

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG FOUNDATION

Stories Project. ACC 54.

Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York.

Dorothy Lichtenstein (1939–2024) was an American philanthropist and the wife of artist Roy Lichtenstein. She founded the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, which helped to promote the artist's legacy, facilitated charitable donations, and published an extensive online catalogue raisonné of his work in 2023. Lichtenstein met Robert Rauschenberg through her husband in New York City in the early 1960s, where the two artists were represented by the Leo Castelli Gallery. The trio solidified their friendship in the 1980s when the Lichtensteins bought a house on Captiva Island, Florida, where Rauschenberg primarily lived and maintained his studio after 1970. After Rauschenberg's death in 2008, Lichtenstein served on the board of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation from 2012–2022.

Iris Love (1933–2020) was an American classical archaeologist – known for discovering the Temple of Aphrodite at Knidos, Greece – and a dog breeder. She was also the cousin and niece, respectively, of the modern art patrons Peggy and Solomon R. Guggenheim. Love and Rauschenberg shared social circles through the 1960s and Love remained a lifelong appreciator of the artist and his work.

Edited transcript of interview with Love conducted by Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg Foundation staff member, Brittany Richmond, on May 23, 2018.

Dorothy Lichtenstein [DL]: I'm Dorothy Lichtenstein. I'm in the chapel of Robert Rauschenberg's longtime home [in New York] and I really have the privilege of talking to Iris Love, a famous archaeologist, who knew Bob Rauschenberg and who was well-known herself. And Iris?

Iris Love [IL]: My name is Iris Cornelia Love and it is I who have the great privilege and honor to be here talking with one of the greatest and best-known women in art, who had the great good fortune to be married to another really great artist, Roy Lichtenstein.

Somewhere in my DNA, I have a love for Modern art. My cousin was Peggy Guggenheim and my Uncle Solomon started the Guggenheim Museum. Peggy had a

great love and a very good taste for modern art and collected art by some of the really great artists.

I have to say I love Robert Rauschenberg. He was absolutely one of the most attractive gentlemen I've ever met, and he had this wonderful gift for art and [interest in] art of the ancient world. And we are tied through many things; I'm sitting in front of the great Hermes of Praxiteles [pictured in the artwork *Rodeo Olympics Glut* (1988) by Rauschenberg] and I found the temple that housed the famous Aphrodite of Praxiteles.

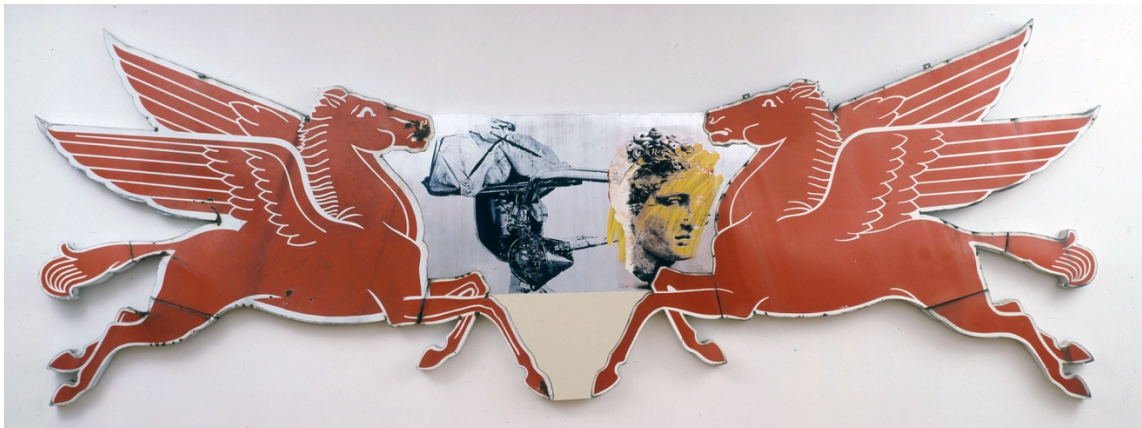


Image above:
Robert Rauschenberg
Rodeo Olympics Glut, 1988
Metal objects, acrylic and enamel on aluminum
69 1/2 x 196 1/8 x 5 1/2 in. (176.5 x 498.2 x 14 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation
RRF 88.131

Image left:
Rodeo Olympics Glut (detail)

DL: I know you knew Bob really [well] in the early days. Do you remember when you met him?

IL: I do because, if I may say so, I found him a work of art himself. I thought he was so handsome. Plus, he was so nice. I went to Smith [College] with [art historian] Barbara Rose, but I really came to know her much better when she was married to [artist] Frank Stella. And in fact, it was while she was married to Frank Stella that she had this wonderful idea of starting a supper club and Barbara would [host] the first. Of course, Barbara being Barbara forgot that she did not have any plates, silverware, glasses, etcetera. So, I said, “Well, how are you going to serve your guests?” Which made me think of Aeneas and the prophecy that was given to Aeneas when he – after he’d left Troy with Anchises and his son – was looking for a place to settle down and had the great love experience with Dido and so on. But that prophecy –

DL: But, silverware? [Laughter.]

IL: – was that he should settle where he found people who were eating their plates. And I was thinking, “That would be good for you now, Barbara.”

DL: That’s wonderful. Actually, you are a Greek scholar and I think that would have been really interesting to Bob. Bob always described himself as having difficulty reading, as being dyslexic. But he knew a lot of information. And actually a lot of his artworks and paintings were named – he referred to Greeks and to Renaissance painting because he had a sense of that, he had a knowledge of it somehow. So, I think he would have really loved that about you.



Robert Rauschenberg
Three Traps for Medea, 1959
Combine: oil, paper, fabric, metal, and glass
bottle on wood with fabric, metal, string, hair,
and plumb bob on wire
24 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 16 in. (61.3 x 63.8 x 40.5 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation
RRF 59.018

Can you remember who, besides Barbara and Frank and Henry [Geldzahler, the first curator of American Art and Modern Art at the Metropolitan Museum], was part of this supper club? Bob, I would think? Maybe Jasper [Johns] was?

IL: I don't think he [Johns] was a member of the club, because I think it was around '63, '64.

DL: Right. So they, their friendship, Bob and Jasper's . . .

IL: Unfortunately . . .

DL: Yes.

IL: I met Jasper Johns. I liked him.

DL: So, I was looking at some old photographs and I saw there was one where Bob had something of Roy's hanging in the background. Do you remember meeting Roy at any of the parties? I mean Roy was kind of shy, so he probably would have been standing in a corner. [Laughter.]

IL: I do remember meeting him on several occasions and, as I said to you, I remember how attractive and very nice and sweet and gentle he was.

DL: Yes, he was. He and Bob had, of course, very different personalities. For some reason, well, we [Dorothy and Bob] became very close. Actually, when my son, our son Mitchell, was thirteen or fourteen, he wanted to go and visit Bob and he did visit Bob in Captiva and he learnt to drive a shift car. They had an old Volkswagen and they actually let him grind the gears. So, at one point, when I was looking for a place to go rent in the winter where it was a little warmer, I thought of Captiva. We did wind up renting a house on Captiva for about three months. I think in the winter of 1980. And then while we were there, we decided to look for real estate and wound up buying a house on Captiva Island. I was there a lot more than Roy. And so, we were always friendly with Bob, but my friendship [with him] solidified.



Dorothy Lichtenstein, Roy Lichtenstein, and Robert Rauschenberg on a boat, 1984. Photo: unattributed



Robert Rauschenberg
For Dorothy 98 [Anagram (A Pun)],
1998
Inkjet pigment transfer on polylamine
Estate of Dorothy Lichtenstein
30 3/4 x 41 1/2 in. (78.1 x 105.4 cm)
RRF 98.074

I remember Bob was very open and so he had these parties that he really wanted – I mean, he invited lots of people from all different parts of the world to come to, and it was really a chance to connect with other people. So, I'm thinking Bob may have been kind of influenced by you. Also, I'm thinking of myths and the work behind us [*Rodeo Olympics Glut*] which I think might have been an old Mobil ad, but it's something like Pegasus.

IL: I always loved these and of course, the genius of Bob changing it, but not all that much. Because you have the head of Hermes.

DL: Yes.

IL: One of the nicest reproductions of the Hermes of Praxiteles that I've ever seen.

DL: Yes, well that's what I meant when I said Bob in a way had culture in his mind, in his head. He had such curiosity and he traveled a lot. So that while he wouldn't have been, say, an expert as I certainly am not in Greek mythology, he had that love of the statue, of the early beauty, of the statues and the myths which exist in our minds, if we're lucky, because they're wonderful metaphors. [. . .]

So, Bob was a very important figure because when Roy brought his first Pop paintings to Leo Castelli Gallery, there was a man named Ivan Karp who was the director at the time, and he looked at the work, and he was saying goodbye to some collectors, and he took one of Roy's paintings – he looked at it, he turned it around and he said, "This is the next important art." Roy was stunned. But still, he had to leave the work there for Leo Castelli to look at and Leo counted on Bob. Bob Rauschenberg actually had to approve of Roy's paintings and Bob was doing an exhibition where each week or every few days he would take one painting down and add another. It was a group show. [Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, *An Exhibition in Progress: Lee Bontecou, John Chamberlain, Nassos Daphnis, Edward Higgins, Jasper Johns, Bernard Langlais, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Moskowitz, Robert Rauschenberg, Salvatore Scarpitta, Frank Stella, Cy Twombly, Jack Tworkov*, September 22–October 14, 1961.] And he put one of Roy's works in there and that signaled, I think, the acceptance which changed Roy's life, of course. And I think Bob really changed peoples' lives when he met them. Do you remember what kind of discussions you would have at these parties? "Supper club." I love that. It's more glamorous.

IL: Well it was fascinating to me because, as we could not eat the plates, we had to buy the plates for Barbara and glasses and everything else. And it was very successful. So the next person to volunteer [to host] was Bob. This is the dinner that I remember most particularly because, aside from coming into this fascinating, intelligent, handsome living artist, he had a huge cage [for his pet kinkajou, Sweetie]. I would say from floor to ceiling, but it was covered at a certain point. And I was so engaged. I was hypnotized by these enormous eyes –



Robert Rauschenberg with pet kinkajou, Sweetie, in his Front Street studio, New York, ca. 1960. Photo: Giulia Niccolai

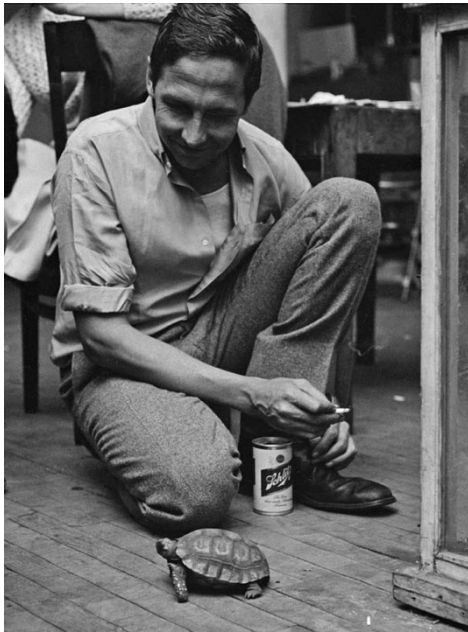
DL: Oh, yes.

IL: – that were looking at me. The animal was so wonderful and so agile with his fingers, he could almost do anything with them. So, I was standing at the cage with my fingers attached. I was at one side of the wire and he [the animal] was at the other, and we were looking at each other. And Bob came up to me and said, “Iris, if I were you, I would step away from that cage. Slowly, but quickly.” And I said, “Why? He’s so sweet.” And Bob said, “Yes, but I have to tell you something. In order for him to climb, he has to” – forgive me, but these were Bob’s words – “he has to pee on his . . .” And I said, “Fingers?” And Bob said, “Yes, and in peeing on his fingers” – [Bob] bowed to me, – “he will spray you.” And I said, “I’m sure you don’t want me to sit through the entire supper with not an eau-du-toilette, but – ”

DL: “Eau-du-primate.”

IL: “– eau-du-one-of-our-ancestors all over me.” So, I stepped back. But in this vision, that really happened, had always stayed with me.

DL: I can see it's impressive that you remember that so clearly. I know Bob was an animal lover and he, of course, had a turtle –



Robert Rauschenberg playing with his turtle, Rocky, at a party in his Broadway studio, New York, 1966. Photo: Bob Adelman

IL: Oh, and I loved her.

DL: – named Rocky and he did this enormous exhibition that he called ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, 1985–91, pronounced Rocky] where he – and this really speaks to Bob's vision – where he had this idea to go around the world and to collaborate with artists in different countries and do artwork with them and then have an exhibition there. And as it turned out, he did travel to many different countries. He went to Mexico, to Venezuela. He went to Tibet. I mean, he went really all over. He took lots of photographs and then made a group of works for each of those countries. And he named it after his turtle. A great thing. I know at one point Bob had the exhibition in Venezuela and he got the Venezuelan air force, a plane from the Air Force, to fly his work to the next country. That made him so happy because he felt like he was kind of undercutting the military and transforming it into something that would actually fly art for the benefit of communicating with other countries. That was really a big part of Bob's personality. But he always had dogs in Florida. He had a Samoyed.

IL: Oh, I love Samoyeds.

DL: Yeah. And he had, I know, a Siberian Husky. It seemed every time I went [and] saw him in Florida, he had another dog. [Laughter.] One more dog. He was rescuing them. And he said, “Oh well, when it gets confusing with three, I think, ‘Just get a fourth.’” [Laughter.] I mean, that said so much.

IL: Why not one more?



Contact sheet detail of Rauschenberg with his dogs, Captiva, Florida, 1992. Photo: Jillian Edelstein

DL: And I remember they were definitely in the house, but his house in Florida was on concrete piers – really in the sand – and so, they had that whole run underneath the house. He just loved dogs. He had the name of the street that he lived on in Captiva Island changed to Laika Lane. That was the name of his dog.

Brittany Richmond [BR]: Iris, did you ever meet Laika? Rauschenberg's dog?

IL: Unfortunately, I didn't.

BR: So, was it just the amazing, big-eyed monkey [kinkajou] that you met? Or did you meet any of the other pets of his?

IL: The only one that I really remember is the one with the big yellow eyes and these wonderful prehensile fingers.



Rauschenberg's kinkajou, Sweetie, in his Broadway studio, New York, ca. 1961. Photo: unattributed

DL: I saw those fingers in the photograph and they are amazing. Lemurs – I learned a little bit when I was in Madagascar – they're called proto-primates.

IL: You're fabulous! [Laughter.]

DL: And they don't have quite the opposable thumb that the real primates do. And I really like when you keep stressing that we are descended from these creatures. I mean that they are our ancestors, and we need to have the respect for them. But this is something I think Bob instinctively felt as an animal lover. I think that he felt that connection with parts of the earth. He once said to me – he struggled a lot to make ROCI happen, this Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, and he sold a lot of work of other artists that he owned [in order to fund it]. Beautiful Warhols.

IL: And I knew Andy Warhol, the best of contemporary art, wonderful artist.

DL: That's right, you knew Andy. Andy was interesting too because, Andy was, kind of – I mean, he had an entourage – he was shy in a kind of way, but if you were on a one-on-one with him or if he was comfortable you, he was very open, he liked gossip, he liked to talk about all sorts of things. And Bob was really opposite in a

way. I mean he loved having people around him. I remember. But he said something really interesting. He said, “You know, I never wanted to be some kind of precious boutique artist,” which is why he loved so much having these big Rauschenberg shows around the world. And he went to some places that were pretty uncomfortable for him, I think.

IL: I think for anyone.

DL: For anyone. And he really got himself into some financial difficulties because he sold his own work in order to be able to continue to show these works around the world really.

IL: Well, God bless him. [Laughter.] I was going to mention that I love turtles. I do not know any civilization that does not worship the turtle, one that – just my thought – can live in earth and they can emerge from the earth; they can live in the sea and swim back to land; and they also have a long life. But mainly the fact that they can live in the earth and return was a symbol, perhaps, of death and rebirth.

DL: Right. Well I know on Captiva there’s a time – and it’s now – starting around the end of May, [when] the sea turtles come out of the Gulf of Mexico and they dig nests in the sand and they bury their eggs, and then they go back to the sea. People now come around and cordon off those nests. But by the full moon in August and September, the turtles, they break out of the egg, and they ask you not to put any house lights on in the summer, because they see the full moon over the Gulf of Mexico and that gives them the direction to return to the sea. I’m sure in the many years that Bob was living in Captiva, he – I mean I know that you can stand back and you can actually watch this happening – I’m sure he must have seen that happen. But I love when you said, “God bless Bob.”

IL: I do because, I know this sounds strange, but the fact that he would use found pieces in his art taught me a great deal. I mean, it taught me to understand pieces of what are, let’s say fur that’s been caught on something, to respect them and to realize, yes, these are works of art. Our Creator, whoever he or she or whatever it is, there’s so many fantastic works of art around us. And Bob taught me, by using them in his own work, to be careful and to look and to try to understand.

DL: That's the wonderful lesson in his work. I know he would go, in Florida, he would drive to this midpoint in Florida and actually pick up things that people were discarding, a lot of old metal pieces. And so, in a way, he was one of the first artists to recycle waste into –

IL: Art.

DL: – art. You know, which is really a beautiful thing. A lot of artists have started doing that.



Rauschenberg returning to his studio in his Volkswagen Bug convertible after a run to the Gulf Iron and Metal Junkyard, a source of materials for his *Kabal American Zephyr* series (1981–83/1985/1987–88), Captiva, Florida, 1982. Photo: unattributed

IL: Bob placed his found works in very unusual places and manners and you look at something, as I keep looking at [gestures to *Rodeo Olympics Glut*].

DL: No, this is really a good example. I mean, just imagine lugging this home from the junkyard.

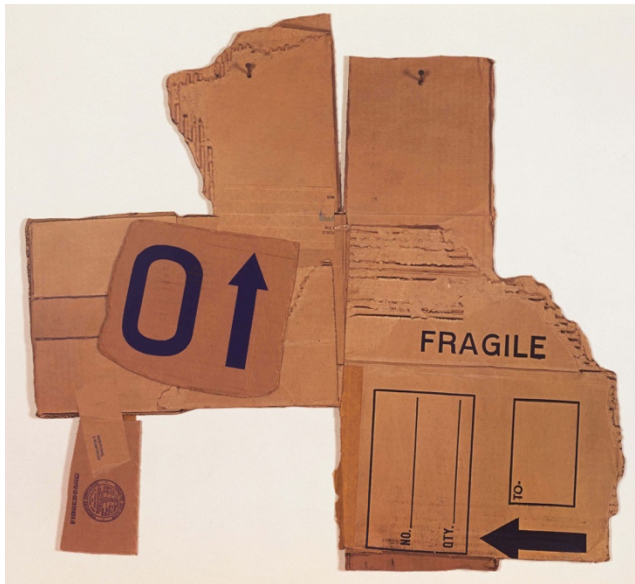
IL: He carried this?

DL: Well, he did have a pick-up truck in Florida. But he also worked, like discarded cardboard boxes. He made a series called *Cardbirds* (1971).

IL: Oh, card . . .

DL: Birds.

IL: That's wonderful.



Robert Rauschenberg

Cardbird VI, 1971

Collage print with corrugated cardboard,
tape, photo offset lithograph, and
screenprint

26 x 28 in. (66 x 71.1 cm)

From an edition of 75 published by Gemini
G.E.L., Los Angeles

RRF 71.E009

DL: Yes. So he really managed to take detritus and, you know, turn it into something wonderful. And I think that people can continue to look at [the artwork] and really see, because we are trying to become – or I hope we are trying to become – a world where we don't have as much waste as we do. I mean we're just treating the earth as if it can survive anything we do to it. And I think we're really beginning to realize this is not the case. I mean, we want to keep earth as a really beautiful place.

IL: Well I now have to say God bless you, because I think the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been disastrous to this wonderful earth which is, in so many ways, an incredible paradise for so many wonderful living works. Whether they're birds or fish or human beings, I mean there's so many different, varied colors and constructions and we're ruining it with plastic.

DL: That reminds me also that Bob was political. You know, I mean, he got out there. He supported people he believed in. He stood up for law. I mean, that was another wonderful thing about him. He was willing to take action. I know he fought, he was in

the process of fighting, for artists to be able to get royalties on the resale of their work.

IL: Well, wonderful.



Robert Rauschenberg
Artists Rights Today, 1981
Lithograph with embossing
40 x 27 1/2 in. (101.6 x 69.9 cm)
From an edition of 200, published by the
Democratic Congressional Campaign
Committee, produced by Styria Studio, New York
RRF 81.E002

DL: This happens in some places in Europe and I think one state in America, California. [The California Resale Royalty Act went into effect in 1977; in 2018, the Ninth Circuit nullified the California Resale Royalties Act.]

IL: The only place? In America?

DL: Well, there are a lot of people fighting it. Auction houses fight it, I mean. But as there are more artists for more countries, I mean, this is a positive thing. And that really speaks to the fact that economically, the standard of living in the world has come up enough to be able to support an artist class. It means that they have enough, so they feel free really to produce art, although that may be an inclination of human beings no matter what. I'm thinking of the caves in Lascaux and Spain. And, of course, as you have studied, this wonderful ancient history.

IL: And we were discussing that there are certain things that seemed strange, but perhaps are really meant to be. My last name is Love. Aphrodite is the goddess of love and to have found her temple, whom archaeologists had searched for over three hundred fifty years, and to be sitting under the statue of Hermes by Praxiteles [pictured in *Rodeo Olympics Glut*] with Dorothy talking about Robert Rauschenberg . . . I don't think that's an accident either.

DL: I don't think so.