

Interview of **ANTONIO HOMEM**

Conducted by **KAREN THOMAS**, Interviewer

Interviews with Rauschenberg Friends and Associates. RRFA 08.
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

March 14, 2011

New York – Washington, DC by Telephone

Session #1

INTERVIEWER: To set you in context I realize I don't know very much about how you became associated with the Gallery.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes. It's going to be a long story. You have to be careful with me.
[Laughter]

Well, let's put it this way -- that I was studying engineering in Switzerland, to please my parents but not very interested myself in what I was doing. And then I knew some friends who knew a little about what was going on in New York. Actually, I knew one, basically. I had met someone called Mark Egger, who is an artist in Switzerland, but who came a lot to New York, and who -- you know -- who knew people around the art scene. This was back in 1964, it was quite early.

At this point he helped Bruno Bischofberger, who had opened a gallery very recently, to make a show of Pop Art with Ileana Sonnabend. I was invited for that dinner and the opening. I happened to be sitting in front of Ileana, and I actually didn't know who she was. During the dinner I found out that she was Ileana and I was considering following up what was going on in Paris with her gallery, which sounded fascinating.

INTERVIEWER: And this dinner was in New York, or was it in Paris?

HOMEM: No, no. This was in Zurich, for Bruno Bischofberger, the opening of his show. So we started talking. I was married at the time, and my ex-wife and I would go to Paris sometimes, and we met Michael Sonnabend, and Ileana, and we started seeing them when we would go to Paris. At the point in 1965. ... [Laughter]...it was such a long time.

My ex-wife and I -- well, she thought that she would be interested in doing the kind of thing I *was* interested in doing, and going to -- and so she thought she would go and work in Paris with modern art, and she first tried go to a gallery called Iris Clert, who was quite interesting, and the owner was Greek, as my ex-wife was. We also had bought a painting from her and we thought that would be interesting but it didn't really happen. I told my ex-wife, "Well, why don't you go and work for Ileana. We know her well. We are not asking to be paid - - just out of interest and learning. I'm sure she'll take you." And she did take her. But a few

months after, in the beginning of '66, my ex-wife and I decided we were going to separate, and she also decided that she was leaving all of that, and going away.

So when I went back to Paris in '66, Ileana had, actually, a very beautiful show -- Lichtenstein -- and we spoke about the departure of my ex-wife, which Ileana and Michael were sorry about, and they invited me to come and see them in Venice, during the Biennale -- which, where actually Lichtenstein and a few others' were. I went, and Ileana told me, "Well, you know, we really think it is you who is interested in all of this. You remind me so much of Leo Castelli, who for so many years worked in things that were not what he was interested in, when what he really wanted to do was be involved with art. You should think about it. Why don't you come and join the Gallery?" I felt I had a duty towards my parents to finish my studies -- which was stupid, but at the time I think it made sense, and I told her so -- and I went back to Zurich. By 1968, two years after, I had finished my studies, and it was quite clear to me that I really didn't want to be an engineer. I thought I really want to open a gallery in Zurich. I had become quite close as a friend, and actually not really working at the gallery of Bruno Bischofberger, but spending a lot of time there, and doing, actually, much of what I would be doing if had I been working there. But I was doing it just for pleasure. And it was a very good education, probably. And I thought I would like to open a gallery in Zurich. I didn't think that Bruno covered all the ground that there was to cover, and I thought, well, I'd like to go and work with Ileana and Michael, as they had proposed. That, of course, would teach me so many things, and then I would go back to Zurich and open a gallery. But by the time I went to Paris, and I proposed this, Ileana had a very "Ileana" [chuckle] doubt on whether this was really something she wanted to get into. I wanted to open a gallery. I guess she had had lots of bad experiences with other people and she said she was not sure that she still wanted me to come and work at the gallery.

So I felt, really, quite lost, but it was also very helpful because I thought, "Well, no matter what will happen, I'm just not going back to engineering. I'll have to find a way. I'll see what happens." Interestingly enough, some weeks after, my parents were coming to visit me in Switzerland, and we were going to talk about my future. Of course, they wanted me very much to do engineering. As I picked them up from the airport, coming back -- I lived next door to Bruno Bischofberger's gallery, and I saw Ileana crossing the square. I went to say hello to her, and she said, "Oh, well, you know, I've thought it over. You can come and work at the Galleria." So this couldn't have been more timely.

I actually really left all my belongings in Zurich, and I couldn't care less. I went to Paris with just a bag, and I started living there, and working at the Gallery. And, you know, very quickly I really lost all interest in opening a gallery myself. My relationship with Michael and Ileana was very fulfilling. My parents were very lovely people, and I loved them very much, and they gave me a very nice childhood, but I always felt, somehow, that my life was not what it should be, somehow. I didn't feel right in my life, and the moment I started working in Paris, and being with Michael and Ileana, I felt that this was what was natural for me.

INTERVIEWER: And you had never been in that role before. So you were basically ... apprentice would not be the right word.

HOMEM: It all made sense to me. It really was one of those things in which all I had to do was be myself, and it worked. And, of course, as I was saying, in an interesting way, Bruno Bischofberger -- Bruno is actually a very interesting man, and it was very interesting, the way he dealt with me, because it was, after all, weird that this young man who wants to be around him and wants to do things -- and he would tell me, "Oh, well, yes, you can install this show if you want," especially when they were not a one-man show, and I would hang around the gallery. I knew everybody there, and we would all go and have lunch together. Then I would talk with the collectors who would come in and all, and basically, I was just doing things that amused me, and they were actually the things that I've been doing all my life. Actually, in a funny way, too, I have to study, sometimes, for exams, and if I were at home I would start reading other things, or God knows what. So I took it as a very good exercise to stay at the gallery of "naïve" art, that Bruno had, where very few people ever went. I think he sold things in St. Moritz to clients but nobody ever visited. So I thought well it would be very good and I would sit there and I would only have my books to study, and the "phone" hardly ever rang. It was like going to an office ... [Laughter]

So, in a very strange way, all these eccentric things worked in a very logical way.

INTERVIEWER: And when you went to Paris, was it different? At Ileana's gallery?

HOMEM: No, it was actually even more -- you know, Ileana, in a strange way -- all of it was very much -- people were very much left to do as they could do, as they could find their own ways. It was very creative, in that sense. I guess it was as a seminar in a university. I really don't know. But we were there, and we would do, as best as we could, what there was to do, and what we felt inclined to do. Of course, there were sometimes things, also, that -- Ileana did ask one to do things, but it was just part of the whole -- of dealing with everyday tasks and things.

INTERVIEWER: And she was representing largely American artists at that time?

HOMEM: She opened the gallery in Paris to show American artists she was interested in, some which were with Leo, and others who were not with Leo. There is always the view, especially in Europe at that time, that Ileana was a kind of representative of Leo; that she came to fight the fight together with Leo, and that it only true up to a point in the sense that they were very close, and that many of the artists Ileana was interested in were at Leo's, but it was not really only that. She was really -- Ileana really lives out of enthusiasm. What interested her was her enthusiasm for art, basically for artists, for art that was being made. Actually, a big misunderstanding about Ileana and about Leo is talking about them as big dealers. They were not, really -- and for a very good reason -- because money really didn't mean anything much to them. It was just that they needed money to lead their lives the way they wanted to; and, of course, Leo was much more regulated. Leo was someone who lived much more in a social way, with people around. Ileana and Michael lived very much on their own, under their own rules.

So money, really, was something that gave you a headache [Laughter], when it came, and then you would have to sell an important work, to be able to go on.

INTERVIEWER: So she was more interested in the art than in the result of the dealing.

HOMEM: The art and her life were all -- Let's say that dealing, in a way, was part of it, the way it was part of me, too. See, for me, they were so logical. They corresponded so much to the way I felt. Dealing was like a wonderful adventure that you were having, dealing with all of these things, sharing your enthusiasm for things with other people. All of that was basically a great pleasure, and money was needed because you needed to pay the expenses. [Laughs] So you coped with it as you could. But the money was never -- it was not a business, in that sense, if you see what I mean.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

HOMEM: Actually, I always thought that -- and especially Ileana and Michael always reminded me of those Chekhovian rich people who lived in Paris, and out on various "estates" in Russia, who really just were not interested in any of that, they just wanted to go on with their lives, and whenever they would need money they would then sell an estate in Russia. Whenever Ileana needed money, she would sell generally a Jasper Johns, because they were very few and the prices were high, comparatively, and there was always someone to buy. So, in a way, that was the way things would go.

I'm explaining this to explain that, yes, the whole thing was very loose, like that. And then in 1969, Michael Sonnabend decided that he wanted to go back to New York. I think he felt that Ileana really didn't leave him enough place in the sense that people were so focused on her -- which was true, in a certain way. But then, you know, Michael was the most unusual person, almost, that I met. He was the most eccentric person, and he was someone who managed, all of his life, to never do anything he really didn't feel like doing on the moment. [Laughs] He was completely mercurial, and of course he was not someone who could run a business, even as loosely as Ileana did -- because she did have a feeling that she had certain duties and certain needs. Michael was totally unable to follow a need or a duty.

Of course, he was very youthful, because he was very enthusiastic, and he loved talking with people -- if he was in the mood for doing it -- and he was almost a kind of public relations for the Gallery, who worked very well in that way. But then, of course, even public relations have duties, and Michael did not take care of his duties. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: He was a scholar, wasn't he?

HOMEM: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: He was a scholar?

HOMEM: Well, that's the way he is defined. But, it's, of course, the wrong way to define. Because, after all, a scholar *also* has duties. Michael was, actually, a great eccentric. The reason why he's called a scholar is so interesting, and it is that -- well, first, he read enormously, and he was very curious about all kinds of things. But mostly he was obsessed with Dante, and when he was very young, in his twenties, he actually went to live in Venice, where he put up an ad to say that he would exchange lessons of English against lessons of Italian, and learned Italian just that so he could read Dante in the original. I have no idea -- It's a question that, unfortunately, I

never asked him -- his did he get focused on Dante? But you know, with Michael, anything could -- he would be so instinctive. And I think that probably the fundamental thing in Michael's life was this idea about God and mysticism seen as a kind of heroic deed. So anything that he felt was heroic and, as they say, larger than life, that, for him, was an easy point of departure. I think Dante must have meant that to him especially. Dante was, let's say, a hero figure who wrote, was a heroic writer, and he wrote about God. So he had all the elements for Michael.

You know, I was explaining that to someone the other day. Every day in his life Michael read Dante, because he wanted to learn it by heart. Now when you say that someone wants to learn something by heart, people always think that metaphorically. Michael was not metaphorical; Michael wanted to know all of Dante by heart -- and it's quite a task, you know. It's huge.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

HOMEM: Of course, I think that probably has something to do with the Talmud and things like that, and Michael was not at all a religious -- Actually, neither Michael, nor Ileana, nor Leo, had great interest in religion, either Jewish or any other. But Michael did have, actually, a sort of admiration for the Christian religion, actually, because he liked the churches, and the mystery, and all of that. But I think that, in a strange way, probably -- I believe that it is a Talmudic idea, that idea of knowing a huge text by heart.

INTERVIEWER: Probably.

HOMEM: He was doing it with Dante, in a very distinctive way.

So he's called a "scholar." [Laughs] Well, you know, it really doesn't have to do with being a scholar. It was almost like an art work. When we started working with conceptual artists, I always said that Michael was the most conceptual artist I knew, because, already, these activities, for me, were such a conceptual arts kind of activity.

So I don't know -- anything that I say that you want to --

INTERVIEWER: I wanted to ask you if Michael ever talked about how the Dante drawings with Bob came about.

HOMEM: Yes, of course. Yes, yes. Sure.

The story with that, as far as I know, from them, is that Bob -- I don't know, by the way, whether Bob got interested in Dante because of Michael, but it would seem very logical to me. Because you couldn't know Michael without knowing how much Dante meant to him. Dante, for him, was something that would appear in every conversation, every day. And since Bob saw Ileana and Michael so continuously, it would be very strange that it wouldn't have anything to do with Michael. I know that they always spoke about it as if it had been a project of both of them, and Bob asked Michael to write small texts about each canto, so that Bob would like go from the kind of thematic program, to do his illustrations. I know, actually, that those small texts were

shown at Leo's, were next to each one of the drawings when they were shown the first time. They were lost, actually, those texts. However, some time ago David White -- a year or two ago, gave me some small texts that came from somewhere else. There's someone in Italy, you know, who's writing about that -- about Bob and Dante -- so, actually, in order to help her, I asked David White whether there was something, and he gave me these small texts that maybe were hung next to the drawings, maybe at the Modern Art, or in some other show. And I'm convinced that they must be very close to the ones, if not the same --

INTERVIEWER: -- to the originals.

HOMEM: -- as Michael's. Well, yes. Because, after all, I doubt very much that if those texts existed, someone else read all of Dante, to write small texts to go with Bob's paintings. So I'm convinced that they must be based on Michael's texts, yes.

INTERVIEWER: They were sort of a distillation, I guess, of --

HOMEM: Well, they were not even about an interpretation, but they were like telling short -- You know, you can get these texts from David White.

INTERVIEWER: From David, sure.

HOMEM: So they are some short texts, in which he says what's going on, really.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure that was helpful, because what I was curious about --

HOMEM: You know -- by the way -- I could put you in touch with this woman in Italy, who wrote a whole, huge essay -- and who would actually like to publish it -- on Bob's Dante drawings. I gave her, by the way, all of this information, and she is quite well informed. If you want, I can put you in touch with her.

INTERVIEWER: I think that the Foundation would like that very much.

HOMEM: Well, very good.

INTERVIEWER: And we will do that.

HOMEM: As a matter of fact -- yes. I'll put you in touch with her.

INTERVIEWER: That would be wonderful.

HOMEM: If you would send me an email.... Her name is Antonia.. I'm sorry -- Antonella Francini --Or just say, "the Italian woman writing on Dante." I know she's very interested in trying to actually organize a show in a museum in Italy, about the Dante drawings and other drawings of the period. I already told her that, if there is interest, we certainly would lend drawings from the estate, from the Sonnabend estate. But, also I thought I'd talk with the

Rauschenberg estate -- I'm sure that it would interest the estate, too, especially if it would be in some really prestigious museums.

INTERVIEWER: I thought the Dante drawings were all at MoMA.

HOMEM: Well, they are all at MoMA, but she said that she spoke with the people at MoMA, and they would consider lending them.

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful.

HOMEM: Well, you know -- if it's an important museum.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

HOMEM: One thing also, on that subject, that I normally talk about is the fact that, yes, until the end, Michael -- or, at least Bob always told Michael -- "Well, we have to do the rest." But, of course, they were talking about "Paradiso," especially. They really always spoke about that. But I don't think that Michael, at that moment, felt so much like it. I don't know whether he felt enough that Bob wanted it. I just don't know. But I think Michael's relationship with Bob by then was too loose, and it never really worked.

But in a funny way, when Bob made a project, actually, initiated by a young Italian -- Mario Cogdognato -- that had to do with a church for the Padre Pio in Italy -- I always thought that that, in a funny way, had something to do with those ideas about illustrating the "Paradiso." Because I remember Bob and Michael, in conversation, saying, "Oh, yes, it should all be about light." I think that that project -- to my mind, I'm sure they are related. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what happened to that project?

HOMEM: I don't know. Well, they never did it. The church was never built in that way. This was a very ambitious, not such a good idea. Actually, that -- I should put you in touch, also, with Mario **CODOGNATO**, who is the person who tried to help that, and he asked several people, I think, like Polke, and Kiefer, and others, together with Rauschenberg, to do a project for this church. But it was much too good to be true, as generally happens, and it ended up not being true. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: When did *you* first meet Bob Rauschenberg?

HOMEM: Actually, that was part of it. When Michael decided to come to New York, Michael and Ileana started by opening a gallery. It was in January, 1970, on Madison Avenue, between 73 and 74. As a matter of fact, they were going to show two young artists who were friends of Bob Rauschenberg. Bob was a kind of godfather, in a certain way. One of them was David Prentice, and that was the opening show, in January of 1970. I came for that opening, and that's when I met Bob. As a matter of fact, the opening dinner, I remember, was just Ileana, Michael, and me, and Bob, and David Prentice, and I forget who. I mean, there must have been the people from the gallery. Judith Richardson, probably. And there was actually Sashkia, whom you already know.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

HOMEM: Exactly. That's when I met Sashkia, and I had met Bob a few days before. Actually, I remember, at the so-called Hyde Park Hotel at that time, where we were staying -- which now is the -- Oh, what's it called now? The Mark Hotel. Yes.

Actually, that's funny, even, because I was going to the apartment where we were all staying, and Bob was going there, too. So we met, so to speak, in the elevator. I knew who he was, I was very curious about him, and he saw I was curious about him, and as a result, he was curious about me. Then of course we started laughing, because we ended up in front of the same door. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: How did he strike you?

HOMEM: I think even then, when, after all, Bob was -- in '70 he was forty-five and I was thirty, so he was an older man for me, and he struck me as being very young, and sort of -- well, Bob had a kind of foolish -- a kind of genius, foolish, young aura about him, that I liked very much. By the way, I think Michael and Ileana also had that -- I always liked what I called that kind of "childish" nature, which really just means that people are being very much themselves, very much not about following rules, but just following their -- being instinctive and open, and being curious about life around them. Bob was curious about *everything* around him, all the time.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean?

HOMEM: Well, his work is even about that. Any object on the ground would be interesting -- *could* be interesting to him. He was always -- his eyes and mind were always open to anything -- to a piece of dirt on the road.

Actually, one thing that even interested me about Bob, on that subject, is that I've always been very interested in art, generally, not just modern art. To me, actually, the Old Masters, and modern art, and all, and actually primitive art and all that -- all that is one single thing, and they all communicate with each other. And I think, by the way, that that was Bob's idea, too, and that's why, in his paintings, newspapers, and Poussin, and Old Masters' paintings all come together -- and, of course, pictures from newspapers, anything -- all comes together. But part of that was that Bob seemed quite uninterested, really, in looking at art, and looking at Old Masters, and looking at things that existed already, as art. He was much more interested in things that he saw that were not art.

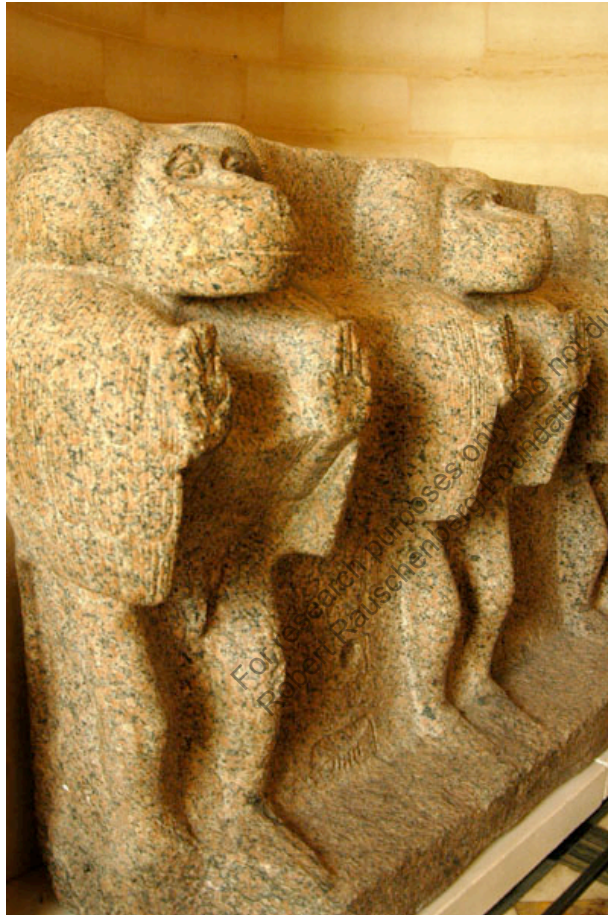
In other words, he was interested in things that were still raw, in a way. He could get more interested in an old, rusty bicycle on the street than in a Rembrandt painting, let's say, or a Raphael painting. I was a bit surprised. Well, also, I think it was probably part of a kind of attitude that had to do with New York in the '50s -- which I didn't know, but I understand that there was that idea of turning your back to Europe, and to the Old Masters, and it was -- well, after all, Pop Art is even supposed to be about that, but, of course, it's not, in my mind. But it was supposed to be about saying that the cartoon was what was interesting, not the Raphael. In reality, I think what Pop Art *was* about was seeing the Raphael, so to speak, in the cartoon.

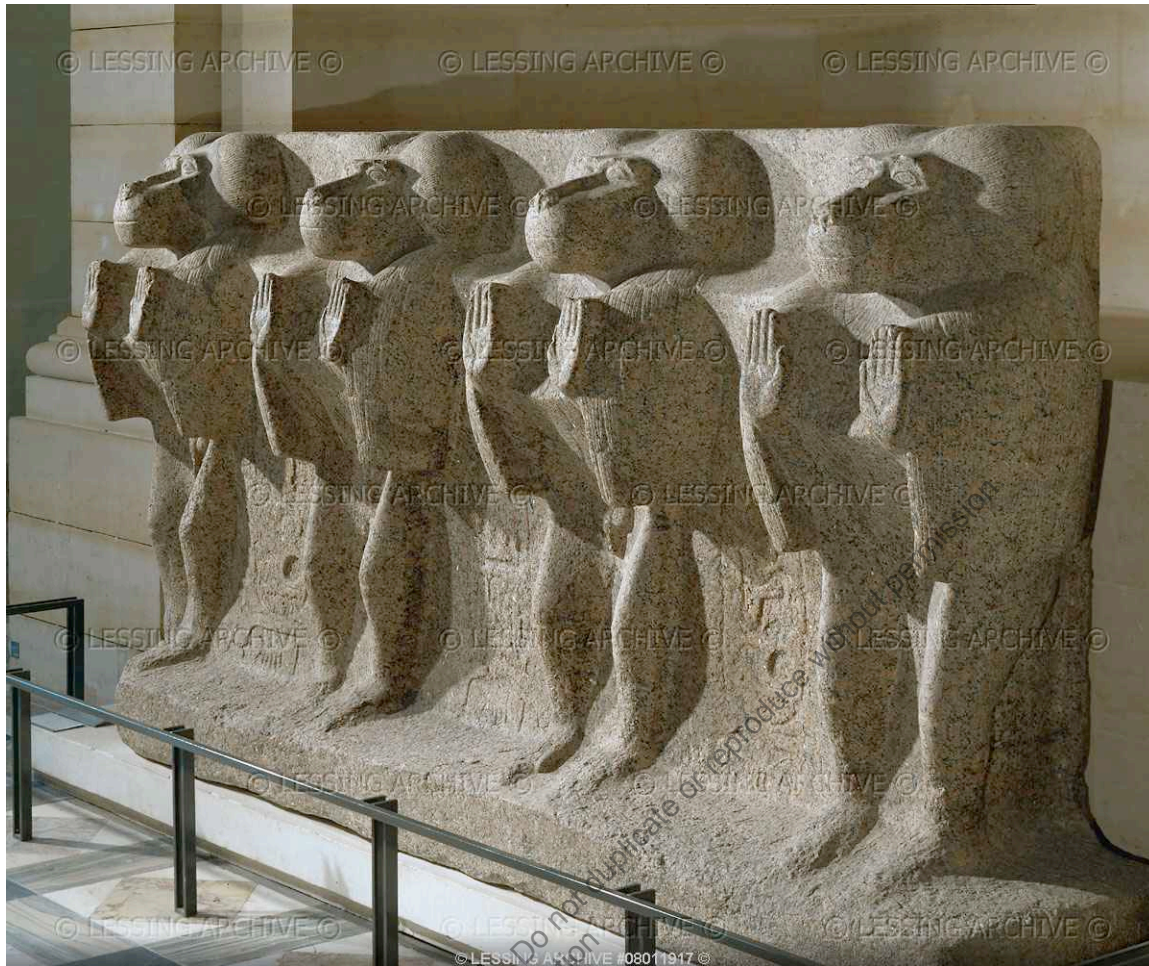
INTERVIEWER: Sure.

HOMEM: But, let's say, that Bob, generally, was very uninterested in it -- unless -- and I don't even remember anymore where we started this -- but when Bob would look at an art work as if it were a rusty bicycle, then he would do something about it, and I noticed that, for instance, going to the Louvre, things that were not very famous, so to speak, were probably much easier to look at in that way. For example, Egyptian art was very interesting to Bob, and he was making, in the early '70s, those "Cardboard" pieces, and he was actually starting with his "Cardboard" --

INTERVIEWER: When he was in Captiva?

HOMEM: In Captiva, yes. I remember, actually, that one of them that has four big cardboard boxes had to do with a very beautiful Egyptian sculpture at the Louvre, that has four big monkeys sitting down. So he was really using that as a point of departure.





Rameses II Temple of Luxor

Monkeys from the base of the second obelisk of Ramses II's temple in Luxor (twin of the obelisk of the Place de la Concorde, Paris). Monkeys were believed to worship the sun, hence their place at the base of an obelisk. Pink granite, H: 159 cm L: 325 cm D 31

[Louvre, Dpt. des Antiquités Egyptiennes, Paris, France](http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notee/monkeys)

<http://www.lessing-photo.com/p1/080119/08011917.jpg>

INTERVIEWER: So he had been to the Louvre, and seen --

HOMEM: Yes. Actually, when he was in Paris we went. I always go to the Louvre anyway. I have no idea, even -- he was not reluctant to go. He came. Other times he was reluctant, actually, even to go to museums. One story I always tell, because it amused me very much, was that when we were in Florence -- He loved Venice, by the way, because all of Venice is like a big, rusty bicycle [Laughter], so he just loved Venice. But when we were in Florence, which was for a show of his at the Belvedere Museum -- Bob really was not that interested in going to museums and such things. I remember we went to the Uffizi, and the only thing that he really

liked very much -- and that he knew already, from the past -- was the Da Vinci *Annunciation* and what he liked in it were the plants and the flowers on the ground. But he basically didn't want to spend time doing things like that.

I was very interested in Pontormo -- this was like in 1975. Actually, he was much less known than he is nowadays -- and I very much wanted to see a painting of his, which is a *Visitation*.



Visitation

1528-29
Oil on wood, 202 x 156 cm
San Michele, Carmignano (Florence)

It's in a little church outside of Florence, and Ileana and I wanted to see it. We couldn't just leave Bob there, so we had to find a way of taking him with us and we were going to see someone we knew who had a villa, a Medici villa, actually, very close to this place. We took Bob to see the villa; then on the way back we had the car stop, to go and see this painting. Bob said, "Well, why are we stopping here?" and we said, "Oh, you know, it's just for a second. We're just going to see this painting inside, then we'll come out. So Bob started grumbling a bit about it, and then he said, "Oh, okay. I'll come to." We went in, and we sat there like for fifteen minutes, and nobody said a word, Bob included! [Laughter] As we were getting out of the church, Bob said, "Are there other paintings by this artist?" [Laughs] And this was the first time.

You see, Pontormo was using draperies and colors that were very special. So we took Bob to see an extraordinary Pontormo, *the* extraordinary Pontormo, I would say, that is in Florence, at a church called Santa Theresa, and Bob was completely floored by it.



The Deposition from the Cross (1852) Santa Felicita, Florence

I remember him saying, "Oh, my God, it's like Disneyland, it's so crazy." [Laughter] And it is, really. It's very interesting -- I always mention this because I think they are good things for people to know of him, in the future -- that Bob, the first work that Bob did immediately after viewing this, was actually a series of costumes for a ballet, I believe by Viola Farber. They are simple leotards, but in silk colors that were Bob's remembrance of the Pontormo colors. And the silk in the paintings of that period, of the late '70s, all have colors that have to do with Pontormo.

INTERVIEWER: So the colors in a series like "Jammers," for example --

HOMEM: "Jammers" was before, you see. This was more the painting -- I believe they are called "Spreads," not the silkies --

INTERVIEWER: Right.

HOMEM: -- and much of them has to do -- they are actually very muted colors, and they have to do with Pontormo, yes. But if you look at the Viola Farber -- there is a video, by the way, which I would love actually to get some day of that Viola Farber dance number, with his costumes. And there the link seemed, at the time, very clear to me.

INTERVIEWER: Is it typical in Bob's work, do you find, that there is an -- "influence" would not be the right word, but he would be "struck" by --

HOMEM: I think it's not typical at all. That's why it made an impression on me.

You see, I think that Bob actually had his own mechanics, somehow, and that he was not -- and, actually, here, I don't even think it was an influence. Let's say it was a very strong impression he had, that came in his direction. Bob, really, basically always kept very much -- how can I say? He was very much the same person, the same artist, from beginning to end. I remember it was very impressive to us when we went to Washington to see a show -- a marvelous show, by the way, that Walter Hopps made for the Corcoran of works from the '50s -- we saw that show. Also in Washington -- I forget where -- there was a show of the works that Bob made for R.O.C.I., that were of that moment.

INTERVIEWER: The National Gallery.

HOMEM: At the National Gallery. So it must have been -- what? I don't know. In the '80s.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. I think '83, '85, something like that.

HOMEM: What was amazing -- and, of course, the show at the National Gallery was incredibly crowded, the way Bob always had to do things --

INTERVIEWER: Because he set that?

HOMEM: I'm sure he did, yes, and Bob would always be unable to not to put in one more piece. [Laughter] Actually, I have a story about that, that I can tell you afterwards, that is quite amusing.

By the way, they were bad things for his market. But, who cares? They were good things, I guess, for him and his work. But even though the works were so crowded and seemed to different, they were very colorful. You know, it was amazing how much you could find the same ideas, and you'd find ideas that you had just seen in the '50s show, that suddenly were there, transformed, translated into a different language.

Now I'm not even sure that Bob was aware of these. This was just what he was about, so it will come back.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me a little more about that? Because I saw both of those shows, and the Walter Hopps show was primarily - if I remember correctly - about the white paintings and the black paintings....

HOMEM: No, they had also the objects -- the boxes --

INTERVIEWER: The boxes. Of course.

HOMEM: -- and the boxes, of course, are the ones that link with those. Yes. And, up to a point, probably, the photographs, too, the black-and-white photographs.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Okay. I follow you. I was thinking of the other part.

HOMEM: No, no. Even though, of course, the white paintings, also, in a way -- it's the idea of surfaces, of reflective, monochrome surfaces. He was always, also, around. And then there pieces -- I think they were already -- well, no, I think they were the boxes, and objects that had a lot to do with that.

INTERVIEWER: That R.O.C.I. show had quite a few "Glut"-type pieces in it.

HOMEM: Exactly. But just even the way Bob -- and, you know, already, the "Jammers," especially the "Jammers" that are not just cloth, they have so much to do with the early box pieces.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Do people who bought Bob's later work make that connection?

HOMEM: No. After all, the very early work was so little known. The work of the '50s. I mean, we didn't even [Laughs] make the connection, necessarily. Let's say -- I suppose we didn't because we were impressed and surprised when we saw it.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Interesting.

HOMEM: No. Actually, you know how it is, actually. Very often, when there is new work by an artist, and it's interesting work, it looks completely different. It's only afterwards that you start realizing what it has to do with things you already knew, of that artist. But you start, always, by being surprised.

Actually, I don't know whether you know that quotation -- what Bob said about Ileana in this panel discussion at the Metropolitan, on the "Combine" show, quite late in their lives, just one year or two before their deaths. Bob said well, that even when Ileana was completely against a new work of his, he would come back and he would find her ready to defend it, etcetera. I suppose that has to do with the fact that after the initial shock, you did realize how much that work, that seemed so completely different, had basically so much to do with what you knew already.

You know, I think that, basically, that's what most artists who do real work are doing. They keep retranslating ideas that they had from the beginning. It's a matter of whether the artist

keeps using that idea in the same way, or whether he keeps finding new ways of doing something out of that idea.

INTERVIEWER: Right. To keep it fresh.

HOMEM: Well, not even to keep it fresh. Just to keep going on, without repeating.

INTERVIEWER: How was it that Ileana and you would see what Bob was working on? Did you go to Captiva?

HOMEM: Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely. And photographs...

INTERVIEWER: And was he like a proud schoolboy?

HOMEM: A proud schoolboy?

INTERVIEWER: Right. Saying, "Here. I'd like to show you what I'm doing now, or what I plan on doing next."

HOMEM: Yes. I don't know if it's that way. [Laughs] That's a funny thing, you made me think. He was like a proud mother, showing a baby. And saying, "Here! Our baby." And we also felt that they were our babies.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Exactly. Exactly. That's very nice.

You were going to say that Bob had set up -- about when Bob set his show; about crowded works.

HOMEM: Oh, my God, yes! I forget what the date was, but Bob had a show in which he had decided that he wanted to make a show together at Leo's, and then at Ileana's, here at West Broadway. The spaces are quite large, so it was an enormous show. Then Bob, as he was installing the show, came back very excited and said, "Oh --" Oh. No, no, no. Excuse me. I had even forgotten -- no, no. Because it was not this enormous -- I mean, it *was* enormous, at Leo's and Ileana's on West Broadway, but then there was also Leo's space at Greene Street, which was *huge*. So that these three spaces were absolutely much too much, really. [Laughs] So Bob came back, and he was so excited. He said, "You know, I went to Greene Street to install the show, and on the way I saw this gallery space which is for rent, and I asked them if they could rent it to us, for the space of the show, so we still can show more!" [Laughter]

The show was enormous, and people were so negative precisely because -- stupidly -- always because of this idea of, "Oh! There was much of them," and blah, blah. And, you know, when people *are* shown so many things, then they don't focus or concentrate -- which is, of course, *their* lack, not the artist.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

HOMEM: But let's say it was not a tactical gesture.

INTERVIEWER: But it was indicative, perhaps, of the generosity of spirit that he had?

HOMEM: Well, it was indicative of the fact that Bob was not someone who could or wanted to "edit." He really was completely involved in what he was doing, and sometimes, I would say -- and it's very logical -- that there were even probably pieces that people were less interested in, that he would even care the most for -- either because they were the ones he cared the most for, and since people found them more difficult they didn't pay attention to them; or, because -- In other words, either this lack of interest was a cause or a result. I'm not quite sure.

In other words, maybe it was because people were less interested that he liked them best; or, maybe because they were the ones that he liked best, that people had more difficulty getting there.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. I can see exactly what you mean.

[Interruption - the Interviewer suggests a break.]

HOMEM: You can always call me back at any point, so don't worry. I'm here.

For research purposes only. Do not duplicate or reproduce without permission.
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Session #2

INTERVIEWER: I wanted to step back and ask you about Bob's relationship with Ileana.

HOMEM: Yes. Certainly. Well, you know, I think Ileana and Bob were very similar, and they both were basically very sensitive people who expected a lot from the other person, and who could get very easily frustrated or disappointed, and to -- then could be quite cruel in a certain way, wanting to hurt the other person because they felt hurt. That was the kind of relationship they had between them [Laughs]. I would say that, probably -- I don't know. It's difficult to know who was more often the aggressor, because, after all, sometimes it's not about you being an aggressor; it's about you being perceived by the other person as being an aggressor. So it's difficult.

So, basically, they had a very passionate relationship positively and negatively, and sometimes I felt like I was the father, trying to help two children who were loving each other and hurting each other.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think their relationship manifested itself that way all their lives? Or do you -- ?

HOMEM: I'm convinced -- I think it had to do with them. And, by the way, I don't know whether you're thinking of interviewing people like Bob Petersen --

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

HOMEM: -- and what's-his-name -- Brunt?

INTERVIEWER: Terry van Brunt.

HOMEM: Terry van Brunt, and all of that, because I think it should be very interesting, even if they are not interesting. Even if they don't tell the truth whatever, it's always interesting. It should be.

INTERVIEWER: I think it's important. I think it's important --

HOMEM: I think so.

INTERVIEWER: -- to have those.

HOMEM: I think that, actually, Bob Petersen -- he would not hurt anybody, but I think Bob very often felt victimized by him, which was completely absurd, because there was really no way of being victimized by Bob Petersen. That's part of what I was saying. It's not whether you *are* an aggressor or not; it's whether you are *perceived* as an aggressor or not. And I think Bob had it in himself to feel "aggrieved," even if he wasn't.

One thing, also -- not that it has a direct bearing on this -- but one thing that I think was very instrumental in his relationship with Ileana, in the years when I was there, was that Ileana really went on working, and exhibiting, and selling, and working hard to sell work he was doing that was very unpopular, and Bob felt that Leo just didn't like him, and didn't pay attention to him. Which, I don't think it was true, but those pieces were almost impossible to sell, or very difficult to sell in the United States, and I don't think it was that -- anyway, contrary to the myth, I don't think that Leo was really about selling difficult art. I think Leo basically -- I mean, he would show and he would defend -- but I don't think Leo was really about selling, again.....

INTERVIEWER: Which work? At what period of time?

HOMEM: Well, I'm talking about the work from, let's say, 1970 on -- which starts with "Cardboards," "Early Egyptians" --

INTERVIEWER: The "Gluts," the "Spreads," all of that.

HOMEM: Well, those come, the "Gluts" come later, but they are part of the whole thing, yes.

INTERVIEWER: People were thinking that once Bob moved to Florida, his work --

HOMEM: I don't think it had to do with moving to Florida, I think it had to do with -- and I wasn't around at that moment -- but it had to do really with Bob's way of dealing with fame and reputation, and wanting to go back to the source, maybe, precisely. So after the Venice Biennale, didn't Bob actually at some point say that he was over with painting, and that he wanted to do -- he got involved with Merce Cunningham and John Cage and all that.

INTERVIEWER: That's correct.

HOMEM: Wasn't he saying that he was giving up that kind of thing? And in a certain way, he did and he didn't. He went on making work, after all, as we all know, but I think that he wanted to start again from the beginning. Comparatively, the "Combines" were very much about painting, in a way that the other ones were not.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

HOMEM: So it was more difficult work. And, God knows, probably even the "Combines" were difficult here in the United States. Collectors were very conservative in the United States. It was only in the '80s that they opened up.

INTERVIEWER: But, in France... --

HOMEM: It was not in France, not necessarily. In Europe, generally, there were very few collectors, but those very few collectors were curious, and they did follow. Whereas in New York, people were very provincial, I think. I only saw that at the end, in the '70s. Basically, it was a situation in which the world was just New York -- and not even California -- and there

were "fames," and reputations, and things that happened just in New York, and what happened outside didn't matter.

Actually, you know, I remember saying that when we moved to New York in the '70s -- actually, we only closed Paris in 1980 -- but in the late '70s we were mostly in New York, and people used to say, "Oh, well, of course. You did that because there are more collectors in America." And I remember saying, "No, actually, all our collectors are in Europe. What New York has that is very exciting for us is a public that looks at works." And, of course, the public that looks at works gave, as a result, the '80s, where there was a complete change in the public, in New York, and people became very international, very open, very interested in following up. Everybody became a professional art lover. Of course, in '92, it sort of went, but in the '80s it was totally amazing. It was the most internationally open public I've ever seen in my life.

INTERVIEWER: What happened?

HOMEM: Well, two things happened. All those years of looking at things finally did get you somewhere. Also, there was a moment of great euphoria, in which everything was doing so well, people felt so positive, and feeling so positive, they felt so open, and being so open, they reacted to the art world -- which is extremely rare, which didn't happen before, and which doesn't happen as much afterwards, not even today. Of course, people are not provincial the way they were in the '70s, but they are not as open as they were in the '80s. They are more careful. It's a different situation. In the '80s, people were so open. I remember -- everybody says negative things about people in the '80s and their ideas, that they were stupid people full of money, standing around. I said, "Well, you know, there were stupid people in the '70s as much as in the '80s or in the '90s, or since." But the difference was that in the '80s, people were so open, and they did react to work. I remember seeing people who were completely ignorant, and you'd think were completely absurd, come and look at work, and choose the best work. I was puzzled. I thought, "Well, how come?" Then I realized that they were reacting to the kind of energy of the work, and most of the time people don't react. They are afraid to react in case they may be wrong.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

HOMEM: So they are being reticent, and in those days, nobody was reticent.

But to go back to the '70s -- what was happening was that the interesting collectors were really in Europe, and the problem, in an interesting way, was that in Europe there was then a kind of academy that was built -- a little like what happens nowadays, only nowadays, it's the auction houses that creates that kind of academy -- but then there was like a consensus, and a kind of academie -- you had very beautiful collections that were all basically the same collection. In New York, everybody had a different collection, but the best and the worst was, in practically all of them. There was no collection that had only good work. I was surprised and interested.

You know, by the way -- one thing that impressed me very much in New York, in the early '70s, when I came here, is that the image we had in Europe of America was completely different from New York, in any case, and from America, even more so. It is that we have an image of America that came out of a bunch of very interesting artists who represented America

to us, and those very interesting artists had absolutely no public in America -- or in New York -- and New York had actually no interest for most of them. Even Pop Art, in the '70s, in the early '70s, was so very much ignored and snubbed. I remember the first Whitney Biennial I saw, which must have been -- I don't know, '71-'72 -- I was amazed at how much -- You know, in Europe, all of what they called the "Ecole de Paris" (The Paris School) paintings started making copies of Pop Art, to be "with it." And suddenly, in New York, where it was all supposed to be happening -- all of that art was still going on, and I remember saying, "My God, those poor guys in Europe! If they saw this Biennial, they would feel, 'What did I do?'" [Laughter]

It was so interesting to me. So that New York was, at the same time, a very retrograde place and a very avant-garde place. It's just that it was a very avant-garde -- a very, very small minority, in a very retrograde majority. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: You showed a lot of interesting pieces from Bob in the '70s, in Paris, didn't you? You showed the "Currents" --

HOMEM: I showed them in New York, too. It's just that in Paris there was -- You see, here, people looked at them, and they hopefully learned something. And there *were* some collectors. But in Europe, there was much more of -- you could see that there were more collectors. It was creative. It was an open place that would change things.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe you can clarify something for me. When you were in Paris, the Sonnabend Gallery represented Bob's work, but also, Leo Castelli Gallery represented Bob's work. How did that work?

HOMEM: There was no conflict at all. To start with, Leo wasn't that very interested in Bob precisely in terms of gallery work. There was no money in it. He liked him and all, but it's not like there was a financial interest for him. Actually, I even think -- I imagine-- that he felt that, like it had happened in the past, it was positive that Ileana would create an interest that, after all, when created, if created, would come back to Leo.

INTERVIEWER: Ah. Sure.

HOMEM: Actually that was happened with Pop Art.

INTERVIEWER: So was Bob okay with that? Did he feel like Leo was representing him "hard?"

HOMEM: Bob just felt that Leo was not interested in what he was doing; that he couldn't sell it; and that Ileana was doing something. Later on, I suppose in the late '80s, he came to feel that *both* Ileana and Leo could not sell his work -- which was true, up to a point -- and he went, actually, to Knoedler, which was a very strange choice. In a certain way, he did start, then, painting, going back more to a type of painting -- more painting-on-canvas work, that, of course, made it easier for somebody like Knoedler, or, later, like Pace, to sell.

INTERVIEWER: How much influence does a gallery have?

HOMEM: None.

INTERVIEWER: None.

HOMEM: None.

INTERVIEWER: So that was what Bob was wanting to do at the time.

HOMEM: Those were Bob's choices, always.

INTERVIEWER: I can see some of the experiences that he had in R.O.C.I., working with some of those materials, in those different locations, then showing up in some of the later work.

HOMEM: Oh, it was all "linked." As I was saying, "It was linked with the early work, and it was linked with the later work." Bob was always Bob. I'm not even saying that -- I'm just saying that, basically, when he left Ileana and Leo and started working with Knoedler, there was the beginning of a return to a kind of painting on the wall that he had not been doing.

INTERVIEWER: If I read my chronology correctly, Sonnabend Gallery continued, however, to show Rauschenberg?

HOMEM: Yes, but not really. In other words,... Bob had written a very long letter that Ileana didn't keep -- because Ileana didn't keep anything -- but that I know Leo received, also, and must be in his archives, and maybe is in the foundation archives, and it was a very long letter in which Bob complained very strongly about the fact that neither of them really could sell his work, and that he was leaving the gallery -- the *galleries*. Then, as I say, he went to Knoedler, and -- how can I say? -- I certainly don't believe that either Knoedler or Pace changed anything in Bob's work. I think probably Bob also started making those more painting-like paintings because he felt the need to change, also, and maybe to start making work that could be sold easier. I have no idea. I don't think it was for the money, it was just for the need of going places and all that ...

INTERVIEWER: He really seems to have had a need to paint.

HOMEM: Yes. Probably, yes. But then that need to paint was in the other ones, too. I don't know what we did. I think, actually, one show we did, that I was quite involved with that, too -- I always had been very curious about the "Carnal Clocks," so we made a show of the "Carnal Clocks." And, of course, nobody was interested in the "Carnal Clocks," so again that was no problem for anybody. But I think Bob liked the idea that we were showing the "Carnal Clocks" there.

INTERVIEWER: Was it successful, in terms of -- ?

HOMEM: No, no. Someone almost bought some, then decided not to -- which was disappointing -- and nothing was sold. But for us, it was just something that needed to be seen.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

Was Bob a good businessman?

HOMEM: No, no. Bob was as bad a businessman as Leo and Ileana were; in other words, money didn't play any part in it.

INTERVIEWER: [Laughs] That's funny.

HOMEM: On the other hand, they all became very rich! [Laughter] But it was not because they were good businessmen.

INTERVIEWER: That's very funny.

HOMEM: It's just what it is. But, of course, like Leo and like Ileana, he had lots of expenses to take care of, so he had to think of money.

INTERVIEWER: Sure. He had a lot of assistants.

HOMEM: Of course. And houses, and all.

INTERVIEWER: I think that talking with those assistants will also be --

HOMEM: I'm sure it will be interesting, yes. I think that part of it was, precisely, his need, also, to make money to keep things running.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, of course.

HOMEM: I don't think that Bob betrayed anything in his work, but I do think that he probably, at that point, felt that he had to make works that could be sold easier.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. It would make sense.

When Bob and the Castelli-Sonnabend whole relationship went apart, did it change the way that Ileana and Bob cared for each other?

HOMEM: No, not at all. No, no, not at all. It was not part of it. It's like the well-known fact that Ileana and Leo's divorce didn't change at all the way they cared for each other. It was the same thing with Bob. No, nothing changed at all. No.

INTERVIEWER: Because their relationship does seem to be quite special. I read somewhere about --

HOMEM: If anything it was probably an easier relationship, since there was no business involved in it.

But, yes -- you were saying that you read somewhere --

INTERVIEWER: -- that Bob gave her a lifesaver?

HOMEM: Yes, but that was very early. And, you know, he gave a lifesaver that was in some kind of sculpted metal -- lead or something -- and Ileana actually wore it for many years. She's even wearing it in the Warhol portrait of her. Then she found out that if it was lead, it was supposed to be dangerous, and she stopped wearing it. It's very much like Bob to give a lifesaver to someone who's very sick -- it's a marvelous symbol -- and then one finds out that, actually, the lifesaver is cancer-inducing. [Laughter] Unfortunately, it was never found again. I always wonder whether someday, somebody is going to find it in some box or something. But probably not. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: It gives new meaning to the words "you're killing me."

HOMEM: Actually, a better word would be "killing someone with kindness," or with love. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Ay, yi-yi. I'm sure he just meant it an absolutely benign way.

HOMEM: Thank God he didn't know about it. I know he didn't know.

What I mean is that it was an interesting fact that -- that life was doing this strange twist to the facts.

No, no, it didn't change anything. As a matter of fact, you know that Ileana died while Bob was in Portugal, opening a show, that, actually, in a way, had even been initiated by us, by this young man, Mario Codognato, and his wife. He almost died. When I last saw Bob, which was probably in November or December of 2007, after Ileana's death, which was at the end of October -- it must have been November, yes -- we were talking about that, and Darryl was saying that Bob almost died, and that he was joking that Ileana was taking Bob away with her. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: It would be fitting, wouldn't it?

HOMEM: What? That Ileana would take Bob away? [Laughs] No, not really.

INTERVIEWER: Soul mates?

HOMEM: No, not in that way. Not so. I know that Ileana would want Bob to live, and vice versa. [Laughs] No, no. Not in that way.

INTERVIEWER: Ileana, she kept an awful lot of Bob's work for herself.

HOMEM: She did. Ileana, she kept a lot of work for herself, by many artists. Jasper Johns, as I said, when she needed money, she would sell -- so she had fewer.

INTERVIEWER: The Chekhov moment.

HOMEM: Exactly. But she always kept a lot of work. Bob's, especially.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Bob, especially?

HOMEM: Well, the estate was left to Nina Sundell, Ileana and Leo's daughter, and to me, and we had to sell -- it's well known -- a series of works, and they were mainly the very star-like works, because we needed to make money to pay the taxes. And instead of selling hundreds of works, we just chose to sell -- I don't know how many there were. Probably thirty works or something. But they had to be very important ones.

But I must say, the collection, as it is now, still has exactly the same meaning. It just has fewer star works. Actually, one very happy thing here is that probably the most important star work, in a certain way, of the past, was "Canyon," and "Canyon" we still have because, luckily, and contrary to what I thought, it still has no financial value because of the eagle being an endangered species. So we were able to keep "Canyon," which is at the Metropolitan Museum. I always said that that was the greatest gift in the collection -- the fact that "Canyon" didn't have any value, and could be kept.

INTERVIEWER: Could be kept. And you have given it to the Met?

HOMEM: No, no, we have not. No, no. It's on loan.

INTERVIEWER: It's on loan. That was a beautiful show. That "Combine" show.

HOMEM: It was always on loan, by the way, "Canyon." Before that, it was on loan to the L.A. County Museum; before that to the National Gallery in Washington; and before that, to the museum in Baltimore; and before that, probably it was in storage.

You know, until Baltimore -- and it was Arnold Lehman actually, and Brenda Richardson, who were very close to Ileana -- they all agreed that Ileana was making very extensive loans of the collection to the museum. Until that happened, nobody -- and even they were disinterested -- no museum was interested in having any of those works, even on loan.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

HOMEM: Yes. Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: I find that astonishing.

HOMEM: I always say -- because it's such a sign of the times -- Tom Armstrong is a charming man that Ileana loved very much -- and who loved, very much, Ileana. He was at the Whitney -- this must have been in the '80s, the second half of the '80s -- and Ileana asked whether they would like to have a diptych or some important Lichtenstein -- and he said, basically, "Well, I have to consult my staff." It's so funny. But that's how it was.

You know, one has to realize that when Warhol had this retrospective at the Modern Art, after his death, I suppose around '88 or '89 -- everybody was convinced that he was such a bad artist here in the United States. I don't know whether you know, but Modern Art could get no corporate help from the nation for the show, and it ended up being at Knoll, because the man who owned Knoll was a trustee of the Modern Art. So it was a way of helping Modern Art make the show. But nobody thought he was a good artist. Then, one year after, suddenly, all of those collectors who were convinced that it was of no interest started to think, "Oh, you know, I just bought the most extraordinary Warhol," etc. There are things like that. That's the way things happen.

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing.

I have in my head -- and maybe you can clear this up for me -- I know that Ileana first saw Roy's work before a lot of people had seen it. I was wondering if that's how -- if she was the person who first saw Bob's work.

HOMEM: Well, yes. I mean, that's what people are always writing now. I don't know whether she first saw Bob's work, whether she saw it before Leo -- and, of course, as it is well known they met Jasper through Bob -- but I think she was just involved with maybe being more open. Leo had that big kind of enthusiasm for Jasper; but, otherwise, most of the time -- many of the artists that Ileana was interested in, Leo never was. But some of the ones he was interested in, later on, started by being artists of Ileana's, like Claes Oldenburg, for instance. Nobody actually thinks of it, but Ileana had a show of Oldenburg in '64. Later, I think that, Warhol was really brought into Leo by Ileana. So yes, it did happen sometimes. But then Leo always had several people that he listened to.

You see, I think Ileana was very intensely involved, and it was for her own self. She was totally uninterested in what other people thought -- on being successful. It was a thing of hers, that she wanted to do. I think that for Leo, other people's opinions were very important, and I don't mean just in terms of people telling him that something was good. I mean, in terms of Leo wanting to show something that he felt other people felt was good. Ileana never had that thought. She only thought that she wanted to show things that *she* felt were good, and she couldn't care less about what other people felt about them.

INTERVIEWER: And as you were saying when we first started, that's a unique position.

HOMEM: It is. Yes. Well, it is. And it's also what makes the collection very unusual, in the sense that it ends up being a kind of, as I always say, biography and self-portrait, and all. You know, there's a show of the collection -- not really of the collection -- there's a show of work *from* the collection with a theme that actually had been proposed for the Guggenheim, for the Guggenheim in Venice, in the space where the "Gluts" were shown.

INTERVIEWER: Now?

HOMEM: This summer.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, wonderful.

HOMEM: Yes. Richard Armstrong had asked me to propose a show having to do with the collection, and I knew that one couldn't do anything on the whole collection in that space, and making it on one artist didn't seem like a very interesting thing. So I proposed a theme that I thought would be amusing, which was a selection of works from the collection that had links with Italy, either because the artists were Italian, or because the artists were not Italian but were making a work that linked with Italy. For instance, Bob Rauschenberg *will* have a Venetian series, and there will be photographed, that one, with the poster that says, "Stalin is Dead," that was taken in Rome, and, actually, a work on paper that he gave to Ileana for her anniversary, or something like that, and that has a Bronzino painting in it -- *The Allegory of Love*.

I guess I was saying that the collection was of "portraits, and self-portraits," and not biography. The precise title of the collection was given by Achille Bonito Oliva -- the title of the show -- sorry -- which is "Ileana Sonnabend: An Italian Portrait." It's quite fun to put together, and I've been enjoying it, because it's a reliving of our lives.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to say -- this is from the heart, this exhibit. This is the first one you've done, related to Ileana?

HOMEM: No, I always did all the shows that had to do with the collection. Let's face it. I've worked with other people, too. But they were really always collections that I made. So, in a way, Ileana always left me to do the collections myself, and I think she enjoyed seeing what I would come up with. [Laughter] It's interesting. I was thinking that, in a way, I can understand very well her position. There is this man, Patrick Seguin, who deals in design, and we made some shows on design, in collaboration with him, and I'm very complicated and perfectionist about installations and things like that. Let's say -- I don't know if I'm perfectionist, but I have very set ideas that I'm very obstinate on following. But he does such a wonderful job, and I enjoy so much seeing what he does, that I always tell him, "I don't even want to know what you're doing. Just do what you want to do. I'll enjoy being surprised by it, when you're finished." And I think that in a funny way, Ileana felt that way about me. I think she enjoyed what I would come up with.

So this show is very much in the same way, just that it's the first time that it really is trying to define an aspect of Ileana. And I must say that I proposed this idea of an Italian theme because it was Venice, but I realized, later on, that it couldn't be done for any other nationality, or any other country -- unless, maybe, the United States -- but even then it would not be very interesting, because it would just mean American artists.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

HOMEM: And, by the way, I think that the collection loses a lot if it doesn't have both American and European artists, because that's what the whole thing was about -- this kind of meandering between both continents.

And I realized that -- it's funny -- the theme that I proposed sounds like a fun idea -- I realized, more and more, how incredibly descriptive it is, and how deep it cuts in our lives. I didn't realize it, to that extent, when I proposed it.

INTERVIEWER: I think it's going to be an important show.

HOMEM: I don't know. It will be a fun show -- I hope. [Laughter] I'm having fun with it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I'm looking forward to it.

HOMEM: It's a very special kind of space, as you know. It's a series of small rooms, so it has to be small work. Actually, in some cases, I'm sorry, because it would work very much better with larger spaces, because there are works I cannot put in it because they are too large.

INTERVIEWER: Well, maybe that will just call for you to do another show, another time, in a larger space.

HOMEM: Well, let's see. Hopefully. That was supposed, actually, to happen, and to go to a museum in Naples -- the Madre -- but, unfortunately, the museum is in a shambles because the political backing -- the Museum really lives on the political backing, and with political changes, the backing went. So it's nearly over.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. Yes.

HOMEM: It's a pity. And it's interesting -- it happened earlier on, when the museum actually circulated the early show of the collection, and there it was the Bordeaux Museum, and a man called Jean Louis Froment. That was also the result of a political backing, and once the political backing was over, the Museum was over. It's still there, it's just that it's not even a shadow of what it was.

INTERVIEWER: I have a Paris question.

HOMEM: Tell me.

INTERVIEWER: You know Bob studied in Paris for a while. I think it was in '48, when he and Susan were there. Did he ever talk about that, when he was there?

HOMEM: No. No. Bob never spoke much about the past. As a matter of fact, the only thing about the past that happened, that was quite interesting, was that when we were in Rome -- I wonder when. In the early '70s, which must have been like twenty years after he and Cy were in Rome -- we were having lunch at Piazza Navona with Bob and Cy, and one of the waiters remembered Bob, and, actually, Cy -- and he didn't know who Cy was, which is curious, since Cy lived in Rome -- and not far from there.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

HOMEM: -- but he remembered Bob from the days they were in Italy, and he told him. It was so interesting. So strange.

INTERVIEWER: That's a good waiter.

HOMEM: Now I'm less surprised, at my age, but in the '80s they were --

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's thirty years.

HOMEM: Maybe it was '70s. Sorry. So '70s, from the '50s, it was twenty years after, and they probably were in their twenties, so they were in their forties....

INTERVIEWER: That's a great story.

HOMEM: Yes, yes. I remember it making an impression on me.

INTERVIEWER: That's a great story.

So, Antonio, I have a proposal --

HOMEM: Yes?

INTERVIEWER: -- which is that I think we should stop our conversation here --

HOMEM: Just always feel very free to call --

INTERVIEWER: Well, what I'm going to do is, I'm going to have our conversation transcribed --

HOMEM: Very good.

INTERVIEWER: -- and I will send it to you --

HOMEM: Excellent.

INTERVIEWER: - - and then what we will do is see what we haven't talked about, that we think is important.

HOMEM: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: Does that work?

HOMEM: Extremely well.

INTERVIEWER: That's wonderful. I did have a question about when you went to the Louvre with Bob. At that time, did they have the two floors for the Egyptians or just one?

HOMEM: Well, it was in the '70s. I don't know how many --

INTERVIEWER: It must have been just the one. It's just so extraordinary.

HOMEM: Yes. But it was always pretty extraordinary.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

HOMEM: It has been extraordinary as far as I can remember.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I will now look at the "Cardboards" in a totally different way.

HOMEM: Well, you should know, also, which "Cardboard" it is, actually. Let me see. I think it is in the show that was in Naples, actually. If you want, I'll --

INTERVIEWER: I'd love to know.

HOMEM: I should tell you, also, what sculpture it is, but probably it's a sculpture, as I said, with four big monkeys, and I even think it's in a rather un-prestigious place. Actually, here it is. It's called *Untitled Early Egyptian, 1974*. titled "Egyptian, 1974." Permission of the artist. It doesn't have any identification. In the Cerraldo catalogue that you have, it's on page 137.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Great.

HOMEM: It will be more difficult to get a photo of the Egyptian piece. Actually, let me see. Well, I'll look for it. I have a book of reproductions, of photographs from the Louvre, of Egyptian and Greek, so it's very possible that it's there.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I am interested in these connections. I had an interview the other day with a woman called Alice Denney, here in Washington, who was involved in the "Happenings" that occurred in Washington in the '60s, in which Bob was, of course, very involved. She was telling me about a piece that Bob was going to choreograph, that we now know as *Linoleum*. She said that he wasn't certain what he wanted to do with it, and they went down to the Phillips Collection, and they were just looking around, and he saw this Eakins picture -- a portrait -- of a woman who was seated in a rather large, massive chair. Bob turned to her and said, "I want a chair just like that." She said so she went down to the thrift shop and found a huge chair.

HOMEM: So you see, already, that is so interesting. So basically it was not a painting, it was not the woman, it was the chair.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly.

HOMEM: That's what I mean when I say that Bob looked at it the way he would look at an old, rusty bicycle.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Exactly.

HOMEM: Actually, you know, something that would be a very interesting study to do -- and I wonder with what results it would yield, but still -- it would be to go through Bob's work, and look at all the reproductions of paintings and sculpture, let's say of museum stuff -- it would be very interesting to see what there is.

INTERVIEWER: I agree. Because one of the things that Susan Weil had said about Black Mountain College, and Bob's relationship with Joseph Albers, was that Albers thought that Bob was extraordinarily unschooled in art.

HOMEM: Yes. Well, I'm sure he did his best to appear so -- and it was a fashionable American-artist attitude.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. I suppose. But, in point of fact, he didn't have the training -- or, I should say, the exposure -- to an awful lot of the works of art.

HOMEM: Wasn't it Pollock who said, at that time, that there was no reason to go to Europe to see any art? I always thought that that was an Abstract Expressionist attitude -- that idea that the past was the past, and it shouldn't be repeated elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER: Right. When, in point of fact, perhaps they just didn't have the fare.

HOMEM: No, I think it was just a trendy way of looking at painting. You know, trends go on. But I do think in Bob's case, there was a lack of interest for something that was art already. He was looking for things that were not art yet. Again, that's why the chair is a possible link, the monkey sculpture is another, and even the Pontormo that he saw as -- and not wrongly -- as a big mass of colored silk. That was also that kind of looking at it.

Oh, my God. I just saw the "Four Monkeys." Well, I'm going to see whether I can get you a photo of it.

INTERVIEWER: That would be interesting.

Well, you've made a very enjoyable day for me.

HOMEM: I'm very glad.

INTERVIEWER: I'll be back in touch.

HOMEM: Perfect.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Thank you so much.

HOMEM: You're welcome.

INTERVIEWER: Bye bye.

[End of Interview]

For research purposes only. Do not duplicate or reproduce without permission.
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation