

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Deli Sacilotto

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Deli Sacilotto conducted by Cameron Vanderscoff on July 24, 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: Deli Sacilotto

Location: Boca Raton, Florida

Interviewer: Cameron Vanderscoff

Date: July 24, 2015

Q: Okay, so today is Friday, July 24, 2015 and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here with Deli Sacilotto in his residence in Boca Raton.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: I've heard it pronounced several different ways since I've been here.

Sacilotto: Boca Raton, in the mouth of the rat.

[Laughter]

Q: We're here for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project to talk about your print collaborations with Rauschenberg in a couple of different contexts. But first I'd like to know a little bit about you. So if you could just state for the record when and where you were born and connect some dots about how you got into printmaking. I'm curious about how you came to this point where you collaborated with Rauschenberg and sort of walking through the steps of your own early interest in printmaking, your background.

Sacilotto: Yes. My interest in art goes back to the time when I went to the Alberta College of Art [and Design, Canada]. I was born in British Columbia. Calgary, Alberta was the closest place that I knew had an art department and so my interest drove me there. I spent four years at the college, which was a great experience after coming from a small town in the Rocky Mountains called Kimberley. It was a lead and zinc mining town. I grew up there, fishing in the mountains with my brother and sometimes we'd go hunting. But trout fishing was one of my fortes and what I loved to do in that time. Well after going to art school—

Q: So in the first place, if you're coming from this small Rockies town, what was your first exposure to art? Why was it art in the first place?

Sacilotto: Well all through high school that seemed to be one of my focuses and one of my best projects, best media. I always was good at drawing. So right after high school the logical thing for me to do was go to art school. My first interest was commercial art because I know that would be where I could perhaps earn a living. When I got there I found my interest shifting to painting. The art school had no graphic work at that time; the only thing they had was linocuts. So once I graduated, I had gotten a scholarship to go to New York and I went to New York and studied at the Art Students League [of New York] and at the Pratt Graphics Center. Then I came back and became a one-man band in the printmaking department and established etching and lithography and all of these things. So I stayed for four years. But after having gotten a taste of New York, after four years I left and went back to New York.

I had just gotten married a short time before I got to New York and I heard I got a Canada Council [for the Arts] grant to study in Italy. So I went to Italy. That was in 1964. That's when I met [Donald] Don Saff. He had gotten a Fulbright to study in Urbino [Italy] through the same person we met in New York, a person by the name of Emiliano Sorini. He worked with the [Atelier] 2RC in Rome at one point, but he was from Urbino and went to the school there. So he suggested that school to us. He said it was a great place and he loved it. So we both applied to that same school and ended up going there.

I had gotten there early. It was raining all the time at that particular point. I went to visit some relatives up north, northeast of Venice, and I spent some time with these relatives, lots of cousins and aunts and uncles. Then I came back. Meanwhile Donald Saff had come to Urbino. I could speak a little Italian at that point because I grew up speaking *friulano* [Friulian], which is a northeastern language. I thought it was a dialect but it turns out to be a separate language based on Italian and some ancient languages that kind of got into it. But anyway, I came back and as soon as I went to the college, they said oh, this person from America has been looking for you. And it was Donald. So they gave me his address and I went there and opened the door and from then on we started looking for a place for him and we became good friends.

We spent the whole year working. He did some prints, I did some lithographs. My main focus at that time was lithography because there was so much that hadn't been out there. *The Tamarind Book* [of *Lithography: Art and Techniques*, 1971] hadn't been printed at that time and when I worked in lithography at the school, they had some old presses and they knew a lot about the chemistry, which fascinated me immensely.

Afterwards I came back to New York. Donald meanwhile, who had gotten his doctorate at Columbia University [New York], he came back early, before I did. He was teaching there for the summer. He was living in Queens with his parents and then when he left, he got the job at the University of South Florida [Tampa]. As he was about to leave he said, “I’ll recommend you to the head of the art department at Columbia University Teachers College,” where he got his doctorate. I said, “Wonderful.” That person was [Edwin] Ed Ziegfeld who, along with [Ray] Faulkner, wrote *Art Today* [1941], which was a classic book on art at that time. He was a very congenial personality and I got to know him quite well. I taught at Columbia Teachers College for several years. And I was still very much interested in doing a book on lithography.

Q: So just parenthetically for a moment, so you’re practicing lithography, was there a depth of knowledge about lithography in Italy, in Urbino, that you weren’t finding in the States?

Sacilotto: There was. That’s right, there was.

Q: Who was doing this work? I’m curious about what the scene is. I know ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York] is founded in ’57, so they’re starting to do some printmaking things.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: But—

Sacilotto: See, Tamarind [Institute] apparently was just getting going, I think, about that time. I remember somebody recommending it to me saying, “You should apply and go to Tamarind,” but I didn’t want to leave New York at that point. But being in Italy, I learned a great deal of the chemistry of lithography, which I’d never read anywhere before; not only how to grind stones properly, but the chemistry involved when gum arabic hit the stone, what happened when the crayon, the tusche, hit the stone. There are chemical reactions, I wrote those down. That fascinated me.

So when I came back and I was teaching at the Columbia University, the Teachers College, I spoke to Ed Ziegfeld, the chairman. I said, “How does one go about having a book published?” I wanted to do a book on lithography because I had been writing a lot of this information down. A few weeks later, he invited my wife and me to dinner at his place. His publisher, the editor of his book, was there from Holt, Rinehart and Winston. I said, “Well, I’d like to do a book on lithography. How does one go about doing that?” “Well,” he said, “We’re a college textbook publishing company. We’d like to do a book on all of the techniques, rather than just lithography. Lithography is too specialized for us.” So that’s when I thought well, I can’t let this pass.

Don was already at the University of South Florida, so I called him. He had professed an interest in doing a book together and he worked primarily in etching. So I called him. I said, “Do you still want to do that book?” His doctoral thesis was on the history of etching. This worked out

perfectly. “So do you still want to do the book?” I said, “I met with the editor at Holt, Rinehart and Winston, and we need a sample chapter and an outline,” and that’s it.

So I flew down on a long weekend to Florida. I spent the time rewriting the chemistry of lithography as one of the chapters in our book. We did a whole outline. Then I flew back on a Monday morning to New York. We had somebody at the university type it up, the fastest typist in the world. [Laughs] I came back, presented that to the editor at Holt, Rinehart and Winston. His name was [Daniel W.] Dan Wheeler, incredible guy. Four months later they came back with the contract. They said, “We’d like to do it.” They’d already published *Printmaking Today* with Jules Heller [1958]. But I remember him saying the books are as different as the authors that print them. He said, “We’d like to do it. We would be willing to do another book on the same area.”

That’s when we started working diligently and getting more material for the book. Meanwhile I’d gone to Italy, to Fabriano and taken photographs of the papermaking department; they had some chiaroscuro light and dark watermarks that they specialized in. I took photographs of the process, where they made it and how it was made, which I wrote in our book. A lot of those photographs are ones that I took on that particular trip. A lot of the other photographs in the book we took. The publisher also gave us money to buy cameras. So we both bought one of the latest Nikon cameras with the close-up lens and we both took photographs of process and so on with the cameras that they bought for us. But anyway, it took a while.

Meanwhile a few years went by and nothing was done on the book. I was getting very anxious because I was busy in New York doing printing and doing various things and then I had an exhibition of my work, I forget where it was. Jules Heller, strangely enough, who wrote the book on printmaking, was the head of the printmaking department or the dean of York University in Toronto. He wrote me a letter saying that he liked my work and he offered me a job teaching at the university. I turned him down.

[Laughter]

Sacilotto: Again I didn't want to leave New York. But then a year later the place where I was working, Bank Street Atelier, went bankrupt. They were associated with several galleries in New York and it was a great printing place. It was started by [Jacques] Mourlot in New York and then there were disagreements with the galleries, Mourlot left and they were without a direction in the printmaking. So I went there, I was working there and I loved it. But when they went bankrupt, all of a sudden that job in Toronto sounded pretty attractive. So I called back Douglas Morton, who was the chairman of the art department. I said, "Is that job still available?" He said, "Yes. Are you interested?" So I ended up going up there and teaching for two years. I thought this is Canada, I'll go back, I'll be able to relax in this teaching position and do a lot of the writing in the book.

So I got up there and there was no information that I could refer to, that I could use, in the university library. So I ended up driving down to New York, back and forth. I'd go to the Butler Library at Columbia, which is an incredible resource; they had a collection from the Printing

Historical Society, I think, they had a huge collection of books on printing. Avery [Architectural and Fine Arts] Library had books, historical books, on early lithography. There were big volumes published by Baron Taylor in Paris, it was *Voyages pittoresques [et romantiques dans l'ancienne France]* done in ancient France. They were published, I think, from 1820 to 1878, around that period. So it included a lot of the great lithographs by some of the best artists of that period. I had access to these books and I could photograph them and so on. Since I was at that time teaching at Columbia University Teachers College, I had a card so I could go into these libraries and do research and do whatever I needed to do, which was great.

As I was worried that they were going to cancel our contract, I left after two years—

Q: Left Toronto?

Sacilotto: In Toronto, right. I found a New York loft in Toronto and I was converting that loft for working and living with big space and then I made a mistake. I had to hook up an electric stove in the place so I could have a kitchen. And of course what happens is that from the electrician, the information goes to somebody in the city and they have to come inspect the work. I remember the day they came and suddenly they could see we were getting ready to live there and said, “You can’t live here.” I knew that was finished. That was finished. So that ended it for Toronto. I sent my wife and my daughter who was, I think, just two at the time, back to New York. They lived with her mother and I just stayed in the loft and wrote for several months, working on the book. I finally sent the information to the publisher and we re-established

contact. Then I would come down to Graphicstudio [University of South Florida] and Don was here and we'd coordinate some projects.

Q: So Graphicstudio was founded in '68, is that right?

Sacilotto: Founded in '68.

Q: So by this point we're into the later sixties?

Sacilotto: That's right. Around '72 I would come down and Don had started working with Rauschenberg at that time.

Q: The *Made in Tampa* [1972–73] pieces?



Robert Rauschenberg
Tampa 3, 1972
Lithograph with collage and graphite
43 7/8 x 47 x 1/4 inches (111.4 x 119.4 x .6 cm)
From an edition of 20 Arabic numerals and 20
Roman numerals, published by Graphicstudio,
University of South Florida, Tampa

Sacilotto: Yes, the *Made in Tampa* pieces, that's right. And [Alan] Al Eaker had some of the pieces that looked like cardboard. I remembered coming down just at that point and he had these cardboard pieces. He wanted to show me Rauschenberg's new pieces. So I came in and they had several of these cardboard ceramic pieces on the wall. I saw these pieces of cardboard hanging on the wall. I said, "Well, where are the pieces? Where is Rauschenberg's work?" He said, "These are them." I said, "What?" And I went over and I couldn't believe it. I hadn't realized it was ceramic. They were just so incredibly done. Even the labels that were put on were just so exact and the lettering on the cardboard boxes. They were so incredible.



Robert Rauschenberg
Tampa Clay Piece 4, 1972
 Fired clay with screenprinted decal, platinum luster and soil patina
 9 1/2 x 17 x 1 1/2 inches (24.1 x 43.2 x 3.8 cm)
 From an edition of 10 Arabic numerals and 10 Roman numerals, published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa

I'm sure Don Saff probably told you the story about how at one point, while they were working on these projects, they had all this cardboard lying around and the janitor came and cleaned it all out. And they had to find out which truck went to the dump to get rid of these. They went to the dump, sorted through everything, and they were able to find all of the pieces that they were working with [laughs] and go back. But that was an amazing project.

Later as I went back to New York and I was in my own studio, I was getting more and more involved with photogravure. My interest in that goes back to 1966 when I first came back from

Italy. Don had gone to Brooklyn and ultimately to Florida and established Graphicstudio. I was in New York and I continued the interest in—I started working—I needed a job and this friend who we both knew, who was from Urbino where we studied, he was printing with [Leonard] Baskin and Louise Nevelson, a lot of different artists, Jack Levine. He was doing only etchings and he said—well someone came to him to print Edward [Sheriff] Curtis's North American Indian photographs from the original plates. He said, "I can't do it," and he knew I needed a job so he talked to me. He said, "If you're willing to do this, you can use my etching press in the evenings and during the weekend when I'm not using it and print these." I said yes, I needed the job at that point. I said, "Great, I'll do it."

Q: So this technique had not been done very much, had it been, since?

Sacilotto: No.

Q: Like the original time of Curtis?

Sacilotto: Yes, it hadn't been. I think right at the time there was only one other—that was one of the largest projects of photogravure, I think, that was done in this country when it happened. Of course with 1930 the project ended because of the Depression, '29, '30. All of the books hadn't sold as well as was intended and so essentially it dispersed the project. The Morgan Library [and Museum, New York] had some of the first two volumes and they ended up in a bookstore in Boston. But in 1966 I borrowed the studio of Emiliano Sorini, used his etching press, and worked on these for a year and a half.

Essentially it saved my life financially at that point. But what happened was, all the time I was printing these and some of them had never been printed since the time of Curtis and they were in sleeves and they were covered with beeswax, which I had to melt and get off before I could even start printing. A lot of it had Curtis's writing on the jacket before they had the engraving done at the bottom and it was really fascinating. But all this time I was saying, god, not only are these images beautiful, but this technique is fantastic; how is it done? That's when I would go to the New York Public Library and start reading up on it. And there were some books, one English book by [Herbert Mills] Cartwright on photogravure [*Notes on the Rotary Photogravure Process*, ca. 1930], which was one of the most helpful ones published, I think in the early 1900s, and then other sources. I found there was a place in New Jersey that had done photogravure by hand. There were two old guys ready to retire. They were changing over and I offered the one who knew a lot about what they did to come to my studio and see what I was doing and he gave me a lot of helpful hints in terms of how to do it, how to put the tissue on, how to let it dry, and so on.

So after that I worked primarily—see, what my main focus was at that time, because it was a positive process you needed a positive photograph to work from. I said I thought the artist could draw on Mylar as a positive instead of the photograph. I said this is fantastic. I worked with Jim Dine and did a lot of projects with him before I did a photograph because it was positive. I had him work on Mylar. He would make the drawing on Mylar, I'd make a photogravure plate, and once I had the plate, if necessary he could work back into the plate to add things. And I said, "This is absolutely fantastic."

So I did a whole series of flower plates with Jim Dine, other things, portraits of Nancy [Dine], and so on. It was just incredible. And then I had somebody come by who wanted to do some photographs. I said, “Well, okay. I’ll give it a whirl.” And they came out beautifully. They wanted it on a thin paper, almost like a tissue paper, but a little heavier. There were about ten different photographs that he had because I made the positives. I had a camera set up and from the negative I would blow them up and make a positive on film and use that. These photographs came out beautifully. So at that point I said, “Now I think I could work with photographs,” whereas before it was all just positive drawings.

Q: Working with them on Mylar, yes.

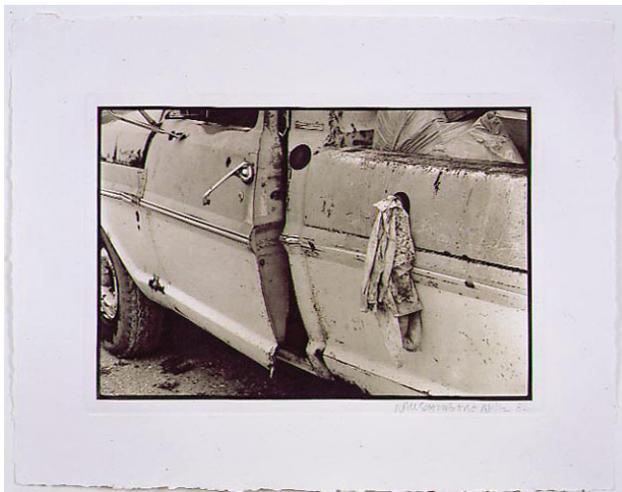
Sacilotto: So that’s when I thought, oh, who would I like to work with? And Rauschenberg was the one person I would’ve loved to work with.

Q: So why Rauschenberg?

Sacilotto: Because he had done a lot of photography. There was a lot of photography in his work and I’d seen some and I said, “He’s the perfect person to do this project with.” I knew wherever he went, he’d always photograph things; sometimes he’d use them in his paintings and so on. So I talked to Don Saff about that. He’d been working with Rauschenberg so we went to see him and I proposed a project to—

Q: Are you in Captiva [Florida] at this point? Or you're in New York?

Sacilotto: No, I think it was in New York. Don would come back and forth to New York quite often. But I think it was in New York when we went to see him and proposed the photogravure project with him. He said, oh sure, he'd love to do that. So he went back to Captiva and he had a photo curator and somebody who would print his photographs. He made a selection; first of all, the *America Mix*[-16, 1983], which were black-and-white like that one and then there are two on the wall there. He made a selection of the photographs and brought me the prints.



Robert Rauschenberg
Truck from *Photogravures–Suite 1*
(*America Mix-16*), 1983
From a portfolio of 16 photogravures
20 1/2 x 26 1/2 inches (52.1 x 67.3 cm)
each, horizontal and vertical
From an edition of 40 published by Iris
Editions

What was amazing with all of these prints and the photographs was that they were composed exactly as you see them. The fact that it had the black edge around them was almost a vindication that he composed it directly without cropping the images. They were 35 millimeter, so that was full-frame and exactly as he composed the image.

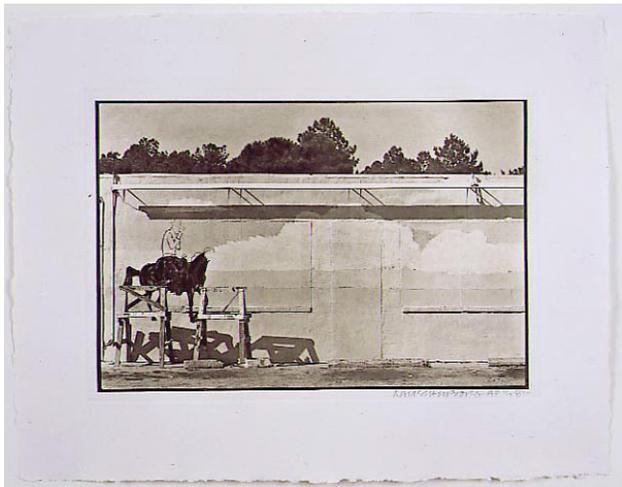
Q: So was he familiar with the technique of photogravure at this time? Are you going to him and saying, “Work with me,” or are you also pitching this technique as well?

Sacilotto: I’m pitching the technique as well as—I’m pitching the technique. I wasn’t sure if he was familiar with it. But I did bring samples. At that point I had these other photographic examples that I could show him. And he liked the idea. He liked the idea. Initially it was going to be perhaps a dozen photographs. He went back to Captiva and made the selection and he came back and it was sixteen. He said, “I can’t do less, we made a selection and that was it, we couldn’t get any less than the sixteen.” So it became the *America Mix* dash sixteen; sixteen different photographs.

These were taken from photographs that he took around the country—some in California, some in Florida, some in different locations. In some cases he had forgotten where he had actually taken the photograph. But there’s one in particular of a car, where you see just the rear end of the car, it’s an old car, and you see garbage cans in the back of a truck, it was actually a truck. The gas cap was stuffed, some rags and lace were coming out of the gas cap. He said, “That’s a very Southern image.” It was taken somewhere in Alabama or someplace. Then he had one in Venice Beach and somebody working on their car and another great one in Florida, which was an alligator. It was an alligator and there was a palm leaf. The shadow of the palm leaf was perfectly on the alligator so you see the alligator, but you also see the shadow of the palm leaf on the alligator itself. Great image. And then some of the other images that he took—all of these pointed, to me, to what a great eye he had. Because in many cases these photographs that he took were almost like his constructions, like his paintings—the same kind of sensibility.

Q: What was that sensibility, do you think, that unified these different media?

Sacilotto: Well, it was the ability to see beyond the object and create this painting, this total two-dimensional as well as three-dimensional idea, visually. He had one photograph, it was of a billboard being painted and it was in the process—it was a Marlboro Man cigarette ad and you see it was partially done; you'd see the outline of the cowboy, of the horse, and there were clouds in the sky. Well the clouds in the sky on the billboard almost mimicked the actual clouds behind the billboard. I'm sure he saw that. This is one of those things. All of these photographs that I worked with him on and made into photogravures all had this incredible visual acuity. I'm pointing to that particular one—the one of a wall, which has a screen on it and it says, "Shop day and night." But this is like a Rauschenberg construction. It's like something that he would do, but here it is in actuality and he photographed it. On the right hand side, it has lettering that is almost disappearing, but produces kind of a textural element. It has the screen element on the bottom. All of those elements are something—perhaps it's even better than he would have thought up himself and here it is. But it's like Rauschenberg, there it is, already existing, you see? And that always amazed me with a lot of his photographs. So he had that incredible ability.



Robert Rauschenberg
Horse from *Photogravures-Suite 1*
(*America Mix-16*), 1983
From a portfolio of 16 photogravures
20 1/2 x 26 1/2 inches (52.1 x 67.3 cm)
each, horizontal and vertical
From an edition of 40 published by Iris
Editions

He was always excited about doing these. Because he presented me with actually photographic prints, what I had to do was re-photograph them, make a negative on film, and then contact that onto another piece of film to make a positive, which I did in my studio in New York. It was on 399 Washington Street. When I started working on this I thought—I established a company called Iris Editions.

Q: You established that for this project? Or previously?

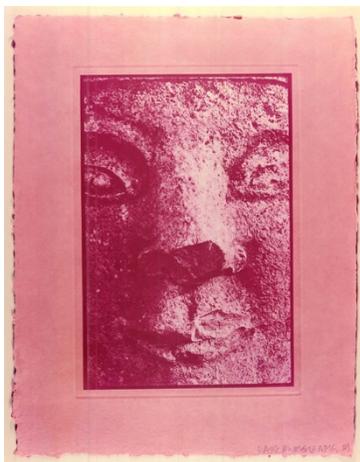
Sacilotto: No, basically for this project. I thought the iris represented not only a flower, but also represented the iris diaphragm of a camera and so I had a chop made and a logo, which I used on the Rauschenberg pieces. But I did that and—

Q: You felt you should have a formal shop for this as opposed to working as some sort of a freelancer, so it's under your name?

Sacilotto: Yes. And since I got more into photogravure at that point, this was a major photogravure project for me. I thought, well this is maybe changing my whole direction.

Q: So you could maybe launch something new with this.

Sacilotto: Yes. Yes. And suddenly as I was working on that, meanwhile the China trip happened and he gave me twenty-one images that he took in China [*Photogravures- Suite 2 (China Mix 21)*, 1983]. I remember going to his place and he said, “Could you print on pink paper?” I said, “Sure, I can print on any kind of paper.” He showed me this paper that he had, he was going to use for another project; it was made by Kathryn Clark in Indiana. She had a hand papermaking place. It wasn’t enough for the entire project, but I said, “I can use these.” So I had paper made by a person called John Koller in Connecticut and he was a hand papermaker. When I printed a few images on the pink paper, I thought, well, I’d do a white chine-collé to bring out the image, which I did. He said, “Well, maybe we should have three different pink papers and three different inks, red inks.” I said, “Yes, we can do that.”



Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled from *Photogravures–Suite 2 (China Mix-21)*,
1983
From a portfolio of 21 photogravures
26 1/4 inches x 20 1/2 (66.7 x 52.1 cm) each,
horizontal and vertical
From an edition of 40 published by Iris Editions

So I had sample papers made. There was a cool pink, a warm pink, and kind of a medium pink. I had an orange-red, purple-red, three different red inks. At one point I proofed up all of these, all of the images. I brought them to him—I would take those to his studio up on [381] Lafayette Street. We'd lay them out and he would write out what paper he wanted and what color ink for each of the images. Well—

Q: So you used a variety, then?

Sacilotto: We used a variety for the project. There were twenty-one different images. So what happened with that, the paper that I had made with John Koller, he used a dye for the paper. The paper that was from Kathryn Clark in Indiana used pigment in the fibers and it was much more permanent, which I didn't know at the time. But she was charging about ten dollars a sheet whereas John Koller was charging me only two dollars a sheet. And I thought, well, I was funding the entire project so I went and had the paper made by John Koller.

Q: So you were putting up the money for this from—

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: So say a little bit about the—so the financing arrangement is you approached Rauschenberg.

Sacilotto: I approached Rauschenberg.

Q: And you also approached him with a financing arrangement? You foot the bill as you go?

Sacilotto: No, it was—yes. I didn't work on the financial arrangement with him except that I would do the editions. I would do it. So I didn't go to him, which I could have. I ran into problems and I realized afterwards that I could have gone to him and he would have very generously given me whatever I needed to for the project. But that was one of the things that I found out because the *China Mix* was never completed. The reason was that the paper made by John Koller in Connecticut, with a dye, faded. So—

Q: At what point? In the process itself?

Sacilotto: No, but once it was hung and light affected it; the paper would turn from a bright pink color to a light beige. I brought this to Rauschenberg's attention and he said, "Well, that's just the way it is." He didn't mind. He didn't mind. That was okay with him.

Q: As a final product, that didn't bother him? That it was beige instead of pink?

Sacilotto: Well it didn't—he said, "That's just the way it is. If it fades, it fades." But it bothered me. It bothered me a bit—so ultimately I never completed the project.

Q: So it was your decision then?

Sacilotto: It was my decision, yes. The ones however that were printed on the paper that was made by Kathryn Clark and used the pigment, those didn't fade. Looking back I wish I had simply gone to Rauschenberg to say, "I can't afford it, but let's make all of the paper from Kathryn Clark in Indiana," because it was far superior, but being ten dollars a sheet I couldn't afford it. I knew in retrospect that if I had gone to Rauschenberg, he would have bought the paper for me to do it because he was apparently very generous that way. I know that when he worked with Styria Studio on Broome Street, they had some financial problems and Rauschenberg gave them like thirty thousand dollars to complete a project of his own work.

Q: That may have been the *Shirtboards* [1990] one, I'm wondering.

Sacilotto: I'm not sure.

Q: Anyway—

Sacilotto: Yes, I'm not sure what the project was. But there was a point where they skipped town and nobody could find them. People would keep calling me up, "Do you know what happened to Adi [K.] Rischner?" "I don't know." He disappeared.

Q: Was that a unique sort of—because I actually interviewed someone several weeks ago who worked for a time at Styria.

Sacilotto: Oh, right.

Q: So is that a sort of unique event? That someone would just sort of—

Sacilotto: That wasn't [Robert] Bob Blanton by any chance?

Q: No, no. It was a guy named Charles Lahti who worked there for maybe two years in the late seventies. But was that a unique sort of event, for someone to just disappear? I'm curious—

Sacilotto: Yes, it is. That's unusual. And I don't know anyone else where that happened. There's a person who worked with Bob Blanton; Bob Blanton worked with Adi Rischner at one point and then he established his own shop and worked with LeRoy Neiman to one of the—Knoedler, I believe. And then he did a lot of other work, did some things for Chuck Close as well. But—

Q: So cycling back to the *China Mix* then, so if the *America Mix* is completed, the *China Mix* is not because of this issue with the paper and the dye versus the pigment, what became of any proofs for the *China Mix* project?

Sacilotto: Some of the proofs, because I started—see, what I did, I went to him and had perhaps a dozen signed copies, some of the initial ones, the APs [artist's proofs]. So I had those done and I was doing it piecemeal. But then I had quite a number of prints that were made, but unsigned. I held onto them for years and then I remember calling up David White, who's really a great guy. I said, "Look, I still have these plates, I have a lot of unsigned prints from the *China Mix*, what

should I do with these?” This was before Bob died because I thought maybe if I get them signed at least they’d be worth something and the project had ended. So he talked with the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation. In the meantime the Foundation had gotten established in Captiva and things had changed. And he had, what’s her name, became in charge of the Foundation. So he had to work a lot of things through the Foundation at that point. So he—they said, “We just destroy them.” So ultimately, I did.

Q: Because the idea was that there wasn’t any—destroying them as opposed to—because it’s interesting, because of course now the Foundation has this very extensive archive. And it’s gone into very kind of archival mode, where it’s preserving lots of different sorts of ephemera related to Bob Rauschenberg.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: And so the decision in this case, it was just incomplete?

Sacilotto: That’s right. And so they were never completed. The *America Mix* on the other hand was. So those are still in existence. I think even before the Foundation was established I went to Rauschenberg because I was having financial problems just surviving in New York at that time. And I had somebody who was interested in buying them. It was a gallery person in New York, but that person did not have a good reputation. So I went back to Rauschenberg and I said, “Well, I’ve got these, I have somebody who wants to buy it, but this person I know doesn’t have a good reputation—”

Q: So without going—we don't need the name necessarily, but to not have a good reputation, being unscrupulous in some way?

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: Or the idea is—?

Sacilotto: The dealer was very unscrupulous. I think Bob knew this person as well and knew. So he ultimately bought them from me. He bought them back. I was delighted with that because it gave me some survival cash at that time [laughs] and also these went to a place where they could use them.

Q: Right. So then since you financed this off the bat was that sort of the first juncture at which you recouped anything? Or had there been anything earlier as far as prints?

Sacilotto: Beforehand there were—

Q: The editions?

Sacilotto: Yes. I had sold a number.

Q: Because there are forty, I think there's—

Sacilotto: I did forty, yes.

Q: Yes.

Sacilotto: But I had set aside, I think, twenty of those, which I'd sell individually, and twenty I wanted to sell as a portfolio. Now, they had a show at Castelli Graphics [New York] of these prints, once they were out. So they were framed, they had them up, and they had the opening of all times on Yom Kippur, a Jewish Holiday. And the head of the gallery was Jewish. I said what, of all places. Of course Rauschenberg came with his entourage and people showed up and a number of pieces were sold. But I couldn't believe that they would have had the opening right at this time.

So there wasn't much publicity, I thought, because here I thought this project would really be a financial bonanza—it was photographs, it was unique. People hadn't heard that much of photogravures. I took a set to the Museum of Modern Art [New York], spoke to Riva Castleman, and she said, "Well, did Rauschenberg do anything to the images?" I said, "No. We've printed on handmade paper and they were chine-collé, but they're photographs, straight photographs." She said, "Really, they belong in the photography department rather than the printmaking department." I went to the photography department. At that time, whom did they have? Oh, John Szarkowski, I think, was head of the photography department. They said, "Oh just drop it off, leave it here," said that he'd look at it and that they'd just call me and say, "Okay, come pick it up." Didn't hear a thing. So it fell right between photography and prints.

Q: Because he hadn't been manipulating them or adding additional things?

Sacilotto: Right.

Q: That was sort of what pushed it over as far as these taxonomies.

Sacilotto: That's right. To me it was disappointing because already you had a certain history of photogravure especially with [Alfred] Stieglitz and *Camera Work*, 1903, 1904, when these were—and some of the photogravures reached very high figures from that period. Stieglitz, of course, even at that time, by the end of *Camera Work*, had trouble getting photogravures done and so he used half-tone reproductions to make prints of the photographs. So the only other project in those early years was the Curtis. So there's a lot of soul-searching and trial and error that went on in terms of my first publishing venture, you see.

Q: And this is—we're in '83, just—

Sacilotto: Yes, '83, that's right. And it was just at that time as well, when I was working on the Rauschenbergs, that Barbara Gladstone came by and she wanted to do a suite of Robert Mapplethorpe. Mapplethorpe fascinated me; he was already starting to really get an incredible amount of attention. So I wanted to do it and she had ten flower pieces that she wanted me to do. I said, "Well, the only way I would do this is that I would co-publish with you." She reluctantly agreed to co-publish them.

Q: So what's the argument that you're making say to Rauschenberg or to Mapplethorpe as to why you should use this photogravure technique? It's not been used extensively since '29, '30, you were saying?

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: With the Curtis project, so it's not something that's necessarily en vogue or seeing a huge— why it's produced at the time. So what's your argument? Why should you—

Sacilotto: Why do it?

Q: Why do this with your prints? So thinking about these shots that Rauschenberg has taken or these shots—or Mapplethorpe's flowers?

Sacilotto: My argument, and what I was excited about in the process, is that it's archivally much more permanent than any photograph. You have pigment on paper and depending on the quality of the paper and the pigment, it's absolutely permanent. You could submerge it in water and take it out—nothing happens to it. It's just like some of the early etchings, going back to the Rembrandt [van Rijn] etchings of pigment on paper. They'll last forever essentially. A photograph has to be very carefully maintained; sometimes they yellow, sometimes things happen. It's a gelatin and the pigmentation and the silver halite in the solution. But ink on paper, in addition to its permanency, has a look that is different, which is a velvety quality of the black

and yet has all the tones of the photograph, to the highlights. So these qualities, the same qualities that really got me excited with the Edward Curtis, I saw as an incredible bonanza for photogravure working with artists.

After working on the Rauschenberg and then the Mapplethorpes, then people started to become more and more interested in the process. One or two other people in the country started using photogravure with success with various artists. But I think I was one of the very early ones. Jon Goodman was a photogravurist who studied the process in Switzerland and he worked with a number of artists. Ultimately when I left and came down to Florida, Mapplethorpe did another series of ten flower pieces, different from the ones I did. So it became very popular.

But when I came down to Graphicstudio, in fact I came down to work on some Mapplethorpe pieces that I had. There were five figure studies of Mapplethorpe's that I did in New York; I made the plates in New York and I came down to Graphicstudio. It was going to be a Graphicstudio project and I printed them at Graphicstudio. That was in, I think about '84. '83, '84. Ultimately I came down, stayed for a number of months, supervised the printing and did one of the first full-color photogravures at that time. It was a Mapplethorpe figure study, which came out beautifully. It's hard to find now. But just to give you a bit of the working relationship I had with Rauschenberg in terms of the prints—

Q: The *China* and *America* ones?

Sacilotto: Yes, the *China and America Mix*. I would do the proofs in my studio in Tribeca and I would take them to him to check over and usually he would sign them, “AP.” So he did all of the APs first. Because of his drinking, I got particular, you see. I made sure I didn’t go there in the late afternoon. I would always go in the early afternoon because I understood he would get up and start drinking white wine or something early in the morning and then continue— So by the late afternoon I could see he wasn’t really—he was slurring his words and not really paying much attention to what was going on. So I always made a point of going in the early afternoon when he was alert.

It was interesting to me, various times when I’d go over, because there was always a certain entourage around Rauschenberg. He had a lot of people always hanging out and sometimes they would cook meals, really gourmet meals. Hisachika [Takahashi] was a Japanese houseboy. He was great, a great cook. At that time they had Rocky, the tortoise that wandered around. He would be various places. Some of what amazed me was just his ability to multitask. He would be sitting at a table working on a poster, sometimes quite large. He’d be working away, there would be people sitting around, all of them talking, and he would interact with the conversation, the television would be on—he loved soap operas and he would watch the soap opera.

One time, it was very interesting, do you know the accountant Rubin [L.] Gorewitz?
Rauschenberg had Rubin Gorewitz as his accountant. [James] Jim Rosenquist used the same accountant. At one point I was there and talking. This was on the third floor. They had a partition, a telephone around the corner. That was a sparse empty space except brushwork paintings on the wall and this was the kitchen area. A large table, Rauschenberg was working on

one side of the table and all the other people were having drinks, talking and so on. Suddenly, Rauschenberg turned around, he said, “Where’s Rubin?” They said, “I don’t know.” He was around the corner on the telephone. He said, “I wish I knew [who he was talking with], I’d feel a lot safer.” He said that. That was an interesting comment. Just a short time after that there was an article on Leona Helmsley and her problems with the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] in the paper and they had various comments from different accountants. Rubin Gorewitz was one of those. He’s this well-known accountant of a lot of famous artists in New York; what would he do? His comment in the paper was that he would have her lie to the IRS and blatantly not tell the truth. Shortly after that article appeared, Rauschenberg and Rosenquist dropped Gorewitz as their accountant. They went to, I think, Bennet [H.] Grutman, their last accountant. It was very fascinating.

Some of those things that go on behind the scenes I wasn’t privy to, but it was fascinating. I was always amazed at the ability of Rauschenberg to just continue working through at an amazing rate of speed. He didn’t seem to spend much time pondering about what to do. He just did it. He’d just do it—he seemed always to know what to do. Even the paintings, paintings that might involve silkscreen images, photographic images, and so on, and then he would go in and brush onto it. It was just direct. And he knew when it was finished. He might stand back—I watched him at one point when he was working on a painting and that was fascinating because he would just do—and it was done. It was finished. And that’s it. Put it aside, take it away. That’s it. He knew at the precise moment when he had gone as far as—and he’d go on to the next project.

What amazed me about his studio, because I think he worked a great deal, at least I spent most of the time when I'd go to visit with him on the third floor, is that it was always neat. There was nothing on the floor except for the tortoise when he would wander about. Nothing on the floor. Just his paintings on the wall and then the kitchen. So of course as you went up the stairs, the second floor, as you looked in you'd see these cases of wine and Jack Daniel's just lined up, three, four high—just cases. And his interaction with all of the people, the comments. He would listen to everything, he would watch the television and work at the same time. And he loved the double entendres. Somebody would make a joke and it had a double meaning and he loved that. He loved to partake of that, he liked to do it himself, to make up word games and so on. It was part of the mind, I think, this incredibly flexible, creative mind that I saw come out verbally as well as visually. It was just—that was absolutely amazing. The times when I saw him in Florida, even briefly when he was working at Graphicstudio, the same kind of activity, mental activity, was apparent. It just amazed me.

A little later, in the late seventies, I was down visiting with Don Saff working on our book and they started working on the sculptural pieces at Graphicstudio, *Araucan Mastaba / ROCI CHILE* [1986]. So I helped. While I was down there I helped with some of those projects.

Q: Yes and I'd like to talk actually about those and a little bit about this before we leave Lafayette. I've heard these stories, that he would wake up and kind of either sort of cook and drink throughout the day basically and then start work at some point. But it's remarkable how prolific he was, right?

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: So you found that it was easier to engage with him earlier in the day before he drank too much, so you would kind of jump in at that moment. And this is just to approve proofs and things like that?

Sacilotto: To approve proofs and then perhaps have some more logical conversation with him about the work.

Q: Sure.

Sacilotto: He was very approving. There was nothing that he said, “Don’t do this.” He always liked what I had presented him, so he’d always go with it. But the times when I’d come, I wanted to make sure that he was totally in charge of all of his faculties when he was making these decisions because there was nothing written down at that point and it was all verbal. So that was my *modus operandi* at that point.

Q: Sure. Sure. And so to close out the *America Mix* and the *China Mix* at this point, there’s nothing extant from that project, as far as the proofs et cetera?

Sacilotto: There are some that I have, some of the proofs that I’ve kept. But basically, I don’t believe it was exhibited that much. But what I did do, I managed to go on several of the trips with ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] because the *America Mix* was part of

that tour. So I managed to go to Mexico, Kuala Lumpur, I never got to China, but I traveled with it to several of the places.

Cuba was very, very interesting, I'm sure people have talked about the ROCI tour in Cuba to you. I managed to go two or three times to talk to some of the people with Don Saff on location. In Cuba there were three different locations [in Havana]; one at the National Gallery [de Bellas Artes], one at the Casa de las Américas [Galería Haydée Santamaría] where they had the full set of the *America Mix* framed up and on show, that's one of the reasons I got to go there. They also had the castle, or the fortress, with a lot of the sculptural works, right on the banks of the inlet to Cuba [Castillo de la Real Fuerza]. It was a major exhibition.

They had a lot of trouble getting there because they had to hire some 747s to put the work in and they realized at one point they couldn't get it in one plane. They had to get another plane to put the work in because by the time they had built the crates, the crates were huge. They were very well-made and they protected the work. They took up a huge amount of space. But the other mistake that happened, on the manifest where it says final destination, one of Rauschenberg's helpers wrote Cuba. At that point, that was a no-no. And when they saw that, they said, "You can't do this. You can't do this." So they had to cancel that and they had to take the work, ship it to Germany. From Germany it had to go to Mexico City and they had an arrangement with the museum in Mexico City where they would then change the labels from the museum in Mexico City and from Mexico it would then go to Cuba. So it was an enormous expense. I heard some figure, each flight, at least from New York to Mexico, was like \$150,000, just to hire the plane

and take it there. So I think by the time it went to Germany and then back to Mexico and then ultimately to Cuba, it was an enormous expense.

There were some dealers who were going to sponsor some of the expenses, but then there were a lot of problems that way because some of the dealers wanted certain works in return and Rauschenberg wasn't willing to give up those works. He wanted them to tour. So he ultimately ended up funding it all with his own money and selling some work, Cy Twombly and other works that he had in his collection, in order to fund the project.

It was fascinating to travel as part of the whole tour group to Russia, to Kuala Lumpur, to Mexico, and to see the interactions of all of the individuals. In Cuba some of the people who went down decided they would get some walkie-talkies and try to communicate while we wandered around Cuba. Well it happened to be a more powerful bandwidth than the police had. So the police suddenly said, "Who is this?" They zeroed in on two of the people with these walkie-talkies and arrested them. By the time the entourage was ready to leave, there were one or two persons still left in the Cuban jail and they had to go through all kinds of diplomatic channels in order to get them out. And they—

Q: Being Americans in a Cuban jail, right.

Sacilotto: That's right, I know.

Q: There might not be diplomatic leverage.

Sacilotto: That's right, at that time, that was—

Q: Barely now.

Sacilotto: Yes. Now, it's probably a little better. But it was fascinating because I happened to be there, I remember on one of the trips, and we went to the national gallery [Museo Nacional]. Well the national gallery had kind of a dark beige burlap on the walls and Rauschenberg said he didn't want that, he wanted to just paint it all white. He wanted to paint it white and finally when he talked to the people, they said, "We can't get white paint. We can get gold paint easier than we can get white paint, it's nowhere to be found." Another group was coming to Cuba and so they went to Sears, I think, and bought I don't know how many five-gallon containers of white paint. They brought it to the museum. They painted all the walls white with this paint and what was left over disappeared like that. Gone. After they finished. Who knows where it went?

In Cuba Rauschenberg met with Castro. I thought that was fantastic and he was invited to his seaside resort, I think he had some kind of interaction. Don Saff and I, we met Lillian Llanes [Godoy], she was Director of the Wifredo Lam Center [of Contemporary Art, Havana] in Cuba. We got to meet with her and we were invited to their place for dinner. Her husband was an officer in Cuba, in Castro's army. Both of them were very hospitable. He spoke some English, she, very little. We went there and it was a large place, but very sparse, nothing on the walls essentially. He said, I always remember, he said, "Just remember," he said, "The Iron Curtain is on your side, not on our side." I thought that was very interesting.

Russia, as part of the ROCI tour, was also very interesting because we had it at the [State] Tretyakov [Gallery, Moscow] and I think there was a national gallery there as well. [Note: *ROCI USSR* (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was presented at the Central House of Artists, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1989.] So this was very different. They weren't quite used to Americans putting on a show, you see? Some of the pieces that Rauschenberg had sometimes would come out onto the floor and they'd have to be very careful to avoid people coming over and stepping on it or not walking around it. So they had to put little barriers around some of the pieces because people would be looking around—

Q: Because it was so strange to people's experience of what art—

Sacilotto: Yes. Right. This was very new to them, a lot of the artwork. It was fascinating to get those kinds of experiences. I remember seeing somebody with a cup of tea and I said, "Where did you get the tea?" She said, "Oh, go right around the corner, there's a little tiny space about that size and there's this babushka, this older woman there, and she has a hot plate and just ask her for the tea." So I went there and she put the tea on and I was about to take it, to make this cup of tea that she had given me. She said, "No no, you have to wait. You have to wait." It had to be boiling vigorously before she allowed me to pour the tea. It was so interesting because it was all hand gestures; I knew no Russian and she didn't speak any English. But some of these experiences, it's fascinating to me, that stick in your mind.

Q: And so you mentioned that the *China* and *America Mix* is the first project that you did for Rauschenberg.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: And then you see some of the ROCI collaborations with Graphicstudio being developed. So then you being on these trips, is that because—you mentioned that a part of that was because in at least some of these places the *America Mix* was a part of the exhibition. So was that always the case? Or were you becoming more part of that entourage? You mentioned Lafayette where you're kind of parachuting in to have this conversation early in the day if possible and then going out. So how has that dynamic shifted or not by the mid-eighties?

Sacilotto: Well, I think—yes, I think in most cases, *America Mix* was shown. That gave me an essentially to participate on the trip. Kuala Lumpur, again, was interesting because I remember they said, “Well, you can't wear any yellow,” because that's a color reserved for the king. The king would come by with an entourage and he would have a yellow flag; only the king could do that. And they had a red carpet when they would come into the museum. That was a fascinating place. Of course Kuala Lumpur was a city kind of modernizing and still had a lot of shantytowns that you drove through. If you drove through this modern roadway you'd see the shantytowns on one side and then just ahead you'd see a big Mercedes-Benz plant and modern hotels and so on. And you'd walk in and you'd see Christian Dior and all the latest fashions.

But in all these places and certainly I remember in Cuba—and I liked a good cigar occasionally—we'd go out to dinner and they'd always bring cigars or they'd have a humidor and you could help yourself to some cigars. So that became part of the tour. In Kuala Lumpur there were some great restaurants as well that we managed to get to. Going to these places was always part of the highlights of the tour.

I do remember in Cuba, they have an organization, like a religious organization, called Santería. They threw essentially a party for him and they had Santería, they were all dressed in white. They would come up and do some kind of dance onstage and other musicians would be around. Well, this was in the evening and Rauschenberg got up on stage and started dancing with them, but he was at this point rather inebriated and he fell off the stage into some bushes. People quickly ran over to get him, but he was fine.

There were a lot of incidents like that in Russia. It was also fascinating because they had, [Yevgeny Aleksandrovich] Yevtushenko was going to write an introduction to Rauschenberg's show. I think he ultimately did. Well, we got to know Yevtushenko quite well. At one point I was at Graphicstudio and Don, I think, was the dean of the College of Fine Arts at that point, and [Francis T.] Borkowski was the president of the university. And they wanted to give Armand Hammer an honorary doctorate. Now at the time I was part of that group that went. We flew into Moscow, couldn't find a hotel room. There was nothing to be had. We even went to the American Embassy to try to find something and they said there was nothing. It turned out there was an Italian trade delegation in Moscow at that time and they booked up everything.

So we went to see Yevtushenko and we had dinner with him. His publisher from Denmark, I think, was there at the time. His wife was eight months pregnant and she was home, but he was quite interested in the publisher; she was an attractive woman, see. But anyway, we kept saying, “But we don’t have a place to stay.” Meanwhile it was getting late. “We don’t have a place to stay.” He said, “Don’t worry, don’t worry.” So ultimately he said, “Come with me,” and so he took Don and I both to his place. He got in and the driver, he said, “Just a minute, just a minute.” He went into his house outside of Moscow. He came back with some glasses and a bottle of vodka and he told something to the driver and he drove to Boris Pasternak’s gravesite. And there we were in the cold Moscow winter; it was cold, the trees were bare, we were all bundled up and we were having shots of vodka over Pasternak’s grave.

Then he drove us back to his house and he had a cottage aside from the house; he had the house and he had the cottage. In the cottage it was heated. He had thick English towels. He had hot and cold running water and a shower. It was really quite a luxurious place. So we ended up staying there. And of course he wrote the foreword to Rauschenberg’s exhibition in Moscow. But I remember the breakfast was fascinating. We got up, he came into breakfast, and they had samovar tea, which was very concentrated. He’d pour a little of the tea in the bottom of your cup and then they have the hot water and they pour that in. They had some kashka, which was bulgur wheat, and you put some butter in and heat that and some other things. At one point we heard this kind of rapport between Yevtushenko and his mother-in-law. She was talking and we didn’t know what they were saying. But they were arguing back and forth, it seemed heated. Eventually he left the table and went back and we heard him still arguing. He came back and he said, “Do you know what that was about? I had a telephone call came in. And I told her to tell them that I

wasn't there. And the woman said, 'But that's dishonest, you can't do that. You are here and you can't expect me to lie for you.'" And that was the whole discussion that took place. I thought that was really interesting. Very interesting.

Q: And so in the larger constellation of this trip, you're in all these places; so you're at ROCI Malaysia, Cuba, USSR—

Q: Mexico City, yes.

Q: Mexico City. So do you have a particular job or task or function? Or are you sort of on a vacation at this point? Because it seems like there are all these logistics going on and then you have Rauschenberg at the center of it. And so how do you sort of fit into this larger context—I'm kind of curious, so thinking about this entourage thing, is it mostly a social thing? A chance to go travel? Or are you sort of on a payroll in some sense doing some task? I'm just curious because there seems to be this huge group of people moving all around the world. So how does that work?

Sacilotto: Yes. That's right. No, I was definitely not on payroll. I would just be there; if they needed a hand with anything, then I would help them. But basically I had no particular work to do specifically. The fact that some of the works that I had done with Rauschenberg were being shown, that was my entrée into the whole world of Rauschenberg. So I was just another person whose plane flight and hotel were paid for and so it was just another expense that they had along with their whole entourage. In the entourage of course you had people who were hanging shows,

who specifically had tasks they would do. And of course since I was there and other people were there who didn't have these specific tasks, we were there to help if need be. I would sometimes go over and help with hanging a picture or doing this or some other thing. But there was no specific task that I had to do.

Q: As far as the *America Mix* being exhibited, that being your sort of point of entry, so is this something like Don Saff contacted you and said, "Hey, do you want to come to Malaysia," or is this Rauschenberg—because it seems to be this kind of amorphous group that sort of takes shape around these different trips.

Sacilotto: Right.

Q: So you just receive a call one day? Or are you in closer contact with either Don or with Bob?

Sacilotto: It was usually through Don. Because we had collaborated on so many projects and we'd worked together on the book, we were essentially good friends. So he is the one who essentially made it happen for me to travel. I felt very fortunate in that regard. When we did go to Moscow, at that time Rebecca [Sacilotto] and I were just dating. So I paid for her trip to come along, paid for all her expenses and her hotel. She came and spent time with Don's wife and Brenda Woodard. Do you know Brenda Woodard?

Q: I've heard of her. Yes.

Sacilotto: Yes. She had a lot to do with the whole ROCI tour. It seemed she was like a secretary or a liaison with all of the things that took place. So much of what took place kind of went through her and then she helped coordinate that. She's a very, very organized person, which a lot of the entourage was not.

Q: Because there had to be some people like her in this mix for this thing to hold together. Because you have Rauschenberg at the center, but then Rauschenberg is also following his usual routine, it sounds like. But as you pointed out, there seemed to be some massively complicated logistics, particularly around the Cuban thing. But each trip must have presented its own sorts of logistical hurdles, just to move that mass of art around the world.

Sacilotto: Exactly, oh, yes. Yes. It was a massive undertaking. Very costly and of course the problems that they had getting the work initially to Cuba was one of the most horrendous, I think, and some of the others—I never went to China, but that was complicated in its own right because China is China. They wanted to do certain things at the paper mill and ran into problems. [Note: referring to Rauschenberg's summer 1982 trip to work with the Anhui Jingxian Xuan Paper Mill that preceded the launch of ROCI] And they were afraid we were going to steal their papermaking secrets at one point. I remember Don had a copy of our book and in the book there are some of the papermaking techniques that we illustrated. According to Don they were absolutely amazed that we had documented this because that was one of their secrets they didn't think the West had, you see? This was the Japanese flexible mould where they put a bamboo mould instead of being a rigid European-type mould for making the paper, they would take the pulp and spread it onto the bamboo mould in sheets and then hang it to dry and then peel it off

and then do it again. They would literally wrap it over some bushes or different techniques at that time. But that was a cottage industry in Japan in particular, but the Chinese, being cut off for so long, still didn't know quite what they knew and what the West knew.

Q: So you have this traveling going on for ROCI and a couple of pieces do come back to Graphicstudio where you go in '84, is this? Or when do you join?

Sacilotto: Graphicstudio?

Q: Yes.

Sacilotto: I'd come down to supervise some editions of Mapplethorpe and also some Joel-Peter Witkin just prior to the Mapplethorpe. There were some other projects I helped work on in the meantime, but I never came down for any length of time except for a month or two at the most until 1997.

Hank Hine was then the director of Graphicstudio. I knew him and had been out to California to see his workshop and he came to New York once or twice to see what I was doing. He was very interested; he loved photogravure. He had a colloquium on photogravure in 1996, I believe it was, so I came down and gave a presentation and talked and he wanted desperately to get me to come to Graphicstudio. I had some problems in New York; I had a place upstate in New Paltz and I had a loft in Tribeca. The loft in Tribeca, they had an explosion in the vault just outside the building. Smoke came into the building and contaminated the building because in the smoke was

lead dust and the lead had settled over everything. It was an old DC, direct current, junction box. A lot of Lower Manhattan still was supplied with direct current from the time of Thomas Edison.

In fact an interesting story: there's one place I used, in fact with Rauschenberg, when I needed to steel-face the plates, which is electroplate iron onto the copper to make them more durable and withstand the printing. An edition of forty was no problem. There would be no change if it's steel-faced. There was one place in Brooklyn that used to do the steel-facing. I would go there early on, well before the Rauschenberg project, and have plates steel-faced because I printed a lot of etchings for a lot of different people. The building was so old, they still had direct current in the building rather than AC [alternating] current. And they had these old presses upstairs. So for electroplating, you need direct current. Since they had it in the building, they used it directly. They had a huge tank, steel-facing tank, just encrusted with salt and on the wall they had a bank of about fifty lightbulbs and then the chart so that if you had a small plate to be steel-faced, you would screw in the lightbulbs. This produced the resistance. So you needed only so much current for a small plate, you would turn on maybe thirty of the fifty light bulbs. So you have all this light coming that was a resistance for steel-facing. If you had a larger plate maybe you would turn off a lot of these lights so you'd get more current going through to the plate itself. I had disastrous results with the steel-facing because they were trying to train somebody, some kid, to do it. Suddenly copper was showing after the first impression. So I said, "I've got to learn how to do this." Again I went to the New York Public Library and did all the research and started doing it on my own.

Ultimately I trained other people to do it and at one point I flew out to Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles] with Don and set up a steel-facing facility for them just when they were changing—they wanted to do etching as well as lithography. So we interviewed several people to take over the etching and I think one of the first projects was a Rosenquist etching project that they did there, but I set up the steel-facing. Then I came back and ultimately when I moved I sold all the equipment and let everybody else do the steel-facing.

Q: So we've talked about how you were using this technique of photogravure and it builds up throughout Rauschenberg and through Mapplethorpe. And so I'm looking at this particular book here, this Graphicstudio review book, and the reason I mention the date '84 is because this book, and maybe you'll have to write to the editor, talks about you coming down to Graphicstudio and doing a lot of work there between '84 and '90.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: Including some etching work and things. So it sounds to me then in that case that this approach did find an audience. You talked about photogravure when no one was really doing it and—

Sacilotto: Yes. I think over a span of time, it became more and more recognized as a media. Suddenly there was more photogravure work being done and it was being recognized as a legitimate technique and not something that fell into the cracks between printmaking and photography. I suppose when I first started with a Rauschenberg project, there wasn't that much

recognition of photogravure at that point. So by the next ten years suddenly—and I'd worked with other artists through Brooke Alexander; I worked with a number of his artists and I'd make the plates, pull a proof, and then he would have it printed someplace else.

It had suddenly become more and more acceptable as a technique until the photo techniques came in with both the Iris printer and the digital printers. It happened with Chuck Close. I made quite a number of things with him. He had tried lithography; he couldn't get the subtlety in lithography, the hand lithography, it didn't work for him. So he gave me some images that I made into photogravures. He liked the results. He did some small portraits and ultimately a number of large portraits. He worked with his thumbprint at that time on Mylar. I used that directly to make a photogravure plate. But he didn't like the idea of calling it a photogravure because there was essentially no photography involved in the process. So we called it direct gravure and that's where that term came from. It was through the Chuck Close images where he'd done the thumbprint pieces.



Chuck Close
John I, 1986–90
3-run direct gravure
30 x 23 inches (76.2 x 58.4 cm)
Edition of 40, produced by Graphicstudio,
University of South Florida, Tampa

It was interesting; Mapplethorpe also did several large flower pieces at Graphicstudio. I remember David Yager and Don—David Yager was the chairman at Graphicstudio at one point and was a photographer himself. So they came to New York. I introduced him to Mapplethorpe and at first they came back and said, “Oh, we’re going to get killed, this is the South.” He wanted to do some of his really risqué pieces. So we ended up with five portraits, these five images. And of course there was no frontal view. One had a bathing suit on and they were all essentially black nudes with different poses, which ultimately became acceptable for the university to do. Then he was invited down to do some more pieces and he ended up doing some magnificent flower pieces, large flower photogravures.

It was interesting both with Chuck Close and Mapplethorpe because they wanted to do very small editions, we talked them into doing two editions, one on white paper and one with a silk collé we had developed, which had a light beige background. And it printed beautifully. It was tricky to use, but once we got the technique down it made some beautiful prints.

Q: And so you talk about working with all of these artists. Could you do a compare and contrast, working with Rauschenberg versus working with them? Was it essentially very similar—because it sounds like with photogravure you’re talking about this process where you’re getting these photographs, you’re getting these prints, and then you’re going away separately and doing your process. So I’m wondering just if you could compare his working style. And feel free to talk about anything you might have seen at Graphicstudio as well, versus working with these other guys. What distinguished it, if anything?

Sacilotto: Yes. I think with Rauschenberg, he presented me with the actual photograph that I was to work with. So my job essentially was to get as close to that photograph as possible. So even the *China Mix*, which were printed in a red ink, were initially proofed up in black. And he would look at that. Once he saw the black impression and approved it, then it was simply a matter of going ahead and making the color changes to that. The same thing was true with *America Mix*, which was essentially black and white. Once he saw the proof it was usually a go. There was never much back and forth between making it darker or lighter. It was just—he liked it, he would approve it. The decision was left to me to make a final impression that I thought was good. And he always accepted that one.

By comparison, Chuck Close had a philosophy, which was interesting. He worked with so many printers. The first impression he would say was eighty percent the printer, twenty percent the artist. So the next proof would come back and he would suggest changes, and the next one would be sixty percent the printer and forty percent the artist. So you'd have to go at least three or four times back and forth, making changes dictated by Chuck Close himself. He said, "When it got to a point when it was eighty percent my decision and my changes and twenty percent the printer," he said, "then I'd go with it." When he made that statement I was fascinated because it always took at least three or four sessions with Chuck Close before he finally approved the final edition and signed the BAT, the *bonne à tirer*. When it came to signing the edition, the editions would come to him and he would just sign them. I don't know if he looked that hard at each impression. But he'd just sign them because he had accepted the process at that point.

Mapplethorpe was also very easy-going once he saw the prints. Initially when he saw the proofs, the flower pieces that I did with him, each piece had a different color to it; there might be one image, black ink with red in it, one had purple, one had blue, one had brown. He wanted each of the prints to have a slightly different color tone to it. So there was some back and forth with him in terms of, he'd like this a little bluer or he'd like a little less— So we'd go back and forth quite a bit that way until—and then he would sign a BAT, they'd go with that. And then we'd use that as the guide.

Q: So if you think about Chuck Close's system of this percentage division and wanting to get it to eighty-twenty, the artist being the majority, so the percentage then might have sat differently with Rauschenberg, if we were to apply that same sort of template? A different approach in terms of his hand in that final piece?

Sacilotto: Right. Rauschenberg, yes—there was never any question of using that kind of approach with him. I think once I presented him with the work, there may have been some discussion about other things, but he accepted the works as I presented them. After making the proof, and he would sign the proof, I would go and print them and bring them back to him, to his place, for signing and he would simply go through them and sign them. Either myself or somebody, one of my assistants at the time, would tell him the number because he would write the number out and sign it. Just before he signed it she would call out the number that he had to write to make sure he didn't get it wrong. In a few cases the number was duplicated and we simply erased it and went on. But that's typical in any signing session.

Q: And so did that *America Mix* ever turn around financially in a way that you had hoped it would?

Sacilotto: Not for me, it didn't. I was going to leave New York at that point and Rauschenberg bought some of the editions from me, the remaining [prints that were left]. That was probably the most money that I'd made from that particular suite of prints.

Q: So there's this ongoing challenge in finding an audience for that in some way.

Sacilotto: That's right, yes.

Q: Because of this odd sort of perceived third category, this middle category of the photogravure.

Sacilotto: Exactly. And—

Q: It's interesting of course because by this time, we're talking about the eighties. Rauschenberg is certainly an extremely established—

Sacilotto: Yes, exactly—

Q: —name at this time, right?

Sacilotto: Oh definitely, oh yes. That's one of the reasons I wanted to work with him, because of his reputation. I thought this would—financially, I couldn't go wrong. But again I didn't have any publishing experience at that point, so I think I'm partially to blame for not really getting it out in as good a manner as I could have.

Q: But it sounds like it did open up this new approach in some way and that you continued doing this.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: Other people continued to do this, which is another interesting way of looking at the impact of that.

Sacilotto: Right. I think after I'd left, he did a number of other photogravures with ULAE. It's interesting that ULAE had the printer out there, Bill Goldston, working with a copy of my book, which was this one and apparently found it very helpful.

Q: *Photographic Printmaking Techniques* [1982].

Sacilotto: Yes. And the reason for writing that was because of photogravure. I have a whole section of photogravure in that. So that was interesting. So I think some of the effects of my work in photogravure spread out in a lot of different areas.

Q: I thought there might be some value in seeing if there's any of these pieces here—so you do the *China* and *America Mix* and then afterwards you're listed as a collaborator for the *Mastaba* piece, which is ROCI CHILE [*Araucan Mastaba / ROCI CHILE*, 1986].



Robert Rauschenberg
Araucan Mastaba / ROCI CHILE, 1986
Hand painting and silkscreen ink on mirrored aluminum with cast sterling silver and lapis lazuli
20 5/8 x 22 x 22 inches (52.4 x 55.9 x 55.9 cm)
From an edition of 25, produced by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa; only 12 realized

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: The Chile trip, were you on the trip itself? Or you were involved in this piece when it came back?

Sacilotto: No, I didn't go to Chile on that one. But when they came back and we were working on this, yes, I worked on some of the—I had a lot of experience with silkscreen as well as other techniques. All of the images were screened on. So I helped with getting inks mixed, preparing a special rack for putting the image on, screening it on, and even cutting the lapis lazuli piece that went on the top. Which was there. And then I think I helped—they had this envelope—

Q: I interviewed the woman who sewed the envelope.

Sacilotto: Oh yes? Oh really?

Q: Yes. Yes. Two days ago.

Sacilotto: And we have that cast in silver on that; it was interesting because I remember the silver—when I went to that trip, went to that area where they produced silver, and it was fascinating. This one—

Q: I'm interested in that because don't you also do something—some luthier sort of work?

Sacilotto: Yes. That's right.

Q: We're looking at the ROCI Tibet piece, the *Tibetan Garden Song* [/ *ROCI TIBET*, 1986] piece, which features a cello.

Sacilotto: A cello, that's right. It was a half-sized cello, a small one. With this we had to find the galvanized tubs, which is an old-fashioned tub. But we had to strip off the zinc from it. So we had to take it to a place that would take the zinc off before we could electroplate the—not stainless steel, but this was—

Q: Because zinc would have prohibited that?

Sacilotto: Yes. The zinc would have prohibited—that's right. The two different metals, you have to get back to this, the pure iron. Then we had to put the—I think we did that either in nickel or it might have been chrome. I think it was chrome-plated. But this is one of the things that I helped do, by going to various electroplating places and coordinating that. I was the one who suggested that they immerse it in glycerin because glycerin would not affect the wood.

Q: The wood on the cello?

Sacilotto: The wood on the cello. Even at that, they immersed the inside of the cello and the outside with an epoxy. They had to put a weight on the inside so it wouldn't float on the glycerin. And then of course this became a little different from the prototype that he did. And so there were lots of things. But my interest in making violins and so on came about afterwards.

Q: Oh, that's after this. Okay.

Sacilotto: It wasn't at that time. But what happened was when Chun-Wuei Su Chien did—

Q: Right.

Sacilotto: She was the one who made the contact in order to get these cellos from China. She knew of a place and she came in one day and Graphicstudio had this catalog of instruments and for \$150 I could get a violin, a bow, a case, rosin, the whole thing. Just a beautiful thing to have. So I said, "Order one of these for me." So she brought it in. I had it for years and it wasn't until

my son started playing violin when he was about five or six that I started to take lessons with him. That's when I started to get interested in violin-making. So for over fifteen years—at the last count I have about forty violins and several cellos, and four or five violas. They're all packed away right now. [Note from narrator: Chun-Wuei Su Chien was a Chinese woman who lived in Baltimore. Her husband, Chih-Yung Chien, was a professor at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. I think Don Saff knew her and her husband at Johns Hopkins and got her involved with Rauschenberg. She was instrumental in coordinating many of the items from China, as well as helping with the China trip. She also was part of an organization to save the snow leopard. I met her on many occasions and she brought me back a few artifacts from Tibet.]

Q: My brother plays the viola.

Sacilotto: Oh he does?

Q: Yes, he does.

Sacilotto: Oh, too bad, I would show you some of those that I made. I did some unusual things later on. But I had this cheap violin; it was a Lark violin, made in China. When I started taking lessons with my son the teacher said, "Oh, this is a terrible violin." It was one of the early Chinese-made violins. "You've got to find something better than that." Ultimately that's what got me interested and I started buying some other violins, taking them apart, putting them together, and got more and more into it. [Note from narrator: The Chinese violins of this time were not good—but now, after many Chinese luthiers went to Europe and studied with German

and Italian makers, the violins currently made in China are excellent and, for the price, far superior to their European counterparts.]

Q: That's an interesting continuity of this. So I know there are these two pieces and then another one, I know he did one for ROCI Japan, which featured a bamboo pole and a multi-colored light—

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: —sort of a stick. And I don't—

Sacilotto: That's right. I remember working on that because the bamboo—it was called *Bamhue* [/*ROCI JAPAN*, 1987], I think, to begin with.



Robert Rauschenberg
Bamhue / *ROCI JAPAN*, 1987
Bamboo with neon, electrical timer, and metal fixtures
90 x 4 x 10 3/4 inches (228.6 x 10.2 x 27.3 cm)
From an edition of 25 published by Graphicstudio,
University of South Florida, Tampa; only 12 realized

Q: Yes, right.

Sacilotto: Someone associated with Rauschenberg had gone to California and they saw this square bamboo. They grew the bamboo in the molds in Japan so it was rectangular. It would grow in the mold and they used it for making ladders and different things. So they wanted that. Through a place in California, they ordered this bamboo and it came to Graphicstudio, square bamboo. This is about that size. They cut a porthole in the back of it where it would open up and they put neon lights of different colors in. Then the cord was actually a bronze-like cord that became part of the piece and it would plug into the wall and you could program the sequence of lights, how fast—and I think they settled on a twenty-second interval. And yes, so I had—and also in that piece, there's another one—

Q: It may not be—this goes up to 1990, I know. And it doesn't have complete—after this, it goes off into another artist. So if it's not—

Sacilotto: Oh, I see. The other one was the one with the Galileo [Galilei] image and a cord coming out and a cannonball on the floor. What was that called? [*Fifth Force*, 1986] That one I had quite a bit to do with too because I used—we had the double-faced image of Galileo on this silk. I remember making a transfer from a Xerox print onto the silk and that was used in the piece. So we had to figure out a way to get that on. Rauschenberg in his typical kind of ingenuity, he wanted to—there was a Leaning Tower of Pisa there. It was from a book, I think a dictionary or something. He wanted to straighten it up, but the text was then on an angle you see.

So that's why that is vertical. And then these two images on the silk of Galileo facing each other, we ran that through the press with, I think, Xerox prints; we put the silk down, put a piece of newspaper, and used a solvent on the back, ran it through the press with the solvent, then dissolved the ink, and then the ink came off onto the silk. The cannonballs were actually shot puts. They had impressed in the shot put, ten pounds or twenty pounds, whatever they were. So we had to get rid of any paint or anything on there and fill it in with epoxy, so it became totally round, so you didn't see that it was a shot put. It became a cannonball, see?



Robert Rauschenberg
Fifth Force, 1986
 Bronze, acrylic paint, Xerox transfer on silk, waxed
 thread, painted shot with stainless steel pin
 83 1/4 x 15 x 45 inches (211.5 x 38.1 x 114.3 cm)
 From an edition of 25 published by Graphicstudio,
 University of South Florida, Tampa; only 12 realized

The whole idea was part of Rauschenberg's double entendre idea, which he used both verbally and a lot of his pieces also had this certain dichotomy; here, in terms of straightening up the tower, Galileo who proposed that, and the cannonball, which dropped faster from the Leaning Tower, that the cannonball dropped faster than something else, something lighter. And it seemed

right. Those were some of the questions in Galileo's days, so he made the whole thing into a piece.

Q: And so I'm curious then, the experience of working with him as a part of this larger team at Graphicstudio and working in different techniques, your silkscreening and you have this challenge with the *Mastaba* that you're silkscreening onto this odd shape. That versus this process of photogravure where it seems very much you consult with him at 381 periodically and then you go off and you're siloed off doing the gravure technique. And so then just the experience of working—

Sacilotto: Well the experience with Rauschenberg was always very pleasant. It was good always to see the mechanism that he used for coming at, arriving at decisions. Quite often it would be different from—people would try to second-guess him, would try to produce Rauschenbergs for him and say, "Oh, this would be typical," and quite often he would shift it over; perhaps because it wasn't his idea directly. It had to be his idea. That may be part of it. But somehow he always came up with something that was really surprisingly unique. And it's the way his mind worked, which was just amazing. Just to be there, to watch him work, make decisions. People would constantly present things to him. And he would often look at them, discard things, and suddenly put something together in a way that nobody else thought of. And that became part of it, this is what I want. That was always fascinating. That was fascinating.

Q: So we've gone through the eighties and before we move forward towards more of a conclusion here, is there anything further that you would like on the record about the ROCI

years, the trips, or anything? Did you say you were part of any of the advance teams that would go? Or would you go when—

Sacilotto: I was, particularly in Cuba and in Russia, I was part of the advance team.

Q: And so you would scout?

Sacilotto: Yes. I went in both Russia and Cuba with Don Saff and we would go to the Tretyakov, we'd go to the major museums, and negotiation would take place with the directors in terms of what locale, how many square feet were available, the timeframe and all of that. The museums in Cuba, because there were three different locations, and ultimately the Casa de las Américas, which had all prints, which included one of the ones that I had done, and then the National Museum and then the fortress on the water. So the selection of what pieces went where was all part of that.

Q: And so we've talked about the ROCI years and that ends I think in '91. I think that project ends, the various projects, the initiative ends around '91. Going forward from that time, you mentioned you come to Graphicstudio in '97. So what points of intersection do you have with him moving towards those later years in his life?

Sacilotto: After I came to Graphicstudio in '97, Graphicstudio didn't do any further work with Rauschenberg at that point. I think all of the work had been done while Don was either dean or chairman of the art department and in the seventies, perhaps late seventies I think, that they

worked with Rauschenberg and some of the ROCI projects as well. At one point they did the hundred-foot photograph of Rauschenberg [*Chinese Summerhall*, 1982]. I think I was around when they were working on that. They had Don Saff at the studio downtown. They converted the entire space into a darkroom for that project. They took I don't know how many, thirty-five, forty different photographs, and they had to project them onto one piece of continuous photographic paper. And they had to run the entire thing through the processing machine. Of course if they missed out on one of the shots it would ruin the entire hundred-foot. So out of I don't know how many that they did, they ended up with only three or four continuous ones, without any blank spaces. Of course the ones that did have blank spaces, they simply cut up and they had individual images that Rauschenberg signed, so there was no loss. I saw the process in operation, but I wasn't directly involved with that at the time.



Rauschenberg with *Chinese Summerhall* (1982) in an apse at Abbaye de Montmajour, *Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie* (Arles photography festival), France, July 1983. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Unattributed

Q: So then you had these interactions with him in the eighties. I know that Don Saff and he had this relationship that continues into the nineties through Saff Tech Arts [Oxford, Maryland], that sort of thing.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: And of course Tampa and Captiva aren't so far from each other. When would be the last time that you would say that you had any personal encounters? Or did it shift into a mode where you were primarily sort of hearing about him through Don or through—

Sacilotto: The last time was probably when I was completing the *China Mix* and getting approval from him to do those and then ultimately I would work once he did the approval and I would get some of the signatures from him. That was probably in the mid-eighties I think. I think after— although let's see, when was the trip to Russia? ROCI, I was certainly, yes, last time I—

Q: Because ROCI is '84 to '91.

Sacilotto: Right, yes.

Q: USSR might have been a little later I think, in that sequence. I'm not—we can check that.

Sacilotto: Yes.

Q: But we're talking about the mid- to late eighties here.

Sacilotto: Yes, certainly—I think the last, I think, was certainly the trip to either Kuala Lumpur or Russia. Because I know Mexico was one of the early ones on the itinerary. But I think either Russia or Kuala Lumpur was essentially the last contact that I had working with him.

Q: And so then we've covered this span of your involvement. One question I do have because I know there was recently an exhibit at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery [at Florida Southwestern State College] in Fort Myers called *Rauschenberg: China/America Mix* [2014–15] and I know that Don Saff was involved with that and gave a lecture and things like that. So I thought—given the title of it whether that was something that you went to go see or that you were—

Sacilotto: Yes. Well yes, I was there. Initially they were going to show some of the *America* and *China Mix*.

Q: The *China* as well?

Sacilotto: Yes. Some of those, right. They were going to show some of those. But they usurped the name and never showed the work, some of the work that I had done.

Q: Really?

Sacilotto: Yes. So I was disappointed in that. They used that name, which was given to the gravures that I had used and never showed the gravures. So I was very disappointed in that.

Q: So that's going on and I know of the *America Mix*—I see some of them online in various auctions and things like that. What do you know about the exhibition? So if they weren't shown at that—because all I saw was the title and I looked at it and I think the *Chinese Summerhall* piece that he did was conceived of as being the keystone or something like that. Strange that they would use the name though and then not use—

Sacilotto: Exactly. Exactly, yes. Yes, I went down for that opening and I was very surprised that they had—because I wasn't aware that's what they called it until I got there. And I saw it. If they had included the work from those two series, which I would have gladly given them to exhibit, but they never did. So I was very surprised at that.

Q: And them in this case being?

Sacilotto: The director of the Rauschenberg Gallery.

Q: This is still at the Rauschenberg Gallery, yes.

Sacilotto: Right.

Q: Just for the record, of course several of them are sitting around here, at least three of them are sitting on the walls.

Sacilotto: Right.

Q: Around here as we speak, so we're having our own exhibition. As we come to a conclusion I'd like to ask you— You have a long history in printing, you've worked as a master printer in different shops—we've talked about Iris, we've talked about Graphicstudio, and some of your own work outside of those contexts. So I'm curious then what your assessment of Bob Rauschenberg is from specifically that perspective? Because I think there's a lot of discussion that goes on about him in terms of the innovation that he brought to the art world. We talked a little bit today about his eye, his unusual eye, both for shooting photographs, like for the *America Mix*, and in his other work. So there was a lot of discussion about how he opened up materials and opened up all these possibilities and is seen as very much this innovator. So if we look then at the history of printmaking and these assorted methods that we've talked about, like photogravure and lithography, screenprinting, what's your assessment of his work, his impact, specifically in that regard? From the perspective—not as a viewer of his art, but as a master printer, relative to other people who were working with ULAE or with Gemini or with Styria or with Iris or Graphicstudio. Where does he sit in that?

Sacilotto: Well, I think he has always been very open to experiment with all sorts of media including a lot of various techniques in printmaking. He was one of the first to work with offset lithography. That goes back really a long time; it must have been even in the sixties that he made some prints in offset lithography. And so he was very open to doing the photogravures with me and continued to work with photogravure with ULAE. He loved the idea of experimenting with different techniques because each technique gave something unique to the image. And he seemed to really love that idea, just as he experimented in painting with reflective surfaces, working on

stainless steel or various things, and having things reflect against each other. He was just amazing that way; that's one of the things that I appreciated about his work immensely. Unlike, I have to mention, the very first show that I saw of him, which was when I first went to New York. It was 1963 I believe and to me it was—it was just all black and all white paintings.

Q: Oh, that's the black paintings [1951–53] and *White Paintings* [1951].

Sacilotto: That's right. I think this was at the Colosseum in New York, 1963. I went in to see that and I was so—what's the right word—I was just flabbergasted. I can't say I appreciated it; I didn't like it. I didn't like it at all. Compared to what he did later and the innovation and the paint or the quality, the Abstract Expressionist quality of his paintings, which are amazing. But the first impression that I had of these paintings, the black paintings and *White Paintings*, was a disaster for me in terms of my attitude towards him.

[Laughter]

Sacilotto: And I often think back that I ended up working with him many years later on some projects and getting to know his later work, which I got to really like very much. So the time span was quite amazing.

But his printmaking was just one of these things that he did that just—because he was so prolific. It just came out of his pores and just went into printmaking and silkscreen, etching, lithography—all these techniques. Whatever it was he just went with the flow and produced

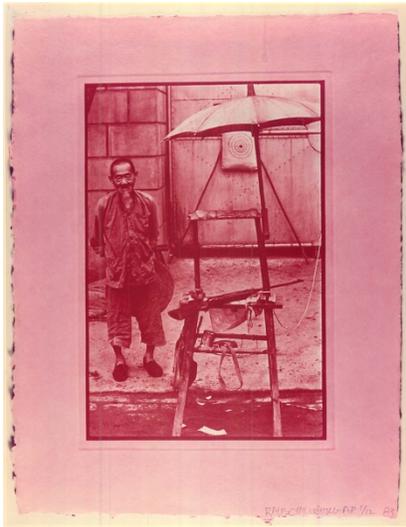
things. And sculpture, paintings. And then he broke the barriers between painting and sculpture. I have no doubt that he will be evaluated and re-evaluated many, many times in history in terms of being one of the pinnacle artists of the century.

Q: Yes and just thinking about a particular case study, I hadn't realized the extent to which the *China and America Mix* represented a certain moment in the revival of photogravure or that that was just an unusual method for an artist to be using, for an artist to employ at that time.

Sacilotto: Yes. Yes it was. I was surprised on the *America Mix* that he had published some of those same images as photographs, which I never found out until afterwards.

Q: Prior, he had done that?

Sacilotto: Prior. Yes, I think it was prior, that he published some of those as actual photographs, signed photographs. Then some of them were made as photogravures, which I found a little disappointing because I thought that he had selected them and that they were unique to photogravure with him. So the *China [Mix-21]* pieces, some of them were great images, just great photographs. He had one of a character with a stand and a rifle; it was an old gentleman. He would charge so many yen, whatever it was, to shoot at the target. So that was his source of income in China. It was a great image. But the stand with the rifle on it was almost like a Rauschenberg sculpture. And one of the great ones, actually we have it hanging around the corner there, it's of the photograph with—I think it has Mao and Lenin and all these people kind of—



Robert Rauschenberg
Two untitled prints from *Photogravures–Suite 2 (China Mix-21)*, 1983
From a portfolio of 21 photogravures
26 1/4 x 20 1/2 inches (66.7 x 52.1 cm) each, horizontal and vertical
From an edition of 40 published by Iris Editions

Q: Communist luminaries.

Sacilotto: Communist luminaries kind of fading in history, it's just like they'd be painted. One would be painted and then the other painted and they were starting to deteriorate just from the wall. Apparently when Rauschenberg was seen photographing that, they tried to get him to stop. They didn't want him to photograph that. But he just kind of ignored them and got the photograph and ultimately used it as a gravure.

It was a period I found exceedingly important to all of the projects that I've done.

Q: Yes. Just as a way of closing, if there's anything further you'd like to say personally in that vein, I think that would be a great way to bring this to a close.

Sacilotto: Right. Well, I think I'd say that it was an honor to have worked with some of the projects that I did with him. I'm very proud of the work that I did. So I think I would say that yes, it's one of the highlights of my printmaking career.

Q: Great! Well, on my end, thank you so much for taking the time out of your morning and now into your afternoon to sit down and talk with me. I really appreciate it very much.

Sacilotto: Okay.

Q: Great, with that we'll close off.

Sacilotto: Okay, all right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]