizen?

Petersen: I probably helped print this or lay out this collage, but it's assembled—

Q2: The stuff behind the door?

Petersen: It's assembled by Tim Pharr. Constructed, the wood and the hinges. I didn't do that. He and Tim would collaborate. Bob would say, "Well, the doors are nice in the middle," or whatever. That is beautiful. That has that—I wish I could think of the name. The white screen. Sheer material. Actually Bob got this material—I was using it in paintings. It's the material they put behind drapery. Light comes through, but it just protects the cloth of the drape or something like that. It's a beautiful material. It comes usually fabric in the bolt of fabric. But this one was 10 feet. You unroll it and then it would fold out. Really big.

I recall the trip—oh gosh, very clearly—to Texas. We flew in. Anne Livet picked us up. Then—let's see. We went out to lunch.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Nice little restaurant in Fort Worth. Then there was a party given at a ranch house in a big Texas ranch. The land. Not so big of a house, but a nice ranch with a lot of cattle.

Q: Do you know whose house that was?

Petersen: I don't recall the name at the time. Maybe when I get all the photos—I have quite a few photos of that, because it was a wonderful party. They had made a tent out in the back, just overhead with lights, and a dance floor. They were doing dancing, like square dancing. Texas kind of—

Q2: Line-dancing cowboy.

Petersen: Bob loved to dance and he's an incredible dancer.

Q2: Really?

Petersen: Yes, really. The way he moved. That rhythm. You can probably do it, Brent.

[Laughter]

Q2: I don't know about Texas dancing. I can do some kinds of dancing.

Petersen: We're out there and it was getting dark and the lights were on, and we were having dinner and dancing, and having corn on the cob. I remember the corn on the cob was so good.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway. They're grilling steaks. Nice. Bob and his mother—and his sister? Was Janet there? Yes, she must have been. Because Ricky Begnaud was there and of course Bob's mother. From Fort Worth, we took a charter bus out with all the guests Anne Livet had invited. Bob's family and myself—

Q: Anne Livet, had she organized this?

Petersen: We could ask her.

Q: That's what I was wondering.



Petersen: I remember she picked us up at the airport. I'm sure she was assisted in it in some way. The bus ride was hours long, at least two to three hours, so we were going way out in the country. Which was fun because there was a bar on the bus.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Bob was just having a blast, talking to people, walking up and down the aisle and visiting.

We arrived at the ranch, we were having the party, the dinner and the dancing, and it was getting dark. Suddenly there were some lights in the distance. It was a helicopter getting closer and closer. So then the hostess went out with some of the hired hands or friends and they all had lights. They went out in the back, close to the dance floor out on the lawn, and they made a circle with lights. Then the helicopter came down and landed in that circle. The sound of a helicopter— just the sound and the visual.

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: So the helicopter landed and the host said, "Oh Bob, the mayor has arrived."

[Laughter]

Petersen: The mayor, with his suit like the president, came down. He came out on the lawn and he came over to the dance area and they had a ceremony and the mayor presented Bob with the key to the city.

[Laughter]

Q2: That's what I assumed would happen.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It was a ribbon with a gold key. I never told you this story?

Q: No.

Petersen: Oh god. So Bob is presented the key to the city and the party goes on. People are celebrating. The mayor stays around celebrating too. It's getting late—

[Laughter]

Petersen: So he shakes hands with Bob. "Congratulations."

Q2: He gets back in and takes off.

Petersen: The mayor leaves. Then the party winds down. It went on pretty late, being Texas—or Bob.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because it's so much fun. So we get back on the bus to go back to Fort Worth. Everyone is very happy and laughing. We get about an hour and a half away and the bus driver stops at a little side road country store. The old kind of Texas, little wood grocery store. He stops to give everyone a stretch. People get off. They go in and buy a bag of potato chips or whatever. Bob gets off the bus. I think I stayed on the bus or maybe went out and had a cigarette. I used to smoke. I'm walking around, then standing there, and suddenly I see a police car pull in. No big deal. Police car. Doesn't have the lights on or anything. I'm here and the bus is parked there by the side of the road. The police car comes in and it goes around to the back of the bus. He's back there, visiting and having fun with people. Suddenly the police car comes out from around the bus and Bob's in the police car.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He comes by and he's by the window and I go, "Bob, where are you going?" He was, well, urinating on the back tire of the bus.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So they arrested him for public—what do you call it?

Q: Urination.

Petersen: In public. And it's dark. There are no lights. It's not a town. It's just a little country store. The local police.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I'd had a few drinks—well I was pretty—in one of those moods— Like what's going on? Just this adrenaline and I run over to the police car, start banging on the hood with my fist. I say, "Stop! Stop! Don't take Bob away."

[Laughter]

Petersen: Ricky Begnaud comes over and grabs the back of my collar and pulls me away from the car. He says, "Petersen, don't."

Q2: Don't do that.

Petersen: Actually I was lucky I wasn't arrested. Thinking back on that. The police guys were screwing up the whole trip, taking Bob off. The bus just sat there. People didn't have cell phones

then, but there was a call made, maybe through the bus driver's radio, that Bob had been taken to jail and locked up.

[Laughter]

Petersen: So Bob is in jail. He's trying to explain a little bit, maybe in his humorous way, "I have the key to the city."

[Laughter]

Petersen: I can picture that.

Q2: He was still wearing the key to the city?

Petersen: "You're locking me up? I have the key to the city."

[Laughter]

Q2: He can let himself out.

Petersen: Right. Anyway, we must have stayed there oh at least three hours, maybe longer, waiting for Bob to come back. I didn't go to sleep. Then we thought well, the sun is coming up.

He's in jail. At the jail Bob said that some way a phone call got made to the mayor. The mayor found out about it. They woke him up at four in the morning.

[Laughter]

Petersen: "Bob Rauschenberg is in jail out here." Anyway the mayor called the jail and said, "Let him out."

[Laughter]

Petersen: That's the story. Then the police brought him back to the bus and we went back to Fort Worth, very happy. Everyone was pleased to see him.

Q2: I'm sure.

[Laughter]

Q2: Oh boy. That's quite a story. No, you had not told us that story.

Petersen: So we got back and it was getting early. Got back to the hotel. It's kind of a Texas summer. I just went in the bedroom there and I put on my bathing suit because they had a swimming pool out front. I just dove in. [Laughs] God, what an evening. You think we could take a little break?

Q2: Sure.

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: Bob and I, we both loved mustard. We were always on the lookout for the best mustard, like hot, whatever.

Q2: What was your favorite mustard?

Petersen: We had one and we were trying to replace it, but we didn't save the name or something. I can't recall. I don't think we ever really located another favorite. When we saw hot mustard, we would buy it.

Okay, to get back to the bus. Fort Worth. We arrived back at the hotel.

Q2: You went for a swim.

Petersen: I wanted to mention that Bob wasn't really upset about it. He was just glad to be back.

Thinking of myself, I would have been a little—

Q: Annoyed?

Petersen: Annoyed, right. But he thought well, you know. It was fine. He didn't talk about it much. Maybe he was a little—just thinking, I'm not sure—but maybe he was a little embarrassed and didn't want to harp on the subject. Anyway.

[Laughter]

Q: Did you see Bob get mad much or annoyed?

Petersen: No, Bob wouldn't really get angry or mad. But he had, I guess, at certain times kind of a no-nonsense anger. Very rarely. Maybe it happened three times in the ten years I was there. I remember one time it happened—we were loading a U-Haul truck and he just came out and started saying things kind of abstractly. Not like him. Like, "What's going on? The truck's not loaded." But not even that simple. He was just very, very upset. I don't know. I would kind of ignore it in a way. I said, "It's okay, Bob."

Q2: But that wouldn't happen often?

Petersen: No. Very, very rarely. I think I only saw it twice, come to think of it, where he flew off the handle. Not personally with someone, not blaming. He wouldn't get angry and say, "You did that," or whatever. It was kind of an odd—thinking about it now, I think it was dealing with the pressure, getting a show together, and it was just too much. I remember one time Cy Twombly was visiting and we were in the Beach House at the kitchen counter having coffee and breakfast. We tended to get up a little earlier. Bob got up a little later. He was in the bathroom at the end of



the hall and Cy was at the kitchen counter. It was April 1 so Cy said, “Petersen, let’s do an April Fools’ joke on Bob.” He said, “I have one. Go to the bathroom door and tell Bob that Pontus Hultén and Ileana Sonnabend are arriving this afternoon at the airport to look at your new work.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: So I went down to the bathroom door and said, “Bob, excuse me, just got a call and Ileana and Pontus Hultén are arriving at 4:30 for a visit.” That was it. I left. I walked back to the kitchen counter and Cy was trying to hold his laughter. He’s going [laughs]. Then suddenly Cy said, “Oh my god.” He said, “Petersen, he’s throwing up. Go tell him it’s an April Fools’ joke.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: He was in there going [imitates throwing up].

[Laughter]

Petersen: I just opened the door. I opened the door and I looked in and there was a mirror right there and then the sink and he was at the mirror. I saw him in the mirror and I opened the door a crack and I said, “Bob, April Fools.”” And boy, the look on his face. He didn’t smile.

[Laughter]

Petersen: His eyes, he had those brown—

[Laughter]

Petersen: And in the mirror he was just like—he didn't say anything. That was a funny story.

[Laughter]

Q2: Funny for Cy.

Petersen: Yes, Cy enjoyed it, but Bob—

Q2: When he was working in the studio, did he get anxious, wound up, or was he very relaxed?

Petersen: Very relaxed.

Q2: When I'm working, when I'm very focused on a project, just the kind of energy when you're trying to make something work. This piece isn't quite right—

Petersen: No. Totally relaxed.

Q2: He didn't get agitated like that?

Petersen: He loved working.

Q2: Well, I love doing it, but I get agitated as I'm doing it.

Petersen: He never would move something quickly or complain. He was just working. He worked in a very quiet, calm way.

Q2: Interesting.

Petersen: In fact, I thought of that, going back into the time I was working with Bob. About five years ago or so I was kind of going back through and I go god, I was in the studio with Bob. Wonderful. Then I thought god, he never complained. He wouldn't say, "That's the wrong color." He never was upset with his work. Everyone is different. I've been working with artists where the paintbrush flies across the room.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Excuse my language, but like, "Fuck it, fuck it." [Laughs] You get that way. "It's not working!" But with Bob, there was never a hint of any of that.

Q: When he was working and things didn't seem to be working, did he just sort of walk away from it or did he keep just trying to fix it?

Petersen: You didn't know at the time what he was doing. Of course he would go maybe into where the fabric was stored. He was never, like you said, frantic about it or anything. No. He would just walk around, maybe stop and watch a soap opera for a while on TV.

[Laughter]

Petersen: He always had the TV on. He loved soap operas. When I first arrived on Captiva—this is 1970—he had a little black-and-white TV with rabbit ears [laughs]. There was a show then called *Dark Shadows* [1966–71]. I don't know if you have ever heard of it.

Q: I used to watch it as a kid. It was a vampire—

Petersen: I think I mentioned that to you. Bob loved *Dark Shadows* and I did too. It was a vampire series.

Q: And it was totally cheesy.

Petersen: Bob loved that show. It came on like at one o'clock in the afternoon.

Q: I think it was actually later because when I was a kid—

Petersen: Was it a little later? Four maybe?

Q: Around four I think, because as a kid I would already be home from school.

Petersen: I know it'd be still daylight and you're watching a vampire. [Laughs] Still day.

Q2: Was it a comedy?

Petersen: No, it was a—what do you call it?

Q: It was a soap opera, but it was a vampire soap opera. It was so cheesy, you could see the bat with the string on it being lowered down.

[Laughter]

Petersen: It was really wonderful. No, it wasn't comical.

Q: It was about Collinwood and the whole Collins family. It would go back and forth in time, like different generations, and it had the same people playing different—

Q2: The grandson and the grandfather.

Q: Right.

Q2: And he would have that playing on the TV right there as he was working? He would have something like that on TV?

Petersen: Bob didn't usually work with *Dark Shadows* on. He would watch.

[Laughter]

Q2: He had to pay attention to *Dark Shadows*. [Laughs]

Petersen: It was just a half-hour show and he loved that show. When my wife Cinda and I moved to Tivoli, 1997, around year 2000—there's a little bookstore in Tivoli just a block away. I'd go down and collect books for images and whatever. I liked the owner, David Brooks. It was called Brooks Books. One day I came in and a nice car, like a limousine—a Lincoln or something—pulled up in front and a young man got out and then an elderly, larger man got out. Brooks looked out the window and he said—I don't know the name. I can't recall. But he said, "Oh, that's Mr. Smith," or—I'm embarrassed I didn't get the name. He said, "He's so wonderful." He didn't come in yet. He said, "He lives in Rhinebeck [New York] and he's the writer of *Dark Shadows*." [Laughs] I said, "Oh god, I've got to call Bob to tell him that I met the writer."

[Laughter]

Petersen: Anyway. The little TV. When we first got that TV hooked up, it was kind of strange. It was daytime and we were watching it and this film came on, a movie. It was maybe, I don't

know, Saturday, Sunday, in the daytime. It was called *The Incredible Shrinking Man* [1957]. It's black-and-white.

Q2: I've heard of it, yes.

Petersen: The guy gets littler and littler. Then he's walking in and he's by a cop and he's only this high and the cop is like—and Bob goes, “God, it's an Oldenburg.”

[Laughter]

Q2: Can I take you back to Texas in this same period? In December, I guess '76—is that right?—there was a film that Bob made with Viola Farber and the musician David [E.] Tudor, called *Brazos River* [1976]. Were you there for that? This was in Dallas.



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

Petersen: Oh yes.

Q2: Do you remember that collaboration? Apparently there was some tension during that shoot.

Do you remember that?

Petersen: The tension? I've never heard. I didn't know.

Q2: What were your impressions of it?

Petersen: Oh, it was wonderful. We met every day for a week or six, seven, eight days.

Wonderful dance studio. Viola and the dancers would do their dance. It was being filmed. David Tudor was mixing over at the table with all the screens and doing his collaboration. I wasn't so involved. I took a lot of photos. That's about all I—

Q2: You took photos during that shoot?

Petersen: Yes. I have about eight proof sheets. It was so much fun. Well, fun. We always had—but work, say, but not—you mentioned tension. I don't recall that. Maybe just a hint of something in the control room, but I don't know. I was outside. Was your story about that?

Q2: That's what I've heard. Obviously I was not there, but I saw a screening of it recently and there were a few of Farber's dancers from the company who were at the screening. Apparently the tension was around the editing of the video, which apparently Bob was involved in.

Petersen: Right, yes.



Q2: What he did that Farber apparently was upset with was that he was splicing and re-cutting the video so that you don't see the dance as a continual stream, but the film, it's actually—

Petersen: Who was doing that?

Q2: Bob apparently. The dance is more cut up so you see a person—

Petersen: Right, I kind of recall that.

Q2: —and then suddenly you see another dancer on another part of the stage.

Petersen: Right, like he did with *Canoe* [1966], the movie back in the early sixties. Beautiful.

Q2: So what these dancers were saying was that, to her, there was a certain violation—

Petersen: Viola Farber?

Q2: Yes, because it was cutting up the choreography. You couldn't see the full phrase of the movement. It would be cut.

Petersen: I wasn't so—but it rings a bell that there was something. You saw it? It's not cut up anymore?

Q: No, it is.

Q2: It is. It's edited.

Petersen: It is?

Q2: Yes. It's edited—

Petersen: I haven't seen it since '77.

Q: Would you like to see a clip of it? If you're interested, they can arrange for you to see a clip of it.

Petersen: Oh yes, if that's okay with your time or whatever.

Q2: Sure. We can keep talking and they'll set it up and we can look at it.

Petersen: We had a little house that we rented, Bob and I. It seemed like a little house. Then David Tudor, Viola. I'd make chicken or bake some potatoes and get drinks together. They would sit at a table in the living room and talk about collaborating. It seemed wonderful.

Q2: Do you remember where the invitation came from? How he got involved? Was it Viola who invited him?

Petersen: No. So many things just happened in a flow. He would maybe just say, “Well, we’re going to Texas to work with Viola.”

Q2: Was he in close touch with her in that period or with people like David Tudor?

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: What I’m thinking of is that right after this, a few months later, is *Tantric Geography* [1977], when he works with Merce Cunningham and John Cage for the first time in a number of years. I’m wondering whether there was something that happened where he got back in touch with the Cage/Cunningham people because Viola Farber, David Tudor, that’s where he—

Petersen: No, I wouldn’t think that. Because Viola had her own company. Well she used to be with Merce years—

Q2: That’s what I mean, that he knew her from that circle.

Petersen: I don’t know if Viola and Merce—maybe she was mentioning it to Merce. I don’t know. Merce, they worked with Bob many times for sets and—

Q2: Earlier, much earlier.

Q: In the sixties. After the '64 tour there was a gap where they didn't work together for many, many years.

Petersen: Right. You're saying that maybe the collaboration project with Viola made that connection back again?

Q2: That's what I'm asking. It occurs to me that it's possible because he knew them from the same circle.

Petersen: The dance world, yes. Like in the art/printing world, people know, they find out what's going on. I'm just saying maybe Viola showed the tape to Merce.

Q2: It's possible. If you don't remember it that way, then that's fine. It just occurs to me because it's the same—

Q: Same moment.

Q2: They're close to each other in time.

Petersen: What was the collaboration called with Merce?

Q: *Travelogue* [1977].

Petersen: *Travelogue*.

Q: Yes. Let me see if I have a picture.

Q2: The set is called *Tantric Geography*, right?

Petersen: And another one?

Q2: No, *Travelogue* is the dance and the set that Rauschenberg made, he called *Tantric Geography*. Is there a picture of it?

Petersen: Is that with the chairs?

Q2: It's with the chairs and the bike.

Petersen: Yes. Didn't that platform move? Was that on wheels? The chairs.

I have photos of Bob trying on the costume with the cans tied to his legs. Beautiful.

Q2: But that moment, you don't remember that as a sort of reconciliation, that Rauschenberg decided, I want to work with Cunningham again, or Cunningham approached—

Petersen: No, I think he was approached by Merce.

Q2: But you don't remember a reaction to that where Bob said, "Wow, Merce called. I haven't talked to him in years," or, "I haven't seen him. I haven't worked with him in a long time."

Petersen: No.

Q2: No, it wasn't like that?

Petersen: No, I think—they got along. In my view—

Q2: They just had stopped working together.

Petersen: Yes. I remember we would go down to—oh Canal— What's the name of that—White Hall? This big building with artists' studios, dancing.

Q2: I don't remember what it's called, but I know what you're talking about.

Petersen: We would go down there and Bob would watch Merce in rehearsal.

Q2: Not the Westbeth [Center for the Arts]? Would Cunningham have already been at the Westbeth in the West Village?

Petersen: Yes, Westbeth.

Q2: Very far west.

Petersen: Yes, Westbeth, right. We would go down there.

Q2: Not Canal Street. It's Bethune Street. It's very far over toward the river. That's where the Cunningham studio was for years. So you would go over and watch rehearsals?

Petersen: Yes. I don't know if Merce invited Bob or Bob—I don't know how that merge really happened.

Q2: Interesting.

Petersen: Did you ever meet Merce Cunningham?

Q2: I used to take dance there a lot in the 1990s and so Merce would be there. Merce would speak in a certain fashion.

Petersen: That's what I was going to say.

Q2: You weren't exactly having a conversation with Merce.

Petersen: With Merce, just in my visual, he was very—with the dancers—I don't know what the word would be. Well, Merce Cunningham.

[Laughter]

Q2: My impression is that Cunningham was less social, whereas John Cage was very outgoing.

Petersen: And Bob.

Q2: That's my impression.

Petersen: Me too. My impression is that he'd be very stern-faced. Wonderful man, I'm sure. Not to do with his—just his—

Q2: There's a photo of it?

Q: I could have sworn there was a photo of it. Oh, there it is.

Petersen: Oh, beautiful. What's the year of that one?

Q: '77, I think.





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

Petersen: Wow, beautiful. I took a few photos of that. Oh and this was wonderful.

Q: It had these really cool designs of the costumes.

Petersen: This is the one where the cans were on the—

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Not this particular—

Q: Right, but it's the same performance.

Petersen: Yes. Beautiful. Wow.

Q2: When you were talking about going to see rehearsals, it would have been before this? It would have been through the 1970s?

Petersen: I'd say before.

Q2: You don't remember there being some moment, some significant moment, when Cunningham approached Rauschenberg and said, "Let's work together again?"

Petersen: No. It could have been on a phone call, it could have been in a letter, or maybe in person at some gathering.

Q: When Bob was working on making set designs and costume designs, how was that work different—how did he approach that work? I would think it would be much different than the way he normally is working.

Petersen: I think he approached it just the way he did with his paintings.

Q2: With this, were you working with him on this set?

Petersen: No, I was doing my own work. I was there on Captiva, but I had a little separate studio.

Q2: You were doing your own work while he was doing the set for *Travelogue*?

Petersen: Because I was with Sonnabend Gallery. I had a show in '74 in Paris.

Sheryl Pharr and Marcia Stice, they sewed all the fabrics. I have to get these photos together. I have pictures of them in the studio with the sewing machines making this and a wonderful photo of Bob trying on the cans with the strings. I would say he approached it in the same way he does with all his work.

Q: Do you know [Laura] Lolly Anderson?

Petersen: I don't know her. I've met her. Bob introduced me—Laurie Anderson?

Q: No, Lolly Anderson. She was a little girl who was dyslexic who lived nearby apparently. I was wondering if you knew her. She apparently said that Bob was a great influence because she struggled so much with—

Petersen: On Captiva?

Q: Yes. She sent some photographs to Christopher—they're snapshots of a lot of people around and there were some of Bob in his underwear, trying on stuff.

[Laughter]

Q: They're kind of funny.

Petersen: On Captiva?

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Yes, I recall her.

Q: She was a little girl. She said that at one point on her birthday Bob gave her a birthday present basically encouraging her not to give up and to—

Petersen: Bob was very wonderful, sweet with her, I recall. He was, generally. She would come over to the Beach House and visit. I think Bob would go see her at her house. I don't recall how they met.

Q: I know she had sent an email because—

[INTERRUPTION]

Petersen: What was the telegram she sent?

Q: She sent an email to—

Petersen: Recently?

Q: Yes, within the last year or so. She sent something to Christopher.

Petersen: Oh, to Christopher?

Q: Yes and she sent him a bunch of pictures. They were just, like I said, family snapshots and things.

Petersen: Maybe her mother took them, then?

Q: I don't know.

Petersen: Oh gosh. I have to get my photos together of all this in the studio.

Q2: It sounds like you documented a lot.

Petersen: Well, I wasn't really documenting. I just took pictures because I don't like to sit around and I had a nice camera, a Leica CL. I loved it. I still have it. But now everything is digital. I would just take pictures. I didn't think to myself that it was being documented. I didn't do it for that reason. I just did it because I was there.

[Laughter]

Petersen: And to show Bob, “Look at the photo I took,” or whatever.

Q2: So you would print it up and show it to him?

Petersen: I just admired what was going on, all our friends and working together and I would just take a picture.

Q2: Another question we were going to ask you—do you want to narrate this? This is the Dallas Museum of Art, possibly during the period when you’re there to work on *Brazos River*. There is a long-missing artwork called *Greenhouse* from 1950 that apparently you and Bob found or rediscovered in Dallas.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Greenhouse*, 1950  
Wire mesh, twigs, wire, paint, glass globe, and  
glass shards  
54 x 12 x 12 inches (137.2 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Petersen: I recall going through storage with the director or curator. This is just kind of recall.

They said, “This is a piece that you entered in a show and it was never sent back.” That’s what I recall.

Q2: They contacted Bob to say that or how did—

Petersen: No, it happened right there as we were looking at it. They had it in storage.

Q2: Was it during the period that you were there to work on the dance video?

Petersen: I believe so. That was '76 or so.

Q: You just happened to go to the Dallas art museum and they were like, “Oh by the way, we have this thing.”

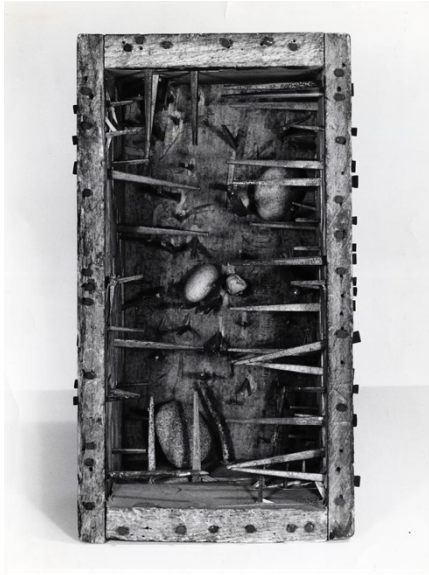
Q2: [Laughs] “We have your work.”

Q: How did that come about?

Petersen: We visited or went to so many museum directors. I don't know how it originated.

Maybe on the phone, they called Bob like, “Come over and look at the space for a show if you're interested.” Something like that. So we would just go over. I remember going into the storage and seeing this piece. It's a little—not vague, but I don't know if it was the same time, but they had the wooden—

Q: The music box [*Music Box (Elemental Sculpture)*, 1953].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Music Box (Elemental Sculpture)*, 1953  
Assemblage: wood packing box with stencil  
text, nails, masonry nails, and four  
unattached stones  
11 3/4 x 6 1/4 x 6 1/4 inches (29.8 x 15.9 x  
15.9 cm)  
Current location unknown

Petersen: The music box with the nails. Bob said, “Oh, Jasper has one of these too.” That’s just what I remember. I got to hold it. Bob just had it. I was amazed at the title and the piece. Did you ever see that piece?

Q2: I don’t think so.

Petersen: It’s a wooden box, about so high, and there are a hundred nails going through. There are so many things I could have mentioned to Bob. Now I think, I wonder if Bob put the nails in? That’s a lot of hammering.

[Laughter]



Petersen: He probably did. Isn't it incredible? Bob was holding it and he said, "Oh, Jasper has one of these." He did maybe two, is that right?

Q: Yes.

Petersen: Then Bob said, "This is called *Music Box*." Then he tipped it a little bit and the rock goes [makes noise], down the nails and that's the music. I just looked at it. In my mind, I'm going god, how beautiful. The idea of the rock hitting a nail as music.

Q: They weren't saying, "You can have this back," though, for that one? Because there's one that nobody knows where it is.

Petersen: I think a curator or director said, "Would you be interested in it? Here it is. Would you be interested in having it returned?" I believe Bob said—I can't remember what he said, but I think he—Bob was describing the piece, which I don't recall, when he made it, the sculpture. Is it in the collection?

Q: No and we don't know where it is, the original one, because this was apparently—the one Jasper owns was apparently created after. And so the first one—

Petersen: There is just Jasper's?

Q: That we're aware of.

Petersen: So this is a photo of Jasper's?

Q: This is Jasper's. We don't know where the original one is. It had been in the Frederick [R.] Weisman collection at one time, but we—

Q2: Who is Rachel Rosenthal?

Q: Rachel Rosenthal was a dancer and had a company. She recently passed away, I think just this year. That one had belonged to her and then it belonged to the Frederick Weisman collection, I believe, and now we have no idea where it is. We're always sort of on the hunt for that—

Petersen: What was that about the Weisman collection?

Q: The Frederick Weisman collection had owned it for a while. I don't know, after they—

Petersen: The first *Music Box*?

Q: Yes.

Petersen: So it did come out of the storage.

Q: No, because I think that was—I don't know the dates, but I think they might have owned it prior. I'm not sure on that. I would have to look at the database to see the dates on it.

Petersen: I recall Bob being surprised because he saw the second one. Because he said, "I know this." He said, "Oh, Jasper has the other one."

Q: This is Jasper's, but the first one, we don't know where it is, the current whereabouts.

Petersen: And the wire.

Q: The wire one, now we have.

Petersen: Yes, I've seen it. It was in one of the—

Q: *Greenhouse* was recently installed here.

Petersen: Oh good.

Q: It's gorgeous.

Petersen: It seems like the *Music Box* was at that—I'm not certain of that.

Q: That it was at the Dallas Museum or was at some other museum?

Petersen: It was at a museum.

Q2: So it may not have been the same—

Q: At the same moment.

Q2: Right, the same moment and the same museum. It may have been—

Petersen: Vaguely, it seemed like the same because they were showing—what's it called, *Greenhouse*?

Q2: *Greenhouse*, yes.

Petersen: *Greenhouse*. Then they said—this is vague—“Oh, we have this other,” and Bob went, “Oh god.” He didn't say oh god, as I recall. He just said, “Oh, Jasper has one.” Beautiful.

Q2: So there's one floating out there somewhere, perhaps.

Q: But we don't know where it is.

Petersen: Have you tried calling some museum? God, that's forty years ago. Or so.

Q: Close to.

Petersen: '76.

Q: Thirty-nine years.

Petersen: I remember seeing it. Bob tipped it and I was just amazed at, like I said, mainly the title, *Music Box*, with the rocks falling inside the box and making—

Q2: A pretty incredible idea.

Petersen: Yes. These are, as I recall, square-headed nails.

Q: I believe so. Roofing nails or something.

Petersen: Yes, from '55. Possibly, if I go through my photos, I'll get a—but I didn't take photos there. I didn't take photos of Bob looking at that. Which would have been a nice photo.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Come to think of it. Because I remember him holding it and being very happy to see it. But I don't recall. It seemed like a museum.

Q2: Well, it remains a little bit of a mystery.

Petersen: Did you get in touch with museums? Would they—

Q: What museum to contact?

Petersen: Yes, which museum.

Q: I can randomly just say, “Hey, do you have?”

[Laughter]

Q: Actually, not long ago, I did put out a—

Petersen: Some kind of email. Because a museum would do archives of every little object, right?

And it would be in their file. Rauschenberg. I don’t know.

Q: In theory.

Petersen: If it was in a museum, it seems like it would show up.

Q2: Eventually.

Petersen: I'm sorry I can't really define that moment exactly.

Q2: It's in Texas?

Petersen: But I do remember seeing it.

Q2: You remember it in Texas?

Petersen: I remember Bob saying, "Jasper has one." He's like, "This is just like the one Jasper has." You know, study. He didn't say study, but he said that there was a second one. Jasper had one.

Q2: In your memory, that's happening in Texas? Whether it's the Dallas Museum or not, it's in Texas at some point? Or could it be in another museum somewhere else?

Petersen: God, we went to so many museums. The Walker [Art Center] in Minneapolis? Let's see.

[Laughter]

Q: It's not Texas.

Petersen: Minneapolis. I liked that. Was that the director, Robert [T.] Buck?

Q: I don't know.

Petersen: Does that ring a bell? Then he became, I guess you say, director of the Brooklyn Museum.

Q2: That increases the possibilities. If it's not museums in Texas, that makes it more complicated.

Petersen: Bob loved the Walker. I forget what he showed there. They took Bob on a tour of the new museum. As soon as we walked in—have you been to the Walker?

Q2: No, I haven't been there.

Q: I've never been there.

Petersen: This is the seventies. As soon as Bob walked in, he went, "God, what a beautiful museum." Because it had these kind of little angles—whatever. I remember we had a great time there.

Q: Buck had been the director of the Albright-Knox [Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York] and then went to the Brooklyn.



Petersen: Albright-Knox.

Q: That's Robert T. Buck.

Q2: Where's the Albright-Knox?

Q: In Buffalo. It's not huge, but it's a nice museum. I have been there. I have not been to—

Petersen: Oh really? Buffalo? God, I don't recall going to Buffalo.

Q: They own that nice Combine called *Ace* [1962]. It's a fairly large—but that's in their collection.

Petersen: I remember Robert T. Buck at the museum.

Q2: Well, it will get solved at some point, hopefully.

Q: Hopefully.

Q2: Let me ask you about one other dance collaboration and that is *Glacial Decoy* with Trisha Brown. Were you around for that and do you remember that process? This is when the photos were projected on the scrims.

Petersen: Bob took all the photos. He was just getting back into photography. What's the year of this one? '79. This is the year—

'79. This is kind of, in a way, personal or whatever. It's life. But Bob was getting related to Terry Van Brunt. So I became less involved. I would go to my studio because I wanted to go away—

[Laughter]

Petersen: —in a way, not because of Bob, but because of that tension.

Q2: Shift in relationships.

Petersen: I went to the performance. I remember setting up the photos. I didn't help—I believe Bob's other assistants did that, to make these screens. Alex Mirzaoff, was that right?

Photographer.

Q: Took a lot of photos.

Petersen: He was photographing at that time. I don't know, but someone helped with the projection. It's all projected on the rear, as I recall. Beautiful piece. Is it listed who did the sound?

Q: I don't know if it lists that there.

Q2: I think the sound is the projectors. I've seen it much more recently, but the projectors click.

Isn't that what they're dancing to? That's what I recall.

Petersen: Oh and maybe that was amplified or something.

Q2: Yes, that's what I remember. I don't know whether someone is credited as designing that aside from Bob. This also, I think, premiered at the Walker Center, speaking of the Walker Center, in Minnesota. I think the first performance of this is in Minnesota.

Petersen: The first performance. What year would that be, '79?

Q2: In '79, yes.

Petersen: But I went to the performance, I believe it was in Brooklyn.

Q2: At BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music], maybe?

Petersen: Somewhere in Brooklyn, it seemed like.

Q2: I saw it at BAM, but much more recently.

Petersen: If you say first performance—I've only seen it once.

Q2: You might not have been at the first.

Petersen: Maybe Bob went to the Walker with Terry Van Brunt or something.

Q2: You were talking about your photography habit, if that's the right word. That you weren't necessarily documenting, but you had a camera and you would shoot. Do you remember that period when Bob was getting into taking photos again himself? Were you there when that was happening? Do you remember him starting to say, "Wow, I'm really liking taking photos?"

Yes, it is at the Walker. May '79.

Petersen: I can't recall the year. I guess it was around '74. I was up by myself. I used to come up to the fourth floor and just look around the collection. There was, at the time, a rack with large paintings in it and then you could go around the back and there were the windows with the light coming through. I saw some boxes by the window. So I opened it up and there were black-and-white photographs that Bob had taken. I was looking at them. Beautiful. Cy coming down the steps [*Cy + Roman Steps*, 1952] and that car with the tarp over it [*Rome Flea Market (III)*, 1952]. They were in there. Maybe that evening at dinner, I said, "Bob, I was up in the collection and I opened some boxes and there are some beautiful photos of yours up there." He said, "Yes, that's when I used to take photographs." He didn't say, "I don't do it anymore." He said, "That's when I used to really—when I had a camera."



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Cy + Roman Steps*, 1952  
 Gelatin silver print, five parts  
 14 3/4 x 14 3/4 inches (48.3 x 48.3 cm) each

The evening went on and maybe a few days later, Ileana Sonnabend and Antonio were coming over for a visit. Ileana said something like, “What are you working on—what you doing?” I said, “Working in the chapel, doing some paintings.” I said, “Ileana, I was up in the collection and I saw some beautiful photographs of Bob’s up there.” Not meaning let’s go look at them. I just mentioned it. I said, “God, they’re really some beautiful photos in there.” At dinner, say an hour later, Ileana looked at me and she said, “Petersen, could you go up and get one of those boxes?” [Laughs] Ileana started looking through the Rauschenberg photos. I don’t know if Ileana had a show, but that kind of started sparking interest.

Then the Gemini project—and time went by. Bob still wasn’t taking photographs. Actually, I had a camera and he would ask me—one time we were in Rome and Stalin had passed and on a brick wall was “*Stalin è morto*” [Joseph Stalin, née Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili]. The car was there and I had the camera and Bob looked over and he said, “Petersen, please take a photo of that.” He took one with—who’s in it? There’s one that he took. He said it was very similar to—

Q: I was going to say, there are two versions of that, but I thought they were vintage photographs of “*Stalin è morto*” [*Rome Wall (III)*, 1953 and *Rome Wall (IV)*, 1953].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Rome Wall (III)*, 1953  
Gelatin silver print  
19 x 19 inches (48.3 x 48.3 cm)

Petersen: Stalin? Well, maybe this is [Nikita S.] Khrushchev or something. I just remember taking the picture. [Note: Stalin passed away in 1953, Khrushchev in 1971.]

Q2: Stalin would have died earlier. It could have been—

Petersen: Bob, once in a while, would say, “Take a photo.” Getting back to Bob starting photography again—this is ’79, so it was during the *Hoarfrost* series at Gemini. They did the diver and he had a lawsuit over copyright for the diver. So he was speaking with Sidney Felsen in the process of getting a lawyer and settling it. That took a while. It kind of conflicted, money-wise. Bob said, “I’ll give them a couple prints, whatever.” It ended up fine, but during that process, Bob said, “Copyright. I can take my own photos.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: So he started taking—and even in his work, they’re all—he really started taking photographs.

Q2: But as you recall it, it was triggered by that lawsuit decision? It wasn’t an interest that had been rekindled before when you had found—

Petersen: I kind of knew. From the Abrams book, which came out ’69. There’d be some beautiful photos. Actually Bob and I were in Malibu and the book just arrived. We were by the fireplace. We were going through it. He hadn’t seen it before. Andrew Forge. Beautiful book. There are photos with typewriting over them. I said, “Boy, that’s a beautiful photo,” and Bob said, “Yes, I took all the photographs.” So from that lawsuit the copyright thing, he just mentioned, “I’ll do my own photos.” Then with Terry Van Brunt, they went to a camera store and got cameras and he started taking pictures. Then the ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] thing. They went to China and he had a nice camera. These are all Bob’s photos in *Glacial Decoy*.

Q2: I think in terms of *Glacial Decoy*, we’re good. We’ve gone through most of the stuff that I had, except for those—I was not remembering whether we had talked about the astrology. Did we want to talk about that?

Petersen: Astrology?

Q2: Did we talk about that?

Q: I don't think we talked—I know I've talked to you on the phone about Zoltan Mason and astrology, but I don't think we've talked about it in these oral histories at all. Or have we? Do you recall?

Q2: I don't think so. Just to ask you to talk about his interest in astrology and about the astrologer that you worked with.

Petersen: Seems like I did have that. I'm not sure. I remember going through that story with Zoltan. It's kind of a long story, in a way.

Q: I know I've talked to you on the phone about it, but I don't recall if it's—

Petersen: It was probably around 1962 or so. When did Bob purchase this house?

Q: In '65, I think.

Petersen: '65? So around '67, he purchased—I don't know the exact dates—the Florida property.

Q: I thought it was a little later, but maybe.

Petersen: A little later?



Q: I think so.

Petersen: Say around '65 then, before Florida, Bob mentioned that he was going—he had advice or he decided—he went to an astrologer because he said he had a period where he couldn't talk. He didn't say the reason, but he just didn't talk. He went to astrologer Zoltan Mason up on, I recall, Madison and Fifty-seventh, up in there. Seemed like it was. I didn't come here until 1970, but Bob told me the story. He went to the astrologer and Zoltan Mason gave him advice that he should live near water. I believe he mentioned Manhattan is surrounded by water.

Bob said there was a party uptown. This is after Zoltan Mason mentioned, “Well, it'd be nice if you could be by the water.” I don't recall the name, but the lady hostess had a new car, a Jaguar, a white, really beautiful Jaguar. She was talking to Bob and she said, “Would you like to drive it?” So Bob drove it and he loved the car. So [laughs] he told her, “I'll trade you a painting for this car.”

[Laughter]

And she did. He got the car. He got in the Jaguar and he said he started out in Manhattan. He said he took every road to the water, down the coast. Maybe not every road, but—

Q2: [Laughs] A lot.

Petersen: Then he came around down all the East Coast and he came around Florida and up the Gulf side and found Captiva. And he loved it.

Q2: Did you also consult Zoltan Mason? Did you yourself go to see the astrologer?

Petersen: Yes. Well, I went with Bob, but I would stay in the waiting room, I guess you call it. Then I would come back later. Or did we go at the same time? For a period there, we did it quite often.

Q2: Did Bob talk to you about that, about astrology or spirituality or religion or anything like that? Did you have conversations about what astrology meant to him?

Petersen: No.

Q2: No? It was just, “We’re going to the astrologer today?”

Petersen: It was just advice, kind of direction, possibly.

Q2: But he believed in it? He believed in the advice? He took the advice seriously, clearly.

Petersen: Oh yes. Zoltan Mason would give us these charts and everything, like you do in astrology. Then after he does the reading with your birth date and so forth—place, location—

then he reads it to you. Actually, I believe I have this. It's a little tape recording and it says, "Zoltan Mason, RR" on it. It's the old tape deck, the little—

Q: Cassette.

Q2: A Dictaphone, a small one? Or a regular-sized cassette?

Petersen: No, it's a little—from the sixties. We used to have them.

Q: They're like 3 inches by 2 inches or so.

Q2: A mini-cassette.

Petersen: A little round recording disc. I'll get it together.

Q2: A round disc. I don't know what that would be.

Petersen: I've always wanted to listen to it, but you can't—that recorder is out of date.

Q2: Is it a reel-to-reel? Is it a reel where you—

Petersen: Yes, right. But it's a little portable—

Q2: So it's a reel-to-reel recorder.

Petersen: —little one, with a little thing like—and wide. It's not the thin one. It's wider. I was talking to a friend here recently and I said—actually, I called my brother because he has one. I asked him if he still had that tape recorder. He said he did. I can't recall how that turned out. I didn't ask him if I could have it. Anyway, my brother's fine, but it didn't happen. I didn't get the recorder. Then another friend of mine said, "Find it on eBay." I haven't done that yet.

Q2: I have a reel-to-reel deck there, but you can record them at different speeds. But you're right, you can get a 10-inch reel, a 7-inch reel.

Petersen: Yes, you can get big ones, little ones.

Q2: The decks can play them back. You just have to know which speed to play it back at.

Petersen: So that may be interesting just to hear.

Q2: You mean it could be a recording of a consultation of—

Petersen: Yes, the consultation.

Q2: That would be very interesting. [Laughs]

Petersen: Anyway, that's why Bob fell in love. He loved Captiva. It's on the water. And so he purchased that.

Q2: Following the instructions of the astrologer.

Petersen: He did quite a lot of work, drawings, as I recall. Because he said, "Well, if I'm going to buy this, I better get some money."

[Laughter]

Petersen: He did a set of drawings for Ileana, for a show in Paris. They're beautiful—kind of done like the early lighter fluid drawings.

Q: The '68 transfer drawings.

Petersen: Yes.

Q: That makes sense. Did we talk about Brigid Berlin?

Q2: No, we didn't. Well, I don't think we talked about that. What episode was that? I have that in a note, but I didn't know—

Q: I know you had said that Brigid Berlin used to hang out down at the kitchen table and record conversation.

Petersen: Brigid Polk?

Q: Brigid Polk, right, also known as Brigid Berlin. But that she used to hang out and record conversations at the kitchen table.

Petersen: Yes. And in the studio, she did a recording.

Q: Number one, how did Bob know Brigid? I know she was involved with Andy Warhol. Is that how he met her, through Andy Warhol?

Petersen: I don't really know. I would think they'd met before my arrival, at Max's Kansas City—I don't know. I'm just picturing how they met and they'd get talking. Debbie Taylor may know a little about that. She worked here and she got along really well with Brigid. I did too. I liked her. She took a lot of Polaroids. At that time, like Andy, we all took Polaroids.

[Laughter]

Q: She wasn't an assistant or ever helping with Bob?

Petersen: Oh no. She was just coming over.

Q: She's a social—

Petersen: Social. Have fun. Take a picture and record—during the evening, Bob and I went down to the first floor and were working on a nice show for Leo, I believe. Big cardboard painting. The one with string coming down one box and then the boxes, little ones, are at the bottom. We were threading the string through. So I was kind of inside the box and Brigid recorded that. She really liked that recording. Then she played it to us and I've always wanted to listen to it. The recording, to me, and I think—well, I'm not sure, but it seems very sexual.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Because I'm in the box and it's kind of a muffled—and Bob's underneath and he's going, "Pull a little harder!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: "It's not in the hole!"

[Laughter]

Petersen: We're just doing it in the working. We're working. We're trying to get the string through the hole.

Q: In the box.

[Laughter]

Petersen: “A little higher in the box!” Or whatever. Brigid played it for us because she was just flipping over it, laughing. She said, “Oh, pull the string a little harder! Pull it up!”

[Laughter]

Petersen: And our voices are so calm, in the box. I don’t know. Well, I do know. I always wanted to re-listen to that.

Q2: She would record habitually? She would record often? She would bring a recorder over and just turn it on?

Petersen: Not that often. She had it in her little bag. I guess we went down to work and she just kind of hooked it up. Actually, I recall she didn’t really mention it.

[Laughter]

Petersen: You know, “I’m going to record you.”



Q: She just was doing it.

Petersen: Because people, in those days, would just take a picture or whatever.

Q2: [Laughs] I would like to hear that too. Are these recordings—

Petersen: Can we get in touch with Brigid?

Q: David has tried a number of times. I know that Karen Thomas actually did talk to her and she had expressed interest in—

Petersen: Now, Karen—I'm getting everyone—

Q: Karen Thomas was the person who was originally doing the series of oral histories. I know you had had correspondence with her. This was several years ago. She actually did have at least one meeting with Brigid and Brigid had expressed interest in having the tapes turned over to the Foundation.

Petersen: She did have interest?

Q: I think she did. However, since Columbia's been involved with the project, we've tried to get in touch with her and she's not responded. David White, I think, has called a couple times and never heard back from her.

Q2: Does she live in New York?

Q: Yes, she does. I had seen her a few years ago at the Loretta Howard [Gallery, New York] show.

Petersen: I'm trying to remember where I saw her on a TV program.

Q: Loretta Howard had a show on Black Mountain.

Petersen: Excuse me?

Q: Not Black Mountain, on Max's Kansas City, a few years ago, and she was at that [*Artists at Max's Kansas City, 1965–1974*, 2010].

Petersen: Maybe that was it.

Q: She was at that opening. But that's the last time I've seen her too.

Petersen: Time goes on. I recall I was with Cinda then and Leo Castelli and [Antoinette] Toiny [Castelli] up near 4 East Seventy-seventh Street. Was that Madison or Fifth? Anyway there was a restaurant a block away. A very wonderful French restaurant. Leo would go there and Toiny, quite often, because it's right in their neighborhood. As soon as Leo came in, of course, "Mr.

Castelli.” It was a wonderful, wonderful restaurant. Then sometime, a couple years went by, and Cinda and I were there again because I had an opening at Castelli Graphics on Seventy-seventh. I recall I took Cinda over there and there was a table and Brigid was there. I hadn’t seen her around for, say, eight years. I recognized her, but she had her hair kind of all—I’m not saying now, this is ’84 or so. She just looked different. Before, she was kind of the Chelsea Hotel hair—but then she had a very elegant, like a dress on. Never saw Brigid in a dress. [Laughs] I thought, oh god, that’s Brigid Polk. I’m a little shy. I just didn’t want to walk over. I was kind of hoping she might recognize me. But then everyone changes. I probably looked different too. Years go by. Because then, when she was here, my hair was down to here.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Then when I met—I got it trimmed. Sheryl Pharr did it on Captiva, probably around I’d say ’77, somewhere in there. Because she would do Bob’s hair at the Beach House and one day I said—maybe she hinted it’d be nice. I said yes.

Q2: Take it off.

Petersen: Actually, I liked it so much better.

Q: Long or short?

Petersen: Short. Because long—oh, it was fun, but it got so long, I had a ponytail and it was pulling my hair back. [Laughs] I felt like—anyway, I don't know.

[Laughter]

Petersen: Well, the styles change too. You still see that kind of hippie somewhere around. People do whatever they want with their hair.

[Laughter]

Q2: I feel like I've exhausted my agenda of questions. Have you?

Q: I think we have covered pretty much everything. I have one question about the printing press. So there was Little Janis, there was Grasshopper. Were there other presses? Lawrence Voytek said there was an Atlas press, but he said, "I only saw Petersen use it. I never saw Bob use it." He said that in fact, for a long time, there was just a TV set sitting on it. But were there other presses down there that were used or was it just Little Janis and Grasshopper?

Petersen: No, Atlas was used, but there was a TV set on it for a long, long time.

[Laughter]

Petersen: A few years.

Q: Did Bob use Atlas or did just you use Atlas? The Atlas press.

Petersen: I never used it for my work, no.

Q: Oh, okay.

Petersen: But Bob did a series, I believe with Peter Wirth, on it.

Q: And you don't know what that series was, though? [Note: *Airport Suite*]

Petersen: I would recognize a photo of it, I think. What was that print? We did so much work.

[Laughter]

Petersen: But I remember I cleaned Atlas up because it had sat with the TV and it needed cleaning, oiling, and in Florida, you get that humidity, a little haze of rust. Let's see.

Q: Lawrence said it was a pretty big press.

Petersen: It was very similar work to the *Airport* series, as I recall, made in Tampa.

Graphicstudio.

Q: Graphicstudio, the *Airport Suite* was totally different than the *Made in Tampa* prints.

Q2: You mean it was around that time?

Petersen: Yes.

Q: Around that time or it was similar to that body of work?

Petersen: Similar to that body of work.

Q: Are you talking about the *Made in Tampa* lithographs or are you talking about—because those are quite different than the *Airport Suite*. The *Airport Suite* has fabric and—

Petersen: Bottle tops, the tie, and all that.

Q: Yes. Whereas the *Made in Tampa* lithographs are thin, long.

Petersen: No, I meant “made in Tampa,” not as a title. Related made in Tampa to the *Airport Suite* that I recall being—

Q: Okay, I thought you were talking about the series of work.

Petersen: I don't know if Peter Wirth was just proofing it. I remember Bob seeing a print from it or a pull and he liked it. But I don't know what that print was done for. Oh, Don Saff would know this. I'm just vaguely going back. Maybe with the *Airport* series, they did some of the printing on Captiva.

Q2: That's what it says.

Petersen: And they had the plates. See, I wasn't involved. I was there, but for the *Airport Suite*, Don Saff took Bob to a newspaper company, printing newspapers. They had these heavy cardboard mold sheets, as I recall. They would be inked up by roller, I believe. Don would know all that, I would think.

Q: I would think so too.

Petersen: Yes, Don, Alan Eaker, they're there. Peter Wirth came from the Graphicstudio and eventually moved to Captiva, assisted with Bob, and a friend with Marcia Stice. And he lived with her. Being done with an etching. If I could see an *Airport* series—like that one with the man, the little—

Q2: The chronology says, "*Airport Suite*, the proofing, editing, sewing, and application, was conducted at the artist's studio in Captiva, Florida."

Petersen: Oh!

Q2: “Yet the supplies, including an etching press, were shipped from Graphicstudio in Tampa.”

Q: Did the Atlas press come from Graphicstudio?

Petersen: Yes.

Q2: Oh well, there we are.

Petersen: Yes, Don Saff brought it down.

Q2: That was the question.

Petersen: Oh, great.

Q2: That clears it up.

Petersen: Maybe I just cleaned it because it was getting rusty after that—when was the *Airport* series, that’s ’78?

Q2: No, ’74. But that sounds like the press came and they did the thing right away, so it wouldn’t have been sitting there with a TV on it.



Q: Right, that's what I'm wondering. I was asking Lawrence what other presses were used and he said, "Well, there's the Atlas press."

Petersen: But what year is he talking about?

Q: He wasn't around until the eighties.

Petersen: Right, he was a student of mine.

Q2: So maybe they used it in '74 and then you weren't using it and you put a TV on it and later you cleaned it.

Petersen: Yes. I think I just looked at it one day and I went god, poor Atlas.

[Laughter]

Petersen: I better clean it up. Oh right, because we had moved it out into the center of the room.

So it says that this was done on Captiva?

Q2: Yes.

Petersen: See, this is a block from the printing. And so is this. Maybe they all are. These are Coke bottles. Or bottle tops. Beautiful.

Q2: Is this text? What is that? Is it a print?

Petersen: It's kind of a heavy—I don't know if they still use it—heavy cardboard that they make the mold for the offset presses.

Q: Like almost—

Petersen: Yes. It's a hard—

Q: We're looking at a picture of *Cat Paws* [(*Airport Suite*), 1974].

Robert Rauschenberg  
*Cat Paws (Airport Suite)*, 1974  
Color relief and intaglio on fabric with bottle caps  
and buttons  
34 x 35 1/2 inches (86.4 x 90.2 cm)  
From an edition of 20, published by Graphicstudio,  
University of South Florida, Tampa



Petersen: It looks like an egg carton.

Q2: *Cat Paws* from the *Airport* series. That's what that is?

Q: Yes.

Petersen: That's beautiful. Is that the same block?

Q: I think it is. It looks like it's a continuation of—yes.

Petersen: Oh and it's being printed on the fabric. Let's see. I'm just curious.

Q2: It's a newspaper.

Petersen: I haven't looked at the *Airport* series for—yes. Beautiful. Yes, it is reversed writing. It has that surface of that cardboardy—it's not the metal—I guess metal. I don't know that process in the newspaper. But these were molds for the offset press. As I recall, they would get discarded and Bob picked up a bunch with Don Saff. Then Don brought Atlas down with a few people. I have photos of moving Atlas in.

Q: Did it stay there or did it—

Petersen: Yes. Don said, “You can have it.” I didn’t, of course, question that. But Bob was quite thrilled. He said, “Okay.”

[Laughter]

Q2: “Thank you.”

Petersen: Yes, thank you, Brand. It’s a Brand press. It’s a very wonderful—

Q: Those are the only three presses that were in Captiva though?

Petersen: Yes, Grasshopper, Little Janis, and Atlas.

Q: Thank you.

Q2: That cleared that up.

Petersen: I found out—or when was that? Was that today? Seems like two days ago.

[Laughter]

Petersen: They painted—oh yes.

Q: I just told you about that.

Petersen: It's yellow now.

Q: It's pink now.

Petersen: Pink, pink, pink.

Q: Grasshopper is pink now.

Q2: Oh because the people—

Petersen: It used to be green.

Q2: And now it's pink?

Petersen: Like Gina said, there was Peter Wirth—

Q: Peter Wirth was working on something and something fell off of it.

Petersen: The color, the paint, so Bob, I guess—

Q: Something broke on it and they had to refurbish the press and when they did, Bob said, “Let’s paint it pink.”

Petersen: Oh, they had to refurbish it because of—

Q: There was something that happened while Peter Wirth was—something fell off of the back of the press or something. This is what Lawrence was saying. And so they had to fix it up and Bob decided to paint it pink.

Petersen: That must have been around ’70—because I wasn’t there when it was pink. It was always green in the seventies. Oh right, Lawrence didn’t work there until ’80.

Q: Until the eighties.

Petersen: No, wait, ’82.

Q: ’81 or ’82, I think.

Petersen: In there. That was kind of a wonderful coincidence story. I instructed printmaking, lithography, etching, and woodcutting at Edison Community College, Fort Myers, Florida. Wonderful student. I loved instructing. You’d get to know people, talking to them. Lawrence and his wife at the time—

Q: Mary [Sullivan Voytek].

Petersen: Mary. They would stay late. Because I would stay late. After the class was over, I'd work until twelve, one in the morning, doing my own work. I said, "Anyone, you're welcome to come in." So Lawrence and Mary would stay later and work on their work. It was a beautiful large print room. We got talking and I said, "Lawrence, how's your work going? What are you doing now?" He said, "Well, I'm making an aluminum boat." He said, "I figured out [laughs] how to weld aluminum." It was just circumstance. I said, "Oh wonderful." So the next day Rauschenberg called me up—the next day—and said, "Petersen." Eric Holt was moving on and he said, "Would you know of anyone who can weld aluminum?"

[Laughter]

Petersen: I said yes.

[Laughter]

Petersen: "I just met him—he's one of my students."

Then Larry and Mary came in. They were in class together. They came in for the next class. Maybe after the instructions, I said, "Oh Larry, Bob Rauschenberg phoned me last night and he's looking for an assistant who—" No, wait, what am I doing? Bob called me. I said that. I'm getting a little—Bob goes, "Maybe I could send him or bring him out." I don't know about

welding, but not everyone can weld aluminum. Like I was saying, the next day I said, “Lawrence, Bob Rauschenberg phoned me yesterday and he wanted to know if you’d be interested in welding aluminum for him.” Lawrence about fainted. He goes, “Yes, I’ll do it.”

[Laughter]

Petersen: So he went out and Bob and Lawrence hit it off. Lawrence started working with him, welding aluminum.

Q2: [Laughs] That is quite a coincidence.

Petersen: Because Larry, he liked the metal assembling—

Q: The *Glut* series [1986–89/1991–94].

Petersen: *Glut*. Like all that metal kind of put together. Bob and Lawrence did all that. I was in New York at the time. I moved in ’84 to Greene Street, SoHo.

Q2: That is an amazing coincidence. Wow.

[END OF INTERVIEW]