

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Lynda Benglis

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Lynda Benglis conducted by Cameron Vanderscoff on November 13, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center      Session #1

Interviewee: Lynda Benglis

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Cameron Vanderscoff

Date: November 13, 2015

Q: Okay, just a brief tag. We're at 222 on the Bowery [in New York City] to finish with Lynda Benglis. Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project and it's noon.

[INTERRUPTION]

[Note: Recording resumes as Benglis overviews the events that led her to meeting Rauschenberg. Topics discussed before recording include 222 Bowery, where her neighbors have included William S. Burroughs and John Giorno; her initial move to New York in 1964 to pursue art; her subsequent studies at the Brooklyn Museum Art School; and, via this point of entry to the New York art scene, meeting the individuals discussed next in the transcript.]

Benglis: —the Lower East Side, [my then husband] Gordon Hart being a Scotsman. Some Canadians were there and they knew Barnett [“Barney”] Newman. That’s what happened—Robert [“Bob”] Murray and Terry Stevenson. So Stevenson and Murray and there was one other Canadian. But Robert Murray is still around teaching at [School of] Visual Arts [New York] and flies his own plane and lives out in Pennsylvania.

So we met Barnett Newman. We met other artists that came to the Brooklyn Museum. And Rauschenberg was definitely on the scene. I knew about him and I would think about him because I thought, well, what is he doing that Cubism didn't do? I kept thinking about that. And of course he had such a mind—and I'll skip a big space from the mid-sixties to '71 and the *Art and Technology* show [Los Angeles County Museum of Art]. One of his best pieces ever, with [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver and Bell Labs [New Jersey], was this stainless steel tub that he did at the *Art and Technology* show [note: *Mud Muse*, 1968–71]. I flew in for the opening.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Mud Muse*, 1968–71  
 Bentonite mixed with water in aluminum-and-glass vat, with sound-activated compressed-air system and control console  
 48 x 108 x 144 inches (121.9 x 274.3 x 365.8 cm)  
 Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
 Gift of the New York Collection  
 Engineers: Frank LaHaye, Lewis Ellmore, George Carr, Jim Wilkinson, and Carl Adams  
 Sound artist: Petrie Mason Robie

But meanwhile, I had flown in from Minneapolis, where some artists were invited to the opening of the new Walker [Art Center]. Rauschenberg was included, but he was very, very busy at the time. And then when he arrived he was kind of jealous—he was so jealous. I knew that because I was at a party and there was a black man with white gloves serving champagne that night at the opening. He was bending down to give Laddie [John] Dill and I the champagne when Rauschenberg turned, spun around, and kicked it with his foot, this whole champagne tray, and it landed on a glass coffee table with a bronze turtle in the middle. It must have been maybe a

Japanese turtle or a Chinese turtle—but now that I think I know a little bit more, probably a Japanese turtle—and it went straight down and broke, shattered the whole table. And it was like an artwork. He did those turtles with the flashlights [*Spring Training*, 1965]. And all of us congratulated him—the poor man [note: referring to the waiter]. But everybody saw it as a positive gesture and an artwork in that context.

Q: So he was jealous of—

Benglis: Rauschenberg was jealous because he had come in late. The shows were already up. Everything looked just perfect. There was a space for him—a large space. And then he ordered all these cardboard boxes and he did his first *Cardboard* [1971–72]. And then he started printing on them [*Cardbirds*, 1971]. So he never gives up a line. He'll just take it and run with it. So he had the ball then; he presented his *Cardboards*. And there it was, the opening of the Walker museum, and he kept at it. [Note: The exhibition *Works for New Spaces*, 1971, included Rauschenberg's *Radiant White / 952 (Cardboard)* (1971), made on-site especially for this presentation.]



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Radiant White / 952 (Cardboard)*, 1971  
 Cardboard  
 90 1/2 x 390 1/8 x 14 1/4 inches (229.9 x  
 990.9 x 36.2 cm)  
 Museum Ludwig, Cologne

I would see him around. I was in Florida; I was down there doing a—

Q: In Captiva?

Benglis: Well, he was somewhere, but Julio Juristo had invited me down to do some printing [at the University of South Florida, Tampa], and I stayed there and used a printing press there, Topaz Editions [note: Benglis worked on several series there, including *Fantasm* (1981), *Chinese Bronze Lustre* (1982), *Ceramic Knot* (1983), *Palladium Wave* (1983), *India/Tampa Mix* (1989), and *Palmetto* (1989)]. I was in between.

In the eighties—I'll skip down to the eighties—I was invited to India and maybe it was even before, but finally I got to India in [1979]. And Rauschenberg had been to India and he was the one that recommended me to go to [the Sarabhais] in the eighties.



Lynda Benglis in India editing the drawing *Patang Fossil #5*, circa 1979. Photo: Courtesy Lynda Benglis

Q: To Ahmedabad?

Benglis: Ahmedabad. It was he that recommended me, and Robert [“Bob”] Morris. So with that I met the Sarabhais, of course. And Rauschenberg, I saw his—when I go there now I see his picture [of him in their swimming pool], floating in an inner tube. These inner tubes were used often in the Gulf [of Mexico], all over in the Gulf area, to ride the waves. Nobody really rode the waves any other way because they were gentle waves, and rarely would you fall out of an inner tube. And they weren’t worth necessarily riding the waves body-style—they just didn’t do that then. So those are early images of Rauschenberg.



Rauschenberg floating in a swimming pool at the Sarabhai Retreat, Ahmedabad, India, June 1975. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni, [www.gianfrancogorgoni.it](http://www.gianfrancogorgoni.it)

And I was down in Florida when I was doing the prints and then Rauschenberg just looked at me and he said, “Why is it that you never age?” That’s the first thing he said to me. I was still forty, or maybe under forty by then. Let’s see, when I think about it, yes, I was just forty. I don’t know how old he was then, but I’m thinking, what year was he born? The twenties?

Q: ’25.

Benglis: '25, okay, so he was some fifteen years older—I'm '41. I really loved him because he'd say exactly what was on his mind. It wouldn't matter—nothing, just right now.

Q: Or do what was on his mind, it sounds like.

Benglis: Or do what is on his mind and that's the case of kicking the tray full of champagne. I always noticed also that when there was some opening he always had a new outfit at the openings. He always had—it could have been like a shirt from Guatemala or something.

Q: So what, he'd wear a Guatemalan shirt, he'd wear—

Benglis: Whatever it was, it was always something really snazzy. He always stood out. He was always well dressed.

There were parties in his place [381 Lafayette Street, New York]. And I don't remember what year it was, but I went to a party in his place and there was a long table. Because I was working part-time at this gallery so I knew—the food was from Arirang. He had the Indians at the other end of the table. And he made Arirang famous, the Korean restaurant on Fifty-sixth Street between Fifth and Sixth [Avenues]. The Korean restaurant had these—later I knew this because I went to Korea for the Olympics—they had these beautiful two sisters and one of the sisters was married I think to the bartender—they had these beautiful antebellum dresses in net, white net.

[The women, when I went to Korea, performed on stage in] Western formal gowns [so the influence] was there from the forties, the fifties.

So Rauschenberg—I don't think the ladies were there that night, but all the food was. The Korean restaurant became popular. I remember celebrating my fortieth birthday there with a small group of people. Because the gallery was right off Fifty-seventh Street, so we would go [around the corner]. They had a particular drink called the ginseng cocktail, which was ginseng, maybe with probably a mixture of either gin or vodka—probably gin, ginseng—and it was delicious, but it would hit you really quickly and that was it. It was like a martini. I know that that family—I won't go into that because that's a digression, but I know what they're doing now.

So Rauschenberg just had a feeling for what was new and what was really great. I happened to be one of the only artists—there was one other, a photographer from Houston—at his opening in Texas at the Fort Worth–Dallas museum show, and the reason nobody showed up was—the head of the museum board had died. So in typical Southern style, the actual funeral was that day, so nobody went to Rauschenberg's opening. [Note: *Robert Rauschenberg, Work from Four Series: A Sesquicentennial Exhibition*, Dallas Museum of Art, 1986–87]

Q: Except you—

Benglis: Yes.

Q: —and this photographer.

Benglis: There was just, well, there were museum personnel and then there was one artist from Dallas–Fort Worth that was there, a very good artist. And that was it.

Q: So tell me more about—

Benglis: Fredericka [Hunter] and Ian [Glennie] from the Texas Gallery [Houston] were there, one or the other or both of them. And they continue to show Rauschenberg and do well. I know that recently Rauschenberg—I saw David down there [much later, in New Orleans].

Q: David White?

Benglis: Yes, of the estate. He was down there. And the New Orleans Museum [of Art] bought a wonderful one [note: *Melic Meeting (Spread)*, 1979, acquired by the museum in 2014]. I'm in the showing of the "*Five from Louisiana*" [*Rauschenberg and the "Five from Louisiana"*, New Orleans Museum of Art, 2014–15].

Q: And I'd like to talk about that some.

Benglis: [William] Bill Fagaly just called today and he became a close friend of mine.

Q: After that show?

Benglis: After that show and later. We've just shared so many things—he visited me in Greece and so forth. He came to visit me for the first time in Santa Fe [New Mexico] and we rode up through—I was invited to San Antonio [Texas] for a talk, he came with me. And he just left less than a week ago, four or five days ago, and went back to New Orleans.

But anyway, that room is just beautiful and I was just reminded of—I met Rauschenberg's sister there [Janet Begneaud, née Rauschenberg] and I was just reminded what a great artist he is. He arranges space. He's spatial and there are very few artists that can pull off that kind of image and space.

Q: So what makes an artist spatial?

Benglis: Understanding of visual phenomena. Rauschenberg has a little—one of his first drawings was in India and I just look at it all the time. He did some rubbings of a woman of that style. He was there very early in India. It was in Anand [Sarabhai]'s bedroom over this settee, where we would watch television as well. And I used to see this drawing and it made me feel very much at home. [Note: referring to a solvent transfer drawing Rauschenberg made in Ahmedabad during the 1964 Merce Cunningham Dance Company world tour]

Because the Sarabhais—at the end of this long table where they were having the Korean food in Rauschenberg's place, Rauschenberg kept a mummy of a cat. It could have been a full mummy of a person, but I'm thinking there was a mummy. Maybe he had to get rid of it finally—I don't remember—but it was glass encased. I remember just going to this table and the Indians were

down at the other end and I was so shy then I wouldn't walk over and introduce myself. But I just remember there was a lady and it turned out to be [Manorama] Mani Sarabhai. And at the other end—I don't remember Anand being there, but he was there.

Q: So this is prior to your own visit [to Ahmedabad] in '79 or '80?

Benglis: Prior to my even being introduced. I just remember it was a table maybe about as wide as this room maybe, maybe about 20 feet long. I don't remember. You might know that table—you might have seen it—but it could have been only 14 feet or 12 feet long. But there must have been maybe about at least sixteen to twenty people there on the table.

Let me see what else I might think about him.

Q: Well, one thing is, do you remember how you first heard about him? Was he someone you were aware of prior to coming to New York?

Benglis: Well, I went to [H.] Sophie Newcomb [Memorial College] in New Orleans, Tulane University. And so I studied—there were little monographs in the library of [Willem] de Kooning, [Arshile] Gorky, and [Jackson] Pollock, probably. There were just very few monographs. Then I noticed in the magazines there was Rauschenberg. There were no monographs at that time—I'm talking about early sixties, '59, '60, '61—there were no monographs on Rauschenberg. But the Abstract Expressionist so-called second generation, I remember looking at the magazines, and right then they were talking about [Michael] Goldberg

and Joan Mitchell and they were doing abstraction. And I thought well, that's very interesting, Goldberg and Joan Mitchell.

Then when I came to New York there was Rauschenberg. When I first looked at them I said, "Well, this is Cubism," because he was doing those cutouts and they were kind of back and forth. So the collage idea—I thought of [Kurt] Schwitters, but Schwitters never brought it out in that way. But all the European stuff was very small, really. Nobody expanded it. And then, of course, the relationship with Leo Castelli, promoting always [Jasper] Johns and not Rauschenberg—I remember getting to know Leo and going to those shows where his gallery was on [West] Broadway. And Leo wanted to show me, but he asked me to do the big *Knots*. He said, "Why don't you do a big knot?" And that's just not my style, to go into something that was about the body—and he wanted me to show with him.

Anyway, as I said, I was just around the art scene and Rauschenberg just seemed to be central to our interests. Everybody loved him, that's all. He gave these small parties. They weren't huge parties, like Larry Poons and Frank Stella would get together and give these huge loft parties and big crazy bands. I was a Southern girl, so I even wore nylon stockings to these things at the time. The art scene—[Max's] Kansas City [New York] opened. [Andy] Warhol was the star by then. It was just a big bar with fluorescent lights. I met, for the first time, Annalee Newman and Barnett—I wanted to know all about Pollock. Barney Newman was right there, very present. And he was such a gentleman, would treat the taxi driver the same way he would treat a museum person—not feeling the same way, obviously, but he was such a gentleman. And his gold monocle—his father was a haberdasher, so he had these great hats with feathers, tweed hats with

feathers, and a tweed jacket. And everything was singular, the coat, double-breasted suit.

Annalee still wore double-breasted suits with thick pumps. We'd go over there. Their place looked like out of a [James G.] Thurber cartoon, it was like leather rolled couch, one chair of the same vintage, and that was it. And there was a cow pie with plaster and then an I-beam sticking in the cow pie and that was his first sculpture, Barnett Newman's first sculpture.

So Rauschenberg [presented much later a magnificent exhibit] with his Combines [1954–64]—and that show that I saw in Dallas–Fort Worth, it was an amazing show, because it took the life of his paintings, made them quite physical, and there you had it. You had it in the real. Later [Cy] Twombly did some beautiful sculptures and just painted them all white, because otherwise they would have been confused and very small. They were very elegant. I saw them at the Menil Collection in Houston.

Of course, Rauschenberg [and Cy Twombly] figured very large with Mrs. [Dominique] de Menil there. He was a focus of hers and that museum was incredible. It was just near the—they built these modern buildings and I saw all of those things that were there when they first opened. She had a Barnett Newman as well, fabricated with Lippincott, which Bob Murray had introduced him to. I just grew up with all this back and forth going to Texas, Louisiana, and then Fredericka Hunter and Ian Glennie introduced me to Californians showing also with the Texas Gallery. We were very interested in supporting Rauschenberg because he is a part of Americana, definitely, and he had the *Time* magazine cover much later. What year was that, do you know?

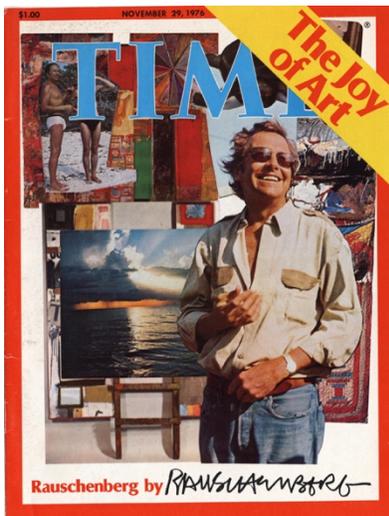
Q: That's a good question. I thought—

Benglis: That was much later.

Q: Maybe early seventies.

Benglis: Yes, yes.

Q: I'm not sure. We'll have to look it up. [Note: Rauschenberg created a series of *Time* covers on various subjects over the years including a self-portrait for the November 29, 1976 issue, coinciding with his retrospective exhibition at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.]



Cover of *Time*, November 29, 1976, designed by Rauschenberg

Benglis: Anyway, he was very central to the Pop movement, very central. But that movement kind of took over in an area and Johns was probably given the credit for the Pop movement, but

Rauschenberg was really—and they were very good friends. So I think in a way he opened up just the realm of the art and life, the whole art and life question.

Q: Working in the space between, yes, right. [Note: Rauschenberg famously wrote, “Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)”]

Benglis: Yes and the Calvin Tomkins book [*The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*, 1965] introducing Rauschenberg to, in his relationship with dance and [John] Cage and—

Q: [Merce] Cunningham.

Benglis: Cunningham, yes. So that was important. I’m thinking if I ever saw him in New York—I did [and met him personally through Anand Sarabhai], but *The Bride and the Bachelors* and that essay about them, when I was teaching, whenever I was teaching anywhere, [University of] Rochester [New York] or visiting—I have visited all over America, the different schools—but often I mention this Calvin Tomkins book because I think Calvin Tomkins really bridged the ideas and the writing in such an offhand, easy way, when he spoke about Rauschenberg’s life and his relationship to the world.

Q: So I’m wondering, there’s the New York art scene overall in this time that we’re talking about, but there’s also differences within it, different movements—or at least retrospectively. You talk about the Minimalist movement and you talk about Process Art and you talk about this

somewhat older generation of Abstract Expressionists. So when you think about, say, the group of people like Process Art, you and several other folks, what was his relationship to that scene? Because you were brand new to the scene in '64–65—by that time he'd been in New York like fourteen years. And so I'm curious about how did you place him in terms of those movements, in terms of the scene? Was he for everyone? Did he seem to be of a certain movement or group? What was that conversation within artists?

Benglis: Well, he had arrived already. He was a known figure, certainly with Leo. And the Pop movement loomed very strongly. But he and Johns, they were like masters by then really—within fourteen years, yes. And so the Pop artists were receiving most of the attention. There was a brief time with the English Pop and so forth, but I don't think it ever took off here at all, because it was more graphic—not more graphic, I would say—well, Pop is really American anyway. But I think in terms of the process, of course Rauschenberg—there were other people doing things, but Rauschenberg—there were the Happenings and so forth. I think [Claes] Oldenburg, to me his most interesting things were his earlier things, not the overly produced things.

[Roy] Lichtenstein has always been—he packages himself so clearly and so well. He's just a great designer. He was a great designer and a very interesting intellectual. He was very interested in science and topical things and he used to speak with Anand, my partner—my partner discovered part of the genetic code, the stopgaps—so he could speak with Anand about anything. Lichtenstein was a different kind of person really, in terms of the Pop world. I knew another person that knew him over in New Jersey. They taught together at Rutgers [University, New

Brunswick], Lichtenstein and Shelly Estrin Killen, and she was down in New Orleans at the time getting a masters when I was in school there. She said that Lichtenstein used to ask her, they used to discuss all kinds of things: what would be his next idea, what he could do. And they would banter back and forth because he was interested in mocking, alluding to all these subjects.

I think Rauschenberg alluded firstly in a general way. He was taking things from everywhere and it was kind of like white trash Pop. He was really a trashy artist. He found his things from everywhere, just like they all did in the beginning—but he allowed it to show. But he was a very spiffy guy and he knew how to present it. So he knew how to think; he knew how to make it into something that it wasn't. He knew how to make trash precious. He knew how to just turn it over and make you think about it.

Q: How do you do that, make trash precious?

Benglis: Well, ask him, because if you look at him then you can see it: that's a Rauschenberg.

Q: How do you think, perhaps?

Benglis: Well, have you ever looked at his handwriting?

Q: Yes.

Benglis: You have to figure out what—if you didn't know his name, his handwriting in itself is pretty amazing, just the "Rauschenberg," the way he writes his name. Only a king would write like that. You'd have to know his name before you can read it. [Laughs] It was very special, how he could turn something like calligraphy into a visual phenomenon. He could turn anything into a visual phenomenon—and it was spatial though. It was all contained or it wasn't. It went on in an irregular way.

Q: Right. And, of course, even initially with the Combines, there's that collapse of painting and sculpture and that space kind of coming out from the wall.

Benglis: That's what I mean, the Combines, yes. But he made them work. He didn't make them too large. Everything was in scale, human scale. And that's the thing he always did, I think, no matter what it was, whether it was the oil, mud, sand, silt bubbling up—

Q: The *Mud Muse*.

Benglis: The *Mud Muse*. What finally happened with that piece, you probably know, it stayed pristine for a while, but then pretty soon people were writing graffiti all over the walls, dipping their fingers into the *Mud Muse* and writing whatever they wanted to say on the walls.

Rauschenberg, I'm sure, loved that. Not like Carl Andre, who might present Styrofoam in the south of France in that show and the dancers decided to start walking in it and making their footprints on this white Styrofoam that was down a hill. He was inviting them to do that.

Rauschenberg probably would have been amused and then done something else with it. He carried it—whatever he did, he carried to the -nth degree.

Q: No, I follow. So you used this phrase “white trash Pop,” right.

Benglis: I just phrased it, but it is—he wouldn’t be insulted.

Q: No, I don’t think so, but the difference between that and that neatness or that precision of Warhol, for example—

Benglis: But he is so precise. Rauschenberg was so precise.

Q: How so?

Benglis: Well, he took both trash, our trash—all the trash essentially—and he digested it, so to speak.

Q: And so another thread that’s running through all of this are the Happenings, things like Judson [Dance Theater] for example—

Benglis: I saw very few. I saw the Happenings, the flashlight piece [*Spring Training*]. I saw that piece. It was marvelous. And he did have that turtle—it was not just a turtle. He had it as a pet around his loft. He’d just move around in the loft. [These were actually rural turtles.]

Q: Now one particular exhibit that—

Benglis: Tortoise, that was the word I was trying to think of.



Christopher and Robert Rauschenberg performing *Spring Training* (1965), First New York Theater Rally, former CBS Studio, Broadway and Eighty-first Street, May 1965. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Elisabeth Loewenstein Novick



Rauschenberg and pets, including Rocky the turtle, in the kitchen of his Lafayette Street home and studio, New York, 1968. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Shunk-Kender © J. Paul Getty Trust

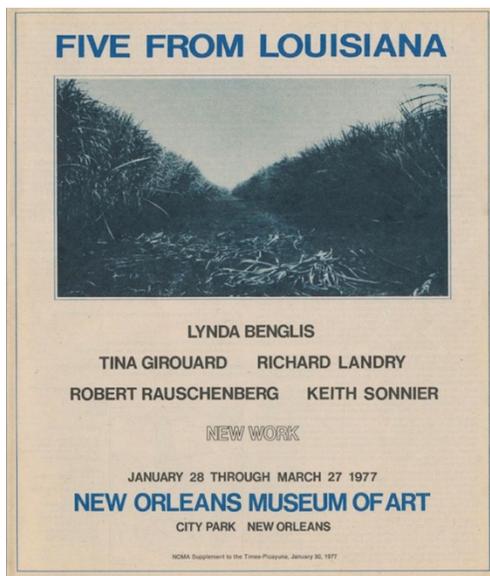
Q: Yes, Rocky the tortoise. So you were exhibited together at least once, in 1977 in New Orleans.

Benglis: Yes.

Q: The *Five from Louisiana* exhibit [New Orleans Museum of Art, 1977] and I'm interested in that point of intersection, especially since you both are from—

Benglis: Louisiana.

Q: Yes.



Catalogue cover for *Five from Louisiana*, New Orleans Museum of Art, 1977, printed as a supplement in the *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans)

Benglis: Well, he's from Lafayette [Louisiana].

Q: Right, his family, Lafayette and—

Benglis: He was from Port Arthur [Texas] or was it Beaumont he was born in?

Q: Port Arthur and then it's Lafayette—but that same stretch of refinery Gulf Coast.

Benglis: Well, it's the same Gulf, same mud, same oil wells.

Q: [Laughs] So I'm interested in that, because you've said often in interviews that your own work is very much inspired by or engaged with nature.

Benglis: Louisiana?

Q: Well, nature and that sort of thing.

Benglis: Nature, absolutely.

Q: So I'm interested if you could say a little bit about that setting, that Gulf Coast setting. How does that interact with your work?



Installation views of three elements from Lynda Benglis's *North South East West*, 1976, aluminum screen, bunting, sprayed zinc, tin, and steel, *Five From Louisiana*, New Orleans Museum of Art, 1977. Photos: Courtesy Lynda Benglis. Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Benglis: Well, I'll call to mind other artists, the "five from Louisiana": Keith Sonnier. We're involved with illusion. We're involved and I think keep very much sentiment. It's very sentimental, my work and Keith's. You might not think so, but I think I've developed form in a way, in a free way, that you can read into it. I think children and chipmunks like my work, chipmunks maybe because it shines sometimes or it looks good to eat. The armadillos ate it in Texas. There's something about visual phenomena you can rearrange; it's loose, it's graphically loose. You could read into it what you want. And Rauschenberg allows that as well. Most art allows that, really. You read what you want. [Raymond] Ray Johnson, for instance, is involved with a kind of graphic sensibility where you try to piece the puzzles together and it's also verbal and it has to do with printing. I think Rauschenberg was like that; Ray Johnson was like that. I think Johns was like that in a very pure way and a minimal way and that's why he took off, because minimal ideas followed that. But minimal ideas are kind of rococo, out there on a limb.

There's never a way to go anywhere else. You've done it to the -nth degree. I think there are certain kinds of centers in ideas that you could interpret many different ways and Rauschenberg's one of the people that has a kind of idea about everything. You can see everything in his work: life.

Q: So do you think the Gulf Coast, the fact that you're from the Gulf Coast matters for your work? Does that—

Benglis: Yes, there's a certain kind of indulgence, probably. It's not a rigid environment. It's more attuned to nature.

Q: And is that something—so you said that you have this sort of a conversation, this dynamic with nature in some of your work. Is that something that you sense with his? Or does that—that dialectic, yes.

Benglis: Well, I think he is interested—say someone like [Edward] Ruscha comes out of Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg is interested in landscape; he's interested in architecture; he's interested in the phenomena of something positioned in a small town. He took those photographs, endless photographs. He's interested in the landscape and the object itself, manmade, in the context of the landscape. And the Gulf is all about that. It's flat. You can see these things as you would on a beach or on a desert—you see these things pop up.

Well, I'm in Santa Fe now. There are very little things in New Mexico. There are no images other than architecture. There are no signs. Louisiana is full of signs, advertisements, billboards, shacks in the landscape, full of interesting phenomena, and the plants that are there, they're either town-grown, old, big oaks, trees with moss, or they're swamps with cypress trees, they're pin oaks. There are various things, but there are lots of fields, fields and advertisements and small houses, wood houses. No stone, rocks—you don't see any of that. So they're all manmade things. Boats, as many boats down there as there are houses practically. It's all water. It floods. I used to go to school in a motorboat or a big truck. My father had a company where they had big trucks and they used to pick us up.

Q: Things move, they reconfigure.

Benglis: Yes, they reconfigure and I think—that's right. That's a good point. That's the point probably. You're immersed and submerged in your unconscious to begin with. It's rainy, it's foggy, it's sunny, and then these storms come in, they blow big trees down by the roots like they were weeds. They blow houses away. There were so many people in the one hurricane called Audrey, first they said there were fifty people, five hundred killed, five thousand, fifty thousand. They don't even know. There could have been half a million people killed; they just didn't have any census, proper census taking then. They did do census, but they didn't—they couldn't there because people were all over in the marshes and the bayous. All you could smell was the smell of death. That's 45 miles, where I grew up, from the coast and you just smelled death for weeks, months, just all over.

We took in people from the marshes in our house. We lived right next to Big Lake, which empties into the Gulf, in Lake Charles, where I was brought up. Now that was in '57.

Rauschenberg wasn't here then. He could have been. Actually, he could have been here in '57.

Q: He was—

Benglis: He just was maybe in Black Mountain [College, North Carolina] then, in the early fifties.

Q: He transitioned here [New York City], started doing the *White Paintings* [1951] and black paintings [1951–53].

Benglis: Here, in '53?

Q: Around then, so I think he would have been—

Benglis: Maybe they have something to do with Louisiana and death. I don't know.

Q: His mother would have been there. His father would have been there in Lafayette, yes.

Benglis: But that happened. It was really horrific. I don't think there's been a storm like that since, just that big there.

Q: And if storms weren't that big, were they a frequent occurrence?

Benglis: Storms were frequent occurrences, yes. Lightning.

Q: But not on that scale?

Benglis: Not on that scale. Yes, there are, when you think about it. New Orleans got hit very hard—Katrina, not so long ago [2005]. And thousands of people left New Orleans, thousands. It never got them back. Now young people are all over New Orleans. Lots of girls riding bicycles, really lots of young people. For some reason I've only seen mostly girls riding bicycles though, when it comes to bike riding—young people coming from the outside. They go to the city park along this one boulevard where [Edgar] Degas had a house.

Q: And so that's a significant change then from your own time there as an undergraduate at Newcomb?

Benglis: Yes, big time. Lots of young people are in New Orleans now.

Q: So this exhibit that you do in '77—here in New York, of course, you're exhibiting with people from all over the country, international people. In this exhibit you're with four other people who are from the same region and so I'm curious about—

Benglis: In '77?

Q: The *Five from Louisiana*.

Benglis: Yes, I was showing with my early metallized knots—each one of us had one kind of work in there.

Q: And I know you do the prop piece [*Louisiana Prop Piece*, 1977].

Benglis: With Ida Kohlmeyer. I invited her to do it. It was an idea of mine, yes. We had these flounces and these flounces—later I did some flounces with these paper bases called *Lagniappes* [note: *Lagniappe I*, 1978 and *Lagniappe II*, 1979], which is what they call a little something extra in Louisiana. You'd have a lagniappe there. If you do something for somebody and then you want to throw in something extra, a favor, they would call it, "Can you do a lagniappe?" In Greece, for instance, it's a Mediterranean thing, I think; you might do something and you might have an agreement with somebody and you do it, and then just because in business you want to do a little more—it's a typical maybe French thing, as well—you just throw in something else. It's good business, so to speak.



Lynda Benglis  
*Lagniappe Luck*, 1976–77  
Chicken wire, cotton, plaster, gesso, sparkle, Elmer's glue,  
and clear acrylic  
46 x 29 x 14 inches (116.8 x 73.7 x 35.6 cm)  
Courtesy of Lynda Benglis and Cheim & Reid, New York  
Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Q: And so for you that was this *Prop Piece*?

Benglis: Well no, it was some paper works [done a bit later]. I don't know if we have any on the wall here. I don't think so. But then I found this polypropylene and polystyrene and made these bows so that they were obviously little gifts, something that everybody could afford or you could give them away like that, a present. When you go to a party and they give you a little package maybe, a little—or when you go to these big fundraising dinners they give you a lagniappe, which might consist of a catalogue of what you have done or what they represent, but it might be anything from cake or something you could use, a paperweight, or like that.

Assistant to Benglis: There's one on the wall.

Benglis: Oh yes, there's one over there. See the flounces underneath—don't pull it out because—yes, but there. There's a paper piece with a bow at the top, so it's like a present.

Q: Perfect.

Benglis: Oh, that reminds me, Rauschenberg, when I was over, had my first studio other than the basement studio and subletting others—not here but over in Little Italy [New York]—I was working with the wax paintings, which is a lozenge shape, trying—with the shape painting coming in, I was thinking well, I'll do a shape painting, but it will be as wide as the format is wide. And I made my own paint. So I made my own format with 1-by-2s, pressboard or Masonite, and then I backed it with the 1-by-2s and clamped it with C-clamps and so forth. Then I painted it and then started pigmenting wax and making these paintings.



Lynda Benglis  
*Embryo II*, 1967  
Purified pigmented beeswax and gesso on  
masonite  
36 x 5 x 5 inches (91.4 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm)  
Courtesy of Lynda Benglis and Cheim &  
Reid, New York  
Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA,  
New York, NY

And at the time Rauschenberg had some—he was printing on scrim that he'd probably gotten from Europe somewhere [*Hoarfrost* series, 1974–76]. Prior to that time [at the Walker opening], [Robert] Bob Irwin had used the big scrim sheet to create a film between the wall space and the

back, and in the room lit the scrim in such a way that it moved the wall forward [Untitled, 1971]. He lit the scrim from the ceiling in the back so you wouldn't know where the surface of the wall was. It brought the whole wall forward. I think that was a big piece of his at the Walker. Actually, Rauschenberg was not working—I can say for sure—was not working with scrim before. He used cardboard for Walker and he was just printing on it—that's what he was doing, printing on it. And I thought the material very interesting, like it was this kind of rag pinned to the wall or maybe some—I don't know, the scrim pieces, but you might look that up, what exactly— But it interested me that he took the idea and just presented it.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sybil (Hoarfrost)*, 1974  
Solvent transfer on fabric, plastic, and paper  
bag collage with rope  
80 x 78 inches (203.2 x 198.1 cm)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Gift of the American Contemporary Art  
Foundation, Leonard A. Lauder, President by  
exchange

I got this bunting because I was working with this cloth bunting and started putting plaster over it. I tried to figure out what I could do with this bunting and I didn't arrive at anything to do until later. I covered screening with the bunting and that's when I moved into screening and those simple knots. But Rauschenberg was using the scrim, I think, at that time. So there was something definitely that he did that influenced me and that was that idea of the cloth. It wasn't

enough for me to just pin the cloth to the wall. I was trying to—I'd already worked on the wax paintings and I'd already done the foam pieces, I think. I was just trying to go further. And then I started doing these bunting pieces with the [wire and the] cloth covered as a skin.

See, for me it's always been skin, body and skin, an illusion, and for Rauschenberg it was always pictorial. For Rauschenberg it was about memory; it was about life, decay. I'd been involved with life, decay too, but it's always been body-oriented. And Rauschenberg, he had every symbol, every symbol he was involved with, but he had such a life—I think he was very involved with icons specifically in the way that Warhol got involved with icons later, but it would be generalized. Warhol was specifically involved with personalities always and Rauschenberg wasn't. Rauschenberg was involved with himself. He was the "It" guy, very definitely. He was the center—and we are all centers of our universe, but he was definitely the showman and people loved him for that. He was so self-indulgent; he made you feel you had a kinship to that feeling.

Q: That feeling of self-indulgence or that feeling of—?

Benglis: Yes, that feeling of self-indulgence, whether you did or not, there you were with him and he would do anything, like kick a tray and make a turtle fall in the middle of the glass down on all fours. He could do anything. He was kind of a magician. Later Laddie told the story and Laddie claimed he did it.

[Laughter]

Benglis: Now, Laddie happens to be looking a little like Rauschenberg, so Laddie got totally confused with that one. [Laughs]

Q: You mentioned briefly that you went to India in 1979–80 and something that I’ve actually noticed in—

Benglis: For six weeks I was there.

Q: Right. And something I’ve noticed in some of your work and then in some of his work, Rauschenberg talks about how going to India in ’75 really opened him up to new color, seeing the saris, seeing all these sorts of things. I was just at your exhibit up at Storm King [Art Center, New Windsor, New York, *Lynda Benglis: Water Sources*, 2015] and you talk about that pink—

Benglis: Oh, the “navy blue of India” [as Diana Vreeland of *Vogue* magazine called it].

Q: Yes, exactly, and the kite. [Note: References to the inspiration for Benglis’s *Pink Lady (For Asha)*, 2013, and *Pink Ladies*, 2014, which were inspired in part by seeing a bright pink kite in India.]



Installation view, *Lynda Benglis: Water Sources*, Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, New York, 2015. Works pictured: *Pink Lady (For Asha)* (2013) and *Pink Ladies* (2014). Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Benglis: And the kite.

Q: Right and seeing this kite in India and this bright pink and that being the color that inspired this particular piece. So I thought it was interesting that there was this connection to color—you were with Asha Sarabhai at the point that you saw the kite.

Benglis: Yes. They [Asha and Suhrid Sarabhai] are here [in New York City] now. Did you talk to them at all? Are you going to see them?

Q: Yes, I'll see them next week.

Benglis: Yes, before they leave.

Q: Right, exactly. So I was interested that you both go to this—you have this connection with India.

Benglis: We were together on the balcony and Anand had just passed away and we were talking and that—flowers also have that pink, the bougainvillea for instance have that bright, intense, Day-Glo pink. It depends on the light of course and the context. So that’s why I did those pieces and I said, “For Asha.” So it was definitely something after a loss. Everything seemed brighter and in a way you’re thinking, well, have you seen this in this way before? We were just talking, “What a pink.” It had connected to the tree—and it could have been just after he died and I came back—but his ashes were under this tree, this particular tree. I know it was the tree where the kite was. But that’s where his ashes were also, some of them, because there’s a tradition, you scatter them everywhere that he’s been. So we went down to Goa [India]; we went different places that he liked or visited. We had animals on this farm, so we would go there and we did them there. We scattered the ashes here and there. So it had something to do with that memory and association and seeing it together, Asha and I. So that’s why I named [the pink day fountains] for Asha.

Q: And a strong color like that, which is both simple and total in some way.

Benglis: Yes, absolutely. Yes, I think it must be the most electric of the synthesized colors, but it is in nature, the Day-Glo. It just means color without black. Did you know that?

Q: No.

Benglis: That's what they are. They don't have black in them. They're pure color, no black. You can see it in nature. I've seen it in New Zealand in the gaseous baths, the gas that comes up from the earth. I've seen pools of—you can see these colors actually, but rarely.

Q: So, of course, after you visit India you become partners with Anand. I know that the Sarabhais have continued correspondence with Bob over the years and visit him.

Benglis: Yes, Mani particularly. You would maybe see those letters. You should ask the—

Q: They're up there. There are some up at the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation.

Benglis: Mani and Bob hit it off. Asha went down there separately to visit him. I think maybe she's been down there once, maybe twice; [they were also close]. Suhrid took some great pictures of Rauschenberg. He was documenting a lot of the artists at the time, so you might ask him, since you're going to see him, that you know that he took some pictures and maybe he would have access to those. You'd have to ask him.

Q: As we come around towards perhaps closer to a conclusion here, I'm curious then, whether via the Sarabhais or some other outlet, what sort of intersections you might have had with Bob Rauschenberg in some of the later years. So we've talked about the sixties, we've talked about the seventies—unless there's something else about the Louisiana exhibit?

[INTERRUPTION]

Benglis: Anand took a kind of—this was toward the end of Rauschenberg’s life. He was in a wheelchair. Even though he was in a wheelchair and very crippled, I remember Anand took a picture of him. He went to this opening at the Museum of Modern Art [New York] and Rauschenberg was there. And I remember we have a picture of him. Anand and I were taking pictures and Anand had taken this picture. What we would do is gold leaf, giving a reflection to the picture plane—we’d build it up a little bit with a kind of plaster glue type thing and then gold leaf that, whatever it was, and make it into some kind of object of distraction of the subject. I know that there was one taken of Rauschenberg at this opening and I don’t know where that photograph is, whether it’s there with Vivian Horan at the Vivian Horan [Fine Art] gallery [New York]. But we should find that out, if there’s a picture of Rauschenberg in any of those images.

[INTERRUPTION]

Benglis [speaking to assistant]: Well, let’s look firstly. Just ask Vivian, email her now and see if there are any of Rauschenberg’s images here that Anand would have taken.

I didn’t go to that particular opening that night, maybe because I wasn’t feeling well or whatever. But I didn’t go. And Anand just happened to see Rauschenberg. It was at the Museum of Modern Art; that’s all I know. I don’t remember Rauschenberg like that, you see. I just remember that I was surprised to see him like that. That’s not how I think of him.

Q: How do you think of him?

Benglis: As always smiling, always very open, and always totally confrontational, but in a friendly way. Always engaging people frontally—not a passive individual at all.

Q: So I think we're coming near the end of any notes that I have. So a lot of people make note of how prolific he was. So I have a question for you, which you can relate to him or perhaps to your own work. He kept producing right up until he passed away, he was still working on pieces.

Benglis: Yes, I could see that. How could he do otherwise? He was always thinking.

Q: So my question then is how do you stay creative through changes, through different settings, through aging?

Benglis: You don't think about aging. I don't think about it. I try to ignore it, the pains. But it has nothing to do with creating. It's not particularly something that I take hold and that I want to express, but whatever you are, you express; whatever you feel, you express. I think the process of a creation, you don't ask for it. You just do it. [You join the process of life with that of the art.] It's something that you're either born with it or you're not. You just have to. It's like breathing. So I don't think it's a matter of choice as to—I think it's a rhythm. Creation does have its own rhythm and you have to listen to it. You can't force it. I think Rauschenberg just had his rhythm. He knew. He followed it. He had to do the changes. I feel very much contextually you have to do the changes. I'm drawn to whatever these places are—I have to.

It's like nesting. It's something to do with migrations and nesting and I think there are certain people that are sensitive to that, that need to migrate. And certain people don't have that need. I think he probably had the need to go and that's why he went back and forth, so to speak. He certainly had the need for people, as we all do, and that's healthy. I think he was a very healthy person, healthy individual.

Q: Healthy in the sense of that curiosity or in that sense of—

Benglis: He was balanced. He was a very balanced person.

Q: So leading into a final question, do you think of your work as being in conversation with other artists or other people or other places?

Benglis: Sometimes. I think probably when I got into the cloth and then decided instead of plastering it, just plastering it or allowing it to show in that way, letting it to drip there, that was a process that I think I was nodding to Rauschenberg and his cloth pieces. Certainly that took me there. I couldn't just hang them up. They had to have form, see, so that's what I did. I think at one part, in terms of media, I was alluding to—



Lynda Benglis

left:

*Paddle (Totem)*, 1972

Wire mesh, cotton bunting, plaster, and pigment  
114 x 6 inches (289.6 x 15.2 cm)

right:

*Charred (Totem)*, 1972

Wire mesh, cotton bunting, plaster, and pigment  
96 x 4 inches (243.8 x 10.2 cm)

Photo: Courtesy Lynda Benglis. Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Oh, Rauschenberg, I forgot about that. Rauschenberg, when I was doing this thing with Morris, the exchange, which I called an exchange in video [note: collaboration with Morris resulted in Benglis's video *Mumble*, 1972, and Morris's *Exchange*, 1973]. Morris really wanted to do a video and he wanted to talk about his relationship with the women that he was involved with and I said I'd do it. He said, "Do you have equipment?" And I said yes and he came over to my studio. I just put the camera on him and he talked, in profile, about his writing rather than just—he was recording his sound—I'm talking about Morris. And then he did his sort of Nazi kind of enchained thing with the Nazi helmet and the arms folded. [Note: poster for Morris's exhibition *Labyrinths–Voice–Blind Time*, Leo Castelli and Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1974.]

Q: Kind of like the S&M [somasochism] gear.

Benglis: Yes. And I think it really had to do with Rosalind [E.] Krauss, who's Jewish, and I think it had to do something with her being an object of this kind of idea of the German—and it had to

do with voice, a lot of references, whereas my reference was only the male-female thing, essentially. It was more humanistic in a sense and more directed to a generalized state of the human situation being both—I was hoping to direct my questions about sexuality and it being not specific—in other words open-ended. The artist is in both; the artist is everything. So you also challenge the god-like object. The object is challenging that. I think Morris's thing was quite specific. But then Rauschenberg decided to come along and do an advertisement with his body in a different way. And it happened just within the same year and he did this whole thing and it was kind of right out there at the same time, but in his own way. You might look that up, because I was surprised. It was a full page in *Artforum*, same magazine.

Q: And this is after your own advertisement.

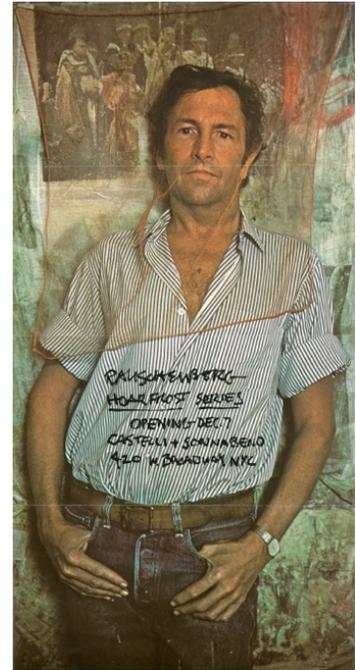
Benglis: After my own. [Note: "Centerfold," published in *Artforum*, November 1974.]

Q: After yours and Morris's in *Artforum*.

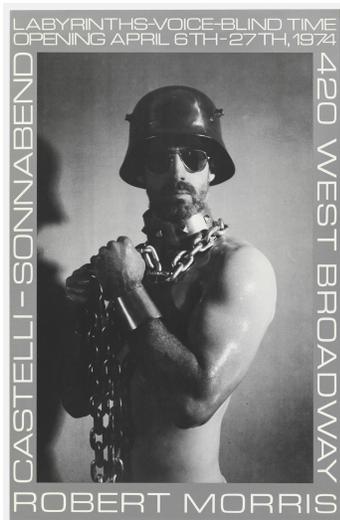
Benglis: Right, right. And I think Morris beat me to the punch because I asked Morris, "Do you want me to—" We were doing photographs back and forth and Morris decided he was going to publish.



Lynda Benglis  
“Centerfold,” 1974  
Published in *Artforum*, November 1974  
Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA,  
New York, NY



Poster and advertisement for  
*Rauschenberg: Hoarfrost Series*,  
1974, Rauschenberg with his *Mint*  
(*Hoarfrost*) (1974). Appeared as a  
double-page spread in *Artforum*,  
December 1974



Robert Morris  
Poster for *Robert Morris: Labyrinths—*  
*Voice—Bind Time*, 1974  
Published in *Artforum*, September 1974

And the magazine was also being a little involved with the whole thing because they charged me much—I know they charged me much more than they would have just an advertiser and they told me that I had to have an advertiser's name on it, that I couldn't just do it for myself because I wanted to. I had approached the magazine a year-and-a-half before it was actually published or at least a year before it was published. It was probably a year-and-a-half, I think. Because [Charles] Charlie Cowles, who owns the magazine, gave me an *Artforum* T-shirt, so I changed the letters of the T-shirt and did some T-shirts too. But I never—but I was surprised at that Rauschenberg thing. You should look it up.

Q: So what did it—yes because I've actually not seen that.

Benglis: Well, you probably—I haven't thought about it until you told me you wanted to do this interview and then I now remember it.

Q: So what did they consist of? It was him—

Benglis: I thought about it before, when you told me you wanted to do the interview. I wanted to mention it. You should look it up. Excuse me. I'm glad we—

[INTERRUPTION]

Benglis: What's that?

Assistant: It's in East Hampton. That's the photo of Rauschenberg. [Note: shows a photograph of Chuck Close, Rauschenberg, and others to Benglis, gold ears have been applied to two people in the photograph.]

Benglis: No, he was in a wheelchair.

Q: He's in a—yes that's 2005.

Benglis: There's another one. Who is that, Chuck [Close] over there to the left?

Assistant: Yes and you can see whoever that is, there's a gold ear.

Benglis: Where? Oh, that's right. See, to me, I think I was kind of horrified that Rauschenberg was not standing. I remembered it more in a shocking way. Is that the only one? There must be one—maybe there was another one. But anyway, we should give you that one.

Q: Yes, that would be great.

Benglis [speaking to assistant]: Send it over to him. There might be another one.

Assistant: We haven't come across it.

Benglis: Anyway, there he was in a wheelchair and I don't remember him that way. I don't. See how spiffy he looks. Nice outfit.

Q: Sharp.

Benglis: Let me see again. Yes, nice hair. Good head of hair. No wigs.

Q: [Laughs] That's staying power of a kind, yes.

Benglis: And also smiling.

Q: You often see that in those photos.

Benglis: What? Do you often see it?

Q: I think so sometimes.

Benglis: Yes, I do too.

Q: So coming around to that final question, if your work is at times in conversation with other artists—your work or your life, understanding that they run together—what would the nature of the conversation be with Bob Rauschenberg and his work?

Benglis: Conversation?

Q: Yes, thinking about his—if your work is in conversation with people, if it can be, what sort of a conversation, if any, is there with him and his work?

Benglis: Well, I think maybe my video really had to do with how the eye sees and what you're taking in. Generally, we see like that—parenthetically, we have this sort of unfocused space like that. But with a camera you can focus it all flat, on a flat screen. So I was very interested and at that time video was different than film. We now have digital. But at that time when it was just beginning, I was interested in taking these short snips and also teaching at [University of] Rochester [New York] and at a media school, Quinnipiac [University, Hamden, Connecticut]. I was interested in setting forth little ideas about how the different students take in things and tell them to do these one-minute videos or three-minute videos like that.

And then one particular assignment I had, I wanted to do porno. And that was at Rochester, later at Quinnipiac—I wanted to do porno with vegetables. And so they did a lot of really funny great animation, because I had to challenge it really in a big way for these advertisement kids and things like that, because that's what the media thing was all about at Quinnipiac. So I thought that my conversations with the media, what I was interested in at the time, I think I wasn't seeing Rauschenberg, but he would have been interested in that aspect of what I was doing. This is something no one really knows about, but I considered that art too, working through and with my students. I think of this as just very open in what they share—and I've always been very generous and I think Rauschenberg is that way too with sharing information. It's obvious in his

work that that's what he does: he shares information. If I were to describe him and add onto that, as an artist, he shares information contextually. Wherever he goes, that's what he does.

Q: Great. So do you think there's anything—before we close out, do you think there's anything we've missed or is there anything else you'd like to say about what we've been talking about this morning? [Laughs]

Benglis: Lastly, he shares movement, information with movement. I think most artists that I'm interested in do that. It's not just about the icon, it's information with that sense of movement and availability.

Q: It's like the way it moves and then is informed by other things in its context.

Benglis: Yes, the other things. And it's available to everybody. One thing I think that I like to do in my present work, because I'm working with water and the fountains, I want to share with all kinds of people and also children. I'm very interested in the idea of what do children see with fountains and what do children see in the gestalt of the image? I've always been interested in that. And what do animals see? For instance, I know, I had a little dog and that dog could recognize the car, the silhouette of the car that I had in the distance. And sometimes the dog would be mistaken because a car would be in a distance and it wouldn't be my color car, but it would be because of the gestalt. So dogs—this was a little Dachshund—would recognize the gestalt of a Volkswagen for instance. So I know that there are certain recognizable things in

animals. And they talk about these things about animals, not this, that—but animals have so much intelligence, sensitivity, everything. We know that if we're pet owners.

All artists deal with that, but I think Rauschenberg deals with that kind of sensitivity. He probably—his turtles, he knew what his turtles were thinking. I have an aunt, lives in Mississippi. She knows where her turtle nests are, these same turtles. She knows where the generations are that have been through there. She's that sensitive to her situation because she's never moved out of that realm. She's lived there all her life, all her eighty-some-odd years. She knows everything about that land she lives on.

There are people like that and our Native Americans were like that. There are people that did move and there are people that don't move—and even if they did move, they know where they're moving to and they know about the place and they learn. We're missing that with these road maps. And also just conversations in the air— When you see somebody so animated—I thought how perverse—I saw this woman on the street. It was as if she were performing. She was sitting down on the street, maybe on something that wasn't—it could have been a hydrant or something. And she was all made up and she was talking with such animated gestures and looking out into space as if she were on a stage.

Q: But performing for who?

Benglis: Yes. And I thought well, is she doing—what do they call it when they do a selfie? Is she doing a selfie for everybody? She's seeing herself—she's talking on the phone, but she's seeing

herself perform for everybody now. She's doing the selfie for the world as if her conversation and what her—it was just bizarre. And I thought what is this selfie business all over? What is this performance thing that people don't mind conversing, gesturing wildly—what do you call it, what's the verb?

Q: Gesticulating?

Benglis: Gesticulating wildly, just with animation. And you barely catch her eye, but you do catch it, so she knows what she's doing.

Q: Well, it's that extreme self-consciousness of the body and what it's doing. Does this look good right now? Does this look like this right now? Does this look like the right—?

Benglis: Yes, exactly. That's exactly—

Q: Frame by frame.

Benglis: Exactly, frame by frame, or whatever is the movement.

Q: So the people who move, the people who do not move—perfect. So unless there's anything else I can shut off this machine.

Benglis: That's pretty cool. Go ahead.

Q: Yes, pretty cool.

[END OF INTERVIEW]