

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Sparks, Esther / Personal Interview, 1985

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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December 13, 1985

Dear Bob'

This was on my desk with a note: XEROX FOR RAUSCHENBERG.

It's been so long that I don't remember if the note means that this is your copy, or that I did do it already. Just in case, here's one for the record. I hope the typist and I got things right. If not, there is still time to correct - this or anything else - before Abrams pounces early next Spring.

Again, again, many, many thanks.

Esther Sparks

R. I'll just tell you this one Venezuelan story. We were so delighted that we could get into Venezuela. There was a marvelous woman, Sophia Imbert and her husband Carlos. They were madly in love with each other - Romeo and Juliet of Caracas - or maybe Venezuela. They have a seven o'clock in the morning show every day except Sunday, to interview all kinds of people from all kinds of professions. They have to get up five, drive to the studio, then she runs the museum and he writes articles. It's a beautiful relationship, you know. As tight as you can get, I guess. She's been either the model or the girlfriend of most of the, a certain latitude of very important (artists) like Vasarely... She knew Picabia you know, an area there. She's still a beautiful woman. Actually, she reminded me of - a combination of Dr. Ruth, you know, on TV, the sex expert? and Tanya.

ES: Oh, really.

R: If you can imagine! These two personalities emerging into an incredible, sensitive, dynamic woman. She has the energy of Dr. Ruth - a forwardness, and strong. She has a lot of Tanya's sensitive nuances. Instead of confronting something that could be a problem, she (Tanya) would sneak up behind you and come from the other side. Usually saying well, I don't know much about that, but why don't you try? And of course, she would put her finger right on it, intuitively. Everybody else behaving like bulldozer through this project, and Tanya comes in like a butterfly and solves the whole problem.

ES: "Is that really what you want to do?" she would say.

R: "I don't know - this looks perfectly fine, but maybe if it was just a little different in here." (Laughs) And everything always looked better. Of course, she could drive some of the artists crazy, with this technique.

ES: But apparently not you.

R: No, we argued all the time.

ES: You did?

R: Yeah, during any day I was out there, I must have thrown her out of the studio at least three times. And I am not a violent person but it was just driving me crazy. "Tanya, we're not trying to do that! Go back in the kitchen!"

ES: That was not where she thought she belonged.

R: She'd come back, put on some gypsy music, change her scarf and she'd be back in fifteen minutes.

ES: Trying to pretend she was somebody else?

R: Right, this brand new personality.

ES: That's really amusing to begin with - my first question to you was...

R: Let me finish this one, because this is a pretty good story, and then we can get into it.

We were so relieved, we were having such a marvelous time; we were in the jungles. Everybody was so nice to us in Caracas, and we had incredible countryside there. During the interview, I was very curious about why we went to Chile. There is not a really good answer to that except that, except that the question is so clear. I think that must be the answer. You know, everybody has to ask that.

R: Mexico was not that eventful. But when we got to Venezuela, which was our last South American place, we just had a wonderful time. During the interview, there were the students, and the old writers and intellectuals, and people like that. About 500 of them showed up. Don't think I don't get nervous with these things, because you never know what's going to happen.

ES: Do you mean what the questions will be?

R: Yes, one of the questions was, "How did you find working here, having travelled all over the world, in this particular museum?" And I said that after all these things we had been through, it was a piece of cake. And Sophia is a very good cook. With the intellectuals, that got a smile. Well, the newspapers, in headlines the next day, they wrote "Rauschenberg says that Sophia Imbert is a torte." It's good, isn't it? I would have like to have thought that the man who wrote it had a sense of humor. Instead of bad English.

ES: And bad luck.

R: Anyway, the reports that came after were really sensational. They're usually not that funny, but misquoting rarely has that kind of humor. I'm sure you know that.

ES: Yes, I do.

R: Now what was that first question?

ES: Well, the first thing I wanted you to talk about was her (Tanya). It seems to me that from talking to Bill, Tony and everybody else, that she had the most extraordinary affection for you, as a person. I mean, more than anybody else. And I wondered, "How do you feel about that?" Was your affection for her a thing of friendship, of instinct? Was it that she had a great understanding of your art? What was it?

R: I don't think she did. I think what we shared was almost a kind of irreverence. I think she could depend on most of the other artists for a certain kind of quality.....

ES: You mean a steadiness?

R: Yes, a quality meaning....

ES: Conventional sense of quality?

R: Well, yes, like high quality work. And I think there was something about the gypsy in her, that she got turned on by being able to say, "Why not?"

ES: So it was the ~~anti~~ side of you that she responded to?

R: I think so. Plus, of course, an immeasurable kind of love that was charging through us. Like my first classic quote. (Classic, because it have been overquoted so many times. Like when I reprimanded Jasper Johns - that this is the 20th century and "what in the hell are you doing writing on rocks?"

Because I was just about to get involved in an Experiments in Art and Technology, which could have closed down AT&T.

ES: Like a big bang?

R: My successes, yes, my successes could have blown all their fuses. But I think it was just that because she trusted me. She knew that I had a great respect for the medium which grew from scratch.

ES: Not in the beginning?

R: No, but it grew from that approach. When I went to the Art Students League, I wouldn't study print making because it was so hokey. When I could have learned how in school - to learn how to make prints, - hairpins and knives and chicken wire was really popular. All you had to do was scratch your way through it. My feeling about -from the very first response, was that it wasn't just a rock. That is was alive. It had the hardness and the weight, and the stubbornness of a rock, which you can't argue with. It's going to do what it's going to do. So you had to understand it, but each rock had a certain sensitivity that also

was unique. So to find that in the stone was doing something else. That probably appealed to my - I don't know - my off-balance, Libran, schizophrenic personality.

ES: Also, your sense of adventure.

R: Oh, I have to do a lecture in Washington next week again. And I never gave on on this. It's going to be kind of difficult: It's for a very good cause. I am one of the six celebrated handicapped people picked out nationally to give an address and do fundraising for the handicapped school here.

ES: You mean because of your reading?

R: Because of my dyslexia. The reason I thought of that is that dyslexia can also be used positively and negatively. I'm going to tell these children and their parents and family, that having dyslexia probably was the reason for my having made so many new discoveries in printmaking. Because I could continually bypass working in reverse.

ES: You saw it that way?

R: I saw it that way. I could see it both ways at the same time. I'm very fast. You have never seen me work. That was why Gemini was crazy about me, and Bill, you know, because I come in and in two days we have the whole place just filled with things. Because I moved directly as in action, rather than interpreting.

ES: Yes - having to make the change, you could see it instantly.

R: Certainly. I could see it both ways because I have had so much practice trying to read. Like in the beginning, I couldn't control my attention because I'd get so bored so quickly, no matter how interesting what I was reading was. Even how important it was to me. In some cases, in a matter of 45 seconds, I could tell you how many o's were on the page. That's no way to read. You know, the transfer technique.

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ES: Uh huh.

R: It's just perfect for ~~tant~~. That's being taught in all the schools now.

ES: What do you see? Backwards and forwards? Flip flopped? Positive, negative? The positive or negative of a photograph? Do you see that, too?

R: Yes. All that. And I was very confused about which one it was because both were very real to me. And having a broader esthetic than just a plain photographer, I very often used the photographic negative as a positive image also. But I think it also had something to do with the fact that I am Libra, which is a balance.

ES: Right.

R: It is already again in conflict where you can be on either side of any argument. If you are intelligent you can probably win on either side. But that's not the point. You come to an interesting stalemate, where you recognize the advantages of both....faults.

ES: But, one must act.

R: Right down the middle! (laughs) I have no trouble with that. Possibly ruined my market just be being so prolific. Am so grateful that I have this project on such a scale as ROCI (Rauschenber Overseas Cultural^e Interchange) where I have an excuse to make as many paintings as I want. And somehow in the American market it really goes against you, as far as financial support. Or even respect.

You see, if you make two paintings, - I don't understand this - I can't afford it. As I was saying to you earlier, I don't feel I have enough time. If I can make 12 paintings a week, I certainly am going to do that. I made 8 pieces of sculpture in five days this week, to go to Tibet.

And they weren't simple pieces either. But they had to get off. I worked in enough theater, so I have great respect for deadlines. And I came very close to being nailed in one of the crates everytime a ROCI show goes out.

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ES: A new Crucifixion.

R: Well, just install plumbing and a light in there, I guess I could make it. They'd get off my back anyway then. (laughs) You know that.

I don't think scarcity of work implies quality. I don't think slow painting is any more interesting than fast painting. I think it is one of the worst things we inherited from the Europeans. We finally have our own style, in American, and do things that make us the envy of the rest of the world. I can't imagine why anyone, unless they are, excuse the expression "bullshitting themselves" can believe that.

ES: It's just dealing, and market and money. That's what it is all about. Rarity.

R: The falshood of "you're serious because you deliberate." The truth might be that you are lazy.

ES: Or you can't make up your mind. That also is against printmaking in general. Especially in the 40's and 50's, a print was considered way down there because there were so many of them. But that never bothered you.

R: I got tired of it. I waged a sort of one man battle there - or at least started it. I got tired of the fact that the only place you'd see prints was on your way to the ladies or men's room.

ES: It was true at the Whitney.

R: How about your museum?

ES: It was pretty bad.

R: It was true at the Modern, too. And when editions got so unique, either to scale or technique, it changed. Riva Castleman, (well, she hasn't done it in a couple of years) Everytime I used to see her, she used to take me in to show me the new drawers they had to build for my work.

ES: That's right.

R: If you have something like 8 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide, you can't treat it like some little wall filler.

ES: It's not for over the sofa.

R: That's right, it's instead of the sofa.

ES: When you were with Tanya, did you talk about your other work, too? Sculpture, paintings?

R: Rarely, the reason I got into Tanya's was because of the Dante illustrations. That's why she kept insisting that I get in that. I always thought that the rest of my work, she accepted through so much love, that it was not critical.

ES: That's what I was going to say.

R: Right. In the print shop, she could be critical of the work in detail, specifically.

ES: What would she say? Give me an example

R: I don't know; she might say something like, "Rauschenberg, don't you think this paper is too rough for your delicate image?" Or, "maybe Bill didn't etch this wash right." You know, always trying to smooth it out with no blame happening. Once, the most daring thing that she ever did.... I don't know what they ever did with that paper. This was something that you were asking, like "What did I bring out in her?" She went from the most expensive, select handmade papers to the.... In one case, she couldn't get anything that I liked. I liked printing on this paper that had tar in between. It was a nightmare ^{for?} or a curator. And she got into it and she said, "Why not?" She, somehow, found out how to get a hold of some very gross paper that the Tibetan people use, of all people - or the Mongolians use, for hatching eggs on. I think we recycled this.

ES: Before it was used?

R: I think so. I might have liked it better after the eggs.

R: A little free drawing (laughs) Anyway, those were very dynamic changes she was capable of making, if she were invited to. A lot of the artists just insisted on using the very best French papers, the special watermarks. That always used to drive me crazy. I didn't want watermarks; it was too expensive, and wasn't worth it. And how many people who have a print, have it in such a condition? Are you going to take it out of the frame and hold it up to the light to see the watermark? Anyway, it costs too much. And I'd rather just get more paper. But a couple of times I had to

ES: The Metropolitan Centennial print - that had the watermarks.

R: That was a special thing. But, also with Robbe-Gillet, who was not a stickler for that. He didn't care about her - I don't mean it to sound quite that honest - (Esther: "I won't quote you.") There wasn't room but for one person in his life, and he had the job. (laughs) He drove us both crazy because she kept saying that I just didn't understand him. That collaboration went on for four or five years.

ES: Oh, yes.

R: And he was driving me crazy.

ES: That wasn't really a collaboration.

R: It was supposed to be. It was a beautiful idea. Do you know the original idea?

ES: Oh, yes. But tell me.

R: It was going to be a dialogue and he was to initiate it. So he would write and then I would respond to that in images.

ES: He would send you some text.

R: Yes, it would be like a discussion, like we're having here now. You are listening to what I am saying, and I am listening to what you are saying. We have a conversation that isn't necessarily predictable. And so, it appealed to me, that an amassed work could grow, change directions, change subjects. That was exciting to me.

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- R: I didn't know it until about the third installment, I think that was when Tanya got a little pissed, too, that he was rewriting one of his old movies scripts.
- ES: She must have been very angry.
- R: Yeah. Well, Tanya always was such an idealist. She just believed so strongly. I was jealous because she started accusing me of not understanding him. I thought it was really so prissy that it shouldn't have been tolerated. He put the project off after we started it, because he wanted to do it at a certain desk. A certain stand-up desk of a certain century. He wanted this. Because that was the inspiration. He was inspired to do this, standing up on one of these things. He couldn't find the right one, and put the project off after it was started, for a year. So the day that I found that out, I had just had enough of it. What he would do (I feel quite passionately about it) and you don't have to use it if it's too rough . So I decided that I would try to open up the discourse by bringing in new elements.
- ES: You can see that on the firstpage.
- R: Then he started working backwards and forwards. He would take that and write that into his script, so he had ruined those. See, he just should have picked up on the images. I trusted everybody else to be able to read them, as hieroglyphics or something, and then pick up from there and write. I think it was about the 4th exchange, and I just did this big bull, and I didn't mean anything other than bull. Ha ha ha! Guess how he responded? It's a bullfight - all of a sudden, it's in Spain or something.
- ES: He didn't get it at all. He wasn't receiving.

R: He wasn't receiving. And that's when Tanya got impatient, too. But we made a beautiful publication, as it turned out. I think it is very sensitive of him and very sensitive of me, and gorgeously printed. I think, you don't know me so well, but knowing my work, you could see how frustrated I would be - to see a perfectly good, marvelous idea go down the drain. You know, for a bunch of European sentiment

ES: Well, it seemed oppressive to me. There was something so intractable about that text, the way it was written, it was almost metallic. Can't rally justify my use of that word, but it was so square and imposing itself, and not leaving room and not leaving alternatives. Unlike anything of yours that I had seen.

R: There was no air. But I wasn't going to let Tanya down. I remember I got very put off by Dante when I was working on Dante. I got so sick of all the moralism. He showed more and more as he continued writing, how two-faced he was.

ES: You mean, what a Machiavellian politician he was?

R: Yes. He didn't have to, at the same time praising his old school teacher that he learned all his writing from - and also put him in hell.

ES: Well, there's so much vengeance in the Dante.

R: It was supposed to be such a good book. That's what I mean. This was the context I wasn't able to resolve. I only mentioned it because I went down to a place near St. Petersburg and lived by myself just to concentrate on it, and I was down there for another six months. You know, just trying to finish it.

ES: And worked on nothing else?

R: Yes, that was another two and one half years. You see, I have persistence. I don't know if you call that faithful or not, but it certainly is persistent.

ES: But that shows the unity of your work and your thought and concentration on that text. There's nothing else like that book in our time, for a collaboration between an artist and a writer. Nothing.

R: Durer was, I think. He tried to treat his things with a similar respect. And like that, I never wanted the imagery to ?? (page 12) become an illustration of the work, a selective illustration, which would make it subserviant. Or did I want it to overshadow his ability with the language.

ES: Did you change a lot: Why did you spend so long a time ? Because you re-thought it and re-read it?

R: Which one?

ES: The Dante.

R: Oh, It was just slow. It just took a long time. Materials were hard to get because I had to fix them in scale also. That was one of the restrictions I had made that if something is full of beautiful words, which most often they were. You know, he was a great writer. Well, then the image could not overpower that. That's what I was talking about in respect to the illustration. The only Dante illustrations didn't do that, and they had a different arrangement, were the Botticelli illustrations. He also wrote the whole page, that I was trying to do - page for page, within the scale of imagery. Whereas everybody else would pick their favorite part.

ES: And illustrate it.

R: And illustrate it. Then you would get to that line and you would say, "Oh, look, that's very important - there's a whole page for it." And that's a mistake that illustrators do make.

ES: And then when you made the prints, the Ark, Kar, Sink, to go along with the book, how did the imagery in these prints relate to the Abrams' Dante?

R: Not directly.

ES: Not at all.

R: No, maybe something in the energy, but that was one of the... that was one of Tanya's and my first big scale productions. I already thought it was a little vulgar, that we would have to do all those hand prints. I liked making the different images, but it wasn't fair to her and her production costs.

ES: That never mattered to her.

R: I know it didn't. Some of us tried to protect her a little bit, so it didn't get totally outrageous. But it was difficult, and probably why we failed. How long did it take: Seven years? Or was it the Motherwell?

ES: The Motherwell took four years.

R: How about the Newman Cantos?

ES: They didn't take long at all. About a year.

R: Oh, really.

ES: It was the Motherwell that took from '68 to '72. He started in 1968 when he first came there. Then there was the Rivers and Southern collaboration. That went on four nine years.

R: Which one?

ES: The Donkey and the Darling.

R: God, we didn't teach that woman honthing!

ES: And that was the end, too.

R:lost....

Well, she was a pushover for it. You were talking about why we got along? I think it was true. For every artist who worked for her there was a different shape to her affection.... a response to something different. With Larry, I think it came from knowing her earlier...from Long Island...

ES: Well, he was sort of her bad boy.

R: Yes, he was always getting into all kinds of trouble, his children getting

into trouble, busy getting divorced and remarried. Maybe she related to him because he always acted so Jewish when he came around her. You know, otherwise he was just real jazzy!

ES: Think about some of the printers that you worked with. One of the words that comes up about your work all the time is collaboration, always collaboration. Other people have played an extraordinarily direct role in your work. I mean extraordinary in comparison to others. The printers, for example: Were there any that were more than usually sympathetic or helpful?

R: Each project had its own cast. And it always sad to finish a project, you know, and you go away, and then two or three other people (take over?). It's revitalizing to my own sensibility to have to get to know some new strangers. And, in the end, there's no better way of getting to know anybody than working with them.

ES: Right

R: It ends up that you don't want to go home alone. In the beginning, it's very scary, it's doubly scary. If you work like I do, you don't know what you are going to do. Nearly never do I have any idea how big something is going to be or what the subject is going to be. Maybe, just once this year - and that was the ^{(Bellini's)?} Botticellis. Somehow, ROCI has interfered with that in such a way that it just slowed down the concentration. Bill's had a lot of problems with the shop and it hasn't been going out to work. I think it's getting back to just going out to work.

But usually I don't know what I am going to do. And then you have to get started. I don't know why, yes I do, it's just human nature. It's harder to make a mistake in front of a stranger, than it is in front of a friend. I've never been very heavy on the technical aspects of the printmaking.

ES: You do all kinds of wild things.

R: I know, that's why I can't keep up. I have a little press down in Florida. Cy Twombly did some stones for me, under pressure, cause he doesn't like having his image reversed because it's such handwriting. But he said he would try, and I etched his things and I practically know how to etch and they almost looked three-dimensional. So there are certain advantages that come from a little bit of information, a lot of caution, a lot of caring. I was terrified about his stones because I knew he would never do them again. He was just waiting to say "See there!" Anyway they came out well. I do know something about it. I know a lot more probably than I am willing to admit. But I much prefer going in the direction of bringing out things in somebody else that they don't know. And that's more fun for both of us. Rather than just dealing with experts.

ES: Yes, people who will tell you the right way to do it.

R: I know some printers like that. I know some photographers like that. It's a very boring existence.

ES: Well, that must have been very exciting.

R: Yes, Keith is too, and Bill.

ES: But that must have been very exciting to you about Gemini, when you went there, because they had all kinds of technical excitement.

R: Well, that's Los Angeles. There's a difference in Long Island and Los Angeles, too. Or just being West Coast, where so many exotic things and high tech are just completely available. I mean, all you do is jump in the car!

ES: When you went to Gemini, somebody said, I think it was Riva, that Tanya was hurt.

R: Well, Jasper had already been out there. She was getting used to the idea. I wasn't the first one that had gone out. She didn't like it at all. It wasn't until much later that she acknowledged the fact that it was

very good for her artists. It wasn't a dangerous competition. It had to do with her artists' development, different attitudes and different skills. So that the work would always be fresh. But in the beginning, her problem was there. I don't think she ever got over it. Even the girls were her boys. It was like a mother-parent relationship. She just didn't want us to leave home. We might get in trouble, whereas if you are there, she can take care of it.

ES: But she never sort of made an issue of that with you.

R: No, I made a big mistake. I just didn't see why - because I liked the people out at Gemini so much, and I certainly loved Tanya. It seemed to me a waste of energy that they would have to have any kind of differences. They should really like each other while they were doing it. So I arranged this disastrous dinner party. I almost couldn't get in because I was in my Indian period then, was wearing a lot of handmade leather stuff (which was not cheap) but...

ES: I saw photographs of you in it.

R: I had one really good one, all handlaced and stuff. So I arranged what turned out to be a nightmare of a dinner party at an expensive restaurant. I was doing the whole thing, one of those penthouse things. I could not get in because they said they didn't accept leather jackets. So they are upstairs sitting round this table hating me as a host who is going to try to pull this thing off! And so I finally showed up in some giant monster suit which would probably be very chic right now. Baggy, you know, matching the tablecloth. And (when I came in, I got?) all those wild vindictive looks. I just gave up. Said I would never try it again. Actually, I don't think I have great respect. Now,

if people just don't like each other, just let them do it. It's none of my business. It was naive but I thought it was a good idea. I thought they had so much to give to each other. At that point, they were the two most important publishing houses. And Gemini certainly did respect her. Ken was still there. (something lost here)

ES: You said you hardly ever know what you are going to do before you start, but you have ^{brought} ~~bought~~ things to the studio to use many times. In the beginning there was the printer's mats that you got from Brian O' Doherty at the Times.

R: Those paper mats?

ES: Yes. You used them.

R: I know. They were very frustrating to me. But they always looked good. But they always look good. Haven't you noticed? Are you an artist?

ES: I did it enough times to know I should stop. But some of them are here and here (pointing to early prints).

R: A lot of those were metal. The ones I put in my raincoat. I wore it and it wasn't raining.

ES: Were the mats your idea?

R: Yes, it wasn't anything like asking for permission. And Brian said, "Sure, Bob, anything you want." And I went downstairs and nobody would me near it.

ES: You mean you went downstairs to the press room?

R: They had barrels full that they were going to remelt. You could just reach out and take them. And it must have looked curious because I'm just a man of the street, you know. Just happened to be wearing this raincoat that had pockets this big! You'd be surprised how suspicious you look with a raincoat on a sunny day with the pockets this big. You change your stride a bit.

ES: And probably your expression, too.

R: Guilt was never one of my subtler problems. But the mats, I never knew how to use them, you see. To use something like that, even though it was a traditional object in printmaking.

ES: What did you do? Did you dip it in ink and press it on the stone?

R: I really don't remember. I did all kinds of things. We did transfers, I dipped them in tusche, we ran it through the press.

ES: (Looking at MERGER) That was for Dylaby, wasn't it? That was the collaboration that didn't come to pass.

R: One of my great matchmakings!

ES: That was supposed to be Dine and Tinguely.

R: Tanya hated his piece (Tinguely). But...just wouldn't do anything about it. I don't like that style of work myself. He's a good buy but not my thing. And Jim decided not to go. Because he decided that...Well, two Americans were invited then there were two Frenchmen, and so on. It was supposed to be an international thing for Sandburg. It was his last show in Amsterdam.

ES: The director?

R: Yes, who then went to Israel - Jerusalem. He was forced to retire. He didn't want to retire. He's still alive, bless his heart. (Traffic noise here) He is a gorgeous little man. I must have known him for nearly 20-30 years (some lost here) Nobody knew all of what he had planned.

That the artists were going to come to this one place, the museum, on a certain day, in July. Here again, no preconception, it was going to be an ultimate collaborative work.

ES: All work together on one piece?

R: Going to be an anonymous group work. Then Jim decided he couldn't come because he couldn't take a ship, he'd get seasick. He was terrified to fly. I don't know how much of this was playbacks from his

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psychiatrist...or whether he just didn't want to do it.

ES: He was having a bad time then, I guess.

R: He was going to the dentist, too, I think. He is very sensitive.

ES: He is very moody, too, and he is the first person to say so.

R: And so we all got there within a half hour of each other and the first thing everybody did was pull out their drawings - what they wanted to do!

ES: Like Robbe-Grillet.

R: We had too months to finish this project. I didn't come back in until about two weeks before. I remember reading a diary on it. They said Bob didn't show up again today. I was furious. That's not fair, I wasn't furious, I was hurt. I mean I think ideas that are good deserve a certain amount of dignity. And they just pulled out this same old bald shit, which was exactly what they were doing in Holland. It would have been a most extraordinary even if it failed.

ES: It would have been such an experience.

R: Yes, it would have accomplished something even though it would have been a disaster. Because it would have been tried. Just like Experiments in Art and Technology, the Nine Evenings - a collaboration.

ES: You don't think they were a failure?

R: No, but most of the audience did, for a long time. Now, people think they are celebrities, because they had the good sense to go. But they weren't particularly happy while they were there.

ES: You felt that then?

R: Yeah, it was easy. If you were a performer up there on that stage, you certainly could feel it out there in the arena.

ES: You felt the hostility?

R: Right.

ES: But you kept on doing it.

R: We couldn't stop because it was an object. The whole thing was an object. We had to go on. Lucinda Childs had to do her piece. Deborah ^{do} ~~may~~ had to ^{do} hers and Steve Paxton had to do his. There was nobody there, just even the smallest bit part that could be stopped. Frank Stella was playing tennis to turn my lights off. It was marvelous stuff going on. That could have been, but just wasn't. (But there in Amsterdam?) I finally just went in and locked myself into the last two rooms that were left and made something that I really liked.

ES: What was it?

R: Because I got tired of pouting. It was a walkthrough sculpture that people would underatand, sort of like a sculpture jungle. The sculptures were wandering here. The people had to stay on the path.

ES: Oh, like the San Diego Zoo?

R: Yeah, I did have a good time. (Tape failure here) Conversation about the elements of the sculpture, which still exist in an unassembled state).

R: One more time, I can't make up my mind. I want to attempt to duplicate what I can temember, what these things were, which, of course, would not be clear.

ES: Perhaps just because it's history. (more lost here).

R: Particularly in my case it would be hard since I had all these new lights which were low intensity. But people didn't think about that then, documenting everything. Or, is my obligation to the material, or to give them a whole brand new life, with my new sensibility. And so far I've not come to any conclusion. Because I seriously am mostaligic about the other. You get into something a little heavier than just

RR IS TALKING ABOUT ~~THE~~ AMSTERDAM HERE, NOT NINE EVENINGS

sentimental values.

ES: It's history.

R: But then my disrespect for it. Intolerance also.

ES: You are a creative artist. You can't be mired in the past.

R: So far I haven't come up with the right solution.

ES: Tell me when you want to stop.

R: Oh, maybe another 15 minutes. The thing is, you're so easy to talk to, I tend to just ramble on.

ES: Wonderful. Actually, we're not getting to a lot of factual stuff.

R: Let's try to.

R: That's not my forte, anyway. I never can remember how many there were, or when it was done or what the name of it was...I can remember everything else around it though. I can probably tell you what we had for dinner that night at Tanya's.

ES: One story I have to get from you and that's the story of Twombly coming to ULAE. I know nothing about that and Bill said that you brought him there one day and it was a surprise to Tanya. She didn't know what to do with him when he got there. So she gave him, or somebody gave him, some plates and he sat outside at the table under the tree and he made them...

R: And he hated it.

ES: And he hated it?

R: Good. Those are the ones you give the whole edition to _____
I say they're beautiful.

- ES: They are. How could he hate them?
- R: (Something lost here) Get into offset where it can be reversed again. You see, he doesn't mind that, but he doesn't like his lines that are going this way, going that way. And I can understand that.
- ES: Oh, sure.
- R: I like them going both ways, myself. I mean, his lines. I don't know how I would feel about something going backwards. Of course, I would be the last person to ask.
- ES: For you. Both ways is normal.
- R: I wasn't even aware, because I wanted to stay out of it. I wasn't aware that all this was actually going on. He came out because I love his work and I think he's one of the most important graphic people in the world. And I thought that they should get together. And I didn't know about these editions until a couple of months later.
- ES: He is a friend of yours.
- R: He has been, he has been. We went to BLACK MOUNTAIN together in 1950. (IS THIS DATE CORRECT?)
- ES: Oh, so you have always been friends.
- R: He was visiting and then I was going out there. He didn't have such enormous obligations, then, just dropped by. I talked him into coming out, a nice day in the country. I'm certainly glad I did it, because I don't think anybody's been able to pull much more out of him.
- ES: Certainly, not in print. They're wonderful.
- R: That's what I meant.
- ES: They really are.
- R: He has done these things where he makes collages and he'll work with the publishing house and they'll make a few changes or something.

But that's not really starting from the bottom up.

ES: What about the Glacial Decoy series? Bill said that that was a performance.

R: That was Tricia's, yeah, and I got so involved. It's the first time I'd gone back to taking as many photographs as I used to. The performance had, I don't know, 280 photographs and rear projection on the sets. I don't know, 18 feet by 5 1/2 feet. There were five of them (projectors) they ripple across. Each one is that big, though. They fill the whole stage, you know, and then there's the dancing. And so, I had all of these images going on, and, plus I got very involved with the dance. I wanted to use that.

ES: In what way?

R: Just involved.

ES: You didn't perform?

R: Oh no, I didn't perform, but working with Tricia, you know, on this and then the performances and stuff like that. I didn't go anywhere without my camera. I did all the photographs within about 15 miles. It was all around Fort Myers. I just took my camera there and just did all the photography work...

ES: I see, I see.

R: It's cows and trees, and spring and too big of a palette. I probably took about 5,000 photographs, because by the time everything got selected and reselected for the performance itself...

ES: You did that?

R: Yeah, I was really into it. But what also happened was that I grew to really love Fort Myers, which is one of the ugliest of towns in the world. There's just not much there. But when you're being honest, you can't afford that attitude. Every shadow is extremely important.

- ES: Well, the same is true of the photographs you took of the Razorback Bunch. The images are not images of beautiful places or high class places or intrinsically interesting things, but you make them that way.
- R: I take the photographs the way I pick things off the street. If something is too interesting, it doesn't need me, you know.
- ES: May I quote that?
- R: Sure.
- ES: Maybe that will be my chapter heading. That's wonderful.
- ES: The print called 5:29 Bayshore. Was that the train that goes out there?
- R: Yeah.
- ES: Did you take photographs all day?
- R: All day, and by, I don't know; Bill can tell you, it started when he got out there and I didn't have anything to work with. So just took my camera and went through the entire process in a matter of like 12 hours. Twelve hours later we had a proof.
- ES: You went down to the railroad station and...all over and..railroad tracks?
- R: Yeah, and that was one of the last shots we took, so that was exactly the time the train came out. Then we went back to the darkroom that evening. The light was going down, too, so I couldn't have taken too many more photographs anyway. That's fun to do that work, you know? You see, I don't know I have to have action. I've never been a studio artist. Although from the very beginning, I described my work and my attitude in the 50's. That I wanted my work to look more like what was going on outside the window, than inside.
- ES: "General" is the word you use. And other people have used the word "impersonal", but somehow that doesn't fit.
- R: Oh, not impersonal: I'm very involved. I mean, I get very passionately

carried away, at the drop of a spoon or a paintbrush or something.

ES: Or a blade of grass.

R: It's not impersonal at all. I mean, how could I be impersonal when I spend an entire day like I did? A print like this is a culmination of one afternoon in Bay Shore. How could that be impersonal?

ES: It's alive.

R: Maybe it doesn't have a bunch of superficial emotional splashes on it, but I do that, too.

ES: A lot.

R: Particularly now with my new acrylics. These are all images, you see, that are part of the dance.

ES: When you say they were projected...were they projected so that they were projected also on to the dancers or behind them? And they were always moving?

R: Well, they rippled across. It was 8...

ES: Projectors?

R: Yeah, but they were computer controlled, so they were exactly times. and Four 4 1/2 seconds, then 4 1/2 seconds down, then that image would be 4 1/2 seconds moving in on this one, while this one was moving out of that one. If you get them out of sync, you're in real hell.

R: Tricia did the piece in

ES: Where was it performed?

R: In ah, in ah City Center, just a couple of weeks ago.

ES: Glacial Decoy?

THERE WERE
5 PROJECTORS

R: Yeah, and I get so nervous sitting in the audience. I feel much safer when I'm backstage, because I feel that I can do something about it. Something that goes wrong? When I get out in the audience I feel nervous. And, the third slide got out of sync, and it was going boom BOOM, boom BOOM. God, what can I do? The piece has started, dancers are gorgeous, the lights are gorgeous! Then one of the guys she has working for her somehow, miraculously, after about the first four minutes, was able to give the thing a kick, or something, and everything fell back to sync.

ES: It's usually hopeless, the computer errors.

R: It is usually hopeless, that's right, exactly. You have to start from scratch again.

ES: Was it a new machine?

R: 400 slides, 2 or 3 misaligned... Anyway, that's how I get involved in and I do tend to, like I did before, as a matter of fact, bring the theatre work, into the graphic work and to the painting and everything. I hope, just before it's totally exhausted you know, that it is a thorough experience. Things change when they go through different processes, or different uses or different spaces.

ES: Not only between the arts, but in the visual arts, also. Sculpture, paper, moving light, prints all that.

R: Right, I didn't mean just flatly.

ES: I've got all these things here, all the photographs and all the stuff that I've written about, and you can read it or not read it as you please.

R: You have no idea how long it will take me to read this page.

ES: After we started talking about it I realized that it would be a burden. Are there any prints that you would remember from ULAE that were of special importance to you? RIVAL seemed to me to be very important because of the connection with the Jewish Museum Show in '63, and also because of

ES: the use of the photoengraving. It is the first time you used that. There are certain images that appear and reappear, and it may not see, very important...

R" ACCIDENT was one, but ~~that's been~~ written about and written about. There is the one, what is the name of that one where I had my cane?

ES: Of yes, that's when you hurt your foot.

R: Yeah, I broke it on my birthday so that was invoved with my birthday celebration.

ES: What is this?

R: It's just a color wheel. It's a gray scale color wheel.

ES: Brian O'Dougherty says that when you came to get the printers mats you didn't want a specific one. You just wanted things, you wanted subject matter.

R: Right, I wanted weather, animals.

ES: The cat?

R: Rural, urban, objects. I still work that way. When I'm classifying, like I'm doing the silkscreen things now, I have to have, or when I'm doing the silkscreen things now, I have to have, or when I'm doing the photographs, IN AND OUT CITY LIMITS. You won't find an equal number, of course, because it's not that well organized, but you will find all these areas covered. I'm having a few problems with ROCI now, because I'm right on the edge of being a reporter.

ES: With ROCI?

R: Yeah, because when I go to a country, instead of just being there and *romantically*, poetically absorbing all the influence and everything, I feel responsibility to the people to show them their country. So I'm going back the other way. I want to show them parts of their country they've never seen.

ES: It's another conversation. You show what you see and they respond and it's illuminating.

R: It's almost a quote from one of the videos. It was that I'm giving you something very special to me but I'm also taking something from you that's special to me. Sounds one-sided -- should come out the other way, but it's true.

ES: But after you take it, they're not missing it.

R: I know.

ES: You're not taking it away.

R: Well, I'm taking it to the next place to show them.

ES: It multiplies.

R: Do you know the ROI concept?

ES: I know it in the most general terms.

R: (some lost here -)

Here's a new article that came from Caracas. Anyway you can read faster than I can.

ES: I think, if you don't want to read it, then...I wonder if there are any of the elements in there that you think are worth analyzing or identifying. You have never wanted to do so before.

R: Exactly, I don't think I'm going to change tonight.

ES: I think the quote was "It takes all the mystery out of it"

R: It does, it really does. We had this writer; he ran for President and I think he was a Nobel prize winner, and who wrote about my work in Caracas.

I just couldn't use it. He psychologically interpreted everything. This is a magic image (and I don't want you to say this) ^{that's how an acne ad.} Mona Lisa never looked that mysterious, right?

ES: Right.

R: Now if I say that, well then it's just funny or something. Do you see this image? That is one of the most mysterious pieces of paper, with that image on it.

ES: Well, there was one print Tony Towle went through for me. I think it was LANDMARK. It's the print that was made from a single issue of LIFE MAGAZINE. Tony said that the print I'm talking about was made from a series of images from LIFE MAGAZINE, and he tells me where they came from: one was a Czechoslovakian Railroad station, one was an ad from the United Negro College ^{Fund,} and so forth and so on. He took me through this exercise just to show me you were right. That boiling them down in to those little blobs of notes really doesn't help anything.

R: These are images, erotic images that came from the color black. This is the original ^[Rocky the turtle] ROCI [^] still.

ES: The turtle in New York? I met him.

R: Right. I think when we figured out Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, we named it after him. Rocky, ROCI. In mythology, they have all those thing. It's very hard to have any kind of spiritual group without a turtle being involved.

ES: Really?

R: Well, the Hindus have the world held on a turtle - Shiva. The American Indians had all those turtles, and the Mayans had their giant turtles. ROCI doesn't seem to be getting us very far. How far can you go? Tibet? Oh, we just found out last week that Russia really wants us. Now this hasn't gone through all the bureaucrats, but it's gone right up to, like students, intellectuals, the old intellectuals, the Guilds. They said it's about time for Russia. They're also very titillated because the show is going to be in China. They don't know exactly what to make of that.

ES: Make something new of it.

R: Well, they have to worry about it. I don't have to figure it out.

ES: (looking at MMA Certificate) When you made this, did you pick out the....

R: Yes

ES: You did. Tony said you didn't like the text that they sent you, so you wrote *one* out.

R: You would too. (Terry van Brun: The best way to get Bob to write something is to give him something he doesn't like.) I write faster than I read. Not necessarily faster, but better.

ES: Where did this come from?

R: Hoving. He was the director there. They kept sending this awful stuff.

ES: Grind-out from the PR Department.

R: He probably never touched it.

ES: He writes well.

R: Yeah, he does, at least for his own commercials.

ES: Right. He doesn't always write the truth, but he writes well.

R: (looking at TANYA) Now here was a photograph that Maurice and I liked.

ES: This was the one that you used on the ceramic from Japan, the one you sent us as a gift. It's up there on the balcony where the storage of prints are. She's watching; that ceramic that you sent us, she's watching. It must have been from Paris, this photograph?

R: I don't think so.

ES: No?

R: It's amazing how she changed, physically, from when we started. She just started shrivelling. Her bone structure, even. Here you can see she's a powerful woman. She could probably punch Gertrude Stein out or something. And then she just turned into a little bird.

R: It was very sad, but we all sort of agree that she was happy to go. That didn't mean that we weren't going to miss her or get terribly upset. But

R: I guess the only comfort was that we knew that she was happier. I mean if you're happy after death.

ES: At least you're not in pain.

(some lost here)