

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Larry Wright

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Larry Wright conducted by Sara Sinclair and Christine Frohnert on May 13, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Larry Wright

Location: Mount Vernon, New York

Interviewers: Sara Sinclair and Christine Frohnert

Date: May 13, 2015

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with Larry B. Wright. Today is May 13, 2015. We're at the Rauschenberg warehouse in Mount Vernon. Before we get to speaking about all this beautiful work that's behind you, I'd like to start with talking about you. So if you could just tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life.

Wright: I'm a New Yorker, one of the few actual born-in-New York New Yorkers. Born in 1950 in Brooklyn, raised in Queens. I was raised by a father who was a real do-it-yourselfer and taught me all kinds of skills as a young boy. Rather than playing baseball, I would hand my father tools. I learned all kinds of carpentry, mechanical things, and, over the course of that early childhood, I developed an interest in art. When I chose to go to an art school, I thought my father would be disappointed and wanted me to be a dock builder like he was, but when he looked at the catalogue for the art school, he said, "My goodness, look at this. You have casting and mold making and welding and printing—it's like a trade school." So he was very comfortable with that.

As an early graduate from college, I started having faculty members approach me to make art for them. The wind-up of the story is, through Charles ["Charlie"] Yoder—who was a classmate of mine—I was introduced to Bob. Charlie got a job through the Pratt [Institute, New York] placement center working at Leo Castelli gallery [New York] and he knew all of those artists. He

got me a job early on, painting in the gallery and doing installations, the art assistant kind of stuff that you would do in a gallery. That put me in league and in contact with some of these artists and it was through that that I met Bob.

Because of my love of working with my hands—and also I was an avid dumpster diver, I liked to collect things from the street, and at that time nobody had money really, but I had a car with a roof rack. The car was called “The Artful Dodge”. I used to collect things on the roof of my car to furnish my apartment with and as an outgrowth of that I used to bring Bob things that he would use to put into his artwork: taxidermied animals or I remember one thing was a wagon wheel from a pushcart on the Lower East Side and various and sundry bits of metal and twisted stuff that people would throw out. The street giveth and the street taketh away, I think was the motto. Bob came to my loft on Hudson and Worth Street back in the early seventies and he said, “None of your furniture matches. This is why I love you.”

[Laughter]

Wright: Anyway, as an outgrowth of my work at Pratt doing printing, I was an avid silkscreen printer for myself, but I did all of the other kinds of printing that one would consider to be the standards of an art education—lithography and etching and relief printing and all of that. So it became time for Bob to get a new assistant because Peter Wirth, who was his assistant at the time, was moving on and they asked me to go down to Captiva [Florida] and take over for Peter. I was already acquainted with all of the equipment and I knew how to do all of that sort of stuff, whether it was using the big motorized Griffin litho press or simple hand tools, I was there. Bob

was very much like that himself; Bob really knew all about the printing. He was old school enough that he really could have done it all himself. He knew lithography, which is probably the most circuitous and mysterious of all of the printmaking processes because everything is sort of chemical and hidden from you. It's all based on the antipathy of water and oil, and if you get the chemistry wrong, it doesn't work. But Bob actually really could do it. And he could do it after six Jack Daniel's, which was another part of the story.

So working with Bob was sort of a seamless and fluid interaction because he was so conversant with all of what we were doing. It had the immediacy and the speed—it had the feeling of automatic writing, where someone falls into a trance and the hand starts like this and you give them a pen and all of a sudden they write Shakespeare. Bob was like that. Bob was unbelievably talented. Also, whatever spectrum stuff was going on with him, he was dyslexic, and so whenever he drew he held the pencil very vertically. The pencil was always dull and he drew in a certain manner that was beautiful, really gorgeous, and crude and wonderful.

Q: Before we continue moving in time, I'd love to hear your impressions about that moment in New York City before you moved to Captiva; the cast of characters that was around and part of Bob's community in New York.

Wright: Well, it was all centered out of 381 Lafayette Street. The phone number, incidentally, is BATLATH, which is the anagram. I couldn't remember numbers and I told Bob and he loved that name so that was what we used to call it: BATLATH. There was [Hisachika] Sachika [Takahashi], who lived on the top and took care of the house. He was sort of the majordomo.

David White—the ubiquitous David White, incredible person. He was always on the scene, he always had things organized. He was just amazing and a constant in Bob’s life since way before me. Then there was a revolving group of people who were around Bob and did various things. At one time or another everyone seemed to live there. We called it Milton’s Hilton. I lived there for a while. After coming back from Captiva, I didn’t have a place to live so I crashed up on the third floor. There were some French girls who had something to do with Sachika and his wife Agathe [Gonnet], who were around, and with the French girls came other kind of Euro trash that was always seemingly there in the morning. There was a constant ebb and flow of social interaction.

When Bob was in New York—it’s why he went to Captiva—it was hard to get things done because there were people always there. Some of the people were the gallery owners and curators and the folks you would expect, Ileana [Sonnabend] and Leo and various other people that had something to do with whatever show he was working on. And then there were people like me, who were sort of an unspecified fodder for the art-making mill. I was always able to help, whether it was cleaning out the chapel or actually making art; we were able to do a lot of things. Charlie Yoder was around at the time. Charles Yoder wore several different hats and that was always an interesting relationship between Bob and him. [Laughs]

Q: How?

Wright: Well—they cared a great deal for one another and there’d be occasions when that was painful and occasions when it was not. Charlie was always there to install and go around the

world and things like that, so it was interesting. Charlie is great. I guess he would have been a curator, although David White was always in the background really, controlling everything, I think. I remember sitting at the table and there'd be [Douglas] Doug Christmas, myself, a few other people, and Bob realized that he just loved our names. I'm Larry B. Wright. That's like Johnny B. Goode, which is something that he used to like to say. It was like stage names and Bob was very into names and he was very into celebrity. That's why he was Bob instead of Milton. He made a list of names of boys in his class because he hated the name Milton and he chose Bob because it was more interesting than John and it was something that was like a ubiquitous name.

Q: Was it Bob who asked you to come down to Captiva or do you remember who initially proposed that you make that move?

Wright: Yes, because I was around a lot and Bob was talking to me. When it finally came to concretizing the tickets and stuff, the office took care of that, but Bob was the one who asked me because he and I—he knew that he could work with me. It is such a close relationship that you have when you're making art like that; he really had to feel comfortable. So many printers are really assholes. They're just—they love to use deliberately circuitous art language and make you feel stupid because you don't know this process. He's just not like that—Bob is not like that and I'm not like that. I'm really all about being accessible and Bob was really the most incredibly generous and accessible person you could imagine.

Whenever he met somebody he would always ask first, “Are you an artist?” And if you said yes, you were on the inside. There was unconditional love for artists, all artists, and he had no aesthetic axe to grind. I was at the time involved with a lot of the post-Abstract Expressionist kind of abstract painters, the Clement Greenberg acolytes. I had done some silkscreen prints for one of those artists and Clement Greenberg had seen it and said I was the most facile printer working and all of these middle-aged men were banging on my door. I was in my mid-twenties and I was making big prints for them. Some people would look down their noses at that kind of work because at that time painting was dead, they said. There was a lot of fucking great painting going on back then and there were some very serious practitioners. But Bob had appreciation for any kind of work: if you were a representational painter, if you were an abstract painter, if you were art language.

Everyone used to go out and we would be at Mickey Ruskin’s bar, whichever one it was, whether it was Max’s Kansas City or the Locale or any of those places. And the artists were all friends. [Lawrence] Larry Poons and Carl Andre were friends, but you look at their work and it couldn’t have been more different. And everybody was in there together. So the world—the art world anyway—was for the artists much more homogenous. Bob was a central spoke in a wheel of thought I think, that was very embracing; everybody had a seat at the table.

Q: Were you immediately interested in going to Captiva?

Wright: Oh yes.

[Laughter]

Wright: Rauschenberg was Rauschenberg, even then. [Laughs] He was a guy who had done just about everything. We're talking about a period of time in the late 1970s and up to that point he'd done so many different styles of things and there was really something for everyone. And of course he was just a whirlwind to be around. He had such a sunny personality. He had such a contagious laugh and it was just a happy place to be. So of course I wanted to go there and it was truly that way. It was an all-embracing, very supportive, very egalitarian experience. In other words, we all cooked and we all cleaned and we all did—it's your night to cook, Larry; and it's your night to cook, Bob. Then we'd have to get into one of the cars to go into Fort Myers [Florida] to buy groceries.

He had two cars. He had the Volkswagen Beetle convertible and he had the International Harvester, which is like a Suburban. But they were called This and That and it was always a great routine to go out in the driveway, "What are we going to take, Larry? This or That?" We'd say, "Well, I think we should take This."

[Laughter]

Wright: So it was sort of like a sitcom. A lot of comedy routines were going on.

Q: Tell me about arriving in Captiva and how you got orientated to who was there and how things worked.

Wright: At the time Bob lived in the Beach House on the Gulf [of Mexico], a small cottage on stilts. Some guy had come and was doing repair work on the roof and he was painting the roof silver. Bob said, “Why are you painting the roof silver?” The guy said, “Because it reflects the heat and keeps the house cooler.” Bob said, “Paint the whole house silver.” So he painted the house silver. It was on stilts. Bob had bought a series of small cottages across the island. The next cottage in from the beach in was the studio house, which had been sort of subsumed by this larger trussed structure, the studio building. I lived in that house, in the downstairs part of it. The first night I stayed there, when I went into my room, there were fresh flowers that Bob had picked from the hibiscus trees around.

The whole place was very sparsely furnished. Bob didn't have furniture really, he didn't have any chairs. In the main house, everything was white—the walls, the floors, the ceiling. There were a couple of pillows, but really you stood around. There was a Formica island peninsula from the kitchen that we all used to stand around and that's where the days got planned. We usually didn't start working until the heat of the day had passed. Maybe ten at night or later, we'd all get in This or That and drive up the Jungle Road to the print house. Each of the houses seemed to have little functions of their own; there was studio house and there was curating, the print house was an old ranch house that had the presses and things in it. All of the other rooms were filled with fabric samples and bits of broken metal and wood and stuff.

Bob got all kinds of catalogues and printed material from everywhere: seed catalogues, Sears Roebuck, magazines. When I was first there Bob was doing solvent transfer prints and this was

something that I had always admired and loved about him. Early on in his career, Bob had illustrated Dante's *Inferno* using Ronsonol lighter fluid as a solvent [*Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, 1958–60]. Solvents fall into two categories: there are the greasy solvents that all end with I-N-E, like turpentine, benzine, lithotine, all that. And there are greaseless solvents like lacquer thinner and acetone and vodka. But he used the lighter fluid and he would take newspaper photographs, put them face down on a sheet of nice paper, and burnish them. The lighter fluid would reconstitute the inks and capillary action would pull them into the nice paper. The thing about this process is that the inks on different publications had to be only a month or less old because otherwise the dryers that are in commercial printing inks would make the solvent transfer not work. So Bob got this reputation of being a very current and political artist, but he was actually driven by the time constraints of what his materials were. He was not in his own right necessarily political, but the time when he was illustrating Dante's *Inferno* was during the race riots and all of the troubles that we had in that long, hot summer of American history. Bob was using images of black demonstrators being attacked by police dogs—and here we are again—and of all of these police beatings, just horrible stuff, to illustrate Dante's *Inferno*. [Note: The later *Drawing for Dante's 700th Birthday*, 1965, commissioned by *Life* magazine, was made with silkscreens and contains the imagery described here.] And it really set people off. It was stunning, startling and amazing and beautiful. Bob was really thinking of them as color or gray but it was actually something else. The biggest photographs in the newspapers were always on the front page and it was always the worst shit that was on the front page that was news.

[Laughter]



Robert Rauschenberg
Canto XIV: Circle Seven, Round 3, The Violent Against God, Nature, and Art, from the series *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, 1959–60
Solvent transfer with watercolor, gouache, pencil, and red chalk on paper
14 3/8 x 11 1/2 inches (36.5 x 29.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Given anonymously



Robert Rauschenberg
Canto XXXIV: Circle Nine, Cocytus, Compound Fraud: Round 4, Judecca, Treacherous to their Masters, from the series *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*
Solvent transfer with gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper
14 3/8 x 11 1/2 inches (36.5 x 29.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Given anonymously



Robert Rauschenberg
Drawing for Dante's 700th Birthday, 1965
Silkscreen ink with watercolor, gouache, and pencil on Strathmore board, two parts
15 x 31 1/4 inches (38.1 x 79.4 cm) each
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Gift of the Woodward Foundation, Washington, D.C.



Q: Right. How long did you stay in Captiva that initial time?

Wright: I think the way it started is that I probably went and came back for some short times because Peter Wirth was still around. I would go down at first just to visit—the girlfriend I had at the time and I would go down and we'd just stay and visit and hang out. We did that for a while. I guess maybe Bob was looking at me to see if I was really going to be the guy because I was pretty young.

Q: When did you open your own print shop in New York?

Wright: Well, I think I really went full bore after I got back from working with Bob. Prior to that, when I got out of school, the thinking was that you don't really want to work for anybody. You want to get a loft and the loft would generate something that you would make money on. So the first thing I did when I got out of school was to start a newspaper. I had experience in printing and typesetting and a guy I knew had a typesetting business and we had a storefront on the Lower East Side. We went down to the World Trade Center—which at that time wasn't done—and thought, oh, we'll get an office here. We'll get all of these freight-forwarding companies. We'll do great business. They couldn't rent that building, everybody was afraid it would fall down. But we realized when we looked at the spaces there that we couldn't afford it. So we decided these people need a newspaper because they were going down to the street to mail a letter in the Trade Center. It was its own zip code. Everything was in the building. So we decided to do a newspaper. That's what I was doing prior to working with Bob.

On the side I was always silkscreen printing and I had started working at the School of Visual Arts [New York] managing their print shop, so that was all kind of concurrent. I got back from working with Bob and suddenly I had this big name credibility: this guy is working for Rauschenberg and then Clement Greenberg said that something's going on on Mulberry Street—that's where my studio was, on Mulberry Street. Before you know it I had a couple of floors and thirteen people working two shifts a day and it was like the factory with television sets hanging from the ceiling and music and Euro trash and lots of people who had nothing to do with the project were there, like, who the hell is that? I don't know.

Q: And Bob came to your studio to work as well. Was there a different feeling, him coming to you versus you going to him?

Wright: I was always very excited when Bob came because that was a big deal. My thing was, I didn't do reproductions. I always wanted the artist to be involved in the actual making of the things and Bob was capable and he would be willing to do that. So I'd have the assistants at the ready, the bar set up, and it was always fun. In advance we'd make up some silkscreens of his images and then we would assemble them there, but there was no—well, depending. As we'll look at some of the prints, for some of the editions obviously more planning was required, but on the original works there was a lot more freedom.

Q: You said that one of the responsibilities that you had when you went down to Captiva was to help set up the silkscreen studio?

Wright: Yes.

Q: Can you talk about that?

Wright: Yes. Bob had a problem with an image that he used in one of his artworks. Bob would use these solvent transfers and generally speaking they were fragments of something that was unrecognizable as an artist's work. Frequently they were stuff like seed catalogues or something that wasn't really very visible to the public. But he used this one image and the artist saw it. Bob hadn't changed it enough and he got sued. He wouldn't go up against an artist in court because he was again so generous to artists that the thought of that was completely unacceptable to him. So he realized that he would go back to the days when he did silkscreen with Brice Marden, I think was his assistant then, and when Laika the dog would lay on everything on the floor.

Yes, so I was a silkscreener and I set up the silkscreen studio. So what I did was I designed a bunch of tables—in and of itself pretty simple—but also heating lamps to dry things, light tables to expose and rinse the silkscreen, and a viewer Plexiglas sink in which you could see what you were doing, like developing pictures in a tray—you want to see the extent to which the image is present and there is a certain choice in how much you remove or how much you leave of an image. So I set up that. I set up all the chemistry, I made lists of things for them to buy.

At the time there wasn't a good water-based silkscreen ink and Bob had become kind of overexposed to some of the oil-based inks because of some of the solvents. That ended up happening to me too. You get so much of it built up in your system. So he wanted to work with

water-based, but all the water-based inks were awful and chalky looking. Golden acrylics had just come out with this really wonderful acrylic paint and they were sold at only one place—Joseph Torch in Manhattan, which was an art store that isn't around now. They've all been subsumed into a few bigger ones. I set him up to use these acrylic paints instead of silkscreen inks. The marvelous thing about that was that first of all, they were miscible with water, but they were miscible with one another, so you could silkscreen an image and then you could paint on it, or you could dump paint on it. Acrylic matte medium was the adhesive that we used to hold everything together. That's the way that the collages were created. Matte medium is essentially an inert clear liquid that, when it dries, is sort of invisible and it's part of the acrylic system. So it was just brilliant on my part.

[Laughter]

Wright: We set up that studio and everything was fine until they actually got it all there; they got everything and nothing worked. They called me in a panic and said, "Larry, we did this, that, and the other thing." I said, "What didn't you do?" And they said, "The screens just aren't rinsing well." So they flew me to Captiva and I should have known. I got off the plane and I realized it's the intense high humidity. The humidity has a diverse effect on chemistry and especially in this case. It wouldn't work. The stuff just wasn't working. So I had them put dehumidifiers and air conditioners into the darkroom. I made a daylight darkroom. I put Rubylith film—it's like red gels—on the windows so you could look out and see the jungle and see the pelicans and the hibiscus, and yet it was light safe so that we could coat the photosensitive silkscreen in an environment that was actually—because darkrooms are a hole. Darkrooms are awful. You

always come out of a darkroom and it's like coming out of a movie. You ever go to a movie and it's like three hours long and you're in some emotional state and you come out of the movie and, gah, fuck, I'm on Bleecker Street. Holy shit. I was just somewhere else. Well that's what it's like, being in a darkroom for a long time. So we made a darkroom that was very pleasant to be in, so you still were in the jungle.

Q: Did they use the darkroom for anything other than the silkscreens?

Wright: You could take the Rubylith up and then it was just like what they call a Florida room, which is a room that has a lot of windows around it. It was part of the truss-structured building where the studio was. The spaces in that building had a lot of different uses over time.

Q: So you talked a little bit about why Bob moved to Captiva—partly to get away from the intense social activity in New York—but it sounds like he really surrounded himself with a community of people in Captiva as well. Can you talk about that community?

Wright: It was like a motorcycle gang. Everything came from one thing: your social life, your work life, your transportation, your love life. Everything was all the group and occasionally you would have to bring somebody in. It was all part of that group, but it was a very closed, insulated group. It was a family and it had the dynamics that a family would have. It was a very loving and supportive family. It could be a little neurotic at times. I think the takeaway from it is that everybody really loved one another and it was this unconditional love that I think made

everything possible. There was never a point at which you held back. Everybody was willing to go over a hundred percent towards the group effort.

There were some people who worked for Bob who didn't live in the compound. I refer to the compound being the houses that Bob owned on Laika Lane. He bought a strip of land across the island to stop South Seas [Island Resort] plantation, which was this big mean-spirited timeshare condominium that Bob hated. He didn't want them to take over the whole island, which is what they were doing. So he bought a strip of land across the whole island beyond which they couldn't build, they couldn't develop. And everything took place within the compound. There were a few people who had come in from outside of the compound, but most of us lived there somehow.

Bob first used to go down to Captiva to work and he'd stay in the Beach House that he eventually lived in, on the Gulf of Mexico side of the island. He constructed a painting wall outside, which was simply a freestanding wall that Bob could work against. Because the house was on stilts, there was no basement. The house itself was really small and so that was the way he started. But of course it was outside and down there being outside, everything tends to get overgrown and covered—things grow on everything, so it was necessary to make a studio that was more climate-controlled. So he started buying all the neighboring houses up the block.

The island used to be separated from Sanibel Island and then yet again from the mainland of Florida, Fort Myers, and they built a bridge to Sanibel. Just before I came down there, they built a bridge from Sanibel to Captiva. Everything changed because it had been a key lime plantation and it was largely undeveloped and then suddenly people were able to drive their cars there. So

things changed. Bob wanted to make sure he had his piece of paradise nailed down and that's what he did.

Q: So let's talk about some of the work. One of the pieces that you asked to speak about today was *Hiccups* [1978].

Wright: Right.

Q: Why don't you begin just by telling me why you wanted to talk about *Hiccups*.



Robert Rauschenberg
Hiccups, 1978
Solvent transfer and fabric with metal zippers
on ninety-seven sheets of handmade paper
9 inches x 63 feet 2 1/2 inches (22.9 x 1926.6
cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Gift of the artist in honor of Phyllis Wattis

Wright: Well, it's huge first of all. It was really fun. I forget how many pieces are in it. It's like 63 feet long. [Note: *Hiccups* contains ninety-seven parts.] Bob had been given some paper by—I'm thinking Dieu Donn  [New York]—some papermaker gave him a whole bunch of these 6-by-9 pieces of handmade paper. They were beautiful but they were tiny and, as you look around,

Bob's work was not that small. So it stayed in a stack in the studio for a very long time. And Bob would look at it and couldn't quite figure out what to do. Anyway, the beauty of *Hiccups* was we came up with a way of backing the pieces of paper—which are kind of fragile—with scrim, which is the Dacron that you would use to make a silkscreen out of. It's a very gossamer fabric. And with the matte medium we glued scrim to the back of the paper. Between the scrim and the paper, we laminated fly zippers so that the paper could be zipped together in different orders and then we proceeded to make individual artworks. Each one of them is a unique piece.

Bob again, worked very, very quickly and very deliberately. He would put things in different juxtapositions and then I would have to run it through the press and transfer images—this was largely solvent transfer still, at that point.

One of the best things Bob ever told me was that part of the process where— One of the photographs that we were transferring was too old. It was a color photo and it didn't work. It was central to this piece and after having run it through the press, I peeled up the artwork and it was just blank. I looked at Bob—because he and I would be at the press together—and I just said, “Oh Bob, I'm sorry.” He said, “Larry, there's no mistakes in art.” I just thought, god, that's brilliant. And I realized that was kind of the way it went for him; there were no mistakes in art. Sometimes we'd be working on something and everybody knew it was a disaster, but he'd stay with it and he would always find a way to make it work.

So *Hiccups* had a little bit of everything: a bit of collage, a bit of hand drawing, a bit of solvent transfer, and the zippers gave it that three-dimensional character that Bob liked. Then he would

display them. We had them set up in the studio house and the thing was just huge. I don't think we realized what it would look like when we put it together. There's a poster of it in which the photographer had to do segments, I can't remember, probably five or six segments of it, but it's never really shown that way. It's supposed to be shown in a single line. He of course decided that it should be hung using pushpins into the tabs of the YKK zippers, the idea being that you could juxtapose them in different ways. I doubt that anybody has ever really changed it from the first time we put it up, but it's doable.

He offered me some of them and at the time my feeling was that so many people were always sucking up to him and trying to get something from him and I just said, "No, I don't want anything from you." Now I really regret it.

[Laughter]

Wright: But he would offer me things and I'd say, "Nah." But he ended up—I do have stuff.

Q: You said *Hiccups* was comprised of so many different things. Can you talk about the order of how it all came together?

Wright: The paper was a very receptive handmade paper, so the first thing that would happen to it would be that if there was any kind of fabric or collage element, we'd have to do that first. Bob had a room full of silks and cottons and different kinds of fabric that we would attach to the paper with the matte medium. That would have to dry. After it was dry we could use the solvent

transfer process, where we would put the paper face up on the press bed, Bob would collage his pieces of whatever printed material onto that, and then I would run the litho press, which was called Grasshopper. Everything had a name. Grasshopper. We'd run it through that press a few times to press the image onto the paper. Then after that we would do anything three-dimensional. So the zippers had to be after that because you wouldn't want to get all involved with the press with the zippers. It would not be pretty.

Q: But the zippers were part of the original conception of the piece?

Wright: Yes. On the back cover of the catalogue for the [*Robert Rauschenberg:*] *Works from Captiva* show at the Vancouver Art Gallery [1978], there's a great photograph of the tack board in the print shop house and it has the maquette for the zipper—two blank pieces of paper held together with a zipper—and it was from that that everything else came. So we knew where we were heading. Even though it was an original work and there's a lot of inventiveness, there is a kernel of structure to all of that.

Q: Thank you.



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled, ca. 1977
Chromogenic print

Zipper maquette is partially visible in top middle of Rauschenberg's photograph of his "muse wall" in his Captiva, Florida studio

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: You are standing beside *Trojan Wedge*, which is a *Scale* [1977–81] from 1977. This series is really a kind of complex infrastructure of carpentry, fabric, imaging, paint, and solvent transfer. I interviewed Tim Pharr in Captiva, the carpenter who made these panels, and I'm wondering if you can walk us through the different steps in creating a piece like this. These panels and then what?

Wright: First of all, this one was largely done by Peter Wirth just ahead of my getting there, but I was around for the assembly. What would happen is, the artwork would be made first on door skin panels, which is what they make hollow core doors out of. It's lauan mahogany. It can come in a size like plywood, 4-by-8, but it comes in the sizes of a door, so it's like 3-by-7 1/2. And it's an eighth-inch thick. You can cut it with a utility knife. It's really pleasant to work with. We

would do the artwork on the door skin panels first and then it would be put onto whatever armature or structure that Tim would make later.



Robert Rauschenberg
Trojan Wedge (Scale), 1977
Solvent transfer, acrylic, paper, and fabric
with parachute, mirrored Plexiglas, and
metal on wood mounted on four casters
68 1/4 x 93 x 36 3/4 inches (173.4 x 236.2
x 93.3 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Tim was brilliant at making the frameworks for these things. We would use construction adhesive, which is like Liquid Nails that comes in a caulking gun and you would squeeze that around on whatever frame you're applying the panels to. Then we would weight that with—we had a bunch of sash weights and things that we would use. A sash weight is a piece of cast iron that would be inside of the wall of an old-fashioned double-hung window where you have the chain that goes into the wall. The sash weight is there to balance out the window so it's easy to lift. So we had a bunch of those we would use as weights and would squish the artwork against the panels.

This is cypress wood, which in Florida and South Florida, is the ubiquitous wood down there. Up here in the Northeast we'd probably use something like pine, but down there it was this—and it's

a beautiful wood. It's a beautiful color. So the way these would work is, the door skin panels are this color and we would gesso them. I experimented with all different versions of sanding the gesso or not sanding the gesso, applying it with a roller and then brushing it out, because you have different surfaces that you create by how you apply the gesso. Gesso is not like house paint. It's absorbent. So you want to keep that absorbent quality, but you don't want it to be too rough. In this case it's gessoed. It's not sanded. I can see what he did in here and it's solvent transfers. You can see that there's a certain quality of liquid about these images. Some of them appear to be dripping in some way and it's because of the solvent kind of floating the ink. Then as it runs through the litho press—which is what you need to do the solvent transfer—it would press the excess liquid out behind the image and it would leave a little trail. So that's why some of them have the appearance like they're melting.

The images also would have a diminished appearance from the original. The inks would appear veiled instead of intense color. They always appeared to be somehow veiled. Whenever I did prints for Bob, if we made a four-color separation—which is the way commercial printing is done—Bob would always tear off the black plate and we'd print the cyan, magenta, and yellow without the black. It's CMYK and it usually includes the black, but he liked the way it looked a little bit less intense. So you'll see that in any of his works and it's because he liked the way the solvent transfers worked, that everything had a similar weight.

So we would put the fabric on here first—pieces of silk. All of these color areas that you see are actually pieces of silk. That's not painted that color. You can see the edge of the fabric here, the way we put it down. We'd put matte medium onto the door skin, then you try to smooth from the

middle out to the edges, but you'll see some of them have little bubbles in it in different places. Peter did a fantastic job on this side, not so good on the other.

[Laughter]

Wright: But this is like, no bubbles.

[Laughter]

Wright: You can see how everything appears to be very—kind of murky and that's because that solvent transfer, by its nature, is not very emphatic.

Bob liked working with this material. We have this sort of anodized aluminum that comes in colors and this is—we were talking about this mirror. Plexiglas, it's a very lightweight material. It's easy to cut and fabricate. This is seen on the bottom inside and on the piercing plank-like member.

This is a silk parachute from a weather balloon package. Bob loved those kinds of things. He used to have these scarves that they'd give World War II pilots that had a chart, a nautical chart. The pilots of that era of airplanes—it was cold in those planes so he would have to wear a leather jacket with these silk scarves and actually the scarf was a chart so if you ditched—there you are in your little six-foot rubber yacht in the middle of the Pacific and you have a map. A lot of good that did you. But Bob loved those and they were beautiful. They were silk. Now you can't find

them, but at the time, the Army surplus stores, you always found stuff like that. And it's silk. I mean, hey, that's pretty cool.

It's on wheels. A lot of Bob's stuff at the time, he liked the idea of having wheels and lights under things. It was fun. We used to kind of move them around at night.

Q: When you would begin working on a piece like this, was it important that you had a sense of how all of the parts were going to come together? Were you working towards this final vision or was it, okay, now we're working on this panel, now we're working on this?

Wright: Bob would come up with an idea for the basic shape. We would do these panels and we were just making panels a lot. The panels sometimes didn't necessarily go where they initially had been intended to go, but because it's a modular system, they would be that 3-by-7 1/2-foot module, they could be put together. One of the pieces from that period that was just too large for us to put up today is *Half A Grandstand* [(*Spread*), 1978]. If you look at that, that's six door skins horizontally bolted together. [James] Jim Rosenquist gave him the idea. Jim would do these really big mural paintings. They were really big. And if you were to stretch canvas on traditional canvas stretchers, the potential for them warping was always there, even after time. So what he would do is he would put door skins on the frames and then stretch the canvas. And then what you could do is to drill through and put some quarter-inch carriage bolts with wing nuts to bolt everything together and then it could be taken apart so you could ship it and store it. So anyway, that's where the whole door skin principle came from. It was a really neat modular way of working and it let you change things. Some of the works saw some changing like that.

Q2: This is Christine Frohnert, conservator of contemporary art. I'm curious to learn more about the mirrored and the colored surfaces. Were they delivered in panels and they were cut into pieces in the studio and mounted together?

Wright: Yes—again this material was easy to cut and work with yourself without a lot of technology. You can score things with a utility knife and straightedge and then we'd use construction adhesive to put everything together. That's why you don't see fastenings on these things because it's all essentially glued together in a very permanent way. Bob just had sheets of this stuff. They'd order things that they had as a resource without any specific thing in mind. So it would be ordering all of the inks that an ink company makes for silkscreen printing and that way you have everything that you need without specifically knowing that you have to have a certain project that you're doing and you need lots of red or something. They had all this in the studio; in all of those houses that Bob had, he had room to store things.

Q: I'm wondering, how you've just described Bob surrounding himself with material—you could similarly describe how he would surround himself with people. Were you hired to be a printer on this project or was it more fluid?

Wright: No, it was really more to be the printer. The main assistant was the person who would run the litho press and would be responsible for actually making the solvent transfers work, or later making the silkscreens work. I had assistants. Tim was the carpenter and Bob would make these drawings for Tim, but then I would have to make those into working drawings. So the

conversation was something along the lines of, “Okay, how high?” “That high?” “That high.” “That high?” “48 inches.” “How wide?” “That wide?” “That wide.” “24 inches.” It would go like that and then Tim, during the day, would be making the carpentry elements and then we would come back at night with the art, the decorating of these panels that would then be put onto them. Then there’d be this whole big assembly process in which everybody was involved and that was Bob, it was me, it was Tim, and the other assistants, and it could have been Tim’s wife Sheryl [Long Pharr], there were a couple of other people. There was sort of an ebb and flow of those other people—Lawrence Voytek—but he was really kind of—he was on the cusp. He was sort of after me. But there were a few other people down there who had different functions.

Bob used to like to just take a pile of stuff and he’d put it out on the table and he’d start pawing through it and he’d look at the fabric colors and he’d sort of make decisions very spontaneously. It was very like painting in that sense. There wasn’t a lot of time spent planning. There was a sort of an inertia that he got going and everything would just flow from that.

Q: Did you enjoy working with the other assistants and technicians?

Wright: Yes, everybody got along very well. I think up until a certain point there was only one person who wasn’t that popular, but like I was saying before, we really were a close family and you kind of had to like one another. If you didn’t like somebody, it would have been detrimental to the process. And Bob was as good at choosing the people as he was at choosing the material and I think he overall understood the chemistry that has to exist. I’ve seen it in working with artists at my print studio. You really have to be able to get inside the artist’s head. You have to

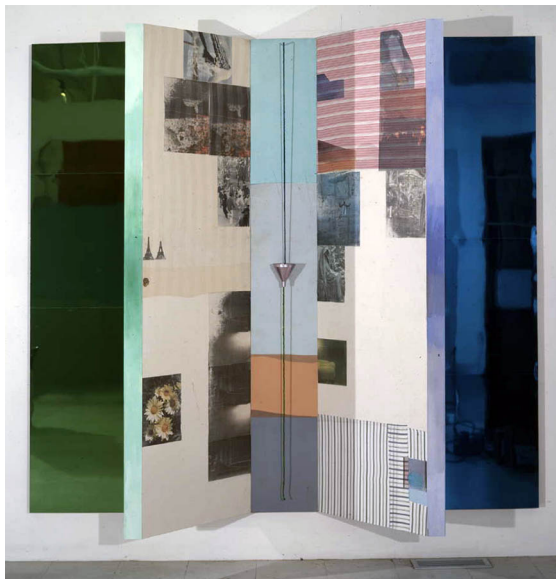
dissect their work. You have to take them someplace that they allow you to take them and you have to allow them to take you too. It's a very—in the world of printing—because you need the printer. The artists mostly don't know that stuff. You need to have that complete cooperation and openness. I've had clients I don't get on with that well for one reason or another and I pretty much get along with everybody, but once in a while there's something.

The atmosphere was very upbeat. Faith Popcorn [née Plotkin] just wrote an article in the *Huffington Post* and it was something to do with—I guess prompted by the demise of the *Mad Men* TV show [2007–15] that I haven't actually ever seen—but she was talking about being in that industry as a young woman and how alcohol really kind of greased the whole creative process. And it's one of the things that's missing in modern political correctness, the fact that they'd go out and they have these multi-martini lunches or they'd go out after work and they'd be drinking beer. That's sort of what it was like in Captiva. The work table—the taboret that we had for working in the studio, on wheels—a little tray—it had the brushes and acrylic paints and some adhesives and tape and rulers and all that one might expect, but it also had a big bucket of ice and Bob's bottle of Jack Daniel's and my bottle of vodka. We would drink, but nobody ever seemed to be really drunk. But now that I think about it, it was definitely part of the way that Bob felt like he could become uninhibited. And without that sometimes he'd get very stiff, maybe very fearful on certain occasions. It was a very social scene and we really enjoyed being at this kind of party with one another. All the best parties have kids and dogs and that's what it was like. The neighbors would come. It was kind of cool.

Q: All right. Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: We are in front of *Hydrangea Reflex* from 1978, a work of the *Spreads* series. I'm curious to learn about the entire production process, starting from the idea to a sketch to a possible maquette. Can you elaborate on that?



Robert Rauschenberg
Hydrangea Reflex (Spread), 1978
Solvent transfer, fabric, and acrylic on
plywood with clear and colored
mirrors, funnel, and string
84 x 89 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches (213.4 x
227.3 x 49.5 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Wright: Well, Bob would come up with these ideas for the basic form, the architecture of these pieces. The idea that this one had this book-like opening to it was the kernel of the whole idea. He'd seen something—there was always a TV going in the house. There was always a TV on a sculpture base. There was no furniture but there was a TV and he would have soap operas and stuff on. It was sort of like the cultural equivalent of all of his catalogues and magazines that he received every day. There was this constant input of information. I don't know where he got the idea for this because they were just kicking around in his head, these forms and there just seemed

to be an endless supply of different kinds of forms that he would create. So he would draw this and his drawing is on the cover of the *Works from Captiva* catalogue from 1978, where he has this pretty much fully developed sketch of what this form was going to be, even down to the way the angles were [note: see lower right corner in photograph on p. 21]. It was all very deliberate architecture on his part.

The artwork itself then—he liked this colored mirrored material, so he was using that a great deal and he liked the idea that he could have something hidden from you, that was only visible really by seeing its reflection in the mirror from behind. So in this case you have the blue and the green side. This is twine that I dyed. I used acrylic paint that I thinned with water and with matte medium and I dyed the twine blue and then green. I had to kind of make a ball out of it that sits into this funnel, which we bought at the hardware store. He liked the green color of the funnel!

Q: What kind of dye did you use?

Wright: I used acrylic paint. We just watered the acrylic paint and used a lot of matte medium in it, so that it was liquid enough to permeate the twine very readily and the twine is a little stiff from it, which is good because he wanted it to keep that form. Then you see the blue and the green together in the ball, so it goes down blue, comes out green.

We did the door skin panels that you see here, on all four sides of these wings, on the Griffin litho press. You can see the first part of the process is—well of course I gessoed these panels. And these ones I sanded a little bit it looks like. Then Bob chose the fabric and I collaged it with

matte medium. So all of this color that you see—and see how beautiful this is, the silk fabric creates a third color when it overlaps two colors. The matte medium is very nice because it's so inert; you don't see it. It doesn't create a gloss or any change in the color. So Bob would take a pile of these fabrics and he would decide what goes where. Again he would work very quickly. He'd have his scissors and he'd cut things to whatever the shape was. Then I'd be collaging the work onto the door skin panel with matte medium; again you have a pool of it and then—it's like putting up wallpaper—you spread the fabric towards the edges and the edges would have a certain character to them. Sometimes you had the strands of string where Bob would start a cut and then tear the fabric. Other times he'd cut it. They're all decisions that somehow he made and you can see that it has a shape to it.

Q2: You applied all the transfers?

Wright: Yes and then the transfers I applied. We had beer flats—the cardboard boxes that cans of soda and beer come in. They're this deep and they hold four six packs. I'd set up two ranks of those on our work counter in the print shop house. They were two levels like stadium seating, and each of these little boxes had a category of image so that they would be labeled with things like flowers, animals, technology, sports, architecture, local junk, abstract—he had all these names that he gave them written on the front of the box. I just got these beer flats and I made a little frame out of some of our cypress that we had. Bob would work very quickly. After the matte medium had dried from the collage, he would choose a group of images and he was looking at them in terms of color rather than subject although he looked at subject matter. But he looked at the color. And he always worked with animal symmetry. It's not really symmetrical.

It's like your face: it's not really the same on both sides but it's kind of the same. So the earmark of that is in all of the pieces when you look. He used to say, "Larry, stay the hell away from diagonals." And you see that in his work. You don't see anything that goes like that [makes diagonal gesture]. It would make him crazy!

[Laughter]

Wright: So this is all about that animal symmetry and the way that things build in a north, south, east, and west direction.

Q2: At that time were you still using the lighter fluid to apply the transfers?

Wright: Well, we were using press and blanket wash, which is a solvent. The Dante's *Inferno* illustrations were done with lighter fluid because it was at a time in Bob's career when he didn't have all these resources and lighter fluid was a simple and readily available solvent. It's like a really cheap solvent that my father used to use for paintbrushes was gasoline. It's one of the -ine solvents. By this time Bob was getting the real solvent, which is press and blanket wash, which is sort of an odorless mineral spirit. We would get it in 5-gallon drums and it was from a printing company, so it was really the stuff that they would use in a big offset house when they printed magazines. It was really the solvent for the ink. So it would give you very good results actually, when you look at some of these things. Some of them were so juicy we'd get more than one hit out of a single image. You can see in some of these where the image repeats and there'll be one that's more emphatic and then the next print off of it is less emphatic. Usually you couldn't get

that, but some of them we could get to work twice and you can see this one sort of breaking up as it goes.

Q2: It sounds like we are witnessing the time where Bob moved to rigid surfaces because of the transfers and all the application techniques that would be harder to perform on canvas. Is this correct?

Wright: Yes. It set him free because in a way it was a better substrate to print on, but really it was better because he could now attach things. He was really able to make a three-dimensional, self-standing, self-supporting artwork that was truly sculptural. The canvases—there's only so much you can do. We're not even going to talk about Lee Bontecou or somebody who really did something else—but that's another story. He really wanted to be able to make things—I'm pointing off camera because there are other artworks in the room that have some three-dimensional quality to them—but this thing is standing up. It's not even supposed to stand up like this. It goes on a wall. You mount this on a wall like a canvas and it has space under it, but it can stand like this. And if you look at some of my pictures from Captiva, it's on the floor when we're working on it. We put little sleepers underneath it just to keep it a little off the floor.

I was describing the moment in production when I painted the edges of the wings here and Bob was sitting in his chair with a cool drink in his hand and, "Larry, you're a painter. Paint the edges. I want it to fade from light to darker, then to light, almost to the white color." Of course I mixed up color that I would show him and then I approached the piece and I started painting. And he was saying, "None of that California stucco shit. I want this to be nice and smooth." So I

would have to go back and smooth it out and kind of work back into it, add a little more white over here, and he was sitting in the chair. Now he usually did all of these kinds of things himself, but he also knew how to delegate and in this case it was the sort of thing that he would have preferred that I do.

Q2: So this is Golden acrylic as well?

Wright: Yes. So all of these things—this is after the thing had been assembled, that these front edges of the wings were blank and gessoed white. As we looked at it they were very clearly unfinished and he'd intended probably all along to do something because he could work back into these things at any time, but once they're assembled you can't do the solvent transfer part because it requires going through the press and the press requires that it's flat.

A litho press differs from other kinds of printing presses by virtue of the kind and the amount of pressure that it brings to bear. It has a scraping pressure whereas etching presses have a rolling pressure, printing presses have a stamping pressure. So there are different effects and Bob knew all of this. The best and greatest amount of pressure is the scraping pressure that a litho press gives you and it made it possible for us to really, really put—you could put hundreds and hundreds of pounds of pressure onto something. It's a bar that has grease on it and it presses against a piece of lubricated tympan, like plastic, and your art is under there and it pushes it against the surface.

Anyway once you've assembled the three-dimensional parts of the project you can't revisit that. So after it's standing like this, it's time to paint and time to attach things. He knew all along that he wanted to put a funnel in the middle and he went looking for funnels and was thrilled to find this pink funnel. Anodized aluminum again. He loved that.

This is—oh yes, it's a good example of the way that the door skin panels work as a module. When you look around behind this, you can see the way that the carriage bolts and wing nuts hold together all of the elements so that they can be disassembled into something sort of—by whatever the height is and stored.

I haven't seen this one in person in a long time and I forgot how much I liked the hidden parts. In the back of the wings, the blue side and then the green side are really nice.

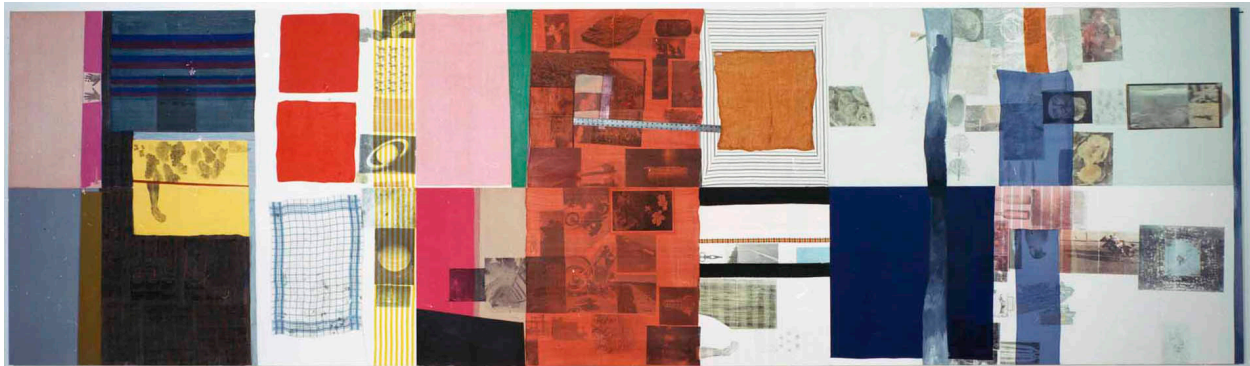
Q2: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: What do you want to tell us about *Half A Grandstand*?

Wright: In looking at the works from the 1978 *Works from Captiva* catalogue for the show at the Vancouver Art Museum, some of the works that we didn't have out here today are in the catalogue, one of them being *Half A Grandstand*, which is aptly named because it is very big. It's six door skins, horizontally arranged—three on the top, three along the bottom on their

sides—so it’s about 21 feet long, something like that probably, by about 6 or 7 feet high. *Half A Grandstand* was the product of quite a night. Bob used to joke—there was a lot of drinking going on as we were working, but it was just part of the background, part of the wallpaper. But there were occasionally nights that stood out, in which case we’d meet up at the Beach House in the morning and Bob would say something like, “It was very drunk out last night.” This was one of those nights. *Half A Grandstand* was truly a party. We were printing and we were painting and we were gluing and we were making stuff and Bob was just—he took everything off of my worktable. He put my ruler in it, he took my towel, my rag. I would work with something and he’d just take it and boom, it was in the artwork. It was kind of a snapshot of the free-for-all that the work environment was or at best could be.



Robert Rauschenberg
Half A Grandstand (Spread), 1978
 Solvent transfer, acrylic, and fabric on plywood
 72 x 252 x 2 inches (182.9 x 640.1 x 5.1 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

He was just brilliant and when the mood—when the spirit was upon him as they say, there was just no stopping him. It was contagious and everybody—myself and anybody else in the room—would get caught up in it. The *Half A Grandstand* piece, it does have lots of stuff in it that wasn’t

intended. With that piece, there was very little planning. We knew we were going to make something real big and real horizontal. [Laughs] But it really sort of just birthed in front of us.

As I said before Bob was really—he was fast. It was amazing to watch him work. He had this intrinsic talent that was so much a part of him. You'd be speaking with him and he'd be telling you something and he'd put three or four things on the table and you'd look at him and just say, "Shit, that's beautiful. The arrangement of what you just did with the saltshaker and that cup. And look at the napkin." He just would do things—he would elevate any three-dimensional situation into art. To watch him work was truly electrifying because he made connections between things, among things, that all just seemed perfect. You put two things next to one another that are unrelated, but Bob would see the connectivity. It's like some savant pool player who, you see the pool table and the cues, he sees dotted lines that go to the corner pockets. Bob was like that. He would see something the rest of us didn't see.

You'd be walking down the street with him and you're all looking at the same stuff, you're in Manhattan. But Bob would see something. He'd just sort of go over and take a picture of some little detail—a standpipe in front of a building—and it was beautiful or suddenly it became like an animal or suddenly it became a person's figure of some kind. The thing about photography with him was that you were a little bit able to know what it was like to be inside of his head. You'd see the results of it, but especially with the photographs, the things that interested him—the sort of imperfection and stuff that he was attracted to, which really make things interesting—would call to him in a way that other people couldn't hear. [Laughs]

So, the *Half A Grandstand*—I’m going to look down because I have the catalogue here. Yes, we’ve got our dishtowel. We’ve got my two napkins because we ate something. He’s got an image—an anatomical image—in our beer flats, we had anatomical images of body parts and stuff—so he has a kind of medical drawing of a leg and then he has all of these—from the plants and fruits box—he has grapes. Actually the leg is supposed to be Italy and they’re stomping on grapes, which is wine. So that all relates. That’s a whole little highlighted panel that sits very bright in the middle of a yellow rectangle on the far left side of *Half A Grandstand* and it’s a little ode to the muse, to the grape. This is a little parable. A little story.

What else does he have in here? It’s more of my painting. I had some fun painting on that one. That was another one where he would torture me not to make any texture in the paint, because I can’t help it. I was sort of abstract at that time in my painting and I liked the physical quality of the paint but Bob wanted it to be very flat. So that’s *Half A Grandstand*.

Q: Thank you. Is there any other work in that catalogue that you wanted to tell us about?

Wright: I think everything has a story, but it’s not a story about me, it’s a story about Bob, so I think I’d let it go.

[Laughter]

Wright: There’s always a story. This one is—*Tower Terrain* [1978] is a *Spread*.

Q: *Tower Terrain?*

Wright: Yes. And that one, on either end of it we have a chevron-shaped collage fabric. Bob worked very hard on that. He really did all of that. I helped him with gluing it, but he really chose the fabrics very carefully and cut them. He did it with one because he was just trying to come up with some idea and then it sort of pointed its way to another direction and then he started doing more of them. He ended up decorating this entire, very long side on each of them, and that was all him. It was another one of these moments where you just had to sit back or stand back and watch him because he's just gone somewhere. That was just an example of how he would find connections between disparate things or colors, images.

In that piece, along on its left side, there are a bunch of wooden buggy wheels. I don't remember where he got those. They were sort of around. But they weren't round anymore. They were very old and affected by moisture and time and they were very eccentric. But if you moved one of them, the little rubber tire part of it would touch another one and then that would move and sometimes they'd all move, but then there'd be one that wasn't round and then that would stop and then—so it was fun to turn them and see which was participating in the turn because some of them would and some of them wouldn't. It was another thing that was just a little bit beyond the simply visual.

Bob was really smart and there were lots of incredible ideas there. He was very dyslexic and I think—you look at what is the creative person and it's some guy with a learning difference and I

got it. You can't learn things like other people so you kind of make stuff up so you at least look good in front of the other kids in fifth grade.

I've seen some of his early paintings. They really are awful. Those figures? Oh my god. He had some of them stored in the garage at Dora [C. Rauschenberg]'s house in Port Arthur [Texas]. He came home one time to visit her and he went to the garage to look at these paintings, these canvases, and he was really upset. These were nudes. They were figure studies. Somebody had painted really cheesy bathing suits on them and he thought it was his sister. He thought it was Janet [Begnaud, née Rauschenberg]. "Mom, Janet ruined my paintings. She painted all these tacky bathing suits on these paintings." Dora was kind of sheepish and it. Turned out it was actually Dora who couldn't stand the nudity. She was made uncomfortable by the nudity and she had gone out and clothed his figure studies. I don't know. I wonder what ever happened to those, if you still have them. [Laughs]

Q: Janet has them.

Wright: Oh she does?

Q: Yes, she has them. [Laughs]

Wright: Yes, the chemistry between Bob and Dora was always—he bought her a new car every year. He'd have her visit. When she was around, he was always Milton, and she was always Dora or Mom. She would say, "Milton, you've got to stop drinking so much," and then he'd put

a finger on her breast and he'd say, "Well, what about all that then?" There was always some kind of an interchange between them, which was fun to watch. And Janet of course, the beauty queen. He got on well with her and [Byron Richard] Rick [Begneaud, Jr.], her son. I digress.

[Laughter]

Q: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we are going to have you speak to the silkscreens and to the *Salvage* series [1983–85], but before we get to that I'm just hoping that you'll share the story with us of how the *Salvage* series emerged out of creating the costumes for Trisha Brown's *Set and Reset* [1983].

Wright: Well, Bob and Trisha were very good friends and they decided to work together for *Set and Reset*, where Bob would design the sets and the costumes for the dancers. Trisha was working on the actual dance choreography with the dancers and Bob concurrently was working on the set and the costumes. So what we arrived at doing was that we would print on fabric in a bolt and we would print photographs that Bob had taken around New York. Using silkscreens and textiles, we would just print very simple black ink on this white fabric. The white fabric that the costumes were made out of was a Dacron that's very much like the fabric on a silkscreen; it's a multifilament white mesh that's very transparent.

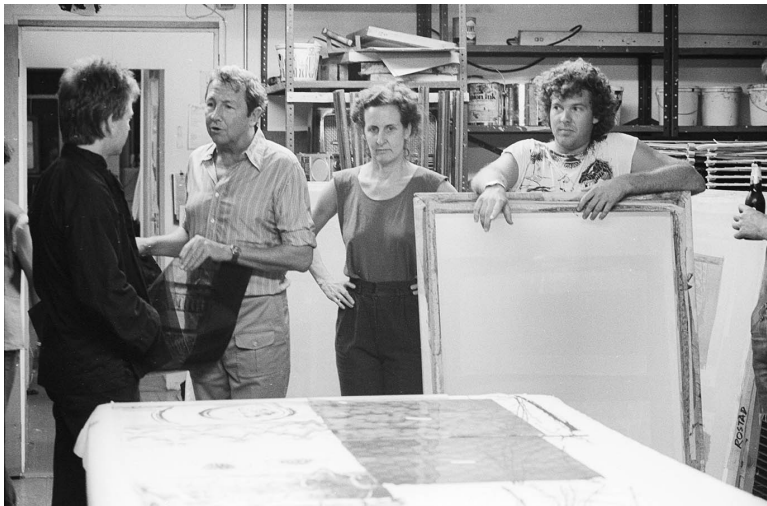


Costumes and set designed by Rauschenberg for Trisha Brown Dance Company's *Set and Reset* (1983), ca. 1990. Pictured: Trish Oesterling, Carolyn Lucas, David Thomson, and Gregory Lara. Photo: Mark Hanauer

I set up a series of temporary tables on sawhorses in my studio on Mulberry Street and Bob had given me a selection of photographs. Quite a few. I can't remember how many right now. But I made silkscreens of these images, individuals like this. This is not necessarily from that series. This is a photograph from down in Fort Myers somewhere that he took of a wall.

The first couple of rounds of fabric that I did, I put newsprint onto the worktable because the ink from the silkscreen printed right through on to whatever table surface it was on and you got an image that was just about every bit as potent as the image on the fabric. It was as strong as that. It wasn't just a diminished bleed-through. It was really a strong image. I looked at it as we were printing and I thought, I had maybe three or four eight-foot pieces of plywood that we were working on and there were quite a few of these images on it and Bob had established a certain kind of density.

I remember the night Trisha Brown and Burt Barr—her boyfriend—and Bob and numerous other people—some of my printers—we were all at my place on Mulberry Street and as per usual it went very quickly. Bob would establish a density; he would use one of the films that we made the silkscreens from. This process is photographic. One would take a film of an image that's a photograph and, instead of a paper print, make a big film positive. Bob would use those big film positives that we made the screens from and he'd arrange them on the table the way he wanted the print to look. So he would arrange things, I'd come in right behind him, pick them up, put the screen in that same place and print, hand off the screen to one of my assistants who would do the dregs of having to clean it up—so I had a lot of people who were just cleaning the screens because we would use them once.



Burt Barr, Rauschenberg, Trisha Brown, and Larry Wright working on costumes for Trisha Brown's *Set and Reset* (1983), Larry B. Wright Art Productions, New York, 1983. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

I was looking at this table after we had printed the first round and it was beautiful. It was a Rauschenberg. It was a big Rauschenberg because he wasn't thinking in terms of individual costumes, tops or pants or anything like that. He was just doing a Rauschenberg. So I had some gessoed canvas in the studio and I rolled that out onto the table instead of the newspaper

and as we printed the rest of it we started creating these canvases and they were spectacular. Bob had established the density, he called it, of the imagery. They weren't quite so closely packed as some of his pictures would be. And once—he said, “You've worked with me, Larry. You know what I want, a certain density. Just do it.” So I continued to work then and make these prints on the fabric, rotating the screens so that they didn't repeat themselves frequently, that kind of thing.

I brought the canvas to Bob. He didn't know about it. I brought the canvas to him. I'd stretched it and we put it up on the wall down on the ground floor of Lafayette Street. Just in front of where the chapel is, there's that big room, which at the time then used to have painting racks in it. And everybody was up on the third floor—Ileana was there and Antonio [Homem] and I forget who else—but I said, “Bob, come and see what I've done.” I brought him downstairs and showed him this piece, with Ileana, and it was a trek to get her down to the first floor again. Bob said, “Larry, it's the best work you've ever done.” So he decided to continue doing it. I have some Polaroids of us because then I would work at Lafayette Street in that room and we did lots of them in color then too, because the ones for Trisha were black ink.



Rauschenberg and Larry Wright, ca. 1980.
Photo: courtesy Larry Wright

After the images were printed on the bolts of fabric, the big rolls of fabric, they were sent to the seamstress. Now the seamstress had made some blank costumes. The men were topless and had sort of loose-fitting elastic-waist pants. The women had a very similar kind of a pant and then they had a very square top, just a hole for the head and arms. They had tried the costumes to see if they were comfortable for the movement and they were and they did some parts of the dance up on the third floor at Lafayette Street for us to see and it was really quite beautiful.

Well when they made the costumes, it was different from the blank white fabric. When you shone a light against the blank white fabric, the light reflected back amply. But when we got to the Brooklyn Academy of Music or whatever it was we had a dress rehearsal with the dancers in the printed costumes and they were naked underneath. Now, when the light hit them, it didn't bounce off that white. It didn't reflect anymore. It went right into the skin and that's what you saw. So we were sitting in the audience watching this closed dress rehearsal and it was really quite beautiful. But at the end [laughs] of the show Trisha was saying, "Bob, what do you think? What do you think?" He was just like, "Kind of like a sex show." So we had to put a body stocking on everybody because it really was sort of distracting. And that's what you'll see. If you look at the images that we printed on the costumes, they were also projected onto this large scrim structure that would raise and lower behind the dancers. That was all the same images. But it was a funny little aside, the way that things tend to work; when you see something done it can have a different effect from what you'd expect.

These are silkscreens. It's a stencil. There's a photo emulsion on here. We exposed that to a film positive and you'd get a stencil that has this photographic image on it. And you can put anything you want through a silkscreen. We were using acrylic paint. You can use textile inks. There are inks formulated to go on—well silkscreen is a viable commercial process. Most of the printing processes are obsolete commercial processes, like lithography, like engraving, like etching. That's commercial printing from hundreds of years ago. Silkscreen is a viable commercial process today. That little bit of white on the back of your credit card where you sign your name? That's credit card white silkscreen. The Corona beer bottles, that's silkscreened. The chalkboards in school used to be slate in my generation. Now they're Masonite, silkscreened. So this has a really great application and Bob was able to use this on all kinds of surfaces. You can put anything through a silkscreen.



Robert Rauschenberg
Mane (Salvage), 1984
 Acrylic and collage on canvas
 49 1/2 x 83 5/8 inches (125.7 x 212.4 cm)
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

This is a combination of screenprinting and poured paint. This one's canvas [*Untitled (Salvage)*, 1984, 84.081]. What he did here was he activated the surface of the canvas first by doing some painting, large gestures, and pouring paint. You can see the way that the paint has this crackling appearance as it dries and it begins to kind of crawl on the surface and it cracks like that. But Bob liked all those kinds of serendipitous accidents that happened with the materials. And then

on top of all that activity, then he would silkscreen his photographic images. They broke up on the surface of the crackled paint and gave you a lot of dimension, a lot of activity. This describes the process used to make many works! That's a really pretty one.

Q2: Did Bob put the canvas on a solid support to apply, to pour the paint on it, before he used a heat lamp to induce the cracking?

Wright: Yes, these kinds of pieces would be on the floor or on a table and most floors aren't particularly true so a lot of times this would be on a table. But he didn't mind the floor being imperfect. When Brice Marden was his assistant and he had the Broadway loft, they did a lot of stuff on the floor because that's what they had a lot of, the floor, and it led to a certain amount of imperfection, which Bob liked. Because the process requires that you squeegee with these long, flexible, rubber squeegees. You squeegee the ink through the stencil. And when you're doing it on some convoluted surface like that, it breaks up. It's not going to give you a perfect reproduction. It's not going to be like a Xerox. It's going to be much more painterly. There's much more opportunity for the material to speak in its own way. So if you look at some of his works, you'll see the squeegee is actually swishing around in various directions leaving a painterly swath like a brush mark rather than straight down in a mechanically reproducible way. This is a real painting. So he would work flat. Somebody told me that he did that before [Jackson] Pollock did, but I don't know for sure who worked on the floor first.

Yes, early on he liked having a lot of screens around. He would find images on the street because there were all of these commercial printers down in the financial district along the west side,

there was a lot of financial printers in those big buildings and they would throw out the films that they used in the printing process and Bob would take those films. A lot of his early subject matter came from—well the saying is, everything I can find walking around the block. And that was the subject matter.

Q: Is it also the case that you taught him how to transfer his own photographs onto the screen?

Wright: Yes, well—I was doing this sort of—it's called a direct photo emulsion. It's essentially like a glue and it has a light-hardening chemical that you add into it and then it becomes light sensitive where the glue dries and if you hose it—if you get it wet—the areas that are protected from light when you expose it rinse away and the areas that are exposed to the light sort of cook into the screen. So what we have here is, all of this was exposed to light—so that's cooked in. Everything here, we see the light has penetrated through this film and that's how we get that positive image. It can give you very, very good photographic fidelity because they have different kinds of meshes in the silkscreens that give you different amounts of detail. This one's a white mesh, which is sort of coarse. This would be like a textile printing screen. This one's yellow, more for paper. I think I'm getting too technical, but the process is one that, even though it's technically pretty precise, it's relatively easy to do. In Bob's case, in the studio down in Captiva, without having a lot of support and access to fierce chemicals and things, he was able to do most everything he had to do using a garden hose or a power washer to clean them.

Q: And the screens also have different densities?

Wright: The mesh count of the screens, the number of threads per inch, varies. This one is coarse. I can feel it. It feels like this is 140 threads per inch. It's a textile screen. This one, I can feel is 160 to 200. I teach silkscreening so I know these things. And they give you different looks. For what Bob did, the coarse screen was probably good because it puts down a heavy deposit of whatever you're printing—ink. In this case, you want that to be a really heavy deposit of ink to go across that convoluted surface.

Q: Is it true that you trained Terry Van Brunt to do the color screens?

Wright: Yes, with a whip and a chair.

[Laughter]

Wright: No. Terry came over from Japan at the time and he wasn't particularly an art assistant. So I trained him using the various kinds of the presses and all of this material, so that he knew what to do to create solvent transfers and then ultimately to make the silkscreens. I designed a shop for them that had certain kinds of tables and things that were all moveable on wheels so that they could move them out of the way. Because when you would do the printing you needed to have the flat horizontal surface, but then when you got to the place where you were assembling things you wanted to have more floor space. So everything was moveable. All the spaces were undefined or they weren't concretized. I used to do that in my loft. If I made a lot of screens, I'd turn the whole loft into a darkroom. I did that for these. Make a whole bunch of silkscreens and then I had black plastic tarps that would drop down from the ceiling. I could make little

darkrooms anywhere, cover the windows anywhere, put red lights in the ceiling fixtures and we'd be in the dark for like a day. So his thing was like that.

Q2: Did you build all the screens from scratch including the frames or can you see certain evidence where frames came from?

Wright: Yes, these are different ones. This one, Bob got from someplace because this is actually a purpose-made silkscreen frame. It has a routed slot in it that you would drive a rope into to hold the fabric onto the frame. So this is from a real silkscreen company. And this one is more like what I would throw together to make big frames like this. This is construction grade 2-by-2 lumber held together on a mitered corner with big staples. And then the fabric is stretched with a staple gun across the face. You can't see but—oh no. This one has tape on it. Unlike a canvas, the stretching of a silkscreen has to be very precise and very uniform. The tension has to be exactly the same everywhere. There can't be baggy parts. So canvases you would stretch starting in the middle and work your way to the corners. A silkscreen is a totally different animal. It has to be stretched from three corners and then you tighten up these two legs. And it's very, very tight. A lot of tension.

Q2: The story goes that Bob requested to have some of the silkscreens destroyed after he won Venice Biennale in '64. Can you confirm that?

Wright: Yes. Destroying the silkscreens actually is a really common practice. After you've done an edition you have to destroy the original. It's one of the reasons why some of the frames that I

would use would be inexpensive materials because we'd destroy them after they were printed. You can reclaim them and use them again, but we would razor out the image and then break up the frame.

Q2: Did the silkscreen process change over time as Bob moved to metal surfaces in the eighties? Did this have any effect on the creation of the silkscreen?

Wright: Well again, it's a process that can print on just about anything and so it was kind of a seamless transition. I think it made it possible for him to work on substrates. Anything you print on is called a substrate. It can print on anything. It would have been impossible for him to do solvent transfers on metal because the metal is not porous and as a function of that process you need capillary action to pull the paint or the ink off of whatever your original is. So really the only way to work on metal or glass or any of those kinds of non-porous surfaces would be with a silkscreen because you can put anything through it. You can put cake icing through it. Really anything. So he was able to work with enamels and acrylics.

Q2: Was Bob particular in terms of the properties of the different grades of nylon, of the silkscreen paints and inks that were used, or did he just follow your recommendations based on his painting process?

Wright: Well Bob again, he knew about these things and some artists really don't nor do they have to. But Bob just had been around prints. He liked prints. I described some of his paintings as a student as being really kind of rough. The way he got himself around all of that was sort of

putting something else between him and the final piece. He really liked processes instead of painting everything by hand. You don't see him really doing that. You see him pouring paint. You see him collaging and montaging, but you don't see him making a picture. He's not painting a landscape. He liked having it filtered through these processes that allowed him to work with these photographic images. So he liked lithography. He allowed the litho stone to break apart in *Breakthrough I* [1964] and *Breakthrough II* [1965], which nobody else would do, but he liked that it was this litho. And he knew lithography. He liked the silkscreen process because it was a stencil that gave him this perfect thing. It could be a perfect thing.

Q2: So it looks like in this series silkscreening was the final process. Were the paintings sitting in the studio for a while until Bob decided, okay, they are done and he's going to sign them and date them? How was his process?

Wright: Knowing when something is done is probably the hardest job that an artist has. Bob was really wonderful because he said so many quotable things. He was always coming up with something. "You want a surface at the edges. You want them begging for more." Things like that. And when you'd see him working on it, you'd say yes, okay, I get it. I want more. I get it.

Yes, he loved this process. It was something that was very visceral. The thing I'm not crazy about with digital prints is that they don't drip. The computer just doesn't drip. This stuff, you can make it drip. Now he did actually make digital prints drip. He was spritzing them with water so that they would melt. He figured out a way around that. But again it was because he was so

inventive and because he knew so much about the process, that he knew the rules, but he also knew how to break the rules. You can only do that if you know the rules.

Q2: Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we have you standing beside *Statue of Liberty*, 1983. You printed this with Bob, so again if you could just walk us through the process.



Robert Rauschenberg
Statue of Liberty, 1983
Screenprint with offset printed postcard
36 x 24 1/2 inches (91.4 x 62.2 cm)
From an edition of 250, published by New
York Graphic Society, produced by Larry
B. Wright Art Productions

Wright: Well in this case Bob had been approached by the New York Graphic Society to be in a portfolio of ten artists who were going to be doing New York-themed print images in a collection

that would be *New York, New York*[: *Eight Contemporary Artists Celebrate Their City*, 1983]. Somehow I think they gave him the Statue of Liberty to do. I think they were trying to give the artists something so everybody wouldn't choose the same thing. So they gave him the Statue of Liberty. Bob wanted to get some pewter-colored paper. The first thing was, he said, "I want to get pewter-colored paper." So I had to go out and find something that was going to be pewter-colored paper. I found this sheet of paper. Now the portfolio was supposed to be printed on paper that was 22-by-30 inches. This paper sadly is not 22-by-30, but Bob loved it and he said, "We're doing it on that paper." He then went to the Statue of Liberty. He wanted to take pictures of the Statue of Liberty from a point of view that people don't usually see. Everybody sees this. This is a postcard that Bob bought on the street or at a flea market or something. So that is the view that everybody sees and thinks of the Statue of Liberty. This is the back of the Statute of Liberty. You can see the sole of her sandal. This is inside the torch. There's the light. This is in the arm and this is at a time when you could go up in the arm. I don't know if you can now, but it had been closed soon after this. And of course a bit of the architectural drawing.

The wind-up of the story is that we made this print that didn't fit in the portfolio. So that's why this is kind of a unique one that Bob has. The other artist who was part of that project would have been Andy Warhol who was asked to do the Brooklyn Bridge. And he thought it was such a good idea that he did the Brooklyn Bridge, but he didn't give it to them for their portfolio. He sold it himself in his own inimitable fashion. He was a brilliant marketer and art director and he made a terrific group of Brooklyn Bridge prints. So now there were eight in the portfolio of ten artists and I don't know what else happened. I can't recall exactly who the rest of the group was, but I think I may have done some other ones. I don't remember.

Q: When you worked on a piece like this with Bob, were you involved from the conception of the piece throughout? Were you involved in creating the unique work? At what stage would you have come into a project?

Wright: Well the way this worked is, Bob came up with a group of photographs that he thought were visually interesting that he could put together and he made film positives of these images, the same size as you see them here. If you were to imagine instead of a black-and-white photograph, instead of printing on paper, it was on film so that we could make the silkscreens. So he actually composed this piece, with his typical animal symmetry, with the films. We knew that we were going to work with this paper, but we went through a series of different color iterations. So I did samples where I had the screens made and I would print ones that had red or green or some other color combination. I know I still have a red one that he gave me, which he signed to me. And then I have this. But there were some other color versions that he did. Usually the way it would go is, he would compare them and he would decide which one he liked the best because we only wanted—Warhol would do all of them, but Bob wouldn't. He would choose one and he would print that. Warhol always—you did a portrait with him, he would choose an image and he would do four different color ways. And chances are, if you had enough money to buy a Warhol portrait, you bought all four of them. [Laughs] He was brilliant that way.

So anyway, this is on this beautiful Japanese paper that's pewter-colored made by a national treasure in Japan. They have their craftspeople elevated to a place in which they are honored and protected in a way that sadly we don't here in the United States. He could take a dollar bill out of

your pocket and with his fingernails he could separate the black side from the green side. Of dubious utility perhaps, but damn impressive. So he's the one who made this paper. In order to get this done I had to order the paper. It took me eleven months to get it; it was kind of a saga. But it's truly a beautiful piece. Bob's take right away on using the pewter-colored paper was at the very beginning before he did anything. I don't know how again that came to him, but that was his idea. You can see down in the lower corner—the lower left, you see a five-pointed star. That's my chop mark. That's a blind embossment, which I put on the prints that I make in my print shop and they all have them. That along with the signature is the authentication of the piece.

Q: Was he often that specific about the kind of paper that he requested?

Wright: No. A lot of times the substrate that we were printing on was sort of subservient to the image. Just like gallery-white walls; they were fine just being in the background. But once in a while he would have some very, very strong preference. He was smart about it.

Q: Can you think of other occasions where he asked for a specific kind of paper?

Wright: I think when we did the Merce Cunningham piece down the row there a little bit [*Portrait of Merce Cunningham*, 1984]. That's on yellow fabric actually. It's on cotton. He had some specific requests around that. It's fabric that's laminated to paper with archival photo dry-mount paper. He had some reason for wanting that and I can't exactly remember what it was, but it's a yellow diagonal fabric pattern. I printed blank white cotton to make it look like that and

since silkscreen is how they print textiles it just looks like yellow striped fabric. So one would not know that it was actually a big process to create that.

Q2: Since this work has a postcard attached to it and it's an edition work, I'm wondering how you built that into the production process.

Wright: There were some French girls around Bob's and I hired them to attach the postcards. I took the original postcard and I had a color separation made. Then we made the postcards and I used an archival photo dry-mount paper again—this Fusion 4000—and we individually laminated them. I think I printed some guide marks as to where the thing went, plus it lined up to the edge of that white, here and here, so the corner of the card just sort of kisses that. We ironed it on with clothes irons actually. Put a piece of newsprint over it or a piece of release paper and ironed the heat activated stuff onto it. So all of them are identical. That postcard—I forget when it's from. There's a date on it and it's something like, "Having a marvelous time in the city. 1908," or something like that.

Q2: Great. Thank you.

Wright: That's a cool fabric—or a cool paper rather.

Q2: So we are looking at *Center for the Performing Arts* deluxe edition from 1983 and again we would like to ask you to walk us through the production process for this edition.



Robert Rauschenberg
Center for the Performing Arts, 1983
Deluxe edition: Offset lithograph with
collage, embossing, and pencil additions
28 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches (73 x 52.7 cm)
From an edition of 125, published by
PACT, Inc., produced by Larry B. Wright
Art Productions

Wright: Well in this case Bob had given me a number of projects to do after I wasn't his studio assistant per se, just as a printer in my Larry B. Wright Art Productions. They were limited edition prints that would then have a larger poster edition and they were usually fundraisers for some entity. The way it would work is, you would have perhaps a hundred or so printed on finer paper, perhaps with some handwork or something that gave it a little bit extra value and then that was only a few. Then there would be a larger poster edition on some kind of a poster paper that would be perhaps including type. They wouldn't necessarily be signed and numbered because there might be five hundred of them or something like that. That varied from project to project.

The original for this, Bob had done. It was photographed and we made this into a four-color process offset print, and we did it on a sheet-fed offset press. Offset is a process by which the printing plate is attached to a roller on the press and then that roller has other small rollers that ink up the image. It prints off onto another roller and it's that roller that then touches the paper. Because the paper and the plate never touch, the image doesn't degrade. When you have very

sensitive washes and fine detail and stuff, it's important that you don't degrade the image quality. When you're doing something like a copper plate etching, the copper is very soft and you only get a few—very few, ten maybe less—good prints out of it before the plate gets crushed by the press. So usually when you do a copper face image, you get it steel faced on top of the copper.

Anyway, in this case we did that. And then we were able to do another edition that was more numbers. You can see it's a slightly different size and it's exactly the same thing, but it doesn't have the handwork. This one has an embossment on it here. I don't know if we can see it in the camera, but there's an image that's pressed into the back of the paper. That's an embossment plate that I carved by hand. That I did on an etching press where I soaked the paper in a tray to get the paper wet enough so that it was flexible enough to absorb the stretching that goes on in embossment. I individually embossed each one of these prints. I forget how many is in the edition. Then Bob has this little handwork here where he used the embossment plate that I made and just sort of traced around it with a pencil. So it's got a little handwork on it by the artist.

This is chine-collé. It means that we've attached a separate sheet of paper onto the surface. It's a kind of collage element and it's done as we run this through the press with the etching press to do the embossment. We also press that onto the paper and it sort of attaches itself with the sizing that's in the paper. This being the same thing just less of a limited edition. I forget the numbers on that. Bob had signed this particular one. As a fundraiser you might sell that one for \$2,500 and then this one would be fifteen and then if he signs it, it's \$250. Those numbers I'm making

up, but it would be something like that and that's how these worked. They're very effective fundraisers.

Q2: I can see that. Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Now we are looking at a portrait of Merce Cunningham from 1984 and this obviously was produced in a different way, there's a different support, so can you walk us through the production of this piece?

Wright: Yes. In this case it's a silkscreen print. Additionally to the silkscreen, it has a stencil where I had—well, actually two stencils; one of them being a pencil line, then the other one being a color that's been painted by hand with acrylic paint inside of the pencil line drawing of the chair. This is a famous photograph that Bob did of Merce Cunningham doing a dance performance piece where he's wearing a chair on his back. [Note: referring to photograph of Cunningham in a costume designed by Rauschenberg for *Antic Meet* (1958) by Richard Rutledge, 1958]



Robert Rauschenberg
Portrait of Merce Cunningham, 1984
Screenprint with pochoir on cotton
laminated on paper
28 1/2 x 18 1/4 inches (72.4 x 46.4 cm)
From an edition of 100, published by
Cunningham Dance Foundation, produced
by Circle Fine Art, Corp., New York



Costume by Rauschenberg for Merce
Cunningham Dance Company's *Antic
Meet* (1958). Production still. Pictured:
Merce Cunningham. Photograph
Collection. Robert Rauschenberg
Foundation. Photo: Richard Rutledge

All of this is printed on a piece of white cotton fabric. I printed yellow diagonal stripes on the fabric and then went back in with the other colors, individually printing the silkscreens one at a time with pure color. These are all Bob's photographs taken on his many walks around in Fort Myers and in Manhattan. At that time still you could get around to the river and there was still a lot of authentic kind of riverfront activity going on. This is one of my favorite pictures. He gave me this photograph. It's a picture of cables tying a barge and they put them through tires to act like a shock absorber. It's exactly the kind of thing that Bob loved. This is right up his alley.

The portrait of Merce Cunningham, he actually put Merce on the floor and traced him with a marker and then we had to take a photograph of that. What else—oh after printing this on fabric we then laminated the fabric onto a piece of hundred percent rag paper using archival photo dry-

mount paper. It just didn't look like a fabric anymore. It looked like yellow paper so I went and, with a razor, scraped all the sides of it so that we have these little strings, these little threads hanging out to give the viewer an idea that it's actually printed on a piece of cotton fabric and it's not just paper.



Larry Wright in Rauschenberg's Lafayette Street home and studio, New York, ca. 1984. Photo: courtesy Larry Wright

Q2: What was the reason for using cotton as the support?

Wright: That I don't remember actually. It could be that he wanted to do something different and then partway through the process he changed his mind. I can't recall a hundred percent. I'm sorry.

[Laughter]

Q2: So the reason that you laminated it was contributing to the fact that it can be exhibited more easily?

Wright: Yes. It was a framing choice. It was something that made it much more manageable.

Whereas if you start giving people a piece of cloth, it opens myriad problems with how does one display this? I've seen people who own these and they always frame them as if they were just on paper.

Q2: So they are framed in a matting board and hinged—

Wright: Yes, exactly.

Q2: That's how they should be presented.

Wright: They hinge on the back and it's a little float, usually. A little spacer between the paper and the glass. This is an artist's proof. One of ten. I can't remember how many I printed.

Probably a hundred or something like that. These were a fundraiser for Merce.

Q2: Wonderful. Thank you, so much.

Wright: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we've done a walk through many series that you were working on with Bob and many prints that you produced with Bob. When did your working relationship with him come to an end?

Wright: I don't know that it ended per se. It just sort of withered a bit. As he had his other assistants working, my being present for that was not as necessary. So the calls became less frequent. Initially I was helping out with Terry and then there was another assistant who came after him, Darryl [R. Pottorf], and they were people who weren't necessarily as conversant with some of the processes. I was involved in some of what brought them along, but then as they got it, then that wasn't quite as necessary. There was never any kind of an end to anything. There never had been a definitive falling out or a moment, it was just—we remained good friends and we'd see each other socially. So that's kind of the way it ended.

Q: Both in New York in Captiva?

Wright: No, mostly in New York.

Q: So you teach at the School of Visual Arts and at—

Wright: I teach at the New Jersey City University in New Jersey [Jersey City]. I teach at the School of Visual Arts where I've been there—I started there for a few hours in 1974, part-time. Now I'm sort of the old man in there and there are a few other old-timers. Principally I teach silkscreen and textile printing. All of this experience is with me when I teach that because I've

worked not only with Bob, but with a lot of other artists who all through the same template of silkscreening—pun intended—were able to get to very different places. And so it's that that I impart.

Q: I was wondering if maybe to close today, if there are any particular lessons that you learned from Bob that you pass on to your students.

Wright: Yes. I think that it should be all about joy. Bob was such an incredible whirlwind of energy, but it was all so positive, it was all so happy. And he didn't separate his art from his life. Everything was all-inclusive and in his case he made it look easy because it was truly his passion. I think for my students, you want to get joy out of this. You want this to be your core coming through. "There's no mistakes in art." All of that kinds of stuff that he would bring to the table, his wisdom, but I think overall he just didn't exclude anything. Everything was possible. Whether you were putting up a piece of grass growing in a frame or an angora goat with a tire around it. It was all grist for the mill and there were absolutely no rules and he really broke whatever ones he could find. He was truly a huge impact personally on my teaching style and my style of making prints. I took a huge cue from him as a young man in the way that he approached things and so my way of working is very inclusive and I try to be very happy and I try to make that kind of fuel that's energy for the whole process. He was like that. He created energy. He got people excited.

Q: All right. Thank you so much.

Wright: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]