

Stories Project. ACC 54.

Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

Craig Zammiello is an author, artist, Master Printer, and former employee of Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) in West Islip, New York, whose work can be found in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, Belgium; Yale University Art Gallery; and the Hoesch Museum, Duren, Germany. He received an MFA from the State University of New York, Stony Brook, and is adjunct faculty at the School of the Arts at Columbia University. While working at ULAE, he collaborated with Rauschenberg on many prints in the 1980s–90s, including the *Razorback Bunch* (1980–82), *Moroccan* (1984), and *Bellini* (1986–89) series.

Transcription of interview with Craig Zammiello conducted by David White, Senior Curator, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, on April 18, 2023. Reviewed and edited by the speakers.

David White [DW]: It's David White. I'm here on April 18th, 2023 to speak with Craig Zammiello.

Craig Zammiello [CZ]: Very good. Zammiello. You got it.

DW: This is part of our Oral History Stories Project. If we could start with you saying a few words about yourself, where you're from, maybe where you live now, and your education, and how you got connected with Bob. I'll let you plunge right in.

CZ: Native New Yorker. I was born in Queens, then my parents moved out to the suburbs in Nassau County and finally Suffolk County where I grew up. I was exposed to art at home. My mother painted and drew. That came from her father, who was a renaissance-type person. Painting, photography, music, everything. Throughout school, I always was doodling and taking part in art-related things. When our new high school was built, they had tons of money at that time, I guess this was around 1970. One of the art teachers was a printmaker, so he had an entire print studio built in the high school. Litho [lithograph] stones, silkscreen, etching—everything you could think of. I was addicted to printmaking from the start, so I had three years of experience before setting foot in college.

I went to Southampton College as a freshman, flunked out of there, bummed around for a while, and finally got my bachelor's degree at Stony Brook University. Right after I graduated, literally the day after, my printmaking teacher, Dan Weldon, called me and said, "There's a print studio in West Islip, Long Island that's looking for someone to make packages." I replied, "Dan, I just graduated. I want to relax." He goes, "No, you want to go to an interview there." I'm like, "No, I don't." "Yes, you do." He talked me into it. I go there two days later and I'm pretty lackadaisical about it. I walk in and I'm waiting to meet Bill Goldston [Director of ULAE], who I had talked to on the phone. As I was waiting, I realized, looking at the walls, my God, that's a Jasper Johns.

And then there was a Rauschenberg and there was a [James] Rosenquist. I thought to myself, “You’re in big trouble.”

I tried to talk myself out of the job. I really did. Tanya [Tatyana] Grosman [founder of ULAE] had also come in to interview me. “Pleasure to meet you.” “Thank you.” “Oh, I really don’t have any experience with this.” “No, no, that’s okay. That’s fine.” “Well, we need somebody to go to the city, to drive in and deliver things.” “I don’t know anything about the city, I’m sorry.” “That’s okay. We’re all from Minnesota. We learned, too.” No matter what I did, I couldn’t talk them out of it. They hired me. Within two days, I realized that this was one of the most magical places in the world.

DW: Named? The name of the print shop?

CZ: Universal Limited Art Editions, ULAE. I think within four months, Robert Rauschenberg showed up to make prints. This is around 1979, 1980. I was helping Master Printer John Lund in the basement of ULAE working on etchings. It was one of those typical Bob Rauschenberg working evenings with his entourage, music going, dinner on the stove at ten o’clock at night, and we’re all working on separate prints. I came upstairs to the litho studio and was standing there, seeing what they were doing, just taking a break. Bob turned around and he looked at me and he goes, “You’re an etcher, get back in the basement.” He laughed. That was when I realized I belonged there. The last term paper I did in college was on Bob Rauschenberg and here I am with the man, and it was wonderful ever since. I wound up working at ULAE for twenty-five years.

In early 2002 there was a shifting of personnel at ULAE. A lot of young artists were coming in, and things were changing. A few of us that were there for a long time left and we moved over to another print studio here in New York City, Two Palms Press, founded by David Lasry. Basically, a lot of the same artists we worked with at ULAE were also making prints at Two Palms. Terry Winters, Carol Dunham, Cecily Brown, et cetera. It was a very easy acclimation. Different atmosphere, completely different energy. I’m still with Two Palms, even though I’m semi-retired, working on special projects.

DW: Wow. I guess each of those print shops has different qualities. That’s why an artist will work at ULAE and Two Palms and Gemini [G.E.L.] and . . .

CZ: Absolutely. Yes. When each artist comes to work, they know what to expect from that environment, and so they bring an idea tailored for that particular studio.

DW: Do you recall the first print project that you did with Bob?

CZ: Yes, I assisted John Lund because I was first hired as a registrar, keeping track of the editions, making packages and shipping them, that sort of thing.

DW: Making packages—meaning, making trips to the city?

CZ: Yes. Packaging and delivering prints to the galleries and people who purchased them, taking trips to Kennedy Airport for international shipping, et cetera. It took about two years before I really got involved in even being in charge of printing an edition at ULAE. And I think that was a good thing because really, you're assisting, you're watching, you're learning. I think it was tremendously helpful. But the first time I was involved in actual printing was helping John do a chine-collé, where thin Asian paper is laminated at the same time that you're printing the etching. That would be *The Razorback Bunch* (series, 1980–82). I think number four [*The Razorback Bunch: Etching IV*, 1981]. It was the first time I really got involved printing an edition.



Robert Rauschenberg
The Razorback Bunch: Etching IV, 1981
Photoetching with chine collé
48 x 32 inches (121.9 x 81.3 cm)
From an edition of 26, published by Universal Limited Art
Editions, West Islip, New York
RRF 81.E026

DW: I think that's such a beautiful series.

CZ: Isn't it? In fact, that was my first printer's proof from ULAE. About four years ago, my wife and I donated it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. That's where it belongs. But I soon learned, and I think I mentioned this to you about Bob, that he was always interested in moving ahead, exploring techniques, different interesting things you could show him. I quickly learned that he usually worked in suites, in groups of prints. When a group was completed, such as *The Razorback Bunch*, the thought would be, "What can we tempt Bob with next? What's something that's going to be different, something that logically would be the next step?" That's what led to figuring out the process of photogravure.

The Razorback Bunch are actually photoengravings. They use a mechanical half-tone screen and a different type of etching process, whereas photogravure is a 19th-century photomechanical reproduction process. Instead of using the halftone screen to break up the photograph for printing with ink, you're able to use rosin aquatint just like a traditional etching. Some people say it's the finest way to print a photograph. I tend to agree. We made a few individual prints using photogravure such as *Hoss* (1984) and *Faus* (1984). Also, there was a photogravure here and there printed over some lithographs. One was *Bazaar* (1984). It had a lot of collage work Bob had done with beautiful fabrics he had brought back from Morocco. Those collages were first printed as four-color lithographs, then we printed the photogravure plates on top of them. Bob became super interested in the photogravure technique. He loved how rich and full of color they were.



Robert Rauschenberg
Hoss, 1984
 Lithograph and etching
 14 x 17 inches (35.6 x 43.2 cm)
 From an edition of 43, published by Universal
 Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 84.E007



Robert Rauschenberg
Faus, 1984
 Lithograph and etching
 14 x 17 inches (35.6 x 43.2 cm)
 From an edition of 44, published by Universal
 Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 84.E006



Robert Rauschenberg
Bazaar, 1984
Lithograph and intaglio
42 1/4 x 29 3/4 inches (107.3 x 75.6 cm)
From an edition of 37, published by Universal Limited
Art Editions, West Islip, New York
RRF 84.E028

DW: Is it something that he knew about already? Or was it that he learned that from you all?

CZ: I'm pretty sure Bob knew what this stuff was, because at one point I remember saying we were going to figure out collotype, another 19th-century photomechanical reproduction technique. And I did get the process of collotype working at ULAE. Bob knew right away what it was. He said "Oh, jelly prints." I thought to myself: "You're doing your homework." But it turns out he had made jelly prints, as he called them, with collotype companies here in New York in the early sixties. That didn't go anywhere because it was a very complicated process and it couldn't be scaled up to the sizes wanted.

Our next full series were the *Bellinis* (1986–89). Each print was done with multiple photogravure plates printed in different colors. The prints were getting quite large and at the time we had yet to find the large copper sheets that we use now, or even the large darkroom films that we later employed. Anything larger than 20 x 24 inches on the *Bellini* series would have been spliced together, both films and copper plates, to make up for the size of the collaged images.



Robert Rauschenberg
Bellini #1, 1986
 Intaglio
 58 1/4 x 38 1/4 inches (148 x 97.2 cm)
 From an edition of 36, published by Universal Limited
 Art Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 86.E010

Next up were the series of monumental photogravures for the ROCI project [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange], *Soviet American Array* (1988–90). It was an immense project, enormous photogravure plates. You know the scale of them.



Robert Rauschenberg
Soviet / American Array VII, 1988–91
 Photogravure
 78 1/2 x 51 1/8 inches (199.4 x 129.9 cm)
 From an edition of 55, published by Universal Limited
 Art Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 88.E020

DW: They're phenomenal.

CZ: Phenomenal. And of course, like everything else in these obsolete printing processes that try to survive, materials changed in the middle of it. Photogravure incorporates a lot of isopropyl alcohol in processing. Isopropyl alcohol also melts traditional rosin aquatint, pine rosin, the powder that we use to break up the photograph so it can be printed in ink. Alcohol melts it. For photogravure, we have to use a special rosin. There was an art store in New York, David Davis Art Supplies. ULAE must have gotten something from them in the early sixties that they called

Vienna Turps, pieces of rosin-type crystals. It was what we used for the aquatint when we were first working out the photogravure process. Whatever it was, it worked great. We had a few pounds of it that lasted for years. And then we ran out of it when we were in the middle of making plates for the *Soviet / American Arrays*.

We went back to David Davis and by that time they'd never heard of Vienna Turps. One of those things. And it's 1988, there's no Google, there's no computers, so I wound up tracking down a rosin specialist in Washington D.C. and sending a sample to him. He called me on the phone the day he received it and said, "I know exactly what this stuff is. It's an additive for contact cement called Stablelyte 129."

DW: That's very specific.

CZ: Very specific. I'm like, "You tasted it? How did you know what it was?" But he's an expert. He gave me the name of the company. I got a fifty-pound bag for like twenty dollars, whatever. We go to use it and it didn't work. It melted with alcohol during the process just like traditional rosin. I called the company and I remember saying, "Did you change the formula of Stablelyte 129?" Silence on the other end for a beat, and the guy says, "How did you know?"

I had to go into this whole thing. "We're not using it for what you intended and it stopped working for us, and we just bought some new stuff." When I explained what we needed, he recommended something else that they make, and they sent that along and that worked out okay. This is the type of thing you come up against, the loss of materials. All through those years, the main material for photogravure is a pigmented gelatin that's coated on paper. This is the material that you sensitize with a photosensitive salt that hardens to varying degrees when exposed to ultraviolet light through a photographic positive film. The gelatin is then transferred onto an aquatinted copper plate, and once dried, you have a photographic stencil that is etched in four baths of ferric chloride mordant. Maybe then you're at the point to proof the plate and see how it came out.

DW: These things are even more impressive than I realized.

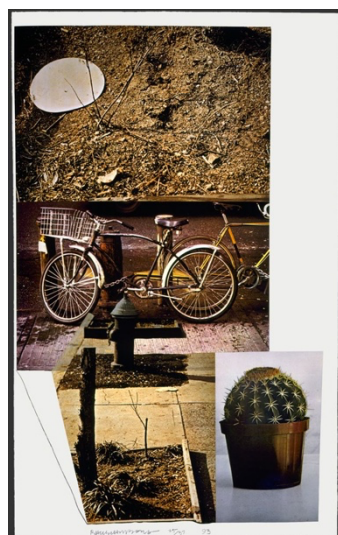
CZ: Every darn material for these processes we used were made for commercial industries. Once that commercial industry isn't using it anymore, they're not going to continue to produce the material for a couple of dozen artists in the world. We're still fighting the loss of components and materials up to this day. As of this moment there's one company in India manufacturing carbon tissue. When we started for Bob in 1982, there were three major manufacturers: Germany, Britain, and the United States. They're all gone.

Back to the *Soviet / American Arrays*: it was a big giant project, and we had a lot of people working on it making those plates, that type of thing. When that series was completed, we were

wondering, “What could the next thing be to interest Bob?” I noticed a lot of his work, the photographs, were in full color, so I thought why don’t we try four-color photogravures? In printing a four-color photo, each finished photogravure would consist of a red, yellow, blue, and black etching plate that are printed on top of each other, resulting in a full color image. Once again, in 1992 there were no computers to do the color separations. It was very old-school. It was copy camera work with gelatin filters to separate the colors and to make the films and masks that would eventually make the etching plates. This process would ultimately become *Street Sounds* (1992), *Street Sounds West* (1993) and *Street Sounds East* (1995), all with whole-tone, four-color photogravures. I think they were quite successful. He really enjoyed those. I believe it was around that time when we started seeing Bob doing color transfers down in Captiva, Florida. He was transferring images onto paper from his Iris printer. It was very intriguing to us. Bill came to me and said, “I want to find out a way to transfer images so that we can offer Bob something along those lines but that can be repeated, so they can be editioned.” I said, “Great, let me look into this.” The first thing we tried was a process from Kodak called dye transfer. At the time, Kodak said it was the best way to make a color photographic print for archival capabilities, saturation of colors, all that stuff.



Robert Rauschenberg
Street Sounds, 1992
 Intaglio with photogravure
 46 x 55 inches (116.8 x 139.7 cm)
 From an edition of 38, published by Universal
 Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 92.E003



Robert Rauschenberg
Street Sounds West, 1993
 Intaglio with photogravure
 56 1/4 x 34 3/4 inches (142.9 x 88.3 cm)
 From an edition of 37, published by Universal Limited Art
 Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 93.E005



Robert Rauschenberg
Street Sounds East, 1995
Intaglio with photogravure
46 3/4 x 28 3/4 inches (118.7 x 73 cm)
From an edition of 41, published by Universal Limited Art
Editions, West Islip, New York
RRF 95.E001

But what we needed to do was not make it on an 8 x 10-inch or 11 x 14-inch piece of paper. We wanted to be able to use the process on large print paper—basically, what Bob was doing with his transfers. I worked on that for about eight months with no success. Again, here I am calling Kodak and saying, “Yeah, can I speak to somebody in tech? I need to talk to somebody in technology.” I’d say, “What are you guys coating your paper with? Because I’m trying to make dye transfers on other papers.” The best I ever got from them was, “That’s proprietorial,” and a hang-up, that type of thing. That went nowhere but we kept working at trying to figure out different ways to get the feel that Bob was getting with his transfers, that spontaneity. I even found a chemical that released the emulsion from actual film. Probably deadly, who knows how bad this stuff was. You put a sheet of film in it and the emulsion would float off it, and then you could put something under it, let’s say a piece of paper, and it would grab onto that. You could transfer it that way, but it didn’t have the proper feel.

Remember decals when you were a kid? It was reminiscent of those. It was a great way to make a decal, but not what we were searching for. At some point, I found this colloidal silver gelatin, basically a liquid black-and-white photo emulsion, that you could paint on anything to develop it into a black-and-white photograph. It was the same emulsion found on black-and-white photo paper that was used for silver gelatin prints. It was made by Rocklin Colloid. I painted some on a piece of paper with some loose brushstrokes. Boom! I put it under the enlarger, exposed it to a negative, and developed it. I was like, “Oh wow, this looks like a Rauschenberg in black-and-white.” We were really excited. Then, “How can we translate this into printmaking?” This is what led to the *Ground Rules* series (1996–97). At first, we were thinking, “We’ll let Bob coat pieces of paper with the emulsion.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Dream Cycle (Ground Rules), 1997
 Intaglio
 52 1/2 x 33 3/4 inches (133.4 x 85.7 cm)
 From an edition of 44, published by Universal Limited Art
 Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 97.E012

DW: The individual print?

CZ: Yes. Like monoprints then. We figured we could make positives, such as the films that photogravures are made from. Normally, for most photomechanical things, you're utilizing a negative, but for photogravure, you need a positive. We thought if we could get something transparent and put this emulsion on it, and then expose it to a negative, and then let Bob paint the developer directly on it in the darkroom to capture the gesture, that might work. We approached him with it. Showed him a couple of tests. Bob says, "Hey, come on down to Captiva, let's do this." We were super excited. At the time, they hadn't really built the darkroom [in Captiva] yet. The first time we went down there, we made a few plates up in Islip, wrapped them up light-tight because the stuff had to be developed in a darkroom under red safelights, shipped them down to Captiva, went there ourselves, and tried to make them work.

The plates that we used were Plexiglas, because we found if you did something of any size with a piece of film, say, clear Mylar, even at five millimeters thick, the developer would move around as the film flexes. Now, all of a sudden you're drawing with Bob because the developer is going all over the film. We went to a heavier support, which was Plexiglas, about one eighth of an inch. That was steady. We could handle it to get it into the stop bath, which stops the developing. And then it's only Bob's marks. His drips, his splashes, his painting. We sent these down there, and the first test we did, he didn't have the darkroom completely set up yet. I had a little crappy 1951 slide projector from my grandfather, and I had rigged it up so we could project negatives of Bob's onto the wall where we hung the photo sensitive Plexiglas plates.

We did this at night in one of the spare rooms of Bob's fabrication studio. It really didn't come out very well. We were lucky that we figured there might be a problem, and we brought all kinds of goodies with us to remake plates if we had to. We did. I even had a spray gun to coat them

with, and Lawrence [Voytek, Rauschenberg studio staff] right away said, “Don’t use that. That thing is no good. That spray gun. Here, we have a turbine sprayer.” That’s the first time I was introduced to this low-pressure heated air turbine sprayer that Tup [Schmidt, Rauschenberg studio staff] and Lawrence were using down there. I recoated the plates and they were better coatings than I’d made before, and we tweaked the enlargements and got everything going good. That was the first trip and that wound up with the first *Ground Rules* print, *Intermission* (1996).



Robert Rauschenberg
Intermission (Ground Rules), 1996
Intaglio
63 x 51 3/4 inches (160 x 131.4 cm)
From an edition of 44, published by Universal Limited
Art Editions, West Islip, New York
©Robert Rauschenberg Foundation and Universal
Limited Art Editions, West Islip
RRF 96.E015

Those were the first plates that we made. We used those Plexiglas plates as the photo positives for the photogravure process to make the copper printing plates. Once we got everything made, we printed up a couple of proofs in the colors Bob had assigned each image, and sent them down. The day they arrived we immediately got a fax. “Fantastic. Send me more plates.” We made two more trips down [to Captiva]. Each time we brought dozens of plates. The last time down, American Masters [a television documentary series] was doing an episode on Bob, and they actually filmed us in the darkroom with a high-speed camera while he was painting and developing one of these plates. They then came to Islip after the photogravure etching plates were made and we went through the printing process. A great historical record.

DW: That would be wonderful to see.

CZ: It’s great. I just watched it again after we had spoken, and I thought to myself, “This was almost thirty years ago, and here it is. It’s captured on film.” That was how we got the *Ground Rules*. I think there are eleven prints in the series.

DW: I didn’t count.

CZ: It’s quite an impressive set. After that was *Ruminations* (series, 1999–2000).



Robert Rauschenberg
'topher (Ruminations), 1999
 Intaglio
 39 1/4 x 27 1/2 inches (99.7 x 69.9 cm)
 From an edition of 46, published by Universal Limited Art
 Editions, West Islip, New York
 RRF 99.E009

DW: Those are beauties, too.

CZ: And that was the last work I did with Bob.

DW: It was interesting, it said four printings made on six copper plates, and sometimes the number of printings and the number of plates wasn't the same. So, for me, not being a printmaker, I wasn't understanding what was happening.

CZ: Okay, yeah. Well, a lot of times you can print multiple plates at once, as long as they are not overlapping each other. That's considered one printing, or one time through the press. In other instances, a plate may be printed and then another plate is printed on top of it. In that case, you have to make two separate printings through the press. So, you can have X amount of plates with Y amount of printings. They are not always equal. One of the things that always impressed me, and it's traveled with me all this time in my own work and looking at other artists' work, was Bob's treatment of open paper, the negative space, sometimes with just the etching plate mark going across the sheet. It's like, "We'll cut that out, won't we?" "No, no, no. It's part of it. That's part of the work, and it's something to appreciate."

DW: It's something that's always fascinated me about Bob is just the treatment of the negative space, always, no matter what series he's working on.

CZ: Uh-huh. The way we would form things, normally, we would make films and then ship them to Captiva. He'd send us sheets of 35-millimeter negatives, with corresponding numbers for the images he wanted to work with, and then different sizes, maybe three or four different sizes. We'd put the negatives on our copy camera and make three or four different sized films for each

image, then send that all back to Captiva where he would collage them into a mock-up of a print that we would work from. It's how the *Bellinis* were made, the *Soviet American Array*, *Street Sounds*, et cetera. In fact, it got to the point with *Street Sounds* that we had to learn how to make color positive films from Bob's 35-millimeter slides because he wanted to see what they looked like layered in colors. That was another learned process, making Cibachromes. Using these motorized developer tanks and everything. Because traditionally, he would assign a Pantone color from a book so that particular image would be printed in the corresponding color. With the *Street Sounds* prints he was trying to get a grasp of the way full color images would interact with each other whether they were overlaid or not. It was quite a journey.

DW: A challenge for sure.

CZ: Yes.

DW: Now, was that typical with the other artists that worked with ULAE, that often work was done not in the studio? You said you were sending things to Captiva? Were other artists working that way as well?

CZ: Sometimes. Through the eighties and into the early nineties, Bob would come to the studio. He'd be in New York more often, that type of thing. I think he started to stay longer in Florida around '92, '93, so we started to go down to Captiva. David, it's so funny because my wife had been to Florida a few times and I had never been. When I got back from the first trip, she asked me what I thought of the beaches, and I replied that I didn't see the beach.

"What do you mean you didn't see the beach?" "I was working." Second time I went down, "Did you see?" "Yes, I saw the beach, but I didn't go in the water. I didn't get a chance. I was working." The third time, it's six o'clock in the morning of the last day and Bill asks, "You ready to work?" I said, "I'll meet you in a half-hour because I'm going to go jump in the Gulf right now. I'm not leaving here without going in the Gulf." That was the third trip. But it was never work. It was never work. It was exciting. It was, "Oh man, look at the time. Where did it go?" It was that type of thing.

To this day, I know that feeling and it's just extraordinary. It's eleven o'clock in the evening, Bob is cooking dinner for us at his house. An incredible chef. Unbelievable. I wrote something down to bring along. Let me just get it. It may sound a bit corny, but it relates to what I just said about working with Bob. "I feel we have a responsibility, a duty to recognize that we were lucky enough to walk the earth with a giant, and to keep their deeds and triumphs alive by passing these stories onto future generations." Really, we walked with a giant. He was a giant in life.

DW: Now, that's lovely.

CZ: What's the chance that some kid from Long Island . . .

DW: I love that your teacher said, "No, you're going."

CZ: Yeah. "No, you're going." "But, I don't want to." "You're going." Wow, it was great.

DW: Well, I can't thank you enough. This is really wonderful.

CZ: That's great. That's basically it. That's my story of working with Bob.

DW: Many, many thanks. A good place to end it here.