

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Ealan Wingate

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Ealan Wingate conducted by Sara Sinclair on April 23, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

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

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Ealan Wingate

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair

Date: April 23, 2015

Q: This is Sara Sinclair with—

Wingate: Ealan Wingate.

Q: Today is April the twenty-third and we are at Columbia University [New York]. Okay. So, as I was explaining, with these oral histories we like to start with a little bit about you. So if you could begin by just telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life, some of your early memories.

Wingate: Okay. I was born in Tel Aviv, Israel in 1948. My father as well was Israeli born. My mom was born in New York State, up in Syracuse, but because her parents wanted to raise the children in Palestine, everyone left in the late thirties to go there. We returned to the United States in 1952, when I was four, so that my mother could be with her mother a little bit more and my father could start a new life, away from the family business and various other things that had embroiled him. We moved to Forest Hills [Queens, New York].

From a very early age, I was fascinated and interested in art and making art, drawing, things like that. I went to art classes on Saturdays at the Museum of Modern Art [New York]. This is the early fifties. We would, as a family, go to museums—the Museum of Modern Art. I remember

very distinctly how it was attached to the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York] at the time. I was very taken with going to museums. Very taken with it.

Later in the fifties, still while we were in Forest Hills, my father decided that he wanted to start buying art. As a young couple, they in fact did have some things that were from antiquarians or things like that from Israel. But now he wanted to do something that spoke more of American art. Somehow—and I'm sad to say I do not know how—he met Edith Gregor Halpert, who was this legendary, wonderful art dealer. She began her career even before the First World War down in Greenwich Village [New York]. She started what was to be called the Downtown Gallery, and befriended and cared after the Modernist movement artists. In fact, reading Lindsay Pollock's book [*The Girl with the Gallery: Edith Gregor Halpert and the Making of the Modern Art Market*, 2006] filled in a lot for me because I didn't know any of this. She gave Stuart Davis a monthly stipend of twenty-five dollars so that she could have all of the work that he made. Eventually she befriended Mrs. John D. [Blanchette Ferry Hooker] Rockefeller III, started her buying primitive art, started her supporting various things, got her American artists involved with the building of Rockefeller Center [New York]. That's how we have some works by [William] Zorach and other artists.

Anyway, my father met her. I started going to the gallery when it had moved to Fifty-third Street when I was eight years old maybe. Having a rather big mouth, I would point to things at the gallery and I would say, rather emphatically, "Daddy, you should really buy this," not knowing or caring if it were a masterpiece or way beyond his financial ability. I don't know if he was embarrassed or whatever, but Edith Halpert loved it. She just thought I was a pip. One of the

sweetest times was, she had told my father, “Next Saturday, when you come, just have the boy come,” which meant that my father had to keep the car running downstairs as I climbed all the stairs. A very unusual thing for a little kid. I remember the stairs of the stoop on Fifty-third Street, a townhouse, and then inside, the flight of stairs to where the gallery was—there were offices on the ground floor. She was there and she presented me with a Jack Levine drawing and she said, “Now I think it’s time for you to start being a collector.” That was very impressive. Very, very impressive. So I continued making my work and loved looking at the magazines, loved going to galleries and museums. I loved that my father was buying the works that he did.

In the late 1950s we moved out to one of the suburbs on Long Island, Roslyn [New York]. It was a longer trek to get into Manhattan and more difficult, but nonetheless, on Saturdays I would, many times, take the train when I was an older teenager and go up Madison Avenue and put my head into the various things that I liked. The things that I liked were the things that were a continuation of those things that I learned through Edith Halpert. So I thought that Reginald Marsh and Philip Evergood [born Howard Blashki] were just absolutely wonderful artists. It might be a little transgressive if I start to like Peter Blume or some Surrealism, but nonetheless I kind of held the line.

But then I became much more fascinated through the media, through magazines and things like that, by the Abstract Expressionists and others that I had seen, maybe an example at the Museum of Modern Art, but really not very much. This is still before Dorothy [C.] Miller’s show of ’59, ’60, ’61. I started to become very fascinated by the Pop artists. My father was buying more and more. We were buying abstract works and I was very enthused, as was he. By the mid, early

sixties, I think he bought a large painting by [Christiaan Karel] Appel which was completely abstract. We were very proud of ourselves of how modern we became and demanding of ourselves, all this. I started to urge him to start looking at this guy Jasper Johns and subsequently Andy Warhol. He just found it commercial art and he did not think that it was fine art or high art, not what he was after and I should just drop it. Of course, being the kind of kid I was, I didn't drop it, so we stopped discussing what to do with art. The walls were full by that time. Everything was fine.

Q: Was that the first time that your perspectives had really diverged?

Wingate: I think that's the one that I remember. Others might have healed quickly. This was very, very specific. I think it was more Warhol. It was the time of the soup cans and they got a lot of press. My father thought that it smacked of a vulgarity that he did not associate with those tenets of art that he wanted to find emotional connection with. We didn't really talk that much more about it. It was a kind of impasse. Still friendly—we remained family, but that one subject, as we're being specific about me and art—

Q: Well, it's interesting because it—I don't know, but maybe—reflects a generational gap. Like you had agreed until that moment, until that transition, and then you were still able to appreciate this next moment and he, less so.

Wingate: And he not. Completely, it was generational. He had his vision into certain things and pushed it as far as he was comfortable in pushing it. He did not want to concede that time had

passed and that society or the world had embraced a different kind of way of applying paint or way of expressing oneself or various things. Because those things as well were not reflected in any museums and they were not even reflected when the [New York] Coliseum that used to be on Columbus Circle would have a large international show. Or you would see things—large exhibitions that everybody was very proud of, the presentation of certain things that Nelson [Aldrich] Rockefeller had done with funding things from Latin America, and back and forth. We just didn't know these things. Or we could isolate them. "That's okay for Latin America. That's not for us," sort of thing. So we were safe. We were not international in that way.

I continued making my art. I contributed a cover to a school magazine and various things that happened in school. I went to college at [Case] Western Reserve University in Cleveland and decided that I was not going to do anything with art because I was going to focus, for the next four years, on my liberal arts education. And yet I was very drawn to the museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art. Sherman [Emory] Lee was its director and it was a very exciting time. They were celebrating their fiftieth anniversary while I was there. Sherman Lee was acquiring things. We could go to open lectures that he would give on what they were acquiring for the museum. His little snide remarks about this or that, praising Buddhist art and Indian art and denigrating [Pablo] Picasso and Cubism because it really wasn't proven yet if it was going to be lasting. It was still 1967, '68. Their wonderful collection ended with *La Vie* [1903], a Picasso blue painting, and then kind of jumped to what the Friends of Contemporary Art had given them. Among them, wonderful things, but it wasn't a sequence of getting us through to—they have a wonderful Rauschenberg, for example, "Gloria weds for the third time" [*Gloria*, 1956].



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Gloria*, 1956  
Combine: oil, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed paper,  
and printed reproductions on canvas  
66 1/2 x 63 1/4 inches (168.9 x 160.7 cm)  
Cleveland Museum of Art  
Gift of the Cleveland Society for Contemporary Art

All of a sudden one evening, I saw on the campus—it's an urban campus even though it's University Circle area and there's an important street, Euclid Avenue, that connects the complete downtown to many miles down where the university is. The site where there was the only hotel, and underneath the hotel, the only kind of luncheonette, diner, which was attached to the hotel. The dry cleaner a little ways down had converted to an art gallery and because it was a converted dry cleaner, it had big windows. In other words, they couldn't be secluded off the street. In the evenings, I would look.

Now I didn't think that I would feel comfortable going in because it was a little too close to home. I had no problem going to all the galleries, to Sidney Janis [Gallery, New York] and Leo Castelli [New York] and all those kind of things earlier, but for whatever reason, not there. Then one evening I saw them installing an exhibition and they were pulling their hair out. That happens in all installations, but I thought this is unusual. I thought that everything just kind of magically went on a wall, levitated on a wall. From another happenstance, I had won a bet and

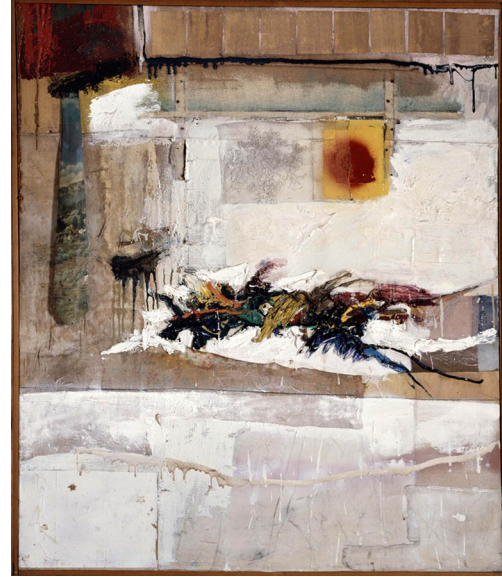


my portion of it was thirteen dollars. I did not want to pay a bill with it. I wanted to have something that I would always look at and know that I won this bet. So I walked into that gallery and explained my situation, that I had thirteen dollars. They showed me some posters and various things like that. It sounded great. There was a poster by [Roy] Lichtenstein, *The Sunrise* [1965]. It was signed by him. That was ten dollars. For an extra three dollars, I could get it covered in harder plastic acetate mounted on cardboard. It was great. While I was paying for it, I said, “I really don’t have any credentials, but I noticed that you might need some help. And if you need a volunteer or something like that—” It was run by two women and they looked at me and they went, “Volunteer?” “Yes. Helping you move something and stuff like that.” They said, “Well, yes. You want to start? We’d love that.” So I started that evening. We started to install a Lichtenstein show.

I didn’t tell you. The show that they opened with or the show that I went to a few times, was Rauschenberg. Now it’s 1968. It had *Pilgrim* [1960]. It had—did it have *Johanson’s Painting* [1961]? I don’t know. But it definitely had *Pilgrim*. It had *Interior*, the one that Agnes Gund has, with the single necktie [note: referring to *Rhyme*, 1956]. It had wonderful 1968 drawings. That was the year in which he worked both at Gemini [G.E.L., Los Angeles] and ULAE [Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York] and had made very interesting, different series of works, and they were there. They were just published. It was a very impressive show. When that show came down was when we were talking and I started working on the Lichtenstein.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Pilgrim*, 1960  
Combine: oil, graphite, paper, printed paper,  
and fabric on canvas with painted wood chair  
79 1/4 x 53 7/8 x 18 5/8 inches (201.3 x  
136.8 x 47.3 cm)  
Private collection



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Rhyme*, 1956  
Combine: oil, fabric, necktie, paper,  
enamel, pencil, and synthetic polymer  
paint on canvas  
48 1/4 x 41 1/8 inches (122.6 x 104.5 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Fractional and promised gift of Agnes  
Gund in honor of Richard E. Oldenburg

It turned out that it was run by two women and my luck was that one of the women was married to my English professor. I'm an English major. This was, I thought, very good. That was Nina [Castelli] Sundell and her partner was Marjorie Talalay. They ran the New Gallery [Cleveland; note: presented Rauschenberg's first Cleveland solo exhibition in spring 1969]. I became their assistant and was so smitten, so won over by working with art and working with these ladies and getting to know them. Their secret backer was Agnes Saalfeld, who eventually remarried and changed her name to her maiden name, Gund. I became her babysitter and I was the Sundell babysitter. I was the only person who drove, so I would drive people around on behalf of the gallery. I would be there every day in the back area and when people wanted, I would help them rifle through the bins and posters, things like that. That was very interesting.

Since I lived in New York, when they were planning New York-based shows that were of young artists, I would go and say hello to them in their lofts. I was introduced to SoHo in 1968, '69.

The most interesting introduction I had was the weekend that Mrs. [Ileana] Sonnabend wanted to visit her daughter and grandchildren, which was unusual because she wasn't very family oriented. Nonetheless, I drove her around with everybody and we got to talking and we hit it off. Nina, very sweetly, said that her mother and her father were going to open up galleries in the lower part of Manhattan and that it would be very interesting for me, if I wanted when I graduated, to work there. She said she already turned down her father on my behalf because I hadn't finished my junior year and she wanted me to finish college, which was very sweet of Nina. It would have been trauma in the family if I left.

Anyway, I became the director of the yet-to-be-built Sonnabend Gallery [New York] to open up on West Broadway. It was supposed to open in 1970. I graduated May of 1970. It was supposed to be that fall, but it got delayed. All four galleries finally opened up in September of '71.

Q: That's pretty amazing.

Wingate: So I was twenty-three.

Q: Yes. So tell me about what you had been learning in Cleveland, in the years before, that readied you to emerge a few years later as director of this gallery in New York.

Wingate: That readied me. I met a lot of very interesting personalities and that was very interesting. Most interestingly, I met artists when they came to mount their exhibitions. Ileana brought me to Paris while I was still a senior in college to indicate to me that she was serious because there was nothing to be had. But I didn't take any coursework. There was no college work. The only coursework I took in art was related to Sherman Lee's specialties, which was Indian art or Far Eastern art, because I knew that my natural proclivity would never have me even open a book about that. I thought these courses were being given by such a preeminent person, let me pursue that. So I did that. But nothing in terms of Western art. It was really meeting people and associating with people much, much older than myself and being comfortable with that. Or not being uncomfortable with it, that's a better way of putting it.

Q: What do you think that she [Ileana Sonnabend] saw in you when you were twenty-two, twenty-three, that gave her the confidence to say, "This is the person I want to invest in. This is the person I want to bring into my fold."

Wingate: She was very interesting and she didn't want anyone who had come through the program to start working at an art gallery. She wanted somebody completely without a history, in that she wanted to mold that person or at least to have that person more unaffected by certain professional polish or attitude, which I think she found off-putting. She was also an extraordinary woman who loved being exposed to what she didn't know. So she would be fascinated by other people who were not from her background.

We explored things—this is jumping ahead, but I was always, since high school, maybe even earlier, fascinated by opera. Quite committed to it. On days when I didn't take the train from Roslyn station, I would be a standee at the old opera house. I would leave high school, go down the stairs, down the block, into the train station. Thirty-ninth Street was the location of the old Metropolitan Opera House. Thirty-fourth Street, Penn [Pennsylvania] Station [New York], was a five-block walk. I would get my standee ticket, go across to the Nedick's, wait until the standees were allowed in. That was a wonderful kind of thing. I wasn't involved with sports. I wasn't very social. I guess it's rather hermetic. There you are in the dark standing like this. It's not like the Metropolitan Opera now where you have a place you can lean. You had to balance for hours. But it was so new.

Ileana had known opera, but she hadn't been with somebody who was avid about it. I introduced her and then she became avid. She loved learning and she loved exposing others, young people, to something that she liked very much and seeing them take it on. She liked that give and take very much. I think that she liked that in me because I was like a sponge and I had some other things to offer her that surprised her, like opera or other things. She was a very, very cultivated—extraordinary lady. There was very little that she didn't find wonderfully passionate.

Q: Okay. So tell me about those first few years, opening Sonnabend.

Wingate: They were very unusual. I think one has to go back and think about the way galleries were, especially galleries of the new art or of current art, contemporary art. Once, when being interviewed about Ileana and those early years, the interviewer was going on about the art

market. I went, “Wait a second. Please. Please. There was no such thing as ‘the art market.’ There were galleries. They made shows. Two hundred people would come. Things would not sell.” One of the gallery artists, I remember, the only sale he made was when something was accidentally lifted and so he got the insurance money on a stolen work. It was the time of performance art in which the public would say, “But there’s nothing for sale.”

So we didn’t really gear ourselves for sale. And she knew that. If she needed to sell something in order to finance the gallery, she had, over the years since opening Galerie Sonnabend in Paris in 1962, purchased works that she had imported for her shows, either from [Leo] Castelli or directly from the artists. In many cases she had pre-bought the works and also not sold them very rapidly, much to her happiness, so that she would hold onto them. So she would pull out a wonderful picture and it would be to Dr. [Peter or Irene] Ludwig from Cologne or something like that, people who were making their museums in the seventies because Germany had quite an active moment then of buying American art. That would finance us for eight months, ten months.

Her second husband, Michael Sonnabend, was quite a character and quite a delight. He liked the whole thing—he was much older than she—and he liked it all being very mischievous. He liked a lot of the thing, the downtown and young people and all this. He would always hug, squeeze everybody. It was very, very wonderful. He had never had a job in his life. He was a perpetual student. But he’s another subject. He was based in New York, overseeing the New York operation while she was in Paris, overseeing the European and Paris operation. But he never really oversaw anything. He would just think the whole thing was this wonderful opportunity to meet people and to laugh, or not.

But there was interest. There was excitement. First of all, Leo Castelli was in the building and he was a serious gallerist. Ileana would become known as a serious gallerist, but had not yet proven herself with her uptown gallery on Madison Avenue between Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth, which she opened around 1969 [1970]. Virginia Dwan was supposed to be in the building but she decided that she would not open the gallery for tax purposes so her director, John Weber, opened the gallery instead [John Weber Gallery, New York]. Then the top floor was André Emmerich [Gallery, New York] and those were the four galleries in 420 West Broadway. So they were diversified and it was a very good moment. We opened up with Gilbert and George [Gilbert & George]. They did *The Singing Sculpture* [1970] six hours a day. I met Bob Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein. I ate with them. We would have studio visits, always with Ileana. She didn't do anything alone. It was very, very magical.

The notion of making sales—I did make some sales, she did. I remember some people made sales and they would be kind of dumbfounded. Like, “I can't believe that—” So the entire notion about art and it selling that we are so entrenched in today—the role of auction houses, what we read about, and the five hundred million-dollar gift that Stefan Edlis and his wife Gael [Neeson] give—this was, I could be talking Neanderthal in comparison and it's only 1971, '2, and '3.

Q: Wow. Do you remember the first time you met Bob?

Wingate: No because he and Ileana were very best friends, very, very best friends, especially at that time. When she would come to New York, was always very, very keen to spend as much time with him as possible. We would go up for dinner four times a week.

Q: Wow. Will you speak a little bit about that relationship? Everything I hear suggests that there was just such a mutual admiration and—

Wingate: Complete adoration. Bob spoke poetically and metaphorically and she spoke very little. Yet when she did speak, it was very well-pointed, slightly ironic, and usually very supportive, but truthful. If she didn't like something, she would probably say it.

They had been through quite a lot in the fifties and then the sixties, when she showed him in Paris in that wonderful exhibition of '64 [*Rauschenberg*]. They were so, so close. They made a very funny couple because Bob was dashing and fun and she was very mischievous. There's a twinkle in her eye. But because of her illness in the late fifties, she emerged from the hospital a very large woman and had to be very careful with her health and things like that. Just like other people in the fifties hanging out with artists, she had been an avid drinker. But then because of the various things that happened to her liver and other things, these things that Bob did—dinners with Bob would be the bottle of Jack [Daniel's] and what else are you having? It was a lot of consumption of stuff.



There was a nice cast of characters. He was, at that time, with [Robert] Bob Petersen, who was sweetness itself. And Sachika [Hisachika Takahashi] and other people were around. There was a lot of activity that Ileana was able to do—oh, I’m diverting from your question.

Q: No, no. It’s fine.

Wingate: There were a lot of things that Ileana was able to do in Italy for Bob. She had a place in Venice, which was, of course, a very good luck place for Bob. And Cy Twombly—this was before he found the place in Lexington [Virginia] so he was always in Rome or staying with Bob in New York, but not an American resident in any way. So when everybody was in Italy, everybody got a chance to be together.

There was always a lot going on. I know only from photographs, but Bob would make these wonderful, beautiful parties in the sixties, and the time with [Johan Wilhelm] Billy Klüver and the time of so much of the performance work is very extroverted, with crowds. But in the time that I knew him, it was a very small coterie of people that would be hanging around. We were that group. If Ileana was not in town, I don’t think that I would go over to Bob’s. When traveling in Europe, we were all together. Part of the team that stayed in the same hotels and took care and watched out for and installed and had every meal together. Those times were very, very rich.

Q: The show in Venice that travels [Museo d’Arte Moderna Ca’ Pesaro, Venice, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 1975. Traveled to Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, Ferrara, 1976; Forte di

Belvedere, Florence, 1976.], the *Jammers* [1975–76] and *Hoarfrosts* [1974–76], *Early Egyptians* [1973–74] and *Venetians* [1972–73]—

Wingate: Of what year?

Q: 1975 and '76. Can we talk a little bit about that?

Wingate: That was the Ca' Pesaro?

Q: That was at this museum.

Wingate: The Ca' Pesaro. Musée de l'art moderne—it eventually became owned by [François] Pinault. This is his museum now, but at that time, it was not. In Florence, it was at the Forte Belvedere above Florence. We installed it there. I don't know if I went to Ferrara because I would have to be working. Between January and March, I couldn't leave New York. So a lot of these things had to be done—for my participation—in coordination with when I could be there. But Venice and Florence, I was involved with. It was just extraordinary when I think now, forty years later or whenever it is, to think that we brought *Hoarfrosts* in suitcases and in boxes and hung them up. The whole attitude was very different. It's not that they had a financial number attached to them, that you couldn't touch a work of art valued at this and this. There was a casualness about it, which is very wrong. [Laughs]

Q: Do you remember how that particular show came together?

Wingate: As far as I recall and as far as I knew, it was designed by Bob and Ileana and Michael. Michael Sonnabend was very active. Ileana lived summers in Venice. She had a very lovely apartment. Michael would roam the city and knew the city as a native. Michael had been, from the time when he came back from having been in Paris to be in New York during the war—Michael was born in 1900 so he came back to New York when he was past forty years old. He stayed in New York and met and hung out with artists and met Ileana when—do you know this story about when she took classes at Columbia?

Q: Okay, yes.

Wingate: And Michael snuck into classes, stayed in the back—

Q: Oh, I hadn't heard that, no.

Wingate: He was like nobody she'd ever met. He was this little go-getter. His claim to fame was that in Paris he had met [Paul-Marie] Verlaine's shoe shiner. Kind of like he got really close to these kind of wonderful, very—he came back and became involved with Lee Strasberg's theater group as a runner, a do-everything person. He got to know everybody and then got into documentary films and that was what he was doing in the earlier fifties. He and Ileana met when Leo—coming to the states, fleeing Europe, and he joined the Army to become an immediate citizen. They looked at his language skills and they sent him immediately to Europe as kind of a wonderful spy. And Ileana was kind of bored. She was very easily bored. She had decided to

take classes at Columbia and in the back of the room was Michael and he kind of picked her up. They started their relationship at that time. Leo had many relationships so that when she decided to divorce Leo, she had Michael immediately. He was already somebody in his late fifties because they only got divorced in '60. He was sixty. It's very easy to tell. When somebody was born in 1900, math is great. Math is great.

Q: Yes. Maybe you can speak a little bit about how the whole Sonnabend team worked. David White told me that Michael—and I don't remember the series—but in one case when they were doing an installation, Michael was the one who actually named some of the Rauschenberg works.

Wingate: That happened at Castelli because we weren't showing Bob in New York, but that was when—he named the *Venetian* series. He gave the names in Venetian dialect. That's why they're very strange names. They're dialectically spelled, church names and things like that. For example, even Ca' Pesaro is Casa Pesaro, the house of— But in Venetian, it's "ca". So, in other words, he did all that for the *Venetian* series that was at Leo's at 420 West Broadway, one flight below us. He was a delight. He was bossy and insistent and you can imagine him taking things over. He knew no bounds. He knew no bounds.

Q: Okay. So what was your role?

Wingate: I did not have very much of a role. I was upstairs. I'm keeping the fort. What went on outside, I was not privy to. All the things that Ileana was able to do for Bob, like all the European things, that was one time. The last time that I did anything American with Bob in the Sonnabend

days was going down and seeing the final touches—and they were really final touches—on the Smithsonian show, the bicentennial show [*Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976–77]. That was just to praise him and to be supportive. But the other shows, we really installed as a team. I didn't say, "I'd like to put this there." I'm twenty-four years—five or six or something—you don't— It was very, very warm. He was an outrageously warm person and enveloping.

Q: Do you have any other memories of this time in Italy? Of either Venice or Florence?

Wingate: Bob was drinking a lot. He would, in some cases, be kind of out of control. So I was upset. I was traveling with Antonio Homem. At that time, in the seventies, I was working and Antonio lived with me in my apartment. It was only after I left the gallery that he decided to move in with Ileana at 24 Fifth Avenue. So Antonio and I would travel together and we would sit with Bob. We would be at a café and he would be rolling on the floor. I remember that one time in Florence. But Bob Petersen was terrific. He had all the pills in the morning, getting Bob all his vitamins and various things that he needed.

I remember enjoying installing in those spaces very much because they were faded, coral, silk-covered walls and various things like that. Beautiful tile floors. We're dealing with an old, palazzo kind of style that had never been restored or cared after. So they were wonderful kind of enveloping things to work in, especially with *Early Egyptians* and the *Venetian* works. It was a little tricky usually, with *Jammers* and *Hoarfrosts* because of the fabric confusion. But we didn't

think about that. We embraced it all, said, “Isn’t it wonderful? You don’t know where the art stops.” And that was very Bob.

Q: You were also involved in the *Spreads and Scales* [simultaneously presented at Leo Castelli and Sonnabend Gallery, 1977] in New York.

Wingate: Yes. That was the last show I was at the gallery for, because I left at the end of ’76. I had wanted to leave earlier, but Ileana had an illness and so I couldn’t break the news to her. She was also, upon recuperating, looking forward to the *Spreads* [1975–83] and *Scales* [1977–81], because that would be a show that would help her financially. It was the first show that she was able to mount of Bob’s on her floor. Leo arranged that. [Note: The first Rauschenberg exhibition at Sonnabend Gallery, New York was *Hoarfrosts*, 1974]

When the show was finally installed and we all loved it and it was just so amazing, Bob made his prices double and triple what they had ever been, and it made it totally prohibitive for her to ever sell anything. So her hopes of some kind of financial—plus the fact that she had this health issue. I think she had breast cancer, a breast removed. So it was a bizarre mixed-blessing show. I, personally, began to resent it because it wasn’t our savior, the saving show.

Q: What happened with him that he suddenly jacked up the prices? Do you know?

Wingate: I don’t know. I don’t know. When we’re talking about jacking up prices, we’re talking about what a drawing gets today by a young artist. [Laughs] But at that time, especially with our

inability to make successful sales—anybody. Because we didn't try. We weren't out there floor-walking. Michael thought that was vulgar. It was like want to put a boutonniere in and walk around saying, "Can I help you?" No, no. We don't do that.

Q: Okay. So why was it time for you to leave the gallery?

Wingate: My father had wanted me to join him in business. Earlier, I guess in retrospect, to woo me, he decided to like Andy Warhol. So he came to the gallery. I had done some traveling with him in my summer vacation time to Japan, where he was an importer of Japanese steel. It was kind of like the writing was on the wall. He said, "Okay, fine. You've had your great time. You've been there six, seven years. You met a lot of nice people," my mother couldn't get over the fact that I wore blue jeans to work, "but now it would be really great—" From his end, the company that he began and then further expanded with my uncle, became very successful in the earlier seventies. He was able to acquire controlling interest in a publicly held company that would catapult him as the chairman of the board of a public company and he wanted me to take over the company that he had begun and was leaving. So there was a full push onto me.

I had also felt that I had done, not as much as I could, but for whatever wonderment and excitement, there's a lot of psychological puppeteering going on around Ileana and Michael and Antonio and the artists. "How much do you love me? How much do you want from me?" All this kind of stuff. "Let me do this and hurt you so that our coming back together again is so sweet." All this kind of stuff which is just symptomatic of that, but to hit somebody in their early twenties, who is seeing that this is what life is about, was pretty complex.

Ileana was just understanding. She said, “The day I met your father, I knew I would lose you to him.” Which was a very funny remark but very Ileana, because she thought that she had become my father. We remained very close. One of the things that I decided to do was that, now that I became an executive at a company and now that I got a salary, which was completely unheard of and since I was, in fact, heading a company that worked with steel manufacturers in Italy and Germany and England, I could do business trips to visit my associates. I could enact successful business times according to Ileana’s travel needs, when she really wanted to be in Cologne for four days, attending a series of gallery openings and things like that, and she needed somebody to be with her because she needed Antonio to stay in Paris and that kind of stuff. So I was her escort up until the emergence of the East Village [New York] scene in ’84, ’85.

Q: And what would your role be as her escort? Why did she want a companion for those trips?

Wingate: She never had wanted to appear alone. Who’s going to get a taxi? Who’s going to make sure that there’s a restaurant? Who would make the appointment? Who will sit with me in the lobby of the hotel as we wile away time? I went shopping with her. In other words, I was like a family member. And like a family member, we put pins in the dolls. [Laughs] So it was interesting and bittersweet and all that. But it was wonderful. It was different from the time together because I was doing this as a favor.

Q: And so you were treated differently, maybe, because it was seen as a favor rather than—



Wingate: Yes and it was a little distant because I had, of course, betrayed her by leaving. So it was trying to soften that blow, at least on my part. I think on her part too.

Q: Okay. So what happens next for you? You obviously don't stay in that role at your dad's company forever.

Wingate: I don't stay in that role. I was able, with my salary, to become a collector and I started to put my money where my mouth had been. I became a collector from Sonnabend and from other galleries, but a lot from Sonnabend. I became interested in the working of a gallery in the East Village called International With Monument. It was a gallery all the way on East Sixth Street and it showed early—this is mid-eighties, '85, '86—Peter Halley, Jeff Koons, Ashley Bickerton, Peter Nagy. I got married in 1986 and my wife and I had been going to this gallery and started buying works from them.

The one person I knew at the gallery, Elizabeth Koury, approached me and asked if I would be interested in working with her because they were at a crossroads. What had happened was, it was a partnership mostly between Elizabeth Koury and Meyer Vaisman, as well an artist. She was not. Another third of the stock ownership was Meyer. She suggested that Meyer wanted to leave and would I buy his shares? Then we would form this new thing.

Around that time, my father's art and my family business, the boom years of the kind of steel manufacturing that we were doing had matured out and was rather stagnant. Also the publicly held company that my father headed was mired with a lot of lawsuits, mostly from the

government because they supplied the explosive bolt system for the rockets. When you see a rocket go up from Cape Kennedy or Canaveral [Florida]—whatever they're calling it—and the gas or the oil tanks kind of go off, somebody's pressed a button and there's an explosive device in the bolts that makes them crack so what they're holding can fall off. We were the producers of those bolts. There were very crazy government contracts in which each bolt had to be tested, but once it's tested, of course, it's destroyed. So these kind of things. There were lawsuits and lawsuits and lawsuits. We decided to close the company and sold all the parts of it. I was really faced with a conundrum, which was I don't want to sit around an office and ponder what to do with investment money—what new company to look at to expand. I had just gotten married and I was in love with art and I figured that I did my basic ten years with my dad and we grew a company and we did a very nice thing. I proved myself that way. And I wanted to go back into art.

So I started to explore this possibility of buying the shares of International With Monument in the hopes that— One of the controlling aspects of it was that the shares I was buying from Meyer, this was all going to be in confidence. It would be an ongoing business with everything intact, no alteration. That was fine, we had our negotiation, and finally, around 1987, we were finished with whatever negotiation we had to do and we signed everything. Immediately after—and when I say immediately I mean within days after—it became clear that he had arranged for Jeff Koons, Ashley Bickerton, and Peter Halley to join Sonnabend so that he could also join Sonnabend. So he brought that. So I bought, as a nice businessman, all these shares in a company that had no artists, in an art gallery that had lost its artists.

So I went to Ileana and I said look, this is the situation. She was horrified that I had gone into the business without asking her, back into the industry, and to think that she was caught in this duplicity of Meyer's—Meyer Vaisman. I said, "Can we at least work together? Can we share?" She said, "No, there's no sharing. No. No. You can leave now." It was very, very specific.

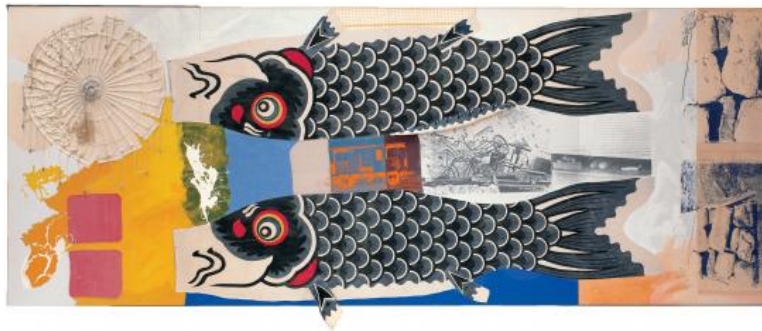
So I was heartbroken, crestfallen. I put together my own gallery, Koury Wingate [Gallery, New York]. We decided to change the name. We were no longer International With Monument. We moved to Broadway and Prince [Street; 578 Broadway]. We made beautiful shows. We launched some interesting careers. But then the terrible recession of 1991 hit and people stopped going to galleries and people stopped caring and it was very painful. Around that time my dear friend Robert Pincus-Witten—who you have interviewed, I hope?

Q: No.

Wingate: Oh no. He was also part of the whole Sonnabend moment and he would have recollections. He worked for Ileana in Paris in the sixties. He had started working for [Lawrence G.] Larry Gagosian. Larry wanted to open up a new gallery in SoHo and I needed to close my gallery and Pincus convinced me to walk the few blocks and become the director. That was in October of '91 and I'm still there.

Q: Okay. All right. So let's move to Gagosian [Gallery, New York] then. What was the first encounter that you had with Rauschenberg through Gagosian?

Wingate: Gagosian and Leo Castelli had a joint venture called 65 Thompson Street, where there was a show of Bob's. Bob had shown with [M.] Knoedler [New York] and had shown with Pace [Wildenstein Gallery, New York]. No, maybe—this is around 1992 or '3. I can't remember when the *Vydock* series [1995] was shown [*Robert Rauschenberg: New Paintings; Vydocks and Doubleluck*, Gagosian Gallery, 136 Wooster Street and *Reefs*, 65 Thompson Street, New York, 1995]. It was certainly after ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange] Japan [1986] because we showed the big fish from ROCI Japan [*Doubleluck*, 1995]. But anyway, it was great seeing Bob again. He came back to Leo almost like a guest gig because he had, in fact, left—or was leaving—I think I got my dates right. When did he join Knoedler and Pace? One after the other.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Doubleluck*, 1995  
 Acrylic, Japanese kite, parachute,  
 and fabric on bonded aluminum  
 97 x 249 inches (246.4 x 632.5 cm)  
 Private collection

Q: I don't know the date either. [Note: Rauschenberg joined Knoedler in 1988 and Pace in 1996, then PaceWildenstein.]

Wingate: Pace is going to be quite late. It's going to be in the 2000s. So Knoedler is the second half of the—maybe this was Leo's last show, when Bob was really eager to leave. Part of it was done at 65 Thompson. It was very, very sweet to see Bob again. But I don't think I even went to

[381] Lafayette Street [New York, Rauschenberg's building]. I don't think I had a lot of social time with him. It was a much more complicated time and people were all over him already. He had Leo and Larry and other people and his handlers.

Q: So maybe you can speak a little bit about that. Because I think, in a way, what you're talking about observing about all these people circling an artist, in some ways, parallels the changes that you're speaking about more generally happening in the art world. And so maybe you can speak about observing that with Bob in particular.

You had all these interactions with him in the seventies when you were having these shows with Sonnabend and it wasn't really about selling. And then however many years later, thirty years later, you encounter him again and the world has changed.

Wingate: Yes. The world has changed. He had self-funded ROCI and that was huge. It also made him into a world figure—for sure in his own eyes. It took many, many people to get that to happen. He depended upon a lot of people, a lot of younger people around him, and then people like [Donald] Don Saff and other people who were more professional.

He was also making his own Untitled [Press, Inc.] prints and his own thing. But in many ways, everybody was taking a little part of him. He had relations with so many people. It used to be a very, very small group. It was Sachika and the man he would be living with, and maybe two or three other people. Dorothea Rockburne who had been his bookkeeper. The story goes that she really messed up terribly with tax filings, but that was before my time. That was around 1967,

'68. But that was the coterie. Sure, there was Brice [Marden] and there was Al Taylor and there was [Debra] Debbie [Taylor]. That was all very nice, but they were more friends. I can't remember—was it Mayo [Thompson]? What was his name? He's still alive. I just saw him in Los Angeles. He had a very, very strange, beautiful girlfriend who subsequently died from like an early onset Parkinson's [disease]. Very frail. Blond, white eyebrows and long, white hair. They worked together with Bob on *Made in Israel* [1974].

Q: Oh, Mayo. Mayo Thompson.

Wingate: Mayo Thompson.

Q: And Christine [Koslov].

Wingate: And Christine. That was a very big suck on Bob. That was the first time I noticed the suck on Bob, how it was.

Q: Okay. And that you feel represented a new kind of norm?

Wingate: It only increased. It only increased. It became more and more people who were like that.

Q: And was that specific to Bob or was that something that you observed amongst other really successful, visible artists as well?

Wingate: Everybody had had studio assistants, but the studio assistants—it was a profession. Then it became a lifestyle and then it became a family or who you were stuck with or lived with. The work day didn't end at 6:00 or at— “Okay, I'm going up to the apartment or out of here.” It's like you're at dinner and you're there and we're traveling together and we're—it's a very different kind of thing, so you become part of this entourage.

Q: And does that remain the same today?

Wingate: No. I think it's gotten quite professional. I think people feel that their boundaries are much more fixed. You go to work. It's more the Jeff Koons model in which you have maybe seventy-five or eighty studio assistants working, but you don't spend time with them. It's much more crisp.

Q: What happened? Was it just this one generation? Was it the sixties and the seventies or—

Wingate: I think it was—this is going to sound weird. I think that the making of art put artists by default in a vulnerable position. I've always said that it's the blank page syndrome. You can imagine it with an old Olivetti. You put in a blank page and you stare at it and you wonder what words do I start putting on this that communicate what I want, communicate to somebody else, are invented? Looking at a blank canvas, how do I fill it? So they're very, very vulnerable. The art of our more current time, from the time of the East Village, which corresponds with the new return to representational imagery with David Salle, Eric Fischl, Georg Baselitz, so many people.

There was a sense of painterly representation that emerged in the early eighties or became codified in the early eighties. There's a certain kind of sardonic quality of—I'm not going to say insincerity, but a removal from connection of the image to the artist. We feel the artists in earlier times loving that which they've created. In more recent times, they are creating it to make a point.

I don't know how to put it in any other words, but there's a—

Q: A separation.

Wingate: A separation. There's irony in paintings that, although there had been with Dada, it had been with a certain kind of love of the irony. Now it's irony for irony's sake. It's not [Jonathan] Jon Stewart kind of sardonic humor. It's like, "You know that I know that I know that you know that you know that I know that I could paint better than this, but I don't have to because I'm making a point." And that has created a new kind of artist. Do I dare say not the vulnerable artist anymore? Not the one who's willing to shake. Much more calculating. Maybe calculated. A more calculated approach to, "Okay, I've got to go make art."

When I first heard somebody say, "I'd like to talk with you, but I've got to make art," I thought to myself, how do they say those words? Art comes from some kind of netherworld of magical creation and you don't do it like boiled pasta. There's a very different kind of thing.



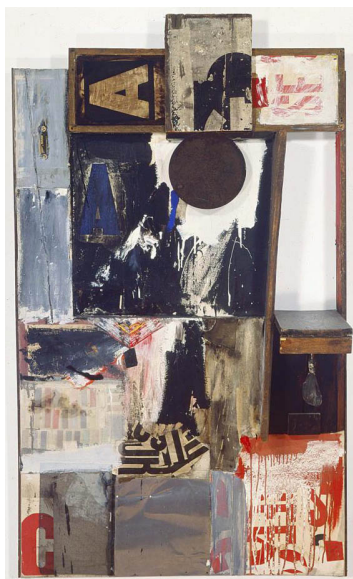
So I think that from the mid-eighties or so, we have a very different kind of professional artist. I think that if you look at the artists before, you have a very different kind of vulnerability, more needy. Much more needy. I know this because I work very much with older artists today. I work closely with Howard Hodgkin. He's in his eighties and he's phenomenally needy and I don't feel that as a very split personality divide to somebody else. They are, of course, needy because they're making something. They want you to like it. I'm not saying that they're calculating in that. There's a different trampoline. There's a net. There's a different kind of net. Also, they've gotten now to where they are without as many years of the history in which they failed in public and had to get up and keep on going and believe more in their vision. It's a curious sort of thing.

I think all industries have changed. I think the movie business has changed. I think popular music has changed. Look, we're in the post-era of *American Idol* where kids all over America voted on art. They voted who was going to sell a song. It's a very funny kind of power shift.

Q: So where would you place Bob in that kind of thinking? Can you talk about him with respect to those themes, that sense of what's motivating his art making? Whether there's that self-consciousness, whether there's that analysis that you were describing some of the more contemporary artists—

Wingate: See, the thing about Bob was his voracious appetite for imagery and thought and new means of getting those across. He was unstoppable and an amazing editor and an inventor of art that looked happenstance and looked ephemeral and looked impossible to completely grasp.

What happened after ROCI, when he was able to explore so many new materials and he saw himself as an ambassador of collecting all over the world, of thoughts and things. By the time you get to the very late nineties and maybe the last ten years, so much seems by rote. So much seems safe. There's a sense of a repetition and no longer an invention. I think that everybody was so thrilled that he was still working, that it remained up and he continued. This is said from a complete outsider because we really didn't have contact after that time in '94, '95. But the magic—and I use that word because he made a painting called *Magician* [1959] and he was a magician. He was an alchemist and a magician. He was that up through '90, '91, '92, '93. Right after that, I don't know what was going on in his private life, I don't know what was going on in various other things or his health, but around then, he tried to do things, I think the *Vydocks* might be among the last things. They were very—I think they're very—I would like to see them again. They haven't had another outing since our failed show. All the two-dimensional works on polylaminate, all that—not all of it, but so much of it, I find to be somehow by rote, almost like signature Rauschenberg. He had made a surprise with every series before.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Magician*, 1959  
 Combine: oil, fabric, wood, printed paper, printed reproductions, and metal on canvas with fabric pouch and string  
 65 3/8 x 38 1/8 x 16 1/8 inches (166.1 x 96.8 x 41 cm)  
 Private collection

Q: I want to ask you about—you called him a good editor and I think that’s interesting because I sometimes hear people say the opposite and I want to ask you what you mean. Because what I’ve heard from some people is criticism that he wasn’t good at curating his own career or his own production of work because, as you said, he had a voracious appetite for creating. And so for him, it was, “I’m going to make art every day and it’s okay if at the end that means that my entire body of work is viewed as inconsistent.” So I’m wondering—

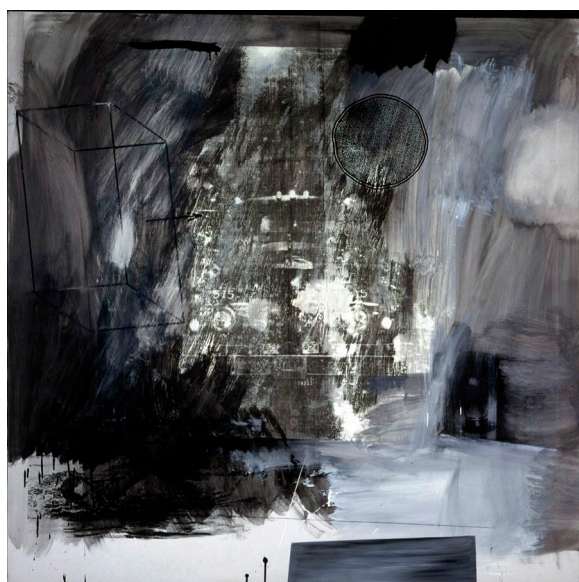
Wingate: When I said editor, I really didn’t mean it as him saying, “That’s not a work that I like and I’m not going to let it out,” as much as when you’re chewing up absolutely in the entire world and you want to know what to say, to spit out. He knew what to say and spit out.

Q: Okay. For each work at a time in a particular—

Wingate: Yes, yes. Every image shows a caress and a care and so you can feel that and you can feel when it’s done by rote, when it’s done because, “That looks like a Rauschenberg image. I might as well use it.”

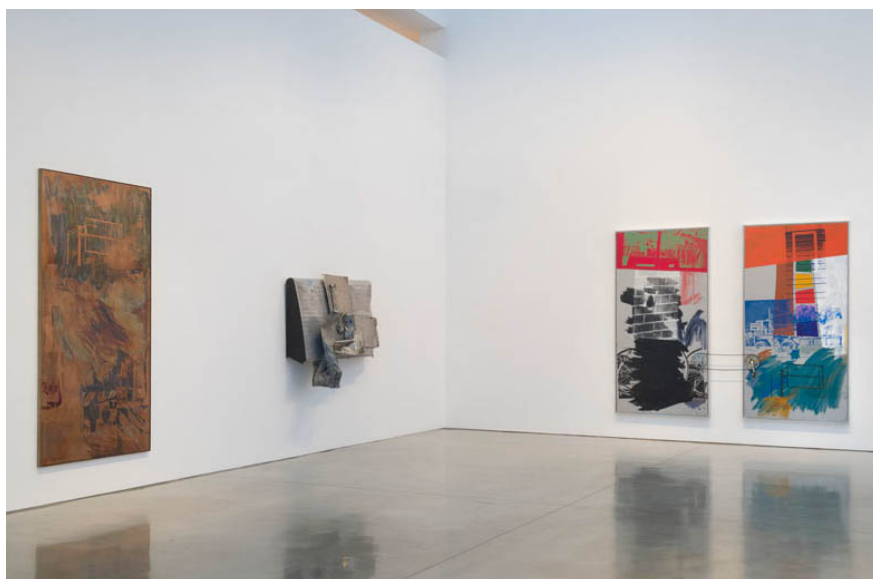
I own a painting from 1962, a black-and-white painting [*Buffalo I*, 1962]. I know it well. I made a show just this past autumn in Los Angeles of paintings on metal from 1989 to ’91, ’92 as well as some *Gluts* [1986–89/1991–94; note: *Robert Rauschenberg: Works on Metal*, Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills, 2014]. But the paintings from the *Borealis* series [1988–92], which was on copper or brass—the way that he applies the paint and tarnish and various other things is so

much like that amazing way he applies the paint on my 1962 painting. It's like somebody having a signature or a style of handwriting, but he's able to make it work anew and make it do things that it couldn't do in '62 and it couldn't do with oil and canvas. And regardless of what one thinks about that trajectory through the years, that in itself is extraordinary. That is demanding to do the same dance step but all of a sudden have it mean new things. It's really kind of wonderful. Really, really, really wonderful.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Buffalo I*, 1962  
Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas  
60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm)  
Private collection

Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: Works on Metal*, Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills, 2014. Works pictured: *Bush Socks (Borealis)* (1992), *Bumper Slip* (1987), and *Climb (Urban Bourbon)* (1993). Photo: Robert Wedemeyer



He wasn't stingy, in any aspect. It's true. There's a lot. Seeing what the estate has, it's vast. It's vast.

Q: Well, what you just said about your own work is interesting. I feel like it's a good transition to speaking about the show that took place after Bob's passing at Gagosian in 2010 [*Robert Rauschenberg*, Gagosian Gallery, West Twenty-first Street, New York, 2010–11].

Wingate: That was my show.

Q: Yes. So in the [*New York*] *Times* review ["Fruitful Talent Who Made Art World Multiply," November 27, 2010], Holland Cotter noted that the effect of so much work taken altogether was that thematic and stylistic links can be observed across a wide span, which is similar to what you were just saying. So maybe you can share some of your other similar observations in preparing for that show and pulling things from different times.

Wingate: When I found out that, unbeknownst to me, we had been negotiating and were successful in being able to represent the Rauschenberg estate, I walked into Larry's office and I said, "I just heard. I want to do that show. I want to be the person to make that show." I was very keen on bringing together works that people had not known. I had observed that he had been taken for granted and he had been not followed and his shows—maybe they had financial success because in the 2000s the prices were low and the work had a decorative aspect to it. It should not alter the fact that this was an arc from very late 1949, 1950 until 2007.

So I started to pull together those things that would be surprising and tried to juxtapose them altogether. The first thing you saw was something from 2005 and then you went back to 1952. But then things settled down in the middle. You knew where you were. Also, it was to cover up the fact that the estate didn't have examples. I could only work from the estate. I couldn't borrow from museums to amplify. It wasn't the kind of show like at the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum, New York, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, 1997–98].

I wanted it to be something that—Bob would always talk about the floating images and also the whole notion of hoarfrost, that for a few split half-seconds, you think you see an image and then it's gone. You think you see clarity and it's gone. That's like the description of what hoarfrost is in the morning when you look through the window and you think you see something and then—that kind of ephemeral understanding of imagery was what I wanted to do in the installation. Sure, a lot of things had to be concretely placed on the floor, but by and large, I hoped that we went through all those years not knowing where we were grounded.

Q: What did you learn about Bob's work during preparing for that show. Were there any surprises for you?

Wingate: I was surprised at how wonderfully generous and strong the works that had the most reduced surfaces were—like the *Jammers* and some of the *Venetian* works and certainly the *Borealis* works, which was the first time that I ever had the chance to work with. When I was working on it, with models and with my selections, I was very clear and I was very happy until I

got to the *Jammers* and then I just didn't know what to do. I just didn't know what to do. And I don't want this to sound whoo, whoo, but I just had to channel. I asked Bob, kind of like, "Okay. What do I do now?" And I just started to put them up and they were just wonderful. It was a very, very curious and difficult show to do, because it was my first time working as curator on a show of Bob's. I had thought about Bob and thought about the work and helped install it, but it was never my show. I said, "I want that there and that'll work there and not there," and the juxtaposition of certain things was, for me, very thrilling. Because it didn't have a timeline at that point.

Q: Can you speak a little bit more about the mental adjustment around the *Jammers*? Where were you stuck before you had that—



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Pilot (Jammer)*, 1975  
 Sewn fabric, rattan pole, and string  
 81 x 85 x 39 inches (205.7 x 215.9 x 99.1 cm)  
 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Wingate: I was stuck because I kept on seeing them as poles. Instead, I stopped seeing the wall. In other words, I saw them as objects and not as space makers. It's very extraordinary when you

all of a sudden realize that this object that you're dealing with is not at all an object. [Laughs] It's something that's charging the space.

Q: So how did you feel about how it all came together?

Wingate: I liked it a lot. I liked it a lot. At the end, it became a little bit of a cook's nightmare because certain people said, "Oh, you've really got to include this and you've really got to include this, but we don't want to take this—" So what I had wanted, which was a much more sparse show, became a little bit overcrowded. One of the things that I really didn't like about the Guggenheim show was how crowded it was. I had wanted so much to make this into something much more urgent so that people felt they had to walk up to this thing that they'd never seen, rather than being barraged by an entire wall of too much information that they would keep a middle distance and say, "Okay, I can take it all in from here." I wanted them to go up like, "What's going on here?" For that, I needed fewer things. But I was still—

Q: What were the reasons that certain pieces needed to be included? Because they needed to be sold?

Wingate: Because they needed to be sold. There was the potential of selling. "Oh, this is one—we could sell that." Mr. Not-Good-Salesman. [Laughs]

Q: Okay. Were you involved in the show in Paris, the Gagosian [Gallery, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 2011]—





Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg*, Gagosian Gallery, Paris, 2011. Works pictured: *The Brutal Calming of the Waves by Moonlight (Kabal American Zephyr)* (1981), *Sky Doily (Urban Bourbon)* (1993), and *Favor-Rites (Urban Bourbon)* (1988). Photo: Zarko Vijatovic

Wingate: That was my show.

Q: Yes? Okay. So can you speak a little bit about the evolution of that show? How was that idea conceived?

Wingate: I am trying to remember, date-wise, which came first. One of the terrific shows that we made was the show in Edinburgh. That was my show with David [White]. I'll speak to that show first because I think that that informed Paris—but come to think of it, maybe it did not. Do you have the dates of—do you have Inverleith? Do you have *Botanical Vaudeville* [Robert Rauschenberg: *Botanical Vaudeville*, 2011]? Oh gosh, what a great show that was. That was a spectacular, spectacular show. *Botanical Vaudeville* was the name of the show. It was at Inverleith House on the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. It's a wonderful Georgian house on hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of acres of beautiful, cared after, historic botanical garden, royal botanic garden. And it had been the home of the first carer of art. He had made shows on the ground floor in the thirties and forties and then when the collection went to the National Gallery of Scotland [Edinburgh], they couldn't tear it down, it was this historic,

beautiful Georgian house and they started making shows of their own. So we had done some shows there. I think, all in all by now, I've done six shows there over the years.



Installation view, *Robert Rauschenberg: Botanical Vaudeville*, Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, 2011. Works pictured: *Cuban Mix (Mezcla Cuba) / ROCI CUBA* (1988) and *Uptown Pig Pox* (1988). Photo: Michael Wolchover

I had done a beautiful show of Cy Twombly's [*Cy Twombly*, 2002]. I called up Cy. They needed a show and it had to all come from him because they didn't have enough insurance, they don't have air conditioning, they don't have climate control. He loved the idea of just showing these drawings of flowers. I said, "What about just flowers? Just over the years." So that was a beautiful show.

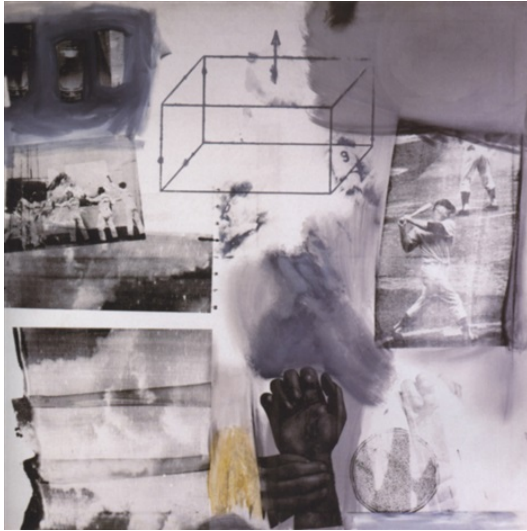
When we were going to make the show for Inverleith, I had heard that one of the curators of the gallery from London had suggested that they make a show that would have Combines [1954–64] and other things like that. I went, "Look. Look. You're dealing with a space that has no air conditioning, keeps the windows open, it's humid, and if it's dry, it's dry. Granted, I can keep things out of the sunlight, but—and so we're going to have to find a different solution for Rauschenberg." I thought everything on metal. Can't fade. Can't do anything. The only thing that can happen is physical scratching and that will happen to any work of art. This is great. So

David and I sat down. We went through all that material. I had thought that Inverleith was our first show and that Paris was our second show of that material, but it might have been that we made Paris first and that was my first introduction to the metal work. I fell in love with it and was able to do that. The third one that we did was just now, this winter, in—

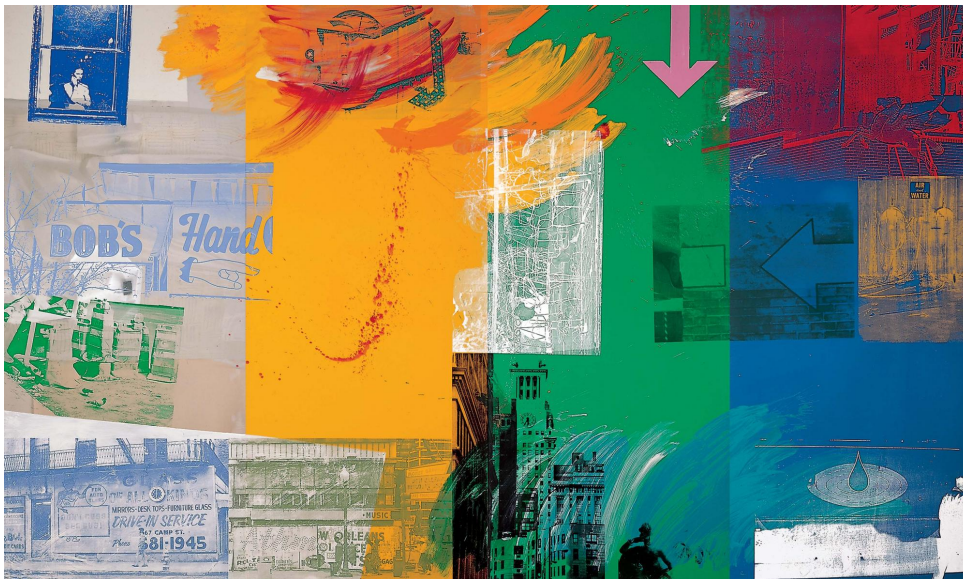
I think it was a wonderful period of Bob's work from right after ROCI. Those pieces on metal. But that was a wonderful show.

Q: What do you like about that work?

Wingate: I like it that I can see that he—that there's so much interesting subtext. The 1962 silkscreen paintings—'62 to '64 silkscreen paintings—are full of potential. There are space launches. There are helicopters. There are swimmers swimming, a man swimmer who is swimming hopefully to win something. There are birds flying. There's [John F.] Kennedy. Even though the screen came days after Kennedy's death, he still decided to—there's all this potential of the early sixties and it was the first time that Bob used silkscreen. Then, 1989, he returns to wanting to use silkscreen [note: Rauschenberg brought silkscreening back into his work in 1983 with the *Salvage* series (1983–85)]. Now the images are his own sources. They're not publicly found newspaper clippings. They're photographs that he's taken. What's very curious is that they showed things that are downtrodden. They showed things that are wrecks. There was this image in the early sixties silkscreens of a kind of linear box with an arrow, usually going up. Now, everything is pointing down. Arrows are constantly down.

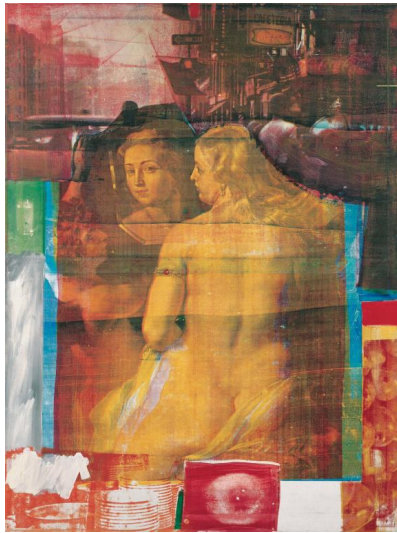


Robert Rauschenberg  
*Shortstop*, 1962  
Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas  
60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm)  
Private collection

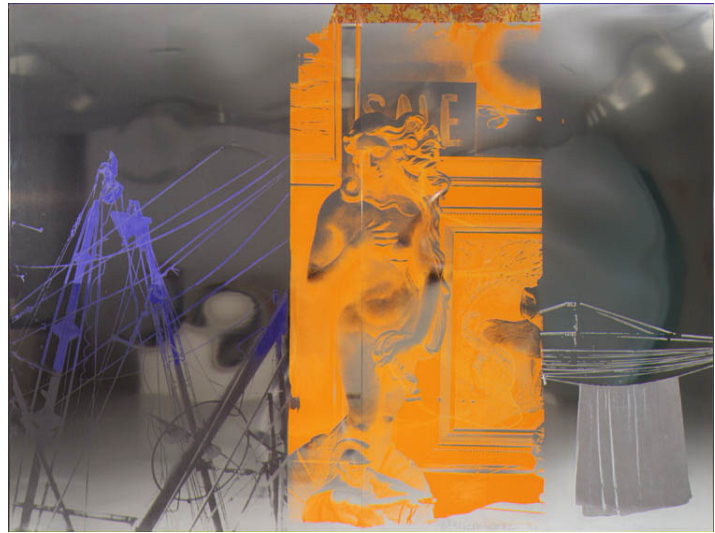


Robert Rauschenberg  
*Catch (Urban Bourbon)*, 1993  
Acrylic on mirrored and enameled aluminum  
116 x 193 1/4 inches (294.6 x 490.9 cm)  
ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark

It's a very curious thing that he's able to—he didn't tell me. I don't know if he—but he found this kind of desolate—it was after the oil glut. It was after so much of the problems. The *Gluts*, of course, were happening around the same time. What had been beautiful, the [Peter Paul] Rubens Venus looking into the mirror, all of a sudden becomes a Venus who's a garden ornament statue. She's kitsch. It's very, very pointed.



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Persimmon*, 1964  
Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas  
66 x 50 inches (167.6 x 127 cm)  
Private collection



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Swim / ROCI USA (Wax Fire Works)*, 1990  
Acrylic, fire wax, and variegated brass leaf on stainless steel  
72 3/4 x 96 3/4 inches (184.8 x 245.7 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

I became so caught up with the images and his own understanding of images that he had used before, which we always ascribe to him not focusing. We had thought of them as, “Oh, give me any image.” But it's not. It's what I was talking about being an editor. There is a beautiful one in which—it was a *Borealis* and it was a photograph of the top of the sardine can with the key that always has that kind of triangular shape and you're supposed to turn the key to get the lid off. Then in the 1963 paintings, there's dangling keys and those keys open a door, and these open your chance to eat dead sardines. Maybe I'm reading too much in it, but they're infused with so



much emotion and yet they're on metal, which is so ungiving and so unresponsive. He also rubs them and he gets them to tarnish, instead of to color. He doesn't add color onto them. He has them change their color, their own color. Very interesting. He uses them in a human way and I find that very extraordinary. I find that very collaborative with the material.



left:  
Robert Rauschenberg  
*Gold Key (Borealis)*, 1990  
Tarnishes on brass  
72 3/4 x 36 3/4 inches (184.8 x 93.3 cm)  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

right:  
Robert Rauschenberg  
*Exile*, 1962  
Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas  
60 x 36 inches (152.4 x 91.4 cm)  
Private collection

Q: Interesting. So there's one other question, really, that I wanted to ask. And it's about the relationship between a curator and an artist. Maybe I won't make it more specific to begin. Maybe you can just say what you think your responsibility is to an artist, especially after they are no longer here. We can start with that.

Wingate: I think my responsibility to an artist, if they're here or not here, is to make sure that, number one, that I can present the best story that they need to tell. And that I can get them to show others, in that story, why I love it.

Q: Okay. So what are some of Bob's stories that you've tried to tell?

Wingate: Like the story I just told about imagery in the metal things, how they're shiny and wow and his use of mirrors throughout his career and yet here you have shiny metal that—sometimes, in the *Gluts*, they've been crushed. Yet it's not kind of AbEx-y [Abstract Expressionist] crushing like a John Chamberlain. It's kind of like a scrapyard crushing—and they're tired and how paintings seem to defy gravity. How things float. How you can't ever see the same thing twice. How objects are shamanistic and most probably have other powers that we have to learn how to read. Paintings can throb. It's not only through mediated light sources that there's a throbbing glow. It had been, that in the earlier part, especially with the Combines, you felt that very special interior worlds were made concrete and that they were, because of the materials, recollections and possibly ephemeral and very vulnerable, especially when you're dealing with certain materials that are decomposing while you're looking at them. In later work, when that sense of object complexity changed, things became drier, stiffer, tougher, and mediated. And—I'm sorry. I can't remember the question.

Q: No, you've answered the question. It was just—I'd asked you about how you see your role and your responsibility as a curator. And you answered that. And then I was asking about some of the stories of Bob's that you've tried to convey.

Wingate: Yes. I guess. The only thing that I can convey is, if you didn't know, if you took it for granted, give a second look. And if you never knew it, give your first look. Don't take anything for granted and look hard.

Q: That's probably a great place to close, but I always like to ask if there's anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to include.

Wingate: I can't think of things. I tried to think about my recollections about being with Bob. Remembering dinners. It's very hard. But I hope this was helpful for—

Q: It was great. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]