Robert Rauschenberg papers


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Voices: But not

Q: Some black.

(Question)

(Laughter)

ACTOR: That I'd like to do is read the review of that first show for you.

CASTELLI (?) I have it?

CASTELLI: I've never read it.

Q: And needless to say it is about nine lines and the very first show was in May 1951 at the Betty Parsons Gallery and reviewed in Art News magazine says, "Robert Rauschenberg, who studied at Black Mountain College and the Art Students League, in his first one-man show offers large scale, usually white grounded canvases, naively inscribed with a covering and whimsical geometry, on vast and often heavily painted expanses, a scappy calligraphy is sometimes added to these abstract patterns, and in other instances collage is introduced, either to provide textural effects -- as in a picture whose background is made entirely of road maps -- or to suggest a very tenacious associaational context. Prices unquoted." And that is the entire review. (Go to p. 8)
Castelli: I see. No one asked?

Laughter (laughter)

Castelli: That's really the question. What was the reception to that first show, and how did it come about? You had only recently arrived in New York. How did you get a show at Betty Parsons Gallery?

Rauschenberg: X

Castelli: Tell me, there were so many things going on there. I mean, I was a student. I don't know how sophisticated, I wasn't so sophisticated. And there were so many things that I didn't understand. I kept going back to the Betty Parsons Gallery and asking for answers. And finally, I just took a bunch of paintings with me and went up there and asked if I could see her, and she came out and said, (imitating accent) "I only look at paintings on Tuesdays." (laughter in audience) This was on a Monday. I said, "Couldn't you pretend that it was Tuesday even though it's Monday?" And she said, "As, a" right, okay, put them in there, in the small room on the side. Then I am standing there in this small room surrounded by these inferior creatures that I have made, trying to figure out whether I should just flee or whether it would be better just to stand there in this loneliness, and before I could make up my mind she was back and she said, "Well, what are these?" And I said, "These are my works." And... oh... oh... drop dead, you know. (laughs)
A very bad idea, lady.

Then she started to say, "You are showing them to me too fast. I am trying to get out of there."

Then she said, "Well, I can't give you a show until May."

I said, "I don't want a show."

(laugh)

I just wanted her to think so if there was anything that I was doing that related at all to the energy in her gallery, because I was upset by seeing all these works.

So I had a show in May. (laughter) But there is more to that story.

Q: Will you tell it to us?

Rauschenberg: Uh huh. I was just about to.

Q: Okay!

Rauschenberg: I just met somebody today that reminded me of it. They had just seen Clifford Still. I had never seen Clifford Still.

Q: Clifford Still?

Rauschenberg: He was part of the magic that was there in that gallery, and I wasn't influenced by Clifford Still but he was part of my process.

So it was about four months that went past there, and Betty Parsons came to my house. (laughter)
We've seen pictures of that first studio.

Rauschenberg: You haven't seen this one. [laughing] This one wasn't photographed. [laughing]

I have paintings on the floor and the walls and the ceiling and no furniture. You just couldn't tell what time of day it was. There were only two times a day.

Of day and night.

Rauschenberg: Yeah, those were they. And she came in with this man and they got and picked pictures for the show, and I thought it went really pretty smoothly.

Then I brought the paintings for the show a couple of weeks later, and she said, "Oh, I have never seen those." And I said, "Of course not. I just did them yesterday." And it was the truth because I had painted the materials five times, ten times, 12 times, as many times over as you could, and I always thought that the next one was going to be better, and if you are doing it you usually think it is right or wrong. Society figures out none of the standards of judging.

I found out that—

She said, "Well, I can't understand this," and I found out that Clifford was still sitting there picking those things, and I had been scrutinized, my work had been scrutinized, which could have probably petrified it.
it. (laughter) It's funny that I didn't realize who he was.

Q: If Clyfford still ran one of your problems, so to speak.

Rauschenberg: Who else isn't? (laughter)

Q: On I didn't want to sound too sharp.

Q: In the summer of 1948 you were still a student at Black Mountain College, and then came soon after that to New York, and are credited with being an enormous influence, in fact the major conditioner of neo-Dada among the young artists of the New York school, and I can recall a sculpture of about two or three years ago that is an homage to Duchamp as well, now heavily does he figure as an influence in your life or your work?

Rauschenberg: I guess heavily but later than he could be an organizer, I mean a direct influence. I remember the first Duchamp that I ever saw was Bicycle Shoes on a Stool, and I saw it at the same time that I saw a sculpture by Maillol, in the Museum of Modern Art, and there was absolutely no problem, and there something by the Japanese.

Rauschenberg: Naguchi. I saw Naguchi, Duchamp and Maillol, and I didn't see any discrepancy. There was no conflict.
But I didn't know him until much later.

Mr. Castelli,

Q: Less you know Duchamp in that period, didn't you?

I, Castelli: I did, but no one, when did I meet him first?

It must have been right after I got back from the war—

Let's say the Second World War, not to make me too old.

I have some vanity (laughter).

Rauschenberg: That was my war too.

Castelli: It was.

Q: Is that how you ended up in Paris?

Rauschenberg: No. I went to Paris from the Kansas City Art Institute.

Q: How did that take place?

Rauschenberg: Going to Paris? The Kansas City Art Institute.

Q: And how did you get to Kansas City?

Rauschenberg: I had a girlfriend in Los Angeles. (laughter)
Rauschenberg: No, but she was going to go away, and she thought I was packing a bag. I told her I was lonely, and she said, "If I can get you into Kansas City Art Institute would you go?" And I said yes.

Q: How long did you stay there?

Rauschenberg: Long enough to change my name.

Q: You were Milton Rauschenberg?

Rauschenberg: Night, yes.

Q: And what happened that made you change your name?

Rauschenberg: I didn't like being called Milton. (laughs)

Q: So a post office was quite good, but not for an artist?

Rauschenberg: Yeah, well, all sorts of things occur to you when you're like waiting for... all these arrangements have been made, like you are waiting five hours in a Savarin coffee shop in a train train depot. I mean...

Q: You have lots of time to think.
Rauschenberg: Yes, you have lots of time to think about, like you can move to a new place; nothing is going to be the same ever again; it's going to be marvelous this time, what kind of a headstart can you anticipate; what would you change about yourself, you know, and I started right from the top -- my name.

(laughter)

Q: Let's carry that progression through several other geographical locations. So from Kansas City you tended your way...

Rauschenberg: I went to Paris, that was your question -- and that was because I went there had took all the courses they had. I ran from class to class. I had these jobs at night, excluding...

Q: What kind of work did you do?

Rauschenberg: I did... In those days they had live acts. They had five acts but you had to make the sets for local -- they were taped in for local houses, they had originally been there -- where you get your popcorn and candy, and all the local stores would advertise, and some of the more progressive ones would seat something more imaginative, and I saw calls for more imaginative. So I got these jobs, so I did that and I did some kind of work...

It was the company, the name was a factory called Kelly...
I stopped down and made paper cahé, anything.

Q: You didingle work in New York too, didn't you?

Rauschenberg: Yeah.

Q: Where was that?

Rauschenberg: I could answer your other question.

Q: Okay.

Rauschenberg: I just talked to.

Q: Let's finish that, where did you the cahées work in New York?

Rauschenberg: Bonnet Teller's and Tiffany's. Anyway.

Q: Let's go back to the other question.

Rauschenberg: Okay, the idea one that I believed the joke that you have to go to France, because by then I am picking up some information that a great artist has to be French. Hah ha, ha ha.
Q: Mr. Castelli, how...

Q: We are going to make you go to New Rochelle in a few minutes. Actually it may be a good time now. You told your story very well and you were asking about the early years. How are you years ago that you were looking at one of the early shows in your gallery? Was your first gallery that you had ever one of the early artists? How does a businessman from Trieste, turn out? (cross-talk)

Castelli: My first gallery, that was in Paris. You see, again... (cross-talk)...

The fact is that for me it was much simpler because I had never been to America. I was in Europe, and to go from... (Berman, 2012)

Reuschenberg: Either he dead or he bored (7)
Castelli & Rauschenberg - 12

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After being in Romania for a few years, where I worked for an insurance company first and then sold real in a bank, after that, then that bank sent me to Paris where they had a branch, so I was there in the bank, as dissatisfied as ever.

I had a friend who was a decorator and a designer of furniture. At that time the furniture was what we call now Art Deco.

One day, going by the Place Vendôme, many of you must know where Place Vendôme is in Paris, he saw a storefront where there was a sign, that the store behind the front was for rent, and to apply at the Ritz, which was next door, to find out that the conditions would be. So this friend of mine and I, who had never done anything in art until then, went in and asked how much it would be to have that place. But first we wanted to see this place, of course, so we wanted to see this place, and then we asked how much it would be to rent. This place was just incredibly beautiful, one room after the other, all covered with velvet in soft colors, chartreuse and all that. Five marvalous rooms, something like 50 feet high, and there were windows on one side to the gardens of the Ritz. It couldn't be more beautiful. And it turned out that the rent was very, very modest for the first three years. They wanted to give us a chance to make good, and then of course the rent would be increased steadily.
I hit some money.

- Early I didn't hit any money, but my father-in-law hit a lot of money (cross talk, laughter, noises, etc)

We felt that it was a worthwhile thing for us to get interested in something.

Q: What was your first show there?

Castelli: My first show was...

(cross talk)

(Laughter)

Rauschenberg: You talk too long too.

(cross talk, half muttered remarks, false starts of speech etc)

I heard this friend of mine and I were very naive and very young, and immediately as we were taken over by the surrealists. You see, I had a friend from way back who was from Trieste like myself, and she was called Leonor Fini. (cross out of you)

Weiss: I've heard of her (I've met her?)

Costelli: She found out that we had this marvelous place and she said, "All right, now let's see what we do with this."

And she, Max Ernst, Tchelitchew, Cali and many others...
decided that we had to do something very, very grand, and they even designed all kinds of things -- panels, furniture. 

I did some furniture too, but it look awful next to theirs. 

Rauschenberg, you designed furniture?

No, (inaudible)

Castelli: My friend. And then we opened the thing in May 1939 with an enormous bang -- it was a great event.

Is this same a three-year lease in May 1939?

Castelli: A three-year lease. Then after the show was over for about two months summer came along and then I went away for a vacation.

(New tape)

Castelli: My gallery in New York. It started in 1947 or so. I came to America in 1941, little after that.
Rauschenberg: It started that early?

Castelli: Yeah, sure.

Rauschenberg: The two of you when did you two get together?

Castelli: I think we got to know each other at Betty Parsons, just vaguely, I mean, don't you think so?

Rauschenberg: Yeah.

Castelli: Do you remember?

Rauschenberg: No. (laughter)

Castelli: Do you remember everything.

(cross-talk, inaudible remarks, laughter)

Rauschenberg: I think vaguely was close enough

Castelli: We got to know each other...

(interrupted by cross-talk)

Rauschenberg: Then see-doing-tha...

and we see interviewing both of us together.
Castelli: Oh yes, we had the same problems.

Rauschenberg: The same problems.

Q: And what was that?

cross-talk

Castelli: It's still within each other.

Q: Well, this is vague. That does it get a little more precise?

Some time between 1951 and 1957, I guess. (laughter)

cross-talk

Castelli: Anyway I saw his work at the first show at Betty Parsons, which was in May, and then I had together with Tworkov.

Rauschenberg: With Tworkov

Tworkov: Castelli with Frank Kline, with DeKooning, with Pollock and who knows, we did a great show together, called the Ninth Street Show, and this was in May 1951, right after he opened the show at Betty Parsons.

If he's in the show...
Castelli: We had something like 90 artists in the show.

(Cross-talk)

Rauschenberg: And then each artist that came in would like to rehearse the show.

Q: (laughs)

Rauschenberg: That's what I mean by off and on, I mean really off and on.

Castelli: So we had the show, and there was an announcement that Kline designed, that the whole show was that he lived in Ninth Street and saw and said, "I'm very disappointed about something.

(Roar)

because I didn't... I'll tell you why. Because I saw your show at Betty Parsons, I saw your work for the first time, and the catalogue had already been printed, and you got into the show after the catalogue had been printed. That's why your name isn't there.

Mr. Rauschenberg, I read

Q: It has bothered him for two weeks. It has! Actually another casual comment was taken very seriously. It was something that
you said in 1963. In fact it became a cornerstone of 1960s criticism. You were quoted by Allen Solomon in the catalogue of your Jewish Museum show in 1963 as having said that painting relates to both art and life and neither can be made. "I try to act in that gap between the two," you said.

(交叉对话)

[(交叉对话) I actually Suzy Cohen quotes that as an Allen Solomon citation. In any event it was repeated. (交叉对话)]

(交叉对话) Say

(交叉对话) And I didn't make it a rule that I don't have to explain.

(交叉对话) Do you have to see anyway because I'd like to know what did you mean by that there?

(交叉对话) Nothing, nothing. (交叉对话)

I don't think any artist sets out to make art. You love art, you live art, you are art, you do art, but you are just doing something, you are doing what no one can stop you from doing, and so it doesn't have to be art, and that is your life.
But you also can't make life, and so there is something in between there, because you flirt with the idea that it is art.

Q: You are saying that, in art, painting works more in ideas than in the painting itself?

Rauschenberg: No, I think the definition of art would have to be more simple-minded than that, about how much use you can make of it, because if you try to separate the two, art can be very self-conscious and a blinding fact. But life doesn't really need it, so it's also another blinding fact.

Q: You've talked a moment ago about surfaces, and one of the things at least to a person such as myself, that were so significant and often referred to as your "iconoclastic approach to art," was to rid yourself of the tyranny of a four-edged two-dimensional surface, and the first day at least that I knew of that you did that was by making what came to be called combines. Can you tell us the evolution of that?

Rauschenberg: It was economy.

Q: What do you mean?

Rauschenberg: Well, it was hard enough to get materials. I had to have this feeling before I could accept it because there were
lots of other artists who could have done that, and I was embarrassed by... during the abstract expressionist days, of sort of some kind of self-pity, self-turning over...

or... resemble, and was working out of... like art still is my major happiness... I mean taking it. Afterwards it's some thing else... But I used like the bed that you are on (?)

Q: The painting that you shared...

Rauschenberg: I didn't have anything to paint on. It wasn't an idea.

Q: I think what you are referring to is the image that you shared on the cover of...

(cross-talk)

Rauschenberg: I've painted on everything. Have you ever tried to collage down on a towel, to put a collage on a towel? It's hard. (laughter)

And then we interviewed...

That's on a bath towel. That was winter time, so I didn't because need a bath towel. I didn't have water anyway.

Q: How did you come to use the quilt on the bed, the patchwork quilt?
Because

Rauschenberg: ... I lost my car; the quilt used to be over the hood of the car to keep the radiator from freezing. (Laughter)

I moved to New York and I lost my car wouldn't work.

Castelli: How did you lose it?

Rauschenberg: It wouldn't work.

Castelli: Oh, I see.

Q: No I think you know how you got the tired though.

Rauschenberg: And it was there, and I sold the summer. Those weren't my tires. That was my quilt. (Laughter) That was my towel. They were somebody else's tires.

You can't hate New York. It's a marvelous place to grow up as an artist.

I can just...

(cross-talk)

It's marvelous from the viewpoint of a young artist.

It's incredible.

I have trouble walking around here.

Q: Is it the objects that lie in the streets that distract you?
Rauschenberg: Everything to do something with, and I've always had this feeling like, if there is something down there, I pick it up and see what you can do with it.

Q: Has New York been a source of inspiration to you?

Rauschenberg: Absolutely, not only because it resisted everything, but also because it can hold everything.

Q: You spend a great deal of your time now in another place, in almost enchanted strip of land in Captiva, Fla. What is that?

Rauschenberg: That's enchanted today, and out there, and I hope I don't miss it. (laughs)

When I find it complementary, I couldn't live without New York. I think New York is just an incredible place; all along the line are rewards that you cannot walk in being there. I used to tell people before I was sure that you have to go to New York, and now I really know it, because there's no plan, there is no continuity, every change seems very dangerous and it's unexpected, but there is room for you. (Go to p. 23)

Q: You said that you see yourself as a...

Rauschenberg: Except for, I have one more thing to say.
Q: I'm sorry.

Rauschenberg: I've done close to take care of the dogs I was talking about, and... and... (laughter), and there are only two restaurants on the island, and they are not really restaurants; they are two places where you can eat and not cook it yourself. And different people asked me about New York, and aren't you terrified to live there? And the only place where I ever got mugged is the enchanted island! (laughter)

Q: You said that you see yourself as a reporter, and that painting is one of the vehicles that you use to give those reports.

Rauschenberg: I am looking for information and I pick it up in the hands. (Voice trails off) And this is where the thoughts start.

Q: How much of your work is autobiographical?

Rauschenberg: Probably all.

Q: And how heavily do you rely on technology -- film, photography, all sorts of technological devices?

Rauschenberg: As little as possible, but it is necessary.
Q: But it seems to me that film and photography and other technological things have absorbed you for a long while -- your involvement in experiments in art. (cross-talk)

Rauschenberg: Yes, the media in which you can do it. Each house has a lot of experience in it. I am mostly involved in changing what I am doing. And sometimes it has been quite a strain.

I got into both technology and theater and printing because I don't like the single ego.

Q: You've said that the work that interested you the most was working in some combined effort with other people.

Rauschenberg: Yes, right.

Q: And is it an attempt to reduce the involvement of one ego? Why did that engage you so much?

Rauschenberg: I just didn't want to have one. I think... it might be good for some other artist, but...

Some kind of assurance would fit me be death.

Q: You told us how the combines evolved. Why don't we talk about the jammers for a moment? How did that happen?
when I was working with fabric already, doing transfers, and I'd been to India, and I had been--I put off the idea of--scatly working in trash.

... and the idea of like a beautiful piece of silk, a beautiful color silk, consumed with its own vanity and all that, didn't interest me. I thought that--sexually... and sexually I thought that was like the other side.

It wasn't until my second trip to India that I realized--that... how that kind of worked, no matter how small a shred you have of it, how that worked into your life, to support you.

There were so you had people wandering around in mud, starving and all that, and they have one little rag and they look better than we do.

So I broke down that prejudice. It's a prejudice.

Q: Was it there that you became involved with these lisp and dencouscous fabrics that have come to be known as hearfrost, which I think is a rather apt metaphor for frosty, silken, almost veil-like layer upon layer that have photos and prints placed on the silk?
(cross talk)

Dante.

Rauschenberg: I read the word in Dante.

Castelli: Translation in English.

(cross talk)

Q: Rauschenberg, in what context was this in Dante?

Rauschenberg: Hearfrost is like good frost, but it's a warning about the change of seasons.

(cross talk)

Q: And you used layer on layer that often have newspaper...

(cross talk)

Rauschenberg: ?

Q: Have you exhibited the hearfrost?

Rauschenberg: Sure. (To Mr. Castelli) Didn't we?

Castelli: We did.

(cross talk)

Q: Where and when was that, Leo?

do you want to leave out all first names & use last names - I'm assuming so.
Castelli: I'm not sure what you think of all these
Castelli: They're not unusual and shouldn't
Castelli: Rauschenberg: I don't know.
Castelli: Besides, it's not clear to me
Castelli: Rauschenberg: I can take that to the bank.
Castelli: In Los Angeles at approximately the same time.
Castelli: Castelli: By the way, they pay great
Castelli: Rauschenberg: In Los Angeles.
Castelli: In my gallery in Vienna -- the
in Los Angeles.
Castelli: Castelli: I'm at the same time...
consider to be one of your major innovations? (pause) Too, what—

Q: I will. (pause)

I know something you once told me...
(cross talk)

Voice: That's a very difficult question.
(cross talk)

Castelli: There are so many.

Q: Well, what are some that are...

Castelli: What he thinks about is the common trait, the all these innovations. I think he's gone through one, or even earlier, when he was at Black Mountain where he started doing things.
(cross talk)

Q: So you think...
One of the things that has described

Rauschenberg: Curiosity, that's put it that way.

Rauschenberg: Curiosity, it's very good.

Rauschenberg: No, photography, pure photography, tall, it just made of course he's been immensely innovative. He has never
cut down the medium completely.

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the security. If you decided that you don't have the security.

Q: Do you plan your major pieces before you execute them?

Rauschenberg: No. I just go to work, and I work every day, and I never know what I am doing.

Q: You work directly on the piece?

Rauschenberg: Yes.

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Q: Actually I once use a piece about half the size of this that had about four lines in it and you said as that was the design of the piece at least 20 minutes were spent doing that did the entire piece?

Rauschenberg: Right. I have to get started somehow. Four lines doesn't make us a liar. (laughter)

Q: No no. I am supporting your theory.

(cross talk, laughter)

Q: I am supporting you!

Rauschenberg: That's one of my tricks, like I never pay any attention to what I think. (laughter) You get from the house, you've done all your business, you've fed the dogs, every-
thing, supper is ready, and everything is going to move very smoothly, and then it's time to go to work and you go, and you trick yourself by saying, "Oh, I am really thinking of a really fantastic thing now." And then you make four or five lines and you say, "That's it!" and then you go over it (you think it over?) and do something else. (pause)

(ordinals)

voices

statement

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Canvases! I think that was part of another canvas thing. But I worked continuously because every time I stopped working somebody would ask me a question, and so...

And I got lead poisoning because cleaning the screens -- I was using silk screens, and I usually had the fan on, but I used to have the fan on in order to dry the canvas quicker. I didn't know that I had it on to save my life. (laughs) And they turned the fan off because it made too much noise, but every time I went back over to the other side of the room somebody would ask me what I was doing. So I finished a very big painting in a very short time.

Castelli: It's 33 feet long and about eight feet wide.
RAUSCHENBERG: If you want a big painting very fast you got a TV test. (laughter)

(Cross talk)

Q: While you are talking about waterborne vehicles, like a barge, I wonder if there is something that you'd both clarify for us, and I am thinking about an event that took place in 1964 when Robert Rauschenberg won the top prize at the Venice Biennale, amid a swirl of rumors, most of them relating to your activities in a gondola, as I recall. Perhaps at long last you could clarify your version of the event and your (to Mr. Castelli) version of the event. What happened?

CASTELLI: It's very simple. Bob had just had a show at the Jewish Museum -- that incredible show -- and became obviously very well known even here in America, but before that he had had shows in Paris, he had had shows in Paris at the Louvre, Solomon's and his work had made a tremendous impression on the French artists and on the French art world. (Cross talk, which Mr. Castelli disregards) . . . then he had had a show in America, in spite of there being first Jewish Museum . . . Of course Allan Solomon had recognized Rauschenberg's merits already quite early, I think in the late 50s, when he first appeared, and he was director of a small museum up in Ithaca, at Cornell.
Q: Who else represented the United States at that Biennale?

Castelli: It was an incredibly complex show that Allan had organized — incredible the way he organized it. He just put into the show all the important trends of the moment, trends that had come up after an abstract expressionism, so he had two key abstract people — (Kenneth) (Morris) — and two key, they were calling, well, whatever xxxxxxxxxI them, new people —

Q: That were you calling them?

Castelli: I don't know.

(To Rauschenberg): That were you calling them?

Castelli: We couldn't have called them proper artists/because the pop movement had not yet materialized. But anyway here were these two, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who had gotten away from abstract expressionism, had used it too, but they were doing something that was an indication of something entirely different.
six other artists, some relating to Rauschenberg and Johns and some relating to Louis and Noland. Still for instance was in there, and Jim Dine was in there, and John Chamberlain was in there.

Rauschenberg: And Oldenburg too.

Oldenburg was in there. So you see it was an incredibly well constructed show that presented in Venice everything that we had to offer at that moment, an incredible feat. The loss of Allan Solomon when he died too young seven years ago was just one of the greatest losses that American art has suffered, because he was so imaginative and active a critic. No one like him has appeared since, and this in my homage to him, today.

Q: Now let's go back to 1964 for a moment.

Costello (to Rauschenberg): Now you say a word about Allan too.

Rauschenberg: You did it.

Costello: I did it?

Q: Get back to 1964 for a moment. What was all that controversy about that really happened?
...The controversy was about the fact that it seemed to many people that we had influenced the jurors that gave the prize to Bob. They couldn't believe, the Americans especially, that suddenly there was a prize here for Rauschenberg, and...just mentioned before early that Rauschenberg was very well-known in Europe--he had many adherents and supporters there--so actually it was Europe that gave him the prize, not (America).

...Rauschenberg: And I had to keep switching, day by day, arguing with Noland, about who went the place on the island? That's the official place.

...Yes, if you want it, Noland, you have it.

...The two locations, these they did--the one...

...And so this switch kept going around, and finally it was off the ground so I almost won it illegally.

...Can't that one of the factors that... (c-c-s-talk)

...Rauschenberg: Right, and then there was also...in the... (c-c-s-talk)
(here Mr. Rauschenberg interjects: "I didn’t care.")

people/—hostile people—maintained that he was not entitled to have the prize because he was not on Biennale grounds, and that’s the story of this so-called gondola which was actually a big barge.

Rauschenberg: Right. I did get a few pieces over there (laughs)

Arthur: Yes, I’m glad you did.

Rauschenberg: Right.

Castelli: Again it was the fantastic imaginative feat of Allan Solomon who didn’t want to get no for an answer, so he said, "Tell, if the paintings have to be on the grounds..." Venice built a little something. You see the Biennale pavilion is U-shaped so there is a part which is a sort of an open space between the two branches of the U. So he quickly built a plastic roof over that and put a painting there of all the people that were in the show. So each was represented also on Biennale grounds.

Rauschenberg: Right.

Castelli: But the fact is that...
(cross-talk)

**Winning**

Q: Did it make a big difference in your career?

Rauschenberg: She was in that bar...

Castelli: That's right, she is here now, today. They didn't get her over here.

Q: Bob, did it make a big difference in your career?

Rauschenberg: Actually...

Q: So it didn't?

Rauschenberg: It probably did. It's hard to... There've been so many dirty ideas about it, because both Leo and Ileana and Allan Selva... that's three... can you have three in both? suffered for a time from being accused of doing something... because nobody could believe that I could win, which is marvelous...

...and that's the response I got in America... you know... I would pick up Art News... there were only five art magazines then... and it'd say, "You won't believe this, we don't know why, but...

Q: But obviously that's changed considerably. I don't know of another artist certainly that I can think of...
Only because of

Rauschenberg: Perseverance. (laughter) Curiosity and perseverance

(inaudible)

(cross-talk)

Castelli: It's something that we had all of us there, Hess and
myself and... that was total faith, you know, total
enthusiasm and that's... well.

(cross-talk)

Rauschenberg: In the entire case though.

Castelli: Yeah.

(cross-talk)

Rauschenberg: I don't simply

Castelli: I remember thinking, well, here is a shove and maybe
he can get the prize, and things like that. We just took it for
granted that he'd get the prize. We just believed in him.

That was really what did it.

Rauschenberg: Stay, I didn't know that one of the ground rules
that I had to be present, available...

If I had thought that it would be
possible that I could get the Venice Biennale prize I had a
difficult problem about the ground rules, because I was
over there.

Working for Merce Cunningham in what theater? La Fenice
La Forna.

Castelli: He headed the program.

(cross talk)

Q: And you knew both Cunningham and (John) Cage from your Black Mountain days, didn't you?

Rauschenberg: I was working for him, yes, like I just happened to be on the scene and wandering around there, and one of the ground rules was that the artist had to be there, and I was in a 'lousy little hotel where nobody could find me, but I knew everybody was looking.

(cross talk, laughter)

Q: Maybe that's one of the reasons that you devoted so much of your time — and I don't say this to embarrass you — to younger artists and artists' rights. I'd like to talk for a moment, to begin with, how much of your time and energy has been given to causes of artists' rights, perhaps culminating at a highly publicized auction when an earlier work of yours that was bought by a collector for $900 dollars was sold at auction — was it ten years later? — for 85,000 dollars, and, of course the artists did not participate in any of that good fortune.
Rauschenberg: Well, like there is a foundation called Change, Inc., which provides 

Q: That does that do? 

Rauschenberg: It's emergency funds for artists. This is part of that. My interest doesn't start from wanting directly back a percentage solely from resales of my own work, but thinking about other artists in the future too.

Q: You pointed out that young artists and often young artists can't even get a credit card. So you founded Change, Inc. to help the more financially distressed artists, didn't you? 

Rauschenberg: We haven't really had an enormous sum of money. I think that the largest grant we've gotten from the National Endowment, 10,000 dollars. Several artists got together for Mobil Oil and put out a portfolio and then we got some money from that, and we are about to have a show. Can this sounds like a commercial? 

Q: Put it this way, why don't you go on.

Rauschenberg: All right. I guess you love art. Illinois is having
Q: For the benefit or change, Inc.?

(more talk)

Rauschenberg: An artist...

Q: How does an artist apply for a grant?

Rauschenberg: Successful artists have donated works, and we don't like to be selective, but we are only interested in the money you know. So there are some works that is very great, give us anything, you know, but we have a storage problem too, and so I think it's very nice that the successful artists have supported this all the way through, and we have kept people from having their legs chopped off. I mean it's really terrible to...

(more talk)

Q: How does an artist in distress get funds from Change, Inc.?

Rauschenberg: They write.

Leo? Mr. Castelli?

Mr. Castelli: Yes. They get whatever they need, I mean up to a certain amount of money.
Rauschenberg: Well, 500 dollars is about our maximum.

Castelli: About the limit, but then also they may just need 50 dollars because they don’t have enough to pay their rent.

Rauschenberg: Right. Those are the hard cases to get.

Rauschenberg: I mean if you apply you are turned upside down, because you don’t have 75 dollars or something. It’s really... That’s it...

By the way, you qualify to spend 12,000 dollars...

Rauschenberg: You don’t need 12,000 dollars.

Q: How much of your time is spent on the whole cause of artists’ rights?

Rauschenberg: A lot.

Q: Do you think the government will ever establish some legislation? Like an IRS check-off...
Castelli & Rauschenberg: I think Carter is going to help us. I have to report on the last week asking my advice and it was a very nice reward for being too outspoken.

Q: What did he ask you to comment on and what did you say?

Rauschenberg: To help him figure out what to do for artists' legislation.

G: You've spent a lot of time testifying.

Rauschenberg: But I also know... and it bothers me now because I don't know exactly how to vote back.

--

Castelli: I've been back to church.

--

Rauschenberg: Call, I got the letter, right? I think it's an enormous responsibility and I'm not sure that I want all of it. I can't seem to get all of it, but I feel the urgency about it. While I would still like to help, I wonder if somebody is really asking you to have just a little more time to figure out what we could do. Is it better for everybody? But I think that the way the government is set up within a few weeks, even if everything is going to be locked in.

Q: So you say you are better off with it?
Rauschenberg: Yes. ... we'll have wasted my invitation. But I

But early on -- and I don't mean to remind you of words said
at earlier times and perhaps not always with careful thought --
you said, with the presidency of General Motors or the presidency
of the United States were available they would be jobs that
interested you.

Rauschenberg: You have to tell what the question was.

Q: That was the question? I only know the reply.

Rauschenberg: "Which would you prefer?" And it was from -- no
offense -- a communist newspaper and my first Paris show, and...

they thought, ... they thought, ... Lee was responsible for that show, and the
city says it really happened was because of Mr. Cordier, and Lee
gave up his commission and then the show was economically
feasible, so then being interrogated by this guy, and he says,
"Which job would you prefer?" So the question is... (cross talk)

Q: That's never quoted tough, so I am glad that you told me that.
But let me ask you another thing.

Rauschenberg: It also offered me a job after he brought in three
more translators to make sure that what I was saying was what his
first translator was saying, and after the interview was over
offered me a job on a newspaper. (laughter)

Q: That was would have satisfied your reporter’s instincts.
Let me ask you a question if I may, both of you. Did you ever
expect your life to unfold the way it did?

Rauschenberg: Has it unfolded? (laughter)

Q: It continues to on a daily basis, doesn’t it? (laughter)
In this body language.

Rauschenberg: I don’t think I ever expected anything which
makes me lucky.

Q: How about you, too? Mr. Castelli?

Castelli: The same answer. I didn’t expect it to... (voice
trails off)
(cross talk)

Q: Let me try another thing on both of you, and that is... Mr. Castelli
(to Rauschenberg) Please go on.
Castelli: I really didn't expect it to unfold, in quotes, the way it did. Well, it's been constantly surprising to me.

Let me ask the next question of you, first, and that is, your lines. If you had to do it over again, what would you do otherwise?

Castelli: Well, probably I'd do all the wrong things, and my life would not have unfolded the way it did, because it was like he--

(areas talk)

I left very much to chance and to accident, and my whole activity ... to receive very accidents. I do not decide about those such ahead of time. They will happen to me, sufficient materia of one point or another available.

Sometimes we force the issue a little bit, like for instance now, with Bob being so busy doing so many things, and painting--his show in Washington and other things--we decided then to have a show of his, I mean, and I, one month after the opening of the MoMA show. And we really have to get that show ...

(areas talk)

Rauschenberg: Stop that, Lee.

Castelli: Who?
Rauschenberg: Don't make her come back... (laughs)

Castrilli: Don't laugh, just sit and see. (laughter)

Q: What do you have in mind?

Rauschenberg: I have six paintings already done. I am not bragging. Well, actually I am bragging. Some aren't quite finished.

Q: What are you working on now?

Rauschenberg: A series of rather large pieces called either Spreads or Eagles.

Q: How do they...

Rauschenberg: It's to me present to me. I just went to use anything that... well, the Jaozers were restricting, there was a kind of a discipline, and you knew then you need discipline to become strait. But I think excess is expressionless. I think excess is expressionless, without restraint, and basically I have been excessive, go thanks to (Josef) Albers and my parents and all the people that tried to knock me down I've learned restraint, but I would say from that into the unnecessary...
New Tape.

Reeves: . . . got to work back just for this one time or something, and—I think—they're a big honor to have shoes of this size, and so I give my present. (?)

Q: Who deserves it more? How did you express . . .

cross talk

Rauschenberg: Who knows what I went for?

It's the truth, you did. . . . What did you want and how did you express this rather so?

by consciously saying to myself that I would like to just indulge in all these excesses, all the things that I had made available to me, and strangely enough I am starting off kind of stiffly.

Q: After all that freedom?

Rauschenberg: You get freedom through it too. But I am working into it.

I know it's going to be a very short period. Leo hasn't heard this.

cross talk
Q: How does the experience of living in New York differ from other places you've lived?

Rauschenberg: It's very hard, Loo. I mean to be self-employed. You don't get a day off, you can't fire yourself, that's a vacation? (laughter)

(vary bad static on tape)

Q: Do you think of it that way? He works every day, all day.

Rauschenberg: I don't like all the other things, like traveling with a show, but it's necessary to me to be on the location where something is shown and talk to the people who are looking at it, because that encourages my growth and my openness. I mean I don't close the door to anybody. I invite people in, turn on the TV, the radio, lights, everything.

Q: Coterie of people. You have quite a group that work with you all the time. How did that group evolve?

Rauschenberg: They change. That's one of the most difficult things and one of the most painful things about it.
Q: You said that one of the values of the retrospective is that it brings you up to date, and that as a result you feel liberated. Is that what makes for the Spreads?

Rauschenberg: It does, at least in a few key points—somebody is going to see, like all the way from there, just example to all the way from here, and then they can just have it them. And then I will do something else, because you have a responsibility if you know things, I mean if you know something and you have a feeling that the information is useless unless you can share it. And I work through my work and that's for you.

You are indulging us, each of you, with your presence here tonight, and sharing so much of yourselves. Special thanks to you to... Robert Rauschenberg & Leo Castelli. We're very privileged (cross-talk) to have you here with us tonight.

Voice: Drinks?

Q: We are going to, we are going to share in the process for several minutes. Special thanks to...
It's every special privilege to have you both here with us tonight.

[Cross talk] (applause)

Q: And now it's time for the class to share in this process. If you have a question please raise your hand and I'll call on you. Is that Dorothy?

Dorothy: Yes.

Q: How's your shoe?

Gestell: Do you know everybody out there?

Q: He, but a lot of them. Dorothy just had a shoe and we've announced it several weeks ago, but I wish I knew more. I do know her number.

Dorothy: I have a question. I'm a neighbor of yours. I look down through my fence into your studio.

(cross-talk)

Q: Ah! Vouyer! (laughter)

Rauschenberg: Would you like to come up here and whisper this
question? (laughter)

Voice in background (very faint, inaudible):

(we need to know what was to keep this exchange otherwise out)

Rauschenberg: Oh yes, that plane (p-sin-?)

Voice: It's hard to get it

Rauschenberg: Part by part.

Voice: Part by part.

Rauschenberg: Yes, it was for... when I was working with experiments in art and technology and a very active group in Ann Arbor wanted to help out with the xxxx coat, so there was an auction of two thins life-size plane models, but cada from a model kit. It was an auction there to raise money for artists.

One guy bought two, and he didn't know how to explain it to his wife that he even bought one, so he gave me the other one.

(laughter)

Voice:
Castelli: Actually the Artists Association came about I would say 12 years ago, and I was one of the original founding members of the Association. It has some uses (laughter)...

Q: Actually the IRS thinks so. Andre Emmerich was here one week and explained...

cross talk

Castelli: Costly to give appraisals.

Q: But he said artists can no longer deduct that.

Rauschenberg: It's very useful, it's not for the artists, ...
cross talk

Castelli: It has a low profile as you say.

Rauschenberg: It actually protects the artists. It's not for the artists. (??)

cross talk

Castelli: The dealer.

Q: And the collector.

Castelli: Well, not even the collector, no. It's just a professional group...
Rauschenberg: There should be another group.

Costello: ... mostly of galleries that are really commercial galleries, not galleries of the type...

Rauschenberg: But they deal with artists' problems or sellers' problems either.

Costello: No. No, they are dealing with problems of galleries.

Q: Are there other questions?

Raites: Are you members chosen?

Costello: Well, they do apply. First there are a group of original members, and then other people do apply and they are scrutinized and you see if they are worthy in every respect to belong to that august assembly...

Rauschenberg: I am embarrassed that he belongs to it myself, even though (laughter). ...

Costello: No. I've been of some use there.

Q: It's better than being expelled.
Castelli: ... in the contemporary scene to that... belong to the Association...

Rauschenberg: It can (he can?) do you some good there.

Q: Bob, Mr. Sheaffer is an artist too.

Mr. Sheaffer: Your explanation of art and life, the photographs and the objects that you use, they partake both of art and life, is based on a particular place and value.

Is that right?

You are talking about art and life, and these are some explanation.

You use a lot of photographs.

Rauschenberg: Yeah.

Sheaffer: How those things partake of life, art and they partake of life.

Rauschenberg: Yes, it's working both ways, but against each other. Once you make up your mind that it's about this, then it's not... I think of all the objects and colors, whatever material I am using, and there is one material that's freeing the other. A restlessness that would make you ask.
Voices: I was just curious, looking at the St. Louis Symphony.

It was that you started it you know, precisely what you wanted to do, whether as experiment.

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It was that you started it you know, precisely what you wanted to do, whether as experiment.
(Laughter)

Rauschenberg: I have no idea. That's why I said earlier that they'd better act fast. (laughter)

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Voice: Actually those pictures were described in today's Times in an article about the new curator of the White House, Clement Conger, who bought two pictures to the study right off the Oval Office. We describes them today.

Voice: Was that done as a collage first?

Rauschenberg: Uh yes. No, it was done as a dressing. Uh, a collage, yes, I got mixed up. It was a single piece, translated into this

Q: The Ocean on the Island?
(cross talk)

Q: Washington International.

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Castelli: Well, they did one last year, I think, and I really didn't believe that they would be able to do it, but they did, so we or other. Now this year they approached us again that they wanted to have at least four good galleries participating
in the show, and so five of us finally consented to participate, and they gave us a free space and told us to do what we wanted, so I think that we'll have a good room there.

Q: That will be held at the Washington Armory? (pause) Maybe you should tell us about the Washington International... (cross talk)

Cawelli: The man who is the organizer is really a very courageous and persistent guy. I must take my hat off because...

Q: Who is that?

Cawelli: He's called Fellus, F.C.L.L.U.B., and in spite of all the guffaws that he got from me and others he persisted and finally he got himself this super gallery.

Q: There is a recurring theme, those men are telling us. (cross talk)

Voice: I wonder if you could comment a little bit about the press... for Tania Grossman.

Voice: (referring to preceding voice) Miss has a gallery in
A different voice: And was this an experience?

That was the experience there?

Rauschenberg: Uh, you make any place that you work like I work in Genisi, this place in Tampa, the Pyramid and whatever.

I don't work with any preconceived ideas, but you work with the people, and it's like music or something, like who is doing the printing, who is doing the etching, and how you get along together, and what came out. In Genisi I can always... their bend is towards impossible technology. Tania Garcia man... wants quality only, but she will permit in my case abuses, as long as it turns out to be quality.

Q: You have your own press in Florence?

Rauschenberg: Yes.

Press. That was established... because print making is a very expensive business and very few artists have the privilege of being able to afford supporting the expense... working on a stone, lithography and... lithography and printing. And that's understandable, because of the economics, but...
(cross talk)

Rauschenberg: Actually Cy never worked on a stone. Bruce Martin never worked on a stone.

Q: I wonder if you would explain something. I saw you at that press make immediate transfers. How does that work? Mr. Castelli mentioned that you have revolutionized some of the aspects of the art of print making. I don't understand that immediate transfer from the fact that at the time you were using the comic strips and newspaper collages.

Rauschenberg: Yes, uh, press cleaner.

Q: What do you mean?

Rauschenberg: Press cleaner is a solvent.

Q: Like turpentine?

Rauschenberg: Yes, that's how you clean the presses. Yes, it's like turpentine. It releases the pigment from the paper.

Voice: Mr. Rauschenberg, if I understand correctly, you have to have... you don't particularly like your conscious mind being involved in the creative process.
Rauschenberg: When everything else fails, Jack Bawlets.  
(Opportune laughter).  
(end of recording)
Robert Rauschenberg and Leo Castelli

BLDD: It has been said that it's doubtful if the art of the sixties would have looked quite the way it did if Leo Castelli had not assembled his group of artists and promoted them into international prominence since he first opened his gallery twenty years ago. Six years earlier, Robert Rauschenberg popped into American art with his first one-man show, what was then called a prophetic show of pictures, some white, some black. What was the reception to that first show, and how did it come about? You had only recently arrived in New York. How did you get a show at Betty Parsons Gallery?

RR: I was a student. I wasn't too sophisticated. And there were so many things that I didn't understand. I kept going back to the Betty Parsons Gallery not so much for answers as for questions. I had reached a very serious impasse, and finally I just took a bunch of paintings and went up there and asked if I could see her, and she came out and said, "I only look at paintings on Tuesdays." This was Monday. I said, "Couldn't you pretend that it was Tuesday even though it's Monday?" And she said, "Aw, all right, okay, put them in there, in the small room on the side." Then I am standing there in this small room surrounded by these inferior creatures that I have made, trying to figure out whether I should just flee or whether it would be better just to stand there in this loneliness, and before I could make up my mind she was back and she said, "Well, what are these?" And I said, "These are my works." She told me, "You are showing them to me too fast." I was trying to get out of there. Then she said, "Well, I can't give you a show until May." I said, "I don't want a show." I just wanted her to see if there was anything that I was doing that related at all to the energy in her gallery, because I was upset by seeing all those works.

So I had a show in May. But there is more to that story. Clyfford Still was part of the magic that was there in that gallery, and I wasn't influenced by Clyfford Still but he was part of my problem. About four months went past, and Betty Parsons came to my studio with this man and they sat and picked pictures for the show, and I thought it went pretty smoothly.

Then I brought the paintings for the show a couple of weeks later, and she said, "Oh, I have never seen these." And I said, "Of course not. I just did them yesterday." And it was the truth because I was using the materials five times, ten times, twelve times, as many times over as I could, and I always thought that the next one was going to be better.

She said, "Well, Clyfford won't understand this," and I found out that Clyfford Still had been sitting there picking these things, and I had been scrutinized, my work had been scrutinized. It's funny that I didn't realize who he was.

BLDD: In the summer of 1948 you were a student at Black Mountain College. Soon after that you came to New York, and are credited with having been an enormous influence, in fact the major conditioner of neo-Dada among the young artists of the New York School. I can recall a sculpture of yours, about two or three years ago, that is an homage to Marcel Duchamp. How heavily does he figure as an influence in your life and work?

RR: I guess heavily but too late to be a direct influence. I remember the first Duchamp that I ever saw was Bicycle Wheel on a Stool, and I saw it at the same time that I saw a sculpture by Aristide Maillol, in the Museum of Modern Art, and something there by Isamu Noguchi. I saw Noguchi, Duchamp and Maillol, and I didn't see any discrepancy. There was no conflict.

BLDD: Leo, you knew Duchamp in that period, didn't you?

(LL): Yes, I did. I must have met him right after I got back from the war—let's say World War II, not to make me too old.

RR: That was my war too.

BLDD: Is that how you ended up in Paris?

RR: No, I went to Paris from the Kansas City Art Institute. 

BLDD: And how did you get to Kansas City?

RR: I had a girl friend in Los Angeles. Her mother was sick. And she was going to go away, so she said, "If I can get you into Kansas City Art Institute would you go?" And I said yes.

BLDD: How long did you stay there?

RR: Long enough to change my name.

BLDD: And what happened that made you change your name?

RR: I didn't like being called Milton.

BLDD: So from Kansas City you went your way...
BLDD: You did window work in New York too, didn’t you?

RR: Yes. Bonwit Teller’s and Tiffany’s. Anyway, I believed the joke that you have to go to France, because by then I was picking up some information that a great artist has to be French.

BLDD: Leo, how did you, a businessman from Trieste, start an art gallery?

LC: My first gallery was in Paris. For me it was much simpler because I had never been to America, I was in Europe, and to go from Rumania to Paris was not so difficult. I had studied in Milan and then I went to work in Trieste, for an insurance company first and then in a bank. That bank sent me to Paris, where they had a branch, so I was there in the bank, as dissatisfied as ever.

I had a friend who was a decorator and designer of furniture. At that time the furniture was what we now call art deco. One day, going by the Place Vendôme, he saw a storefront with a sign that the store was for rent, and to apply at the Ritz, which was next door. So this friend of mine and I, who had never done anything in art until then, went in. The place was just incredibly beautiful: one room after the other, all covered with velvet in soft colors, chartreuse and all that. Five marvelous rooms, something like fifty feet high, and there were windows on one side on the gardens of the Ritz. It couldn’t be more beautiful. And it turned out that the rent was very, very modest for the first three years. They wanted to give us a chance to make good, and then of course the rent would be increased steadily.

BLDD: What was your first show there?

LC: My friend and I were very naive and very young, and immediately we were taken over by the surrealists. You see, I had a friend from way back who was from Trieste like myself, and she was called Leonor Fini. She found out that we had this marvelous place and she said, “All right, now let’s see what we do with this.” And she, Max Ernst, Tchelitchev, Dali and many others—decided that we had to do something very, very grand, and they even designed all kinds of things—panels, furniture; Leonor did some furniture too, but it looked awful next to theirs, which was so much more imaginative. And then we opened the thing in May 1939 with an enormous bang—it was a great event.

My gallery in New York started in 1947 or so. I came to America in 1941 or thereabouts.

BLDD: When did you two get together?

LC: I think we got to know each other at Betty Parsons’, at the first show, which was in May 1951. Then he was in a show with Tworkov, Frank Kline, De Kooning, Pollock, and others. We did a great show together called the 9th Street Show, and this was in May 1951 too, right after he opened the show at Betty Parsons’. We had something like ninety artists in the show.

BLDD: Bob, I recall something that you said in 1963. That became a cornerstone of 1960s criticism. You were quoted by Allen Solomon in the catalogue of your Jewish Museum show in 1963 as having said that painting relates to both art and life. And neither can be made. “I try to act in that gap between the two,” you said. What did you mean by that?

RR: I don’t think any artist sets out to make art. You love art, you live art, you are art, you do art, but you are just doing something, you are doing what no one can stop you from doing, and so it doesn’t have to be art, and that is your life. But you also can’t make life, and so there is something in between there, because you flirt with the idea that it is art.

BLDD: You are saying that in art, painting works more in ideas than in the painting itself?

RR: No, I think the definition of art would have to be more simple-minded than that, about how much use you can make of it. If you try to separate the two, art can be very self-conscious and a blinding fact. But life doesn’t really need it, so it’s another blinding fact.

BLDD: One thing that is often referred to as your iconoclastic approach to art, is the fact that you rid yourself of the tyranny of a four-edged, two-dimensional surface. The first way in which you did that was to make what came to be called combines. Can you tell us of their evolution?
JOB K15 -007S-00 DIAMOND ART 25
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RR: It was economy. It was hard to get materials. I had to have this feeling before I would accept it because there were lots of other artists who could have done that, and I was embarrassed, during the abstract expressionist days, by some kind of self-pity. I didn’t have anything to paint on. It wasn’t an idea, I’ve painted on everything. Have you ever tried to put a collage on a bath towel? It’s hard. That was wintertime, so I didn’t need a bath towel, because I didn’t have water anyway.

BLDD: How did you come to use the quilt on the bed, the patchwork quilt?

RR: Because I lost my car; the quilt used to be over the hood of the car to keep the radiator from freezing. I moved to New York and my car wouldn’t work.

BLDD: Now I think we know how you got the tires.

RR: Those weren’t my tires. It was my quilt. It was my towel. They were somebody else’s tires.

BLDD: Has New York been a source of inspiration to you?

RR: Absolutely, not only because it resists everything but also because it can hold everything. You can’t hate New York. It’s a marvelous place to grow up as an artist. It’s marvelous from the viewpoint of a young artist. It’s incredible. I have trouble walking around here.

BLDD: Is it the objects that lie in the streets that distract you?

RR: If there is something down there, I pick it up and see what I can do with it.

BLDD: You spend a great deal of your time now in another place, in an almost enchanted strip of land in Captiva, Florida. Why is that?

RR: Because I find it complementary. I couldn’t live without New York. I think New York is just an incredible place; all along the line there are rewards in being here.

I used to tell people this before I was so sure that you have to go to New York. But now I really know it. Because there is no plan, there is no continuity, every change seems very dangerous and it’s unexpected, but there is room for you.

There are only two restaurants on the island in Florida, and they are not really restaurants; they are two places where you can eat and not cook it yourself. And different people asked me about New York, and aren’t you terrified to live there? And the only place I ever got mugged was at the enchanted island!

BLDD: You said that you see yourself as a reporter, and that painting is one of the vehicles you use to give those reports. How much of your work is autobiographical?

RR: Probably all of it.

BLDD: And how heavily do you rely on technology—film, photography, all sorts of technological devices?

RR: As little as possible, but it is necessary.

BLDD: But it seems that film and photography and other technological things have absorbed you for a long while—your involvement in experiments in art.

RR: I am mostly involved in changing what I am doing. And sometimes it has been quite a strain. I got into both technology and theater and printing because I don’t like the single ego.

BLDD: You’ve said that the work that interested you the most was working in some combined effort with other people.

RR: Yes, right.

BLDD: Is that an attempt to reduce the involvement of one ego? Why did that engage you so much?

RR: I just didn’t want to have one. It might be good for some other artist, but for me some kind of self-assurance would be death.

BLDD: You told us how the combines evolved. Why don’t we talk about the jammers for a moment? How did they occur?

RR: I was working with fabrics already, and doing transfers, and I’d been to India, and I had put off the idea of mostly working in trash. And the idea of a beautiful piece of silk, a beautiful color of silk, consumed with its own vanity and all that, didn’t interest me. It wasn’t until my second trip to India that I realized how that kind of excess worked, no matter how small a shred you have of it, how that worked into your life, to support you. There were people wandering around in mud, starving, and they resisted one little rag and they look better than we do. So I broke down that prejudice. It was a prejudice.

BLDD: Was it there that you became involved with those limp and sensuous fabrics that have come to be known as hoarfrosts, a rather apt metaphor for frosty, silken, almost veil-like layers upon layers that have photos and prints placed on the silk?

RR: I read the word in Dante. Hoarfrost is like mock frost, but it’s a warning about the change of seasons.
BLDD: One of your characteristics is that you dare—that you dare to keep pushing the limit. One thing I know about your printing is its immediacy. How do you achieve that immediacy?

RR: By not making up your mind before you are going to do it. It has to be immediate if you don’t know what you are doing. And you take that chance, and it can be very embarrassing. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don’t. But you don’t have the security.

BLDD: Do you plan your major pieces before you execute them?

RR: No. I just go to work, and I work every day, and I never know what I am doing.

BLDD: You work directly on the piece?

RR: Yes. That’s one of my tricks; I never pay any attention to what I think. You get away from the house, you’ve done all your business, you’ve fed the dogs, everything, supper is ready, and everything is going to move very smoothly, and then it’s time to go to work and you go, and you trick yourself by saying, “Oh, I am really thinking of a really fantastic thing now.” And then you make four or five lines and you say, “That’s it!” And then you go over it.

BLDD: I wonder if there is something that you’d both clarify for us.

Leo: I am thinking about 1964, when Robert Rauschenberg won the top prize at the Venice Biennale, amid a swirl of rumors, most of them relating to some activities in a gondola, as I recall. Perhaps at long last you would give us your version of the events?

LC: It’s very simple. Bob had just had a show at the Jewish Museum—that incredible show—and became obviously very well known even here in America. Before that he had had shows in Paris and his work had made a tremendous impression on French artists and on the French art world. Of course Allan Solomon had recognized Rauschenberg’s merits quite early. I think in the late fifties, when he first appeared. He was director of a small museum up in Ithaca, at Cornell.

BLDD: His selections represented the United States at that Biennale? LC: He put the show together. It was an incredibly complex show that Allan organized. He just put into the show all the important trends of the moment. Trends that had come up after abstract expressionism. He had two key abstract people, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, and two key—well, whatever they were calling them—new people. Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who had gotten away from abstract expressionism; they had used it too, but then they were doing something entirely new. Well, these four were the major figures in the show. And there were six other artists, some relating to Rauschenberg and Johns and some relating to artists John Louis and Noland. Clfford Still, for instance, and Jim Dine, and John Chamberlain were in it. And Claes Oldenbourg too. So you see, it was an incredibly well-constructed show that presented in Venice everything that we had to offer at that moment, an incredible feat.

BLDD: But what was the controversy about? What really happened?

LC: The controversy was about the fact that it seemed to many people that we had influenced the jurors who gave the prize to Bob. They couldn’t believe the Americans especially, that suddenly there was a prize here for Rauschenberg.

RR: And I had to keep arguing with Noland about who was going to exhibit on the island. That’s the official place on the grounds, where the rules said you had to show. There wasn’t enough room for all of us, so we kept switching. And finally I was off the grounds, so I almost won it illegally. I didn’t know that one of the ground rules was that I had to be present, available. I was working for Merce Cunningham in the La Fenice theater, and living in a lousy little hotel where nobody could find me, but I knew everybody was looking. I just happened to be on the scene that day, wandering around.

BLDD: You’ve devoted much of your time to younger artists and artists’ rights.

RR: I founded Change, Inc., which provides emergency funds for artists.

BLDD: You pointed out that many artists can’t even get a credit card.

RR: We haven’t really had an enormous sum of money. I think that the largest grant we’ve gotten is from the National Endowment, $10,000. Several artists got together and put out a portfolio for Mobil Oil; we got some money from that. And we are about to have a show.

BLDD: How does an artist in distress get funds from Change, Inc.?

RR: They write.

BLDD: Are you on that board, Leo?

LC: Yes. They get whatever they need, up to a certain amount of money.

RR: Our maximum is about $500.

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LC: But then also they may just need $50 because they don't have enough to pay their rent.
BLDD: The artists' rights cause culminated at a highly publicized auction, when an earlier work of yours that had been originally bought by a collector for $900 was sold at auction—was it ten years later?—for $85,000 and, of course, you did not participate in any of that good fortune.
RR: It's all part of the same thing. My interest doesn't come solely from wanting back a percentage of my own work, but also from thinking about other artists in the future.
BLDD: How much of your time is spent on artists' rights.
RR: A lot.
BLDD: Do you think the government will ever establish some legislation?
RR: I think Carter is going to help us. He sent me a letter asking for my advice.
BLDD: What did he ask you to comment on?
RR: To help him figure out what to do for artists' legislation.
BLDD: Let me ask the next question of both of you. If you had your lives to live over again, what would you do otherwise?
LC: Well, probably I'd do all the wrong things, and my life would not have unfolded the way it did. I left very much to chance and to accident, and my whole activity still remains very accidental. I do not decide about shows much ahead of time. They will happen whenever sufficient material of one painter or another is available.
Sometimes we force the issues a little bit. For instance now, with Bob being so busy doing so many things, we decided to have a show of his. Weana and I, one month after the opening of the MoMA show.
RR: I have six paintings already done. I am not bragging. Well, actually I am bragging. Some aren't quite finished.
BLDD: What are you working on now?
RR: A series of rather large pieces called either Spreads or Scales. It's my present to me. I just want to use anything. The Jammers were restricting, there was a kind of discipline, a restraint. I think excess is expressionless without restraint, and basically I have been excessive, so thanks to Josef Albers and my parents and all the people that tried to knock me down I've learned restraint. But I moved away from that by consciously saying to myself that I would like to just indulge in all the excesses, all the things that I had made available to me, and strangely enough I am starting off kind of stiffly.
BLDD: After all that freedom?
RR: You get freedom through it too. But I am working into it. I know it's going to be a very short period. Leo hasn't heard this. It's very hard, Leo. I mean, to be self-employed. You don't get a day off, you can't fire yourself, and what's a vacation? But I do enjoy it. I don't like everything, like traveling with a show, but it's necessary to me to be on the location where something is shown and talk to the people who are looking at it. That encourages my growth and my openness. I mean I don't close the door on anybody. I invite people in, turn on the TV, the radio, lights, everything.
BLDD: You said that one of the values of the retrospective is that it brings you up to date, and that as a result you feel liberated. Is that what makes for the Spreads?
RR: It does. And then I will do something else, because you have a responsibility if you know things. I mean if you know something and you have a feeling that the information is useless unless you can share it. And I work through my work.
INTRODUCTION
ART WORLD

NEW YORK'S

INSIDE
and Leo Castelli

Robert Rauschenberg

you did window work in New York, didn't you?

We talked about Kansas City, your window work there, and I wanted to know what happened next. You mentioned that you had happened to change your name. Why did you change your name?

Blind: I had grown up in Kansas City, and then I had moved to New York. When I was there, I felt that the city was changing. I wanted to be part of that change, so I changed my name to Blind.

R. E.: That's interesting. I didn't know that Kansas City was such an important place in your life.

Blind: Yes, Kansas City was a special place for me. It was where I grew up, and it was the place where I started my career as an artist. It was a place where I could be myself and express myself in my art.

R. E.: Tell me more about your life in Kansas City.

Blind: In Kansas City, I was able to be more experimental with my work. I was able to explore new ideas and techniques. It was a place where I could really be myself.

R. E.: That's fascinating. I can see how important Kansas City was to you. Thank you for sharing your story with me.
...
BARBARA DIAMONSTANN AND...
I work through my work.

I have a feeling that the information is useless unless you can share it. And responsibility if you know what I mean; you know something and you have a door, then and then I will do something else, because you have a door, and then I will do something else. Because you have a door.

R: You said one of the values of the epistemology is that it

RASCHELBERG AND CASTELL

Barbara Diament

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