

Interview with SIDNEY FELSEN AND JONI WEYL

GEMINI G.E.L.

For the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project

Conducted by KAREN THOMAS, Interviewer

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KAREN THOMAS: I have a good sense from the literature and from talking with Stanley, about how Gemini got started. But what I didn't have a good sense of -- and I wanted to ask you -- was, when you put it together, if you had a philosophy of what you wanted it to be.

SIDNEY FELSEN: Well, not meaningful. It wouldn't be an interesting answer. What I most often say is we were born out of innocence. We wanted to have a print studio. We wanted to work with artists. And for us, the idea was that it would be fun to be with the artists. So we started in a small room with the idea of having an artist come in and doing something. Let's say there was no mission statement, and there was no intention of having a grand Gemini, which it became. And became very quickly. There wasn't a plan. It was about having fun, and being around the artists.

THOMAS: And Josef Albers was your first guy.

FELSEN: Albers was first, yes. Man Ray was second. In the early days, we were knocking on the doors of the Abstract Expressionists. We went to Rothko, and de Kooning, and Edward Hopper. But printmaking wasn't their thing. Bob Rauschenberg was the beginning of Gemini. Bob established what Gemini became. He set the tone or the pace.

THOMAS: How did he come to your mind?

FELSEN: Bob had been around Los Angeles quite a bit. Keep in mind this was 1966. Stanley and Elyse [Grinstein] had met him during his visits to Los Angeles. We invited him and he immediately accepted. I picked him up at the airport [LAX] and asked him if he had any idea what he would like to do in the workshop. He said, "I'm thinking about doing a self-portrait of inner man." Sitting there with Bob Rauschenberg, I'm thinking, "What does this mean? Do I want to ask?" But I didn't ask.

The next morning I picked him up and he said, "Do you know an x-ray doctor?" It just so happened, one of my closest friends from high school had become an x-ray doctor so I took Bob to him. Bob wanted a one piece-six foot x-ray, head to foot. We immediately learned there was only one x-ray machine in the country that had such a machine and it was at Eastman Kodak in

Rochester, NY. So it turned out to be six – one foot x-rays which became his self-portrait of inner man, which he titled *Booster*.

THOMAS: Somewhere I read that your friend then said, "Don't take your shoes off." Do you remember that? I didn't quite understand what that was.

FELSEN: What he told me was that he said to Bob, "If you've got to pee, you'd better go to the bathroom pretty quickly." I didn't hear about the shoes.

JONI WEYL: His shoes are on. His boots are on.

THOMAS: His boots are on in that picture.

WEYL: But I don't know that that was necessarily at the direction of --

FELSEN: It may have been because the X-ray machine would pick up all the metal, and he felt he was, in a way, doing him a favor by saying, "[Your shoes] are going to show in the X-ray." The X-ray doctor probably didn't understand what Bob --

THOMAS: What Bob was going to do. Anyhow, I was curious.

FELSEN: We can ask him, we still see him...[chuckles]

THOMAS: Once that print was created, how did you bring it to the attention of the world?

FELSEN: Well, again, you have to keep in mind this was a very different time. Gemini started in the beginning of 1966. The art world was tiny whether it's artists, dealers, collectors, museums compared to today. It's a huge industry. So it was tiny. There were a couple of art magazines, one was *Artforum*, and it started here about four blocks away from Gemini on La Cienega Boulevard, which is the next big street. So we took a full-page ad in *Artforum*, and we reproduced *Booster* -- the print itself that had his X-ray. And, incidentally, the layout -- the boy who did the layout, this young man -- I handed it to him, and it was Ed Ruscha.

The ad brought in approximately 200 responses very quickly. We also produced a brochure/booklet with a text written by Alan Solomon. Bob's project consisted of 8 lithographs, titled "Booster and 7 Studies," which had the print "Booster" plus 7 studies, each study contained a section (image) from the master print, "Booster." It was a roaring success.

THOMAS: I've never seen the Alan Solomon essay. That would be interesting.

FELSEN: We must have some.

WEYL: I don't know.

FELSEN: Do you have one? We have the brochure.

THOMAS: I should check the archive. Because for this particular project, it would be a really interesting [FELSEN: I'm pretty sure he wrote it.] thing to do.

FELSEN: I think we asked Bob who, he thought would be a good writer and I'm pretty sure he said Alan Solomon's good --

THOMAS: He had done that nice Jewish Museum [show] with Bob. Did [*Booster*] expand the boundaries of what Gemini was going to be?

FELSEN: Well, *Booster* -- the print itself -- was six-feet vertical and three feet horizontal. And in those days, prints were 22 X 30 inches, or, 32 X 40 was probably a giant print. So it absolutely expanded -- It was considered, and as far as we know, the largest hand-printed lithograph, ever, at that time. So *that* in itself was an expansion.

THOMAS: And then you went on to *Stoned Moon*.

FELSEN: Well, the next thing that Bob did was called *Reels* -- r-e-e-l-s parenthesis B plus C, meaning "Bonnie and Clyde." (*Reels (B + C)*) What happened was Bob was in New York and he had a cold. He was telling us, "Oh, the weather's miserable," and we said, "Well, you know, the weather's sunny here. Why don't you come out and you'll feel better. And do something." And he came. And he had been friendly with Warren Beatty, so he arranged for Warren Beatty to get a bunch of the placards -- the still cards -- and a whole bunch of film from the movie. So he had a lot of material to work with, and he created *Reels (B+C)*, which became known as "Bonnie and Clyde." And he felt better. And he got rid of his cold.

WEYL: But also the thought occurred to me that Bob's collaboration on *Booster* and the [*Seven Studies*] was really the first in-house artist collaboration for Gemini.

FELSEN: Yes. Josef Albers was seventy-eight at the time. He thought [that] was very old and he wouldn't travel. So Josef Albers' project was -- I don't want to spend a lot of time, because it's not about Bob -- but he would paint a square on a piece of cardboard and tear it in half. We would go there and he would hand us the half, and Gemini would bring it back and proof it. Meaning, we'd do that onto one of our printing plates, and send it back to Albers, and he would say yes or no. So his whole project wasn't really an in-house "passion" thing. It was a Federal Express project, you might say. And so Bob came along, and he was the first one, really, who did a project at Gemini.

THOMAS: I'm curious whether or not Bob ever spoke about Albers, and Albers spoke about Bob.

FELSEN: Well, Bob talked about Albers quite a bit. He felt Albers was very influential in his life. Bob was very much a free spirit and Albers was quite rigid. Albers brought structure to Bob's life; a sense of order. Being around Bob working, you felt in a set he was all over the place, but underneath it all, he was quite orderly. There were all these piles of photos, but he always knew where to find the images he wanted.

So he was very complimentary to Albers. He said that Albers told him he was the worst student he ever had. [Laughs] So that kind of language was pretty common.

THOMAS: Andy Oates, who lives in Key West, Florida, was at Black Mountain with Bob, and did photography class with Bob and Sue. He also took paintings classes with Bob and Albers, and said that it was just real tough to watch the way that Albers treated Bob. So you've explained a lot about Bob's take-away from Albers. Nobody's ever done that, really. They just say, "Yeah, Bob says he owes him a lot," but not in terms like you're talking about -- the organization part. Yes, that's very helpful.

WEYL: Also, I suppose, a little bit, when you think about Bob's sense of color -- he had an incredible sense of color. There was an early piece of Bob's that has almost like this kind of color chart or whatever, and he had to have thought a lot about Albers in that way. But I think the process is certainly -- that's what somebody does in person to you, give you a rigor or structure that otherwise you might not necessarily have.

THOMAS: I'm interested in what you're saying about the collaborative process here. When I was speaking with Jim [Reid], he said that when there was a Gemini retrospective at the National Gallery, the first thing Bob said was that he wanted to thank the printers. And Jim was, I'm sure, then, and still now, very moved by that. How did that come about here?

FELSEN: That's what Gemini is. It's all about collaboration. An artist comes here, and he or she -- they have an idea -- or they know really what they want to do, but this is a process. And the people in the shop, they're experts in the processes -- whether it's lithography, or etching, or screen-printing, or woodblock printing—and so the artist needs the printer. It's a hand-in-hand -- It's a dynamic, passionate connection, where the artist relies on the printer, and the printer needs the artist. The printer has a lot to do with it. The printer has a lot to do with what the print's going to look like. ... Look, some artists need the printer more than others. [Laughs] I'd say Bob didn't need a printer as much as some other artists did; Bob had such a mind that he had a pretty good idea of what he wanted to do. He didn't know how to do it. But some artists really rely on the printers much more, because they don't have that certain ability to see what a process is and what it can do.

WEYL: On the flip side of that, though, I would say that Bob needed a printer -- maybe "need" isn't the --

FELSEN: He "used" --

WEYL: He "used" a printer probably as best as anybody I've ever seen, because, for one thing, he was always so open to whatever happened in the moment, and making the most of it. So if there was an accident with a plate, or a stone, or something went wrong in the process, Bob would look at it and go, "Great. That's exactly what I wanted". So I think in that regard, in collaboration with a printer, the printer might have done something that wasn't what was intended, but Bob would embrace it fully. So, in that sense, he makes the most of the printers, because, in some way, whatever their hand is in it, whether it's a positive or a mistake, it becomes incorporated into the work of art. I can't tell you the story exactly -- I can backfill it --

but Jim Webb was telling me this amazing story about this print in the *Stoned Moon* series called *Earth Crust*, and it had something to do with a reversal in the processing. I don't think it was an accident, but I think it had something to do with the way they processed it, and whether it was intentional or not, it was absolutely printer-influenced. Bob created the image, but the result of it wound up being something that had a strong influence and impact of that collaboration. I think there are stories like that all along the road with Bob on so many things where that happened.

THOMAS: It does seem to me that he really liked having people around, and interacting with them.

WEYL: Totally. Here in the studio, the television was always on, and the door was always open. People were flowing in and out, whether it was a printer or a visitor.

THOMAS: And when visitors came in, that didn't interrupt the flow? When Gregory Peck walks in --?

FELSEN: Bob encouraged visitors – Seven people could be in the studio – Fifteen people could be there – he was listening to them – he was sensing something about them – and at the same time he was thinking about his next move, which was most likely influenced by what all of his surroundings were. Some artists close the door to the artist studio – can't have anyone in while working – need total concentration. Bob seemed to thrive on the action surrounding him – you might say the vibrations or spirits in the air. I felt everything around him influenced the art he made.

You asked about Gregory Peck. Bob and Gregory Peck met at a screening gathering at Norman Lear's home. They spent much time that evening talking about creativity. The next day [Gregory Peck] came to Gemini and [they] spent approximately six hours together. Bob was working on *Borealis Shares*, a group of brass chairs created by him, and being hand painted by him at this time. They talked the whole time and continued their discourse on many aspects of creativity. The two of them enjoyed each other and all of us at Gemini were blown away by these two giants being together.

WEYL: I remember in 1979 Bob was working on a series called *Rookery Mounds* and it was my first in-depth experience of being around Bob -- because I had come to Gemini in 1977. He had an audience, basically. He had the printers working on it, and he had the front-office people, like me, hanging around. I'd come to work at nine and finish my desk job at five-thirty, then stay from five-thirty until three in the morning, or whatever, and try to go home and have a little sleep, and then come back and do my desk job the next day. And he encouraged that. It wasn't that it was supposed to be only printers, or "I need to get my work done." It was really, "Hang around. Talk." Bob would sort of make a mark, or do whatever he was doing, and then it would be standing around and talking for an hour or something, or half an hour, or more -- whatever. And then go back and make some other mark, or lay something else down, and then wander back in, and talk with people again, and then wander back. And it was sort of this evolving long process of how he worked. It wasn't like somebody who goes from A to Z, and that's what they get done, and then they take a break, and they enjoy everything. It was much more evolutionary.

FELSEN: You'd get the feeling that while he was talking to people and listening --

WEYL: -- something was percolating.

FELSEN: -- his mind was brewing and out of that came --

WEYL: -- whatever the next mark was going to be, or the next image.

THOMAS: There's [a] focus that you [Sidney Felsen] capture in your photographs of Bob that seems so "at the moment... I know what I'm doing." He makes that mark, and then he lets it settle, hangs out, makes the next effort.

FELSEN: There's something else built in to that. Bob could be looking at you or talking to you, and he knew what was going on over there. He reminded me of -- in basketball there is a "point guard," who brings the ball down the court, and he's looking over there, and he's making sure he knows what's there. Bob always had that sort of peripheral vision, where he'd encompass the whole room. I always wondered -- you know he was part Cherokee -- whether there was this American-Indian thing, or whatever it was but he had something that nobody else did. I never observed it in anybody else, in such a strong way. He was picking up what was happening, always knowing -- picking this from over there, and putting it together.

THOMAS: Did he ever "poop out" at the end of the day? You were saying you were here until three o'clock in the morning.

WEYL: No. He didn't.

FELSEN: There's a picture on the wall above of Bob on a bicycle. He had just worked for 24 hours straight -- no sleep. It was 8 in the morning, just after he completed this Herculean moment. He just wanted to come outside to get some fresh air. Bob regularly worked long hours into the early morning hours. Sometimes you'd have this feeling, "Well, Bob is getting tired," and this would last for a short period of time -- then all of a sudden, he's up and running again, working, talking, etc. This could be 3 or 4 in the morning.

THOMAS: Now were you there most of the time? You were probably were.

FELSEN: Yes, I was there all the time.

THOMAS: All the time, in the room?

FELSEN: Well, not all the time in the room, because I had my own, other work to do. First of all, it's hard to stay out of there, because it's interesting when he's there. You want to talk to him, or listen to him, or see, and in certain cases, I was taking pictures of him.

That guy was amazing as far as energy. You have to keep in mind when Bob started working at Gemini he was forty-one years old. He worked all the way through until he was almost eighty. And so we certainly saw, as the years went by, he continued to work hard, and he continued to

spend hours, but I would say, in the latter years, he worked eight or ten hours. But he certainly gave it a go all the time.

THOMAS: Looking almost as cute as he did at the age of forty-one.

FELSEN: Yes.

THOMAS: Those early photographs are sort of --

FELSEN: Well, those pictures of Bob and Jasper -- handsome boys.

THOMAS: Two handsome boys. I spent some time yesterday with Rachel Rosenthal, who hung around with them in New York. She's the only person I've met who knew them -- she was there, really, from '53 to '55, so she knew them just as they were getting to know each other. There was Jasper working in a bookstore, and, she said, "Bob said to him, 'You know what? You should quit that job. You should come work with me, because you're really talented. I can put food on the table or whatever, and you can make enough money, but you really need to spend your time - -'"

FELSEN: Window dressing and so on?

THOMAS: Yes, exactly. "You need to work with me, and then you need to work on your art. You shouldn't be working at the Marlboro bookstore anymore, because you're really good."

FELSEN: [Laughs] That's believable.

THOMAS: What I continue to collect are these stories about the generosity that he had toward an awful lot of people.

WEYL: Enormous.

FELSEN: If you asked me what were the special things about Bob? First of all, the art is a given, but I would say, beyond that -- I don't know which is first, but, certainly, his kindness, and considerations, and charitable attitudes was the best I've ever been around, as far as either giving his time, or money, or art, or any cause he believed in. He gave, and gave, and gave, and never stopped.

WEYL: That kind of story is sort of typical of his caring about people, and a protector in a way. I told the following story at the memorial -- I was really sick at one point, about sixteen years ago. I was in the hospital for a month, and Bob was concerned about *me*, but I think he was really concerned about the fact that Sidney was watching me go through this. So Bob got on an airplane and came from Captiva, and had to change planes twice or whatever -- to get from Captiva to L.A. was not so simple -- and came out for a day, basically, two days. He came to see Sidney and to make sure Sidney was doing all right. Then he came to see me, and brought me a drawing, and went back to Captiva. But he just needed to make sure that everything was okay. He had no other need to come to Los Angeles. It was unbelievable that he would do that. I think

it's just -- for the people that he cared about -- he was an action-oriented person. He really wanted to do something, or make it happen, and I think his foundation for artists came out of his own maybe life experiences, but really, also, to think about taking care of those who, really, don't have a chance, in a lot of ways.

THOMAS: Yes. Absolutely. You know, Sidney, when I think of great friendships, I do think of you and Bob.

WEYL: Yes.

THOMAS: How did it develop?

FELSEN: Just over time. No specific moment or anything. I started out in awe of him, for sure. I think the first time I was *really* around him was in New York, in his kitchen -- there was that table there, and there was probably...

WEYL: On Lafayette Street.

FELSEN: On Lafayette, yes. There were maybe eight of us sitting around the table, and I don't think I said a word all night; I just kept looking at this guy, listening to him. That's another thing. You say what are some of the great things about Bob? He was a great philosopher. One of the things I said is, "Put a recording device on him and just leave it there for three months, and you'd have the best book of philosophy ever written." I just listened to him, and was astounded by how brilliant he was. He could say things differently than anybody else, and he'd look at something and see it differently than anybody else. So I'd say just over the years, the friendship developed, with working together.

You know, one of the great things for us is [that] the working together leads into socializing together. If Bob was here for eight nights, we probably had dinner six, or seven, or eight nights together. And if Joni and I traveled, sometimes we'd go to Captiva, or we'd go with him somewhere.

WEYL: We saw a lot of the world with Bob, in terms of that. Other people did, too. Also, there was a lot of overlapping interests, because Bob clearly was interested in shopping, and clothes, and Sidney's clearly interested in that -- and I've come up to speed on that, too. And Bob loved fine dining, and food, and that was absolutely a passion of ours. Bob was like -- either before he'd get to L.A., or the minute he'd get to L.A., he was plotting out -- "Okay, the excursion to Barney's, and what restaurants are we going to? And are we going up to Maxfields?," or whatever. So I think because, as friends, there was a tremendous amount of overlapping, "hobby" interests. Bob never really "hobbied" about anything, but I think food and clothes were probably the two things that were really his passion, and there was clearly overlapping, intense interest with us, in particular with Sidney.

FELSEN: And I also think -- Bob never really wanted to talk about art. [WEYL: Yes.] He never talked about art. He may have with somebody else, but not with us and he never seemed to want to. And so we talked about our lives, and, socially.... Bob and I were of a similar age. I'm a



year older than him, but we grew up in the same era. There were probably a lot of things -- photography was one thing. I started taking pictures of him, and he started telling me how much he loved my photographs. It made me feel great. So he was very open to let me take his picture. I think we have about 3,000 photographs of him or something like that, all different places -- here, or in Venice, New York, wherever we were.

THOMAS: What do you think was so entrancing to him about the overseas projects?

FELSEN: R.O.C.I, you mean?

THOMAS: Yes. Or China, or any of those places.

FELSEN: My first guess is Bob always wanted to do something different -- to explore something new. He regularly would go to print shops such as ULAE, Gemini, or others, but here [were] opportunities to go to foreign lands. His first overseas junket with us was in France, where he worked with French paper makers, assisted by Ken Tyler -- he also went to China and collaborated with Chinese paper makers, accompanied by Stanley and Elyse Grinstein. He also travelled to Ahmedabad, India to work in an Ashram developed by Gandhi, where handicapped persons worked with Bob. Rosamund [Felsen] and I were on this trip and it was so rewarding to see how the 20 or so who worked there were so appreciative of working with this great artist and Bob was so happy to be able to work with them.

To give you an idea of how eccentric Bob was, the original plan was for all of us to go to Japan and work with Japanese paper makers. I had made arrangements with someone in Japan for our working visit in a famous mill there. Thirty days before departure time, he called and said "You know what, we're going to India instead of Japan." So we went to India and it was very successful. He didn't speak the Indian language, nor did he speak French or Chinese, but he's so great -- he reflects off of someone else. He reflects off of what these people do, and what the surroundings are.

WEYL: So it was almost like a, not literally, but almost like a boredom of working in the same domestic kind of situation, so going overseas would at least shake it up a little bit for him?

FELSEN: I'm not sure that anything Bob did was boredom. I don't know what's inside him. It reminds me of a minor-related story. Bob said to us one time, "You guys think I'm such a --." I forget exactly what his words were. The idea [was] that "I'm such an experienced printmaker, and I'm so capable as a printmaker." "Every time I walk into your studio for the first time, for a visit, I feel like there are about eight people standing there with a printing roll in their hand, saying, 'Okay, Bud. What're you gonna do now?'" "I walk in there and I know I've got to answer to that." So he was telling us, yes, he's capable of getting nerves when he walks in for the first day. Then pretty soon he's rolling, and he's got something new, and it's always exciting. But that was internal, so --

THOMAS: I would agree with you that [for] anybody who's got a curious appetite, that going in and collecting all those experiences has to kind of charge your batteries. Then you come back, and you do something that maybe is a different way of looking.

I wanted to ask if, in your travels, you went to NASA with him for the Apollo --

FELSEN: No, we didn't go. He came here from there, and did -- you're talking about *Sky Garden*. Well, *Stoned Moon* was the name of the series. So NASA invited him to go to Cape Canaveral -- which became Cape Kennedy -- and they told him they thought he was the U.S.A. artist most interested, or most involved, in space travel That's why they invited him to be a witness to it. When the event happened, they opened up their archives or records to him, so he could have charts, maps, photographs -- which he brought out to Los Angeles -- and then he developed this series called *Stoned Moon*.

THOMAS: I went online and they brought all the pictures back [together]?

WEYL: In Chicago. It was great. We'd never seen them all together before. It was really magnificent.

FELSEN: I was amazed.

THOMAS: It made me think about those silk-screens that Bob did in the Sixties -- there seems there's always this fascination with outer space, with that kind of travel.

FELSEN: Sure. Sure.

THOMAS: I suppose, if he didn't really talk about his art, he didn't really talk about that. But it interested me, what that connection might be. When he was working, you said he never spoke about his art.

FELSEN: Well, I didn't say about *his* art. He didn't talk about *art*, meaning he didn't want to talk about art philosophy. Look. If you wanted to ask him something about his art, he would answer. I meant -- like some artists want to sit and talk about art history, or art philosophy --

WEYL: -- or say they'd been to a show, and they saw some other artist's work, or whatever.

FELSEN: Bob was always interested in somebody else's art, but he never talked about it. He encouraged people, and he bought other artists' work. He was definitely a supporter of the art scene in a lot of ways. I meant it more in the sense that you could sit down here with some of the artists who come. They want to talk about art; they want to talk about the philosophy of art; about art history and things like that. That wasn't Bob.

THOMAS: It sounded to me that he was really supportive of the artists who worked here, as artists?

FELSEN: yes, he was very supportive of other artists as well as becoming friendly and supportive to our printers. They are mostly young artists working to make a living coupled with the pleasure of collaborating with so many accomplished artists. Bob encouraged them -- told stories about his younger days ... how he started out, struggled for years, so many rejections --

advising them to just keep going, whatever the difficulties are at the moment. There was no room in his vocabulary for the word "No."

THOMAS: And it seems like he "bonded", if that's the right word, with the art community in Los Angeles.

FELSEN: You interviewed the people that I felt were the ones who -- the friendships sustain -- it could be that he was also friendly with somebody for a moment or two. But between Ruscha, and Frank Gehry, [WEYL: Laddie Dill] and the kids who were around -- Bob really liked them, and he would always encourage them.

THOMAS: Laddie Dill told me that Bob brought Ileana to him.

FELSEN: That's great.

THOMAS: They had done collaboration, Bob and Laddie, and Laddie said it worked out really well, and he was hoping they could do another one. And Bob said, "You know, it's not really fair to you because it's always going to be about me. So I can do something for you that maybe would be okay," and Laddie said, "At some point in time, Bob said, 'Ileana Sonnabend is going to be in town, and I told her I thought she could come see your work.'"

So she did, she liked it, and she said, "I'd like to give you a show."

FELSEN: Oh good. I didn't know that.

WEYL: That's great.

FELSEN: Bob, for my taste -- Bob had more respect for Ileana's eyes than anybody. Anybody.

THOMAS: Yes -- and it sounds like everybody had that sense of her. She made such a difference here.

WEYL: Yes.

THOMAS: I know Frank Gehry made furniture out of cardboard. And I couldn't help but think, he's doing this [around] 1975, and Bob is doing *Cardbirds* --

FELSEN: -- in '71.

THOMAS: I was wondering if there was any cross-pollination there?

FELSEN: Not that I know of. Frank's cardboard pieces -- they were very thick, layered cardboard -- because you're going to sit in it, or stand on it. Bob's was a sheet of cardboard about this thick. It was a reality and illusion. Some of it was real cardboard; some of it was just printed paper that looked like cardboard. [Chuckles] Bob had a fascination with cardboard, because

however he said it, here's this common material that's around that nobody pays attention to, and it's beautiful. I'm going to make art out of it. So those pieces he made, those huge...

THOMAS: They were gigantic.

WEYL: The unique works.

THOMAS: Yes, exactly.

FELSEN: He did seven *Cardbirds* and a *Cardbird Door*, here, in our place.

THOMAS: He and Frank Gehry became friendly, right?

FELSEN: Yes, they were friendly. I don't know when it began. I know as the years went by they were certainly friendly. Frank designed this building we're sitting in, and this building was - it was finished in 1979; it was started, probably, in 1976. So it was around that time of Frank making those chairs. But look, Frank was an architect who was always interested in art, in fine art, and artists. He was very friendly with some of the artists around here in the early days and he certainly had an acquaintance with Bob in the early days, but I really don't have a handle on when -- They were always friends, but I don't know how -- later on, you have the feeling that they became better friends.

THOMAS: Closer friends. He said that when you all built this building, he thought it would be nice to have it on an angle, and that Bob didn't think that was such a good idea. He sounded like things cooled a little bit.

FELSEN: I don't know it went that way.

THOMAS: In his eyes, anyway. Then he said he was so happy [when] he went to the opening of Bilbao, and Bob came -- and it was the *very* first time that it opened, and he said there was Bob, and he was, "Uh oh, is he still going to be mad at me?" And he said Bob came around, and he said "he threw his arms around me and kissed me on the mouth." [Laughter]

FELSEN: When Frank designed our second building, he made an artist studio on the north end that had one wall all windows. Bob was the first artist to work in it. Almost immediately he said "I feel like I'm in a fish bowl." That people walking by all stop and stare in. This was a surprise to me, being so used to Bob wanting people around him while he worked. Somehow the idea of someone removed or detached -- separated by a pane of glass obviously bothered him. We told Frank about the conversations -- he removed the glass and replace it with metal so you can't see in from the outside. It remains that way today.

THOMAS: From that side.

FELSEN: Because that's a walkway out there. That's what I remember about Bob's comment. I don't remember Bob not wanting an angle or something.

THOMAS: I was interested, because at one point I read [Frank] said that he much preferred to hang out with artists than with architects. And I thought, "Oh, my god, this is like Bob saying, back in the Sixties, he much preferred hanging out with the dancers than with fellow artists."

WEYL: Well, for one thing, I would suspect -- and I can't speak exactly to Bob's desire to do that -- but it takes the competitive element out of it. You're not sitting with other artists, worrying about whether or not they're bragging about their work, or you're bragging about your work, whatever. Now you're just in a completely different field. That's one thing. Then there's also the kind of energy that you draw from somebody who's creative, but not in your field, and so you get a different kind of light on something. I certainly think that was true of Bob. It allowed Bob to expand his art making in such interesting ways. And I think, for Frank, it probably does the same thing, just in a different way.

FELSEN: I wonder which came first. Bob did a lot of sets for Merce Cunningham. Did that come from hanging around the dancers, or did he hang around the dancers because he was building the sets ....

WEYL: ... or does it come out in the window dressing ....

THOMAS: Exactly. Or John Cage saying, "Go sit on the ladder and read poetry." But I think there's something to that; this stimulation of being around people who do something different. Did he have a competitive nature?

FELSEN: I was going to say something else. I don't think about that. But Bob was very friendly with Roy Lichtenstein, and he was very friendly with Jim Rosenquist. They were the two artists that we, in our lifetime with him, as far as being around him -- in a way he was closer to Jim because of geography, and he saw him more, but he really liked Roy, and Dorothy. And so he was definitely attracted to them as far as being around them. I always felt those guys fantastically appreciated each other. Roy really loved what Bob did and Bob really loved what Roy did. So I didn't pick up any competitiveness there. I suppose any of us would have to ask the question, was there a pattern of competitiveness between Bob and Jasper, because of the fact that they grew up together, they lived together, and there was a certain relationship in what they do.

What I was able to observe here was that whenever Bob came in to start a project, the first thing he wanted to see was, was Jasper here recently, and what did he do? And in a way Jasper did the same thing. When he came in, "Well, what did Bob do recently?" I always thought it was an inquisitiveness; I didn't think pick it up as a competitiveness.

THOMAS: I tend to be like you. I don't think that's the way people are approaching their world, because the energy just gets too dark. But I remember you saying that -- and I had mentioned that to somebody in New York, and I said, "I think that's so nice, that he was interested in knowing what Jasper was working on," and the response was, "He's always been very competitive." I had never seen that side, so I had to ask.

FELSEN: Okay.

WEYL: I didn't feel it.

FELSEN: I didn't pick that up at all.

WEYL: What were you going to say?

FELSEN: I think artist's work that he didn't like -- there were things that some of his "brothers," so to speak, in time --

WEYL: Yes. That's different. I think that Bob, in his own -- I always thought Bob's process, his working process, was sort of slow but not slow at all. In other words, it was this, again, what I talked about before, where he would sort of make something, and he'd dabble, and he'd walk away, come back -- it would all get done. Bob was amazingly productive. How he could make as much art as he made in any one visit at Gemini, or at any place else, in his own studio practice, was extraordinary -- because he was always working -- but it wasn't like this kind of action, active kind of motion that you could really see something actually getting bronzed, somehow. It was this kind of imperceptible mark-making in some way that when you looked around, all of a sudden, the picture was finished.

And so I think that Bob was very decisive. He really knew how to make art, and he had opinions about that. I think if that's competitive, then -- because I think that interaction would spill over, potentially, that kind of decisiveness on his part would potentially spill over into his interaction with other artists. If that is translated as competitiveness, then -- I don't know. I wouldn't call it that way. I would just say that he definitely had opinions about how something should be made, whether you're telling the story about the Frank Gehry building, or other things we might have observed. And some artists might do it differently. They might not express themselves in a way that Bob would. They might think it and then not say it. Bob was more open about saying to somebody -- whoever it was, whether it was a peer or not -- "I think you ought to make it this way. I think you ought to do it that way." I think he did it out of respect, and love, and trying to help, and thinking that he had a vision about it that the artists themselves, didn't have, and that they couldn't see because they were so close to it; that he could help them out of that box -- not because he felt that they were wrong, as much as that they just couldn't see it, and not because he wanted to trump their creativity; but, more that he had an opinion and wanted to voice it. That would be my observation.

FELSEN: One very specific thing about Bob working here, and probably anywhere -- he finished what he started. If he came in for a week, and made up his mind that he was going to do eight prints or nine prints, he did them. He never left anything -- said, "I'll be back again; we'll resolve this." Never. Never. In all the forty years --

WEYL: Very, very unusual.

THOMAS: Really.

FELSEN: Even if he had to get back, he finished. A lot of artists don't do that. It will be Saturday and they have to leave on Sunday, and they'll say, "Look, just put this away, and I'll

come back again when I can, and we will continue on." But Bob was absolutely a decision maker.

THOMAS: That strict upbringing?

WEYL: Probably.

THOMAS: When you have young artists coming in, do they evidence receiving gifts from Rauschenberg? Do they acknowledge any kind of influence from Bob?

FELSEN: Oh, yes. Artists, oh yes. And I think it's a language of the young and middle-aged community how much they gained from Bob, how much they took from him.

THOMAS: Good.

WEYL: I don't know that we have a lot of specific stories to say where somebody comes in and says, "Oh, man, I wish I could be more like Bob Rauschenberg, because he did this." Or, "because I observed that in Bob," or whatever. But I think that you just see it -- not so much always in their actual art product, but something -- it's in everything. The ones that got to meet Bob -- it's about knowing that kind of generosity of spirit, and that kind of openness to the possibilities of letting something happen. And to those who didn't meet him, but who felt the impact of his work -- you've got to embrace the openness to possibilities that Bob brought to his work, and I think as an artist that's really powerful.

Probably the one aspect -- since we just touched on it -- would be the thing that's probably lacking most in the younger generation is that kind of "I've got to finish it. I've got to do it. I'm going to be here for ten days, and I'm going to make this project finish." That's more unusual, increasingly so. I think it's a generational thing. I think that Roy used to finish everything, and probably other artists of that generation probably tended -- Jim Rosenquist finishes, for the most part, and things like that. I think the young generation is a little bit -- they're probably more distracted, and more dabbling, and more doing other things. They're used to a different ability to focus on the moment that they're here, and then get done, and go back.

FELSEN: They probably get more cell phone calls, more twitters, and texts.

WEYL: They do. And they're Skyping to somebody at home, and they're doing whatever they're doing. And also, frankly, probably the explosion of art, the awareness of art, has probably put increasingly more pressure on the younger artists, the younger, talented artists of today, than there was in Bob's generation. Relatively speaking.

THOMAS: Financial pressure, do you mean?

WEYL: Just everything -- the kind of critical pressure, the kind of, you've got to have this new painting ready for the next art fair, and you have to do the thing for -- the museum is asking you to do this. And there's a lot more, -- the explosion of art fairs is one thing that all artists are dealing with all the time, and the kind of constant request from their galleries. "I'm showing in

Art Basel, I'm showing in Shanghai, I'm showing here, blah, blah, blah." "I need a new painting, or a new work of yours, to have in the booth." That's creating another exhibition and a half, on an annual basis, for a lot of these artists. So that right there is something that wasn't happening in Bob's generation. And also, the visibility, the acclaim and the success of Bob's generation was different. It was happening, but it was happening at a whole different pace than it is today.

THOMAS: I had not thought about the art fairs. But it's a huge step for the appreciation of art, certainly in the United States. But it sounds, globally, to have these popping up, because, clearly, somebody thinks that it's a destination location -- which is good for everybody, except for, perhaps, the pressure it puts on the artist.

FELSEN: Well, it puts pressure on everybody. We're in two art fairs a year. It just takes so much out of our lives to put these things together. It's going on stage for seven days, and the preparation is three or four months of this or that and to make sure it works. There's a major art fair at least once a month, somewhere around the world.

WEYL: And if you're a successful artist, you're expected to have something in it. And the hardest thing is saying no to -- you're an artist and you've got a dealer in Berlin, you've got a dealer in London, you've got a dealer in New York, you've got a dealer, maybe, in L.A., and all of them are all going to different fairs, and they're all expecting you to have work in it. It's a big job, right there. Just take that part. That wasn't present for Bob's generation. So artists trying to finish things these days is tougher and tougher. In Bob's generation, you'd come to L.A., and the excuse on the East Coast was, "Bob's in Los Angeles, and I can't disturb him. He's working." Now it's all texted, and you'll get an answer back by the end of the day. It's not so easy.

THOMAS: Changing subject -- was *Hoarfrost* a big technological challenge?

FELSEN: If you had been in our studio during that time. It wasn't *Hoarfrost* it was a "Holocaust." [WEYL: "Horror-frost!"] It was taking a newspaper -- the Los Angeles Times -- and it was a combination of transferring that onto the material, which was fairly easy. There were these big pictures he wanted, big photographs that he wanted transferred onto the material and that was -- We spent a long time figuring out how to make it work. It was difficult, very difficult.

THOMAS: With extraordinary, magnificent results.

FELSEN: They were great. Bob did approximately 120 *Hoarfrost*'s that were unique.

WEYL: A hundred?

FELSEN: Yes, Bob did around 120 unique *Hoarfrost* pieces, and in many ways the "uniques" and the editions had similarities. One major difference was the size and scale of the imagery. All unique pieces were made from direct transfers of existing photo materials. The editions had many images that were enlarged greatly through process and then transferred onto the final fabrics used. You could place unique *Hoarfrost*s next to our edition pieces and you would have a hard time figuring out which was the unique piece.



THOMAS: They're so delicate. I know you were involved in this business about the photography lawsuit. Did you perceive a change in his work, as a result of not being able to [use extant photo images]?

FELSEN: One hundred percent. All of a sudden he only used his own photographs. Joni mentioned *Rookery Mounds*, which were done in 1979. This was the first print works he did after the lawsuit was filed. Incidentally, Bob prevailed in the lawsuit, because the photography had an insufficient copyright, so he had no case. The most painful part of all this was Bob was such a supporter of artists rights --

WEYL: -- advocate.

FELSEN: -- advocate of artists' rights. He did so much for that cause, and here was this photographer -- artist -- who was suing Bob because he "stole" his image. The image was -- seriously -- was about this big.

WEYL: About how big?

FELSEN: About that.

WEYL: Two by three inches?

FELSEN: Two by three inches, and it was in a magazine. It was an Acapulco diver. It was an ad for a Nikon, for the camera. And Bob's --

WEYL: final picture..

FELSEN: -- *Pull* was probably four or five feet high, vertical, and it has a lot of imagery around it. But the diver is very specific. In reproduction, you're not allowed to do that. He could have taken that picture and done it on a unique piece, and he'd be okay. [WEYL: In an edition work.] But on a reproduction work you can't repeat.

So it was a dangerous position to be in but, fortunately, the photographer didn't have a copyright. So he walked out of there. Once he saw there was no -- this place doesn't make that kind of money. It's like you'd make thirty of those, and thirty of those, so each one is a little bit of profit and altogether it becomes an interesting result. Well, he had dreams of how much money he was going to make off of that. Once he saw -- because in the depositions we showed what the results were. He got very uninterested. But beside that, we proved that he had no case.

WEYL: But I think Bob's -- to kind of go to your question -- my feeling from -- my background is as an art historian. And, again, it was probably my first real observation of Bob working. I think that the product, if you want to call it -- the result -- after the lawsuit, was totally different. Clearly, he used his own photographs, but also in the first prints he made, these *Rookery Mounds*, the photography is very dominant. There's no overlapping of any of the images; they're all abutting one another. He used the photographs in the typical kind of Rauschenberg way. He'll see something in an ocean, let's say, and he'll observe it as a pattern, and he can move it

around the piece, and turn it upside down, and it doesn't look like an ocean anymore, or something. But the images all abut. There's no rubbing; there's no layering; they all are just tight up against each other.

So what it was for me was sort of like [Bob Rauschenberg] saying, "Wow! I'm loving taking these pictures, and I'm really interested in looking at these images that I'm getting on my camera, for the first time in a really, really, really long time." I think the prints were large (they're about 41" X 31"), and they're all about the photographs -- they're on beautiful, handmade paper and everything -- but I think that was a real celebration of photography, for him.

So, clearly, the results were really different -- in my mind -- at least in his printmaking here, to see the difference.

THOMAS: That's interesting. Because one of the things -- and maybe it was because -- in the '60s he work he was doing had a photojournalism quality to it.

WEYL: Right.

THOMAS: Then it didn't. And I didn't know whether or not there was a connection between the lawsuit, or if he had moved beyond the photojournalism because that was something he'd done in the mid-'60s, and by this time he wasn't doing that anymore.

WEYL: I don't know. I can't really address the photojournalistic aspect of the early work, exactly. I can't. But I certainly can, in my mind, trace the use of photography in his prints, if you look at the way he uses his photographs in *Stoned Moon* or other things, where, clearly, he's using photographic images, but he's rubbing them in such a way that they become -- they have his hand. The print series just prior to *Rookery Mounds* was *Romances*, and they were done in 1977. Right? [FELSEN: Right.] What I'm thinking is -- is there anything in between that I'm forgetting? I think '78 was something else.

FELSEN: '75 was India [*Bones and Unions*] '74 was *Hoarfrost* and I think maybe -- it was during that time the [National Collection of Fine Arts] in Washington had a retrospective...

WEYL: He was tied up with a lot of that...

FELSEN: At that time he was tied up with doing other things. He didn't do that many projects [at that time].

WEYL: *Romances* has photographic images. But they're still smaller, and there's still some handwork, and rubbing, and stuff that's kind of obscure, and they're layered more, so you can't always read exactly what the image is. So there's that kind of continuum from the early prints and early paintings, where the images were more layered, and more obscured, and that kind of thing. They're there, but you could make a whole thesis on one work of art, trying to figure out all the different images that are in it. And when you get to *Rookery Mounds* you know exactly what those things are. A couple of them are a little confusing, and you have to study for a while, turn it upside down and figure out what it was. But they're very, very readable. You know

exactly what those images are. So it ties back into what you're talking about, as sort of photojournalism, I'd say maybe, except that the combinations of the images, and the abutments of those images, and how they join, and the way they come together, takes it way out of that.

THOMAS: That's interesting.

WEYL: Way, way out of that.

THOMAS: That's great. I'm asking these questions so that thirty years down the road, somebody else is going to ask these questions --

WEYL: Yes. Right.

THOMAS: -- and I want to make sure they get the right answer. When you were, say, "reading" -- I wondered if he ever commented on the ways people interpreted his work, if he ever talked about that.

FELSEN: Not to me.

WEYL: No.

FELSEN: It's funny. He finished something, he finished it. It was done, and he never talked about it again. He didn't seem interested in it again; he just went on to something else.

WEYL: Even if he were going to sit down and be interviewed by somebody, or something like that, he wasn't very interested in an interpretation of that work or something.

FELSEN: I think he wasn't interested.

WEYL: That would be my interpretation as well.

THOMAS: I had asked him a long time ago -- this was in the '80s, when I first met him -- and Robert Hughes had just come out with his *Shock of the New*, and he had made his bold statement about the meaning of *Monogram*. So I said to Bob, "This is my takeaway?" and he shook his head, and he said, "I just thought it would be interesting to put a tire around a goat." [FELSEN: Yes.] One can read into a piece of art like you would read a book.

FELSEN: I think he liked *that*. I think he liked the idea that somebody interpreted what he did, and that he would say "Look, I just put a tire on a goat, with no great, deep meaning." But who knows.

WEYL: For example, there's a print that he made with us -- it's called *Blue-Line Swinger* -- and people always ask me about it. It's the one print that people actually ask me more about the content of than anything we've ever made that I can think of. And it's three panels; it's a swing-set, and it's kids swinging on three different panels of it. Beneath it, there are three different other images. One of them is this kind of locked fence, and one of them is this cushion, at the

bottom of it, and they always say, "Well, what does it mean?" And I said, "Look, I think Bob was just interested in the images and the forms and things like that." But when you look at the whole thing, and you get away from it....

I think just his innate, intuitive ability to make art and combine images was really what was dominant in his work. But then when you get all done with it, and you look at it, you go, "Wow. This is about childhood, and life, and how you emerge, and how somebody's underneath you, and saving you, and whatever -- I'm sure Bob wasn't going, "Oh, man, I'm going to do something about my childhood." [Laughter] Yet, that's what you want. The funny thing about that, though, is it kind of contradicts what he said to you, which is, "I want to make a self-portrait of inner man." That was a very intentional kind of thing, and I would say that that would be more rare than normal, in terms any experience I've ever..

FELSEN: I agree, and it's the only time I can think of when he did something like that.

THOMAS: Right. And it's such a provocative statement that it's perhaps the kind of thing that just comes to your head when you get off the plane, because you're thinking --

WEYL: -- "I have to say something to this guy." [Laughter] I think that's probably part of it. It's almost like he was, "Okay, I'm showing up for work. This guy's going to ask me what I'm going to do, so I'm going to have an answer for it." He probably had six Jack Daniel's and worried the whole way while he was flying, what he was going to say to you.

FELSEN: I'm the last one to probe somebody. I don't usually ask people questions.

WEYL: But you didn't know each other well enough [for him] to know he wasn't going to get grilled.

FELSEN: I just thought of something -- that has nothing to do with what we were talking about. Joni and I once observed something with Bob that was -- in a sense it has a relationship to art history. I never thought about this until today. You know, Bob was famous for -- one of the things Bob was famous for was erasing the de Kooning drawing. Well, we were involved in a situation where Steve Wynn, who owned, or operated the -- what was it?

WEYL: The Bellagio.

FELSEN: -- the Bellagio Hotel. You walk into the entrance of the Bellagio Hotel, and there is a --

WEYL: -- a plate-glass ceiling by Dale Chihuly.

FELSEN: -- Dale Chihuly, this huge, highly-colored, really in-your-face image -- decoration. And right over there is the desk where you sign in, the reception area. And there were two de Kooning paintings on the wall. They were fairly small, and they were timid, as far as imagery. In a lot of ways, Chihuly buried those paintings.

So Steve Wynn invited Bob to come there, and commissioned Bob to do two paintings to replace the de Kooning paintings. So Bob went, and he studied, and he looked, and he said, "Well, if you take this furniture out, and you do this, and you do that, I'll make two paintings," and he did, and they worked. They were really pretty bombastic, but I really hadn't thought about that until today, how he had --

WEYL: -- How he had replaced a de Kooning?

FELSEN: - a de Kooning. Did you ever think about it?

WEYL: Oh, absolutely. [Laughter] That's the historian in me. He erased the de Kooning *twice!*

THOMAS: That's right. Or maybe he was going, "Wait a minute. I don't want anybody looking at the decorative piece, I want them looking at me."

WEYL: That, too.

FELSEN: The de Kooning paintings moved down the line to a more peaceful surrounding, whereas Bob's piece has held up.

WEYL: I don't think the irony of replacing the de Koonings was lost on him at all. I think that was part of the attraction, honestly. I think that was part of what --

FELSEN: But, again, he never said anything. He never said a word.

WEYL: No, he didn't. But Bob knew he was coming to Vegas to do this. So he called us on the spur of the moment, a couple days before, and said, "Will you meet me in Las Vegas?" So we got on an airplane, and we went and met Bob -- who had been flown there by Steve Wynn's private jet. Steve Wynn put us up on the top -- in the high roller's suite -- on the top of the Bellagio. We each had this enormous suite; each of them was like 4,000 square feet.

FELSEN: We had a suite twice as big as -- we each had a bathroom that was as big as this room.

WEYL: It was just enormous.

FELSEN: There was a swimming pool outside, and each one had a bar -- there was a bar in the room. There was a workout room.

WEYL: There was a private butler who was there for you twenty-four hours, just waiting outside the door.

FELSEN: This guy was in our room all the time. So Bob said to him, "Why are you here?" And he said, "Well I'm assigned, I'm your server..." He said, "I don't want you here."

WEYL: Because he didn't want the guy just waiting on him.

FELSEN: So the guy waited outside our suite, he sat there all the time. Whatever we wanted, we rang a bell. It was just unbelievable. [Laughter]

THOMAS: When Bob had his stroke, he handled it pretty well, didn't he?

FELSEN: Yes, in the beginning, is that what you mean? I think immediately his hand froze, didn't it? That was probably one of the first things that happened, his hand froze. Well, I don't know how emotionally he handled it, but he certainly continued to work. You know, he had a lot of handicaps, but I think he handled it well, considering he was debilitated. He accepted it in the sense that he didn't stop life; he probably worked as much as he ever did. Now he had to use other people's photographs.

I remember -- I took some pictures and he said, "No, no, no. I want dumb pictures. I want dumb pictures that I can make a story out of. I don't want a picture that's its own story." So people took pictures for him. He must have given them instructions on what he wanted.

THOMAS: He was his own author; he didn't want anybody else being the author.

FELSEN: Yes. He continued doing what he always did.

THOMAS: Yes.

FELSEN: I thought for a long time he functioned exceptionally well, considering he'd still get dressed and go out. He was in a wheelchair. Darryl was great. I must say, Darryl, for several years, really, was Bob's nurse, companion, and at the same time he was making his own art. I thought he really did a hell of a job of taking care of Bob.

Later on he got worse and worse. We weren't around him much at the very end, but you could just see -- that night with the dinner and all, he was really having a hard time by then.

THOMAS: Were you surprised that he took himself out?

FELSEN: No. I wasn't there, but the guy was on a life-support system. He had asked the doctor, "Can you make me much better?" and they really said no, so I think he didn't want to live that way. One of Bob's favorite lines, I heard him say so many times, "I don't want to die. I'm having too good a time." Well, I don't think he was having a good time at the end of his life. He was really suffering.

THOMAS: A friend of mine wrote an article in the Sunday *Times Magazine* a couple weeks ago. He has ALS, and he said that when someone heard that that was his affliction, they said, "Well, I guess we need to get you a gun." And Dudley said, "No, I don't need a gun, I've already got what I need. When there comes a time I can't tie my bowtie, and I can't smile, and I can't hug my daughter, then I know --." It made me think of Bob.

FELSEN: Bob was really in terrible shape. We weren't there, but we were told that he said to the doctor, "Is it going to be painful?" and the doctor said, "No." So they just pulled the plug on him.

In the good days, when we were around, him he still had a lot of problems, but at the end there --, for one thing, at that dinner we had with him, we were told that his esophagus was starting to give out, and so that was causing a swallowing problem. Supposedly, he went upstairs from the dinner and was taking pills, and he started choking. He was rushed to the hospital.

THOMAS: Oh, that's what happened.

FELSEN: There are people who would know that better than me. That's the general idea. He never got out of the hospital. That photograph on the wall of Bob with Stanley, Elyse, Mark Pace, Bob's nurse plus Joni and me is probably the last one taken of him.

[Editor's note: Rauschenberg was able to leave the hospital and died at home.]

THOMAS: Oh, what a treasure, then.

WEYL: It was certainly the last good meal he had. [Laughter]

FELSEN: He was great the night we were there.

WEYL: He was great that night. He was rolling, he was happy.

FELSEN: He was rolling. He was telling stories. He made us all feel really good.

WEYL: I remember we came into the room, and he just lit up. He was absolutely so --

FELSEN: He responded very ... We hadn't seen him for a while. He was sitting in the living room with three or four people, and we just walked in and had this fantastic reception.

THOMAS: [Joni], you had this great connection with him. I have seen that light in his face, when you walked into the room.

WEYL: Well, look. Bob did the most unbelievably memorable thing for us on our wedding day. He came out to L.A. for our wedding. The wedding was at the Grinstein house, and the reception was -- the wedding was in the front, and then everybody had to go to the back for a little while, while they reset the front of the house again for the cocktails and food and stuff. So during the reset, Bob disappeared. There were a lot of people there; we didn't really notice. So Bob disappeared, and came back to the reception, and then we left the reception, and we were given, for our honeymoon night, to go to the Chateau Marmont, where Bob always used to stay. In fact, Bob was staying there.

So we left the reception, and we went to dinner, I think. And then we came back from the dinner, and walked into our room, and the first thing when we opened the door, you just had this incredible aroma. And it was flowers. You could smell these flowers, intensely. We went into our bedroom, and spread all over our bed -- he had peeled off all the ugly bedspread, and all that kind of stuff, and all that was there was this white sheet and pillows. And sprinkled on top, and then inside, between the sheets, were hundreds and hundreds of multi-colored rose petals. He had made this art piece.

Of course, we didn't have a camera, but it's so vivid in our minds, what he had done. He made this incredible honeymoon bed for us out of rose petals. It was really great. It was totally great. We've seen lots of wedding announcements, and birthday announcements, and things which, of course, ours was also made into. But I've never heard of anybody having their honeymoon bed turned into rose petals.

The other thing he did was, he let us -- the first trip we made to Captiva after we got married, he let us stay in the Fish House, on the water. Very rarely did anyone stay there.

FELSEN: That was our honeymoon suite.

WEYL: That was our honeymoon suite, out on the water. So that was great, too.

THOMAS: Do you all cook together? I know you all shared eating, but did you share cooking?

FELSEN: We eat out twenty-nine out of thirty nights a month.

WEYL: It was impossible to be around Bob and not cook with him, in the sense that you'd be around the kitchen and he and Darryl would be doing whatever. But no, we didn't cook. We sort of sat and drank, and watched them do their thing, or whatever.

FELSEN: He made bird's nest soup. Or red pepper soup.

WEYL: Beet soup, or any kind of -- great soups all the time, and all kinds of interesting things.

THOMAS: I thought maybe you had a special recipe that you were going to share.

WEYL: No.

THOMAS: The [filmmaker] that I was working for a long time ago said that the most important part of any film shoot was the restaurant advance. I was thinking about it when you said that what you all liked to do together was shop, and figure out what restaurants to go to.

FELSEN: Bob was a very adventurous eater. We'd go to good restaurants, and he used the menu.

WEYL: But also, he formed friendships -- especially with Wolfgang [Puck] -- but with chefs because really, that was a real passion for him.

THOMAS: Laddie [Dill] or Chuck Arnoldi was saying that when they were on Lafayette Street, staying at Bob's place that Bob would cook these Creole dinners, and he would cook up this big mass of shrimp, then they'd just dump it on the table.

WEYL: Yes, yes.

THOMAS: The way he described it, I thought, "That's a party."



FELSEN: On Lafayette Street, in those earlier years -- that was also an all-night thing, with a lot of people around. Later on, Bob worked his way out of that. But I'd say for at least fifteen or twenty years that was it.

WEYL: Even into the Eighties.

FELSEN: Once in a while.

THOMAS: What are you talking about?

WEYL: Just the whole -- lots of people hanging around.

THOMAS: The party scene.

WEYL: Not just a party, just these kind of cooking up big batches of food, and people wandering in and out, and that kind of thing, and late nights, and hanging around until the wee hours. I don't think I ever went to a really huge -- well, maybe I did -- a really huge party on Lafayette Street but more of that kind of friends floating in and out. Particularly because at that point, he was living in Captiva. When he would come to New York it was sort of an event, and lots of people wanted to come and see him.

THOMAS: Right. Do you have a view on the move to Captiva?

WEYL: You mean like why, or when?

THOMAS: Yes. If that was an important thing for him to do.

FELSEN: Well, it was 1970, and I think in late '70 -- he was here one time and he just said, "I'm thinking about buying this property in Captiva, in Florida, and I've considered living there. What do you think?" I thought this guy was so interested in the action of the city. I said, "I have a feeling you'd be happier living in New York than you would in a remote place like that." But he obviously bought it, and it was great for him. It was great. He went to New York so many times. It was a pattern, whether it was Bob or whoever. Roy and Dorothy, they lived out in Southampton, but they weren't quite removed like Bob, but they had their own privacy. Jasper would spend the winters in St. Maartens, Ellsworth [Kelly] moved up north. So, in a sense, they all wanted to get out of the city because of the need for privacy, and they had to make art. So it was great for Bob.

Well, we went to Captiva a lot, there were times when I probably went three times a year or something like that. It was a great place for him.

THOMAS: Wolfgang Puck told me that he would get mangos at Christmas from Bob. [Laughter] I thought that was wonderful. I thought, for the restaurant -- did he get *crates* of mangos?

WEYL: I don't know what he got, we got --

FELSEN: We got a box.

THOMAS: Isn't that funny.

WEYL: Then there's that famous clip with Jim Rosenquist in your movie, where Jim goes "Mangoes, I never got any mangoes from Bob."

THOMAS: That was so funny.

WEYL: He was so offended that he'd never gotten any mangos.

THOMAS: He was *such* a cranky guy. [Laughter] I remember when I was [filming] this conversation with you, [Sidney]. It was in Rosenquist's studio. He [had come to watch], was sitting on the steps, and we're doing this interview. He's listening -- Rosenquist -- and then we start talking about mangos. And I remember him sitting there --

WEYL: -- fuming. [Laughs]

THOMAS: -- fuming! "I didn't get any. *I* didn't get any." So I thought, "Aha. This will be fun." So when I talked to him, at the end of the interview, he *did* his riff on the mangos, and that was really --

WEYL: It was great. It was so great. It was perfect.

THOMAS: It was really, really funny.

FELSEN: Jim is a fun guy to be around.

WEYL: Because he tells so many kinds of stories.

FELSEN: He's a storyteller.

FELSEN: He's *the* storyteller. Bob was a great storyteller in his own, unique way. But Jim was like a guy --

WEYL: -- a raconteur.

FELSEN: -- a guy hanging around the local bar.

THOMAS: Yes. He absolutely is.

FELSEN: Who was that -- Damon Runyan? He's sort of a storyteller like that.

THOMAS: He would be a great bartender, wouldn't he?

WEYL: Yes.

FELSEN: He has that voice inflection. "This guy from New York..."[imitates].

THOMAS: Exactly. I had a conversation with him, and the woman who's the transcriber wrote back, and she said, "Is it the same person?"

FELSEN: [Imitates Rosenquist] "Hey! Jim!"! [Laughter]

THOMAS: Exactly. Is there anything more we ought to talk about?

WEYL: No, I don't think so.

FELSEN: Probably, but I think we did a lot. Did you cover your list?

THOMAS: I covered all of my questions. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]

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