

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Hisachika Takahashi

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Hisachika “Sachika” Takahashi conducted by Sara Sinclair on July 29, July 30, and July 31, 2014; and Sinclair and Christine Frohnert on November 23, 2015. These interviews are 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: Hisachika Takahashi      Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair      Date: July 29, 2014

Q: Today is July 29, 2014. I am Sara Sinclair with Hisachika—

Takahashi: Hisachika Takahashi.

Q: And we are at Columbia University in New York City [joined by his wife Agathe Gonnet]. Throughout the next few days, we'll talk about your life and your career and your relationship with Robert Rauschenberg, but to begin today, let's talk a little bit about your history. Maybe to begin, we can start at the very beginning and you can tell me where you were born and a little bit about your early life.

Takahashi: I was born in 1940 on May 23. My father was a train engineer and he worked at the Chinese Language Expo. My mother wanted to go with him, to have the family together, so we went to China. Then the war was over and my father died. So we came back to Japan and Tokyo was completely burned up and smoke was still coming out from some of the houses because the houses were made of wood.

I grew up in downtown Tokyo and my interest—I wanted to be an artist. I went to a university called Tama Art in Japan in Tokyo. I thought though, the school was quite boring; the teachers were not interesting and were very pretentious about famous artists. I wanted to be a sculptor so I

thought that it might be a good idea to get out of Japan, to go to other places. I had seen an Italian sculptor's show in Tokyo and it was quite exciting. They had Fontana, Lucio Fontana, and Roberto Crippa and other artists work there. After the opening, I met Roberto Crippa, an Italian sculptor and painter, and he wanted to show off in front of this collection of artists and so he said, "Why don't you come to Italy to study?" And so I said, "What a great idea, I'd like to come to Italy too," and I could not sleep for quite a long time.

Just after that occasion, there was an opportunity to make a monument next to Tokyo called Mi Casa. It was an old world boat that they were putting up to make a museum and they needed a monument. Somebody else was asked to do it but he couldn't so he passed it to me and I said, "I'll do it." So I made the sculpture and I made enough money for a one-way ticket from Japan to Italy and no way back.

I went to Italy to study. There's a program of study at the university called di Belle Accademia [Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti Milano]. They did really old-fashioned work, like carving stones and stuff. I wasn't interested so I decided I'm not going to school. I'll just study myself. Roberto Crippa had invited me to use his house and his studio and so I did use them, but the main thing was that I was Crippa's assistant because he had a plane accident and broke three hundred bones in his body [1962].

Q: Wow.

Takahashi: And he could not do artwork. He was invited to be an artist in the Venice Biennale, which was one month away so I had to make these paintings and I was quite young. I think I was twenty-three, something like that, but I spent every moment, all the time working on it. Crippa told me how to do it and I just did and made maybe eight big paintings.

Q: Wow.

Takahashi: It was quite successful in the Biennale. In the meantime, I met many other artists. One of the artists was Lucio Fontana. I was having a difficult time with Crippa because he had some family problems with his wife and kid, and I was babysitting the kid, taking care of his artwork and taking care of the dog and I had no time for me. They were difficult times. We had a discussion and I quit, and then I started renting my own house. I had to get a job, some income, and so I knocked on Lucio Fontana's door and he said, "Sure, come work for me. I've never had an assistant before." I was the first assistant and the last assistant. I did the preparation for Lucio Fontana's paintings and he had a show in the Biennale four years later and I went to Venice to help make the paintings [1966]. He treated me like a father. It was a wonderful time and I was learning a lot. That was my Italy period. Meanwhile I was also doing my own paintings to show at Montenapoleone Gallery and the Carlo Cardazzo Gallery [Venice]. It was quite exciting, my life.

Let me see. My friend came from New York to show an Andy Warhol movie, a very nice, strange movie, one actor, and I think with Ultra Violet, talking at a bus stop, both naked. I met John de Menil, the art collector and founder of Rothko Chapel [Houston] at the screening. And

he asked me, “Could I come to your studio to look at your painting?” So I said, “Of course.” He came over and said, “I want to buy this painting, how much does it cost?” I had no idea but somehow I made up a story, I think I asked for five hundred dollars. He said, “Okay, you bring it to New York and I’ll pay for it, and you can stay for three weeks’ vacation in New York. You can stay at my house.” The house was completely full of artwork. Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and [Willem] de Kooning and [René] Magritte and Andy Warhol. And I sat with this big painting called *Evening Falls* [1964], the Magritte painting with the broken glass, with the sun. I was almost touching the painting, it was that close. Now I’m sure it’s in a museum. I had a really fascinating time in New York.

Q: What year was this that you came?

Takahashi: This was 1969. And de Menil made a big party, about a hundred people sitting at tables with lobster and champagne, the best champagne. My table had Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg, a girl who is a photographer, quite famous, and the writer Norman Mailer. We had some conversation and I didn’t speak very much English but Rauschenberg tried to communicate with me. So I said, “I’m kind of bored here, almost three weeks have passed and I’d like to be of help to an artist. I left my telephone number with Rauschenberg and he called me a couple of days after and said, “Would you come in to help me paint?” I went right away. He was making artwork with mirrors, with lighting behind them, and plastic glass silkscreens, with a very strong sexual image. They were called *Carnal Clocks* [1969]. My job was to clean the silkscreen material and he’d point up and say, “Get me pussy.” It was a very strange feeling but we could communicate somehow.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Alchemist (Carnal Clock)*, 1969  
Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on  
Plexiglas in metal frame, with concealed electric  
lights and clock movement  
67 x 60 x 18 inches (170.2 x 152.4 x 45.7 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

I washed the silkscreen material and put the lights on and a timer switch to synchronize it. Every three minutes, an image would come out. At midnight or twelve o'clock, all the lights went on so you could see the whole image. At the opening of the Leo Castelli gallery [New York, *Carnal Clocks*, 1969] people waited until midnight to see the whole thing. We synchronized every piece to open together. That was my job. I'm not a technician but somehow it happened very successfully. Then Rauschenberg went to California to do silkscreen work with Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles].



Installation view, *Carnal Clocks*, Leo Castelli, New York, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Rudolph Burckhardt

And it happened to be that at that time ten puppies were born.

Q: Ten puppies are born, okay.

Takahashi: Rauschenberg didn't know what to do, so he called me and said, "Would you come to California? To Malibu Beach? To take care of the puppies?"

Q: The mom was his dog?

Takahashi: Yes. His dog had puppies. They had two dogs. This was close to the beginning of 1970 and I went to take care of the dogs. The house was in Malibu Beach and the puppies were wonderful. Every place I went people would say, "Hello." And the house was on the beach, a big beach, with a lot of movie actors walking down it. Okay, that was the beginning of communication with Rauschenberg. He had a house on 381 Lafayette Street [New York] at Fourth Street, a five-story house with a church adjoined to it and two basements. I lived in a small room in the house to take care of it. And then the dog had another ten puppies.



Rauschenberg's dog Laika with her and Kid's "Moon Child" puppies born July 12, 1969. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: Wow.

Takahashi: This time it was in New York. In the meantime, twenty kitty-cats were born.

Somebody had left a cat to take care of one summer. A male cat. Rauschenberg had two Siamese cats, Siamese and Burmese.

And my job was kind of to take care of the animals and the plants. I got a job in Puerto Rico and I had to go to Puerto Rico for a couple months so I hired a girl to take care of the animals, and when I came back, all the cats were gone. I said, “What happened? Were you able to successfully give them away?” She said, “No, I closed the door at midnight every day.” One by one she put the kitty-cats outside and closed the door. That’s terrible. Shocking. My god, this was a terrible story. But then we started giving away the puppies using the newspaper: “Free dogs, come and get a wonderful dog.” I adopted one dog and Rauschenberg adopted a dog that he called Booger.

Q: Booger?

Takahashi: Yes. [Robert “Bob”] Petersen, Rauschenberg’s boyfriend, adopted a dog and called it Kelso, but he never touched it. So I said to him one day, “You cannot leave a dog like this, he must have some relationship.” So I convinced him to give the dog away. That’s a dog story. I have a lot of dog stories too.

Q: What was the job that you had in Puerto Rico?

Takahashi: Puerto Rico. My friend, de Menil's secretary, had a boat in Puerto Rico and a house on a beautiful beach with nobody there. And she wanted to survey the 4 acres of land. There were four houses of people living there. Four houses with—what do you call people that don't pay rent? Squatters. They'd lived there more than thirty years. And so during the survey of all the beaches my job was to communicate with these people because I speak Italian.

Q: Right.

Takahashi: They spoke Spanish and it's very similar. We figured out that those people could not live there. Simone Swan wanted to build a house so she needed the squatters to leave. But because they had been there for so long, to make it official we were going to give them a small plot of land to rebuild the same house, and to build a bigger house too. This was my job. I'd never done it, but what the heck? I could try.

Q: So when you went to Puerto Rico, you told Rauschenberg, I'm going to go to Puerto Rico, but I would like to come back and keep working with you when I return, or you were not sure?

Takahashi: This was no problem because I hired somebody to take care of the house. And then I came back after Puerto Rico.

Q: How long were you working on the *Carnal Clocks* series?

Takahashi: The *Carnal Clocks* was maybe a couple of months.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about what a normal day would be like, working on *Carnal Clocks*? What time would you start working?

Takahashi: He asked me to come in at eleven o'clock, so I said, "Eleven o'clock in the morning?" He said, "Yes," and so I went there at eleven o'clock in the morning and he wasn't there. And the maid has come over and started to cook lunch and he's not there. I was getting tired of waiting. At five o'clock, he gets up and then fixes for our morning, a first morning drink, a vodka and grapefruit or something and next he changes to Jack Daniel's. Well, this is all day and people are coming and going, visiting, a lot of people, phone calls, and I'm falling asleep. I said to him, "I'm going to fall asleep," and he said, "Well, we must eat dinner." Okay, so we eat dinner and I'm getting more sleepy. And I said, "Well, I'm falling asleep, I'm going home," and he said, "Oh no, no, we must work." It was five o'clock in the morning when we started working and it was so exhausting. He said, "Why don't you sleep here?" And it ended up that I was given a small room, my room, and that was the *Carnal Clocks*.

Q: So you would work for how many hours?

Takahashi: On *Carnal Clocks*? I have no idea right now.

Q: When you started working at five o'clock in the morning, how long would you work? Until eight or nine or?

Takahashi: I think more than three or four hours. Then he started making his *Cardboard* [1971–72] artwork. My job was to cut plywood in the shape he wanted and to glue the cardboard box and then he signed it and that's it, he was done. It happened to be not too successful.

Q: What do you mean?

Takahashi: Nobody bought them, because they were too early.

Q: Too—?

Takahashi: Too early. People didn't care to spend money on garbage. What happened is they became very successful later. I have one piece as a gift from Rauschenberg and I was able to sell it to the Tokyo [National] Museum of Modern Art. I bought my house in Vermont with that piece.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Potato Buds (Cardboard)*, 1971  
Cardboard  
73 x 48 x 7 3/4 inches (185.4 x 121.9 x 19.7 cm)  
National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

Q: You said the pieces were not very successful at the time. Did Rauschenberg speak about why he was working with the *Cardboards*?

Takahashi: He went to Los Angeles to make cardboard artwork in Malibu Beach. And the next time in Malibu Beach, I think it was, he adopted a studio and used sand from Malibu Beach to cover the cardboard box over glue. Then behind the cardboard, he painted white and then put on a fluorescent paint, like orange or yellow or red or pink, and blue too. Then he put it next to the wall and put on the light and you could see this glowing right around the sculpture and they were very beautiful, but at the opening, nobody noticed. So I had to tip people, I would say, “Look at the glowing light.” And the people said, “Wow.” I was a kind of an inter—what do you call it?

Q: Interpreter?

Takahashi: Yes. An interpreter for art.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Early Egyptian*), 1973  
Cardboard, sand, Day-Glo paint, wood, fabric, and  
fabric belt  
54 1/4 x 35 x 78 inches (137.8 x 88.9 x 198.1 cm)  
Hess Art Collection, Switzerland

Q: There is a photo of your baby [Hummingbird Takahashi] with Rauschenberg, when he is working on the *Cardboards*.

Takahashi: Yes, yes, that's it. That was in Captiva Island in Florida.

Q: Will you tell me that story?

Takahashi: Sure. Rauschenberg was in Florida. He asked me to come to Florida to work on his new artwork and also, he wanted to build a printing shop, Untitled Press [Inc.] and I was invited by Untitled Press to do my own artwork. It was quite successful for a time. He mounted the print machine and then all the artists came. Cy Twombly, those kinds of people came in to print and then we had a show at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art, New York], no MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York; *Works from Change, Inc.*, 1974]. Somehow, my piece was sold and Rauschenberg was very upset. He said, "How come mine doesn't sell and you sell?" They were more or less the same price. Mine was actually bought by my friend.

Q: Tell me about your piece.

Takahashi: My piece was postcards. I took paint off a postcard, a Twin Tower postcard, I didn't know what would happen at that time, and I removed paint so that a little bit was leftover, sort of like a tattoo image that you still could see. Another one was a big gorilla standing up and I took the paint off but you could still see it. This combination of postcards were glued together, make artwork like— Am I talking all right?

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: Like some, like this [note: indicating that the postcards were attached or linked together].

Q: In a link.

Takahashi: Yes. Some of them were like a fountain, all different color fountains for night or some of the major birds. Sort of like a tattoo, that you see in Florida, when paint on the signs fail from so much strong ultraviolet.

Q: Ultraviolet, okay.

Takahashi: Yes. If you put this one outside, it would fail completely. There would be only a little pink leftover.

Q: Right.

Takahashi: So that was what my work was, but I didn't know the Twin Towers would be gone. That was part of Florida.

Q: Tell me more about that experience of working there. You went down as an artist to make a series of prints.

Takahashi: Yes. You see, most of my idea for printing was to take the color of the postcard off, which was different. And Rauschenberg said, “You cannot do that.” I said, “Why not? That’s what I’m doing.” If I did one of one, in printing it’s called one of one, meaning monoprints, he’d say, “You cannot do that.” I said, “Why not? I decided I’m doing it.” We had quite different understandings. He had a sort of traditional way because he was older than I am. But I said, “I’m an artist, I’m doing this and nobody told me that printing was supposed to be putting ink on.” That was my excuse.

Q: Who else was there? Was Bob Petersen there?

Takahashi: Oh yeah, Petersen was there and Cy Twombly was there.

Q: What did they think of the work you were doing?

Takahashi: I didn’t hear anybody talk about it. And then at MoMA I showed and one piece was sold. Rauschenberg was quite upset because his pieces were not selling and at more or less the same price. At that time it was three hundred dollars, something like that, for a print.

One day on Captiva, Rauschenberg said, “You must come and see.” He had pinned up on the wall a beautiful print, a drawing, and I said, “Wow, beautiful.” He could not wait to ask me,

“Have you seen the beautiful two doves kissing?” I hadn’t. So when he asked me, I looked at it closely and then I could see two doves in the middle of the painting, kissing each other. Wow. After that, I could never miss the doves because they’re right there. But this kind of communication and explanation, exploration, happened so that right away, I could ask other people, “Have you seen the doves?”

Q: What piece were the doves in? What work were the doves in, what piece?

Takahashi: I don’t know. He probably sold them in Sonnabend Gallery [New York and Paris].

Q: In Sonnabend.

Takahashi: Sonnabend, yes.

Q: Okay. So they were part of a cardboard series or a silkscreen?

Takahashi: No, no, no. He was doing different things at the same time. He liked to work very much.

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: The one that you saw, that my son was photographed in, the *Cardboards*.

Q: So let's go back a little bit. You said when you were young, when you were still in Japan, you wanted to be a sculptor. Why did you want to be a sculptor? What did you see that made you want to be a sculptor?

Takahashi: When I was in elementary school, there was a sculpture project in school. And I drew. I remember drawing tulips and I got a good mark. I made this little statue of the sphinx and I got sort of accepted. And then in high school, I did a painting on plywood and I got a prize. So after high school, I wanted to go to art school, but my mother wanted me to start working. But I insisted so I was able to go to school. I have a very sort of low IQ and so I was not able to get into a good school, the best schools, and on top of this, we didn't have money in the family. So I got some kind of scholarship. Italy was—we didn't have money in the family so they wouldn't let me go.

Q: To Italy.

Takahashi: Yes, they wouldn't give me a visa. So my mother borrowed money from friends and put it in the bank so it looked like she had money. I worked to make the monument and get the one-way ticket to go. And then I had a need for—what's somebody taking care of, sponsoring somebody?

Q: A sponsor?

Takahashi: A sponsor, yes. And I didn't have a sponsor. Roberto Crippa, he didn't sponsor me at that time, but after, I received a letter later, the Italian consulate, travel consulate, he said, "I'm taking responsibility." He signed the paper and he said to the Japanese government, "If some young kid wants to go study in Italy, why don't you give him the visa? The problem though was people from Japan who don't let you go. So I was very sorry. I got this scholarship; I didn't think I had a high enough IQ enough to pass the scholarship because a thousand people ask for it. There are two artists; one painter and one sculptor, one photographer, one fashion designer, and a graphic designer. Those are the only people that can pass. So two, three, four, five, six, six people in one thousand people who all have incredible IQ and technique too, and I was able to go through them. I was very surprised myself. I'm a very lucky person, also lucky to meet Bob Rauschenberg and stuff. That's what my art started.

Q: How did you meet the artists that you connected with in Italy? How did you meet people?

Takahashi: You mean what?

Q: You said you were a studio assistant in Italy. How did you meet the artists there?

Takahashi: The artists, they go on vacation usually in one place called Albissola [Marina, Italy] next to France. The beaches next to France. I don't remember the name of the town right now. The place is called Albissola.

All the artists spent some vacation together, so we could talk, we could see each other. I even had a small show. At that time, Lucio Fontana said, “I’ll buy a small painting,” and I thought wonderful. And that’s when I knocked at the door and said, “I want to work with you as an assistant.” This town had ceramics; Fontana made ceramics, big bowls, all the same type. People from all over came to look around. It was a wonderful place for artists to vacation.

My favorite trick in Italy was—I needed some money for the summer so I invented something to do, for people to bet on. I got a wine bottle and whenever I sat drinking coffee or tea or wine or whatever, I would say, “I can break this bottle with my bare hand.” I had never done it, but I had an idea. So I’d say I must cover this bottle with a napkin, just in case, I don’t want to break my hand. Then I tried and it didn’t happen, so I tried a couple more times. Everybody said, “Sure, sure.” So I put in one thousand Italian lira and everybody puts in their money. And it was quite a lot. And they’re all quite drunk, all the artists are drunk. So I go, “One, two, three,” and it broke.

Q: Wow.

Takahashi: But I have a trick. Before I use the bottle, I put a small rock in the middle.

Q: Underneath?

Takahashi: Inside the bottle.

Q: Oh, inside, okay.

Takahashi: Yeah. So the little stone goes back and forth, back and forth, a couple times, and then you break it. So that is one trick, I got some money. I was not really a hustler.

Takahashi: The next thing was—I could not do the same thing. So I got a stone from the beach. I said, “I can break the stone in half,” and everybody just laughed. I tried it, tried it, and I said, “Well, do you want to bet one thousand lira?” Everybody just puts in the money and then I tried to break the stone and of course, it didn’t happen too fast. I tried a couple of times. And I go, “Ah!” And I go, “Ah!” I think maybe done twice the stone will break, but for this one also, I have a trick. I put a small stone in my hand.

Q: Right.

Takahashi: “Thank you very much.” That’s another trick. Summer time, you need some money to go dancing. At the time the twist had come out and people were going, doing it. And then those artists didn’t want to bet anymore so I went to the beach and pretended I was throwing stones. I was throwing stones, but an Italian macho boy comes out said, “Let me try to throw stones.” Then he was trying to throw and get more distance. So I said, “You want to bet who can throw farther away? One thousand lira.” And I had already collected the stone, a stone that would go far away. Nice and round and that I’m able to keep in my hand. When you throw, you go a couple of steps back and then run and then you throw. Now Italian people are very good with their feet.

Q: Very good?

Takahashi: At soccer. But their hands are very weak. He was a big guy, macho guy. We said “One, two, three, and throw. One, two, three, throw.” This guy’s stone dumped and my stone was still floating in the air and jumping and I said, “Thank you very much.” That’s what my trick was.

Q: How long did you stay in Italy?

Takahashi: I lived there eight years, yes, eight years.

Q: Okay. And then it was time to move to New York.

Takahashi: That’s when I went to vacation in New York, to bring a painting.

Q: For de Menil.

Takahashi: For de Menil. I had ten pairs of shoes, five suitcases, and eight or nine paintings with me.

Q: Wow.

Takahashi: The first one was for de Menil. When I arrived at the airport, a black, huge Cadillac was waiting, a limousine, and inside it, a secretary, I think it was Simone Swan's secretary. She handed me a big envelope full of money and I said, "What's this for?" She said, "Oh, this is for your expenses, for spending three weeks." All five-dollar bills, like this, and she said, "Don't spend too much money." I was very shocked to have a black limousine and we got to the bridge and saw Manhattan and I said, "That is New York!" That was the beginning of New York.

Q: Where did you stay?

Takahashi: I stayed at de Menil's house.

Q: You did stay in their house.

Takahashi: I think it was on Seventy-third Street. I don't exactly remember now. De Menil was not living in New York at that time, he was living in Texas. There were two cooks and three waiters, not waiters, but people who cleaned houses, and just me, there on vacation. Sometimes I'd get very bored so I would go out, but I didn't want to miss a street so I walked a hundred blocks one side and then turned around and came a hundred blocks back and then went home. I did every single street and then next, I did it the other way.

Q: The avenues.

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah. That's the way I noticed New York.

Q: What street did you begin on?

Takahashi: I think Madison [Avenue]. Wait a moment. Before Fifth Avenue, what's this?

Q: Madison.

Takahashi: Madison. Yeah, I think from Madison and there's the house over there and then Broadway and the edge of the East Side, the edge of the West Side, that road, and then the next road. In three weeks, I had done everything.

Q: Did you do everything?

Takahashi: Yeah.

Q: Wow.

Takahashi: It was fun.

Q: So what else do you remember from your first three weeks in New York? What else did you see?

Takahashi: Oh, I had no fright in anything luckily, because I went to quite dangerous places.

The period was very dangerous. More than now.

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: Let me see. Rauschenberg was a very good cook and I started learning how to cook by watching Rauschenberg cook.

Q: I read somewhere that you cooked when you were a boy. That you cooked when you were very young because your mother and your older brother worked and so you fed the family.

Takahashi: Yes, yes. So a little bit, but I didn't like to cook. At the time, I was seven years old and I had to cook dinner for the whole family. Somebody had to lend the money, an aunt or uncle, so I could go shopping and then I had to make a fire to cook and when my mother came back we ate together. But the way that Rauschenberg cooked, he invented, so a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and that started to open up my cooking. And I got invited by a magazine called *Food and Wine* to cook for that. There were photos. I have the magazine here.

Q: How did that happen? How did you meet the people at *Food and Wine*?

Takahashi: I had one friend who was a food critic and she said, "You're a good cook, why don't you put it in a book?" I said, "I've never done it in a professional way." But I invented myself to be sort of stretching food. That means you have planned for four people to eat and eight people show up. So now there are twelve people, but you only have four people's food.

Q: Right.

Takahashi: And you're already so close and there's nothing to buy. Now, there's twenty-four hour stores all over. And so I learned a kind of a way of stretching. Stretching doesn't mean putting water in to make your soup into more. Stretching means small cups and small soup and still the same. That was a way to learn how to cook.

Q: When did you work at Food?

Takahashi: Food restaurant was open for artists to come in to eat cheap food [note: artist-run restaurant founded by Carol Goodden, Tina Girouard, and Gordon Matta-Clark]. Homemade bread and soup at very convenient prices. Young artists came to sit down and eat, and a group of friends of mine were doing this. One person was Gordon Matta-Clark and other people. I was invited to guest chef. On Sundays they had guest chefs and in the newspaper, say this was for next Sunday, it would say, "Takahashi is cooking, come and get it," and I think, "seven o'clock dinner," or something. So I went shopping on Friday and then cooked on Saturday, did my preparation, and I cooked all of Sunday to be ready for seven o'clock. Most of the time there were a hundred to a hundred-twenty people coming and I was the only one doing all this. It was lots of work so I said, "How much do I get?" The restaurant said, "We almost lost money." I said, "What are you talking about?" I got, I think, fifty dollars or something, but it was better than nothing.

Q: Sure.

Takahashi: That's where my cooking career started.

Q: Where was Food? Where was the restaurant?

Takahashi: The restaurant was on Greene Street. Bleecker and Greene Street [note: 127 Prince Street].

Q: Okay. And it was for artists. Do you remember who came when you cooked?

Takahashi: Even Rauschenberg cooked at Food restaurant. It was many young neighborhood artists. Most people, they couldn't survive with just art. Musicians too, Philip Glass.

Q: Philip Glass.

Takahashi: Yes. He was working as a carpenter or a plumber because he couldn't survive at that time. Many others were doing all kinds of work, electrician work, all kinds of work. Then there was John Chamberlain and other artists who came in to eat.

Q: When did you realize that you were going to stay in New York—that you were not just on a vacation?

Takahashi: It was because I was meeting so many artists at the same time. Dancers, musicians, painters, sculptors, photographers. It was just the center of the world. Rather than live in Italy, I thought of this as the center of the world. Look, I was living in a provincial, a small town, and I had my own house in Milan. I paid money for two years for my studio that I was not using and then finally decided I was going to move out. That was quite a decision. I didn't want to stay in Italy anymore. In the meantime, the language was getting better here. I was used to speaking Italian.

Q: After you stayed with de Menil, did you have to look for somewhere to live in? In between there and living at 381 Lafayette?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q: So where did you live in between?

Takahashi: No, I think I moved into 381 Lafayette.

Q: Okay. So who else was there at that time? Who else was at 381 Lafayette when you moved in?

Takahashi: Petersen, he was not living there, but Dorothea Rockburne was there and Brice Marden, he was assistant to Rauschenberg. Brice Marden was making artwork for his own show and that's why he could not help Rauschenberg, and that's what I got, the part of Brice Marden.

Those people did not live there though; they'd come in to work. Who were in and out, were people from other countries, for a short time.

Q: Who? Visitors from other countries?

Takahashi: Yes, yes.

Q: Who would come?

Takahashi: I don't exactly remember. People from Holland. That's what I remember. Who could it be? Oh I think for some time it was—I don't think it was Cy Twombly. He didn't stay here. It was kind of a pass by, instead of a using hotel.

Q: Right. So there were many, many people there all the time.

Takahashi: Yes. The people just came in without invitation and would sit in the hotel room. Sometimes people didn't even say hello to you and would go to the icebox and get a drink. So it was kind of, I didn't like it, but I got used to it. At first I was quite shocked. They fixed a drink and came to the table and said, "Oh, hi." You should be invited first. Anyway, I figured out the New York people.

Q: Right. But you liked New York.

Takahashi: Yes. I thought about, I wanted to make some of my own artwork so I started making, or collecting for collaboration, the memory drawings of the map of the United States.



Hisachika Takahashi  
Untitled from *From Memory: Draw a Map of the United States*, 1971  
Pencil on handmade Japanese paper  
17 1/2 x 22 3/4 inches (44.5 x 57.8 cm)

I think twenty-three artists did it. We had Cy Twombly, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, [James] Jim Rosenquist, and they're also conceptual artists like Joseph Kosuth, Dorothea Rockburne, Mel Bochner, [Lawrence] Larry Weiner, and other artists. And later, in September of 2013 I had a show at Sean Kelly Gallery [New York] at Tenth Avenue and Thirty-sixth [*From Memory: Draw a Map of the United States*].

Takahashi: And luckily, all the group sold to a Mexican collector, Boris Hirmas, and now it's being made into a book. It was quite successful for me after how many years. Forty?

Gonnet: You went to New York in '71, '72.

Takahashi: Between '71 and '72. That was the beginning of New York.

Q: What was the idea behind the map project?

Takahashi: Well, I had a little drawing made and I had an antenna here and I wanted to ask artists to do an artwork collaboration. And I was guessing because I had no idea how. And then I started a little drawing. Some of the artists were doing exactly the same thing, even before I even started asking. Some artists were doing minimal art or a kind of cartoon idea. It was wonderful. And also, I had a show when I was living in Italy, I had a show in Antwerp, in Belgium, and the show ended, but I could not collect my artwork because the gallery had closed and I had no way to get in touch. After forty-three years, maybe more, this was done what? In 1967? And all the time I had disconnected, the gallery owner kept the paintings, for forty-something years. And then, a Japanese artist was looking for me on the computer and my friend saw this on the computer, this information. So he told me I should get in contact with this Japanese artist, a Japanese artist called Yuki Okumura, a very young Japanese artist who was living in Belgium. So we talked to each other and met in Paris. At the time, I was living in Paris and my wife had a house in Paris. Okumura said, “How about we have a show?” So I said, “Why not?” So I had a show in Brussels and this show moved to Liverpool, England [note: *Hisachika Takahashi: Antwerp 1967 / Brussels 2013 / Liverpool 2013*, WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels and Exhibition Research Centre, Liverpool, 2013–14].

Gonnet: But this artist is making—his work is to do work on other people. He took many pictures and Okumura’s work about Hisachika was shown in Japan at the Mori Museum in Tokyo.

Takahashi: In Brussels the students wanted to have a collaboration with me. I had a damaged painting that I'd kept quite a long time and I decided that instead of fixing it, I would give it to the students. I gave everybody a small piece of the work and they used it as material to make their own. They worked very nicely in collaboration and my show took place in one room, and the next small room was the student's work. My artwork was floral shaped, phosphorescent, a pattern of a flower. It was a lot of flower patterns.



Detail of a painting by Hisachika Takahashi under black light from *Hisachika Takahashi: Antwerp 1967/Brussels 2013/Liverpool 2013*, WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, 2013

Q: A flower pattern.

Takahashi: And when you moved, the patterns started coming. You go in, out, in, out, in, out, and there were many multi-colors. I used a black light to show it. When it was dark, and there was no light, it would still glow. The next show was in Liverpool, then went to show at the art fair—Rotterdam in Holland [Rotterdam International Art Fair.] The paintings sold before even the opening of the show, one to the Dallas art museum [Dallas Museum of Art]. So another lucky moment. So I got quite excited. Now I must make another show in Amsterdam at Annet Gelink

Gallery [*Hisachika Takahashi Annotated by Yuki Okumura: Memory of Past and Future Memory*, 2015] and I'm working now, trying to collect all the information together. I'm making a calendar for 3015.

Q: Making—?

Takahashi: Calendar.

Q: A calendar?

Takahashi: January 3015 to December 3015. I put out a little notice about how you can put information in the calendar. On 23rd of May, I put "One thousand seventy-five years old." One thousand seventy-five years old. May 23, my birthday. Those kinds of real jokes.

Q: Tell me what the calendar looks like.

Takahashi: It's not done yet, but the calendar was preplanned during the period 1970 or '71. I'd been working towards making a calendar. I had a big calendar image and I tore it all up. I used a chemical lighter fluid to transfer the images from the torn, crushed paper to my new paper. Then you print the paper but it's very abstract looking. I've kept this paper for many years. I said, I'm going to use this paper and put in dates, and Monday to Sunday and holidays and all kinds of stuff. But the main thing is for the end of the calendar, I have a piece of my drawing that I'd done in this period, 1970 or '71, maybe '72. *Petrified* [*Bible*, 1971], a petrified Bible, and it has a

rock and when it breaks, there's a petrified Bible inside. It's a drawing. After thirty thousand years, the whole world is upside down, and the Bible will be petrified. It will still have the gold edges of a Bible, the shape of a Bible. That's a drawing I'd done in 1971 or something.



Hisachika Takahashi  
*Petrified Bible*, 1971  
Caran d'ache pastel and pencil on paper  
25 x 19 inches (63.5 x 48.3 cm)

Q: Are you also collaborating on the calendar?

Takahashi: No.

Q: Okay.

Takahashi: Anybody who buys it, you can put in your blind date. Party. It's kind of open. I'm not done yet but I've tried not to hurry up, to make a mess. And it's working.

Q: Why did you do the map project? Why were you interested in having artists draw the United States from memory?

Takahashi: It's the artists. There's an incredible amount of self-control—I could use the language selfish or pretentious, but that's not the word exactly. The artists try to show off—what can I do for what you are doing? It began as a competition about all the artists doing individually different—I didn't know that I was going to make a collection. It ended up being this big map. Twenty-three artists. I was trying to show the Metropolitan Museum, the new art section. At the time, we had a man called Henry Geldzahler.

Q: Okay.

Takahashi: Henry Geldzahler, the museum director [curator]. I went to meet him and we talked and the first thing that he said was, “Why don't you make something for the new section, a print or book.” We had a community meeting at the time. Senator [Jacob K.] Javits's wife, Marion Javits, who was an art lover, she bought lots of artists, especially Rauschenberg. Senator Javits's wife said, “Jasper Johns is a painter, Rauschenberg is a creator,” or something like that. Somebody at the meeting gave me advice to go to Italy to meet a publisher. So I went to Italy because I used to live there and I pushed the doorbell and nobody showed up. I telephoned and it didn't connect, so I gave up. This was at the time that I wanted to make these pieces, the book. Also I wanted to make a calendar for 2000. But I was kind of lazy. Also there was something to do with money and so I didn't do it for 2000. I did not think I would be alive in 2000. Anyway, I didn't do it, so this time I'm doing 3015.

Q: Okay. Did all of the artists that you asked to draw the map, did everyone say yes?

Takahashi: Most of the people did it in front of me. I brought a bag of paper and crayons and watercolors, magic markers, and I went to knock on their doors most of time. But many times it was when they came to Rauschenberg's house, "So would you draw a map of—?" Cy Twombly said, "Sure, for you, I can do it." He'd do it. Something like that. I said, "There's something missing here, Texas or New Mexico," so Cy Twombly said, "Well, I know that, but if we put it in, it looks like underpants." So that's why he cut it off. It's kind of a very cute way. I had a wife and husband, both artists, one was on one side of a window, the husband was on the other side of the window, doing it at the same time.

Q: Who is this?

Takahashi: I forget the name. Juan and the wife?

Gonnet: Jane—

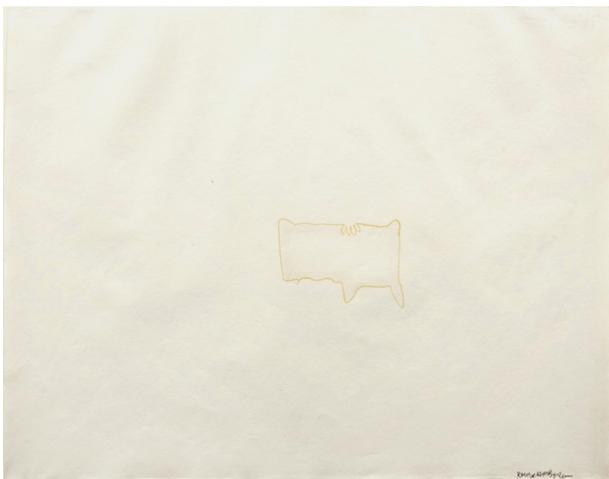
Takahashi: Jane Logemann and Juan Downey. Joseph Kosuth's drawing was just here and there [note: gesturing towards two points]. I looked and he said, "New York and L.A."

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: That's when I said, "Wow."

Cy Twombly said, “I know Jasper Johns, I can ask him for you.” Cy Twombly came back a week or something later and said Jasper Johns said, “I’m not doing art for other people.” So I lost Jasper Johns. But then I said, maybe I’ll just push myself to go door-to-door. I called his telephone and made an appointment, and I knocked and the door opened and Senator Javits’s wife, Marion, was visiting, a good friend of Jasper Johns. I explained that I was doing this project and asked, “Would you please help me?” So he said, “Okay, just leave the paper and we’ll have lunch.” And we had a wonderful lunch. I knew Marion Javits and they were very friendly, and one week later I came and picked up a beautiful drawing he had done. He did the great lakes. It was the most beautiful drawing, proportional views. That’s what the story was.

Rauschenberg picked up a crayon and a pencil and said, “Turn the light off.” I said, “You cannot see,” and he said, “I don’t need to see, it is just a memory drawing.” And he started drawing. He started drawing it small, small. A small drawing with pink and gold. I said, “It’s so small,” and he said, “America is shrinking.” That’s the only answer I got. It’s very—it’s interesting, unpredictable.



Robert Rauschenberg  
 Untitled from *From Memory Draw a  
 Map of the United States*, 1971–72  
 Crayon on handmade Japanese paper  
 17 1/2 x 22 3/4 inches (44.5 x 57.8 cm)



Q: Thank you.

Takahashi: You're welcome.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #2

Interviewee: Hisachika Takahashi

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: July 30, 2014

Q: Today is July 30, 2014. This is Sara Sinclair with Hisachika Takahashi [joined by his wife Agathe Gonnet] and we are at Columbia University in New York City. So you just asked me a very interesting question. You just asked me if I would like to meet Robert Rauschenberg and I said yes and then you gave me what?

Takahashi: I gave you Rauschenberg's ashes. At some point an employee made little containers of bronze and he put the ashes in it and gave them to Rauschenberg's favorite people. I received one and my wife received one. And at the same time, Rauschenberg's turtle, his favorite pet, she died. She had lived more than fifty years. Most turtles can live for over a hundred years, but not as a house pet. She was very happy to live downtown, in 381 Lafayette. We'd buy her vegetables and dog food. At one point the turtle had eggs coming out and I was very surprised. And one time, I was not working anymore, some of the eggs were not able to come out of body and impacted inside the stomach and she died. So later she was cremated and I got the ashes because I had lived with that turtle more than forty something years and she was a very wonderful pet.



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

I was talking about the pets yesterday and this pet was—it was kind of a romantic, classical way—she was originally borrowed from the Bronx Zoo. We had rented this turtle, a bunch of turtles, to make them perform artwork with Rauschenberg [*Spring Training*, 1965; note: the turtles came from a pet shop on Chambers Street called Trefflich's and Rauschenberg returned them all except for Rocky]. There was a big, round dome and the turtles were inside. I don't exactly know how many, but it looked like many. Rauschenberg turned the lights off and opened the big cover. Inside, a turtle was taped up with a flashlight on its back and the flashlights were shooting each other, making shadows on the wall. They looked like dinosaurs. And that's what this dancing performance was. They had to be given back to the zoo after, but Rauschenberg decided to keep one. That was Rocky. That's the story of Rocky.



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

Q: Right.

Takahashi: Okay. Another question?

Q: Okay, so we were going to talk a little bit more about a few of the things that we spoke about yesterday and one of the things was I wanted you to tell me the story of Yuki Okumura, how he contacted you. Tell me a little bit more about the project with him.

Takahashi: Yuki Okumura was a young Japanese artist. The Japanese government had given him some money for the project, I think. He was going to Belgium in residence at WIELS and was living there and he wanted to do contemporary artwork. He was researching a new project and he saw the catalogue for Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp. He saw in the catalogue, my performances, jobs, the artwork, and he was somehow interested. I'm not sure exactly what his interest was in my artwork, but he tried approaching me but he didn't have any contact information for me. He only had the name and catalogue. So he searched for me online and looked for two years. A friend of mine has friends at the gallery and Yuki gave information

through the gallery to my friend Misha Spireburg. Misha approached me and said, “This young Japanese artist is looking for you, you’d better get in contact.” At the time, I was living in Paris so I called him on the telephone in Brussels, Belgium and he said, “Oh wonderful, maybe I’ll come and see you in Paris.” I was surprised to later hear him say, “Let’s go to Antwerp in Belgium to check out the artwork.” And so after forty-five years, I re-met the owner of the gallery [I had showed at]. She was a very young, slim lady at that earlier time and she still had a wonderful shape. It was the first time I had seen her in forty-five years and she was very pleasant receiving me and showed me my work. The next thing Yuki suggested to me, “I already made a plan for a show.” He said, “Okay?” and I said, “Why not?” Better for people to see it.” And so they made arrangements for my friend from Paliseul, Belgium to see this opening and the owner of the gallery would come over to see it and the owner of some of my collection, artwork, would come and see it. It was a very wonderful reunion after so many years. And then this show, when it was over, was going to move to Liverpool, to some kind of art museum—the museum at the university. There were a lot of fashion designers there, photographers, architects, and painters. All of these sections had one gallery space to show in. I was invited to have a show there with the student collaboration work next door. We set up a black light, a spotlight. A very big, professional spotlight. So my artwork looks like it’s coming over, to take you over, and when you’re standing in front of the painting, you just feel like you go inside it. It was a color combination of fluorescent and phosphorescent for the black light to take on, but when the light was off, you could still see it in the dark, glowing. My idea was that I wanted to make artwork—when you have the light off, any beautiful artwork, you cannot see it, like *Mona Lisa* [ca. 1503–06], anything. I said, “I just want to make something I’m able to see in any condition.” At the same time, this is when, that this started?

Gonnet: The artwork? I think '66.

Takahashi: Okay, '66, I was working in Italy.

Gonnet: And in Italy it was earlier, in Antwerp it was '67.

Takahashi: I started working in '64. So that's the connection of my artwork going to Liverpool. After Liverpool, England it went to Rotterdam. What's the name?

Gonnet: In Holland.

Takahashi: Holland. In Holland, they had an art fair [Rotterdam International Art Fair] and my work showed there. I was surprised that even before the opening of the show, it was all sold out. I was very happy and surprised and I didn't need to ship it to America. Also I made money there. In the meantime a gallery owner, Annet Gelink, wanted to buy artwork but it was all sold up. So she asked if I would have a show in Antwerp. Amsterdam. And so this is next year. March 2015. I'm working on that. And Yuki Okumura is included in the same show.

Gonnet: It showed in Japan. His work and yours showed in Japan.

Takahashi: Yuki Okumura was showing my videos and speeches at the Mori [Art] Museum in Tokyo, not showing any artwork, but having videos shown.

Q: Okay, thank you. So you have traveled a lot in your lifetime and you traveled a lot before you arrived in New York in 1969. You had already lived in many places and seen a lot of Europe. Yesterday you said that when you came to New York, you thought that you had been living in a big city in Milan, but then you came to New York and you realized actually you had been somewhere very provincial. So I'm wondering if you will tell me a little bit more about your first impressions when you came to New York, about the community of artists, and about what was exciting for you.

Takahashi: What's that?

Q: What was exciting for you when you first came to New York? Why was it so much more exciting than Milan?

Takahashi: First of all, New York was a very open and international community, there were different languages going on and people looked to me, very free and very easy to communicate with. At the same time there were many provincial people in New York, you would go to a hardware store to buy light bulbs and they didn't sell them to you unless you brought your light bulb, the broken one in, so they can sell you the exact same one. Before they sold it, they would test it, so people didn't come back over complaining about the light bulb.

In Italy the people walking the street were sort of camouflaging themselves so that nobody could see them. Living in Italy, people wore three-piece suits in summertime and the color of the suits,

which you saw other people wearing, was gray and green stripes, and the shoes had to be shiny and the collar, what do you call?

Q: The collar?

Takahashi: The collar of shirts must have no dark wrinkles. Sometimes people would wear handkerchiefs under their collar so they don't get dirty or dark. It was kind of a tight situation in Europe, but European people think this is normal. And coming to New York, everything was open.

When I noticed people throwing food on the floor, even my wife, throwing food, that was a shock. This is a different part of the world, and so once in a while I would interact with people in the subway and I said listen, "You cannot throw the peanut shells on ground. You pick them up." And this big, 6-foot black man stood up and he was really upset, but all the people in the subway kept out of it, and he was making garbage. Those kind of human communications, I loved them.

Q: How could you tell that people were more open?

Takahashi: Huh?

Q: You said people in New York were more open, were more free. How did you see that?

Takahashi: First of all, wonderful eye contact. Okay, you are on the subway and carrying heavy things and a shopping cart and you're going to the stairs to go upstairs. I was going one floor by one floor and suddenly my package was lifted up and I turn around and somebody was helping me to carry it upstairs. And to my surprise a woman was helping me to carry it upstairs. Now I was not that much older. It was very shocking. It happened many times. Of course myself, if anybody needed help, I would volunteer. Sometimes, even in bad situations, when people were fighting in the street—I saw one person cross the street, fighting some other man and hit him with a glass bottle of wine and his head was cracked and bleeding. It was very shocking to see. Two women were across the street and one woman picked a knife out from her back pocket. Quite a big knife. And she opened the knife and was talking to the other girl saying, "I'm going to mess up my brother." I wanted to go over there and stop the person who was hitting the other man. I had no fear about stopping this, which was very dangerous. I twisted his arm and took the knife from this lady and the lady was big. Of course after, I gave back the knife, folded it up. This kind of thing, for me, is very natural and people accept it. [Laughs] Look at the teeny Japanese guy, what's he doing? It happened many times.

Q: Thank you. How about the way that the artists thought— Were the artists in Italy different from the artists in New York?

Takahashi: Artists in Italy, of course all artists, must survive and not only survive; they must pay the rent and food and house and wife and children. So more than anything else, the artist is dependent on money in any country. And so many Italian artists are doing very strange things to make their own fake art. By this I mean you have done in the 1950s something very successful.

It's not the period of artwork you are doing now, but people are still requesting to buy it. So he can get the canvas and the paint and he can do [work] as from the same period of time. Of course, after finishing he can try to make the canvases real old, smudging up the back of the canvas and signing 1950. I couldn't believe it. That's—I want to be creating art—that is really shocking. I'm sure it's done in any country too. This was my eyes seeing—that's when I was working with Lucio Fontana. I asked questions about it: "How come you're making so many of the same painting?" The same painting, same style, maybe different size, different color, with one cut or two cuts in the canvas. So Lucio Fontana called me Cha-cha, instead of Hisachika, I don't mind anybody calling me something I can relate to. I was very young and innocent, so I said, "How come you are making so many artworks the same?" He said, "I'm making many versions of it so that the most people can see it." Because many people were keeping them in their private homes and he said he wanted to make more for more people to see. I agreed too, but at the same time, you're not doing anything new, fantasy, or new sharing for—but that's not my business, that's a way of survival.

I didn't see in New York too much of that work, in America. I'm sure it was done. Another thing in that period, what the people were doing—and it doesn't develop any more—the time I was there, around 1970—I was part of a big group, a wonderful group of artists, dancers, musicians, painters, sculptors, all those things, even the architects. The kind of energy inherited by the artists—it was a very exciting community. I could not go back to Italy, where I still had a house. So for two years I paid rent on my apartment so I could hang around in the United States. New York actually.

Q: Thank you. So let's talk a little bit about the neighborhood around 381 Lafayette.

Takahashi: Okay. 381 Lafayette at the time was a very low, downtown, but artists chose to live around there because of bigger apartments, bigger kinds of studios, and very low prices. But at the same time, there was construction—not construction, factories, like for sewing blue jeans. Usually downtown was storage for food, like eggs, meat, the fish market. It was not high quality of living for people, but there was a really nice art gallery. It was easier to have a connection with the artists there and it was easier to buy big buildings or to buy bigger spaces. So the galleries started moving downtown. But the time that I was there was much earlier, so a lot of crime was going on downtown. At the same time, there were free spaces. It was to me like spaces in the country—they were open for everybody.

The house at 381 Lafayette, it was quite a tall building and it touched a half chapel. It was called St. Joseph orphanage house [St. Joseph's Mission of the Immaculate Virgin]. In the orphanage house there used to be children, maybe twenty-five, thirty children living in the building, with priests and assistants to priests. People lived there before Rauschenberg bought it and they moved to some island. Staten Island? One of these small islands out of Manhattan. But still people would pass by and say, "I used to live here when I was a kid. It was an orphanage." For me there's a little bit of a spiritual, religious, sort of cycle of human construction. The children would walk to offices in the neighborhood asking for donations for the orphanage, grow up, and then came back to reminisce about the house. Once in a while, the door buzzed, with people who had just come to see the house, and I asked questions about why. "Because I used to live here when I was a child." So I would just show them. There were terrible, very strange vibrations in

the basement. So I made my own story about some children who died, but the church people didn't want to make any structure that would get them in trouble. So from the second floor they went down to the basement, dug the holes, and put in the cross. That was the kind of fear I had. I didn't see any ghosts or anything, but I made the little story with my son. At one point Hummingbird was involved with the Buddhist church, he asked a high preacher with his temple to come over to pray, to kick the vibration, the spirit from the house. It's not something I made up. I lived many years and I can see it, I can feel it.

Q: Did your son live there? Did your son, Hummingbird, did he live there?

Takahashi: Maybe for three or four years and then when he grew up, during high school, that time, he came over to live for two years. That time, he hired the priest.

One request was, the house was very old, painted so many times, and Rauschenberg wanted to reconstruct the inside of the house and the outside. At some point, I saw across the street, people were doing repair of a house and so I asked, "Who is the manager?" So the manager came over, he was from India, Bangladesh. I said, "I'm across the street and I need to repair the outdoor and the inside, walls, ceiling and the floor and the staircase and the banister." So he came over, looked, and he estimated. I think at that time it was twenty-five thousand dollars. At the time, I had no idea about the money story, but it wasn't cheap. So I told Rauschenberg. He said, "Go ahead." Those people, they were working with paint remover on the old banister. The banister had kind of three dimensions. I don't know how to call—this is a stake, yes [newel post]? The banister, the round pegs.

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: They used paint remover to remove paint and did it three times until it looked like normal wood and a lot of money was spent on them. Well, we tried to help. But they were kind of talking about the material and I don't know how and I must go, when I die, I must go to Bangladesh for my family. They were kind of talking like this. It was very strange and during that time, you could not use the staircases. So I must have used the fire escape, carrying the dog on my shoulder, using the fire escape to go down. And then we had a wonderful garden on the roof and it was an incredible amount of energy to bring up to the roof—five floors plus one more floor—to bring dirt and the vases, the flower vases, they're not called—

Q: Flower pots.

Takahashi: Wood pots. Then a Jack Daniel's bottle, not bottle, a box cut to make a pot. You filled it up with pebbles, then you put in dirt, and then you put in the plant. There's a lot of plants on the roof so my job was to give them water, to take care of the plants, and when some plants were gone, I decided I should put some plants, plant some edible food to grow. So I said, "Well how about the New York apple?" So I went to buy that plant and I brought the plant up. My idea was a New York apple. It's green and you plant it and you give it water for a year and in the spring, all these flowers start coming out, they're wonderful. Except the flower, somebody needed to pull it. Not pull it. The bees are going to—

Q: Pollinate.

Takahashi: Pollinate. But not too many bees come into Manhattan, downtown. So I said, “The flower won’t make fruit.” Then I had an idea. Maybe I could pollinate it. I remember seeing in *National Geographic* or something, a Japanese apple maker, an old lady, who pollinated the apple tree, and it was quite a big apple tree and the old lady was doing it and so I said, maybe I can do that. And then I remember, they had the little white piece in a stick, tube, like this. So I picked up the chicken feeder, tied it in a stick, and went around to every single flower, and I was hoping it was going to make apples. At the end of autumn, I had one hundred apples, in Manhattan, on the roof.

Q: Wow, wow. I think I have the photo.

Takahashi: Yeah. [Laughs]

Q: Yeah.

Takahashi: It’s Rauschenberg.

Q: Yes, you tell this story.

Takahashi: Oh wow, that’s wonderful.

Q: So you made a cast of the core of the apple, yes?

Takahashi: The apple was eaten by Rauschenberg and Rauschenberg said, “Would you mind finding someplace to cast the core?”

Q: The core.

Takahashi: Core. So I looked and luckily I found something very close. Next to the house, I saw two places, Lafayette here at Bleecker Street, two houses from me, almost next door. So I said, “Would you make me a cast of silver?” He did make something wonderful, but we ate the apples. Rauschenberg ate it. And in the kitchen, I decided to make the cast. Who has this?



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled, 2003  
Cast sterling silver  
2 7/16 x 2 1/2 x 1 inches (6.2 x 6.4 x 2.5 cm)  
From an edition of 5 produced by Untitled Press,  
Inc., Captiva, Florida

Q: This is from one of the catalogues. It’s at the Foundation.

Takahashi: I never saw that.

Q: Maybe it’s the catalog of his private collection.

Takahashi: Very nice.

Q: So you had a hundred apples. What did you do with the apples?

Takahashi: Well, there were a lot for anybody who came. Of course we ate them and made a pie and then we would bring them on any occasion to give. It was wonderful to get into the fresh air, a gift; it was a lot of work. One time Rauschenberg was telling people—at the time I was not there—that he was growing a strawberry plant. They had a little hole in a barrel and he was telling a story about a wonderful strawberry that would grow on the roof and one of the people, I think from India, wanted to come and visit, the whole family, to see the strawberries on the roof. At that time it didn't have one strawberry and they were very, very—why, I got embarrassed. So I tried to stop this fantasy, but it must be some kind of exchange for gifts, because I think people really like to see in Manhattan. This time, luckily, I had apples in the tree. So I said, “Well listen, the apple tree has taken over the strawberries, so take an apple.” They were very happy to see a hundred apples in one tree, quite beautiful. Imagine. With the green leaves and the apple was not a New York green apple. It was—what's the name of the red ones?

Q: There's Red Delicious, there's McIntosh.

Takahashi: Yes, it was McIntosh. So that was saved from Rauschenberg's talking. In the meantime some people were making honey, but not in this section, I think they were near Central Park. But I thought about, why doesn't the government or New York State give money for a tax

deduction? If people have a roof, gardens and trees, to make New York citizens—that would be good for human life. Also they'd have to work, watering every day. That was kind of a funny idea I was thinking about. It was kind of, why not? That's a roof story. [Laughs]

Q: So, are there any other stories that you would like to tell me about 381 Lafayette?

Takahashi: Oh, in the church, it's a very beautiful space. I worked with Rauschenberg to make cardboard sculptures in the church. There's a very high ceiling, about four floors, and a big window, church window. One day, I was invited by a dancer. What's her name?

Gonnet: Laura Foreman.

Takahashi: Laura Foreman, a dancer, she said, "Maybe we can collaborate with music, dancing, and me to work." I said, "Maybe a good idea." Then I had no idea what she wanted to do and so I invented something. It was sort of like a flying machine. [Note: Work was a collaborative art/video/sound installation-environment by Takahashi, Foreman, and John Watts, May 1979.]

Q: Fry?

Takahashi: Fly.

Q: Fly, fly.

Takahashi: A flying machine from a Leonardo da Vinci drawing. The material was called mylar, mylar on top and the construction was maybe 15 feet, I'd say 15 feet, more than this. And I was inside it.

Q: Like a drum.

Takahashi: Yes and I was on the inside. And then I had a pole standing up in the air and I was pulling it up and down. The idea was to have a little hole and the hole had a little flap and when you go up and hold the pole down, it was easier for the air to come in, and then when the pole went up, the hole was closed. So slowly, slowly, we would go up, that was the idea. Anyway, this was a fantasy.

We were in the church and we gave out little balls, Japanese paper balls. We still have those. It was a blue ball, a paper ball, and people played, used their hands, with each other or alone. I had hundreds of balls, which I gave to people in the audience. The front, to here, and this is the ball, right here. The balls were hanging on here and that was kind of a fantasy [note: describing an image he is drawing]. This man had a big cable TV with the music. I forget the name of the artist—John Watts. I have a poster. I forgot to bring it. I can send it to you, no problem.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

Takahashi: So this is four stories high, a church.

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: And this is the entrance. This is how it went. Music, cable TV, and the music, and the window, a big, huge window, and what's the name of the dancer?

Gonnet: Laura Foreman.

Takahashi: Laura Foreman wanted me to make a big, wood high chair. The high chair was high as the ceiling. All right, more than a high chair. She was sitting in it, looking outside. She was looking outside the window.

Q: Okay.

Takahashi: And she didn't say anything for three, two hours. I forget how many. I came and made things and the audience was hanging around. She had three days, five performances every day, but it was very, very tiring. Five times one must go up and down, circle around.

Q: Did this performance have a name?

Takahashi: Did it have a name?

Gonnet: I don't know.

Takahashi: We have a poster.

Q: That would be nice, to see the poster.

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah, it's a beautiful poster too.

Q: Yes, okay. I heard that you fixed something in the church.

Takahashi: Oh, yes, yes the floor. I did it for Rauschenberg's sculpture, which was in Paris, what's the name of the museum?

Gonnet: The museum in Paris, Beaubourg?

Takahashi: Yes, the Beaubourg museum [Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris]. Rauschenberg had pieces, with all kinds of sculpture and music [*Oracle*, 1962–65]. It was an art technology, when you make these pieces, and the piece was very, very old and so he wanted me to fix it. To polish it and stain it and some of the pieces were missing, so I had to remake them. And then Rauschenberg had in his house a fire and his house was damaged and the church ceiling was damaged and the sculpture was also damaged. So that's what I repaired. This is in Paris, in the Beaubourg museum, in a collection.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Oracle*, 1962–65

Five-part found-metal assemblage with five concealed radios: ventilation duct; automobile door on typewriter table, with crushed metal; ventilation duct in washtub and water, with wire basket; constructed staircase control unit housing batteries and electronic components; and wooden window frame with ventilation duct  
Dimensions variable

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Schlumberger, 1976

Engineers: Billy Klüver, Harold Hodges, Per Biorn, Toby Fitch, and Robert K. Moore

But before you enter the church, from the entrance in the hallway, the floor was missing a part.

The floors were made in a mosaic, a mosaic from marble stone, all different colors, but one section was missing. So I said maybe I'll just paint it. It's next to the entrance or the door. I started to clean up the floor. It used to be mosaic, but this was now just cement and so I said well, I'll paint the floor and start making a mosaic, I copied the mosaic from the rest of the floor. It took me maybe two months. Slowly, Slowly. If you have a chance to go, it's still there.

Q: Okay, I'll look for it. And you also fixed something for Cy Twombly.

Takahashi: Yes, I fixed many things. Cy Twombly's pieces—who gave you this information?

Q: My friends. Gina [Guy] told me that.

Takahashi: If nobody looks around there, I can make it up, and nobody will know it. The only thing is, if you point, everybody could see it. So I took the tape off, scotch tape; okay, that's enough, some paintings like that. The paintings were on paper and I think, I don't remember, canvas. They had tape, scotch tape, and when it was twenty years old, some glue dried up and the tape would just curl up. What happened was, this tape was inside the paint, so when the tape came up, the painting would come up too, and how do you put it back? Well, I had new tape, so if I remember, I cut out a section and taped. I think maybe I did a little fix.

Q: A little?

Takahashi: Where I put the tape, part of a Cy Twombly drawing, he used crayon or something. That's one. Another time, Jasper Johns, a sculpture, it was a flashlight. I have a picture at home. Jasper Johns sits down with the flashlight. What he made it with was sort of a sculpture clay that is used by children. It was soft enough to make it with and he made the mold of the flashlight and put switches and everything, and the glass broke, the glass on front. One day, somehow, it fell down, and he asked me if maybe I could help to fix it. So I said, "No problem." The flashlight was like this and there was a switch here and then—the pieces are all made with this waxy—I think children use it.

Q: Plasticine?

Takahashi: It's kind of gray, looks greenish. So this piece of glass, it was worn down and there was some crack there. The same material makes all this. Just under this, there were small pieces I took out, mixed together with, I think I used water, and then I put it around here, covered the crack hole, and then I put it back, the glass. And when it dried you make sure to take it out. When I was done, it looked just like before. This one and two or three more. Okay, one was Yves Klein.

Q: I'm sorry?

Takahashi: Yves Klein. Yves Klein is a monochrome artist; he made blue paintings, completely blue. He's called Yves Klein.

Q: Oh, Klein, okay.

Takahashi: Rauschenberg had a painting, a blue painting, and one day, I was cooking in the kitchen, baking or frying something. I don't remember. I don't really—I don't want to remember. So it was a frying pan and a painting was [splashed with] grease and this maid was in the house. She noticed, so she used sponges and Ajax on it. Oh the painting was completely smudged up with that white, white Ajax powder. After seeing it wet, it didn't look right when dry. She was terrified; she didn't know what she do. I started thinking about it. Wait a minute, I know a story. I knew the woman who'd married Yves Klein, I'd met her. She was still making artwork for Yves Klein after he died because she knew how to make it, and through painting, Yves Klein was still there. My friend from Belgium told me, he said, "I have some color from

Yves Klein homemade paints, but I cannot use them for my paintings. If you want to use it, I can give it to you. So I made the artwork from that paint. It was a very strong paint. Yves Klein made it himself, with powder. You can buy it in the store; it's called Yves Klein Blue. The powder and other blue material, and then reproduce those. The name doesn't come to me. It's very strong. I'll look it up after.

Q: Okay.

Takahashi: Then I thought maybe I can paint it, but I didn't tell anybody yet. So I contacted the Modern art museum [MoMA]—they have a section for information. We got the information about what kind of material to use. So I got all the information and I got all the stuff. I mixed it together—they come in colors, different pigments. So okay and I go home because I lived at 381 Lafayette. I went home and painted on the table, put on plastic and put the paint and I was going to do it. I was going to paint it with a roller.

Q: A roller?

Takahashi: Yes, a roller, a paint roller. It didn't do exactly what I wanted to see. So I said my god, I don't want to ruin it. I got terrified. So I quickly cleaned up my paint. Then I went back later and had success. It took me two years to finish. One day I decided—I went to the roof, the roof table, to have lunch—but there, on a beautiful day, I looked across and said okay, it's done, and I have done a wonderful job. And I cleaned up all the things and I hung it up. A couple of

days later, a group of museum people came in to see Rauschenberg's workshop. The people looked around and said, "Oh, this is an Yves Klein painting, it's in very good shape."

Q: Because it was new.

Takahashi: I had painted that like new. Okay, so this is the Yves Klein story.

Q: Did Rauschenberg ever know?

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah, he was very happy.

Q: You told him?

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but it took two years to finish. Another one was a Brice Marden painting. You know the artist?

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: Brice Marden's painting, all his paintings were honey waxes, honey-bee wax, and they had sort of a natural color. He painted slow, heating, and then painting, and it's a very, very nice color, but sort of a very natural, kind of smooth, almost like a living paint. One day, our friend—what's the name?

Gonnet: I don't know.

Takahashi: [Debra] Debbie Taylor.

Q: Debbie Taylor.

Takahashi: Taylor's husband, the artist [Al Taylor]—he was working with Rauschenberg at that time. He was talking to people and made some kind of careless move and scratch!

Q: With his fingers.

Takahashi: The painting and with his hand. I was shocked, "What did you do?" So this is the late afternoon, so I said, "Don't feel so bad, I might know how to fix it." So I put the painting on the table and I heated water and put it on and waited until the wax was halfway melted. I think we may have used cheesecloth and we boiled it and pulled it out and squeezed that and put it on in top of the painting, and I left it there, and it made the wax relax, and then I moved it slowly and I kept going and I put my finger across and took it off and all the scratches were gone. And then I let it dry and hung it up. Nobody could see a difference. So that's another. I don't know how I had the instinct—because I didn't know anything about how wax is, but I could figure out its temperature could be smooth.

Oh, one day a friend of David White's who had a painting called—a Combine—a very small painting and it was damaged, asked, "Are you able to fix it?" So I said, "No problem." In the park next to 381 Lafayette—what do you call it?

Gonnet: Washington Square.

Takahashi: Washington Square Park, she lived next to it. And she showed me the painting and I said, "Do you have any photos of this?" She said, "No." So now I knew I could do it some way and nobody would notice the difference. I looked at it. Some section of the painting was out, but not materially, so I had to reconstruct it. I had some paint, but the body of the painting was some kind of natural material. So I took a little dirt from the ground. Dirt, a little ash from a cigarette, and mixed it together, mixed the paint, and made sure that it matched the color, and put it in there. It didn't see any difference. That kind of work.

Q: So you are talented at fixing things.

Takahashi: I don't remember exactly, but she said, "How much do I owe you?" I think I told her two hundred dollars. But this was okay for me.

Q: Okay. So before, you were telling me about the performance that you did with Laura Foreman at 381 Lafayette. Many people came to see the show—maybe you can tell me more about events in the space or parties in the space. It sounds like there were many, many people who were there.

Takahashi: Do you know the story about—there is an invitation you can see. I sent invitations, a poster, something for Rauschenberg, and I tried to put in Rauschenberg's father somehow. One image, but not exactly his father.

Q: His father?

Takahashi: Rauschenberg's father. Rauschenberg's father is half Indian, American Indian, and his mother is from Germany. Rauschenberg is one quarter American Indian. Because Laura Foreman didn't have an ideal space to use, I said I want to make arrangements to use these spaces, very nice spaces. Have you been to the church?

Q: Yes, yes.

Takahashi: Nice, no?

Q: It's beautiful. Are there stories about parties at 381 Lafayette?

Takahashi: Oh my god, so many parties. With parties, we like to do a party, especially Rauschenberg. Most times, he opened a party, so many people would come in and usually they'd never leave and in the morning, there were people sleeping all over. Sometimes it would be my job to kick people out. Well, most people were drunk of course.

So one party—[speaking to Gonnet] I'm sorry, I'm going to put Penelope [Newcomb, Takahashi's ex-wife] in this party. The party had all the artists there. John Chamberlain. John Chamberlain, the sculptor. I can't come up with the names.

Q: You can tell me the names later, it's okay.

Takahashi: A lot of big strong men and they're pushing each other for much of this. Brice Marden was there and his wife Helen Marden [née Harrington] and she was very charming. And my ex-wife was there and John Chamberlain came over to the party. He was a complete drunk, but he was very charming and somehow he grabbed Helen Marden's pants, pulled down the pants, so she was naked. Meanwhile everybody's around and John Chamberlain is laughing and Helen gets very upset. So she pulled her pants back up. She turned around, went into the greenhouse, picked up a big plant with dirt. She ran behind Chamberlain and hit the back of Chamberlain and Chamberlain was so big and strong, he was laughing. Every artist, macho guy, wanted to do something, but nobody did anything. Somebody told Rauschenberg, "I think John Chamberlain must get out of the house, be kicked out." So Rauschenberg—I'm sure it was the only time that he did this, Rauschenberg said—I had tried to help with John Chamberlain so they could forget all about this problem. Chamberlain was very upset at me, "What, you're kicking me out of the party?" So Rauschenberg followed to the staircase and John Chamberlain said, "Are you, Bob—" that's what his name was, what everybody called him, "Bob, you are going to kick me out of the party?" Bob said, "I think you'd better go home." He'd had trouble with his wife before, they had a fight when they came into the party, he got drunk.

Anyway, John Chamberlain said, “Listen, why don’t you look in my eye?” He was two steps down the staircase. He said, “Look me in the eye to tell me about it.” So Rauschenberg said, “I’m looking at your necktie. I cannot see your eye.” At the same time, my wife came over with a big cast iron frying pan. She wanted to come over to hit John Chamberlain in the head. At the banister—Rauschenberg was here and John Chamberlain was here—and my ex-wife came over and tried to hit him. I was lucky, I was next—so I grabbed the frying pan and said, “Are you kidding me, you’re going to kill somebody.” John Chamberlain left. That’s a party.

Anyway, they were all big and macho, all the people who were there at the party. Luckily, it didn’t happen, the physical fight. But we had many parties, we had so many parties, and many people we didn’t invite were there.

So any other questions?

Q: Yes, many more questions. Let’s see.

Takahashi: Do you want to talk about Bob’s artwork?

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: Drawings, the paintings.

Q: Yes, both. You tell me what you—

Takahashi: You first ask me other questions, but it looks like—

Q: Well, I was thinking tomorrow we would talk about traveling.

Takahashi: Traveling?

Q: Tomorrow.

Takahashi: Okay. Traveling to so many different countries.

Q: Let's talk about that tomorrow because it's a big subject. What are you holding in your hand?

[Note: Takahashi holds a stack of papers—drawings and notes.]

Takahashi: Many things. When Rauschenberg was painting, at a time he didn't have too much money, he decided to buy paint at a paint store, oil paint, but the oil paint was in a tub, see. Oil painting tubs that had no labels.

Q: Right.

Takahashi: It's because they were old, the label was off the finish. He decided maybe he could use it. They were selling big buckets of different oil paints, tubs, so he bought it all together; he bought it at a very good price. So he went home to the studio to paint, with surprise colors. He

didn't know what was inside, what color. He used the tubs to make paintings during the period, I think, of his Combine paintings. It was quite the incredible imagination without knowing the color, what color will be used for painting. That's one.

One day, he was living in a studio. The studio was divided in two sections. One was Rauschenberg's studio and the other one was de Kooning's studio. I don't think anybody has heard this story. Nobody, no. [Note: Referring to when Rauschenberg would stay in Jack Tworkov's studio, which was next to de Kooning's studio, on break from Black Mountain College, North Carolina, ca. 1953.]

We usually had our nighttime dinner at the kitchen table, getting drunk. It was after three o'clock in the morning and we would share a lot of funny stories. Anyway, this is Rauschenberg's studio, separated from de Kooning's studio by a wall with an empty space before the ceiling. So they had a table and paint was all over it, de Kooning's paints. De Kooning and Rauschenberg had a nice relationship, they had a collaboration. De Kooning gave him the drawing and Rauschenberg canceled the de Kooning drawing [*Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953]. Rauschenberg saw de Kooning's paint on the table and he could not buy very fancy colors, like the kind with lead. Even now, they're very expensive because you're using real material, like turquoise and blue—I think it's blue using a stone called lapis lazuli. At the time the artists were making their own painting materials with stones. Rauschenberg, he climbed up the wall in between the studios to de Kooning's studio and picked up the paint. It was—he mentioned cardinal red and he brought it back. And the day after, de Kooning noticed it was missing, but de Kooning accused his wife of using it because his wife was also an artist. That's what Rauschenberg told me and I said, "It's

very strange, it's very funny." And it happens that I have one painting, a Combine painting, it's small, it had been in my room for eighteen years hanging, but I never took it out. At some point I inherited it, Rauschenberg gave it to me, and there is a little color, a red color in the painting and I said, "Oh my god, that's the paint that he was using."

This is Rauschenberg's story. He loved to go to the Metropolitan Museum and he looked around and at the end of the day, at closing time, he wanted to spend the night there. So when it was time to close and everybody must leave, he hid in some corner. Everybody went out and the last person there was Robert Rauschenberg. But the guard came and looked around, "Did anybody forget to leave?" And Rauschenberg tried to be quiet, but he couldn't stop laughing. And so the guard asked, "What are you doing?" He said, "I forgot to leave." He tried to stay many times but it never happened. That's one story.

Another one—the Philadelphia Museum of Art, they have a [Marcel] Duchamp. They have a sculpture and other pieces. Rauschenberg liked Duchamp. He was trying to get a piece of marble sculpture—it was a cube. It was supposed to be a sugar cube in a mouse cage, in a cage for catching mice, there were two and he wanted to get one for a souvenir and he was so nervous and the whole thing fell down. The guard came over. The guard accused Rauschenberg and the guard said, "What the heck, people love this kind of garbage?" And he put it back. So that's another story.

Nighttime, we talked at the table and Rauschenberg had some ideas for artwork. There was a small paper and he started drawing and I kept watching and he said, "I'd like to make a

sculpture.” Like that. Here it is. This is a big sculpture. It’s a bathtub. It’s a huge amount of wood [Sor Aqua (*Venetian*), 1973]. And this is another drawing.

Q: Is this the United States?

Takahashi: Yes, it looks like it. Would you read it?

Q: “Any more plastic mirrors in New York.” And this says, “Drawing for tub plus hanging for Venetian series.” So he drew this at the dining room table? [Sketch for *Sor Aqua*, 1973]

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And he said, “I want to make this sculpture.”

Takahashi: Yes. It’s a huge sculpture. So I said, “Can I have it?” And so he looks and says, “Oh, you like it?” Of course, he made the sculpture and somebody bought these pieces. It was really amazing. It’s a big—I think an apple cider bottle, the big bottle, for alcohol or whatever.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Sor Aqua (Venetian)*, 1973  
Water-filled bathtub, wood, metal, rope, and  
glass jug  
98 x 120 x 41 inches (248.9 x 304.8 x 104.1 cm)  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
Gift of the Caroline Wiess Law Foundation

Another piece, another time, in India, he was working on an artist project for Gemini and we had to go to India to make it. It was homemade paper from there and mud and using all different things [*Bones* and *Unions* editions, both 1975] and one day I had time—I was making pieces myself, about—it's called Anabi. Anabi is Indian, a very rich family.

Q: Oh, Sarabhai.

Takahashi: Sarabhai, not Anabi. Sarabhai had a house with quarters and we were there to produce this work and Sarabhai's family asked me to make something and they were really wealthy. "Oh, everything you want, we can get." I had time and it could be fun, so I used an old Victorian mirror and engraved it on the outside. I said, "Can I use this mirror?" They said, "Sure." I had a picture with Mickey Mouse T-shirts from one time, so I put it on, and then I scratched the middle and back of the mirror of all pigment material. I ground up an old Mickey Mouse. Mickey Mouse was in the center and it was a mirror. So you were standing up in front of

it and you were reflecting Mickey Mouse in the mirror. It was kind of a piece I forgot completely and one day—the artist Lynda [Benglis] and her boyfriend—

Sarabhai, they had two sons, and these people had a really big connection with [Mohandas Karamchand] Gandhi. Gandhi was a very good connection of the Sarabhais. We used Gandhi's ashram [at Sabarmati, Ahmedabad, India]. Anyway, what was I talking about?

Gonnet: You were talking about Lynda, the artist.

Takahashi: Lynda came back from India with her boyfriend and one of the sons and she said, "Oh, they have lots of collection of artists, there are many, many people. I looked, it was very shitty work." She said, "The only thing I liked was your piece." But at that time, I didn't remember what piece she was talking about. And then she explained to me about my Mickey Mouse mirror. So I said, "Wow, that's wonderful." She's a very strange artist too.

Anyway, at the time in India, Bob said, "Oh, I used to paint, to draw Betty Boop." Betty Boop is a cartoon. So I said, "I don't exactly know what you're talking about." And he said, "You know, with the small dog." So he started drawing for me and drawing to show me how, and then when the drawing was over I said, "Wow, I remember seeing some kind of cartoon." Then I said, "Can I have this?" Here. [Note: Takahashi takes the framed drawing out of his bag, Untitled (Betty Boop), 1975.]

Q: Oh wow, this is Betty Boop by Rauschenberg.

Takahashi: India.

Q: In India, in 1975.

Takahashi: Isn't it nice?

Q: Yeah, I like his version of Betty Boop.

Takahashi: He doesn't usually paint like this. He uses crayon, not crayon, pencil, an IBM pencil. IBM is a computer company or whatever. IBM pencil, B, 2B, the number of the pencil. It's called 2B. Anyway, this is the drawing.

Q: He made a small Betty Boop here too.

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah, very cute. Her mouth. He started doing one and then he never committed.

Q: This is great. All right, thank you.

So how are you feeling? Is this a good place to pause for today or would you like to keep talking?

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah, I think so.

Q: Yeah?

Takahashi: I want to show you one more thing because I brought it, so I don't need to bring it back. This is— [note: *Food and Wine* article]

Q: Ah, the food. This is what you were telling me about yesterday.

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So, you show me.

Takahashi: I don't remember. I should put the—here it is.

Gonnet: You are wearing the same shirt.

Takahashi: Oh, no kidding.

Q: Oh yes, he's wearing the same shirt as in the photo in the magazine.



Hisachika Takahashi in Rauschenberg's Lafayette Street home and studio, ca. 1999. Photo: Matthew Hranek, published in *Food and Wine*, April 1999

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: So this is at 381.

Takahashi: Yes and the church.

Q: Right. This is on the roof.

Takahashi: This is Rauschenberg's sculpture, painting and sculpture.

Q: What floor was this?

Gonnet: The church.

Q: In the church, okay.

Takahashi: These are the ceramic pieces done in Japan. So I'm cooking.

Q: What year is this?

Takahashi: I do not remember. I think the date is on it somewhere.

Q: 1999.

Takahashi: Where do you see it?

Q: Here.

Takahashi: Wow, you have a good eye. So this is the kind of work in the kitchen.

Q: Right.

Takahashi: The entrance.

Q: And this is you preparing.

Takahashi: I wear the same shirt?

Q: As today.

Takahashi: My god.

Q: It looks good.

Takahashi: Yes, this is my birthday present. This is Rauschenberg's dessert.

Q: This is mango?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q: Tell me about this.

Takahashi: I don't exactly remember everything. Rauschenberg, in Florida, had a lot of mangos growing and if you didn't eat them they were going to get rotten or over-mature. So you'd take the skins off and then slice it up and put it in the freezer. It's frozen, that's kind of frozen mango, and whenever people came, you would pull it out, halfway defrost it, and give it to people with ice cream. They have cream it looks like.

Q: Cream and mint maybe.

Takahashi: Maybe the writing says.

Q: Does it say? Yes. Mango freeze. Six large ripe but firm mangos, a 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar, 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice and 1/2 cup crème fraiche. So this was famous at his house, yes?



Rauschenberg's mango freeze, ca. 1999.  
Photo: Matthew Hranek, published in *Food and Wine*, April 1999

Takahashi: When I did it, it wasn't exactly like this. I took the picture. This is eggplant. I don't remember this, maybe chicken?

Q: Chicken, it's Latin lemon chicken. It looks beautiful.

Gonnet: Yes, but he made it very flat, like paper.

Q: For the photos.

Takahashi: But you see, the chicken breast, I sliced up thin, put it in wax paper and then put another wax paper on top and then flattened it.

Q: Right.

Gonnet: So it would come out like a paper. The magazine probably thought it was too complicated to do.

Takahashi: Nobody can do it; you spend the time, many hours, to do it. Oh, I forgot to tell you. When we were doing the performance, performing [with Laura Foreman], Rauschenberg came over—all the people working in Florida, in Captiva Island, he brought them all and they saw my performance—the last day. That was very sweet. What else happened? That day, we went to see after, another day, to see a show with the Blue something.

Gonnet: Stomp. Stomp, it was called [note: referring to the Blue Man Group].

Q: Stomp, with the buckets?

Takahashi: Yes and the blue faces. Rauschenberg bought a ticket for everybody that was a part of the show.

Q: Okay. Thank you so much and we'll keep talking tomorrow

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #3

Interviewee: Hisachika Takahashi

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: July 31, 2014

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with Hisachika Takahashi [joined by his wife Agathe Gonnet]. It's July 31, 2014 and we are at Columbia University in New York City. So thank you very much for yesterday and for the day before. It's been a pleasure to speak with you.

Takahashi: Thank you.

Q: Today, I would like to begin by speaking about some of the trips that you took with Rauschenberg. Maybe we can begin with Israel, which I believe you went to in 1974. I have a few photos from that time. Maybe you could tell me your memories of that trip.

Takahashi: We were going to Israel, the Jerusalem museum [Israel Museum, Jerusalem], to have Rauschenberg's show [*Robert Rauschenberg in Israel*, 1974]. Rauschenberg took the crew, me, his assistant, and somebody who was taking pictures and that person's girlfriend. Petersen was another sort of assistant. Basically Petersen was doing his own artwork more than assisting, so we ended up pitching to—the idea was Rauschenberg would go to Israel, pick up garbage from the street, and deconstruct it, making artwork. We looked all over the city. We didn't find any cardboard boxes or anything.



Robert Petersen and Hisachika Takahashi, unknown location in Israel, during the *Rauschenberg in Israel* project, 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Attributed to Mayo Thompson



Rauschenberg, Hisachika Takahashi, and others, gathering rocks near Caesarea Maritima, Caesarea, Israel, during the *Rauschenberg in Israel* project, May 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Mayo Thompson

The museum had a section to work in and somehow we went to the basement to look and there was an incredible amount of cardboard. So we chose many of the best ones and brought them in to the studio to work on the next day. The day after, we got to the studio, in the museum, and everything was gone—taken back to the basement. It was quite shocking but it was very reasonable because the museum people needed these boxes to pack.

So now we had a real problem, so one more time, we were forced to go to the city, looking for anything we could find. In the evening we found a broken wheelbarrow. We pushed it and we reconstructed it and brought it back to the museum [see illustration on p. 139]. On top of this, we went to pick up sand from the desert, any desert, we would go there and collect sand, and so there are many different colors of different sections of sand, and we started gluing together and putting things together, and gluing the sand. In some places we painted color, but where exactly, I don't remember. We used paint, the glue was medium, and the glue was constantly strong, water-based, and still holds everything together right now. We had sort of an incredible time. We

had to have time to dry the sculpture and we had time to play a game called *Hanafuda*, a Japanese [card] game. Most times we used the floor to work, the floor to eat, and also we had enough time to go visit a few special places. Like the place that Jesus was cremated or in the temple where they carved up the wall of rocks. Anyway, we went to the main Israel sites too. Also most of the time we went to eat in Arab restaurants because Israeli food was not quite tasty for us.

And then the show was open and it was a quite successful show. In the meantime, we went to a couple of stores and one time, to an antique store and everybody was looking around and I was looking behind the store and there were boxes of mummies from Egypt, and I thought very strange—in Israel, a mummy of an Egyptian. So I called Rauschenberg, “Come and see something, a surprise.” And Bob Rauschenberg, right away, fell in love with this mummy and he wanted to buy it, but he didn’t want to spend money for the particular price of the mummy, so he made some negotiation, an exchange for artwork. And then everything was all right. It took two years to come to the United States and Rauschenberg’s secretary, [Charles] Charlie Yoder, he went to pick it up at the airport. He was thinking there must be some payment, but at the airport, the tax person said, “We don’t charge anything after two thousand years old.” So Charlie put it on top of his car and tied it up to bring it to Manhattan and he brought it to 381 Lafayette. Then we opened the boxes and we didn’t see the mummy. It was covered with all different colored toilet paper on top of it, to make a cushion—the pink, turquoise, and white, yellow. Incredible. We didn’t take a picture but it was very beautiful. And the mummy had come without any damage. We had it for quite a long time in the small bedroom, lying down in the bed, and so the room was called mummy’s room. Then when the guests came we moved it outside. Then one

guest was going to stay a very long time— We didn't ask how long do you want to stay? They were very comfortable. One night she tried to use the house telephone and on it was written mummy's room and so she asked me, "What is mummy's room?" So I told her about the room, "When there's nobody in the room, we put back the mummy in the bed." That night the lady packed her suitcase and left. So we figured out, especially Rauschenberg said, we should make a box, a museum box, with glass cases.



Rauschenberg's mummy cartonnage and display case at his Lafayette Street home and studio, New York, ca. 1998

So we went to Metropolitan Museum to study how the boxes were made and to make little sketches and then to hire a carpenter to do it. The bottom section had some dry, moisture control that we never used. Anyway, so the mummy was standing inside a box in front of a greenhouse, a small, indoor greenhouse, which was standing between two windows on the third floor of 381 Lafayette. That's when Rauschenberg was working in Israel and that's the story.

Q: A very funny story.

Takahashi: The next one—I don't exactly remember which one was first, which was after—but we were going to India for the Gemini project, a printing project. So we got to our home and this time, I think it was Petersen and myself and Rauschenberg. We went to India and Rauschenberg had a wonderful friend called Sarabhai and Sarabhai opened the house for Rauschenberg. Le Corbusier made the house in cement and with very small windows and the house was quite hot because Corbusier didn't want to use air conditioning.



Le Corbusier, Villa de Madame Manorama Sarabhai (1951), Ahmedabad, India, photographed in 1961. Richard Langendorf Collection. MIT Libraries. Photo: © Richard Langendorf. License: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0

So there were little fans going on the ceiling, that's it. But when we arrived in the airport because we were first class, there was air conditioning and champagne and everything. When we arrived, they opened the door to go downstairs in the airport. It was 108 degrees, something we had never felt before. Everybody started to complain, "It's too hot, too hot." Usually, when it's so hot, you don't sweat, you only see crystal salt on the skin. So I thought that ice is sort of a good idea. So we started there and we started complaining we're hot, which wasn't going to change anything, so I said, "Let's not say hot any more. Nobody say hot anymore." That was a wonderful trick.

I was, on the plane, quite interested in the rice fields and stuff I could see, and we took pictures from the airplane, and somebody came over, "You cannot take pictures." I said, "Why not, I'm

taking a nice view picture, besides I am not doing anything wrong.” And when I arrived at the airport, some kind of security guard came over and said, “We want to have your camera.” And I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “We want to check out your film.” So I left the camera in the airport. They were going to take the film out, develop what kind of picture? They were scared that I was a spy or some kind of nuclear assistant, and there probably was around there, I have no idea. I got back my film and my camera. That was the beginning of India, shocking.

The place we were working was the paper mill, handmade paper. Usually making paper is—any shred of fabric is melted up, chopped up and melted and put in to make paper pulp with water, and then it goes through the screen to take the water out. And only cotton fiber was on the screen and Rauschenberg wanted to make artwork from that. It was quite a good technique. Layer over layer, it’s wet, it shrinks, and somehow used cow pee to make a sort of seal for the paper. He ended up using big pressure to take all the extra water out and it was one by one put in the sun to make it completely dry. In a very primitive way—I think many other countries are doing this. I was sort of, I said, bored at times. It’s funny, but at certain times I thought about how I could use this technique for myself, in my free time.



Rauschenberg, Robert Petersen, Hisachika Takahashi, Gemini G.E.L. collaborators, Sarabhai family members, and workers at the Gandhi Ashram paper mill, making handmade paper for Rauschenberg’s *Bones* editions (1975), Ahmedabad, India, 1975. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen

And at one point—we were eating mostly vegetarian food—and we were so hungry for meat. Once in a while, we'd go to a restaurant. They have two kinds of people in India, one religion where they don't eat meat and the other people, another religion can eat meat. So once in a while we would go to a restaurant, but very often, we didn't. So I had an idea. I wanted to catch a peacock.

Q: A peacock?

Takahashi: A peacock is not easy to catch; it's a huge bird. They're like eagle size, maybe even bigger. Also the peacock is the national bird of India and you cannot kill them, and I'm here talking about one to eat. So I had to wait until there was nobody around and then when people went home, from a worker, from the gardener I borrowed an air gun and this air gun was very old. When you pulled it out to put in a pellet—the pellet was already the second time or third time used, secondhand pellets old style, cut lead. Anyway, I was going to try anyway and then something was jiggling, the tube to the main body was kind of loose, so when you tried, air would come out from inside. So I had to keep my finger on it, so air would not come out. It was that kind of old air gun. Then the peacock—it was nighttime, by night I mean after dark started—the peacock was going to the top of the tree. I saw on this program, just to spray from the bottom, to shoot. Many times, I got someplace to shoot; the peacock would start to fly away. It was screaming, a huge voice. Then, one more try, and only one peacock was left on top of the tree, a male peacock, but it was so far up, five floors up. I said okay, maybe I'll try one more time. This time, I sort of prayed to god, "I'm very sorry for trying to get the peacock, but would you mind if I have one peacock for dinner?" Or lunch, whatever. Then I aimed up, but this time I

aimed not at the body of the peacock, I was aiming at its head and peacocks have a very small head. I tried to aim in the eyeball, but there were a lot of leaves in that tree. So I didn't see the peacock very well. It was high, five floors high. So I aimed up, closed my eyes, prayed to god to give me one. I shot with my eyes closed and then I heard ch-ch-ch-ch-ch. The peacock coming down, but still alive. Huge. And one Indian guard or driver actually, a private taxi driver, he came over and tried to help me. So I got the peacock, but had to hide the evidence. So I cleaned up the meat—whatever meat I thought I'd like to have—the breast meat, the leg meat, but I still had all the main things; the head, the feet, and the feathers. So I took all the feathers out and hid the feathers. And with the feathers, I didn't know what to do with—small feather from the chest and stuff—I tried to make handmade paper from them. And Rauschenberg was very interested, so he wanted to see it. It ended up to be—there's paper coming out, but not iridescent paper, just a little bit of iridescence to it, in the paper.

Q: A little bit of?

Gonnet: Iridescence.

Takahashi: Anyway, I used many parts of the peacock and I wanted to bring home all the feathers, so I thought of how to hide it because they are not allowed by customs in America. So I asked someone to make a pillow case and I asked her to stick them in the pillow and I asked her to sew it very well so nobody could see. I used it on the airplane and when I arrived in New York, I used all the peacock feathers for artwork too. I even made my wife a curtain in Paris. So it was very useful and the meat was—I made it, cooked it in a very small oven, a little brick oven

with quite a big pumpkin, with a cut in the top and I cleaned up the insides and put in a chunk of meat, and the rice and spices, and then I covered the peacock, covered the top and put it in the oven for a couple hours. It made a wonderful dinner. Rauschenberg enjoyed it very much. But the day after, I went to go finish eating it, I went at lunchtime and they said, “Oh, they were curious, the Indian people.” So I said, “It was duck.” The people who ate it thought it was duck, but what happened was the peacock was eating hot pepper in the garden. The stomach was full of hot pepper, so the peacock self was marinated, wonderful. So there, for lunch, I went to eat the rest of it and this lady said, “Oh, sorry, we gave it to our gardener.” So that was the time of eating the peacock, but this was in India, time to do printing.

Q: Sorry, go ahead.

Takahashi: I stayed a little after Rauschenberg left. I stayed for, let's see, a couple more weeks and I went to go see Buddhist monks who had been in India and then, who after India, moved into other country, in China, through Tibet. They went to China for their religion and then went to Japan. When they arrived in Japan, all of India was without Buddhism. But they still have a big cave there and a huge, wonderful cave, with all the Buddhist inside, elephant inside, about a hundred, because the religion was very high and people worked for religion and it was very old, maybe two thousand, a little more than two thousand, years ago. And at that time, I was just enjoying myself. Okay, next.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about the work that you did together in India.

Takahashi: It was using bamboo sticks or cane more than bamboo. We did matte, mixed the paper pulp in curry powder, so the sculptures still smell of curry. That was one. Another one, we were using paper, fabric, with bamboo sticks. It almost looked like a Japanese shoji—it was a door. There were two or three other kinds of work. A huge sculpture with silk fabric through bamboo sticks and you could move them, so that they were sculptures by themselves but the image kept moving.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Ally (Unions)*, 1975  
 Rag-mud, bamboo, dyed string, rope  
 45 x 49 x 3 1/2 inches (114.3 x 124.5 x 8.9 cm)  
 From an edition of 13 published by Gemini  
 G.E.L., Los Angeles



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Hard Eight (Bones)*, 1975  
 Handmade paper with bamboo and fabric  
 26 x 33 1/4 x 2 3/4 inches (66 x 84.5 x 7 cm)  
 From an edition of 32 published by Gemini G.E.L.,  
 Los Angeles

And Rauschenberg would hold on with one hand and the top popped up and fell to the ground and Rauschenberg's foot was there. The section knocked his foot and it was really painful for him, but he did not complain. One leg was socked and one foot had a shoe, the other one with just a sock, and he walked around like that and all the Indian people were so shocked to see him. He looked almost like a fashion model or something. That was a little part of our Indian work.

Q: When you were walking around in Israel, picking up the garbage, did you speak with people on the streets? What did the Israeli people say to you? Did you speak to people as you were gathering the garbage?

Takahashi: Most times luckily, people were not around. We went looking for things in the afternoon, later, so not too many people were hanging around the street. In a way, nobody cared about picking up garbage and second, we didn't find any valuable garbage, meaning real garbage. Have you seen pictures?

Q: Yes, yes. I think this is from Israel, yes? What are you carrying here? [Note: discussing photographs in *Rauschenberg in Israel*, exhibition catalogue, 1975]



Hisachika Takahashi, Rauschenberg, and Christine Kozlov gathering materials for *Rauschenberg in Israel*, Israel Museum, 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives. Photo: possibly Nir Bareket

Takahashi: This is carrying sand; sand is in the buckets and rocks. This is a printing shop that we went to—a school, a meeting. We met printing students and we ended up—Rauschenberg left all the leftover paint and glue, he gave it to them. He didn't want to bring it back. I was wearing quite a good shirt.

Q: Yes, you look nice. And this is where?

Takahashi: I don't exactly remember, maybe something to do with Jesus, before he was punished, he was there.

Q: And this is a party in Israel—

Takahashi: It's the opening.

Q: Do you remember this opening?

Takahashi: Yes, yes, yes. The mayor of Jerusalem was there and the opening was very successful. Many pieces were left in Israel.



Hisachika Takahashi, Rauschenberg, and others at an event for or the opening of *Rauschenberg in Israel*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: So by successful, you mean much of the work was sold?

Takahashi: People in Israel had never seen Rauschenberg's work. Probably there were one or two pieces in the museum and so this was a pack of completely different artwork.

Q: This is one of the pieces from Israel. Can you tell me about this piece?

Takahashi: This is a can hanging from a piece of cloth, a paper canvas; the canvas had paper and a glued seam. This section is a printing of newspaper. Let me grab it. Look at this. This is an Israeli newspaper and we used the print shop.

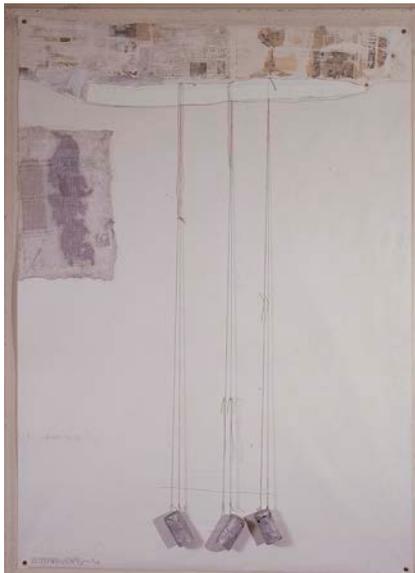
Q: Yes.

Takahashi: And we used this print machine. You put the newspaper in and sprinkled a solvent and then you pressed down and it went through the machine and then wherever you lost the pigment from the newspaper, that was going to print on the paper.

Sometimes Rauschenberg was not finished yet, a painting, so he said, "I don't know how to finish." Anyway, he was doing some work, I don't remember which one, but doing some painting and he didn't know how to finish, something was missing. So I said, "I think I would put in one line and then some other thing here." So I tried to make balance of the painting and I said, "Why don't you have something over here." It was a big sign of Rauschenberg, to make balance. After a few minutes later, he finished it, just like that. So I think he was very flexible—accepting ideas from other people.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about how you would work together, when you were working? You told me this story, you had a suggestion and he was flexible. Can you tell me more about how you would work as an assistant? So for example with this piece, what might you do? How would you assist in making something like this?

Takahashi: I would tie the string or can, which we found in the street, and glue the two pieces. This is quite a long time ago so it's hard to remember. Most of the time we would hold work up to the ceiling, a wall, to see how high he liked it, so there would be two people, one on this side and the other side, and a little bit left, a little bit right, a little higher. That was our physical help.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Scripture*, 1974  
Solvent transfer, acrylic, graphite and  
collage on paper  
85 x 59 inches (215.9 x 149.9 cm)  
Private collection

Q: Did you speak while you were working?

Takahashi: Yeah, most of the time we were speaking, yes. What's your question about speaking?

Q: What would you be talking about while you were working?

Takahashi: We talked about anything, about food, about people and Israel. I had a friend in Italy, she grew up in Israel and had a sister—they were very open to Arab people. In Israel they have a system that when you're a certain age, you have to be in the military. These people, they agreed. Arab people, Israeli and Arab, but it was too bad because European people, American Israeli people, support Israel to have wars with the Arab countries. That's kind of what we talked about.



Rauschenberg, Robert Petersen, and Hisachika Takahashi working on a *Scripture* (1974) to be exhibited in *Rauschenberg in Israel*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, May 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York



Rauschenberg and Hisachika Takahashi, Israel, 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

Q: What did Rauschenberg think about that?

Takahashi: He agreed. Given the story of the war, they were waiting for the Messiah to come back. I chipped in and said, “I wish I could blow up this wall because this is a division of Israeli to Arab people.” Bob Rauschenberg said, “I agree. If I could, I would like to blow up the wall.” That big, heavy wall, the big rocks piled up.

Q: Were you also able to meet Palestinian people?

Takahashi: Yeah. Every time we went to eat lunch outside, we would go to Arab restaurants. I was using a headband and all the Arab, Palestinian people, children, were very shocked to see this, when I started using their own headband. I think we went even to Gaza.

Q: Yes?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q: Do you remember that or you're not sure?

Takahashi: I think so. Yes, we went to Gaza too. I was collecting a lot of garbage too, myself, broken glass and it looked like two thousand years old. There was a lot of broken glass in one section so I collected it and brought it home. I thought in a magazine they had one section of photography of all the remaining stuff that we picked up off the street. That was my collection. You have the book?

Q: Yes, yes.

Takahashi: Because I have one book [note: referring to the *Rauschenberg in Israel* catalogue]. I wanted to use that to make artwork. One part was glued into a piece of plywood and framed up, and then all the broken glass—maybe a thousand or two thousand years old, I have no idea—but I just made it myself. Who was drinking two thousand years ago? That's the artwork. Have you seen it?

Gonnet: I think I have one. I have one.

Takahashi: Oh good.

Q: You said that you also traveled to Japan with Rauschenberg. Was that for ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] in 1986 or was that a different trip?

Takahashi: Rauschenberg went twice. Once it was for ceramic artwork, the name of the place—it was a very famous ceramic place, a big factory [Otsuka Ohmi Ceramics Company, Shigaraki, Japan], ceramics were usually made with similar images in the—so to use it as a panel or as a center, like the president of an Arab country or something, and Rauschenberg wanted to use this company to make artwork. He made really beautiful artwork in a big cooking oven [*Japanese Clayworks*, 1982/1985 and *Japanese Recreational Clayworks*, 1982–83/1985/1989] and he needed to have quite a big space to make the mold, to cook it with an image on top, and then to cool it down so that the space of it was correct. And then after it was done, you needed to have

shipping. I think one time there was a show in the museum, it's—well, I forget the name. And then the rest of them were brought back to New York.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Gates: East (Japanese Claywork)*, 1982  
Transfer on high-fired ceramic  
96 1/4 x 167 1/4 x 43 inches (244.5 x  
424.8 x 109.2 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Q: Did you feel like you were a host in Japan? Was it nice for you to share where you come from with Rauschenberg?

Takahashi: I don't exactly understand what you—?

Q: Was it nice for you to go back to Japan?

Takahashi: Oh yes, it was different too. And I got a few times, a program, to work with the museum and I had an assistant from the museum to help and I was helping too and I was translating for the assistant Charlie Yoder, who was very tall, 6-foot tall, maybe 6-foot-5. Anyway, he would speak to me in English and I would translate in Japanese for the worker. And we also talked to workers, the museum workers, because they were not just workers, but were also interested in art.

At that time we were setting up a sculpture, it was very heavy and everybody was waiting to pick a setting. I was with the other assistant of Rauschenberg's, Thomas Buehler, a German; he did computer work and installations. He kept saying to me, "Don't speak, just hold that," and he was very rude. Next thing I said, "It's heavy." And then from the entrance of the museum, museum people came out to ask, "What do you think about putting it at the entrance," these ceramic pieces, because they are very big, very heavy, and very interesting, and people can see them before they go into the museum. I said, "That's not a bad idea." About an hour later, Thomas Buehler came over, grabbed my arm, pulled it, and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Are you giving permission to these museum people? That's my job." I didn't give permission, I just suggested to people, when they asked me for a suggestion, I said, "Good idea." And that was the beginning of a very un-collaborative time with this guy, Thomas Buehler. I said, "Take your hand off me because otherwise I'm going to punch you in your face." He took his hand off. Anyway, there was a type of jealousy about working with Rauschenberg instead of a collaboration or a working together. But guess what?



Installation view, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI JAPAN*, Setagaya Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1986. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Charles Yoder

Q: What?

Takahashi: It happens to be outside, the sculpture [laughs].

Q: Did Rauschenberg like Japan?

Takahashi: Oh yeah. He had—very early, he went to have a show in one of the famous flower arrangement places. They still have this big, open museum and Rauschenberg was doing a show there and it was a very beautiful open show, mixed with Japanese traditional painting and he left it for the museum. He had a very good time in Japan, so he was very happy to go back to work in Japan.

Q: Right. And then you did go back, so tell me about the second time you went.

Takahashi: That was for the—

Q: ROCI.

Takahashi: ROCI. This is maybe another story. ROCI was going to have a show in a museum and I was there with my family, coming to Rauschenberg's show. Somehow, this Thomas Buehler was there and said, "I don't like Takahashi coming with us." Something like that and Rauschenberg said, "I don't want to have trouble in the museum because it's a very important show and so if you want to go, you go on your own money." I can stay in my family's house but what are you talking about? I didn't understand. So I decided not to go.

Q: You said that sometimes there were problems with people being jealous or territorial. Were there other times that that was your experience?

Takahashi: Oh yes, many times, but mostly small. People like to gossip, especially my community at that time. Most people would come in the morning, about six, and talk for more than a half an hour of gossip and it's kind of a very bad habit. Many workers complained about me to Rauschenberg and Rauschenberg was not in the same place, he was in Florida, so he lamented these bad stories of me. It was very uncomfortable, but that was the life.

Q: So let's talk about Florida. Tell me about when you would go to Captiva. I know you were based in New York and you were caring for 381 Lafayette and you were managing everything there, but I understand that sometimes you would go to Captiva. Would you go as a studio assistant?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q: What were the series that you were working on in Captiva?

Takahashi: Captiva is a very relaxed place. People didn't show up at dinnertime so he wasn't hosting until three o'clock, so he had time to work. That was why he moved to Florida. In New York, he didn't have time to do artwork. In Florida, once in a while he had friends come for dinner, from New York, from all over. So we made treats for dinner. Usually Rauschenberg

would catch a fish for dinner. Catching fish is very good early in the morning or before sunset. So we'd go fishing to catch—so everybody could have one fish. It was quite nice, the fish you could catch in Florida. The one that's called sheepshead, like the family of the snapper, it's striped and very beautiful. It was usually easy to catch, but when it was very hot we had to stay in the water later, so the water was colder. But we were able to catch the quantity of guests that were coming to the house, eight people or twelve people, and so that was kind of the way dinner was served. You could go outside in the bushes; you could get a papaya, a wild tree, not cultivated. Things like this.

We used to get blue crabs. Rauschenberg's mother loved crabs. But Rauschenberg's father didn't like the smell of blue crab so they were not allowed to eat them inside the house. So outside they would put newspaper on the table and then put the blue crabs on the table and eat. Rauschenberg still had the memory of that; he told the story about putting newspaper on the table and dumping the crabs. It was very sweet.

And then Rauschenberg had a print shop called Untitled Press and this is the machine here [note: referring to a photograph].

Q: Yes.

Takahashi: Yes, the print machine was called, I think, Janet [note: Little Janis].

Gonnet: It had the name of a woman.

Takahashi: Anyway, in the print shop, this is the print shop. This is—oh here it is. Here, I'm making my calendar pieces. Anyway, Rauschenberg invited artists to come in to make new prints on the Untitled Press. He invited artists there; they'd have good times and make a print. The machine had belonged to an artist neighbor, she had it in her home, the printing machine, but she was not using the whole section. Once Rauschenberg inherited it, he needed to have the machine cleaned and then reset, but we had no crew. We must have figured it out the way—this must go like this, this is the top. And Rauschenberg's friend Bob Petersen, he's a Gemini printer, and we worked together to set it up. Once it was set up, we must have put in something. A lot of people wanted to do printing called etching, quite a different printing system. Some of the panels were bronze and scratchy and we used acid to make them right and put the ink on and paper to take the ink off from scratch. You do it right in the stone and then use acid to take sections off and sometimes this old stone, it was very special—an image that somebody printed before would go through so the image would get doubled, from the new print to the old print coming through. It was very interesting. So that was an invitation for a lot of other artists. The Untitled Press catalogue had artists Cy Twombly, David Bradshaw, me, Shusaku Arakawa. I don't remember now.

Q: I think Sue Weil came.

Takahashi: Sue Weil, yeah.

Takahashi: So the entertainment was—it was the place that everybody would sleep. It was kind of very normal, but also fun. You talked all night and stuff like that. One time Arakawa wanted to go fishing, so we went fishing together and we talked about all kinds of wonderful things while fishing. All the ones we had already caught, so they're going to nets and come in to dump the new fish in buckets, and we discovered that the buckets were empty. The fish had been there and so we were quite surprised—who stole them or what's up? And then David Bradshaw, every time, he dumped the fish back into the ocean for whatever reason, which was not all right.

Arakawa was very cool so we caught more fish. That was in Captiva. Captiva also had a lot of dogs, so my job was to take walks with the dogs, about three or four. I even brought my dog and so Rauschenberg, the first thing he said, "If you go out with your dog, you must take mine too." So I had tons of food and dogs, but it was very easy for me.

Q: What about when Rauschenberg would come from Captiva to New York?

Takahashi: Rauschenberg went to Captiva, this was before, and he was looking for a place to buy. He found a small house. It was two floors, bedrooms on the second floor, and the bottom had a garage and he made the garage into a studio. The second floor was his bedroom and the guest room. Every time I went there, I would stay in the guest room. Then one day in New York—because at that point he was just going to Captiva Island for short trips and coming back to New York and he was living in New York, making art in New York—a fire destroyed the building. Two floors and the basement were damaged from smoke and the church section, so he decided to move to Florida because of the ashes and the house being very hard to work in and the

heat not working. So I ended up having to be, just to be by myself. It was a lot of work, especially the dogs and cats that were all cold.

Rauschenberg had stuffed animals; I don't know what you call, like tigers and zebra. They had bison, buffalo, on the floor, with curly hair, and so the dogs and cats were all sleeping together because it's warm. The house had no heat and no hot water either. That was not for too long though. When Rauschenberg came to New York, it was to do business; either he had a show in a gallery, Leo Castelli or Sonnabend Gallery or part of a museum or he was going to Europe.

One day he came over without a suitcase, just carrying a small paper bag, so I asked, "What happened to your suitcase?" He said, "I'm tired of traveling with a suitcase, so I traveled with the paper bag." I looked in the paper bag; key limes were in this paper bag. I said, "Why bring just key limes?" He said, "I'm going to bake a key lime pie." He made a wonderful key lime pie. He also liked hot spice so he asked me to go look for hot spice in Manhattan and I found it in a few places and a few hot spice peppers and he made his own hot spice sauce. He liked Jack Daniel's, everybody knows that, and he asked me to buy a small bottle of Jack Daniel's and then he drank it all and the bottles were filled up with hot spice and signed, "Robert Rauschenberg, Hot Spice," and he gave it to all his friends. The house would have the smell of hot sauce all over, so hot that if you scratched your eye, you're going to get a terrible shock.

So he was back and forth from Captiva, but most of the time when he was coming there was big preparation, lots of people coming back to the house or to have a show on the outside. Usually he would take the dogs back and forth, and when I'd go I would bring back the dogs. So Captiva

was the main house and the print shop. Between the print shop and the Beach House there was a road called the Jungle Road. In front of the print shop house, there was a house for sale. The owner worked for a commercial newspaper, was a cartoonist or something. This person had a lot of land and also had a sort of park not included in the house section. Rauschenberg bought this house, a small house out of the ocean, called a Fish House. So the other house was not anymore called the Fish House, it was the Beach House. This house, Rauschenberg liked to go there to spend time, and he would pull out the bridge so nobody could come over the water there.



Rauschenberg in front of the Fish House, Captiva, Florida, 1979. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Terry Van Brunt

We [Takahashi and Agathe Gonnet] had our wedding, honeymoon, in Florida and we stayed in this Fish House, and I caught fish from the balcony with a harpoon. One day we came back from the outside and the bedroom mirror was on the floor, completely broken. It was very, very shocking, a big mirror. The winds had come in from the window and knocked it. So I know that a broken mirror means you have bad luck, it's called seven years of bad luck, and we were just on our honeymoon. So we decided to throw it in the ocean so that the reflection would come from the water. That's what the fantasy was—that the bad luck would go away. In the meantime, Trisha Brown, the dancer, walked into the Fish House. She said, "Oh, it's beautiful, can I help

you?” And she was throwing it with us. Then that afternoon she went back to the main house and she told Rauschenberg and Rauschenberg got so upset. He drove his car and went to look and he was very upset and he said, “Your wife is throwing broken glass into the ocean.” And so I said, “I’m very sorry, but I didn’t think about it. I’d rather worry about the bad luck for seven years and we are on honeymoon.” And that was the end of our conversation. Rauschenberg accepted it, but I tried to pick up many pieces as possible from underwater. This was kind of very dramatic and fun together.

Q: Do you think that Rauschenberg, do you think that his work changed because he was in Florida?

Takahashi: I’m sure it was different. He did some artwork, he got tired, and he wanted to change. He’s not like some artists, doing the same subject, continuing same for a lifetime. Rauschenberg gets tired; he wants to jump into the next and the next. That’s what Marion Javits said, “Rauschenberg is an engineer or a technician.” Rauschenberg changed. He used hibiscus flowers in prints because the color of the pigment would stay in the paper and those kinds of things that come from nature. He was born in Texas.

Gonnet: Texas, in Port Arthur.

Takahashi: And I’m sure there’s a lot of nature there and his father went fishing, went hunting duck, and when he was young his job was to clean that duck to sell to the neighbors. He told me when they would go fishing, his father dressed up very well, and they’d go fishing in a boat.

That's kind of Rauschenberg work, he inherited that in a way, he'd go to do printing and he'd put on the best of clothes. Of course anyone could come in too. I copied that too, you can see it here, I tried to be best. So Rauschenberg was brought up in nature, he didn't come from a big town or big city. He went to study as a marine doctor?

Gonnet: Veterinarian. Taking care of animals, vet.

Takahashi: Not vet, but he studied, he wanted to be a doctor in the marines, but he couldn't make it, the killing part. The frog, opening the frog. You've got to check the heart and then use the electricity to make its foot move. He took it home, the frog, and put it in water.

He wanted a chance to be a psychologist. He had seen many crazy people in the hospital. One person was pulling his hair and eating it and Rauschenberg was very interested. He asked the guy, "Is it good, your hair?" And this man stopped completely, eating his hair. He didn't want to share it. That's the kind of story that came from Rauschenberg. And after he finished with the military, he went back home. His family was not there; somebody else was living there. So he got the information that they had moved to Louisiana. So he went to Louisiana and found his parents' house and he was quite shocked that they had not even given him that information. Next thing, he wanted to study art. He went to Black Mountain [College, North Carolina].

Q: He went to Kansas City and then he went to Paris and then he went to Black Mountain.

Takahashi: He met a lot of other artists. So his career started quite late. Let's see. I think, what was it? Rauschenberg was at the Venice Biennale [1964] and had done the Merce Cunningham background with polka dots [*Summerspace*, 1958]. At the time he was making a Combine painting. I was in Venice; I couldn't get into the show because the tickets were all sold out.

Q: Okay, so I wanted to talk a little bit about time, because you worked with Bob for many, many years, for more than thirty years so you were a witness to a long period of his life. I'm wondering if we can speak a little bit about his personality and whether you think he changed over time.

Takahashi: Okay. Rauschenberg was a very, very generous person. He was an artist, so he made a foundation to help artists in emergencies, to give some money to support them [Change, Inc.]. Most artists don't have insurance, house insurance. Many times when houses were burned up, they had no place to stay, and sometimes we received those people in the house, they'd be living there. Sometimes they did for a long time because they were looking for another house or something. My wife— Rauschenberg chipped in money to the company of my wife, to make her, what do you call it?

Gonnet: My own label, as a designer.

Takahashi: That's what a generous person he was. He was fun, funny, and very charming. His mind was working constantly—he talked about art, artists, was always thinking. So I said if he doesn't think, his brain dies.

This is Terry Van Brunt [note: pointing to a photograph]. At that time, Rauschenberg started doing high-level business as an artist and this Terry Van Brunt interfered in our friendship. And Rauschenberg, at that time, had to fire many people, his friends, when he was friends with Terry Van Brunt. Of course he had new friends coming always, because he was open. I think Terry Van Brunt gave to Rauschenberg negative energy and he got sort of sucked into this negative energy and also he drank a lot and changed morally too.

Correct me if I talk too long. Now let me see.

Gonnet: There were no more parties, no? They were over, the parties.

Q: Oh yeah? When did that happen?

Takahashi: I think once he went to Florida and came back, there were no more parties, just people hanging around to 10:30 at night, maybe ten people.

Q: Oh yeah? So even as early as the seventies, no more parties.

Gonnet: I think maybe that's right, '76.

Q: Why was that? Why no more parties?

Takahashi: This was about Terry's influence, for—

Gonnet: When Bob was still with Bob Petersen, I don't remember any parties, because he was living in Florida. Parties were over. People were going to nightclubs.

Q: So you were saying that different relationships in Bob's life had a large impact on what was happening around him and his lifestyle.

Gonnet: Things changed depending on the people around.

Q: With different boyfriends.

Takahashi: In a way Rauschenberg had sort of unlucky or quite bad boyfriends and took quite a while to change boyfriends. Many boyfriends—I think were looking for money. Anyway, people used Rauschenberg, not Rauschenberg offering, but once he offered, people would take advantage. I could see it but I could not talk because if I mentioned anything, it's, "You're jealous." And so I started to not say anything. It was not helping. One person I—

These two people [note: pointing at a photo] lived in Rauschenberg's Captiva house and they were going to Venice with Rauschenberg and had a hotel room—a wonderful first class hotel and had champagne. And outside they told people Rauschenberg is a capitalist, but they're staying at the same hotel, drinking champagne, and going outside and talking about things. So Rauschenberg got very, very upset. I had seen this before, but I could not say anything. So prior

to leaving Venice, he said, “Out of my roof, I cannot live under the same roof.” Then on the way back to the airport, they stopped in, what do you call the mall, a big supermarket store?

Q: A mall?

Takahashi: Yeah, okay. They stopped there, started shopping for their own items, like two watches and other things, and charged them to Rauschenberg after they were fired. So these kind of really bad people were hanging around. I’m sure that other people could see it, but you couldn’t tell.

Q: Okay. So I would like to talk about influence. Maybe we can speak a little bit about how you think Bob influenced your way of working and thinking.

Takahashi: Bob is most influential. When we went to India, he didn’t want to go outside because he didn’t want to get influenced, but there were tons of influences on his work. But also he was very open. If he saw something that other people were doing and he got an idea, got stuck—it was not necessarily the same, but he put them in his own things together and he had a great way of doing that.

Carl Andre—he was at a party. He wrote near a piece of work saying artists, nobody creates art by themselves; there is only the influence of others, even Rauschenberg. And he signed it Carl Andre. And Bob Rauschenberg thought, my god what a terrible thing, he came over to the party to write that. This was downstairs by the first entrance and we always had third floor kitchen

parties and he asked me to cancel it. I had two or three ideas about it. One was to chip off the writing, the magic marker writing on the wall, or another was that I cover it with paint. In case it needs it, I can chip the paint off, but I can see still. They were very hard words, quite aggressive for showing off yourself, to put that. That was kind of not normal—but it was getting normal. Remember Michelangelo's time, whether making paintings or even sculpture and also the architects against other architects, there was terrible competition going on. But I think Rauschenberg was very open.

One day we went to the museum, the Edison Museum in, I think, Tampa or forty miles away [Edison Ford Museum, Fort Myers, Florida]. Edison house was made into a museum, from a small house. There were all kinds of equipment there. We went there and Rauschenberg was looking at something and it was cardboard painted white and a cardboard box painted black and yellows and there were all kinds of colors, and the explanation was you put in snow, the same amount of snow, to see which one melts fastest. And Rauschenberg was watching. This was between nobody else. I was curious. A couple of years later, Rauschenberg was making a sculpture with sand on the outside and painted fluorescent paint on cardboard box. So I said, "Oh my god, he's seen some information." That was kind of cute, yeah.

Q: What do you think Rauschenberg learned from you?

Takahashi: Oh well, I don't want to be narcissistic, to talk about this. I don't know. I was learning from him.

Q: Okay, so what did you learn from him?

Takahashi: Drinking. I got in trouble for drinking. Good food. Good food came from our boss—truffles. Used to be that he liked caviar, but the caviar was called press caviar and press caviar is not caviar. It's white fish eggs dyed black so it looks like caviar. Then he discovered real caviar and beluga or something and after that, it was only the best caviar. Once in a while he asked me to go to Caviarteria. The Caviarteria sold only caviar, uptown next to Tiffany's [Tiffany & Co., New York]. And when they opened the container, the big container of caviar, the top section, it had something to do with the air—so they would scoop off the top section and the price was cheaper. Any time they opened caviar in a can, every day. So he'd say, "Go get it." So I went there—they gave you a test, a plastic spoon or something—and so I always volunteered to go shopping. And the caviar, I bought it. When he had it, he invited people to eat caviar. He'd chop hard-boiled eggs, yellow and white, and I think some onion or something, and crackers and caviar, he'd put it on top. This was a kind of way of spending wonderful time together. And then when he started traveling by airplane and any time he would stop in another country—Germany or a project in India—they give you caviar to take home, caviar to eat. So he was always coming back from his trips with the best caviar.

And I started to show him a truffle, it was an Italian truffle, a white truffle, it's completely different from black truffle. From the same family, but the flavor is different and they're very expensive.

Gonnet: What about your artwork? Influence on your artwork.

Takahashi: Me?

Gonnet: Yes, influence on your artwork.

Takahashi: From me?

Gonnet: Yes, you, Takahashi.

Takahashi: I'm sure that there was a lot of influence, but not individual. But something very neat—when we started working on the cardboard pieces, we marked the cardboards on the top and then marked up and I would cut, and Rauschenberg said, “You don't need to cut perfect.” But if you don't cut perfect, if it's not cut perfect, the glue doesn't touch each other. I think his meaning was it doesn't matter, but I could not change myself, so I would try to be perfect. That's the kind of thing that, as time passed, slowly, year after year; he got neater, learning from me.

We have cooking. I started learning how to cook and that was with a book. When I was cooking in Florida, I'd go to the bathroom and then come back and something would be different. When I was in the bathroom, he'd put other things in my cooking. One day, I caught a lot of young, baby shark, and I was curious how it tasted. And I ate shark before, in this country and in Japan too, and this shark was—its eyeballs are here. I forget the name.

Q: Oh, a hammerhead.

Takahashi: Hammerhead, you got it. A hammerhead baby, about this size, I thought it was to be so delicious because it was tender and everything. Maybe I got 10 of them. So I was going to cook it. In the meantime I went to the bathroom and the fish was not there anymore and nobody told me about where the fish went. He had thrown them in the jungle because he didn't want to eat. This was kind of very strange.

But I was going to make sashimi and I made it for an opening at Illeana Sonnabend Gallery, I brought two big bamboo chests and they were full of two big cut tuna fish with soy sauce and wasabi for the opening. It took ten minutes for people to finish it. I went to the fish market to buy, the day before, one big chunk of tuna fish and used a teeny pocketknife to make it.

Q: So just maybe one or two more questions. I was asking you about Rauschenberg's influence. What about the other artists in that community? Did you feel that you learned from all of those other artists?

Takahashi: Me or Rauschenberg?

Q: You.

Takahashi: Me. Oh yes, different views. I was not a conceptual artist and I did not know what it means I have a collection of memory drawing of maps of the United States, which is very much conceptual, but I was not—most artists are wrapped tight with their work, "I'm conceptual

artist,” but I do anything I like to do, just to do it. So I have pieces that are very conceptual. I have the calendar pieces—they are very conceptual. So I was hanging around a lot of conceptual artists, I think I was very influenced. And also I watched Jasper Johns’s artwork and Rauschenberg’s artwork, I got more loose, without panicking about technique, so in that we exchanged a lot.

Q: Okay, so maybe to close, is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to talk about?

Takahashi: Rauschenberg had a collector in Washington, D.C., a big collector, and they wanted to make a party for Rauschenberg and their friends. The party was at a big fancy house, a big art collection. They had, I think, two or three astronauts there, who went to the moon, and they were really nice to see. Rauschenberg started to get in a good mood. I think he was quite drunk and he said, “I can float without moving my body in the indoor swimming pool. And he took his clothes off, to his underpants, and went into the water. In the beginning, the water was coming up, and then he was just like this. And then at one point, the water was right here.

Q: Under his chin.

Takahashi: It was almost like he could stay half an hour. Anyhow, Petersen, the assistant, he went and took his clothes off, went into the water, and he was going to drop in the swimming pool water. That was a kind of real challenge in front of these astronauts, who went to moon.

Another one—this kind of challenge—there was some kind of conference in the evening. Here, he knew people, an actor, the Dalai Lama; he'd met couple of times. The Dalai Lama was there, next to Rauschenberg. Richard Gere?

Gonnet: Yes.

Takahashi: Richard Gere was there to support the Dalai Lama and Rauschenberg, at one point, he pulled a rubber band off his wrist and said, "I'd like to give this to you," to the Dalai Lama. So the Dalai Lama said, "What's that?" He saw the rubber band in his hand. Rauschenberg said, "This is for good luck." So the Dalai Lama said, "I don't need it." But Rauschenberg even challenged—like the Dalai Lama is almost a kind of god, but since he's human, he wanted to give him good luck. But not in bad way, it was almost comic and very cute.

Q: Yes, yes.

Takahashi: That's the part I wanted to tell you. I think we can— Let's see. Okay, I think I told everything.

Q: Okay.

Takahashi: Okay, yeah.

Q: Okay, thank you very much. Thank you.

Gonnet: Thank you.

Takahashi: Any questions, you can get in touch.

Q: We will, definitely.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #4 (video, technical oral history)

Interviewee: Hisachika Takahashi

Location: Mount Vernon, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair (Q1),  
Christine Frohnert (Q2, conservator)

Date: November 23, 2015

Q1: This is Sara Sinclair with Hisachika Takahashi. Today is November 23, 2015 and we are at the Rauschenberg warehouse in Mount Vernon, New York. To begin today's interview, we would very much like for you to tell us how you came to meet Robert Rauschenberg.

Takahashi: I was living in Italy, about 1969. John de Menil and two art collectors came over to Milano in Italy. He saw my studio and then he said he liked my painting. He said, "I want these pieces," and, "How much?" I never sold him that painting though. I say, "Maybe five hundred for it," and he said, "Okay. You come to New York. Bring me painting and you can stay for three weeks' vacation in my place." So I tried to get to New York. I don't know. I had twenty pairs of shoes, so it must be I was planning to stay longer. De Menil was making a party of one hundred of the best artists. At one table I sit down with Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and a book writer who's called—I forget. It's one of the book writers—the writer—Norman Mailer.

Q1: It's okay.

Takahashi: Okay. Anyway, I was able to, in some kind of way, connect to talking to Rauschenberg. He speaks all different languages. I said I was vacationing here, I was bored, so if you need help, I would be ready. A couple of days later he called me and said, "I need an

assistant. My own assistant is Brice Marden, he will have his own show,” so he could not help Rauschenberg. Then I was—had never done before—silkscreening pieces called Combines—not Combine. I forget the name.

Q1: *Carnal Clock*?

Takahashi: What?

Q1: *Carnal Clock*?

Takahashi: *Carnal Clock* and this was the first time I was helping Rauschenberg. I don't speak English quite—just a little—and he'd say, “Pass me this,” and “Pass me that,” and it was shocking because it was all sexual stuff. But I got used to it. That was the first time that I helped Rauschenberg.

Always he started working late. “So what time I should come in tomorrow?” He said, “Well, nine o'clock.” So I'd be nine o'clock in the morning there and he's getting up at three o'clock in the afternoon and at five o'clock. Unbelievably late and I'm going to get tired and sleepy. I said, “Maybe I should come back tomorrow.” He said, “No, no, no, we're going to start work,” and through three o'clock in the morning. It was getting later to go home so he said, “Why don't you stay in my place?” That's when I started staying overnight to sleep. Then when he'd done this show, I was sitting up with the computer writing. I think eight pieces were in the show and I must synchronize it to time, all changing every three minutes, changing image—or five

minutes—I forget now—and synchronizing. At twelve o’clock, open the whole light—everything together, at noontime and midnight. Opening wasn’t until midnight; people waiting to see the whole thing to open. That was the time when I started working for Rauschenberg. [Note: The *Carnal Clocks* each contain a timing mechanism and electrical lights that illuminate the hours and minutes behind a silkscreened Plexiglas face; at noon and midnight, the clocks are fully lit.]

Q1: Thank you. Great. Now you will talk to Christine about more.

Takahashi: Yes, okay.

Q2: I’m Christine Frohnert, a conservator of contemporary art. Hisachika, I would like to learn more about the creation of the *Carnal Clocks*. I understand in total there are fifteen pieces. Please, tell us your *Carnal Clock* story.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: We are standing in front of *Audition*, one of the *Carnal Clocks*, made in 1969. We would like you to tell us more about your *Carnal Clocks* story and the creation of those pieces.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Audition (Carnal Clock)*, 1969  
Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on  
Plexiglas in metal frame with concealed electric  
lights and clock movement  
67 x 60 x 18 inches (170.2 x 152.4 x 45.7 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Takahashi: Yes. When I meet Rauschenberg in the party of one hundred best artists, at my table was Jasper Johns and Norman Mailer, Robert Rauschenberg, and two other women photographers. It was very difficult to communicate because I don't speak English well.

Rauschenberg tried to get in touch. He had a little bit Italian, a little bit to other languages. We were able to communicate—and I remember it was very boring in New York for three weeks' vacation. I'd been at the party. I'd been in all the museums. I walked the one hundred blocks from this way to this way and I said, "Maybe if you have anything where I can help you, here's my telephone number."

Two or three days after I get a phone call and he said, "Would you come in to help me at my studio. I need an assistant for silkscreen." I'd never done in my life silkscreen but I said, "If anybody can do it, I can do it too." So I went to the studio and started doing the *Carnal Clocks* and these images were very sexual. I would do cleaning for the screen and that was my part of the job. He said, "Pass me this," so I would bring him this thing so he could squeeze it to make a print. This is a half-mirror on one side and the other side you can see through, but the image was

behind. As long as you go every—I think—five minutes around the clock. At the middle day, twelve o'clock, open all the light. There are eight images, I think if I remember, eight pieces, synchronized to open at the same time. My job was to make sure all the systems were synchronized. It was quite a big job—in time too—and I was able to manage doing things I had never done before. That was a very good challenge for me. The next thing Rauschenberg asked me to—“Help me more,” and then I started to like New York so I hung around. I had been living in Milano, Italy, and I'd keep paying my rent from New York. That's when I started working forty-five years with Rauschenberg. So many pieces of artwork, at the same time, we worked on together.

Now maybe I can explain for how to make it and which country. Okay? So let's see, beginning for this and it goes down.

Q1: I think Christine has more questions.

Takahashi: Oh okay, no problem. All right, okay. What is the question?

Q2: I'm wondering if you know what inspired Bob to create the series of *Carnal Clocks*.

Takahashi: Okay. This artist, Rauschenberg, was always—he tried working with what's called [Experiments in] Art and Technology [E.A.T.] through this artist called [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver who was doing art technology. Rauschenberg was working on, before many other pieces—this was a part of art that was mostly computerized and that I think very early artists

were doing. But he must have it synchronized and so there was a manual way of setting it up. They had all kinds of switches and that was quite a long time ago. I don't exactly remember but at the time Rauschenberg wanted to do some kind of a sexy artwork and those are the things I remember. I don't have any more than that.

Q2: Did Rauschenberg take all the photographs himself?

Takahashi: Yes. In the present view, his penis was there.

Q2: Do you know who's pictured there or whose body parts are pictured there?

Takahashi: Yes. I have two people in the image. One is Deborah Hay and the other, the man is David Bradshaw in the picture. So one day they both arrive at the house and then they start, in the bedroom, taking pictures.

Then they have silkscreen material for the image. They were stuck over silkscreen material and then printed one by one. After I cleaned the ink away with a newspaper—and it was a quite nice thing to print. I have no idea but the image must keep moving and that was technology and the art world getting together. That's it, yes.

Q2: Did you apply the mirrored layer on the Plexiglas as well?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: Who else was involved in the creation of the artwork besides you and Bob? Was there anybody else?

Takahashi: I don't really get it—creation from—

Q1: Did any other people help?

Takahashi: Any other people help? No. Rauschenberg's assistant was Brice Marden. His own show was going on and he must make artwork and didn't have the time for assisting Rauschenberg. That's why Rauschenberg asked me to help. That's why I got the contact. Any other question?

Q2: Who designed the technical components and who coordinated that?

Takahashi: Who designed?

Q2: The technical components.

Takahashi: Components—you mean what—other artists? Rauschenberg himself created the image and the idea to have the image move around. Then, sometime, at midnight, open all lighted together. That was the kind of clock, watch. But Rauschenberg asked for Art and Technology to create the machine and a quite complicated machine and so they computerized it.

That was the collaboration for that. He'd done it before with other artwork too. One of the museums in Paris has all the radios and all the equipment.

Q2: *Oracle*.

Takahashi: Yes, moved around. That was also Art and Technology.

Q2: Thank you so much.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Okay. Hisachika?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: You're now standing in front of *Capitol a Unions* series work from 1975, which consists of a red mat, of bamboo, silk, string, glass, and teak wood. You made this piece in India in collaboration with Rauschenberg. Can you tell us about the creation process?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Capitol (Unions)*, 1975  
Rag-mud, bamboo, silk, string, glass, and  
teakwood  
34 x 53 1/2 x 4 inches (86.4 x 135.9 x 10.2 cm)  
From an edition of ten, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Takahashi: Yes. This was—we went to India. He did Gemini printing in Los Angeles. So a group of people went. It even included Rauschenberg's son [Christopher Rauschenberg]. These pieces were made by mud, paper pulp, some curry powder, mixed together. Rauschenberg was picking up one of the pieces and he was a little bit frustrated. He dropped it on his foot and the foot was halfway broke. He was wearing red socks, not shoes, but other men have shoes.



Rauschenberg and Hisachika Takahashi working  
on *Charter (Union)* (1975), Ahmedabad, India,  
1975. Photo: Sidney B. Felsen

He was working in India and the people from India were shocked to see something going on like that. These pieces were—six of them moved to make a different image. This was made of silk. They were quite unusual pieces. He made five or six of these at the Gandhi Ashram, where

Gandhi used to be boycotting England with more than ten thousand people walking from the Gandhi Ashram. The pieces were from one period.

Q2: Did you use tools to shape the mud?

Takahashi: Well, he made it first shape by molding these pieces. Then he put them in sunshine to dry and they naturally dry. It was the time of rain season in India and they start to mold up. So we take the molding ones and put them in an oven to cook to kill the mold. Then that would start changing shape. It was much more interesting.

Q2: Is it still smelling as much as it did right after the creation?

Takahashi: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, it's not an unpleasant smell. It makes your appetite.

Q2: Why did Bob want to include the curry or the tamarind?

Takahashi: Yes, Rauschenberg wanted to do a print. He didn't do it. But his idea was doing these kinds of pieces about—because India's curry is the most important thing—and also not just temporary; it's for a lifetime. It was new to me how the sculpture smelled. Rauschenberg was creating things like bubble sculpture and the mud bubbles up and the sun is coming out.

Q2: The *Mud Muse* [1968–71]?

Takahashi: Yes. That's kind of how Rauschenberg's mind works and how the pieces were done.

Q2: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about this piece?

Takahashi: Well, we were working on quite a different project for this period. In summer they were hanging something called calendar pieces. Big pieces, the same material that would hold. With the string there was a little bamboo and they would stick in Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday through Sunday, something like this.

Q2: Thank you.

Takahashi: Shall I go to the next one?

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: So now we would like to talk about *Lisa Fugue #1*, a work that was made in 1985. It is a transfer on high-fired Japanese art ceramic. Can you tell us about the production process of that piece?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Lisa Fugue #1*, 1985  
Transfer on high-fired Japanese art ceramic  
32 1/4 x 21 5/8 inches (81.9 x 54.9 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Takahashi: Yes. I went to Japan. The place is called Shigaraki. The entire town was making ceramics, very famous. This company was making ceramic images and many things were made there. The king and queens and the entire family had things printed there. The ceramic is very hard. It's going to last a million years if you don't hit it with a hammer. Rauschenberg wanted to make some ceramic art. Many things were huge. These are small pieces. He liked the image and he adopted the image first of all of his own. *Mona Lisa* you can see. The first, this was an image transferred on ceramic. It's a technique almost like a printing system. When you cook it in the oven—a huge oven because the pieces are bigger—it would move in to temperature. These things were small but he would usually make them the size of a wall. That I think is all I remember.

Q2: What is written there to the left?

Takahashi: Oh this is writing in Chinese but I'm not able to translate it. I'm sorry.

Q2: There are some cracks in the background, in the green. Was this intentional by Rauschenberg? Did he want those drying cracks?

Takahashi: You can see one under here, one under there. Rauschenberg was usually doing transfer on the next one like it was having an image—the image is a kind of overlap and going to another one very soon. That’s part of the Rauschenberg creation. They’re almost like a ghost is coming throughout, yes.

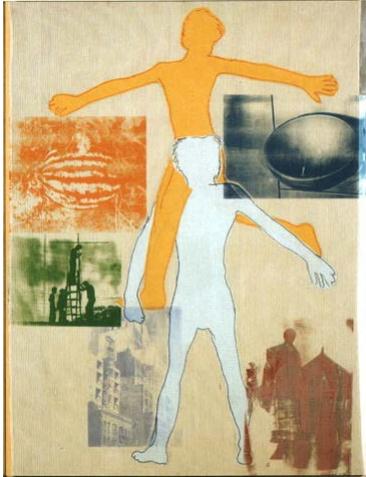
Q2: Thank you so much.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: We are now in front of one panel of *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* that was created between 1981 and '98. It is literally the longest painting in the world and consists of 191 panels and is 1,582 feet in total. [Note: The final artwork has 190 parts with one part removed by the artist.] Why did Rauschenberg want to create the largest painting in the world? Do you know?



Installation view, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98) in *Robert Rauschenberg: The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, 1999–2000



Robert Rauschenberg  
*The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, 1981–98 (detail)  
this panel: Silkscreened ink, fabric, acrylic, ink,  
and graphite on plywood  
96 x 62 1/4 inches (243.8 x 158.1 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



Rauschenberg tracing Hummingbird and  
Hisachika Takahashi's silhouettes for *1/4  
Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98), Captiva,  
Florida, 1984. Work in background is  
*Colonnade (Salvage)* (1984). Photograph  
Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation  
Archives, New York

Takahashi: When he was in Japan doing the ceramic pieces, he had the idea of making *The 1/4 Mile* painting. I thought, “Wait a moment, a quarter mile is quite far away.” A painting that much longer and bigger. But he had the idea. But it happens to be an incredible amount of money also even to have—but he started doing it already after Japan. This piece was one of the parts of the piece and it happens in Captiva Island in Florida, where he had a studio. He asked me to come in to a tableau with my son, Hummingbird. He said, “Lie down on the floor,” and Hummingbird was up to my shoulders. “Lie down,” and he started tracing in pencil. I have absolutely no idea. Then he started printing the painting. That was the piece from *1/4 Mile* pieces. I’m sure you have more of this particular image.

Q2: Yes. Can you identify any other individuals based on their body outlines?

Takahashi: This is me and Hummingbird. Then I'm able to recognize a person because I don't have a moustache or eyeball. Most people are friends of Rauschenberg and assistants or secretary. Do you have names in the—? I can't identify a person.

Q2: It's known that Bob himself is included in the body outlines, his mother Dora [Rauschenberg, née Dora Carolina Matson], [Donald] Don Saff, Merce Cunningham, Darryl [R.] Pottorf, Lawrence Voytek, and Bradley [J.] Jeffries.

Takahashi: Who is that?

Q2: Bradley Jeffries.

Takahashi: Oh yes.

Q2: His former secretary.

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: Do you recall anybody else who was part of this?

Takahashi: Just one second. I'm going to—oh I do recognize he painted a dog that Rauschenberg had. It's called Star, a Husky. It's a white Husky by the way and Rauschenberg loved him.

Q2: His name is Star?

Takahashi: Yes, Star.

Q2: Star.

Takahashi: He bit me. Oh right this is a painting—printing—but he had made a sculpture to go with *The 1/4 Mile* pieces and we were going to China for an exhibition.

Q2: That's correct.

Takahashi: Okay, that's as much as I remember. Maybe you can start with this one.

Q2: Sure.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Now we would like to talk about work that's part of the cardboard works. In this case it's *Untitled*, which is part of the *Early Egyptians* [1973–74]. It was made in 1973 and it consists of cardboard, sand, a metal rod, concrete, and Day-Glo paint. Hisachika, where were those works made?



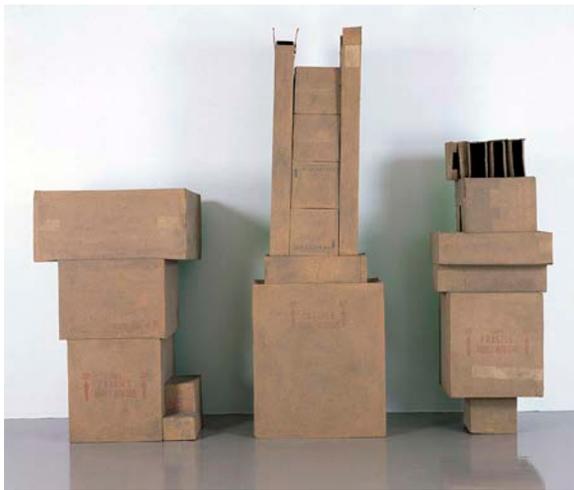
Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Early Egyptian*), 1973  
Cardboard, sand, metal rod, cement, and Day-Glo  
paint  
29 3/4 x 21 x 64 inches (75.6 x 53.3 x 162.6 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Takahashi: Well first, one would start making it in Florida in his front door beach on Captiva Island. Here—and by there a box coated up with matte medium.

Q2: Golden matte medium.

Takahashi: That's a glue. Matte medium, before they dry, they are put in the sun on the beach and covered them. But one side of the box doesn't get covered up with sand. I was wondering how to do the back and then he started to paint it white. When he waited for everything to be dry, he started to put fluorescent paint. I was wondering what it looks like. He put it in the studio to look and at the time, I don't see it. Then when he points up and says, "See, it reflects." I say, "Where?" Then I see the glowing light behind the sculpture. That makes a quite different atmosphere. Now he says, "That's not enough," and he went outside looking for something. He pulled out from the ground of cement with a metal stick. I was wondering what would he do. He made a hole and then he put the stick in. That's where this piece come from.

This is the beginning of this quality of artwork. He had done it in California on Malibu Beach and was making it in the sand. In Ace Gallery [Los Angeles] he had a show of this quality of art. [Note: *Untitled (Early Egyptian)*, 1973 was exhibited in *White Paintings, 1951*, Ace Gallery, Venice, California, 1973.] The whole entire gallery with sculpture. But people only see cardboard boxes with sand on. I must go one by one and say, “Have you seen it reflects?” People would say, “What are you talking about?” Then once they start to see, the whole entire gallery reflects; some of them green, some of them blue, yellow, and red. That was a show.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Untitled (Early Egyptian)*, 1973  
 Cardboard, sand, and Day-Glo paint  
 108 x 138 x 28 inches (274.3 x 350.5 x 71.1 cm)  
 overall  
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation  
 Exhibited in *White Paintings, 1951*, Ace Gallery,  
 Venice, California, 1973

The work we did in Israel also he used the same technique. The pieces he made in Israel [*Made in Israel*, 1974]—also having one of the pieces here and that I’ve explained. Yes that’s so far as I know.

Q2: Was it the first time he used the Day-Glo paint?

Takahashi: Day-Glo paint?

Q2: Is this the first time he used the glowing paint?

Takahashi: Yes. This is—but if you don't point it out, you don't see it. I was really so glad to see.

Q2: Did you always apply the glue first and then you went to the beach to apply the sand or did you bring the sand into the studio sometimes?

Takahashi: Many times, we do it differently. Sometimes we would do it on the beach because it is easier and sometimes we would do it in museums. When we bring it to Israel, we went to five different deserts. The sand was a different color and one of them came from far away. It was a city and we must carry it to the museum to do it. But that was quite an experiment. But I'm going to explain to you later about the Israel museum things.

Q2: Wonderful. I'm wondering where did the cardboard come from. Did he have cardboards piled in his studio or—?

Takahashi: The cardboard has a lot of stories. Most times he would go around in the street. Principally in New York, he would have no problem; cardboard all over. He'd pick it up from the street or sometimes driving in the car, he'd see any cardboard in the street. Once in Israel, we were looking for cardboard and they don't have too much cardboard. The museum basement has tons of old cardboard, so we bring it upstairs in the studio and leave it, ready to do tomorrow. In

the morning or the day after, all the cardboard has disappeared. The museum people took it back to the basement. That's when he must start using another material.

Q2: This was one of the first series you worked on when he moved to Captiva, right?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: So this is what he started working on after he stopped working with E.A.T.?

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: —and technology works. He went right to the cardboards.

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: Thank you so much.

Takahashi: Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Okay. Hisachika, we are now looking at a work that was made in Israel. It is called Untitled, made in Israel. It was made in '74. It consists of a wheelbarrow, a rubber hose, and a wood stick.

Can you tell us about the creation of the work and where you found the materials and put them together?



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled, 1974  
Wheelbarrow, rubber hose, and wood stick  
28 x 190 x 54 inches (71.1 x 482.6 x 137.2 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Takahashi: When we were going to Israel, we must bring all the materials because we don't know if we're able to get any materials in Israel. So we bring our glues and color and sometimes other materials. But customs was very hard. Anything that could be a bomb or something you cannot bring in. We start thinking about what we could find in the street, find in the museum. The museum people took away the cardboard they had in the basement so now we must go and look in the street. This came from the street. Rauschenberg had this pipe he was able to stick in the handle. Then he said, "I don't know what I can do with the other handle." I said, "Here is a stick." He said, "What?" "Here. It's just the perfect size in the hole." So he made the stick and I just recognize now this stick was the wrong size; wrong in shape, somewhat. We asked the curator for Thomas—Thomas Buehler—and told him this is not the original stick. The stick was lost. Something similar—it's very similar but I just remember because at the time he was making the sculpture, I was hunting for sticks that were part of the sculpture. It's creating from the garbage to art. That is the whole story.

Q2: Do you remember if the work had a different title than Untitled, originally?

Takahashi: I don't understand. One more time—

Q2: Do you remember if the artwork was given a name in Israel? Some people at the Rauschenberg Foundation believe that it had a different name, other than Untitled, initially.

Takahashi: I have no idea.

Q1: Okay.

Takahashi: I don't think it had a name.

Q1: Okay.

Takahashi: The question was—you want to know a title? I have absolutely no clue. Not one.

Q2: Hisachika, here's the catalogue of the exhibition [*Robert Rauschenberg in Israel*, catalogue published 1975, exhibition 1974].

Takahashi: Okay.

Q2: Do you want to go through it and see if something triggers your memory about the creation of those pieces?

Takahashi: I was going to the desert to get the sand. I had one with Rauschenberg carrying the sand to bring in the museum. The museum, on the floor, put a big mattress and then cardboard. We glued that with the matte medium and then we dumped in the sand. We had five different desert sands in all different colors.



Hisachika Takahashi and Rauschenberg gathering materials for *Rauschenberg in Israel*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, May 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Nir Bareket



Sand, cardboard boxes, found objects, and other materials for Rauschenberg's *Scriptures* (1974) and *Made in Israel* series (1974), spread across the floor at the Israel Museum during preparations for *Rauschenberg in Israel*, Jerusalem, May 1974. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Nir Bareket

Q2: You had to find a lot of materials in Israel because many materials you brought were held in customs, right?

Takahashi: Will you explain now? I need an interpreter.

[Laughter]

Q1: Okay. You couldn't bring everything you needed into Israel.

Takahashi: I told her before.

Q1: Right, so you had to find new material there.

Takahashi: That's right, yes. I already told her.

Q1: Okay so maybe no more?

Takahashi: That's it, yes. Anyway when Rauschenberg was making artwork—these pieces here—somehow he wasn't able to finish. Then he started to cut it in half the one side and the other side. One he was going to throw away. I said, "Can I have these pieces?" Rauschenberg said, "No." [Laughs] So he took it back to New York.

The memory was not quite together. Anyway, we had a wonderful time. We played a Japanese game called *Hanafuda*. We were learning how to play the game. It was the first time we played. Okay. More or less, like this—I don't remember any more than—I remember food and stuff. We liked the Arab food instead of eating the Jewish food. There you can see a lot of our images. That's my memory. It's okay? Yes, thank you.

Q2: Thank you so much.

Takahashi: Yes. We're going on a lunch break, no?

[Laughter]

Q1: Yes.

Q2: Thank you, Hisachika.

Takahashi: Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Now we are going to talk about the *Hoarfrost* series [1974–76]. We are standing in front of Untitled from 1974. It was made by using the solvent transfer technique, fabric, and paper collage. We would be most grateful if you could walk us through the entire process of the creation of the *Hoarfrost*.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled (*Hoarfrost*), 1974  
Solvent transfer on fabric and paper collage  
77 3/4 x 40 inches (197.5 x 101.6 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Takahashi: Rauschenberg had a great idea about *Hoarfrost*. Hoarfrost is not frost. It looks like frost in early winter, coming into a layer. This is what he tried to do. It's sort of like a repetition and an approximate movement that can make sort of a double image and like almost three dimensions. In this period Gemini was printing and Rauschenberg and I were going to Los Angeles and he started doing frost research for images. Somehow we get into *National Geographic* magazine. He chose a magazine and cut out. He decided about how many times it should be larger. At some time I said, "Twenty." So he said, "Twenty times bigger." Sometimes I said, "Five times." So that's where the image comes from. Then he printed some directly using newspaper—taking image from newspaper to fabric.

When he had a show, it was a very exciting show. I think at the opening he already sold half of the show. One photographer from *National Geographic* would say, "This is my picture and you stole my picture and took the artwork." He was suing. Rauschenberg chose a good lawyer—a big cigar—and he said, "We are going to fight his story." The photographer said, "I will pinpoint my photo," called "Swan Dive." It is a man jumping into ocean with arms like plane wings. He used it for the image; very beautiful. This lawyer with a cigar said, "By the way, I ask you a question. Do you hire this jumper? Do you pay this jumper and what's the name of this jumper?" He said, "No. I took the picture." So the lawyer said, "We just used your magazine for a photo. It is not necessary to pay you." Anyway it ended up he gave him some pieces. But, this photographer wanted to have every product done from Gemini—every piece. Finally we win. But he had—when you have a photo used by somebody else—that was *Hoarfrost*'s story. [Note: referencing the lawsuit brought by photographer Morton Beebe regarding the image of a diver that originally appeared in a Nikon advertisement, settled in 1980]

Q2: Interesting story. Hisachika, this *Hoarfrost* is combined of silk and cheesecloth and the image process that you just described, but everything was processed in a press. Can you describe that?

Takahashi: Well, one is solvent transfer of material using light— It is from a magazine and then you put it in cheesecloth or silk material and then press—passing press. The image is transformed so that most of the writing was upside down. But the image could be removed and that's what we were using for *Hoarfrost* because it looks like frozen—it looks like moving—and using for gluing cardboard directly to the original fabric. Sometimes he'd paint before printing. The paint was dry. He'd put it on top of a newspaper, load up the newspaper sometimes; sometimes flat, this writing and then put it on fabric which glued up into cardboard. Then go and pass the printing machine and then back and forth a couple of times.

Q2: Oh, back and forth a couple of times.

Takahashi: Yes and so it is sometimes slightly off, slightly double, yes.

Q2: Then did you hang it? Did you hang it for drying?

Takahashi: No—drying natural. When you spray the chemical everybody [goes] out or some people would wear a mask, but Rauschenberg and I never wear a mask or glove. We were kind

of tough. Even the dog must go out. Rauschenberg had at that time, maybe four dogs, and dogs [were] all right in the studio. So dogs out, the children out. That was the *Hoarfrost* period.

Q2: That's so interesting. I thought you were hanging it for drying.

Takahashi: No, not—

Q2: You left it horizontal.

Takahashi: Also we put in a corner—

Q2: With grommets?

Takahashi: Hand stretch it so the push pin doesn't break the fabric. One lady was doing all the sewing stuff.

Q2: Do you remember who this was?

Takahashi: I forget the name right now.

Q2: Sheryl?

Takahashi: Sheryl—yes.

Q2: Sheryl [Long] Pharr?

Takahashi: Sheryl was working for a time, yes. She was doing wonderful sewing; other forms of material too.

Q2: Do you remember where Rauschenberg got the silk from?

Takahashi: Do you remember Rauschenberg—what?

Q2: The silk that was used—

Takahashi: I just want to hear that. Hold on. Yes, what did you say?

Q2: The fabric—where did you get it from?

Takahashi: Okay. Rauschenberg used a lot of cheesecloth and the cheesecloth is very flexible and thin and transparent. Also he used a lot of silk fabric. When we went to India, there was incredible, wonderful silk. He was into silk and he used cheesecloth and so a combination of two different materials. One is shiny in color and another one was transparent white. The image would go through. That's where the idea came from. Also the name *Hoarfrost* came from an idea he had before I think, when he took the newspaper—no, no, the dictionary to figure out a name

and meaning. That's what he used for fabric and image. Many of the images he was using were a political way he chose. Okay that's it.

Q2: Thank you.

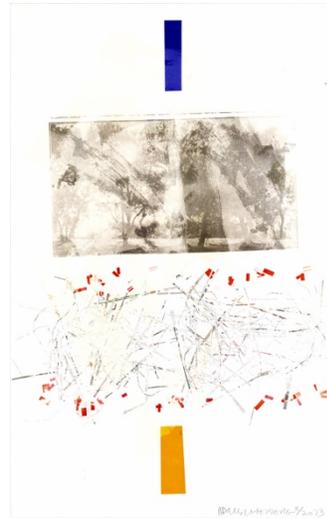
Takahashi: Thank you very much.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Now Hisachika, you are standing in between two works, one of which is *Cactus*, on your right, from the *Crops* series [1973], and the other one to your left is *Watermelon [(Crops)]*. Both are from 1973 and both works are silkscreened gesso and solvent transfer, similar to the *Hoarfrost* that we just talked about but solvent transfers on paper. Would you like to talk about it a little bit?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Cactus (Crops)*, 1973  
Multicolor print with two silkscreen runs and one solvent transfer run  
60 x 38 inches (152.4 x 96.5 cm)  
From an edition of 20 Roman numerals and 20 Arabic numerals, published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Watermelon (Crops)*, 1973  
Silkscreened gesso and solvent transfer  
60 x 38 inches (152.4 x 96.5 cm)  
From an edition of 20 Roman numerals and 20 Arabic numerals, published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa

Takahashi: This is a print, but it's the same kind of technique for using on other pieces. It's a technique where you shred newspaper or either plain newspaper and put it on top of paper and you spray transfer liquid and then put it into a machine to press down so that it gets into image, enough to finish the newspaper. You take it out and every time the printing was unique because it was one of a kind. The newspaper probably had the same kind of newspaper, but the image would transfer a different way. That's what caused the unique—

Q2: Editions—

Takahashi: Yes, one of a kind. It was quite a surprise to Rauschenberg, doing other printing company, and then we'd do a watermark for the company—

Q2: Graphicstudio [University of South Florida, Tampa]—

Takahashi: Don Saff was doing in the time—Don Saff was an artist also, but his printing machine was bigger. Rauschenberg had a small machine so probably that's the reason for doing, yes.

Q2: Graphicstudio?

Takahashi: Yes. I was not here then—before—but the same period they're working.

Q2: I understand.

Takahashi: Okay?

Q2: Thank you.

Takahashi: Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Now you are standing in front of *Snake Eyes*, which is just part of the *Bones* series [1975]. It was made in 1975 when you and Bob arrived in Ahmedabad in the state of Gujarat in India. The work was made of paper—handmade paper, right—?



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Snake Eyes (Bones)*, 1975  
Handmade paper with bamboo and fabric  
33 3/4 x 26 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches (85.7 x 66.7 x 3.8 cm)  
From an edition of 33, published by Gemini  
G.E.L., Los Angeles

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: —bamboo and fabric. Can you tell us more about the production process and working with the paper mill?

Takahashi: I was in India, Ahmedabad, and the Gandhi Ashram has a couple different fabric places and paper mill places. The paper mill is usually made by all the shredded cotton fabric and shaped it up and then pounded it up and cooked it up to make pulp. It's called paper pulp. Then everyone has a screen and pulp is poured in, then pressed in to take the water out, and then stuck to be dried. In this period Rauschenberg was interested in handmade paper. These pieces were his idea to use material to make pulp because it stretched. He chose specific colors or probably

designs he liked to make them look cut. Then process before—one is putting pulp in a screen and putting bamboo and then putting in fabric on top, and then when you're done, putting more pulp on top and then press it out. That's what the process was. In this period he was working in France—a paper mill place in France—and images on pulp. He did a quite different process. [Note: The editions that resulted from the work in France are the *Pages* and *Fuses* series, both 1974.] He's into the bamboo in this period and so that's why they used bamboo.

I was working, making these things. In the meantime I had my own idea to make peacock feather paper. I told Rauschenberg. I said, "I'm making peacock feather paper," and he wanted to see how. When you're done he said, "Oh, this is nothing. It looks like those flowers in the paper." Well that's the end of my story.

[Laughter]

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: We are now looking at three cast apple cores [Untitled, 2001, cast 24-karat gold, 201.E002; Untitled, 2003, cast sterling silver, 203.E002; and Untitled, 2003, cast bronze, 203.E003]. I know it's a wonderful story, which started in 1988 on the roof on 381 Lafayette Street, right?

Takahashi: Yes. I was taking care of the roof plants, a lot of plants in the roof. There are sometimes strawberries but of course the season's over. One day I decided I would put in some plants that make fruit. Of course in New York it's difficult and in Manhattan especially, with the

pollution. But I was going to try to put in an apple tree. The tree was supposed to be sold to me, a New York Apple. I thought about the coming green apples and it ended up to be, I think McIntosh or something. It's colorful and quite small but delicious to eat. What happened is you have a flower, a coming flower, but no insects to be pollinate it. So I have an idea and I put in two feathers in long stakes and I went through, one by one in the flowers—

Q2: That's wonderful.

Takahashi: —to pollinate. It ended up I had one hundred apples growing in the tree. Every time I'd go to the roof I'd bring a couple of apples to the table. Rauschenberg would say, "Where did they come from?" I'd say, "Your tree on the roof." So he started eating. Then one time he started to put an apple core and he said, "I want to make a sculpture." I couldn't figure out why—but anyway I must find him someplace to do the casting. Luckily two blocks from Rauschenberg's house there was a man who could cast anything.

I asked the man to cast apple cores and they're supposed to be in gold. The man made it except when he was done, the leaf had disappeared. I said, "The leaf was there." So I went home. I said to Bob—Bob Rauschenberg, but Bob I called him. "It doesn't have leaves." So Bob said, "So what? Go to the roof to get another leaf." So I said, "Yes, maybe, a good idea." So the leaf I bring into Chinatown, to my jewelry shop. I asked, "Will you make me cast for this one in gold?" They have no problem. But meantime I bring the other cast and say, "After that is done, would you put it together?" That's what happened. That's one kind of style of Rauschenberg idea

because he was into sculpture. He said, “Pablo Picasso was doing sculpture. Some of it serious sculpture. So why not? I can do it.” That’s where it comes from.



Robert Rauschenberg  
Untitled, 2001  
Cast 24-karat gold  
2 7/16 x 2 1/2 x 1 inches (6.2 x 6.4 x 2.5 cm)  
From an edition of 5

Q2: It’s a wonderful story.

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: Thank you for sharing and if I understand correctly, ten years later in 1998, Lawrence Voytek made a mold of the initial—

Takahashi: Yes.

Q2: —apple core and so consequently created a silver one and the bronze one. Is this correct?

Takahashi: Voytek was Rauschenberg’s assistant, making all the frames to all kinds of—and Rauschenberg asked for a couple casting stuff. Voytek got very interested and he wanted to make it—and he made for me wedding rings from gold coins. Then Rauschenberg wanted to have a

different material. This is silver and this is bronze and this is gold. I don't think this is original. But anyway that is the casting process. Rauschenberg is the creator and Marion Javits—Senator [Jacob K.] Javits's wife—she said, “Rauschenberg is a creator, not a painter,” or something like that. It was a compliment. That's the story. Thank you.

Q2: That's a wonderful way to end this interview. *Domo arigatou gozaimashita.*

Takahashi: Thank you very much, yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]