

**Robert Rauschenberg, video interview by David A. Ross, Walter Hopps, Gary Garrels, and Peter Samis, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, May 6, 1999. Unpublished transcript at the SFMOMA Research Library and Archives, N 6537 .R27 A35 1999a.**

DAVID A. ROSS: Bob, we know that when you first made these, a lot of the works in this gallery, especially the earlier works, selling them was the last thing on your mind. In fact, there were few people interested in buying works from you, or from any of [*inaudible*].

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: I wasn't—Oh, I shouldn't talk while you're talking, because you're not here.

ROSS: Well, yeah. I mean, if you remember, you know, back to those days when selling them was not on your mind; or if it was, it wasn't something you took for granted. You know, that may've been one thing, but from the sixties on, you could've sold this work any time. All the works that you sold to this museum, you could've sold them just about any time you wanted to. Why—why did you hold onto this particular group of works?

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, these—this particular group of works were somehow sort of the icons of—of—of eccentricities and—and—and—and—and—and exceptional, in the sense of—of—that they didn't fit into the art world at that time. And—I just knew that they were unique. And they—they—they couldn't be done again, and—and there was no reason to. And they were dear to me.

ROSS: Did you keep them stored away and locked up or were they works that you referred to?

RAUSCHENBERG: They were sold—they—they were sold. I mean—I mean, not for sale.

ROSS: Right.

RAUSCHENBERG: Even though they were shown.

ROSS: Right. But did you keep—when—when you had them in the studio all these years, did you look at them often? Did you often look at the *Erased de Kooning Drawing* and just, you know, use that as a touchstone? Or was it something that was literally stored away in the back of your mind, as well as physically stored away?

RAUSCHENBERG: Most of—most of these—these works were on view in my various studios all the time. I have my sort of muse wall. And they were personal to me, and celebrated, but not available. And it wasn't 'til the retrospective that—that—that—that Walter and I put them out publicly together.

ROSS: But when I looked at the back of the *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, it has more exhibition labels than just about any other object I've ever seen. It—it tells the veritable story of your career, in a way. Because that piece has been in so many important exhibitions over the years. So I know that that object, as well as so many other works in this group, are very hard for you to part with. Why did you decide to part with this group now? What led to that decision? I'm sure it wasn't anything you—you approached lightly.

RAUSCHENBERG: It had to be done sometime. Because the reason that—that—that I hadn't sold any of the pieces individually was because I wanted to somehow keep them together. It seemed like, I don't know, that they—they—they seemed like a—sort of a core of an attitude that—[mic noise] that—that only was responsible by me. I mean, it wasn't—Most of this work [mic noise] could not have been done by any other personality. And— And I was protecting it. Because I—you know, I've done other works that—that— that—that I—I would have in series. And not to criticize the series or evaluate 'em, but these—this seemed sorta special, in—in— in—in the sense of not fitting into what was going on in the art world.

ROSS: I think not fitting in is a good way of putting it; but also creating a very new approach to art making in American art, from the very first time these works were shown, is—is more like the reality of the trajectory that your career has taken. So “not fitting” is a nice way of putting it.

RAUSCHENBERG: [over Ross] Well—

ROSS: It's very—it's very—it's very gracious of you to say that about yourself. But you were also inventing at a very furious pace.

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, most of the—the—the—the works in—in this—in this collection scared the shit outta me, too. And they didn't stop frightening me. And so—There was—there was a kind of courage that was—that was built into them, in their uniqueness, that—in the individ— individuality [mic noise] that [mic noise] I didn't wanna forget about, either.

ROSS: Well, maybe we should begin talking about some of the specific works in this group here.

CREW: I think we're going to need about a two minute break, [*inaudible*] adjust the lighting so that we can walk around the room.

ROSS: Great. Great. [*file stops and restarts; no audio for a few seconds*]—was from—from a show that you had at Betty Parsons in 1953, it was?

WALTER HOPPS: '52.

ROSS: '52.

RAUSCHENBERG: '52.

HOPPS: Right.

ROSS: But if you could—You know, this—this wonderful—this wonderful white form on this group of maps, but it's got the most extraordinary legend in the text that's down at the bottom.

Could—could you read that for us, Bob? Do you remember it?

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, you can read it.

HOPPS: I have to get down on my knees to read it.

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, you're—you're—you're—you're—you're—you're—you're kneeling before the Mother of God. [*they laugh*] You might get a few points for that.

HOPPS: Here's what—here's what it says: An invaluable spiritual road map, as simple and fundamental as life itself.

ROSS: And it's signed, *The Catholic*—

HOPPS: *The Catholic Review*.

ROSS: *The Catholic Review*. So what I always—what I always wonder is, is that your first review?

RAUSCHENBERG: Uh...

ROSS: Did you put your first review on your—on this picture at the Betty Parsons show?

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I did that like, I mean, the—the—the scripture—

ROSS: Yeah.

RAUSCHENBERG: There, the critic, was not referring to this piece.

ROSS: I—I didn't think so.

RAUSCHENBERG: And just like I—when I had my first show at Betty Parsons, I painted—nothing was—Actually, John Cage bought a piece. And— and—But that was the only thing that was sold. But I—I—I painted in red stars on ones that I liked, to—you know, as a—as a cartoon of—of— that— that those were sold pieces. But the way I got to Betty Parsons was I was with my ex-wife, and we—I was going to the Art Students League. And Betty was having—And I hope I'm not stealing your stuff.

HOPPS: Mm-m.

RAUSCHENBERG: But—but Betty was—She had Rothko, Reinhardt, Barney Newman, and—and Clyfford Still. And—and there was—

HOPPS: And Jackson Pollock.

RAUSCHENBERG: And Jackson Pollock.

HOPPS: [*inaudible*]

RAUSCHENBERG: And so that—that was—Those—The imagery that—that was in her what used to be an enormous gallery were just so bewildering to me. I felt creatively uncomfortable with all of her shows. And so I got Sue, my ex-wife, to carry two pieces, and I carried three, from the Art Students League, which was right down the street, was 57<sup>th</sup> Street. And—and went to—into the Betty Parsons gallery. And she said—I told her that I had brought some artwork up, and would—I—I didn't want anything; I just wanted her reaction to them, because I was so bewildered by what was being created in that space.

HOPPS: I think you once said that all you really wanted to hear from her is whether or not [*mic noise*] she thought you were becoming professional.

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I didn't say professional; I didn't know professional yet.

HOPPS: But were you an—were you an artist like she could show, or her gallery could show?

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I just wanted to know what she thought.

HOPPS: OK.

RAUSCHENBERG: Really. And—And she says, in her gravel voice, “Well, I look at new works on Tuesday. And this isn't Tuesday.” So I was busy leaving; she said, “OK, put 'em down here, and—and—and I'll look.” And I was so nervous by then that—that—I mean, she was—she was a real *priestess*. I mean, you know, she's sort of a holy Tallulah Bankhead or something. And—

and—and a dash and [*sic*] Tabasco by—by Marlene Dietrich. And so—She was terrifying. And so I was leaving, and she said, “OK, bring ’em back here.” And—and—and I was so nervous by then, that I just— I couldn’t show them fast enough. I just wanted to get—I thought, This is a mistake, this is a mistake. And you know, I just wanna get outta there. And so I put one up and then I’d reach around and get another one, take that one down. She said, “Wait a minute! I can’t see that way.” And so—And then by the time I left—this is that—this—in—that show, became that show—that she was saying, “Well, I can’t give you a show until May.” I said, “I didn’t ask for a show.” [*laughs*] But—OK. Let me—let—Should I just go on?

ROSS: Yes, please.

RAUSCHENBERG: OK. The— the—the—She came down to my studio to see the rest of my work.

ROSS: This is—you were on Front Street still?

RAUSCHENBERG: No. I was—I was—No, my wife was pregnant. And so her—her mother had terrified her enough about having a miscarriage that we had to live on the—on the—on the ground floor.

HOPPS: This is the studio [*inaudible*].

RAUSCHENBERG: That was on 96<sup>th</sup> Street. And— and so she came down. And she was with this old guy. I was younger then. And—and I didn't know who it was. And—and they selected works. Well, I was still—And I—I almost—I'm almost the same way now. That—that—Or it's been a recent change. And that is, that I always think that the—the new work that I'm doing— is—is—

ROSS: Best.

RAUSCHENBERG: more revelant [*sic*].

ROSS: Right.

RAUSCHENBERG: You know? And—and so—And the—the old guy, that—that—that—

HOPPS[?]: We thought that too, by the way.

RAUSCHENBERG: He was—[*laughs*]

HOPPS: [*inaudible*]

RAUSCHENBERG: He—he turned out to be Clyfford Still. But I didn't know it. And—and so by the time—

HOPPS: I have to put—I have to put in a quick thing here for Mr. Still. He liked young artists, beyond what the public ever understood. Or especially, by his critics.

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, really?

HOPPS: Yeah, he liked young artists. And he went back late in life to teach, just so he could meet some young artists again. That [*inaudible*].

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, that's beautiful.

HOPPS: At Pennsylvania. Anyway. He was a fine man; you had a good critic looking at your work.

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, he—he picked— they—they picked the show together. And I had— was working on a very tight budget for materials. And this is before the street days.

HOPPS[?]: Right.

RAUSCHENBERG: And—And so I just used the canvases again. And so the show that she got was not the show that she and Clyfford Still had picked out. And this is one of 'em.

ROSS: So this is one—one of the works you made after they—

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: They visited. So they didn't see this in the studio.

RAUSCHENBERG: Mm-mm.

ROSS: Interesting.

HOPPS: There are— This is really a rare bird in several ways. But there are only, I think, six things from that show, where— There'd been legend that Bob had destroyed everything, since nothing really sold. Well, it was wrong on two counts. John Cage ended up getting something. And he didn't destroy it all. Part, but there— Let's see. There's this one. There's one at the Menil Collection, where I am, managed to get out of Baron Thyssen, called *Crucifixion and Reflection*, that an artist we know—I don't think she's with us any longer—had sort of slipped away with. Bob had it stored there. And then she went off and sold it. But we found it. There's *Man With Two Souls*, a fascinating piece of sculpture that Cy Twombly has. There's a small, as far as I know, untitled painting, it's with Robert Bass, out in Texas. And it's a beauty. Has a little piece of mirror on it and some things.

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, yeah. With the piano?

ROSS: Does it also have a—

RAUSCHENBERG: With the piano?

HOPPS: No. It has elements on it, and it's like a— it's like one of the— the first DNA of Combine painting, in a way. So is this, in a way. Then there's one other one, that one that John Cage got, called *Should Love Come First?* Now, we know what it looks like from an Aaron Siskind photograph, 'cause he photographed Betty's shows. But as happened later with Bob, somehow he was resting or stuck up at John's.

RAUSCHENBERG: But John gave me his—his place; he was touring.

HOPPS: Right.

RAUSCHENBERG: And to thank him, I—I was working all black [*sic*] then.

HOPPS: Right. You painted two of 'em right on top.

RAUSCHENBERG: [*over Hopps*] So I painted—I painted—[*they laugh*] I painted the whole painting black.

ROSS: Can I—ask you about the title of this picture? Because it seems that a group of those pictures had sort of religious titles. You have this *Crucifixion* work; you have this, called *Mother of God*. You know, I know that— that— that titles are to be taken seriously when they're

applied. So I assume—I wonder what— what you were thinking about, in terms of spiritual issues, or religious directions or—

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, just that. I mean, nobody ever talks about the mother of God. And so I was wondering about it. I still don't know the answer. But I just finished the apocalypse.

HOPPS: Hm. David.

ROSS: Well, there's a level of irony, though, in this also, because of the kind of humor in that—in that legend that you put down below, and the kind of little jab at— at Catholic culture—and the kind of— that kind of piousness of—of it all. And yet this is a picture which is about a void.

HOPPS: There's a—

RAUSCHENBERG: But it's made of maps. So you follow one road or another and you're gonna get there.

ROSS: To this void. Uh-uh. And then we have a real void.

HOPPS: David, there's something I wanna say right off the bat about this. When Bob made this set of pure white paintings, he wrote Betty and wanted them shown at her gallery. She refused. Sadly, the letter is missing. We know the—I've seen the original letter of yours at Parsons, and it somehow got out of the Archives of American Art, Betty Parsons's materials. Bob wrote a

rare—And it's rare for him to write a letter. And you referred to these paintings as having one white, as in one god, in trying to describe them, which I thought was a beautiful phrase. They weren't shown at Betty's—

RAUSCHENBERG: I think there was something mentioned about the alpha and the omega or something there, too.

HOPPS: Right, right. There's a—a unit—there's a—a one, a two, here's the three, triptych; then there's a four, and a seven. That's the whole set.

RAUSCHENBERG: Seven was infinity. I mean, I didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing something that I— that was this easy.

HOPPS: Right. [*they laugh*]

ROSS: But these were easy, because in fact, they weren't about painting; they were about a white surface. Is that what you meant...

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: ...by easy?

RAUSCHENBERG: I mean, like—like just putting your hands on something and doing something with it, you know? I mean, it—it—it cleared my concept, satisfied me, because it was—I—I did them to see how—how far, you know, you could push an object, and yet it still means something.

ROSS: To—

RAUSCHENBERG: But I didn't wanna spend the rest of my life doing that. You know? I just—I was doing this for myself. It's my [*inaudible*].

HOPPS: [*over Rauschenberg*] Well, there's been speculation that somebody in the gallery objected strenuously to Betty Parsons—one of the older artists—that this not be shown. And people have said, for example, that it was Barnett Newman. I *know*—and want very clearly to say—I—came to know Newman very well, and I absolutely believed him, first hand, that he would've never vetoed this painting. So it wasn't Newman. He was the one member of the old New York School who attended Bob's retrospective that Alan Solomon, the late Alan Solomon, did in 1963.

RAUSCHENBERG: He went to all of our dance concerts, too.

HOPPS: Right. He was there. He stood and he—and—He explained to me—I said, “It was wonderful, amazing you went there.” You know, Bill de Kooning didn't go, et cetera. He said,

“Well, I wanted to stand with Rauschenberg.” And that was a very spec—special expression. He wanted to stand up for him, be with him, all around that show. Which he did.

ROSS: There’s some— there’s something else about these paintings, though, that—that—that’s fascinating to me, besides the fact that they remain so pure because you insisted on them retaining an absolutely pristine surface, even if it meant repainting them to keep them pristine.

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, absolutely.

ROSS: Right.

RAUSCHENBERG: And they’re not—they’re not collections of nostalgia or—They don’t *have* any history.

ROSS: So it’s a—it’s, again, a void.

RAUSCHENBERG: Right.

ROSS: A void of history?

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, actually— actually, the— the— the— the first group was made— I got bored just painting white.

HOPPS: Right.

RAUSCHENBERG: And so Cy Twombly helped me. Then—then—then they've been painted again by—by Brice Marden.

HOPPS: And not so coincidentally, the studio assistant, Brice Marden.

RAUSCHENBERG: And Pontus Hultén, I saved him shipping charges by just giving him the directions, and he painted him.

ROSS: So they were a painting, but they became a conceptual element as well.

RAUSCHENBERG [*over Ross*]: And Darryl Pottorf—

ROSS: Uh-huh.

RAUSCHENBERG: —has painted them. And—I always picked good artists, though. [*he laughs*]

ROSS: Uh-huh. Well, it's important that they were all good artists.

RAUSCHENBERG: Not just anybody.

ROSS: But there's something else about this picture, also, and that is that it seems to be a ground for the shadow of the—of the viewer. Is that something—

RAUSCHENBERG: That's what— that's what— that's what John Cage said.

HOPPS: John Cage said. He said they're landing strips for little motes that we don't see, and they're—and for shadows.

RAUSCHENBERG: I called them clocks.

HOPPS: Clocks?

RAUSCHENBERG: Clocks.

HOPPS: Clocks.

RAUSCHENBERG: Whereas, you—if—if one were sensitive enough that—that—that you could read it, that you would know how many people were in the room, what time it was, and what the weather was like outside.

ROSS: All the information you need.

RAUSCHENBERG: Want one? Paint one. [*they laugh*]

ROSS: Well, thanks for the permission; I think I will. Maybe we can walk over this way, because there's obviously a lot—

PETER SAMIS: Maybe we should get all of your shadows on it first, before we—

ROSS: Oh yeah, sure.

RAUSCHENBERG: What?

ROSS: Can you—can you stand here, so we can get your shadow on—your shadow falling on here, too?

SAMIS: [*inaudible*]

ROSS[?]: Get your arm in there. Yeah, I think the arm is good there.

SAMIS: [*inaudible*].

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, you took that seriously, about the time, huh?

ROSS: Yeah, absolutely.

RAUSCHENBERG: Who wants[?] the hands of the clock? [*they laugh*]

ROSS: I'm the minute hand.

ROSS: Well, this is obviously an object that you've spent a lot of time thinking about in your life, having made this in 1953, in a situation that I—that I think is one of the most fascinating situations out of which a work evolved. And then at every level, it's remained extraordinary, since that generative moment. Could we go back to the point at which this work, the idea for this work, evolved and—

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: —and talk about that?

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, we just left the *White Painting*. And so, I was working with no image. And so—I love drawing. And so I—I was trying to figure out a way to do drawings for this series and—the all white. And—so I— I—I thought, The only way to do it is like—like with an erasure. And—When—when—when I just erased my own drawings, it wasn't art yet. And so I thought, Aha, it has to be art. And Bill de Kooning was the—was the best-known acceptable American artist, well known, that—that— that—That could be indisputably considered art. And so—

ROSS: And so how did you approach—how did you approach de Kooning?

RAUSCHENBERG: I'm doing it. I bought—I was on a very low-budget situation. But I bought a bottle of Jack Daniels. And hoped that—that—that he wouldn't be home when I knocked on his door. [*laughter*] And he was home. And we sat down with the Jack Daniels, and I told him what my project was. He understood it. And he said, "I don't like it. But, you know, I—I understand what you're doing." And—and so—He had a painting that he was working on, and he went over and—and—and put it against the—the—the—the door to the stairs. And as though, you know, being closed wasn't enough. By now, [*laughs*] I'm really frightened. And—and—and he said, "OK. I don't like it, but I'm—I'm going to go along with it, because I understand the idea." And—He went through one portfolio, and he said, "No. It'll have to be something that—that I'll miss." So I'm—I'm—I'm, you know, just sweating, shitless, ya know? And then I'm thinking, like—like, It doesn't have to be something you're gonna miss. [*they laugh*] And—and then—and then—Then he went through a second portfolio. Which I thought was kind of interesting, things he wouldn't miss and things he would miss and—And then—and—and he pulled something out, and then he said, "I'm gonna make it so hard for you to erase this." And he had a third portfolio, that was—that had—had—had—had crayon, pencil, charcoal and—and—and—And it took me about a month, and I don't know how many erasers, to do it. But actually, you know, on the other side of this is also—I mean, if there's ever any question about this, there's a gorgeous drawing of Bill's.

ROSS: So you chose a two-sided drawing—or he chose that for you?

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I think that was just on the other side of this one.

ROSS: Uh-huh. Do you remember what the drawing looked like in your mind?

RAUSCHENBERG: It's— it's part of the *Women* series.

ROSS: Uh-huh. I mean, do you have the image, though, burned into your head?

RAUSCHENBERG: Sorta. It's not burnt in. And—and—and—and so when I titled it, it was very difficult to figure out exactly how to phrase this. And Jasper Johns was living upstairs. So I asked him to do—do the—the the writing.

ROSS: He's still very proud of that, you know. [*Rauschenberg laughs*] After he learned that we'd acquired this, he—he told me that.

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh good, yeah.

ROSS: He said, “You know, the only—the only thing *added* to that picture was by me.” The lettering on the title card. I—I—I love the—the pentimento that is on here, though. Is this—is this imagery that we see, the dark areas, is this bleed-through from the drawing on the other side?

RAUSCHENBERG: [*over Ross*] No. No, no.

ROSS: Or is that the crayon, the grease crayon that you—that you couldn't get off?

RAUSCHENBERG: [*over Ross*] No, just the—just the grease, that I couldn't get off.

ROSS: Uh-huh. And I—I—I imagine that it had to be done very delicately, so that the paper wouldn't tear.

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: I mean, the idea of erasure there was a very delicate piece of surgery. But was it also about a kind of negation? I mean, there seems to be—

RAUSCHENBERG: No.

ROSS: —something kind of—

RAUSCHENBERG: No. Like, nei—neither—neither is the *White Painting*. It's not a negation, it's a celebration. It's just the idea.

HOPPS: David, twenty years ago, when I first had a chance to exhibit this and faced it with Bob, he was very passionate about the fact that this only would have meaning if it were a drawing that he really thought was great, from an artist he admired enormously; and it was not a negative act.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

HOPPS: And going to de Kooning and working that out was sort of a miracle. But as you say, he under—respected what you were doing, even though he didn't like it.

ROSS: Was this work ever taken as a sign of— of a—of an aggression—aggressive stance—  
[inaudible, Rauschenberg over Ross].

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, it— it was *only* read that way.

ROSS: One generation to another?

RAUSCHENBERG: It was only—Yeah.

HOPPS: Should we— should we name names?

RAUSCHENBERG: It was a— it's anti-Abstract Expressionism and—

HOPPS: Yeah, well, I mean, from Jane Fitzsimmons, who wrote in— serious criticism in *Arts and Architecture* magazine, and later Hilton Kramer, they hate this thing. There's been nothing but—There's been a constant kind of negative people approaching, to me, what is a very extraordinary work. I consider that a beautiful work. This is one side of a process...

RAUSCHENBERG: It's a very positive gesture.

HOPPS: ...and we're coming to the other side of the process over here, where he worked with Mr. Cage.

ROSS: Well, let's—let's talk about that a bit. Because the—the—the hundred-foot—the *Tire Print* is also a work on paper made with a rubber. In this case, a rubber tire instead of a rubber eraser. And the image of this—of this ex—of this very simple set of lines, maybe a musical score.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think of it as a Tibetan prayer wheel.

ROSS: Yeah? When I looked at it set up this way, I also thought it looked like a Torah.

[*Rauschenberg laughs*] But can you talk a bit about the process of making this itself? It—It seems—

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah, I was living on—I—I was living on—on Fulton Street. And—I hadn't gotten into making prints yet. But Fulton Street is almost empty of—of any kind of traffic on the weekends. So I got some typewriter paper. And glued 'em all together with, you know, like that stuff you have in—in school, that you eat.

ROSS: The mucilage, yeah. [*Rauschenberg laughs*]

RAUSCHENBERG : And— and glued them all together. And this is how many sheets came in—I think it’s about 20 feet, actually—came—came to be. And then I called John, and—and asked him, you know, like if he could come down on the—on the—on the weekend. And had some black house paint, which is what I was working with, [from] the paint store across the street. And—And he drove down in his Model A. And—Which I had met—both John and the Model A—in—in Black Mountain College. And I just poured the paint on the—[It] rained. And the— the— the— the paste didn’t really hold up too well. You know. I salvaged it all. But at any rate, it didn’t have to rain. And so I poured it, and I told John to really—I mean, I—I poured it in—in front, and told him to drive just as straight as he could. You know, “Be careful,” I said, “Keep going straight,” you know? And— and John was fascinated by the fact that we were doing this. And he did a good job. And—

ROSS: Well, he was the printer in this project.

RAUSCHENBERG: Hm? He was—he was the printer. And the press.

ROSS: Uh-huh. [*they laugh*]

RAUSCHENBERG: And—

ROSS: But it’s— it’s—it’s—but the piece also becomes a performance work, a document of a— of a—of a collaborative performance because...

RAUSCHENBERG: Right.

ROSS: ...what you set up was much more than a printing process. It really was a—a—a kind of collaboration. And collaborations have always been very important to you, for—[*inaudible; Rauschenberg over Ross*]

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, I love—I love—I collaborating, because art can be a really lonely business, if you're really just working from your ego.

ROSS: Mm-hm.

RAUSCHENBERG: And— Or your style. It's the same thing. And—When you have two people thinking at the same time about a single outcome, or object, well then, it's just like—it's multiplied and mirrored back and forth, 'til—'til it becomes, you know, like—like a whole group of—of brains and feelings and solutions. And that—that—that's why I like collaborating.

ROSS: It also seems that collaborating has been a way of you breaking the boundaries between media. You've never seemed comfortable being defined by any set of traditional art making practices. You always want to change it, to break it through, to do something else, to be kind of creatively dissatisfied with whatever processes you've come across. And maybe collaboration has been one way around that for you?

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

CREW: If I could collaborate with you and ask you to think about that question while I change batteries.

ROSS: OK.

RAUSCHENBERG: Change mine while—

*[file stops, re-starts; inaudible voice]*

ROSS: Want some water, Bob?

RAUSCHENBERG: Sure.

SAMIS: Were the paintings already attached at that time? Or did you attach them later?

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I—I glued 'em all together first.

SAMIS: Yeah, yeah.

*[inaudible voice]*

GARY GARRELS: And it only took one try?

RAUSCHENBERG: Yep. [*inaudible voices*] John was really quite straight ahead, wasn't he?

[*inaudible voices; file stops, re-starts*]

ROSS: Let's—let's—Are we rolling?

CREW: We're rolling.

ROSS: Great. Can we talk for a second about Black Mountain?

RAUSCHENBERG: Sure.

ROSS: And what—what that meant to you.

CREW: Oh, I can't—

ROSS: Whether that— whether the experience of Black Mountain continues to be—have a meaningful place in— in—in your—in your creative life. Or is it just a set of memories about kind of your well-spent youth?

RAUSCHENBERG: That's a hard question to answer. Because I don't know how to separate that. You know. Whether—I mean, you know, I—I—I'm not obsessed by it. And—And it's—

it's certainly not simply a bunch of memories. But experiences are still sort of standards. Like buoys or something, where you know where things are.

ROSS: Mm-hm.

RAUSCHENBERG: And I mean, Albers was the best teacher that I ever had. Simply because we had, revoltingly, nothing in common.

ROSS: Mm-hm. What was expected—

RAUSCHENBERG: And so he sped up of the process of my finding out who I was. And—But I also remember Bimbus, who was the music teacher. And Madame Yalowitz, and—who was a voice teacher, and—and the kinds of things that we did.

ROSS: So your intermedia activities, your—your—your love of working across the boundaries of traditional art making media, comes out of that experience, in many ways, doesn't it?

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't know if it was—I—I think it was always going to be there.

ROSS: I mean, from your youth in Texas, it was there?

RAUSCHENBERG: Mm-hm.

ROSS: Engaging with music and dance—

RAUSCHENBERG: It was called impatience there. And then I dressed it up to curiosity.

[*laughs*]

ROSS: Well, that's a nice evolution, from impatience to curiosity. And then maybe you can just stay with curiosity for your whole life.

RAUSCHENBERG: It hasn't left me yet. In fact, that— that—that—that's the—I was asked, at a kind of a seminar thing with— addressing a bunch of— of painters and artists and poets and dancers and— and they—they said, “Well, what advice would—would you give to an artist today?” And I said, “Nurture your curiosity.” And fortunately, that was the last question. And that—It just—it— it just rang in the air.

ROSS: That's perfect. Let me ask you to respond to some—Maybe we can—It's sort of like a little bit of a word game, but I'd love you to just give me a—first responses to some—the names of some of the—of the men and women you've collaborated with over the years, extraordinary friends and artists, each of them. But let's—Cy Twombly. Let's look at this photograph here of Cy on the—on the Spanish Steps.

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, I don't consider that a collaboration; he's just a model there.

ROSS: Uh-huh.

RAUSCHENBERG: But we never worked together. So—But most of—Like, the most obvious collaborations have been with Merce Cunningham and—and— and— and John Cage, and Paul Taylor, and now Trisha Brown.

ROSS: Mm-hm.

RAUSCHENBERG: And with the Judson group, where we all were collaborating with each other.

ROSS: So your collaborations will always be, then, with musi—with musicians, composers, dancers, not with other painters or sculptors.

RAUSCHENBERG: No, actually, we have—we have the *Quattro Mani* that I did with—that—that's an ongoing thing, with Darryl Pottorf. And that means four hands. And we work on the same piece. And—But I consider printmaking a collaboration.

ROSS: Of course.

RAUSCHENBERG: And...I just don't think that— that— that I'm comfortable—But I do it all the time. I was gonna say that, but it's not true. Like, I mean, I can work by myself, too.

ROSS: Mm-hm.

RAUSCHENBERG: And— and love it. And—

ROSS: So it's another way of mixing it up, of just [*inaudible*].

RAUSCHENBERG: It's not cutting yourself off.

ROSS: Mm-hm. Now, photography's always been important to you, since the very beginning of— of your career. I mean—

RAUSCHENBERG: Right.

ROSS: You've made photographs since you were a kid.

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: And— and somehow, in the early work, we don't see any evidence— in the very early work, we don't see any evidence of it collaged in. In fact, here, we— we see you making serial photographic work, like the portrait of...

RAUSCHENBERG: Cy.

ROSS: Cy on the Spanish steps.

RAUSCHENBERG: Mm-hm.

ROSS: Can you talk about the early photography a bit, and then how photography becomes integrated into the—into the practice in another way?

RAUSCHENBERG: Actually, that's— that's another thing about Black Mountain College, is that I had the first chance to be able to—to work in a dark room. And, you know, and the equi— equipment. Which was part of the school. And Aaron Siskind and Callahan were there. Penn was there, and—But mostly, I learned from Hazel-Frieda Larsen. And I just ate it up. There's something so timeless, like being in the darkroom, and you get so involved. And I— and you know, the environment is—you know, like it's all in the dark...

ROSS: Sensory deprivation.

RAUSCHENBERG : ...anyway, and you—you have *no* idea about how long you've been there. You know, whether it's going to be daylight or night again, or—or how many meals you've missed, or—or—And you may have just done two photographs. So I love—I *love* that— that— that— that— that timelessness of, like a special world.

ROSS: The world of the darkroom.

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: So you printed your own photographs—

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: At this point. So this—these prints you made back then. Can you—can you tell us about this work, and what was going on? It seems to me so prescient. I mean, we see so much conceptual photography in the seventies and— sixties, seventies, and eighties, that deals with issues of a kind of narrative that are implied in a picture like this, but what was— what were you—

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, that— that— that wasn't...

ROSS: What were you doing [*inaudible*]?

RAUSCHENBERG: ...that wasn't the— that wasn't the concept then. And—

ROSS: And it's not really a portrait of Cy, because you don't have his head in there. So you weren't really trying to portray him as an individual; he's a figure.

RAUSCHENBERG: I was always doing space.

ROSS: Uh-huh.

RAUSCHENBERG: Space and time. And it was like—you know, like something in the middle of a desert or something that would attract your attention because it was the only thing there.

ROSS: When it became clear to Cy that you weren't putting his face in these pictures—

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't think it was clear to him. He probably still hasn't noticed. [*they laugh*]

ROSS: Walter? I thought maybe you could join us and we'd talk about the *Black Painting* here. And these two black—these two dark ones, and they'll lead us into the next gallery.

HOPPS: Well...

ROSS: [*inaudible*]. [*Inaudible*] the two of you.

HOPPS: OK. My first notion is, is that somehow when I began looking at the early work of—of Bob Rauschenberg, that he had a very pragmatic way of working and looking at materials. One of his favorite people who could come up with a direct physical way to work was Benjamin Franklin, the experiment about putting colored sticks in the snow—

RAUSCHENBERG: Ooh, I liked that.

HOPPS: He loved it. And seeing how [*Rauschenberg laughs*] he got evidence of how light was absorbed. So in a kind of absolutely point-blank way, it occurred to me that if Rauschenberg is going to do White Paintings, he's then going to do Black Paintings. And if they're matte, they're going to be shiny. So somehow, these black works—and there's a magnificent big multi-paneled one surviving, one that John Cage had that I think is lost, bad rain or experience. But this one is beautiful, with its articulated surface and its glossy black nature. It's the other side of the moon from the Whites, but they're related.

RAUSCHENBERG: Actually, I was doing the—I started the Black Paintings while I was doing the White Paintings, because I didn't want to be trapped with an idea. It takes care of my schizophrenia. And my Libra complex, my—I'm Libra, too, so—schizophrenic, a Libra, and—and—and—and—and—and dyslexic. Perfect combination. [*laughs*]

HOPPS: Solves all kind of [*inaudible*]

ROSS: The surface of this picture, though, is also—It's not just that it's black and it's shiny.

HOPPS: No.

ROSS: It's so—it's so fragile and—

HOPPS: It's articulated. Now, the other place we see that, but we don't have here, and what was part of the White series, Bob conceptually thought of doing some works on paper, and out of dirt,

and out of gold. And it's funny, the only real paper piece from the early days to survive is the *Erased de Kooning*. The only dirt piece that survived was one that he gave to John Cage. It's a beautiful piece, and John gave [it] back to Bob years and years later. And it would take someone like John Cage to treasure and keep careful a dirt painting. Now, as Bob would've predicted, any—

RAUSCHENBERG: I also did—I also did the— the gold at the same time. I wanted to test the—the—the waters. And— and— and I—I tried to duplicate the gold leaf—

HOPPS: Mm-hm.

RAUSCHENBERG: . . . with toilet paper.

HOPPS: Right. Right.

RAUSCHENBERG: They didn't survive at all.

HOPPS: The toilet—the toilet paper papers [*sic*] all got thrown away. But you can be sure that every collector, anybody who got their hands on it, saved the gold leaf ones.

ROSS: Well, this almost seems like black gold leaf.

HOPPS: But this is related to those—that beautiful surface somehow that's on the gold leaf, too, to my mind.

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah, me too.

ROSS: Can you describe the construction of this surface?

RAUSCHENBERG: It's just newspaper torn up, with—dipped in black enamel.

ROSS: Mm-hm. It almost feels, though, like it's been charred, like it has the fragility of some—of some charred remain that's— that's got very little life on the planet left for it. Its last stage, before it crumbles to dust. Did you intend it to have that kind of—that kind of fragile sense to it?

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, fragile, yes, but not...

HOPPS: Not dead.

RAUSCHENBERG: ...death. [*laughs*] Thank you, Walter.

HOPPS: Some of our—some of our most—some of the *most* exquisitely fragile things have to do with life. For heaven's sakes.

RAUSCHENBERG: Absolutely.

SAMIS: [*inaudible*] ask you, while we're here, with a question our conservators asked—funny thing. You know, you've worked with them on the—on *Collection* to get— to match the— the wine stain on the—on the—on the silk piece. But their question was, you know, a lot of this early work made—was made with ephemeral materials, not necessarily built to last, or thought about in those terms at the time. I know now you're thinking about—you're putting layers of UV filter on your frescoes so that they—the vegetable dye transfers actually have a—a chance of lasting. You know, the— you know, you're putting chance on the side—

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, I— the— the— the inks that— the vegetable inks are—are so untested. And— So I can't risk it. And they get so heavy when— when— when you cover them with UV Plexiglas, that the smallest work becomes un-liftable. So—But the three coats of—of UV, we've sort of— with each coat, we've sort of— we have scientifically managed to— to add another 25, 50, 75 years to their life, that we might not have had to have been burdened with.

SAMIS: And then that brings us back to their question about these early works. Which was, you know, as these have deteriorated or decayed over time sometimes, what's been your experience of the changes? I mean, have you ever found them— the changes to be a positive thing? Have you ever liked the—the changes, in a sense? Or— or—or you know, should this remain exactly as you originally pieced it together?

RAUSCHENBERG: I wouldn't decide that.

HOPPS: May I make a statement?

RAUSCHENBERG: But I— but I don't want those to— to be a mass history of—of people's handling it.

SAMIS: Yeah.

HOPPS: I like the human approach to caring for the work. It is so wonderful to see these works here not under Plexiglas, that I would *beg* that the museum would somehow have two human beings sitting in this gallery at all times, who can point out to the public to—that they shouldn't be taking souvenirs off this work here, for example, or adding little things to the *White Painting*. I—I find—

RAUSCHENBERG: [*over Hopps*] Ball point pens are *really* good.

HOPPS: Right. I— [*laughter*] I find human presence in the gallery—I don't like to call them guards, but—who are concerned with the work are absolutely the best. That it— it's often hard to be able afford that. And you have a— you always need a third person, as one or two or taking their breaks for whatever reason—

RAUSCHENBERG: No, to wake them up.

HOPPS: Yeah. [*they laugh*] To wake them up, too.

ROSS: Let's walk into the next gallery and talk about some—some of the— some of the other works that we have here.

[*inaudible voices*]

CREW: You are? OK, so we'll take a five-minute—

[*file stops and restarts*]

CREW: Oh, that's good. I think this is the right [*inaudible*]. Any time.

ROSS: Okay. So this work was made in—in what year?

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't know; ask him.

HOPPS: In what medium?

ROSS: What year?

HOPPS: Oh.

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't do time.

HOPPS: It's with the Combines, in the middle fifties.

ROSS: 1961?

HOPPS: Was it '61?

ROSS: Yeah.

HOPPS: OK, that was finally the—the so-called late Combines, the sort of end of the run. And it's— it was done as a trophy, for Merce Cunningham.

RAUSCHENBERG: No, John Cage.

HOPPS: No, John Cage. Right, I mixed them up. John Cage.

ROSS: So—so—so we're talking about trophies. [*Rauschenberg moves the shoe element of the piece; it "kicks" the metal in front of it and it makes a loud noise.*] So it's a musical piece.

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah. Well, John's music. [*laughs*]

ROSS: It makes a great sound. I don't think anyone ever imagined that it was a sound work. That's fantastic.

RAUSCHENBERG: I've done—I've done—I—I—

ROSS: Would you play it one more time for us?

RAUSCHENBERG: I—I do— Trophies is a separate series. I did one for Marcel and Teeny Duchamp. I've done one for Jasper Johns. This is the one for John Cage. And just every now and then, you just— there's somebody who comes up and— that—that— that is so—I don't know, it's a kind of a prize or something.

HOPPS: You did one also for Merce Cunningham.

RAUSCHENBERG: Huh?

HOPPS: Merce Cunningham that's one[?]

RAUSCHENBERG: Merce Cunningham, too. And— But it's— When you—when you get so involved—and it's like debts—that you wanna thank somebody back who has given you so much, then there's a new trophy.

ROSS: It's odd to use the word trophy rather than homage or, you know, or—

RAUSCHENBERG: "Homage" is a dirty word.

ROSS: *[laughs]* But a trophy also is like the symbol of a victory. It's what you get from, after you've won a victory. So what's the victory here? The victory of John Cage.

RAUSCHENBERG: No, there is no—no victory. It's just a special kind of thanks that— that has been in—in a series of my life's work.

ROSS: Talk about when you first met Cage. Do you remember the day you first met him?

RAUSCHENBERG: Actually, I don't remember the first day I met him, but we—we were soul mates right from the very beginning, philosophically or spiritually.

ROSS: Mm-hm.

RAUSCHENBERG: And he— He told me that— that— that he had to learn Zen. And I didn't know what Zen was. And— and I still don't. So I'm real Zen. *[laughs]* And that— then—And he said I was natural Zen.

ROSS: Well, the White works, I mean the works that— void of the— in the— in the *Mother of God*, those all—

RAUSCHENBERG: There's nothing missing there.

ROSS: Well, a void doesn't necessarily mean something's missing. It's just a white space.

RAUSCHENBERG: Why do you say "just?"

ROSS: That's right, that's—

RAUSCHENBERG: It's full. [*laughs*]

ROSS: It's a full space. It's a space full of white. I keep bringing these kind of negative readings, or that—

RAUSCHENBERG: No, you're thinking too much.

ROSS: You think that's a problem with your work, if people think too much?

RAUSCHENBERG: Not with my *work*.

ROSS: I don't think anyone would've thought, looking at this work, of performing the kick into that metal.

RAUSCHENBERG: It's obvious to me.

ROSS: Well, now it's obvious to me.

RAUSCHENBERG: Look, look, there's even a handle on it.

ROSS: I know. Could you—could you do that one more time, so we understand how it's done?

HOPPS: As many times, [*inaudible; Rauschenberg "kicks" with the piece again several times.*]

ROSS: I think on behalf of the—the guards at this museum, we're glad you didn't motorize that.

[*they laugh*]

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, I— I— lot of those sound pieces—I mean, and— and showing at Leo Castelli's, who doesn't want to be disturbed by anything. And— and— and *Oracle* was there. I never went to the gallery once, and it was turned on.

HOPPS: He always turned it off as soon as you'd leave.

RAUSCHENBERG: As soon as I—[*they laugh*] I'd turn it on. And they wait 'til I'm gone, and they turn it off.

ROSS: [*laughs*] Well, Cage, of course, is famous for saying that one sound is as good as any other sound, and that the hierarchy of sound that we call music is an irrelevancy, in a way, to—his idea.

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, the whole thing is—the whole thing is— I mean, what—Now, he says— he says that— that— that all sound *is* music. That's the difference.

HOPPS: I have another sound story. Duchamp actually got into the Stable Gallery to see a show of Bob's there. It was a one-person show of Twombly and a one-person show of Bob. Two shows at the same time, really. And Bob had an early piece in. It was a box with iron nail spikes in it, and rocks, called *Music Box*. And Duchamp happened into that show. As far as we know, it's the first show of Bob's he ever saw. And he did see others. And someone demonstrated this for Duchamp, who had a wonderful quip. He said, "Ah, yes, it's playing my tune."

ROSS: Quite an honor.

HOPPS: So he—he liked that work, you know.

ROSS: Can—can you talk about the—the—the role that Duchamp played for you as a young artist, looking at or thinking about that?

RAUSCHENBERG: Not really. I mean, I can—I can. But, I mean, he didn't play a role. The first Duchamp I ever saw was in the Museum of Modern Art, and it was— it was in—in an exhibition with— standing right ne—A sculpture. And it was the *Bicycle Wheel*. And it was by a—a Miró. And— and they both looked equally interesting to me. So I—I don't know. I— I don't—I don't—

HOPPS: Duchamps weren't available to be seen, David...

ROSS: In the fifties.

HOPPS: ...until 1956, when they went on view at the Philadelphia Museum.

RAUSCHENBERG: But my point is that...

ROSS: So Duchamp wasn't [*inaudible*].

RAUSCHENBERG: ...that— that— that— they looked absolutely—I mean, the—the—the nude was just as realistic, and just as much of art as—as the bicycle wheel on the stool.

ROSS: But when you became aware of works like the *Fountain*, like *Fountain*, or like the other readymades of Duchamp, which maybe you'd heard of as a rumor, since you weren't able to see them as a young man—

RAUSCHENBERG: Uh...

ROSS: How did— how did the idea of the readymade affect you as you went out and used material from the street to create your Combines and your sculptures?

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, with my economy at that point, it was—I mean—I mean, I think of anything as being material. It— so it wasn't— wasn't a handicap. And— nor was it anything special about a—a readymade. I was confused about—Well, about the— the idea that— that— that you make ready— that you put out editions of readymades that are not ready made. And that— that always confused me about Duchamp. But then— then, if he deliberately decided that, you know, I mean—I mean—

HOPPS: That came near the end of his life. And the one way—I know this firsthand, David—the one way he was going to have some money coming in for his widow were those Schwarz editions.

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, really?

HOPPS: The income for those were all slated to go to Teeny. And it was for a nice reason, too, Bob. He didn't want her to *have* to sell one-of-a-kind things she still owned in order to survive. I mean, that family didn't—He wasn't producing art to sell. And nobody had any normal work to earn money. So he had to be very inventive about how he could survive.

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, now— now— now— now, there's the poetry. A sup-poetry.[*they laugh*]

ROSS: That's the poetry, right. But it's also equally practical to your use of— in a way, to your use of found material, because that was economically what—

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: . . .was necessary. There wasn't anything intellectualized about it; it was just what you had to work with. So it was a kind of...

HOPPS: He liked it, too. I mean—

ROSS: ...pragmatic of you.

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, actually, it was my richness, too, for living in New York City.

HOPPS: See that piece of dowel? There on top, and arou— and the posts around the shoe? That's better than if you went to the lumber yard and bought brand new dowels, or had somebody make—

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't make dowels.

HOPPS: They don't.

RAUSCHENBERG: *I don't make 'em. [they laugh]*

HOPPS: You don't. But if you had to buy one—

ROSS: Let's— let's walk over here and look at—

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I like— I like the experience that— that— using found objects or— or something that— that doesn't just start from the artist's hands.

HOPPS: Right, it has a history.

RAUSCHENBERG: Mm-hm.

ROSS: Let's talk about *Collection* a little bit, because this is obviously a major work that's been in this museum's collection since nineteen-seventy—

HOPPS: '2.

ROSS: '2. And so this really forms the locus of what's now our Rauschenberg collection. But *Collection* didn't start its life off with that title; *Collection* started off with no title, it was an untitled work, as I understand it.

RAUSCHENBERG: It did?

HOPPS: Yes. You christened it.

ROSS: You titled it in—

HOPPS: In '76. In '75 or '6, when we were putting that retrospective together, I raised the issue with Bob that there were several really extraordinary Combines, this one owned here in San Francisco, that were just untitled, and how did he feel about giving them names? And you thought, Well, OK, let's. And he did a couple or three. One is called *Levee*. It used to be an untitled painting that Agnes Saalfield had, Aggie Gund. Now—

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't like untitled paintings—

HOPPS: I know.

RAUSCHENBERG: 'Cause I like language so much.

HOPPS: I know. So when he came to this one, we were at the National Collection of Fine Art and I was very touched that he called it *Collection*. Which it is, literally, a wonderful accumulation of little artworks inside his own artwork. You know, we've got a Renoir. And this, I'm not sure if this is a Van Gogh; I think so.

RAUSCHENBERG: It is.

HOPPS: A little Persian painting here. Over here, we have some—something called *Tammy*, some comic strip art. More funny paper here, photographs from the newspapers. I love this work. It truly is— makes its point of art being a collection of elements of art.

ROSS: But it seems to be also—

RAUSCHENBERG: You know how this here—you know how this one started?

ROSS: No.

RAUSCHENBERG: I was— I was trying to break from the Red Paintings. And so I went out and bought some taffeta or nylon or whatever this is. And so this— this is an all red painting. I mean, red panel. This is a yellow panel. And that's a blue panel. So I thought that was— you know, like, would scare me enough to get into color.

HOPPS: It's a good Poussin combination anyway.

RAUSCHENBERG: Right, but it doesn't look like it now.

HOPPS: No.

RAUSCHENBERG: But I mean, I'd ha— I'd have to tell you this story to— for you to ever know that, you know? 'Cause I immediately mixed 'em up. [*laughs*]

SAMIS: Because before this, you were working on the Gold Paintings, the Red Paintings, the dirt paintings, the monochromes, and then you did *Yoicks*.

RAUSCHENBERG: I did the Red—I did the Red series right after the black and whites. Because... The— the— Both of them were recognized as— as— as—as a resistance to art. And they weren't. And—

ROSS: This is how they were being critically received, or...

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

ROSS: ...received by your peers, as well? How did your—

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, my peers weren't paying any attention to me. I was just a clown. Harmless. That's why I got ahead of 'em. [*they laugh*]

ROSS: Nice position—nice position to work at.

GARRELS: So Bob, as you kept working on this, though, did you work on a single pan—there are three panels here.

RAUSCHENBERG: No, they were put together.

GARRELS: Yeah. And so then did you start working, like from one corner to another, or just kind of all over? Or how do you—

HOPPS: All over.

RAUSCHENBERG: Just kind of all over. I mean, anything you did there ruined what was here, and—

HOPPS: He works additively.

RAUSCHENBERG: You just clean—keep cleaning up your mess. *[laughs]*

ROSS: I— in this— in this work, you also, you know, begin to bring in newspapers with provocative headlines, dealing with real social conditions and situations, very, you know, lighthearted kind of popular cartoons, and then reproductions of classical, serious, modern art *[inaudible; Rauschenberg over Ross]*

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, all of this is part of our misinformation.

HOPPS: Done, by the way, as little things on fabric for children. These—these are not high-end reproductions of these artworks. They're very nice sort of low-end reproductions, which is nice, in terms of the work too.

SAMIS: Another thing that starts here is that you actually start using a brush and dripping and painting, in a way that you weren't doing in the— in the first room, in the [*inaudible*].

HOPPS: Well, and the Red Painting's very much painted, Peter.

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

HOPPS: They are truly painted. And many layers.

ROSS: And what—and tell me about the function of this— the oculus here, this little, this eye, the mirror hidden under the gauze of the— of the—

RAUSCHENBERG: That's— that's just its breath. I mean, at the same time that, that— in many of the Combine pieces, that, that, that— there were mirrors. And that— that was to bring in the— the traffic in the room and— and— and— and just to make a change. Just to recognize that you saw something.

ROSS: To bring the viewer into the work.

RAUSCHENBERG: So you—Yeah.

HOPPS: [*inaudible*].

SAMIS: Should we go to *Scanning*?

ROSS: Yeah, let's do *Scanning*. [*They walk; inaudible voices*]

SAMIS: Can you give us a tour of this one, Bob? Just kind of the— the tour— a tour of the surface of this one and the image?

RAUSCHENBERG: Do what?

SAMIS: Give us—could you give us a tour of this one and the images and— as you remember them? And do you remember in any way, the— the way it evolved? I mean, it might not— that might be more than you remember, but just—

RAUSCHENBERG: No, it's not more, it's just not my habit.

ROSS: How much of this—

RAUSCHENBERG: You have to have room for other people to express their life, so I never explain my work.

ROSS: How—

RAUSCHENBERG: I'll tell you stories around it and stuff like that, you know, but—

ROSS: How— how much of the photography in this work was actually found imagery and how much of it were images that you made yourself?

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, I took those— I took the photographs of the Cunningham Company at its peak. And—

ROSS: And the rooftop water towers?

RAUSCHENBERG: And the rooftop is mine and—

ROSS: What about these— these—these mosquitoes up there? What— what— what's going on there?

RAUSCHENBERG: They're big.

ROSS: They are big. [*Rauschenberg laughs*] They're like helicopter-size mosquitoes, they seem to me. This is a picture made in nineteen-sixty—

HOPPS[?]: '3.

ROSS: '3. The Vietnam War is taking place, space is [*inaudible*] —

RAUSCHENBERG: [*over Ross*] Well, I— this was about— about the time that— that I was, like—The Cunningham Company was breaking up and— and this is— This is why I—I held onto this one so much. And this is—these are prints of my kinkajou. And—

ROSS: What is that?

HOPPS: It's an animal.

RAUSCHENBERG: Prints of my—footprints of my kinkajou.

HOPPS: It's a marsupial pet.

RAUSCHENBERG: [*laughs*] Yes.

ROSS: How long did you have a kinkajou?

RAUSCHENBERG: Her name was Sweetie. [*laughter*]

ROSS: And— and was she asked to walk on this picture, or did she just happen to...

RAUSCHENBERG: No.

ROSS: ...get involved. [*inaudible voice*]

RAUSCHENBERG: No.

ROSS: She had a nice touch, though.

GARRELS: So Bob, you're saying this—

RAUSCHENBERG: I respected it. I thought, You know, I—I—I can use that.

GARRELS: Did you work on this—did you— would you turn it as you worked on it? Or did you work on it always the same way? Or was it flat and up and down or how did—

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, I mean, kinkajous, even though they're— they're prehensile, *[laughter]* they— they— they can't step down when they're hanging by their tail.

ROSS: Yeah, well.

RAUSCHENBERG: Enough to be effective as a painting.

ROSS: Yeah, well.

RAUSCHENBERG: So this is on the floor.

GARRELS: And now, you worked—you worked it on the floor, too, not just the kinkajou?

HOPPS: Yeah.

ROSS: Yeah.

HOPPS: [*inaudible*] One of the later silkscreened paintings of that series, he's—he's working down [*inaudible*]. Fortunately, his dog, Laika, knew never to walk on his art. [*inaudible*] visiting Jasper Johns's studio, Laika walked on the Jasper Johns. Anyway, the screening was done down on a flat surface. And some of the painting probably was, too.

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

HOPPS: One thing that means a lot to me is the way animals turn up in Rauschenberg. It's absolutely—it's *very* important to me. I have no idea how conscious he is of it, but one of the more important Medieval images is putting animals into the work, in Christian iconography, as the innocent witnesses of how human beings behave. So it means a lot to me that along with our Cunningham dancers here, who have their good and bad days, there are mosquitoes and kinkajou prints that remind us of our faithful, innocent witnesses to our foibles. I think that's a very important quality that's maintained in Rauschenberg's work. Of course, the most famous one is *Monogram*, the beautiful goat, heroically standing in there for—keeping his eye on our folly. Oh, a third animal I should mention, of course, the bird here in the cage. We get echo—

RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, that's my dog.

HOPPS: That's your dog. We get echoes from mosquito to helicopter to space rocket.

RAUSCHENBERG: And the umbrella.

HOPPS: [*inaudible*]. And the umbrella.

SAMIS: Is that a helicopter there? Is that what—

HOPPS: Yes.

SAMIS: Down the line?

RAUSCHENBERG: Yeah.

HOPPS: Right here. It's sort of hard to see, but it's in there.

SAMIS: [*inaudible*].

ROSS: But this colored passage right in front of you, Bob, which seems like a piece of—  
from—from a—a— a piece of wallpaper or [*inaudible*]—

RAUSCHENBERG: That's East Hampton.

ROSS: How so?

RAUSCHENBERG: It's a beach scene.

ROSS: Ah. Those are the beach umbrellas?

HOPPS: Right.

GARRELS: How would you start a piece like this? Would you start any— in any particular place? Would you—

RAUSCHENBERG: You have to. [*over Garrels*]

GARRELS: . . . would you have a silkscreen—

RAUSCHENBERG: Or you don't get started. [*over Garrels*] [*laughs*]

GARRELS: Can you talk about that, where you would begin?

RAUSCHENBERG: No. I mean I . . . I . . . I can't imagine where you would start.

ROSS: But you can remember where you would start. Like in, in the newest work we have just acquired.

RAUSCHENBERG: No I don't remember where I started.

HOPPS: Let me get a last word in on this painting.

ROSS: Oh please.

HOPPS: *Barge* may be the largest silkscreen Bob ever did. I think this is perhaps the most beautiful. I've always especially loved this one. So congratulations, David Ross.

RAUSCHENBERG: It's got more heart. That doesn't mean it is less art. [*over Ross*]

ROSS: I particularly love this [*inaudible*], particularly this blue piece here [*indicates*]—it's just extraordinary. That's the real, that's the real. [*inaudible*]

HOPPS: [*over Ross*] In the painting Bob did called *Winter Pool*, David Geffen has, there is all sorts of gorgeous lyric painting that goes on. And that turns up from time to time. This just isn't crummy little incidental splotches. It means a lot to me. These sections here. Two layers there, it's done . . . something underneath, and then, then . . . probably black and then over-painted with white. This um. . . [*indicates yellow in upper right*]. Great restraint.

ROSS: I particularly like the reappearance of the white space. Reminiscent of *Mother of God*, also there's that full white space. Nothing empty about it.

SAMIS: Do you want to do one more?

ROSS: Sure why don't we do the latest.

RAUSCHENBERG: [*sighs*]

ROSS: Are you too tired? If you are we can stop.

RAUSCHENBERG: Let's stop.

ROSS: That's all.

SAMIS: Want to stop?

ROSS: Thank you [*inaudible*].

[*all now off screen*]

RAUSCHENBERG: This hurts. You know. This is really tiring.

ROSS: Well you did really well, so thank you very, very much. This is going to be really useful for us to have this material.

RAUSCHENBERG: Walking backwards. Looking forwards. This is really kind of an extreme position.

SAMIS: Oh god. [ *laughs* ]

ROSS: Excruciating.

SAMIS: It's kind of like walking forwards with the flashlight on the, going backwards here.

[ *inaudible* ] You're walking forwards but the flashlight has to go backwards.

RAUSCHENBERG: The flashlight doesn't care. That flashlight is tired anyway [ *laughs* ]. Retired!

SAMIS: Thank you very much.

[END]