

Stories Project. ACC 54.
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

Tony Ganz is a film producer and collector based in Brentwood, California. He is the son of the late Victor and Sally Ganz, major New York collectors of twentieth-century art, who owned many important works by Robert Rauschenberg.

Transcription of phone interview with Tony Ganz conducted by David White, Senior Curator, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, on October 28, 2020. Reviewed and edited by the speakers December 2, 2020.

Tony Ganz [TG]: Let's see, my name is Tony Ganz. I live in Los Angeles. I grew up in New York in the shadow of my parents, Victor and Sally, who were art collectors and who knew the two principals of this little story, [Robert] Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, quite well. And they had from a fairly early point in their collecting lives become avidly involved in their work. I think they started around 1960, '60 or '61. They had become quite friendly with Leo Castelli and that was a point of entrance for sure, their friendship with Leo, which became true friendships with both Bob and Jasper.

And I have only a few memories of Bob, because I was away at school when I was a young teenager. But there were many conversations around the dinner table about his work and Jasper's, too.

David White [DW]: And, can I just interrupt you? At that point, when you were growing up, works by Bob and Jasper were in your apartment and you saw them on a daily basis?

TG: Yes, yes, that's true. They had, by the middle- late-sixties collected a significant amount of important work by both of them, both artists. And all of that work was . . . we lived with [it] as a family. It was simply hanging in their apartment.

DW: How great to just live with that stuff—

TG: And, of course, the world, the art world, the collecting world, was entirely different then. The mania that has descended upon the art world and particularly the world of collecting and the values of art, or at least the amount of money that people are paying for art now, had nothing to do with the way people lived with and collected art fifty, sixty years ago.

DW: Right. I was asked just recently when I was working at Castelli starting in 1965, "How many serious collectors were there around?" And I said, "Oh, probably ten or less." There were a lot of people that were interested, but people that were really collecting and they were collecting because they loved it. That idea that you were going to get rich by collecting didn't seem to be a notion at that point, that I understood.

TG: Yes. Actually, you were going to get poor by collecting, which is almost what happened to my father. In any case, for purposes of this little anecdotal story, I can tell you that in 1968 or '69, I came down from college to visit Mom and Dad for the weekend. I quite distinctly

remember walking into the living room where, after dinner, they were sitting with Bob and, of all people, Pauline Kael. I can only imagine that he brought her along for the evening as I'm certain that they'd never met her before that night, and I don't believe they ever saw her again. I listened and they all had a very convivial conversation after dinner, a fair amount of alcohol being consumed that evening. In any case, after a while, I noticed that Bob kept glancing through the . . . there was a large open doorway from the living room into the dining room, where Jasper's great painting *Decoy* [1971] was hanging, newly acquired by Dad. At a certain point, Bob suddenly said with a little impish grin, which I think people who know or knew Bob would recognize, "I know that's my picture, but I just can't remember when I painted it."

There was much laughter at this, but of course inside his joke was the enduring truth of their deep affection and admiration for each other. Not to mention, of course, the unending profound influence that they had on each other's work.

DW: It's a very telling, little story. It's absolutely wonderful.

TG: Well, I'm glad you like it. I can tell you I do have one other memory, which is that I went with them one evening, I don't remember when this was. You probably know all about this. I know it's been written about, I mean, not that evening per se, but we went down to Lafayette Street. It's funny how these kinds of memories stay with you in visual form, a certain kind of tableau. And I remember, I think we all sat around and had dinner together. I was a teenager and the guest that evening was Abba Eban.

And the Israeli war had either just happened or it was about to happen. And Bob was remarkably irresistible in so many ways, so charismatic and very verbal, especially as these evenings wore on. And usually he, not in a self-important way, but the evenings became very much . . . he ran the night as it were. But Abba Eban was very, well, just shockingly articulate, just took over the entire dinner and its aftermath. And basically, we all sat there, and in his thrall, as he told stories about Israel's struggle for survival. It was unforgettable really.

DW: What a fantastic evening to have been present for.

TG: I know. So, there you were, Pauline Kael and Abba Eban, wanting to hang out at the bar with Bob like everybody else.

DW: Great. Wonderful. What were you about to say?

TG: I said, I could make up some more stories for you, but those are the only things I actually remember.

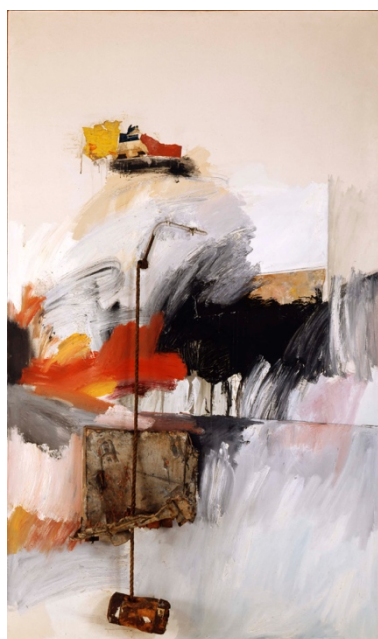
DW: But as long as I have you on the phone, may I ask you a couple of questions about some of the artwork that was in your parents' apartment?

TG: Well, it's funny you ask that because I've thought so many times that I deeply regret not having taken some version of an oral history with Dad, with both of them, but particularly with my father. Most little boys went out to the park and tossed the ball around with their father. Dad

had no interest in that, and less than no ability to throw the ball. But what we really loved doing together was hanging pictures. So, I remember hanging them and that's something that I've held onto.

DW: Oh, what a great thing to have gotten to do.

TG: In retrospect, of course, there were some very large-scale pictures like *Rigger* [Rauschenberg, 1961] that he got some help on. But we hung a lot of pictures and a lot, of course, a lot of drawings, a lot of prints. He was also an avid collector of pretty much all the work that they did at ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York], both of them. Especially Jasper. But we did collect a lot of the early . . . I still believe underappreciated, undervalued, early black and white ULAE prints that Bob made there.



Robert Rauschenberg
Rigger, 1961
Combine: oil, metal, rope, wood, fabric, plastic buttons, paper,
graphite and sand on canvas
102 x 60 x 11 1/2 inches (259.1 x 152.4 x 29.2 cm)
Private collection
RRF 61.026

DW: Oh, they're so beautiful. I love those prints. I agree. Not appreciating the value that they are and I don't mean monetary value.

But back to some other works, like the drawing that I think originally had been called *Aeroplane*, and then at the time of the show at Acquavella [Acquavella Contemporary Art, New York, *Robert Rauschenberg: Drawings 1958–1968*, Oct. 24–Dec. 6, 1986], it got changed to *Trans-Plant* [Rauschenberg, 1958], but had been in your parents' collection. And is that in your collection at this point?



Robert Rauschenberg
Trans-Plant, 1958
Solvent transfer with graphite,
watercolor, and crayon on paper
24 x 36 inches (61 x 91.4 cm)
Private collection
RRF 58.D019

TG: Yes, it is. It's one of the most beautiful. Our collection is mostly about drawings . . . Well, not about, but mostly we have drawings. And nothing is more treasured or beautiful in this house than that drawing as far as I'm concerned.

DW: It's absolute a masterpiece. I'm crazy about that drawing.

TG: Well, I'm glad you feel that way, of course.

DW: So, having lived with it this long, have any images come to light, that although you've looked at it for a long time, you were unaware of, and then all of a sudden something popped out at you? That happens to me all the time. So, I'm just wondering if that—

TG: Yeah, well I can't remember now who explained this to me, to my embarrassment, but for a long time, you see there's a profile of a man who I thought was actually Abraham Lincoln. Well, it turns out to be Bob.

DW: Oh, really? I have to go look at this reproduction again. Is it Bob Rauschenberg then, and not Abraham Lincoln?

TG: Yeah. Also in that drawing, when you hold a mirror up, there's a little . . . it looks like hieroglyphic writing, but of course it's just backwards writing and it's actually a little grocery shopping list.

DW: That's the kind of thing I would imagine you would not be aware of what it is at first, until it's been pointed out to you.

TG: I finally had the brains to look at it in a mirror and saw what it was, and of course that would be a perfect Rauschenberg thing to have done. Yeah. One thing about it, we're extremely careful with it. I have to say, we're extremely careful with the lighting in this house. But I think it's in

absolutely perfect condition because for all the years it was at 10 Gracie [Square], it was in Mom's sitting room. Because in those days, people really did not begin to grasp, at least not fully, the terrible danger and price to be paid for leaving things exposed even to ambient light. And I don't think Mom and Dad understood it either until, well, late. I don't think anything in their collection faded ultimately, but anyway, it was in her sitting room. And it was very dark in there. So, I'm so glad for that because of all things really, if that had faded at all, it would be very sad.

DW: No, that's wonderful to hear, fortunately.

TG: I think that group . . . I was nineteen, I guess it's [the drawing is] '58.

DW: Yeah. I think so, yeah.

TG: Those large-scale works are . . . Of course, there's the *Inferno* drawings [Rauschenberg, *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, often referred to as his Dante Drawings, 1958–60], but aside from that, there's nothing comparable in his whole production of making drawings, transfer drawings. There's one great work after another there in that group he did in that year. Very extraordinary.

Well, this has been a real pleasure.

DW: Tony, it's been fun to reconnect with you after so long and then to hear your stories.

TG: Well, believe me, the pleasure is mine, 100%.