

ROCI



RAUSCHENBERG

OVERSEAS

CULTURE

INTERCHANGE

Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

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INTERCHANGE

National Gallery of Art, Washington

Prestel

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The Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, after six years of only spiritual support, is now a reality. ROCI, as we shortly put it, is a four-year private project taking, making and exchanging art and facts around the world.

Emphasis will be placed on sharing experiences with societies less familiar with non-political ideas or communicating "worldly" through art. A selection of works done in, or influenced by, participating countries will then continue to travel, including videos, photos, sound, drawings, prints, and catalogues, to the next country, systematically eclipsing the opening exhibit, which functions as a catalyst, enabling the international exhibition and collaboration to exist and grow.

I feel strong in my beliefs, based on my varied and widely traveled collaborations, that a one-to-one contact through art contains potent peaceful powers, and is the most non-elitist way to share exotic and common information, seducing us into creative mutual understandings for the benefit of all.

Art is educating, provocative, and enlightening even when first not understood. The very creative confusion stimulates curiosity and growth, leading to trust and tolerance. To share our intimate eccentricities proudly will bring us all closer. When I was a student at the Art Students League in New York City, I was surrounded by groups of artists, all investigating the comparable similarities and likenesses between things. It was not until I realized that it is the celebration of the differences between things that I became an artist who could see. I know ROCI could make this kind of looking possible.

Tobago, 22 October 1984

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

A CONVERSATION ABOUT ART AND ROCI

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG AND DONALD SAFF

Following his 1976 retrospective exhibition at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington (now National Museum of American Art), and its subsequent tour of the United States, Rauschenberg began thinking about an exhibition that would travel internationally. With the working title, "The Robert Rauschenberg Round the World Tour," discussions took place with the U. S. I. C. A. (now United States Information Agency), and later, with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Although many of the features of this first plan were later incorporated in the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) project, the Round the World Tour was to be a fixed selection of works. In ROCI, the exhibition would be a changing one, continuously evolving as the result of the artist's response to the varied cultures of the participating host countries. It was hoped that the exhibition would be in places where the artist had not previously had major showings. Further, when possible, the exhibit would take place in host countries with little or no previous exposure to contemporary Western art and whose political and economic systems stood in contrast to those of the United States. It was not until Rauschenberg's 1982 visit to Jingxian, Anhui Province, China, to work at one of the world's oldest paper mills, that the potential for what was to become ROCI was fully appreciated. The interaction that occurred in Jingxian, between old and new, East and West, parochial and international, gave to the ROCI project the impetus and energy, both artistic and practical, that would fuel it on a global scale. ROCI became, consequently, a mode of communication and a bridge between disparate cultures.

There were risks involved in Rauschenberg's decision to make an individual commitment to bring into sharp focus issues of world peace and understanding. In seeking peace, there is the risk of hostility, and in seeking understanding, there is the risk of being misunderstood. Abandoning these goals, however, would be to act irresponsibly with the freedom Rauschenberg cherishes and to accept a lesser result than that intended by the ROCI ideal.

The relatively short history of ROCI is replete with success and frustration, hopes fulfilled and promises broken, bursts of genius and periods of fallow thought, action, and inaction. Yet it is also the story of ideas and

ideals pushed beyond their formal limits. In many ways, ROCI can be considered a logical extension and predictable result of Rauschenberg's love of art and people.

His extraordinary ability to work harmoniously in collaborative efforts in unfamiliar and even hostile environments is a testimony to his way of uniting differences. His way of working and sharing can be viewed as a model of the social and cultural excellence that can be achieved in a focused pursuit of mutual goals. Mr. Rauschenberg honors the differences between people and cultures and shows us, through his art, that the celebration of these differences makes life whole and worthwhile.

ROCI is, in effect, Rauschenberg's way of acting personally on behalf of concepts as global and daunting as peace and understanding, believing that the individual, not governments and international agencies, is responsible for such matters. And while it is naive to think that ROCI would cause nations to "wage peace" immediately upon each other, Rauschenberg has confidence in the power of art to foster understanding and release energies essential to peace. ROCI is one artist's antidote to despair over global dissent and aggression. He has commented that "peace could break out everywhere if people thought of it as aggressively as they did war."

DONALD SAFF

The following is an edited conversation between the artist and Donald Saff that took place at Captiva Island, Florida, in November 1990. Rauschenberg's responses are printed here in bold type.

When and where did you announce the first pre-ROCI Rauschenberg Round the World Tour?

I don't know the year but I remember the first time I announced that we were going to do an international traveling show dedicated to education and peace and familiarity and social concerns. I was in Los Angeles

having an exhibition at the Ace Gallery. Doug Christmas had a press conference for the show and I was bored. I had had this idea, so I just announced it. But it wasn't until many years later, after many changes and lots of successful frustration, that it ever took any shape. I think we were as naive as the people who attempted to support it.

There was a kind of poetry in the naiveté, and eventually that naiveté was circumvented. The first plans were really impossible, unreasonable logistically, politically, and artistically. I reviewed a schedule prepared on 1 January 1979 and realized it could be met only if you weren't going to travel and work in the countries. Your working in the countries would actually become a critical element later, when the project evolved.

That kept the pieces related directly to the country with a specific input . . .

Initially, there were efforts by Anne Livet at the Fort Worth Art Museum, then by Pontus Hulten at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, to organize a tour of the pre-ROCI show. All fundraising, venues, catalogue copy, and so on would have been coordinated through the museum. It seemed to me that, as each letter came in, more and more constraints were placed on you. The following is your response dated 19 February 1982:

"Dear Pontus: If you have wondered about the amount of time that has passed since I received your letter initiating contractual areas of responsibility, rights, and restrictions, all of course to be mutually discussed and agreed on with adjustments, it is because I have realized that working in and through an institution will inhibit all of the in-process spontaneous reactions and decisions that cannot be filtered through a bureaucracy or legal contract. It seems to me that, if the Round the World Tour is going to succeed or fail, the entire expedition has to be a series of my decisions. I want to assume full responsibility. I am setting up my own foundation for the project only. I conceive of the tour as a giant creative piece on the hoof, supported by intrigue, deceptions, misunderstanding, and para-political maneuver. I don't want our personal friendship to ride out these storms with your new museum on your back. I think too much of both of you. Love, Bob Rauschenberg."

The letter was received graciously by Hulten and he still offered to help in any way possible. Yet you separated yourself from institutions. It seems characteristic that, if a

project is contained within a bureaucracy, it just doesn't work for you.

Not only do you have bureaucratic restrictions but you also have political restrictions. If we had traveled under the cover of an institution, I don't think we would have been allowed the freedoms we just took as individuals. At the same time, I never asked for any support from the government because I knew that was out of my control. Because we were independent, ROCI took on its true form. Like all these mistakes and naive maneuvers we made, I think that's what, in the long run, made ROCI tough. I mean, the muscles were already exercised by the time we started. And what was it, about five years getting started?

It was seven years from the time the world tour was conceived to the announcement of the ROCI philosophy and plans at the United Nations.

Geeez, no wonder I'm tired!

Another naive thing was when I made a list of companies I would permit to support ROCI. As the exhibition involved lots of traveling and shipping, I proposed to Pan Am that I would paint one of their planes and it would be the ROCI plane. Thank God they didn't take me up on it. Every time I get on a plane now, I look at it and think, "I didn't want to paint that!" Then I thought Canon or Kodak or somebody might like to be a sponsor. Absolutely nobody was interested, which was terrific because, if you have a really thorough rejection, then you have to act realistically. As I said, I think our failures in making ROCI run smoothly gave it a lot more honor and integrity. With the exception of contributions from personal friends, we never took a dime from anyone. That protected one side of us from criticism.

Early on, Mobil Oil, IBM, Atlantic Richfield, Philip Morris through the help of Frank Saunders, and a number of other large corporations delayed their decision to fund the tour. They were all quite interested but one didn't want to give money until the other did. Therefore, in order to accomplish ROCI, you sold much of your art collection.

Yes. I sold my big 1951 black and white Cy Twombly that he had done in my studio on Fulton Street. And I sold the first cartoon, *Alley Oop*, the first non-monocolored Jasper Johns. That had a kind of family history because he lived above me and came down one Sunday morning and said,



ROCI CHINA

“I can’t paint in more than one color at a time.” And that’s serious; that’s a serious problem.

One of the other pieces I hated to part with was a very early Andy Warhol, *Dick Tracy*, but I had to see what could bring the most money. I placed all three in important collections where the public has access. That fact, too, helped me not to miss them.

There were a lot of efforts by your friend and attorney, Ted Kheel, who so ably assisted through the entirety of the ROCI project through his

Legal-eze and big heart.

His Institute for Non-Broadcast Television tried to help through a donation. However, in the end, as you pointed out earlier, you paid for everything.

I never thought that would be the final reality, but it was. I think it did prevent a lot of confusion about the function of ROCI because, in the dialogues with the public

in the various countries, one of the first questions was, “Who is paying for this? Who is behind this?” The whole world is very suspicious, still, even after ROCI. Somehow ROCI maintained its integrity by my being able to say, “I did, through my work or selling my collection of my favorite things.” Continuing ROCI was definitely worth it and this was a decision I had to re-make every time I parted with something that I loved so much.

There were no sales of ROCI work in the countries you visited.

No. There was no business. There could have been in a couple of situations but I refused.

Many well-intentioned, potential sponsors insisted on compromises that were not within the ROCI spirit.

The concept of ROCI was so vulnerable that any outside organization would have been a compromise to the intentions and success. In fact, my closest and most professional friends thought I was a fool.

Collectors, dealers

Museums

Artists and friends . . . why did they think that?

They thought it was too extravagant, a waste of energy, and I don't know how many other reasons because I wouldn't even want to know. I'm certainly glad that all these doubters will have a chance to see the results at the National Gallery.

In a way, they can't really feel or see the results. They would have to have been me or you or one of the others who traveled with us for the entire tour to see Soviets coming from every republic to Moscow, taking weeks to travel and, for all I know, spending their last ruble to see the show. Or to hear the Chinese talk about "art before Rauschenberg" and "art after Rauschenberg." Or to see the lines at the Tretiakov or sense the anticipation in Cuba. There was something about the way the art functioned in the exhibitions in those countries that rarely seems to happen here. It was less a commodity and more of a vehicle for human communication. In a sense, the audiences here see it as art; the audiences there used it as art.

And they were really looking at the art. In none of the situations was it a prestigious event to the general public.

What was it for them?

Information. A new way of looking at things and an opportunity to see things that they might never have seen in their lives. I think because we went to more sensitive places, social attitudes about "going to be seen" were not present. Not that there is anything wrong with that. It's just that *that* was not the function of ROCI in the places we went.

You tried to defray some costs by seeking indemnification from the U. S. government. That is the only help you sought and, had it materialized, it probably would not have clouded the exhibition concept. You tried for years to have Senator Howard Metzenbaum and others change the indemnification regulations.

At that time this country would indemnify art coming here but they wouldn't indemnify American art going to other countries.

Unless there was a one-to-one exchange. Had they agreed to consider an application for indemnification, it would

not have been granted anyway because the museums and security in the various countries could not have met the standards specified. When you asked me to join ROCI in 1983 one of my first obligations was, in part, to work on our indemnification issue. It was Senator Robert T. Stafford who, on 3 October 1985, with the help of Senator Paula Hawkins, had an amendment added to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act. This allowed, as the *Congressional Record* reads: ". . . flexibility to provide indemnity coverage for exceptional American exhibitions of national or international importance which are not part of an exchange of exhibits." The ROCI concept is cited as a prime example of such a project. You hired a public relations firm to help me help you get this accomplished and, after a great deal of lobbying and a lot of effort, it was indeed accomplished.

We worked on other changes on behalf of artists' rights. I brought to your attention problems with copyright notices and the concept of *droite morale* in France, where the artist retains the right to maintain the integrity of his or her work of art against mutilation, destruction, etc., even though the work is privately owned. You requested that I work with Senator Edward Kennedy's staff to change the laws on these issues because you felt so strongly about the destruction of Isamu Noguchi's sculpture and the copyright infringements that have affected you and those close to you.

Last week, four years later, legislation passed that gave art more reasonable protection and artists more opportunity for redress.

In 1983 we decided that ROCI would be more effective and credible if the finale were at the National Gallery. What would be more appropriate for an effort on behalf of peace and understanding than to have those issues addressed in the United States capital? I went to the Gallery and spoke with Jack Cowart who informed me of the Gallery's policy that no living artist could have a one-person exhibition there. However, he was enthusiastic about the opportunity to change or modify this approximately forty-five-year-old habit. I called you after meeting with J. Carter Brown and Jack Cowart and asked whether you would be willing to give a work for each country you visited in order for the Gallery to form a core collection of your work. You agreed and further suggested that the National Gallery invite ambassadors and politicians from the countries just visited, those that had been visited, and those that would be visited, as well as members of our Congress, to Gallery events celebrating receipt of each of the ROCI gifts of artworks.

That seems right for Washington; that's where they are. To make a celebration of the fact that we either were going to that country or had been there.

You saw the opportunity to bring these government representatives together for the purpose of communication.

When I signed my contract, I put in a clause saying "but the show is off if I'm dead."

I think we struck that because we didn't want to gamble. It's not in there.

You mean I might have had

You've got to deliver. The show is on!

I wanted to guarantee the fact that the Trustees had decided they could show a live artist. It wasn't facetious—it was fun—but it was a backup.

Through the efforts of Anne Livet, the U. S. I. C. A. was organizing shows for you through some of their embassies in Australia and the Far East. Once shows like this are organized such agencies can be helpful. However, they have no more ability to organize a show in Beijing or Moscow or, certainly, Cuba, than we did. In fact, the places where they could organize shows were not important or sensitive enough for you. And after all their efforts, you still didn't make any significant inroads.

Yes, quite the opposite. Sometimes on tours it was annoying that, after I had done the work, financed the show, made these trips, and talked to the people who were directly in charge locally, some ambassador would come in and take the bows.

There were plans to have the World Tour exhibition open at the 1984 Olympics with a program using surfboards, with music by John Cage and choreography, perhaps, by Merce Cunningham.

The windsurfer piece was to be my contribution to the Olympic festivities. I went to Los Angeles to pick an appropriate site for masses of people to come and be able to see. On that coast there wasn't one and windsurfing is so unpredictable anyway. All you have to do is go to a windsurfing event and God knows you're there and he turns off the breeze. So everybody just gets blistered and you can't move. So I tried to make an adjustment and

turn it into a film for showing at the Olympics. The only way I could have done that was with a helicopter, except you can't windsurf with a helicopter hovering over you. I was really gung-ho on the beautiful sails. Each sail was going to be a painting and the people were going to be dressed as a living unit of the painting. The idea was perfectly good. But if you are working in action and nature you can't disrespect it.

I noticed one of the things you most respected at that time was the Olympics. The event was truly special to you and, as I recall, you sent works of art as a gift to each participant. What was it about this that touched you so much?

I think it's just that people through different circumstances have manufactured so many reasons not to get along that to have an energetic, profound, and athletic cooperation between nations and to see this kind of energy . . . well, I think that was the original idea of the Olympics

Not just competition but communication?

Yes. Because the athletes were all crazy about each other. You could see that. It wasn't the kind of dirty competition that you have between capitalistic companies, industries, and management. I mean there was no way to fake being a winner. There wasn't any room for finagling.

What you are saying about the Olympics reminds me of a statement you made in *Newsweek* in August 1982. When you left China's Anhui Province you said to the reporter, "After the third day we almost weren't talking through a translator. If you are used to inventing and adjusting, as any artist should be, then you go right to whatever has to be done. Actually the translator confused us. He told us that it was easier to translate for diplomats." That's a wonderful statement and for me it is the pivotal point in the change of philosophy from the Rauschenberg Round the World Tour to the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange.

I hated it at the time when the Olympic Games were being used as a political football, when the United States wouldn't be in the games.

The Russians boycotted the Olympics because we had boycotted the previous games.

Those athletes have spent their entire lives preparing for the Olympics and they have to be exceptional to be



ROCI USSR

included. It's the highest honor, a fulfillment to be used publicly. By the time of the next Olympics there were a lot of sad athletes because they were too old to compete.

ROCI started with my middle-aged attitude that I have to give more to the world. I decided that if everyone had as much respect for themselves as they had for everyone else, there would be no use for war. Then peace could be a new sport. And what's missing is information, pure information through communication through the artist. Apolitical communication, with no bull. Lies don't work in art. Eyes work in art.

Accepting what is "given" doesn't ever seem to be your modus operandi.

Well, if they gave me the right thing . . . I'm a gracious receiver.

Politically, they have not given you the right thing. However, at its heart, ROCI is not about an effort to change. It is an effort to accept and celebrate. It is an effort to begin wherever you are and to go wherever it leads.

This brings me back to the 1982 trip to the city of Jingxian and the Xuan paper factory. You were invited by the Chinese through Gemini, G. E. L. and Chun-Wuei Su Chien.

I told them I just wanted the honor of working in the world's oldest paper mill and they liked that. They liked my work when I was finished with it but I don't think that artistic information about me and what I did (certainly in those days) would have done anything except make them refuse. But they couldn't because of their pride. Very few people, even today, know that the first paper mill was in Anhui Province. Most people think the first paper was papyrus but papyrus isn't paper.

In any event, you accepted and we all left for the paper mill, stopping in Shanghai to look at the posters, the ubiquitous Chinese posters.

The New Year's posters. The Chinese decorate their homes with these political, floral, semi-decorative, sometimes zoological images. I was just gathering materials every place we went.

And fabrics . . . wedding sheets . . .

Forty embroidered silk/satin wedding sheets and they didn't bat an eye.

In the process of getting there, we went to the Yellow Mountains and there we sat.

Yes. There we sat. I was getting frustrated because I only had a limited time to do my project and a lot of the places, even though we used them well, were not necessary to the project. They kept us in the Yellow Mountains or were trying to keep us there one day too long. I refused to stay. I don't know what I was going to do but I refused to stay. I wanted to get to work. They had no choice. Also it was one of the first times you could be on a bus and stop it and get off in these places that had been closed to foreigners for forty years.

So we insisted on a lot of new liberties.

You looked at the mountains, looked at the clouds and the mist that punctuated the verticality of those tall Yellow

Mountains that were so typical of Chinese classical painting. You made a statement that reminded me of Oscar Wilde saying that really nobody saw the fog in London until Turner painted it. What you said was the flip side of that. You said, "I'm disappointed again. I thought they were being innovative but they were just copying nature."

It's true. The mountains actually looked like all these fantastic prints and paintings that I had been in awe of. The artists were just painting old barns or something... excuse me, Andrew Wyeth.

I want to jump ahead for a moment because there was a review of your work after the show in Beijing. Roughly translated, it states, "Rauschenberg is the first Western contemporary artist who came to exhibit. This exhibition was funded and prepared and installed by himself. It provided us with a window on art. It enabled us to develop a deeper and objective understanding of the overview of modern Western art. Rauschenberg's technique and materials and aesthetic pursuits inspired us. A new style often appears concomitant with new materials and techniques. The opposite is the case with many of our artists who use classical techniques, traditional tools and materials which tend to be restricted in form." This writer from the Art Research Institute in China, in response to your show, states exactly what you are referring to about the painter who just copied nature: they were restricted, the tools were constraints, everything was a "given" and they had to work within those parameters.

Your work offered information and alternatives to the 300,000 people visiting your show if they elected to take these options. What you aspired to in 1982 was realized at the 1985 ROCI exhibition in Beijing.

Also, it's not just to influence artists and writers. Certainly in China there is no elite. There's power, yet the reality for those who had power at that time was just about as grim as it was for the rest of the country. But the boredom of the sameness of the thinking through—what is it, one billion people or something—ROCI opened up eyes and concepts and reminded them of some things they hadn't seen in a long time. That's a kind of individual sensualness.

Do you think you were subversive while you were in China on the 1982 trip? You showed those people who were with you and touched you a different way of looking. I remember someone yelling at you in Chinese that you

were wasting film when you were shooting a garbage pail . . .

Which had some glorious yellow melons on top. I was shooting it in color for our Graphicstudio Chinese Summerhall project.

And yet those people who thought what you were shooting was not viable subject matter would soon point out to you things in the landscape they thought might interest you. I assume they developed a sensitivity.

Everybody started looking for "Rauschenbergs," which can be annoying but, when they are right, it's good. I wasn't looking for "Rauschenbergs." I was looking for what most people can't see. If I am a successful artist, then I think you don't need art. Art is then an appreciation of your own life.

The people running errands for us to a neighboring city had to have layers of bureaucratic approval, signed passes at both the destination and at our location on their return. I know that had a profound effect on you. I think, if anything was pivotal in crystallizing your idea about ROCI, it was a problem in constraint and curiosity. It seemed like curiosity was so constrained that it perhaps no longer existed, that people didn't necessarily care what was happening twenty-five miles from them, let alone in the rest of the world.

I think they really were just beaten down. They had exhausted any initiative, any hope of anything changing. Once you kill the curiosity, everything else goes.

Do you remember passing that brick yard with the blindfolded ox? You seemed quite touched by that. You stood there for quite a while.

It seemed something out of an ancient myth, to see this big water buffalo walking around and around and around, blindfolded with an old dirty rag. And that was his life. If one isn't moved by that . . .

It was also a metaphor for you. In a way it seemed so representative of what we were seeing all around us.

Yes, the restrictions. But we did end up learning how to make bricks! Because of our interest in stopping there, I think the people got interested in what they were doing, which they probably hadn't thought about for a hundred years.

What about all those artists who were so completely turned on when we were there [in China]? These people now saw paper that had a tradition of a thousand years used in a totally different way. You cast it; you used the scroll-maker's techniques; you combined processes that were really part of their technology. You didn't introduce any new technology. Yet the image and the handling of the materials were so completely different that I believe they were in absolute awe.

At least they were interestingly confused. I think one of the healthiest things in a lot of places we've been—well, just like I think with all art—is that an understanding or an attempt to understand can keep you from ever experiencing.

In China in 1982, we came across a sculpture of a turtle supporting a stele representing the universe. Was that the source of the symbol or title of the tour?

No. I don't think so. It might have been a reaffirmation. But nearly every religion, except Christian, has some important part that the turtle represents the world or the universe. My turtle is Rocky, whom I've had since maybe '63. I didn't know how old she was then, and I still don't know today, but she's still looking good.

The acronym started from Rocky or ended up with ROCI or you don't recall how it happened?

It coincided . . . Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange and that says ROCI. My turtle Rocky got to be the symbol of the whole project.

Working side by side with the Chinese and witnessing the change of attitude, you resolved to do ROCI . . . working in a country and trying to introduce the people to the images of their own and other countries through your work?

Yes, but I was so depressed by the lack of interest. There wasn't anything else in their lives other than an acceptance of the most austere, boring habits.

You traveled a great deal with John Cage and with Merce Cunningham previously, but this was different, wasn't it? This collaboration . . .

Yes. But it certainly helped me with my traveling because, with John Cage and Merce Cunningham and the dance company, I basically had the responsibility, after doing the sets and costumes, of taking the most

impoverished, impossible spaces and turning them into real theatrical events. I did the lighting and the calling, to make sure all the dancers got the right costumes and were on stage in five minutes. I also had to pack everything, which certainly influenced my ideas about costuming. And we went to Bangkok, Sweden, Finland, Czechoslovakia. So I'd say that was a good out-of-town rehearsal for ROCI since most of the places ROCI went were not prepared or set up either.

I had not heard you talk about the issues of peace and understanding or misunderstanding on a global level until that summer of 1982.

Right, but I think that's when I realized that that was the problem or one of the major problems. If that problem wasn't taken care of, there would be no chance for any kind of world cooperation. It doesn't have to be understanding; it can be just information.

It sounds crazy but in China I thought, God, these people have never met a Mexican and they don't know what the Mexicans dress like, what they look like, what their music sounds like. That was one of the things that formed ROCI's intentions. I mean all those people . . . they're never going to go to all the places that I can go to freely. And I have all that information. It's no wonder that the teachers teach the same things day after day and treat the materials the same way. Those are the people called "talented" if they can treat their materials the way they were treated a thousand years ago. Well, a thousand years is a lousy definition of avant garde.

While visiting a number of cities in China, you photographed the images that would be included in a one-hundred-foot continuous photo collage. When the show took place at the National Gallery in Beijing, the Chinese attraction to this hundred-foot photo and all the individual images in the *Summerhall* series was intense.

They saw themselves. It gave them a chance to look at themselves without thinking of the boring patterns that were their existence.

When you got to Beijing after Jingxian, both you and I gave back-to-back lectures at the Central Art Institute.

That was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life because there I am in China and I'm not there to offend or criticize anyone, just to show them some things. But it's been very hard to leave quickly any one of

these countries that are so starved for outside contact. The professors picked the cream of their student crop and these anxious young people were waiting for me to say something about their work. The reason the work looked like it did was because that was the only thing they were allowed to do. So you couldn't praise them but, on the other hand, you couldn't deny them or put them down. It was right there in front of you.

I went first and showed a number of your paintings and sculpture and I didn't find the Chinese particularly receptive. Then, later, you showed them your photographs and their attitude about your work changed completely.

What is it about the photographs that made such a difference?

I think that is a kind of international blindness. If you see something and you know it's a photograph, that's the "truth." If you make a photograph that has the same complexities as an abstract painting, they have to choose the photograph while they're still denying the abstract painting. I use photography—use everything that I can find—but photography is a way for me to stay in touch with all the shadows and highlights that are around me. It's an exercise that keeps my feet on the ground but moving, the realization that every corner of the room is never going to be the same again.

When I first started photographing, I was doing the *In and Out City Limits* series; I was going to photograph the entire United States. Actually I have a lot of it done already. I hadn't taken photography really seriously as a complete devotion since the early days at Black Mountain College when I decided that I couldn't do art and painting and sculpture and still do photography. But I was young and weak. Now I find it requires a lot of energy but it fulfills certain things. When I do photography, it's a constant reminder to change my mind.

Through screenprinting, your photographs find their way into your painting and sculpture. Do you think this makes you qualified to demonstrate or communicate the imagery and culture of one country to another country—to show Mexico and the Mexicans to the Chinese—as you said earlier?

I think so, but none of my work comes with any guarantees. I don't say that I'm more qualified; it's just that I do it without any complications of commercial intentions.

Go back to Black Mountain for a moment and your use of photography. Did the teachers see that work? Did they react to it? Did Albers address any of your approaches in photography?

I was not Albers' favorite student. Albers didn't see it but I worked with this marvelous woman, Hazel Larsen, my teacher in photography and she was terrific. She insisted on one of my trips to New York that I take a selection of the works and show them to Edward Steichen. Actually I was in The Museum of Modern Art collection first as a photographer and it wasn't until about twenty years later that they bought a painting. Steichen looked at the photographs; he didn't know any of my history but he was a very fine man and he said, "Looks like Black Mountain."

It certainly was not the Black Mountain of Albers, was it?

In all the departments at Black Mountain, there was a serious interest in quality and dedication, no matter how frivolous the subject. Anyway, the project—and it's strange that I almost returned to it—was one day I woke up and had this idea that just scared the hell out of me: I wanted to photograph every inch of America, foot by foot. So by now, where should I be? I should almost be into Asheville, which is the next town.

What is the point? To make everybody see everything?

I think so. I think it's only an attitude that keeps one from not looking at everything they see. John Cage said, to paraphrase, one of the major hangups that people have is that they go through their lives thinking that, wherever they are, the most interesting thing is to get somewhere else. They're missing the whole trip, going from place to place without seeing what's in between. I have said when I travel I like getting lost because then I have to look at everything. That's true about changing styles artistically. If you have no certainty about how something is going to develop, then you go through the whole process of witnessing its development.

And anything is possible then?

Yes. If you don't know where you're going. I have a fear that I like to share with all other artists; that is, if you are absolutely certain about what you are doing, don't do it. It has probably been done already.

Every time I go to the studio, if I do happen to have an idea about what I'm going to do, I don't do it. I have the

feeling if I can imagine something and plan something then it must be related to something I've already done or seen.

John Cage felt one should accept all givens and then move on from there. The notion of not having to get to a destination makes everything a possible destination.

Under your direction, your staff made videos that were shown in each of the countries. It was a major element of each exhibition, a very lively and kinetic element and informative about each of the countries. Viewers were looking at a kind of video *verité* of that country. I noticed that people would stop at the television monitors initially and then look at the paintings.

I think that what we just talked about, abstract paintings versus photographs, applies to videos. If they can see real people in real places, no matter how outrageously they may be behaving, that's the truth. Then I think they reflected on the works and were able to see the same things there. And it had to be true because now that they had seen it in video or in photographs, it was part of their past. So in a few minutes they could adjust to the new reality.

The video person often was right behind you, and photographing the very same thing that you were photographing, which eventually became the subject matter.

Right. They knew they had seen it someplace. I must say Terry Van Brunt did a lot of that but there were at least five other people who also added videos during the exhibition and also in some cases before the exhibitions.

We had to make a final decision where we would start ROCI and you decided it would be either Canada or Mexico.

In the neighborhood.

Why in the neighborhood? Why Mexico?

Because that was the first tryout of ROCI and I thought, humorously but practically, that, if we overlooked anything, we'd be very close to home and we could come back and make corrections.

Mexico was an ideal place to start because at that moment our political relationship with Mexico had never been weaker.



ROCI MEXICO

Before we went to Mexico, though, you made an announcement at the U. N., arranged by Ted Kheel through Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick.

My United Nations announcement, which I admit was not too soberly presented, happened on the very day that three million dollars' worth of ROCI support, for which I had exchanged works, was taken away in a dispute. I had to pay for ROCI again later with works. I got so confused and disillusioned, yet I knew ROCI was good. So I guess all those years traveling with Merce Cunningham and working with the Judson dance group paid off. The old idea that the show must go on really proved itself, because the show did go on.

I remember your visiting Javier Pérez de Cuellar, Secretary General of the U. N., and the productive conversation the two of you had. One of the requests from the United States Mission was that neither Libya nor Iran be invited.

You said that was unacceptable and you were not going to make those political judgments, that all nations had to be invited. You have been very consistent about that with one exception, South Africa.

I couldn't figure out any way that we could go to South Africa without it somehow looking as if it was an endorsement of their political situation. I was just invited to the U.N. again to be in a seminar on anti-apartheid. I don't know what I can contribute to that except maybe my presence, which I've already done in Greece and a couple of other places to show where I stand on that issue. Everybody involved knows why it's bad and I think all ideas about how to correct it have been exhausted. Financial boycotts didn't work because they weren't thorough. There's too much there, I think, in South Africa, and anyone who would listen to you has heard it before and knows it well. So I don't think any particular philosophical idea could possibly make a difference other than mere representation.

I did have one condition under which ROCI could go to South Africa and that would be if, just like the initial plans for East and West Berlin, we had an exhibition in Soweto; then we'd have a simultaneous show in Johannesburg. That was totally out of the question to the organizers in South Africa.

For a similar reason you rejected the ROCI show in Berlin.

Yes. I thought I would have the two exhibitions simultaneously, not back to back, because that doesn't make the point. The East Berliners would be allowed, even in patrolled buses or escorted or chaperoned buses, to go to West Berlin to see the exhibition. I don't think it was a problem that the West Berliners could go to East Berlin to see the show. But I wanted the East Berliners to be able to move, even chaperoned. The response was: we can't let them go because they will not come back. That's a hell of a way to run a country. But even with ROCI being apolitical, it seems to me that, in the situations we were confronting, we couldn't afford to make these compromises. When the wall opened, we were there on the spot two days afterward with a show already organized.

The museum directors were sure the show should not and, indeed, could not happen. However, the tide had already changed in East Germany and I think even they did not realize, as certainly we did not, the dimension and implication of those changes.

Following the U.N. announcement, I requested Chun-Wuei Su Chien to begin very delicate negotiations in China. At the time we were to start those discussions with the Chinese, there was a defection of Chinese table tennis players that absolutely destroyed what had appeared to be our opportunity to show in China: the Chinese government decreed that there would be no more cultural exchanges. With no funds for the Chinese venue in hand, you left for Tobago to contemplate and record the philosophy of ROCI and I went off in search of the proper venues in South America. It was rather an inauspicious beginning, I'd say.

It was consistent. At least we knew that we were swimming upstream.

When we were starting to set up the show for Mexico you had moved on and were doing work in Chile We were forging ahead despite the fact that ROCI had not officially opened. You didn't have any funding but you were committed to the idea.

One of the worst situations I got into with ROCI was when, in one country, I absolutely submerged myself in all sorts of foreign experiences. Then, before the final event, which is the exhibition, I'm in yet another country, totally submerging myself. For example, when we added Berlin and I hadn't finished the works for Malaysia, it was difficult for me to keep up with my memories and impressions and experiences to keep them separated. Usually the materials I pick up assist my recall once I get back in the studio. Since they somehow are carrying the experiences I can just look at a piece of fabric, then "Oh, I remember that day." It all comes back. But I experience this fright because each place I go I am so completely involved, it's almost more than I can carry, even just back home. Of course, I didn't confuse Berlin with anything but I was afraid it would make me forget about Malaysia.

As a nomadic artist, working on behalf of peace, on a world odyssey moving from one part of the globe to another in an effort to experience, research, and create, then returning to a previous location for the exhibition opening, then moving ahead to a new country to see whether it is an appropriate location or not

It's like I'm making my own echo. I shout down the canyon, then run across and holler back at myself.

You had already traveled extensively on behalf of ROCI by the time the Mexico show opened, so a number of works

displayed the kind of information you wanted to communicate. You worked at the paper mill in China and in the clayworks at Shigaraki, Japan. You had been to Sri Lanka and Thailand. Plus the exhibition in Mexico included new works produced for Mexico. During your research visit in Mexico you collected lottery tickets, religious objects, commercial tin cans, and so forth. The operative guideline for the exhibition was to show works dating from 1972. The show would metamorphose as it moved around the world, removing earlier works as you produced new ones. I recall you decided against chronological order. Of primary importance was to have the Mexicans walk into the exhibition and see their own Mexican imagery before they experienced works from the other countries.

I've always insisted that the works inspired by a particular country be in a group, concentrated. Dickie Landry, with his saxophone, pulled the whole Mexican show together because it was a stone building that he constructed like a series of caves. The way his live music crawled around in the space gave it a cohesiveness. But I did want the Mexicans to see related works all in one location. So in every space there has to be a kind of theater in the organization, rather than logic.

Just prior to the opening, you had decided that another component to the ROCI concept would be to give a work to, as you said, "the people of the nation." There was formidable pressure to have the minister of culture or the president accept the work on behalf of the people of the nation. That was not acceptable to you. You insisted that Dolores Olmedo, one of the strong advocates for the arts in Mexico, and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, photographer . . .

Artists . . .

. . . receive the work.

Which was given to the people, not to the museum, just as Alicia Alonso, the ballerina, accepted the work for the people of Cuba.

On one side, there was an absolute furor. On the other, you were applauded. Octavio Paz, who won the Nobel prize within this last week, wrote a poem to introduce ROCI in Mexico and Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez visited the show just prior to the formal opening. ROCI opened, the work was given to the people in the presence of your mother and your sister, Janet, as well as colleagues, friends, artists, and thousands of Mexicans.

Well, ROCI got off to a rocky start.

Mexico was hugely successful. However, ROCI was at a point where, because of its attractiveness and invitations from many nations combined, the absence of financial support could have made the Mexican premiere its finale. Its own success could have been a seed for its demise. You received counsel from just about everybody that this was a . . .

. . . ridiculous idea.

A time to stop.

Yes. ROCI will be an example that any individual can be successful, no matter how outrageous the idea is, and that adversity can make you even stronger. It was hopeless at that point in Mexico . . . and I can't stand good advice.

Everybody said, "See, we told you it wouldn't work."

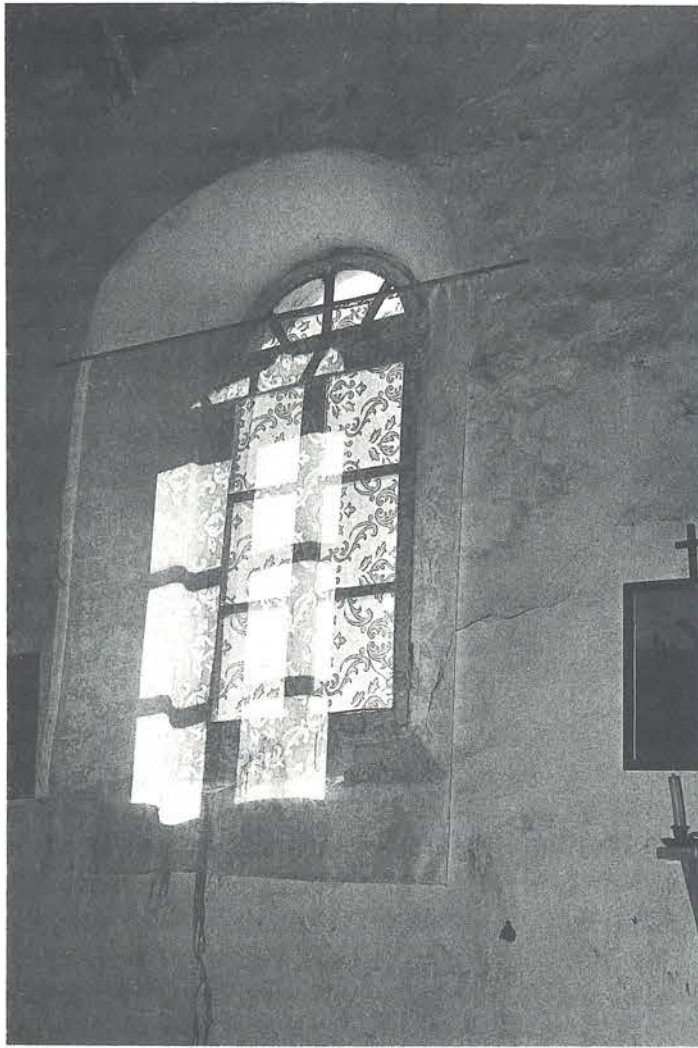
Your response to that was to return to your studio and begin work on the Chilean pieces.

Shortly after arriving in Chile, we had a very curious situation. We had the national museum, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, offer us a show. The anti-Pinochet dissidents urged us to come but not to show at the museum. You returned from Tobago on 22 October 1984 and departed for Chile, at my request, on 25 October, arriving amidst burning tires and gunfire . . .

And two earthquakes. It sounds romantic now but all those things are real.

Once back in the U.S., we received substantial criticism for our decision to take the show to Santiago.

The masses in Chile—even though they wanted us there so desperately—didn't want us to be there because it appeared to be some kind of support of their predicament. Yet, we insisted. José Donoso, their Poet Laureate, couldn't understand why we would show in the Nacional, which is what you alluded to before. At that time the only communication, because the government controlled the newspapers, was through the churches. I had to persuade him like crazy . . . José, or Pépe as he is called, wanted me to show in the church, the only institution people respected, because of Pinochet. There was no way that a church needed that much art. I think that's



ROCI CHILE

what convinced him. He realized this was a reality and agreed to write the essay once he knew how we felt about ROCI.

Subsequently, I traveled to Spain. I remember the reaction of the Spanish was that of praise for your plan to go to Chile. They felt one of the more grievous errors perpetrated against the people of Spain occurred during the reign of Franco when they suffered cultural isolation. The benefits of isolationism accrue to the dictator, not the people.

The exhibition went to the Museo Nacional in Chile. They placed a picture of you alongside those of Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo on the façade. The museum, glorious when we first arrived there, was subsequently wrecked by an earthquake, requiring your aid to repair it so the show could take place. The catalogue had an introduction by Donoso. You created a paradox in which you used the state's museum to give the art maximum visibility

to the public while introducing the work with a catalogue essay written by their most popular dissident author. All this was received with admiration by artists and students when the students understood the ROCI premise and realized it was not an American government venture but an exhibition conceived and supported by you and you alone.

What about Chile itself? What was your impression of the people, the landscape?

Chile, I think, is one of the most beautiful places in the world. In the north are deserts and copper fields. To get there, I drove for the better part of a day from Santiago and wanted to photograph the forges and flying fire when we came back from the copper mines. We had a hard time. It took a day and a half, actually, to get permission because the mines were a government operation even though we already had the permission to go in and photograph the smelting. On the way back, there were some llamas on the hill grazing. I got out and a couple of llamas approached us and I found three big turquoise stones just lying in this desert. The llamas, the smelting, and the factories, all were real experiences. You go through all kinds of countryside . . . beautiful farm land, great beaches, fantastic seafood everywhere . . . and the people were just marvelous. We were not refused for being strangers at all. At the presentation, there was some planned hostility that made me question: "What did I do wrong?" A block from the museum we had a place, a little bar we called our "office." So when any of us working on the project got frustrated, we'd go to the "office" to talk. There, in the bar, we talked to the same five people—in a mass of more than a hundred—who had shouted at us like hecklers at the presentation. They admitted in the "office" that they had been paid to do it.

Did it distract from the work itself, which couldn't be abused by hecklers?

That's what they were trying to do, to get everyone not to look at the work. The day before we left I went back to the museum to check out the work one more time. A number of people came up and apologized for these rowdies . . . it was heartbreaking. And Pinochet couldn't go anywhere at that time because, if he stepped out of his house, he would be shot.

For Chile you created the *Araucan Mastaba*, using silver the Araucanian Indians use and lapis lazuli. You also did *Copperhead Bites* done on copper sheets. What is the significance of the title *Copperhead Bites*?

It's a play on the snake.

And is the snake Pinochet?

No. The images were the bite on the copper.

In my initial trips through South America, I left Chile to go to Argentina and I guess Argentina was the only country that I visited that initially did not want ROCI. It was rather disappointing. The country was filled with bureaucracy and obsessions about European "culture." I think any exhibition that originated in the United States at that time would not have found a receptive audience in Buenos Aires. The aspiration was so great to be seen as the "Paris of South America" that they could not see anything in their effort to aspire to be continental. From Argentina we went to Brazil where the spaces weren't large enough so I went on to Venezuela. There we found a museum in Caracas that was managed with vitality and which possessed adequate space. Sofia Imber and Carlos Rangel immediately



ROCI VENEZUELA

embraced the idea and invited you to come. We then met in Washington and you decided to balance the shadow cast by Chile's dictatorship with an exploration and exhibition in South America's oldest, albeit youthful, democracy, Venezuela. I wasn't with you when you traveled the Amazonas Territory but, in looking at the paintings, there are some puzzling and seductive elements.

There was a complication about agreeing to take ROCI to Venezuela: I had just enough funds to go to China. I had to consider canceling Venezuela if we were to make it to China, which did have priority. But the Venezuelans had a solution. They said, "We will move the art. We'll use our Air Force." That made me a little bit nervous so I insisted that they call ahead at least three times before they landed in Chile. What happened was the first two cargo planes took off and all the soldiers had their wives and children and loaded up the plane with a minimal amount of art so they could return with oranges, apples, and gifts. It required another trip and, for them to make another trip, ROCI had to pay for the fuel.

Which was purchased in Peru, where you couldn't use a credit card. You had to pay cash.

But the works did get to Caracas and I remember saying maybe that's the way ROCI can function—just keep all the armies and navies and military busy hauling art around, not necessarily mine, anybody's, so they won't have time to be aggressive militarily.

The Chinese Air Force flew the work to Lhasa as well. When you made your initial visit to Venezuela, weren't there efforts to keep you from going to the Amazonas Territory?

Yes. In Venezuela there are only about three leading cities with a lot of aristocrats and intellectuals. They asked why I would want to go to the Amazonas Territory and visit with the tribes, since they had nothing to do with the country. I said they must have something to do with the country because they occupied eighty percent of it. That's when I went by dugout up the Amazon. Those images, plus the information, are a big part of the Venezuelan series. We visited Indians who had been taken over by liberal Baptist missionaries, who permitted them to keep their native dress, something less than conventional. I mean the women were still going braless and the men had loincloths and dyed their skin the same color as their loincloths. But for some reason they had lots of bicycles. Another tribe gave us gallons of killer bee

honey and baskets they made. We had this pilot, a tree-hopper, I think they're called, and probably our travel was illegal. When we got back to Caracas everyone told us you had to apply a year ahead of time to take the trip we had just finished.

The pilot had a kind of Jungle Jim attitude. No risk was too great, which didn't make the flight that comfortable. We got into this tribe that cultivated and lived off killer bee honey. When we arrived, all these Indians came out and the pilot was screaming "Don't touch the plane!" There were so few planes and so much curiosity, and that's what they wanted to do. But the pilot intimidated them enough to keep them from touching. We went in, met the chief, got some gifts, had some form of conversation, looked around, had a tour of the village, and then went back to the plane. And, again, the pilot was screaming at everyone "Don't touch the plane!" But while he was taxiing down the sandy road for takeoff he was showing off; he went too far and the plane got stuck. He didn't know what to do. We couldn't get it out. There were only three of us in the plane. We started digging with rocks and logs but we weren't getting anywhere. He had to go back to the village and tell those he had warned "Don't touch the plane!" that "Now we need you," all within a three-hour period. They laughed and laughed about touching and digging out the plane.

I guess it's a reaffirmation of their lifestyle. I mean, they knew why they didn't need a plane.

What do you think religion did to the natives of Venezuela?

I went to another tribe and they were totally civilized in a Catholic sense that made them ashamed of who they were. This was quite a letdown from the braless, loin-clothed, clay-colored people. There were three extremes; we didn't have time to go to more than three tribes. Strangely enough, the Baptist-supervised tribe was the most liberal.

You did a *ROCI VENEZUELA* painting called *Onoto Snare*. Does "Onoto" refer to a berry?

It's the name of both the river and the foam in the white waters. But there is a berry that grows profusely. They make a dye from this berry that they paint themselves with and also put their clothing in it.

Was that the dye used to make the loin-cloth and the skin look the same?

Yes. I brought back some berries and had some paint mixed. I think it's "Number 15."

After Venezuela, the show went to China. The National Gallery in Beijing was rather grand in its socialist scale.

And they kept giving us more space, as we painted the walls for them.

It was not the only place we painted walls. We had to paint walls in Cuba and . . .

I don't know one place we didn't paint the walls except Venezuela.

We carried paint with us; we had it imported; we had it flown in.

And plywood for new walls and lights were carried and bought and left with them.

Do you remember when the Chinese tried to stop you from photographing a painting of Mao, Stalin, and Marx on a wall in Shanghai? It was gone the next day.

They painted it out. It was already faded and crumbling off the bricks but they saw me looking at it, then they saw me photographing it, and I wouldn't give them the camera or the film.

China was changing at that time.

It wasn't changed that much.

No. It wasn't. The Tibetans told us about how horrible the Cultural Revolution was. Teachers and intellectuals were berated hour after hour, day after day by the youths whom they taught . . . others exiled, tortured . . .

And the burning of all the paintings that weren't hidden, including all the calligraphy and the writings.

Like the Tibetans, it seems that nothing is more or less important to you—the material you use or the imagery you use.

That's why I had trouble in Tibet, making Tibetan pieces, because they have that total respect for all things. You know, whether it's an old dog bone or a chicken feather or a buddha, there is no hierarchy in materials. I think I've exercised that quite successfully.

Wouldn't that be one of the points of your earlier cardboard pieces?

Yes. If you take something that no one looks at and you displace it successfully then people will look at it as though it's theirs and beautiful.

In another way, when I lived in New York I was used to the richness and treasures you could find in the streets. When I moved to Florida obviously there was not that kind of material. I thought, okay, I'm going to live many other places and can't be dependent on the surplus and refuse of an urban society. So, what material, no matter where I was in the world, would be available? Cardboard boxes! It was sort of a practical, rational decision. I still haven't been anywhere where there weren't cardboard boxes... even up the Amazon.

Did you use sand in the *Egyptian Series* for the same reason?

Right. At home I had been using Captiva beach sand but I also made sand pieces in Israel. At that time, I was living and working in Jerusalem for more than a month. So I decided I would do artist's proofs from each of the deserts. That way I would get to travel within a small area. I think it was seven pieces and, sure enough, the sand was a completely different color in each place. I also found a number of objects to incorporate, all of which made Teddy Kollek, the mayor of Jerusalem, ask me where I found all this "stuff" in his city. I never did tell him.

When I went to Tibet early on, it reminded me of you. The prayer flags hanging from the corners of houses, the calligraphy and colors, the bits of fabric sewn together, the stacked stones and so forth... it seemed that either they were Rauschenbergs or you were a Tibetan.

That's what scared me.

I loved the Tibetans. I thought they were so close to my own sensibility that I think that was the most difficult show I had to make. The people were just as I would think that people who feel as much as they do about everything would be. So that was a reaffirmation of this concept about not having any hierarchies.

You told the Tibetans when you were leaving that you would never forget them and, if you had your way, the rest of the world would not forget them.

I don't think anyone will.

I videotaped the caretaker of the Patala Palace, pleading for the Dalai Lama to return. He said he had kept the Dalai Lama's home in wonderful condition and would he please return since his people miss and need him.

I've seen the Dalai Lama twice since being in Tibet. The first time was in New York at the opening of a Tibetan art exhibition. I had been to Tibet since he had been there. It was the first time I had ever talked to him and thought it a wonderful time to tell him some of the stories about Tibet and how much his people missed him. I took him a signed poster from the Tibetan show and I thought he would be more interested, and maybe he was; maybe he felt uncomfortable. Anyway I don't criticize him, but I got frustrated and said, "I know why you left home, and it wasn't the Chinese. I laid on your bed in Lhasa... it's worth leaving home for." But recently I've been with him in Amsterdam, in a conference called "Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy," and we got along just beautifully. In fact I think that he might come to the Washington show.

The touching of the plane in Venezuela reminds me of the situation in Tibet where you selected work specifically so it could be touched.

I made it so it could be touched. I wanted their involvement. In Tibet they have this ceremony that goes along with painting the rocks and picking up feathers. They are in awe of something, mysteriously or religiously. They carry around a jar of yak butter, rancid yak butter, and anoint the object. We had to put up a string, not a fence, around the works that could be harmed by the yak butter. I kept thinking about the works and ROCI's next stop and the insurance company but in my soul I really thought that nearly everything I'd ever done needed some yak butter.

But you did provide *Revolver* for the Tibetans to interact and play with.

Yes. *Revolver* and a couple of sculptures you have to move. They queued up and fought over who was going to run *Revolver*, which is an electric piece. I think very few of them had ever before run anything mechanical.

People also queued up to watch the show being installed in the Soviet Union, where we had a string across the doorway to the exhibition area. There were any number of

occasions when you asked the babushka security women to allow people in because they appeared desperately interested. They had traveled from Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan out of the Soviet Union as well as Mongolia to see the show. The opening day thousands of people arrived. They were lifting and touching many of the works, especially *Dirt Shrine* with its ceramic chain. It was a curator's nightmare with all this art that was carefully installed with white gloves by Thomas Bühler and the staff. The Soviets wanted to have a tactile relationship with the art.

Right. Just like the Tibetans. I can't do anything but appreciate that. I've had trouble with my art in the States where museums have missed opportunities with a lot of works. They are considered too inviting. That's been a problem.

What about the works that are purposefully participatory like *Black Market*?

That really didn't work. It's now locked up in the Ludwig Collection. The system was that you could take any of the four objects in the box. Each has a number stamped on it. If you take object number two, then you can put anything in there of any quality, or lack of quality, just whatever you have, but stamp it with the same Rauschenberg number. But what you add you have to either describe on one of the metal tablets outside, higher on the pieces or trace it and then sign your name. In spite of the natural generosity of the concept and the piece, people started stealing things, including the drawings, which were going to be the log, the development of the piece.

You are saying if you seek communication, you risk misunderstanding. If you . . .

. . . if you quit trusting people, then I think you are in more trouble.

You donated a lot of video equipment to the Tibetans and they requested a tape of "Lost Horizon"—the Ronald Coleman version.

Yes, and from time to time, I send them other tapes. In most of the ROCI tour, there was some cultural establishment where you could donate a work of art to that country, everywhere except Tibet. Tibet doesn't have that kind of culture. They have programs and meetings with just thirty or forty people. Now there are

additional, different groups who get to see the films and videos we've sent.

How shall we categorize Tibet for the exhibition at the National Gallery? Do we list it as a separate country or do we list it under China?

No. We list it as a separate country. Where would you list Kuwait?

I see what you're saying . . .

From China the art went to Japan to be stored in a mine.

Yes, a mine five stories deep.

Why Japan? Why did you elect to show in Japan? It certainly is not a sensitive area.

I had the works in China, no possibility of storing them and I had been invited by the Japanese for a ROCI show. Part of the agreement was that they store the works in this salt mine since there was a time gap before the Cuba show. But I had a lot of works I had made in Shigaraki in the exhibition. It didn't matter in this situation that Japan was not a "sensitive" area.

The ROCI philosophy would be just as important to be viewed in Japan as it would be Cuba, would it not?

Yes. Also, we have to respect a certain amount of economic practicality. The Japanese had never seen that much of my work anyway. It was a beautiful show. They had a new museum, the Setagaya.

Ed Saff was invited to Cuba to give a series of lectures on mathematics at the University of Havana. Before he left, I had asked if you would like to exhibit in Cuba and whether we should pursue it. He delivered a letter to the minister of culture, Armando Hart, exploring his interest. I think that both of us felt the political situation would present difficulties.

I didn't think so. I was very excited about it. I think it was . . . I don't know, living in Florida and having been—and still am—very disturbed about our cutting off our diplomatic relationship with Castro . . . that was just a perfect place. And it turned out to be so. We had three outstanding sites to show in. One, the fortress, the Castillo, had never been used as a museum before.



ROCI CUBA

Nor had most of it been used for years for any purpose. Some rooms were significantly neglected. There was also the Casa de las Américas.

That's where we showed the photographs. And the Museo Nacional, which we painted again.

We needed the three sites that were spread out all over the city. One of the directors of the museum said to me that it was a splendid American invasion . . . your work in every significant exhibition space in Havana. The enthusiasm was incredible. Arrangements for my first visit were labyrinthine. It was not easy to go to Cuba. We had to comply with Treasury Department regulations, which meant that the Cubans had to host us so that we would not spend U. S. dollars. With great enthusiasm for the show, Roberto Fernández Retamar, head of the Casa de las Américas and a preeminent poet, invited us. He initially wanted us because the Casa de las Américas needed, in his mind, to be devoted to the arts in all the Americas, yet it was restricted to Central and South America. This was his first opportunity to bring in an exhibition from North America. On seeing the work and hearing the philosophy, it was his opinion that a much broader issue than the Americas was addressed. He then facilitated our having the other locations in which to exhibit. Getting the work there, however, was not exactly easy. The ROCI JAPAN exhibition was transported by the Cubans on a vessel called the "Bay of Pigs." Shipping of the ROCI CUBA works originated in the U. S.

That was extremely problematic politically. Even though Cuba is about two hundred miles away from Captiva, where the works were made, there was the possibility that we would have to go through Sweden because they have diplomatic relations with Cuba. Then we found a

shorter route, through Mexico. The exhibition turned out just beautifully.

We shipped the work to Miami and someone in Miami saw an insurance form that indicated the final destination was Cuba. We were blackballed. There was no way that anybody in Miami, New York, or Houston would help us get the work to Havana. It was not until we sent the work back to New York and scheduled it for a fictitious show in Mexico that we were able to get the show to Cuba. During your extensive travel there, were you aware of anti-American sentiment?

No. Not at all.

Were there anti-American slogans anywhere?

I remember, when you and your sons came back, you said you had difficulty in Pinar del Rio. But I didn't find that. Just outside of Havana everyone was really celebrating the fact that an American was there.

When Castro met with us, he talked about cooking with you. You always appear to be as comfortable in the kitchen as you are in front of a canvas. There was a lively discussion with Castro and you invited him to the U. S., which amazed him.

That's right. I said, "You know, I'm just two hundred miles away and you are welcome to come stay with me." He said, "That's the first invitation in twenty-six years I've had to come visit America."

He offered to cook, didn't he?

Yes, and I said, "You can cook breakfast because I don't eat breakfast and I'll cook the other meals." But he had humor and hospitality and a delicate sensitivity to everything that was around him. It was impossible to think of him as any kind of enemy.

I'm sure neither of us is sophisticated enough to know all the subtleties or foolishness of Castro's politics or those of the United States toward him. But it was clear that the people of Cuba were so receptive to your work and their enthusiasm for any information from the United States—the hunger, in fact—was very touching.

That's such a senseless controversy that's going on and can only be excused by secrets and maneuvers that are useless and hostile.

He would not let you leave the island unless you were his guest.

That's right. I wanted to get back home and start work and he said, "You can't leave until you go to Varadero, my summer place, and stay at least three days." Well, of course, my sister Janet was absolutely delighted. Since I live in a paradise I wasn't as anxious, even though I enjoyed the prestige of being his guest. I went, obviously. I obligatorily went.

We tried to get into the Soviet Union for years and it never worked. There was no way of doing it. You had felt, when I and others failed to get you into the Soviet Union, that . . .

That I might just contact Dr. Armand Hammer.

Isn't that what brought you to Knoedler Gallery?

Dr. Hammer said he would only help me get into Russia if I would sign up with the Knoedler Gallery, which didn't seem to me to be a compromise with the trust I had in Knoedler. I did, and, once we got into Russia, we found that the Artists' Union resented the fact that we were connected with Dr. Hammer. So much so that that connection more or less cut us off from any kind of privileges and the Russians compensated by providing an even greater hospitality.

Tahir Salakhov, head of the Artists' Union, entered into an agreement with us on a handshake and everything he said he would do, he did. The militia waited at the border to escort the work. A grand exhibition facility was made available to ROCI at the Tretiakov Gallery.

With galleries right next to Malevich, who is an idol of mine.

Is that why you included the White and Black paintings?

They were in the ROCI Soviet show from the very beginning.

I believe Trisha Brown was performing "Astral Convertible" for the first time publicly while in the Soviet Union. The lighting for this work runs on car batteries. There were calls to us from the dance company's staff saying they needed twelve batteries but had only six. You suggested we go out, find taxi cabs, take their batteries and invite the cab drivers to the performance so the event could take place. Only then did you discover that an

automobile factory was across the street. The batteries were provided at the very last minute.

The first six batteries were provided by the American Embassy, the rest we got from the factory to power the lights and sound triggered by the movement on the stage. But when Trisha went back the next night she found half of the sound cassette tapes had been stolen. So we went on with half of the possibilities of the sound. In Russia, there's just no way you run out to the local tape store.

The Artists' Union space was painted a color they called "universal beige." We painted it white with a truckload of paint from Berlin. We installed the gallery lighting. We wired the place. We asked Yevgeny Yevtushenko, an adversary of Khrushchev, to write the introduction for the catalogue.

He's a great poet, makes his own wine, and has a spirit that can't be beat in any nationality . . . For example, after a long dinner and dancing with the Yevtushenkos and the Salakhovs, Yevtushenko wanted us to see his collection of work by young Russian artists. It was a cold, icy night and after some slippery, swerving driving, we got to his apartment. But there had been a mix-up with the keys and we were locked out. So we decided to go out to the cemetery and finish his wine at Boris Pasternak's grave.

As we left, he wrote a note for someone coming later to the apartment and gave it to the aged, stooped concierge who proceeded to correct his Russian, much to his consternation. He looked at us and said, "Can you believe it?"

It just wasn't his night. We started driving again and we were pulled over by the police. He was driving without his lights on, plus his name was still not too welcome with the authorities. He barely got off without going to jail and he's the leading poet there. The policeman, as I heard the next day, told him it was a good thing he was such a good poet, because nobody else could have lied so well. Seems to me that the policeman was pretty good there, too.

What happens to someone like Yevtushenko in a society where he was such a force behind change now that the change has taken place? It is as if the mountain he was trying to move is gone and he is pushing against nothing.

You want that parable about Jasper Johns? It's the same thing. John Cage asked me to make a statement about

Jasper. I said he is in the most dangerous position in art that anyone has ever been in. He's walking a tightrope and it's on the ground and there is no place to fall. Yevtushenko still has many causes to write about and to inspire him because I think the problems have just begun in Russia.

He ran for office and now is a member of government. Octavio Paz was, if you remember, a foreign ambassador many years ago and then quit because . . .

Because his country was shooting students who were rebelling. And he said he couldn't represent a country that does this—and he quit.

One of the important events that took place while we had your exhibition at the Tretyakov was an exhibition organized by young, non-union artists in what was to become the first commercial gallery in Moscow, the First Gallery. Their show was titled "Rauschenberg to Us—We to Rauschenberg." There were approximately thirty artists who did work as a tribute to your arrival in Moscow. These works were wide-ranging aesthetically, some similar to your work and others reflecting the individual style of the artist.

Surprisingly few were imitating or mimicking . . . Well, I didn't see that show but I saw them in Venice.

You showed with five artists in the Venice Biennale who were selected from the First Gallery show in Moscow. The First Gallery and its first exhibition were very important and symbolic of the changes that are now taking place in the Soviet Union as the country moves into a free market system. At that time, it was anything but a free market system. After you left the Soviet Union and ROCI had gone to Berlin and Malaysia, we were informed that the Soviet minister of culture had selected the First Gallery exhibition to represent the Soviet Union in the Venice Biennale, along with your work. The implication of having a mixed national show in the Biennale, which is usually so profoundly nationalistic, is, I hope, prophetic.

I think the Venice Biennale has to change its concept. The notion of countries competing against one another for frivolous prizes, is obsolete in the new world. I've thought of a rough idea. You have a commissioner appointed from each country. They would have the obligation to review works from all of the countries in the Biennale and make a critical selection that would be the presentation for their country. You'd still have your

judges . . . we don't want to put the judges out of work . . . and the pavilion itself would be judged on the quality of selection by the particular commissioner.

So you would have all nations exhibiting in each of the pavilions?

You don't have to do that if a certain judge can't find, say, a Japanese or American painting that he likes. So it would be varied. I think this new concept would brighten up interest in the Biennale, which seems to be pretty dim now.

How did you feel being there in Venice with these young artists? Most of them were out of the Soviet Union for the first time and in one of the more remarkable locations in the entire world. You spent so much time with them, exhibiting with them, dining with them, talking with them.

I felt as though I had a brand new family I had adopted and nobody was more than twenty-one. The Russians didn't give them a budget. All the pavilions were having their openings and the Russians didn't have any budget to buy food or refreshments. So I gave them some money but with no advice. They took it and bought vodka, which is natural, Coca-Cola, and pickles . . . gherkins.

There was a significant investment in the American, English, and French pavilions and so on, but virtually a zero dollar outlay for the Soviet pavilion. Yet there was a kind of energy there that I did not sense in the glitz of some of the other shows. I spent time in the Soviet Union with you meeting artists and it somehow reminded me of New York in the late 1950s where we got together over someone's kitchen table and argued ideas.

Me, too. I found a new energy in that pavilion. When I was in Russia, the interviewers and the television people had the same question, "What do you think of new Russian art?" I had to hedge at that time and said, "Well, you know, it's been a long time since the young artists have been exposed to any other ideas and, in fact, they've gotten into trouble if they've had any other ideas. Give it at least five years and maybe ten for them to catch up with the outside world." I was wrong because they caught up overnight with some of the most exciting work. They were young and rough but somehow the uniqueness came overnight and so did the energy that you were familiar with in New York.

Have you ever been a juror for an art show?

No.

Why not?

I think there is room enough for everything.

Do you feel it is implicitly wrong to have a competition in art?

It is for me. I mean I've been in competitions and the art world is based on competition for success and power. But when all the abstract expressionists and I were good friends, I was crazy about Rothko's paintings and De Kooning's and Franz Kline's and any number of others but I had so much respect for them that I knew there were millions of other things I could do even though I'd still love to paint a Rothko. You don't have to be in the same place someone else is and, if you stop moving, you are going to get in their way.

I once heard you respond to a question about what your favorite painting was from a series you were working on at that time and you said, "I don't do that kind of thing." What did you mean by that?

If I do have a favorite painting, it's usually from some sentimental detail in it which has nothing to do with art. I mostly like making the art rather than admiring it or thinking of it as a great accomplishment. I usually stop working on a piece of art, know it's finished when it starts looking like the next painting. That's where you let go and do the next painting or sculpture.

We met with representatives of East Berlin in Moscow during the exhibition. You were adamant about two issues: the shows in East and West Berlin had to take place simultaneously or with significant overlap and they had to share the catalogue. Perhaps more than any show there was an immediate effort to intervene politically. With this gesture at uniting the separate Germans, we kept meeting more and more resistance because we were told that everything happens in "little steps" in East Germany. You wanted to take a rather giant step toward reunification. There was no discussion of reunification at that time.

My plan was that there would be art buses passing Checkpoint Charlie, even with armed guards, that the East Berliners were allowed to see the West Berlin show and vice versa.

Well, they wouldn't have that. There was a letter written to Erich Honecker, General Secretary for the Central Com-



ROCI BERLIN

mittee, asking for his help. He replied in an ambiguous letter that indicated it was a wonderful idea but implicit was the fact that he had no intention of helping in any way. The West Berliners were willing to help with some financing for the East Berliners but it was impossible to get the East Berliners to agree to a simultaneous show.

They finally did agree that West Berlin could have the show immediately after the East Berlin show. So not only did they want the exhibition first, but they absolutely insisted that it not overlap at all which would have been difficult. I mean ROCI has enough artwork representing the different countries that we could have put on two separate shows. But to me that was against the attitude of what ROCI stood for. So we refused. I was in Zurich when the so-called opening of the wall occurred, though it wasn't really opened until sometime later. Two days after the announcement, we were there and already had the show organized.

Wolfgang Polak, Director of the Zentrum für Kunstausstellungen of the now defunct German Democratic Republic, made a supreme effort to arrange a coordinated East/West ROCI show, but the extraordinarily refined bureaucracy from which permission was necessary was too overwhelming. Coincidentally, with the candlelight marches in Leipzig and the imminent destruction of the wall, he arrived in New York as a guest of the U. S. I. A. It was his first time west of the wall and he was deposited at a hotel bordering Hell's Kitchen. He was alone, called Florida, and found I was in New York. We were able to make contact almost immediately. I thought it would be wonderful to show him Roy Lichtenstein's painting at the Equitable Building nearby and have dinner. Over dinner he lamented the fact that he had left East Berlin just when ferment had at last borne changes. I took him to the World Trade Center and then for a ride on the Staten Island Ferry. After all, what does one do in New York with a first date who also happens to be a virgin? As we floated past the Statue of Liberty, tearful, he became quite poetic about freedom, so much so and so wonderfully, that I could never do justice to it by paraphrase. He then asked if we could now do the ROCI exhibition in East Berlin. When I called you that night, you were painting and watching the news about Berlin. I asked you if you now felt it appropriate to do the show in East and West Berlin. You said we will do only an East Berlin show since it will all be one Berlin in the near future. And it now is. You were leaving for Zurich the next day for an opening and we met three days later in East Berlin for you to begin work and to complete the logistics. The show opened only weeks later.

We had Malaysia to go to but I already had been to Malaysia to do the research and then went to Berlin. If you want to talk about a culture shock, Malaysia to Berlin is really about as extreme as you can get.

The exoticism of Malaysia, where they have the Portuguese, Chinese, Malaysians, and the Indians In Malaysia I had been to the installation of the new king. I've never seen so many jewels in my life, and I used to have a job at Tiffany's! The next day we took off in a helicopter, ending up in a dugout in Sarawak with head hunters. After Malaysia, going to Berlin with all its austerity, poverty, and grayness was really a shock.

The paintings for Berlin are realistic in that sense. I don't know that I have heard you called a realist but . . .

They are quite literal but I think that part of the responsibility of the artworks done for that country is



ROCI MALAYSIA

that they have to somehow mirror the environment. The paintings for Cuba were as colorful, I think, as anybody can paint. I think the ones for Berlin are about as gray as you can paint. But I just came from all the color in Malaysia and I didn't want to lose my grip on the experiences that I had had there. I had to do a quick investigation of the possibilities that were in East Berlin.

When you offered to give a ROCI painting of Berlin to the museum for the people of Germany, the curators did not want that painting; they wanted a ROCI CUBA painting instead. They did not fully understand the nature and purpose of the gift and your autonomy. Their aspirations were what they would like to appear to be as opposed to what they actually were.

They just loved the color of the Cuban paintings.

You were sympathetic to the East Germans living in an environment that was a product of a kind of Prussian-

Maoist bureaucracy . . . an imprisonment climate supported by an infrastructure of oppression and fear.

That had the worst of all the influences that created it. In fact the Russians said, when we were in Russia, that Berlin is much more communist and restrictive than Russia. I mean they have an officialdom. They take bureaucracy to the absolute absurd.

The provinces breed extremism and . . .

The more exaggerated if it's an affected culture. The exaggeration and excess of that particular culture are unembarrassed. In fact it has a pride attached to it, like how communistic can you get? It was definitely a cultivated taste.

We saw the Chinese spewing poisons and smoke into the atmosphere, almost worshipping that as a symbol of progress. You were in Sarawak in Borneo and they were removing the rain forests. That must have been another kind of exaggerated human activity, not bureaucracy, but perhaps capitalism in its most exaggerated and destructive . . .

Only one aspect of capitalism and that was greed. By cutting down these thousands-of-years-old forests, they didn't think they were improving the country. But they were running all of the Indians out because most of the tribes live off of hunting. The saws and the equipment and the lack of the trees made hunting not work anymore. I bought something like five hundred silkscreened "Save the Forest" T-shirts and actually the art work on the T-shirts was tops. Then I got a bunch of bamboo bracelets. I wanted to help them. I didn't want to insult them by just leaving some money. But this was all to fight the government situated in Kuala Lumpur. In fact, the governor in the area where they were cutting down all the trees said a group of Indians came to him to complain that they couldn't fish or hunt anymore. He said, "I've never cared for hunting or fishing. I like golf." This is their leader.

Did you live with the natives at all?

I didn't really live with them but I stayed in a couple of long houses. The one with the head hunters, the Iban tribe, was a beautiful, romantic, terrifying situation. Before the evening dances started, the chief and his deputy brought out a chicken and rather crudely killed it, announcing that they had made the sacrifice of the

chicken so none of their guests would have to shed blood that night. Then they pulled off four feathers, the number in our party, dipped the point into the chicken blood and slightly pricked each guest. Now I'm sure that was the chicken we had for dinner later but it was a very serious ceremony. I mean, I hadn't been thinking about shedding blood that night . . . until then.

You tend to gravitate to the aboriginal, native people of a country. You did it in Venezuela; you spent much more time in the Amazonas Territory in Venezuela than you did in Caracas, much more time in Sarawak than you did in Kuala Lumpur.

Well, I understand an urban society a lot quicker once I get a representative collection of materials. But a really foreign situation takes longer, even superficially, to understand. For example, in Malaysia they insisted on doing a cock fight. I don't even like bull fighting but I knew that this went further than just a sports event. It turns out that a cock fight precedes all weddings and funerals, but I wouldn't have known that; you can't just assume that. Neither cock was hurt. I think they are too valuable. They certainly were gorgeous.

For ROCI at the National Gallery, you recently completed a series of new works based on photographs of the U. S. A. that you have taken over the years.

And some new ones.

All the surfaces are reflective. We can watch the lights dance over the crumpled metal and wax surfaces. Will you tell me why you chose this material?

In the first place I don't like explaining the whys of what I do because I think that robs the unique experiences and eliminates or makes it difficult for somebody to have an independent reaction. For example, in 1949 I said if somebody knows what something else means then the physicality and the actuality and the responsibility of the viewer dies. Jasper Johns had a schoolteacher in South Carolina, I think, and she had a gentleman visitor who came often and always sat opposite a Moholy-Nagy and stared at it all through the evening. After months the guest said, "What is that?" and she said, "That's a space modulator" and he said, "Oh," and he never looked back at it.

Understanding is a form of blindness. Good art, I think, can never be understood.

But I did pick the reflective surface because I thought it represented a kind of—I don't know if this is the word—"garish" quality of American life. Somehow, because we are such a young country, it seems to pick up as many outside reflections as possible so I just made a bed for whatever is going on around the work to reflect that immediacy.

Is that similar to the white paintings in that respect?

In a sense, yes. I think it was John Cage who wrote about my early all-white paintings that, if one were sensitive enough, one could tell the time of day by them. And certainly you've seen the new *ROCI USA* one that's hanging here on the wall change and tell us what time it is and who is in the room. In fact, while I was working on them, I had my back to the door and I could say hello or goodbye to anyone who was coming or going without turning around.

Like, they say, having eyes in the back of your head?

Well, in this case you need them in the front and the back.

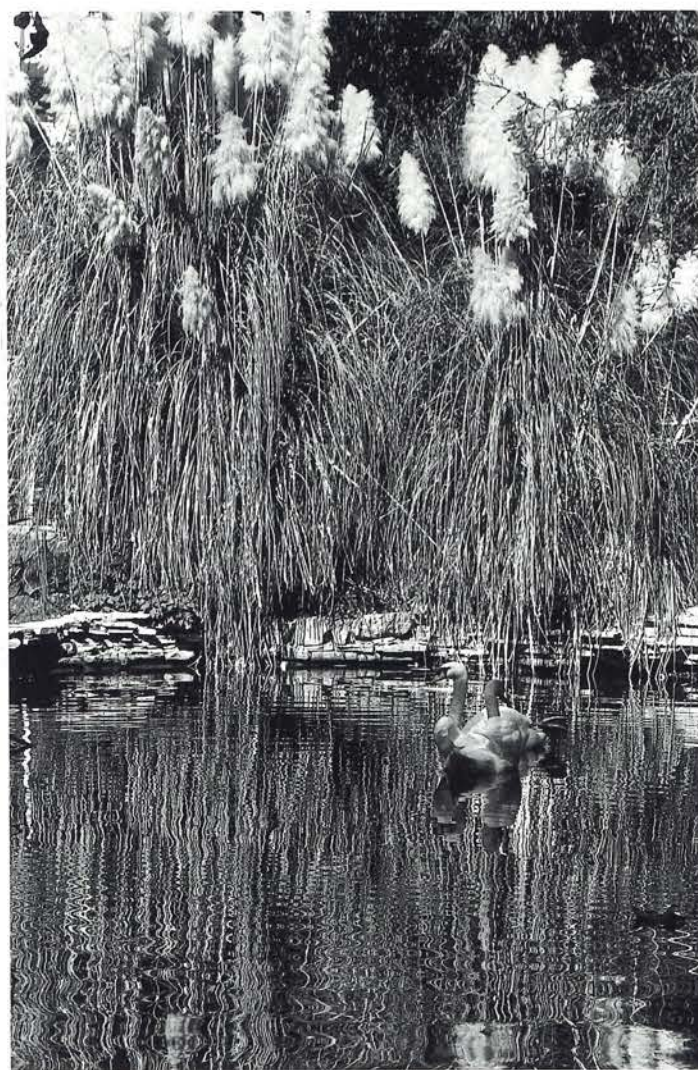
Because of your sensibilities, did the American work present the same pitfalls for you as did the *ROCI TIBET* art?

Well, the American work has a different pitfall. That is, no matter how I try, I really can't have the objectivity of a foreigner here. I make it part of my everyday exercise to try to see everything, then try to look back at it as something else without having to spoil the reality of it. That's where the photography comes in handy. There is no place in America I can go that I haven't already been that can compare to the sort of realistic wonderment that I have in a society in which I have to learn as much as I can in a short time, about the histories, the reasons of this being this way and what that is and then what it means to somebody else. Because I can be surprised first and then find out why that was there. In America the mysteries are bypassed so I can't just move intuitively. I already know too much.

I don't think it's preconceptions; it's the familiarities. I mean, while we are talking, I'm just realizing I don't have any shots of the Grand Canyon

Please tell me what "change" means to you.

One of the things that terrifies people more than anything else is change. But I also think that our greatest



ROCI USA

enemy is making assumptions that things are going to be the same. As a professional painter for forty years or so, my ideas have changed many times because I'm terrified that I might discover the "right" way. I'm not interested in the "right" way. I want all the other ways. That's where I think the freshness is . . . in the changes. And that's where the energy is . . . in the difficulty in making the changes. Once you've made the change and you have succeeded, well, then you can fall asleep. Sleep is my enemy.

Do you depict a world for us that is both Botticelli and Bosch?

Whether I am working in shadows or silks or atrocities or just the street corner, I think it's headed toward—it's certainly meant to—a realization of "you are here."

You have actively followed the space program—the moon shots in particular. Is that also about "you are here?"

Of course, it is. I got involved with the Apollos and then the shuttle. I thought that both of those situations had the possibility of enlarging and acknowledging, also just as realistically as a new "here." In Japan I exhibited, in a one-night show, no less than forty ceramic artworks done in Shigaraki and I had a rather hysterical press conference. One of the questions that I remember the answer to was, "What is your greatest fear?" and I said, "That I might run out of world."

The thing that's been a constant over all these years is that I believe that art is communication so that the message has to change with the time. Something that I did in 1950 would not be necessary to do today. If I can possibly show to anyone that the world belongs to them, to each person, then the work is successful. And if I succeed in being a great artist, then there won't be any need for artists any more.

Fortunately, at a very early age, I decided that there were so many ways to work that no one had to work like

someone else. You just had to be better with the same idea. There's enough room that I don't have to step on your feet and there are enough ideas that have not been discovered so that, if I work like you, then you're going to be in my way. It was very tempting because I grew up at a time when Pollock, Rothko, De Kooning, and Barney Newman were in America and very accessible. I would love to have painted like them but, out of respect, I couldn't. So there had to be another way. And since then there have been many other ways.

One of the reasons that I am so thankful that I'm an artist is that the language of being an artist works anywhere. There is no country that is so rich or so poor that they don't have an artistic culture. Artists always understand each other . . . I even feel restricted with the world as small as it is already. I'm trying to take advantage of as much of it as possible. I'm old enough that I probably won't run out of land, but I would like to go to the moon.

CHRONOLOGY: 1984-1991

This chronology encapsulates the complex events of the international collaboration and scheduling of ROCI. Dates of the touring exhibitions, the artist's advance research and working trips, and the speculative negotiations for possible future venues are included.

Most of the organizational and administrative work for ROCI was carried out at the artist's studio on Captiva Island, Florida; his archive office in New York City; and the ROCI headquarters, first at Graphicstudio, University of South Florida at Tampa, and then at Saff Tech Arts, Tampa, and Oxford, Maryland.

Despite this elaborate infrastructure, ROCI was essentially an "itinerant," flexible project. The events that together comprise key elements of its history from 1984 to the present are chronicled here.

Donald J. Saff, ROCI's artistic director, and his assistant Brenda Woodard frequently traveled on ROCI surveys and other negotiating trips. Terry Van Brunt was the artist's traveling companion through most of the ROCI tour, and he and others made hundreds of hours of videotapes, recording what the artist saw and experienced in each country. When we list the travels of Saff and Rauschenberg it is understood there was often an entourage.

The Rauschenberg Captiva, New York, and ROCI staffs have included: Rick Begneaud, Thomas Bühler, Emil Fray, Lauren Getford, Nicholas Howey, Bradley Jeffries, Denise Le Beau, Lawrence Massing, Michael Moneagle, Sheryl Long, John Peet, Alex Rudinski, Pam Schmidt, Rodney Schmidt, Hisachika Takahashi, Ilona Tullmin, Lawrence Voytek, David White, and Charles Yoder. Special mention should be given to Rauschenberg's assistants Darryl Pottorf and Terry Van Brunt who helped the artist produce the more than 125 works of art created for the specific ROCI exhibitions.

Other consultants for special aspects of ROCI over the years included: Michele Archambault, Rubin Gorewitz, Bennet Grutman, Sam Houston, Ted Kheel, Anne Livet, Ruth Saff, and the late Steve Reichard.

A list of key individuals at each ROCI exhibition venue follows. In Mexico, Robert Littman, director, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Ana Zagury, Françoise Reynaud Pancha, Carlos Cordoba, Sarah Sloane, Miriam Minkow, Eduardo Rossi, Octavio Paz, Emilio Azcárraga, Hector Tagonar, Ambassador John Gavin, Dolores Olmedo, and Manuel Álvarez Bravo; in Chile, Nena Ossa, director, Museo

Nacional de Bellas Artes, Mario Stein, Monica Gelcíc, Augustín Edwards, Carmen Beuchat, José Donoso; in Venezuela, Sofia Imber, director, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Caracas, Carlos Rangel, Rita Salvestrini, Arturo Uslar-Pietri, William Reynolds, Marilyn McAfee, John Russell, Harvey Schwartz; in China and Tibet, Chun-Wuei Su Chien, Chih-Yung Chien, Chang Jianguo, Wu Zuguang, Laba Pingcūo; in Japan, Seiji Oshima, director, Setagaya Art Museum, Fujiko Nakaya, Junichi Shioda, Mr. Okada, Tono, Warren Obluck, Hiroyuki Watanabe, David Cordova; in Cuba, Roberto Fernández Retamar, director, Casa de las Américas, Lucy Villegas, director, Museo Nacional, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Rodolfo Gil, Alejandro Alonso, Lillian Llanes, director, Centro Wilfredo Lam, José Ayala, Ana Vilma Castellanos, Clinton Adlum, Armando Hart, Beatriz Aulet, Blanca Acosta, Lesbia Vent Dumois, Edward Saff, Jeff Saff, Steve Saff, Alicia Alonso; in the Soviet Union, Tahir Salakhov, First Secretary, Board of the USSR Artists' Union, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, the late Dr. Armand Hammer, Richard Jacobs, William McSweeney, Deborah La Lond, Nina Vlassova, Yelena Militanian, Anatoly Ryzhnikov, Andrei Surotsev, Michael Mikheyev, Vladymir Kuropatov, director, Central House of Artists, Mr. Panchenko, Director of Goskontsert, Asya Shkondima, Andrei Voznesensky, V. I. Kazenin, Ambassador Jack Matlock, Victor Jackovich, Rosemary DiCarlo, John Joyce, Philip Brown, Alex Rudinski, Vladimir Tseltner; in Berlin, Wolfgang Polak, director, Zentrum für Kunstausstellungen der DDR, Heiner Müller, Dieter Ruckhaberle, director of the Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin, Dietmar Keller, Günter Rieger, Günter Schlien, Kunstspedition APV, Peter Hartmann; in Malaysia, Syed Ahmad Jamal, director, National Art Gallery, Khalid Haji Ismail, Janet Echelman, Muhammed Haji Salleh, Malaysia Airlines, Hamdan Yaacob, Alex and Irena Lee, Mohammed Asri Abdul Ghaffar.

Friends of the artist who assisted in some or all of the ROCI tour exhibitions are: Trisha Brown, Bill Goldston and Riccarda de Eccher, Sidney Felsen and Joni Weyl, Robert Hughes, and Richard Landry.

Others involved in the ROCI project included: Arte-Media, the BBC, Keith Brintzenhofe, Crozier Fine Arts, David Epstein, Nigel Finch, Sue Ginsburg, Graphicstudio, U. S. F., Robert Gray, Senator Paula Hawkins, Larry Kars, W. R. Keating & Company, Mary Lynn Kotz, Alfred Kren,

Kunstspedition APV, Emily Fisher Landau, Maury Leibovitz, Arnold Levine, Donald Massey, Pamela McCormick, Robert and Jane Meyerhoff, Rennert Bilingual, Mark Robertson, Saff Tech Arts, the late Frank Saunders, Günter Schlien, Senator Robert Stafford, Universal Limited Art Editions, and, at U. S. F., Francis Borkowski, John Lott Brown, Wendy Elias, Brenda Gettig, Sandy Labyris, Willard McCracken, Kelly Medei, Susan Moore, Gregory O'Brien, Deli Sacilotto, and Helma Wishaupt.

1984

August

Saff to Mexico City where he is joined by Rauschenberg. They visit the Tamayo Museum and meet with Octavio Paz. The artist works in Toluca, Oaxaca, and elsewhere.

Saff meets with Jack Cowart at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. They prepare a proposal for the Gallery to display the completed *ROCI* exhibition at the end of the world tour. Director J. Carter Brown agrees to present this proposal to the Gallery's Board of Trustees for their formal approval in January 1985.

September

First organizational meetings of *Captiva* and *ROCI* staff, with consultants, to plan exhibitions, schedules, and possible funding.

Meeting with Chun-Wuei Su Chien to begin planning for a *ROCI* China exhibition.

University of South Florida president John Lott Brown confirms participation in and support of *ROCI* project.

October

Chih-Yung Chien reports encouraging response from China for a *ROCI* exhibition.

Saff travels to Lima, Peru, for preliminary discussions with the director of the Museo de Arte. The theft of Saff's equipment in the Lima airport and numerous security and customs problems make it appear too risky to send *ROCI* to Peru. He continues to Santiago, Chile, to meet with the director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and artists. Chile agrees to *ROCI* exhibition.



MUSEO RUFINO TAMAYO
MEXICO CITY

Rauschenberg travels to Tobago where he writes the "Tobago statement." Rauschenberg to Santiago, where he stays into November, visiting the countryside, copper mines, and the desert, and discusses the catalogue essay with José Donoso. Earthquake and riots in Chile.

Saff to Buenos Aires, Argentina, to meet with the director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, artists, and publishers. No agreement could be concluded.

November

Saff to São Paulo, Brazil, to survey Museu de Arte do São Paulo and Museu de Arte Moderno and meet with their directors; then to Belo Horizonte, Ouro Preto, Manaus; and to Caracas, Venezuela, to meet with the director of the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Caracas.

Buenos Aires agrees to exhibit *ROCI* but the dates for the China exhibition preclude an additional showing in South America. Chun-Wuei Su Chien goes to China to work on Beijing exhibition.

Saff to New York meetings with Tamayo Museum director and staff for a ROCI exhibition, then to Europe to research potential ROCI sites.

December

Saff to Venice where the director of Palazzo Grassi declines the exhibition; to Milan to survey Palazzo Reale; then to Madrid to survey the Crystal and Velázquez Palaces and to consider spaces in Barcelona.

China agrees to schedule the exhibition in Beijing.

Official announcement of the ROCI world tour at the United Nations.

1985

January

New York meetings with National Gallery director and staff concerning the Washington ROCI exhibition, a ROCI collection at the Gallery, and Gallery events and receptions with foreign host embassies and cultural communities.

Saff to Caracas, then Madrid, planning for ROCI in Ministry spaces, Fundació Caixa de Pensions, or Museo de Español de Arte Contemporaneo. However, these issues were never resolved and Rauschenberg elects not to pursue an exhibition in Spain.

The Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Art approves the ROCI exhibition Washington venue, collection, and reception program.

February

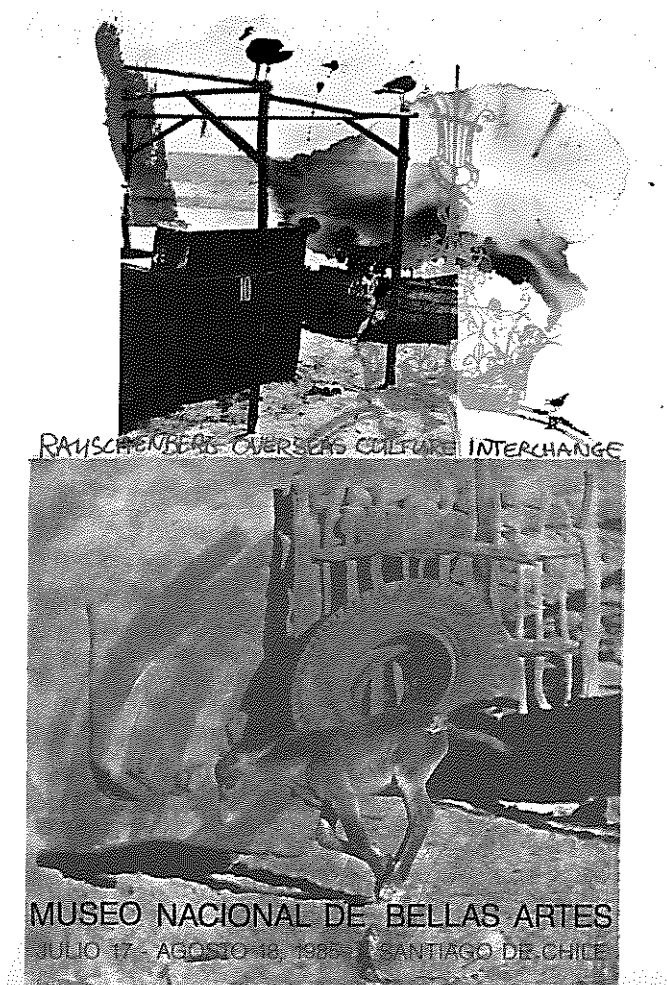
Exhibition contract signed by Museo Tamayo, Mexico City.

Saff and Chun-Wuei Su Chien to Beijing, China, then to Weifang, Chu Fu, Chengdu. At Saff's insistence they travel to Lhasa where they successfully negotiate second exhibit.

Discussions concerning a possible exhibition in Yugoslavia.

March

Earthquake in Chile; Museo de Bellas Artes suffers substantial damages but the staff remains committed to the exhibition. Meetings with National Gallery staff; then Saff meets with Senator Howard Metzenbaum and NEA staff concerning hoped-for indemnity application.



Officials in Lhasa confirm interest in the exhibition. Beijing showing space is doubled.

April

The artist and ROCI staff travel to Mexico City.

roci at Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, 4/17/85-6/23/85.

Montevideo, Uruguay, and Calle, Colombia, express interest in the exhibition.

May

Museo Correr, Venice, expresses interest in ROCI, to coincide with the Venice Biennale. José Donoso voices concerns that the Chilean situation (state of siege, curfew, his detention) may compromise his proposed article for the ROCI catalogue. Further discussions will eventually permit Donoso to write for the catalogue.

Cancellation of the Caracas exhibition threatened due to lack of financing; agreement reached whereby Venezuelan army transports will fly the ROCI exhibition from Chile to Caracas if ROCI pays for fuel.

ROCI MEXICO: National Gallery Reception for Altar Peace.

Lhasa sends final approval of the ROCI exhibition there.

June

Rauschenberg and Saff travel to Caracas. The artist begins work in Venezuela and travels to the Amazonas Territory.

July

Rauschenberg to Maricao; returns to Caracas; to Santiago for exhibition, interviews, press conferences.

ROCI at Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, 7/17/85-8/18/85.

ROCI CHILE: National Gallery Reception for Copperhead Grande.

September

The artist and ROCI team to Caracas for press conference and opening.

ROCI at Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Caracas, 9/12/85-10/27/85.

October

ROCI VENEZUELA: National Gallery Reception for Urban/Interior Network.

November

ROCI at National Art Gallery, Beijing, 11/15/85-12/5/85.

The artist attends opening and press conference and meets with students.

Trisha Brown Dance Company performs in Beijing.

Rauschenberg to Osaka; Tokyo; returns to Beijing; to Chengdu, and then Lhasa for opening, press conference, and meetings.

December

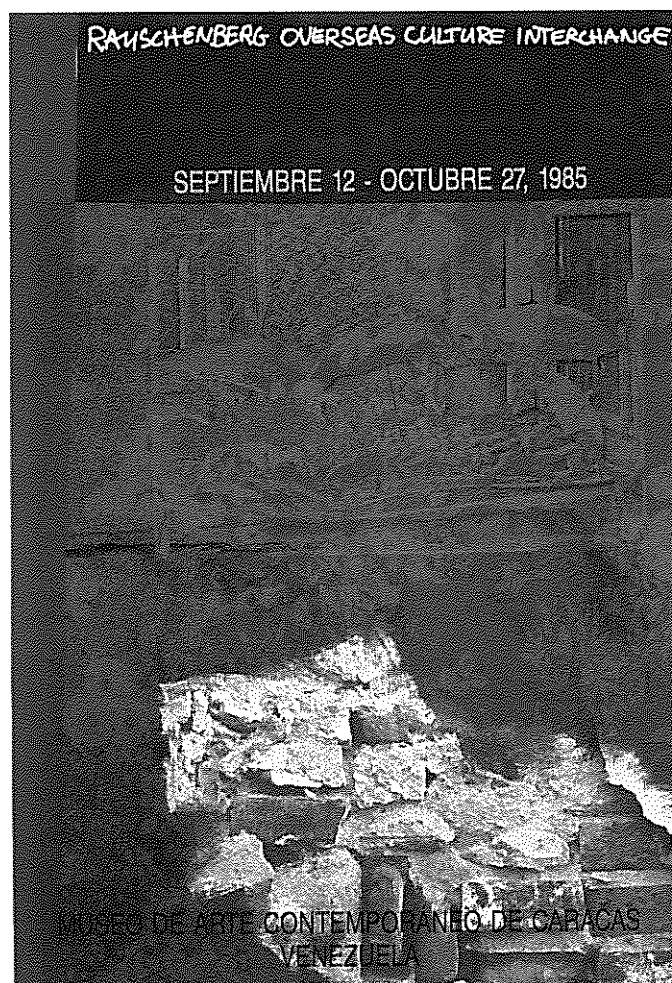
ROCI at Tibet Exhibition Hall, Lhasa, 12/02/85-12/23/85.

The artist to Beijing and Osaka.

1986

January

Exhibition goes into storage in Japan.



February

Saff meets in Washington with Senator Edward Kennedy to initiate changes in artists' rights and copyright based on preparatory legal work by Ruth Saff; negotiations for artists' royalties and indemnification. Artists' rights and copyright legislation will pass Congress in 1990.

March

ROCI CHINA: National Gallery Reception for Sino-Trolley.

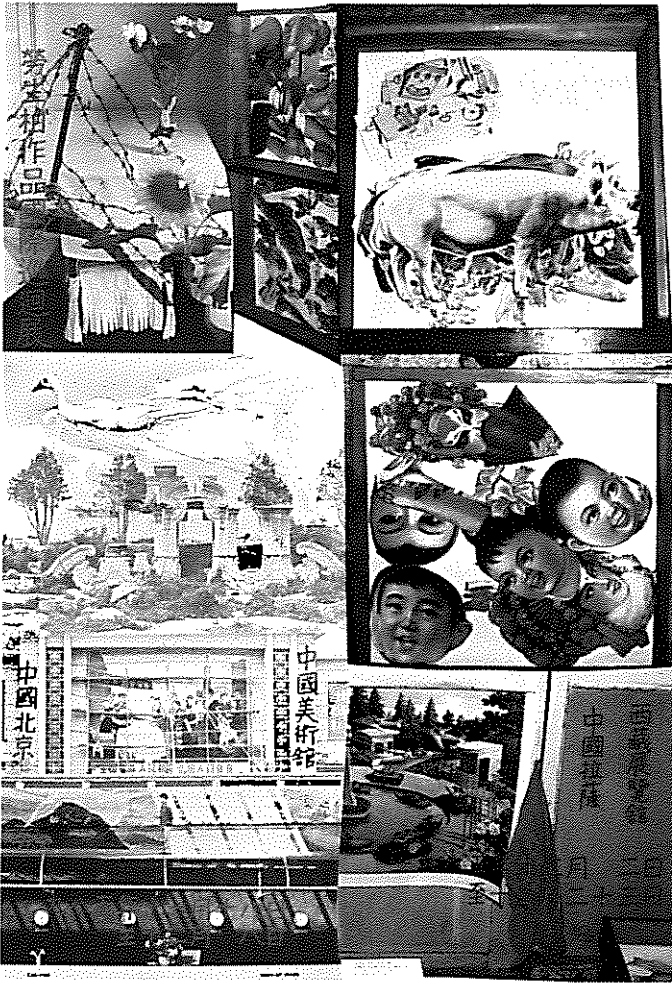
August-October

Agreement concluded for ROCI exhibition in Tokyo. Plans made for loan of a single Rauschenberg work for "Interlink Exhibition" in Tokyo. Attempts to raise funds through Japanese companies prove futile.

November

Rauschenberg to Tokyo for press conference and opening.

ROCI at Setagaya Museum, Tokyo, 11/22/86-12/28/86.



1987

January

Saff sends formal expression of interest in a ROCI exhibition in Havana to the Cuban Minister of Culture.

March

ROCI JAPAN: National Gallery Reception for Wall-Eyed Carp.

April

Roberto Fernández Retamar writes proposing ROCI CUBA at Casa de las Américas, Havana.

August

Saff and his sons travel to Havana. Cuban Ministry agrees to ROCI exhibition. Retamar will write the essay and the show will be divided among the Castillo de la Fuerza, Museo Nacional, and Casa de las Américas.

Rauschenberg to Cuba to travel throughout the country and begin work.

December

Plans with Dr. Armand Hammer for a trip to the Soviet Union.

Saff to Cuba for exhibition negotiations.

1988

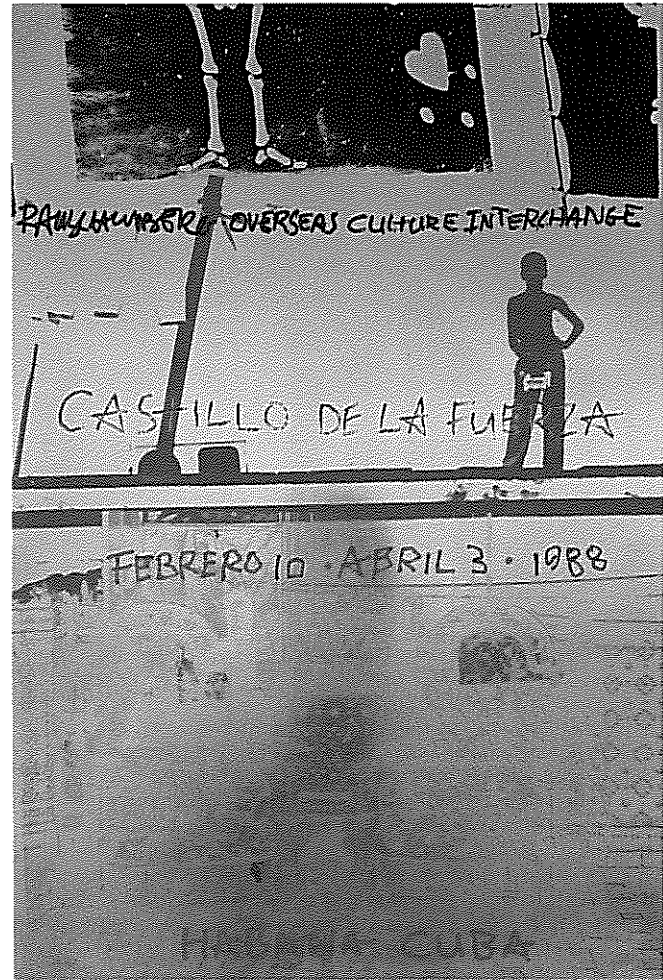
January

Problems with one of the shipments to Cuba; then sent through Mexico. Requested permission from Cuban Ministry of Communication to use ham radio equipment for transmission. After much delay, temporary license refused.

February

Rauschenberg to Havana for interviews and opening.

U. S. guests approved by the Cuban Interests Section depart Miami for Havana. The artist, Saff, and a few team



members meet with Fidel Castro at a state conference of writers.

roci at Museo Nacional, Casa de las Américas, and Castillo de la Fuerza, Havana 2/10/88-4/3/88.

April

Saff and the artist to the Soviet Union. Meetings with head of Artists' Union and Minister of Culture.

July

Rauschenberg to Leningrad, becomes an honorary member of the Artists' Union. Saff to Moscow. The artist leaves Leningrad for Tbilisi with Saff; the artist to Samarkand.

August

Saff to Washington to discuss possible exhibition in the Philippines.

October

Saff to Moscow to meet with Artists' Union; then meets

with museum officials in East and West Berlin for possible roci exhibitions there.

1989

January

Letter to Secretary Honecker (GDR) asking for assistance in arranging simultaneous exhibitions in East and West Berlin.

Saff and Rauschenberg to Moscow for press conference, interviews, and opening.

February

roci at Central House of Artists, Moscow 2/2/89-3/5/89.

Trisha Brown Dance Company performs premiere of "Astral Convertible" at Palace of Culture, Moscow, with sets and costumes by Rauschenberg.



April

Letter from Wolfgang Polak saying the people of East Germany would be disappointed not to have the ROCI exhibition. Rauschenberg is prepared to cancel the exhibition due to the extreme resistance by some officials to his requirement that there be simultaneous East-West showings.

ROCI CUBA: National Gallery Reception for Cuban Acre.

Preliminary plans for a ROCI venue in Southeast Asia.

May

Janet Echelman travels from Bali to Kuala Lumpur surveying facilities for ROCI MALAYSIA.

The artist cancels ROCI BERLIN.

June

Saff negotiates with the Greek Cultural Attaché regarding a proposed ROCI exhibition in Greece. Eventually, how-

ever, the schedule did not permit this exhibit. Saff begins researching of exhibition sites for ROCI in Africa.

August

Saff to Kuala Lumpur where he meets with the director of National Gallery and others; to Bali to survey spaces and meet with officials. Letter to head of National Arts Council in Harare, Zimbabwe, inquiring about 1990 possible ROCI exhibition.

September-October

Rauschenberg to Kuala Lumpur to begin work for ROCI MALAYSIA paintings. Attends installation ceremony of the Malaysian king and then visits Melaka, Pulau Pinang, Koto Gharu, Kuala Terengganu, Kuching, the Iban tribe in Sarawak, and Miri.

November

ROCI BERLIN discussions revived due to opening of Berlin Wall. Wolfgang Polak arrives in New York and arrangements are made to bring ROCI to Berlin. The artist and team members to Berlin for research.



December

Rauschenberg accepts Ministry of Culture invitation to exhibit, in the USSR pavilion at the 1990 Venice Biennale, "Rauschenberg to Us - We to Rauschenberg."

1990

February

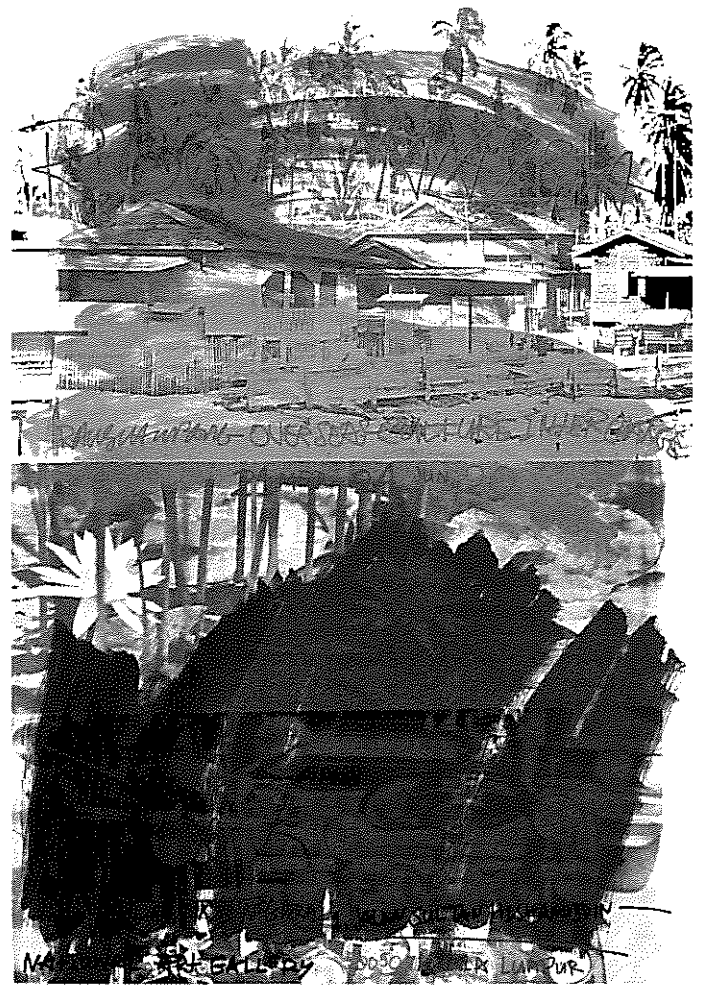
Letters from ROCI to Minister of Culture of the Republic of Senegal in response to their interest in a ROCI AFRICA exhibition.

March

Saff to Dakar, Senegal.

The artist to Berlin for press conference, meetings, and opening.

ROCI at Neue Berliner Gallerie im Alten Museum, Berlin, 3/10/90-4/1/90.



April

Plans for ROCI AFRICA abandoned given lack of available space, shipping complications, and lack of time between ROCI MALAYSIA and the opening of the ROCI exhibition in Washington.

May

The artist and ROCI team arrive in Kuala Lumpur.

ROCI at National Art Gallery (Balai Seni Lukis Negara), Kuala Lumpur, 5/21/90-6/24/90.

Artist departs Kuala Lumpur for Venice to participate in the Soviet pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

June

ROCI USSR: National Gallery Reception for Samarkand Stitches and Soviet/American Arrays.

September

ROCI MALAYSIA: National Gallery Reception for Malaysian Flower Cave.

October

Saff Tech Arts crew to Captiva to work with the artist on ROCI USA pieces. BBC begins interviews and filming for feature about ROCI. Artist's sixty-fifth birthday.

November

ROCI BERLIN: National Gallery Reception for Bach's Rocks.

1991**May**

Artist to Washington for press conference, public programs, and opening.

roci at National Gallery of Art, Washington, 5/12/91-9/3/91, where Trisha Brown Dance Company presents the world premiere of "Astral Convertible II," commissioned by the National Gallery of Art, and "Astral Convertible," with sets and costumes designed by Rauschenberg. Donation of the ROCI collection of key paintings, sculpture, and objects to the National Gallery of Art, by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. Additional ROCI gifts from Saff Tech Arts and the artist; Graphicstudio, U. S. F. and the artist; Gemini, G. E. L. and the artist; and Universal Limited Art Editions and the artist.

COMPILED BY BRENDA WOODARD AND BRADLEY JEFFRIES
WITH JACK COWART

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