

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Caroline Huber

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Caroline Huber conducted by Alessandra Nicifero on May 29, 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: Caroline Huber

Location: Pasadena, California

Interviewer: Alessandra Nicifero

Date: May 29, 2015

Q: Okay, so my name is Alessandra Nicifero. I'm here with Caroline Huber. It's May 29, 2015.

Thanks for agreeing to be here.

Huber: You're welcome. My pleasure.

Q: So why don't we start talking briefly about where you were born, where you grew up?

Huber: I was born outside of Philadelphia. I grew up in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, which is about twenty minutes from downtown Philadelphia. I lived there until I went off to college and then lived up and down the East Coast until I moved to Houston. Now I'm out here in California.

Q: So when did you discover art? What's your first memory of it?

Huber: Well actually when I was young I used to draw a lot. I took art classes in the fifth or sixth grade after school and really loved it. It was just something I really loved to do. Then I stopped doing it and then I took some more in high school. When it was time to go to college I was thinking I would be a science major, but I was sorry I hadn't pursued art more seriously and done some kind of portfolio so I could go to art school. At the same time I think my parents would have wanted me to have a more substantial career, education, other than in the arts. So I went off

basically as a biology major, which then changed and I ended up going back into art and getting a degree in art education. Anyway, from when I was very young I always loved to draw and make things.

Q: And after Philadelphia, where did you go to college?

Huber: I started at Emory University in Atlanta and was there for five quarters. I went to school in 1968 so of course that was kind of an explosive time. I came home one day and my roommates, who were my best friends at college, said, “Well, we’re going to Europe.” I said, “Well, you’re not leaving me here,” because we all had kind of separated ourselves from the very conservative, Southern way of being; even though my mother was from Atlanta and I’m half Southern, it just was very different from where I grew up. So we had gone our own ways. My best friends were leaving town so I convinced my parents somehow to give me the tuition money for the sixth quarter, which would have finished my sophomore year, and use it instead to travel to Europe with my friends, which they agreed to, which was amazing.

Q: Where did you go?

Huber: We went all over. We flew over on Icelandair back in the days when it was almost like a propjet, I guess. There was a noisy engine. We landed in Iceland to refuel and then landed in Luxembourg and then we kind of went all over. I spent three or four weeks in Greece and I went to Paris. I didn’t go to London that trip, but I went to Belgium, spent just a few days in Germany, Spain, Yugoslavia, and Italy. So I kind of went all over. Of the four of us who went, some of us

stayed together; after traveling together for a while, some went their own way. I figured out ways to live very cheaply and I ended up staying for seven months in Europe. Then my health was falling apart and I was ready to come home. I just stayed in youth hostels, Amsterdam, part of that whole experiment, with a hash dealer coming to the dormitory beds and things like that.

I really loved it. It really taught me self-reliance and made me see the world in a whole new way. I learned about all kinds of wonderful food, after growing up with a different kind of cheese, seeing real cheese and real food and real bread. It was like, wow, there's a whole other world out here, a way of life that was very different, the day-to-day, fresh food, going to the market everyday, and things like that. Seeing [Sandro] Botticellis and [Gian Lorenzo] Berninis for the first time in the flesh, rather than in tiny reproductions. It had a huge impact. I loved it, it really did change me, and it made me grow up really fast. So when I came back and went back to school again, I just felt like I was much older than all the other kids in school. Also I came back and worked for a while and then I thought it was time to go back to school. But it was an incredible experience for me. I lived in the caves of Crete, just had really amazing experiences, hitched some around Europe, which I would never do now, but we were young and foolish and thought we knew everything. It was a really exciting time for me.

Q: Then you returned to do what?

Huber: I ended up moving to Boston. I didn't want to live at home obviously and it felt the most European to me. So I lived up there in Boston and Cambridge [Massachusetts] for a while and then I decided I wanted to go back to school. I went to BU [Boston University] for one semester

and just couldn't stand it. I went back to study education and I just felt like the students were interested in things that I wasn't interested in. I would take English classes and I hadn't even read the books and I could talk about them in ways that they couldn't because I had gone to a private school from the seventh grade to the twelfth grade and I had a really good education. So I left.

I ended up going to Goddard [College, Plainfield, Vermont] and studied in their UWW program, which is University Without Walls. You could go to Goddard for a few weeks, work with a professor, design a course of study, and then come back and be more on your own. At that point I was twenty-two I guess and I just felt more independent. So that's what I did. I ended up getting my degree in education from Goddard. I lived in Boston and Cambridge for a while and then I moved to Washington, D.C., which is where I met Walter [Hopps].

Q: Can you tell me more about your experience of Washington?

Huber: I really loved Washington. I thought it was beautiful. It was interesting. You turn on the evening news and it was about some world event as opposed to just the local stuff. The local issues were also national issues because you have every embassy from every part of the world and you had protests and you had the seat of American government. So it was really interesting. My friends weren't in politics, my friends were in the arts, but it was just a fascinating place to live and it's beautiful and you could go down into Rock Creek Park and suddenly you're in the middle of these woods right in the middle of the city. So you have this way of getting out of the urban aspect of it. It's a very dynamic city, but it's also a more quiet, peaceful city than, say,

New York would be. So I really loved it. It was hard for me to leave there to move to Houston. I didn't want to move to Texas. We were married for a couple of years before we even moved to Texas, that's how much I loved living in Washington.

Q: So where and how did you meet Walter Hopps?

Huber: Well I first met him with a friend at a gallery. He was looking at some things and I was just introduced to him. Then we met again. I went to Philadelphia with a friend and we were at an event. Sam Gilliam, who's a Washington artist, had a piece on the exterior of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It was called *Seahorses* [1975] and it was draped canvases that went on the outside of the building. Sam was a friend and so we were up there for that. Walter was there. We were all having lunch at a diner and so we met each other then. But we were with other people and so we didn't get together.



Installation view, Sam Gilliam's *Seahorses* (1975), Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1975

The time we really got to know each other, the first real spark, was in 1976 around Bob [Rauschenberg]'s work. Walter was doing the retrospective for the bicentennial at the Smithsonian [*Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976–77]. Bob's piece *Minutiae* [1954] had been used by Merce [Cunningham] as a set for a dance. The dancers moved through the curtain and it was an integral part of the show of course and also extremely fragile.



Robert Rauschenberg
Minutiae, 1954
Combine: oil, paper, fabric, newspaper,
wood, metal, and plastic with mirror on
braided wire on wooded structure
84 1/2 x 81 x 30 1/2 inches (214.6 x 205.7 x
77.5 cm)
Private collection, Courtesy Hauser & Wirth



Rauschenberg and Walter Hopps discussing *Minutiae* (1954) during the installation of the retrospective exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976. Works in background are *Red Interior* (1954) and *Untitled* (1954). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni, www.gianfrancogorgoni.it

I think it had been with Merce for a number of years and had been borrowed back from Merce for the exhibition I believe. David [White] or Neil Printz could set you straight on all that. Suddenly at the eleventh hour of the installation, just before it was opening, I think Merce got the opportunity to have his dances filmed for PBS and so he wanted the piece back, but it was part of

the show. Bob said, “No, I need it for the show,” and so there was I think some kind of friction about that and who really owned the piece. Bob said, “No, it’s always been mine.” I remember Walter talking about this, but I really didn’t know him well, so I could be wrong on some of the details. In typical Walter fashion he came up with this extraordinary solution that was mind-bogglingly complicated but also brilliant; that was to create a duplicate, a facsimile, that was identical, that Merce could use for the dance. But he had two or three days to do it. It was something ridiculous. So he invited two artists, Yuri Schwebler, a sculptor, and Michal Hunter, a painter and a really good friend of mine, to oversee a team to make this replica. Michal invited me to work on it and so I was charged with making the curtain that the dancers went through.



after Robert Rauschenberg
 Décor for *Minutiae*, 1976/1954
 Combine: oil, paper, fabric, newspaper, wood, metal, plastic, with mirror on string, on wood structure
 84 1/2 x 81 x 30 1/2 inches (214.6 x 205.7 x 77.5 cm)
 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

We were in the museum all day and night. It was like an all-nighter. It was like being back in college prepping for exams. I was only twenty-six and I’d never been in a museum all night with no one in the building but us. It was an incredible experience. The people who worked in the shop downstairs that did the silkscreens for the labels and stuff for the walls were also working

on it. This incredibly complicated Combine piece was being re-done. There was a fabric store across the street from the museum so I ran back and forth across the street and matched the fabrics and got the colors and worked all night making this curtain. My job was really the easiest part of it, I think. We were all in the museum all night long with just a couple of guards and Walter and us working and it was so exciting and thrilling for me and this thing I had never experienced in my life.

Q: Were there some challenging parts?

Huber: Oh yes. There were comic strips in this thing and scraps of fabric and all these things that miraculously got duplicated through the shop downstairs, silkscreening cartoons and ephemera, and through the fabrics I was able to find, and the painters painting and duplicating his brushstrokes. Amazing things. And Yuri's a sculptor, making the structure. I believe the artists did amazing replication and collaging of the various parts of the piece. But there was this one metal disk, I remember, and no one could figure out what it was and how we could replicate it, and it was something that moved if there was a breeze from the dancers. Then suddenly—the museum was located on the edge of Chinatown and someone was walking by a window at the eleventh hour and saw this thing in the window and realized what it was. It was the lid of a Chinese tea caddy. It was a long time ago, but I think I'm remembering that right. So that solved that problem.

So we worked all night on this, through the day and night, it was like a twenty-four-hour marathon. As the dawn was coming we were leaving the building and there was some

construction in the back and I remember there was a plank covering the mud or a construction ditch and Walter took my hand and said, “I wouldn’t want to have you lose your balance.” There must have been static in the air because this spark went between us. So that was the first sort of, whoa, but then we went our different ways. But it was very exciting to have this little connection there. Then later I worked in a gallery that some friends of mine owned and he would come around to see the shows and to see me and we got together that way. I think it was in ’78 or ’79 when we started to really see each other, but I first met him in ’74 or ’75.

Q: And everybody talks about the high level energy that he always had.

Huber: Yes, unbelievable. In twenty-four hours he could do what most people take four days to do. He was incredible that way. This project was another one of those instances where he just, “Okay, we have this insurmountable problem, I’m going to come up with a solution that seems crazy and I’m going to make it work,” and it did. Actually he put everybody’s names on the back of the sculpture and said it was a replica so that it would never be confused with the original. It was such a good facsimile. Yes, he was amazing that way.

Q: This in a way seems almost an element that he had in common with Bob Rauschenberg, this capacity to solve problems on the spot.

Huber: Yes, I think so. Walter just—well everybody did, but he adored Bob and he got to do three retrospectives of his work, including one of the early work, which turned out to be groundbreaking. He ended up figuring out things that had been wrong throughout texts and

things. Walter was very thorough. When he was working on something, he was very thorough and really wanted to get it right and have no mistakes. He was not afraid to challenge the canon, but he also wanted things to be absolutely correct. Working on that early Rauschenberg show, when they were doing it at the Menil [*Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, The Menil Collection, Houston, 1991] and the catalogue—there were a lot of all-nighters on that too, just going back and starting over and really correcting things, finding things and saying, “I’m not sure if this is right.” The people working with him had a lot of detective work to do and they ended up changing some of the things that people had always thought were done this time or done this way because he really researched it in a way that was new or found some things that were new. He loved Bob’s work so much that he did it three times.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, The Menil Collection, Houston, 1991–2. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

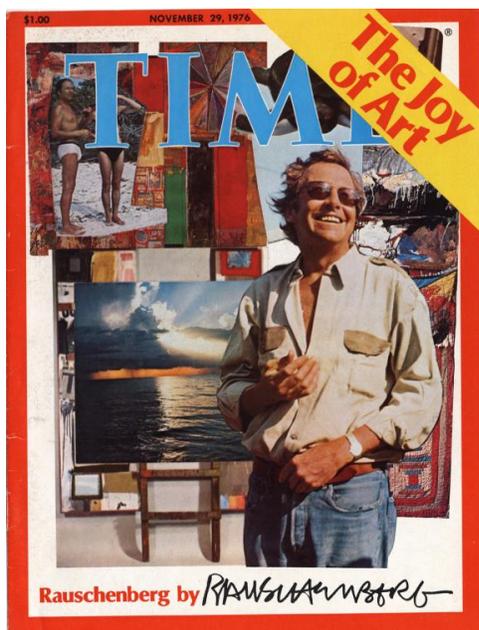
Q: When did they meet?

Huber: I don’t know when they first met. I wonder if it’s somewhere in the Rauschenberg archives. I think he went over to Sweden for the Rauschenberg show that Pontus Hultén did. I

can't remember when that was. [Note: *4 Amerikanare: Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Stankiewicz*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1962] He probably met Bob before that. Well, he would have. He met Jasper Johns early because he showed him in the early sixties so he might have met Bob then.

Q: And he worked on the first retrospective in the seventies.

Huber: Yes, the first retrospective was at the Smithsonian and it was for the bicentennial so it was 1976. It was the bicentennial anniversary of the country and he talked Joshua [C.] Taylor into letting Bob be the bicentennial artist. Joshua was director of what was then called the National Collection of Fine Arts, now the Smithsonian American Art Museum. That's when Bob got the cover of *Time* . He probably met him in the sixties and I know he sort of strengthened the relationship when he went over to Sweden I think, and then did the retrospective, and so it just kept growing from there I guess. But that was before I knew Walter so I don't really know for sure.



Robert Rauschenberg
Cover for *Time* magazine—November 29, 1976
10 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches (27.3 x 21 cm)

Q: Did you meet Bob Rauschenberg while you were working on the replica of the *Minutiae*?

Huber: No. Bob wasn't there. I met him later in Washington and then of course I saw him when the retrospective was traveling, the second retrospective, and it went to Europe. I saw him in Germany and in Houston and all, but I didn't meet him until the later seventies or eighties.

[Note: the second retrospective organized by Hopps with Susan Davidson was *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Guggenheim Museum SoHo, and Guggenheim Museum at Ace Gallery, New York, 1997–98; traveled to the Menil Collection, Contemporary Arts Museum, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1998; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1998; and Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1998–99]

Q: What are your memories of meeting him for the first time?

Huber: Well he had such an ability to touch anything and turn it into something magic so it was like this thing you idolized, this person you idolized. I found him a little intimidating because I was always really shy around him and just felt nervous. He was somebody I thought was just so extraordinary, I felt a little overwhelmed by him. But I thought he was incredibly attractive and dynamic and funny. Walter and he were on a panel at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2000. I think it was the first one of the McBean lecture series or whatever it was called, so they were on a panel together. Bob was so funny and Walter ended up being the straight man. He turned Walter into the straight man. It was really great. He just had this amazing sense of humor.

Q: What was the occasion again?

Huber: Bob and Walter were on a panel together talking about Bob's work. They were chosen to be the first panelists on the San Francisco Art Institute McBean Distinguished Lectureship and Residency. Anyway Bob was this larger than life figure for me. It was a little scary because he was so special.

Q: So they continued to have a relationship from the first?

Huber: Oh yes.

Q: So they would talk often, they would plan things together?

Huber: Yes. I don't know that they talked so often, but I think they were very close and just had a special connection and admiration for each other. Walter was one of those people who really loved artists. He was one of those rare art historians who loved living artists, as a lot of them like to work with people who are no longer around. He really loved the energy of artists. Walter actually was originally a photographer and he was a really talented photographer, even as a young boy. He made the conscious decision, I think in his early twenties, to give up his own art and go more into the curating end of things. He had an artist's eye anyway inherently and then he had this brilliant gift for installation. But he thrived on artists. He loved being around artists and so that was something that I think got him going in the morning.



Walter Hopps and Rauschenberg during the installation of the retrospective exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976. Work in background is *Sor Aqua (Venetian)* (1973). Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni, www.gianfrancogorgoni.it

Q: He described himself as an orchestra conductor and I like this image.

Huber: Yes.

Q: There is this intensity in making the decision, having the work of art there on the wall and making the decisions. It seemed very inspiring.

Huber: Yes. He could, I mean literally, make artwork sing. He just could. Because really you can make or break it, it doesn't matter how beautiful it is. If you don't know how to install it, you can take the life out of it. He was able to really bring things front and center and just make it alive. He did really innovative installations and very beautiful, simple, poetic things. So yes, it's true.

Q: Can you describe other exhibits besides Bob Rauschenberg that you thought were—

Huber: One that I really loved that he did was of a good friend of ours, William ["Bill"] Christenberry. Before the museum opened in Houston, Dominique [de Menil] was doing exhibitions at Rice [University] Institute for the Arts [Houston], which was something she and her husband had started. It was a corrugated metal building on the Rice campus that was nicknamed the Barn, because when you walked in it was basically a big open room, like a barn, with big, simple plank floors, a really beautiful space. Walter started there. The idea that the de Menils had had of building a museum and Louis [I.] Kahn was going to be the architect was tabled, between her husband's death and Kahn's death. It was just really tabled. I don't even know if she was thinking about doing a museum initially when she hired Walter to work for her foundation in 1979 or '80.

Walter was at Rice at the Barn and in 1982, he did this exhibition of Bill's work [*William Christenberry, Southern Views*]. Bill was an artist who lived in Washington. He's from Alabama, is well-known as a photographer, but also made amazing sculptures based on some of the buildings that he photographed. And then also did more abstracted sculptures and he's also a painter. All his work is about Hale County, Alabama, where he grew up, and he would go back every year and spend a month photographing in Hale County, often photographing the same buildings over and over, watching them deteriorate or change, watch the landscape change. Walter did a retrospective of his work that was hauntingly beautiful. It was the most beautiful exhibition of Bill's work I've seen and Bill's had exhibitions and retrospectives at the Smithsonian, in Germany, all over.

One of his sculptures was a version of Sprott Church, an iconic little rural church in Hale County that he had photographed over the years. He made a sculpture of it, sort of a photorealistic sculpture in miniature of this church. All of his sculptures have this red soil that he goes and gets in Alabama and it becomes the base of the sculpture. Walter had it where you just walked in and at the far end of the building you could see this beautiful little white church floating on the red soil on its little pedestal. It was just this apparition. It was like a mirage almost. It was beautiful. Then you didn't see much else around it until you got closer to it, and then the rooms had bays and you could see the photographs and other sculpture and things. So that was one that I thought was particularly beautiful.



William Christenberry
Church, Sprott, Alabama, 1974–5
 Painted balsawood

Before I moved to Houston, he worked on an Yves Klein retrospective that they were showing and that had already been on the books and he really did a beautiful job with that [*Yves Klein 1928–1962: A Retrospective*, Rice University, 1982]. I didn't know Klein's work at that point in time so it was a real learning experience for me. Then, oh god—well even with the Rauschenberg show, the early Rauschenberg [*Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*] and the one that went to Europe in the nineties [*Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*], it was a completely different exhibition with every venue. Works were coming in and out, and new works were being added, but also the buildings were so different that it completely changed. So I really learned a lot about Bob's work and about the later work and realized that Bob was consistently innovative all along. A lot of the thing about the early work being really a breakthrough and the most important, well yes, it's fantastic, but so was the later work and it made me understand that.

The same when Walter did the [James] Rosenquist retrospective after Bob's [*James Rosenquist: A Retrospective*, 2003–04]. Same thing. The work changed with every venue. It was just an incredible thing to see it. It was like you were learning about it anew every time. That was an

amazing gift. But I can't think right now. There are so many shows he's done that I just thought were really special, that I learned a lot from, and I'm not thinking of them right now.

Q: How was it for you moving to Houston?

Huber: Well at first I was really nervous about it because I loved Washington and I loved the people I knew there and what I was doing. I was working for a commercial gallery there. It was owned by Chris Middendorf, who headed it, and I was the director. I loved the people I worked with; they were like family.

Q: Where was the gallery?

Huber: In the Adams Morgan section of D.C. It was called Middendorf [Gallery], which later went down in infamy, but at the time was a great gallery. It was probably the most interesting gallery and Chris showed a lot of interesting people from all over and focused on Washington people like Sam Gilliam. Chris had some of the best people in Washington. But Walter and I were also involved with a nonprofit artists' space in Washington called the Washington Project for the Arts [WPA] founded by Alice Denney. It was a really important artists' space started in the seventies. Alice Denney was someone who was close to Bob and she should be interviewed if she's still alive and still together. I think she did the show at the Jewish Museum [New York, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 1963] with Bob because I think she was working there then. She was living in Washington, she founded the Washington Project for the Arts. We were both fans and

supporters of the WPA and Walter served on the board when Al Nodal was director. It was a great space.

Walter began his association with Dominique de Menil in Houston in 1979 or 1980. We got married in 1983. When I finally moved to Houston in 1985 I needed to move into the nonprofit world. An artist who worked at the foundation in Washington, William Steen, was running an alternative space on the side, a really important early one for Houston. He suggested that I work with a very young nonprofit there called DiverseWorks funded by Charles [Gallagher]. Charles and Michael [Peranteau] came up to Washington and we met. We got along really well. We decided I would run the visual arts program there and that gave me something to move to that was mine and that really helped me make the transition, to have something and not just move there as Walter's wife.

So I did that and I dove in and that was an incredible introduction. I started working peripherally before I moved. I think we met in '84 because it was founded in '83 by Charles Gallagher and then Michael got involved with it a year later and then I guess it was about a year-and-a-half old when I came down and officially became involved. It was like diving into this incredible pool because there were so many artists in Houston and so much energy and I met so many people right away. I ended up really being excited and amazed by the artists living there and what was going on. Then of course also being connected with Walter and being associated with the Menil endeavors at that level was incredible. So it was a very exciting and heady time for me. Thrilling. But that's what got me there. I ended up being the visual arts director and then when Charles left,

Michael and I became co-directors. I was involved with that space for over nine years and it was incredible. It was really exciting.

Q: So you organized, you curated exhibits?

Huber: Yes, exhibitions. It started off with a really small budget. When I moved there in '85, in '85 or '86, Houston had a terrible recession. It was kind of like what the rest of the nation had in 2009, but Houston had gone through it so deeply in the mid-eighties that it weathered the latest recession in a way that nobody else did. It was a really terrible time and the organization was so fragile and funding is a day-to-day thing, having to raise money every day just to keep the doors open. We got more support that year than we ever had because I think Houston is a community unlike any other I've ever lived in, where people are so generous and very collaborative. So large organizations like the Museum of Fine Arts [MFA, Houston] let DiverseWorks use its Xerox machine when it started; just basic things that really helped it survive and thrive. People really stepped up. There are a lot of wealthy people there and they supported it and so it continued on. Then we kept growing and growing, and the budget went from thirty thousand to like seven hundred or eight hundred thousand when I left. I don't know what it is now, but it's still going on. It's one of those organizations that still exists, which is amazing.

When you start out in those places, you're basically cleaning the bathroom and you're raising the money and you're curating the shows and you're one of the artists; it's like you're doing everything and that's kind of exciting and wonderful. You're the janitor and you're the head of the thing at the same time. That's what I did. I met so many artists and really fell in love with

Houston. I ended up hating to leave. Coming out here was a very difficult decision and made me literally physically ill because I was so torn about it. I went to Houston kicking and screaming, I never wanted to live in Texas and now I feel like that's my home in a way.

It's a really vibrant, interesting place, culturally, ethnically; physically it's not particularly and the climate is terrible, but it's got so much energy and it's such a really wonderful place to be and easy in a way. Everybody works together. There's a healthy competition and competitiveness, but at the same time the smallest little fringe organization and the largest most established one will support each other. They realize it's all part of an ecology and everything matters, everything feeds into everything else and you're not really a complete cultural center until you have it all. So you have the bases that support the artists and you have the people that support the artists and then you have the institutions that present them in every way, in every facet. It's a very exciting place that way. People are very, very generous. There's a lot of money, but people really put it down. If they care about something and want it to thrive, they really put their resources behind it, intellectually, financially, and emotionally. They don't just do something half-ass, they do it first-rate.

The institutions there are some of the best in the country and built from scratch, unlike in Atlanta. I lived in Atlanta years ago and even though my family was involved with Atlanta early on, the High Museum [of Art] for example doesn't compare, to me, with the institutions with perhaps similar beginnings in Houston. Houston is far superior. It has one of the best operas in the country, great symphony, great ballet, great museums. The Menil is really special,

exceptional, and unique. Houston just has a sense of going flat out for being the best and that's really exciting.

The East Coast, where I'm from, it's so taken for granted because you have these extraordinary things that people don't support it in the same way. I'm sure there's lots of money there, but there's that wildcatter mentality in some of the early genesis of Houston, which means that it's almost like a gambling place where people just throw it out and are really ready to take a chance and go for it. It also means that when you go to parties or events nobody worries so much. There's a real cross section of people and backgrounds and professional identities that all interact and overlap and can be in the same party or place at the same time. That makes it a really fun place to be.

People know how to have fun there too. When the museum opened Mary and Roy [Henry] Cullen had a party for the out-of-town people. It was one of my first introductions to a party Houston-style, which was great. The museum opened in June of '87 and there were all these events around it. The Cullens had a big house in River Oaks, which is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods, if not the wealthiest neighborhood, in Houston. The valet takes your car and you walk up this long driveway and there's Mary looking amazing in this beautiful cocktail dress, and there's a mariachi band playing and there's a tray of margaritas before you even walk in the door. She's greeting you before you even walk in the house and there's a band playing and there are drinks before you even get in the door. Then it's artists and actors and the social set, and everybody all together and it was just really fun. They really know how to have fun here and that's something special about Houston too, I think.

Before I moved there, after Walter and I got married, I was finally allowed to go on these amazing trips to Europe that Dominique de Menil arranged, which actually benefitted the Pompidou Center [Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris]. A group of Houstonians and some people from New York would join this society that you had to be invited to join and then you would also get to go on these incredible trips where you went to extraordinary homes and collections and saw the inside workings of the museums and everything. After we were married, I was allowed to go. I got to go on my first trip and didn't know anybody and I met people from Houston who were so much fun. They were older than I was, but I just laughed a lot. Everybody takes themselves pretty seriously on the East Coast, but Texans just know how to have fun in a way. I can't describe it, but it's a way of being more alive and not worrying about stuff, just not taking yourself too seriously. So I thought, okay, I think I can do it. I think I can move there. Then I got the DiverseWorks thing going and so I was able to feel excited about going and that it was going to be okay. Then I ended up falling in love with it.

Q: And how was the work that Walter was doing with the Menil?

Huber: With the Menil? It was incredible. When she decided she wanted to actually build a museum again and create a real museum on her own property, they started thinking about architects and they went to meet Renzo Piano in Genoa [Italy]. I think Christophe de Menil was the one who suggested Renzo, but I'm not sure. They went to meet Renzo and Renzo comes from a family of shipbuilders, I think. I'm not sure. I think he had an engineering background too. In his studio there were books by California architects like Craig Ellwood and then there

was [Richard Joseph] Neutra and all these architects Walter loved and so he felt right at home with Renzo. Everybody was on the same page. So Renzo was chosen and then he came and looked at her house, which Philip Johnson designed—such an amazing house with interior gardens and all—and so a lot of the museum has references to her house.

But getting that open—three weeks before it opened to the public Walter slept about two hours a night, if that. It was really intense. It was exciting, but there were a couple of years of just focusing on designing the building and getting it built. When Walter opened the museum, he did a John Chamberlain exhibition [*John Chamberlain*, 1987–88] and he also did an exhibition of an artist from Texas who was really interesting, but who had sort of been forgotten about, Ben [L.] Cullwell [*Ben L. Cullwell: Adrenalin Hour*, 1987]. He was an Expressionist artist who ended up, like Gerald [C.] Murphy, leaving his art to run the family business. That's the way Walter was. He focused on Texas and also on the international and the national. Most people in Houston didn't even know who Ben Cullwell was, but there was a little exhibition of Ben Cullwell up at the same time as the museum opened along with the collection and along with this big exhibition of John Chamberlain. So there was that aspect of it too, I think a kind of formula for thinking about what you would present for the future.

There were a few little things that Walter wanted for the museum because it was his dream to be at the ground floor beginnings of a museum, to design the perfect space. So while much of the building is Renzo's, there were some little things that were Walter's. He wanted to have a flexible interior space and there are little tricks. The wall will stop a few inches before the ceiling so that when you're painting between shows you don't have to cut in, which takes so much time.

The roller can go up and down. So there's a reveal at the bottom, and a reveal at the top. It's cheaper. And then there are vitrines behind walls so you can just open the wall and there's already a case built in. There are rooms that could be big and clean and open or you could divide them in ways that allow for lots of changing and flexibility without a lot of expense. So those kinds of things he built into the museum.

Q: Now that you're describing it, I'm just thinking that the new Whitney Museum [of American Art, New York] has the same structure.

Huber: Oh it does? With the reveal?

Q: Yes.

Huber: Okay, well then, I'm ninety-nine percent sure that was one of Walter's contributions to the building. That was a practical thing that he learned from years of—because you paint often between exhibitions and that's expensive and time-consuming unless you can figure out a way to shortcut it. That's interesting. I haven't seen the new Whitney yet so that's interesting.

Q: When did you decide and why to move and leave Houston?

Huber: Well, the house was here and it was something that Walter had held onto through thick and thin. Even when he left I felt like it was his—well it was haunted in a way because he had so much of his life here and his first two wives—I'm number three—lived here with him. My

interpretation of the house was that it was also his way of maintaining a tangible part of California. Because ultimately he was a California boy and while he ended up spending most of his professional life on the East Coast and in the center of the country and not here, a lot of what he's most known for is his early work here. In fact he did have an extraordinary career when he left here in January of 1967 and went on to do great things out of California. But part of him always wanted to keep a toe in California so I think the house represented that in a way and we started renovating it.

When Walter resigned, Paul Winkler, who had been the assistant director with Walter, became the director. After Dominique died and things started changing at the museum, it was a difficult transition because the founder had died and it was such a close-knit and hands-on team. Things changed a bit and Paul resigned and then there was a transition and a new director was hired whom we all knew and it ended up being not a good time. Walter wasn't treated well. My feeling is that there was a lot of desire for out with the old, in with the new. It wasn't about change and nobody on the outside understood that we weren't afraid of change; it was just that it felt like more lip service than actual belief in the legacy and founding, the underpinnings of what the institution was about. So basically all the senior staff left the first year. I begged Walter to stay because I felt like, you're too important here. But anyway it was a difficult transition.

This house was falling apart literally, but Walter couldn't deal with fixing it up and focusing on it because it was sort of haunted and also beloved. I finally got him to start thinking about it because I thought, okay, if we need to jump ship, let's have a place to bail to, let's come to California and we can move. He said okay. So we started renovating the place and put a new roof

on and the floor. The roof had leaked, the floors were rotted here, there were holes, there was no central air. It was like the *Addams Family* house. The haunted house in the neighborhood. So we started fixing it up and that made a point for Walter where he could move back to California, if we needed to, and we could live here in this house.

Then when Josef [Helfenstein] came to the museum, it was like a veil was lifted for Walter. They had a nice relationship, they respected each other, it was genuine, and so Walter was reengaged and appreciated in a way that was really nice. We continued to work on the house, but it was more like I think we were going to stay in Houston. Then after Walter died in 2005, the house we lived in had belonged to the Menil Foundation. It was sort of like being the parish priest, the foundation had the house for us. Josef was great and set it up with the board so that I could live there for five years. He kept the board from selling—because they could have, they wanted to sell the property, and he allowed me five years to live there, which was great.

This house in California had so many memories and had so much to do with Walter's past and such an interesting history. It had become so much a part of me too because it had become so emotional for Walter to deal with the renovation that I ended up taking it over, just figuring it out and saying, "Is this okay with you?" and he'd go, "Yes, that's fine." So I worked on the renovation and designed the kitchen and a lot of the way it is now. Basically it's the way it was, but we did make some changes. I was very involved with the renovation of this house so this house started becoming something that I started falling in love with. Also I'd never owned my own house really. We had some property in Houston with a little bungalow that was like a studio guesthouse, but this was the first proper house that I'd had even at my advanced age because we

didn't own a house in Houston and we rented apartments in Washington. This house became very important for a whole lot of reasons.

I had been debating about what to do with it and I knew I needed to finish it if I wanted to sell it because there were still scary parts where you could see under the windowsills, see daylight all the way through, and just lots of things that needed to be done. Also I knew it wasn't just any old house. I had to live in it to make my decision, to see how I felt about it. So actually this house brought me here. Most people move for other reasons. I moved because of this house. We had never lived in this house together because there had always been other people living in it. We had always stayed with friends when we'd come out to visit or stayed in Walter's father's house until his father died and then they sold that house. The first time I stayed here was by myself and it was kind of a strange experience. But then I woke up in the morning and went—I really love it. I love being in this house. I just felt really happy here. I thought, it will be okay. So I moved out here to live in the house and finish it and to see how I felt about it and ended up just feeling really happy to be here.

Q: Can you tell me briefly the story of this house? Because it's very interesting.

Huber: Well the house was built I think in 1889 by an artist, Julius Ludovici, who was originally I think Italian and German. He grew up in Europe. His family moved to Brooklyn. I think they were in the import-export business or the hide business—importing hides or leather. He moved out here. I'm not sure if it was for his health, I can't remember, but he came out here. He had a studio in another part of Pasadena. At that point of course Pasadena was not very developed, but

that neighborhood, which is east of here, felt too busy for him so he wanted something a little more secluded. He moved over here and built this studio. I don't know if he built the house or bought the house. He lived here with his daughters who were also artists and with his sister who, because their mother had died in childbirth, raised the girls.

Then he died and so Aunt Josephine [Ludovici], who was raising the girls, decided to open a teahouse. I think before he died, they had decided the house was too small so they raised this bungalow up and made that the beginnings of a second floor and built this entire very expansive ground floor underneath it. I think some of it was designed to be this restaurant that she opened. I believe it was the first teahouse in Southern California. It was called the Rose Tree tea house. It ran in the red for the first five years and then they figured it out and it became this real destination place. Walter had come here with his mother when he was a boy. The restaurant closed in the late fifties. It had been sold to a member of the same family, a woman who had worked in the restaurant and she continued running it until the late fifties when she sold it to two men who were going to run it as a restaurant. They couldn't make it viable and they sold it to Walter and Shirley [Neilsen Blum], Walter's first wife. Walter bought it in '63.

From the moment Walter and Shirley owned it, they divided it up into studios. Joe Goode had a studio and lived here, and Fred Mason, so there were a couple of artists living here with Shirley and Walter from the beginning. Then when Walter moved East there was a whole slew of characters including Hells Angels and a child porn star living here with older men, which is crazy. Richard Jackson came in. Walter hadn't met him, but he was a friend of [Edward] Ed Kienholz's, who was Walter's dear friend, and so Richard came in and started managing the

property and had his studio here. Richard brought Bruce Nauman here because they had known each other at UC [University of California] Davis.

Later Michael McCall, Jason Rhoades, and Rachel Khedoori lived there among others. There's been an amazing array of artists who have lived in this house and it's also been a place where artists and friends who are in the arts have stayed when they were between places or needed some place to get away from things. They would stay here when we weren't here. So even though it was sort of falling down, it was a sanctuary and an arts center in a funny way. It's just had this incredible life. I feel it's almost like this puppeteer, managing all these different lives that interact in this crazy way.

Q: Has Bob Rauschenberg ever been here?

Huber: I don't know. He might have been. I don't know if he and Walter were out in California at the same time.

Q: And did you ever spend time in Captiva [Florida]?

Huber: I never went to Captiva. I didn't get to go, but Walter did certainly. He went. I would have loved to have seen it because I know it's a special place.

Q: What did he report?

Huber: Oh he always loved going there, yes. Bob was a really good cook so he would talk about Bob's cooking and what a great cook he was and the house and how it was designed and everything. So he loved it. He loved going there.

Q: So going back to Houston, how did you manage these very demanding jobs that you both had? You must have had also a very high energy level to manage DiverseWorks.

Huber: Yes. It can burn you out. Yes, it did. I didn't work around the clock like Walter, but I worked twelve- and fifteen-hour days a lot of the time. It meant that we didn't always travel together, but it also gave us something that we both had of our own but that was similar so we could compare notes. I was of course very interested in what he was doing and he was really interested in what I was doing because he loved the young artists and the energy and getting to see all these people. I introduced him to a lot of Houston artists and Texas artists that he wouldn't have gotten to see otherwise. So it was exciting for both of us I think. We developed a lot of friendships with the artists through our work.

The other thing about Walter that most people don't realize, and I don't think people who were working with him at the time even realized, is that there were a number of aspects to the [Menil] foundation. There was the [research and photography archive] *Image of the Black [in Western Art]*, which also had an office in Paris. There was the [René] Magritte catalogue raisonné that the foundation was funding. There was the museum being built. What other things? There was the Rothko Chapel. There were all these things and I don't think Dominique was quite aware of the scope of all the programs she had. There were the papers of [Father Marie-Alain] Couturier.

There were all these things and Walter had to oversee all of it. Then he had to deal with a very complicated family structure and so it wasn't just the museum that he was working on. He was working on all these other aspects of the foundation.

He was busy a lot and worked long into the night. He and I were both night owls anyway so that was one way we were really compatible, we both could stay up all night; well not all night, but stay up late. We weren't morning people. But it was hard. There were times when it was hard certainly. But Dominique was the ideal patron for him because she didn't care about his schedule per se. Walter was notorious. He was always doing fifteen things so he was always late to things and part of it was because he was doing too many things at once, but he had a reputation for being late or flaky, or working all night and sleeping all day, or something.

When he started working with Dominique de Menil, that all changed. It was crazy, he was so on time. I think maybe—this is just my interpretation of it, or my pop psychology, but it's like he finally had the ideal situation in terms of a patron who was an incredible intellectual and didn't care about the mundane stuff, didn't care about things being ordinary, or nine-to-five; who was truly interested in ideas and would pursue those ideas for their own sake and not for the number of people coming into the door or adoration or anything else. So they had this in common and a curiosity. They had this incredible simpatico. They were different, but in some ways they were very much alike and so there was nothing to rebel against anymore or nothing to sort of push against.

Because Walter really had a thing I think for authority. He'd been very ill as a child. Both of his parents were doctors and they confined him to his bed. He had to be homeschooled for a while by his grandmother and his parents because he was too sick to go to school for a year or two at a time. This is my other pop psychology, but—normal kids get to push back against these things, but there was nowhere to push back because they were controlling every aspect of his life. So he always was, or maybe this was just the way he was, but he was always pushing the envelope. With her there was nothing to push against. He was also so thrilled at the kind of work he was able to do and he was able to do whatever he wanted to do. He got to be part of designing a building and creating the perfect museum. So I think it was a fulfillment of a lifelong dream for him.

Then when he decided there were projects he wanted to do like a Kienholz retrospective, which he didn't think was really appropriate for the Menil, and he didn't want to be doing the day-to-day administration anymore, he resigned as director. He wanted to become just a curator again and really focus on that aspect. There's a lot that goes with being a director and when they were going to do a whole endowment campaign he just said, I don't want to go through another fundraising thing. I don't want to spend my time doing that. So he resigned as director to just go back to being a curator. He was able to affiliate with the Guggenheim and other institutions to do other shows that weren't necessarily appropriate for the Menil and he would figure out a way. He did an early Kienholz for the Menil [*Edward Kienholz, 1954–1962, 1995–96*], which was sort of like the early Rauschenberg. He would find aspects of an exhibition that he would do for another institution that would be appropriate for the Menil.

He was very good at understanding what made sense for a particular institution. The MFA in Houston, which is a more encyclopedic museum, had a huge pre-Columbian area of collecting. The Menil has a very tiny part, and he and Peter [C.] Marzio had a good working relationship. They had known each other in Washington and they were both then suddenly in Houston running museums in the same town so they came to an understanding of what the strengths were of each institution. If there was something that was appropriate for one institution, if a painting or an artwork became available, Walter would say, “It’s not really right for us,” and he would tell Peter about it and vice versa. They tried to keep their own areas of collecting so they didn’t compete particularly. They also collaborated on exhibitions. So Rauschenberg was in three institutions and Rosenquist was in two institutions, the MFA and the Menil.

That’s a long answer to your question. But anyway there was this ability to really spread his wings and work with someone who shared his vision, who had her own vision that very much dovetailed with his. That was I think really thrilling for him. He absolutely, he loved that museum so much. It was like you were part of this family and this experience and it is a rarity to be a part of something like that, to be with something from the beginning that is so meaningful and that continues to be something extraordinary.

Q: Do you go back to Houston?

Huber: Yes, actually I ended up buying a condominium there this year because I just miss it so. I sold our property in 2012. We had a little bungalow, which I’d go and stay in, but I sold it and then I decided I really wanted to have a tangible piece of Houston again. I had friends who were

wonderful and let me stay with them for weeks on end, but I felt I needed my own place and to give them a break from me. So I'm very excited about it, to have a place again there, because I miss it. I miss the ease of getting around and seeing your friends. It's so complicated here because it's so spread out and my friends live everywhere, all over. Plus I lived most of my adult life there; a large portion of my adult and professional life was in Houston, so you can't reestablish that when you're older like I am. You don't have the time to have twenty-five years of making friends. That's a large part of where you are. You end up realizing as you get older that it's really your friends that make a place interesting and more meaningful.

Q: And are you still engaged with art projects there in Houston?

Huber: Nothing specific, no. I resigned from one board I was on and things like that because it was just too complicated. But we'll see. Maybe I'll get more involved again. I don't know.

Q: Well, this is a beautiful project.

Huber: Thank you. Yes, I've been able to take a break from this for the last year or so, but it ended up being kind of an obsession. It was a strange thing I never thought I would do, but it ended up taking me over, to make this house all that it could be and more; to honor it, but to refine it. Because it has a great legacy so you have to honor it.

Q: You're also collecting all the writing of Walter, you said.

Huber: Well, before he died he had started. We had taped him and so he had lots of tapes. Walter was able to talk in a way that almost was like it was written. He was really a dynamic, interesting, captivating, and very lucid speaker, or storyteller, too. So Deborah Treisman, who's at the *New Yorker*, who was the managing editor of *Grand Street* when he was art director there, proposed that he do a memoir and so he did. She's basically editing all those tapes and other material and then turning them into a book. It's taking a while because she's a full-time editor to the *New Yorker* and the mother of two young girls so her time is extremely limited. So that's what it's going to be. So it's a melding together of all those different things, a kind of nonlinear adventures in art memoir.

Q: What are some of the most memorable stories that you heard from him about artists and about Rauschenberg for example?

Huber: God, I don't know. I can't think. For the book, I know he talked a lot about Bob, not with me, with Anne Doran, who did a lot of the taped interviews with Walter. I think there was going to be a whole chapter on Bob. I'm not sure. There were certain artists he selected to focus on and Bob, I'm sure, was one of them. The one story that I remember has not to do with Bob, but it was with the São Paulo Biennale [Brazil] with Barnett Newman and how Barnett Newman really, really wanted to meet Pelé [Edson Arantes do Nascimento] and I think that was the person that he wanted to meet the most in Brazil. And he became sort of a local hero because once some reporter asked him who he wanted to meet most and he said Pelé and everybody of course loved him for that. I remember there was a story about them being in a taxi and there was so much traffic and Annalee Newman [née Greenhouse] was terrified and the taxi driver was going crazy

and Barney loved going really fast. I remember funny stories like that, but I'm going blank on other stories right now.

Q: Were you involved at all while he was working on the retrospective on the early 1950s for Rauschenberg? The early Rauschenberg [exhibition].

Huber: No, I didn't. He worked with Susan Davidson.

Q: Oh right, yes. Yes.

Huber: And Don Quaintance. We kept our professional lives separate in a way. We shared and were interested in each other's, but I didn't work with him. I wouldn't want to work for him. He could be difficult, demanding. It was hard enough to be married to him sometimes so I didn't want to have to work for him too. I was glad I didn't have to work for him. I tried to keep him kind of calm and even, but no, I didn't work officially on anything like that.

Q: Should we take a break?

Huber: Sure.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay, so we are back. Can we talk briefly about—of course, you didn't know Walter yet—what do you remember about the 1972 work that Walter did as the American ambassador, commissioner, for the Venice Biennale?

Huber: Well, I didn't know him then and so I didn't know firsthand, but I think one of the things that was most striking about it was that it was the first time photography had been included, and the photographer was Diane Arbus, so I think it was the first time a woman photographer had been included. I think she committed suicide right before it opened. He got a lot of flak for continuing to include her and he said, "What do you want me to do? Take her out because she's dead?" He stuck to his guns. I know he took a crew, including Jennie Lea Knight, who was an artist from the Washington area. She was one of the people who helped him do the installation and they took their own tools because they didn't want to have any problems. They heard it was notoriously difficult to get what you needed so they went with their tools and took everything they needed.

I think that was also a transition point between the Corcoran [Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.], where he was director, and going to the Smithsonian [National Collection of Fine Arts] with Joshua Taylor, whom he had met when his first wife Shirley, had taken a course from him because Shirley was also an art historian. I think she was working on her PhD at the Art Institute of Chicago and Taylor was a teacher there, and Walter and he got to know each other then because I think Walter audited some of the classes. So Taylor hired him at the Smithsonian because Taylor was director of the National Collection at that point. That was either before,

during, or just after he was fired from the Corcoran for allowing some of the staff to organize the union.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that.

Huber: The Corcoran has a history of difficult boards and financial difficulties, and at the time the chairman of the board was Vincent Melzac. I didn't know him, but he had, how do you gracefully say, less than savory connections in the world. He just was furious that Walter hadn't told him or shut it down, and so Walter was forced out and then he ended up at the Smithsonian because Joshua said, "Well, you can come work for me." So he did. That was all around the time of the Biennale, but I don't know, I can't remember. I've seen differences between what Walter said versus what I've seen in documents and stuff so I'm not quite sure that it's really clear what came first. But I think that the most radical thing about the Biennale was having Diane Arbus involved in it and that was his idea from the beginning.

I think that also was indicative of Walter's feelings from the very beginning that photography was as important and as much a part of the fine arts as painting and sculpture. It's hard to believe that at the time there was such a discussion—Is photography art or not? Or is it of the same caliber as the other?—and some people still have that question. I think it's ridiculous, but anyway. That photography was on an equal footing with painting and sculpture was always clear to Walter. That's how he started off as an artist too, as a photographer, and he loved photography. So to put her in was something to show the world that it was all the same. I'm not sure if I can think of anything else outstanding about that time. I don't think I can right now.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: The second Rauschenberg retrospective in the early 1990s about the early work of the 1950s, there are also many photos that Rauschenberg took that were included in the exhibit. So do you have any memory of how he collected this incredible amount of early work that was neglected back then?

Huber: Well actually, I remember when the Menil bought some very early paintings of Bob's from the fifties. I think one is the double cross [*Crucifixion and Reflection*, ca. 1950, The Menil Collection, Houston]. I forget if it's in there. I can't remember what it's named. And maybe *Mother of God* [ca. 1950, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; exhibited in *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*], was that at the Menil? Anyway what I was saying earlier, that he just was relentless in terms of finding out, finding the material, and also really interested in the material. He looked under every stone and followed every lead he could, like a detective would almost. And the people he was working with, they all had to look behind every wall to see what they could find. That was important for him too. And to reestablish the significance of this early work prior to the Combine, how important that was and how innovative it was and how much it informed what Bob was doing later. There were early black paintings [1951–53]. There's a painting that the Menil has that is really beautiful that they bought. I remember them getting it early on. It's a black painting [Untitled (*Night Blooming*), 1951], but it's also the *Night Blooming* series [1951], that's a beautiful painting.



Robert Rauschenberg
Crucifixion and Reflection, ca. 1950
Oil, enamel, water-based paint, and newspaper
on paperboard attached to wood support
47 3/4 x 51 1/8 inches (121.3 x 129.9 cm)
The Menil Collection, Houston



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled (Night Blooming), 1951
Oil, asphaltum, and gravel on canvas
62 1/4 x 31 1/2 inches (158.1 x 80 cm)
The Menil Collection, Houston

Q: Yes, that's beautiful, yes.

Huber: So I think Walter just loved this work and felt it was really, really important and I guess he also—I don't remember, Susan would probably be a better person to talk to about this—but I think, especially as a precursor to the retrospective, he wanted to set the stage for what would come later and to show the significance of this early work. I know a lot of people went whoa, they didn't even realize it existed or didn't realize how significant it was. It was really a groundbreaking show. It ended up being a revolutionary show in a lot of ways. I think a lot of the work probably had been collected and wasn't seen much so people didn't know about it.

But that's a hallmark of Walter's approach. Basically he doesn't care what anybody else thinks. If he thinks something is interesting or important, then he'll pursue it. If he thinks an artist is out there in the hinterlands but is really interesting, even if it's stuff that doesn't fit in with anything, he will go find it or explore it or celebrate it. He's not afraid if people disagree with him about the significance of something or the interest of something. That's something he's always done. He's always written his own canon in a way. He's also just fascinated by what people are doing, whether or not it's even really great or not, he's just interested in people's creative endeavors. But with something like this, it's a way of setting the record straight and reevaluating things that he probably felt were overlooked or were misinterpreted from the beginning and saying, "Okay, this is really important and you need to know about it and I'm going to show you why." I think that was a lot of what Walter was about too.

Q: I also liked the idea that he valued the work of an entire generation of artists, also the ones who were not considered great, and he loved to have again this "cultural environment" it has been called.

Huber: Right. Well there was an expression he had, he used to say, "Go wide." Look at everybody. We all know that the squeakiest gear gets the grease or the one who's the smoothest talker or the nicest person, but there are a lot of artists who are really interesting, who get left out, and then it gets narrower and narrower. Walter was really interested in the whole picture. Before he died, he was thinking of doing a whole Abstract Expressionist show that would have everybody in it, not just the canon, but a huge amount of people. That was something that was always of interest to him, what everybody's doing, not just the five key people. It's all

interesting. That's very much a part of his interests and his approach; he just loved to look at all of it and he felt so much of it was valid.

Q: Do you think there is a legacy almost, that there are other curators with this kind of vision?

Huber: I hope so. There is an award now in Walter's name [Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement] and it's supposed to recognize people who are doing adventurous curating. Ann Temkin did a really great speech when Walter got an award for curatorial excellence at Bard Curatorial [Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York] one year. She said the irony of the award [Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement] is that there is no other Walter Hopps. Walter was a very independent thinker and there may be aspects of what he did that other people can do or they do in their own way, or they're just as valid, but Walter had a singular mind and curiosity and confidence to just get out there and do it and not worry about anything and almost a—I don't know if it would be sociopathic irreverence for what the standards are; but he just had this ability to joyously go out there and do what hadn't been done before. It sounds sort of Star Trek-ian, but that was just part of who he was.

He was also extraordinarily brilliant. He was so smart. Whether he was a genius or not, I don't know, but he was close, if he wasn't one. So that's not something that can be replicated or even if you're in the same vein. Walter had a quality of mind that was unique. Plus he was funny and witty and charming. He certainly had things that were not great, but he had these abilities that made a really compelling package. It's not something that you can just necessarily replicate. He was just such an independent thinker too. He paved the way so that things that are done now, he

may have been one of the early people to do. I'm sure he wasn't the only one ever to do some of the things he did, but to strike out on new ground.

There was a big [Joseph Mallord] William Turner exhibition here at the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum, Los Angeles, *J. M. W. Turner: Painting Set Free*, 2015], which was amazing and the way he approached his work, which was different than what anybody else was doing at the time and it seems so radical. He just did it because he had to and because that's who he was. I think Walter was like that. He was radical without trying to be radical. He just was. He had a really curious mind that could go into any subject and be interested in it and really explore it and understand it, and he had a gift with putting things together in a visually compelling way. There are a lot of curators who are really smart, but they're not good at installation. It's a gift. It's just something you're born with or you're not. He learned from—he admired Jermayne [Virginia] MacAgy, a curious thing.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay, so you were talking about the influence—

Huber: Of Jermayne MacAgy. Walter saw some of the exhibitions she did that were very interesting, combining science and art and all early on in the fifties at California Palace of the Legion of Honor [San Francisco]. Walter saw them in the early fifties, when he would go back and forth between L.A. and San Francisco, when he was doing his art galleries and stuff, maybe mid- to late-fifties. Well he started at Stanford [University, California] too in 1950. He went to

college in Stanford for a year and then he dropped out and went to UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles]. But later she was hired to work in Houston for the Contemporary Art Society. Then the de Menils hired her to start the Art Department at the University of St. Thomas [Houston] and Dominique worked with her. She had a big influence on the way things were done and programs were initiated there. I think it was something also that the de Menils learned from Father Couturier about the affinities between art and the spiritual, the spiritual connections between artworks that aren't necessarily linear or art historical, and the relationships between objects, different objects, and artworks and things, and how they can speak to each other. But MacAgy also had that inherently.

She was an influence on both Dominique and Walter, and later they came together, after she was gone. I'm not sure when she died, but she left a number of things to the Menil, including the [Joseph] Cornell [*Museum*, ca. 1945–48] and things like that. And Dominique had commissioned Warhol to do a portrait of her, so there's a Warhol portrait of Jermayne MacAgy that's really wonderful. They hung it when the museum opened as a kind of homage to her. So it was on view for a long time when the Menil Collection opened in '87. It's a really beautiful portrait of Jermayne smoking. I think she died of lung cancer because she was a big smoker. But anyway that was a curious connection for Walter and Dominique, and a shared affinity between the three of them. But she was someone who had influenced both of them. Then of course Walter had his own spin on things. But anyway that was another person in the field who did these very inventive combinations of objects from different aspects of life, putting them together in unusual ways, so that they really had a dynamism and a way of revealing something new about themselves and about you as a viewer. Walter was good at that too.

He just loved the objects so much; he just loved them and he loved the people who made them. He was so interested and fascinated by it all, and that came through too. He had a real gift with putting things on the wall or in the room and making it anew. That's not something that you can learn—you can learn how to do it better, but I think it's innate. There were a lot of aspects of Walter that even in these awards—well the Bard wasn't his award, but the Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement is something the Menil started in honor of Walter and it's wonderful and curators rarely get recognized. Artists get grants and stuff, but there are very few grants for curators—this may be the only grant for curators, just pure grant. The only string, I think, is that you have to give a talk or something at Menil. There are very few for curators and I think that's great and to have that be a legacy of Walter is wonderful. But I don't know that anybody—and this may be my prejudice—has come close to living up to the achievement of what Walter has done or the kind of inventiveness or the poetic ability that Walter had to make things really come alive in a very beautiful way, the way a good writer can make words sound so different and beautiful. But also to just go out there in a whole new direction, I don't know that anybody can replicate that. They might get an aspect of him, but I don't think they get the whole picture. I don't know, maybe I'm just prejudiced, but really special people like that, they only come along once in a blue moon. So it's not like you're going to have fifty Walter Hopps, just like you're not going to have fifty of [Pablo] Picasso in a century or [Marcel] Duchamp or Rauschenberg.

There's no other Bob Rauschenberg out there. There might be other artists who are really talented, maybe even equally talented, but Bob was special. Given your love of dance and all, the *Gluts* [1986–89/1991–94] and the things he did for those sets when they were lost, and they just

put these things together; these to me are some of the most beautiful Rauschenbergs that exist, and they're just so spontaneous and they're just so beautiful. [Note: When the delivery of the original set designed by Nancy Graves for Trisha Brown's *Lateral Pass* (1985) was delayed for a 1987 performance in Naples, Rauschenberg created an emergency set from salvaged scrap metal, elements of which were then made into *Neapolitan Gluts* (all 1987)]



Set designed by Rauschenberg for Trisha Brown Dance Company's *Lateral Pass* (1985), Teatro di San Carlo, Naples, January 1987. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Luciano Romano

Even when Bob would just drip paint and it just dripped down, it just looked better on what he did than on anybody else's. Some people just have that ability, that gift. There have been no other Turners in our history. There are no other Bob Rauschenbergs. There's no other Walter Hopps. If you get lucky enough to have your life touched by one of them, it changes you and it makes you have a life that most people don't get to have. My association with the Menil, through Walter, what it meant and how it started and the kinds of things that it endeavored to do and what it still endeavors to do, that's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I'm lucky to have had that. I don't know that anybody comes close to either Bob or Walter. That's one reason Bob was intimidating

to me because he was so gifted. How do you even go and try and make an artwork after seeing what he's done. They both had that ability sometimes to really show you how extraordinary something can be. It's like looking at a star in the sky. How do you top that?

Q: It seems also that they had in common these work ethics and once they were driven and passionate about something, they would devote themselves completely.

Huber: Yes. Incredible focus. Walter could be scattered, but also he was driven to do these things and had this drive and this passion to do it.

Q: That must have been contagious for collaborators.

Huber: Yes. I think they could feed off each other because they both were funny and very witty and bright. They were both very, very smart, and they both enjoyed each other's company and they both admired each other's work. It was fun. That feeds on itself and makes it even more exciting. Bob would say, "Oh I've just made a new painting, I want to put it in," and Walter would go, "Okay." He was open to anything that Bob wanted to do and I think Bob appreciated that. He never tried to—it certainly was his show and he had a vision for it, but he was very open. It was a real collaboration and he was willing to have it change and evolve and ebb and flow because he was really interested in what Bob wanted. It was very much about Bob's input, and some curators aren't like that. With Walter, it was a real collaborative process. He was really open to whatever Bob wanted to do. If Bob wanted to do it, it was okay with him.

That's another reason I think the show was so interesting. To me, why I learned so much from it, it was because with every installation, every building had different architectural elements that created new possibilities for Bob to make something different. I remember in [Guggenheim] Bilbao there were these ropes hanging off the balcony. [Note: *Earth Pull*, 1998, a site-specific installation] He made it for there so it was a new piece and a new way of seeing his work. That was thrilling. The early Combines and other early works are seminal, groundbreaking, but I think it misses the boat when they are considered the main event because it was interesting from the beginning to the end to me. That was a real revelation and that was something that Bob and Walter could show you from the way the shows were done.



Installation view, Rauschenberg's *Earth Pull* (1998) in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1998–99. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Erika Barahona Ede © FMGB Guggenheim Bilbao

Q: So was Walter ever involved with E.A.T. [Experiments in Art and Technology]?

Huber: I found a file where there were some notes about [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver, what he was doing and all, but I don't know if Walter had a direct involvement or not. I can't remember. It was before I knew him and I don't know if he just had a peripheral interest or was talking about it, but if he had anything specific or official to do with it, I don't know. You could ask Julie Martin about that.

Q: Yes, she's been interviewed.

Huber: Oh, okay.

Q: Julie's great, yes. Is there any question that I haven't asked you that you would like to answer?

Huber: I don't think so. I'm sure when you leave I'll think of something that I should have let you know about, but I can't think of anything right now. Definitely talk to David about the details on that piece that Merce had, the replica of *Minutiae*, because I think that there was some conflict between the two of them as to who owned it, but Bob always felt it was his. Or maybe Neil would remember about that because Neil was a fellow at the Smithsonian, Neil Printz, who's in New York, who's doing now the Warhol catalogue raisonné. Do you know Neil? Have you talked to him at all? He would be another good person to talk to about the retrospective in '76 because he worked on it with Walter closely.

Q: It's possible he's being interviewed by others from the group doing the interviews.

Huber: You should check with David and find out because Neil would be somebody important to interview. But anyway David would know more of the details about *Minutiae* because I just have a memory from 1976 and I didn't know Walter well, but I remember there was some issue about that and that was the resolution, which was a brilliant resolution.

Q: So eventually the replica ended up with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, yes?

Huber: I think they have it. Do they, is that true? I'm pretty sure they have it, yes. But I can't think of anything else right now.

Q: Well we can close here and if we remember I'll come back with other questions.

Huber: Yes. Yes.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

Huber: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]