

Stories Project. ACC 54.
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

Transcription of phone interview with Markus Stebich conducted by David White, Senior Curator, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, on December 22, 2021. Reviewed and edited by the speakers, January 2022.

Markus Stebich [MS]: My name is Markus Stebich, and I'm originally from Germany, grew up in the United States. My father [Gerhard Stebich] was with Schenker International Freight Forwarders, and it was through this that I met Bob [Robert Rauschenberg] because Schenker had the task of doing the international freight forwarding together with a local New York company called Crozier Fine Arts for the ROCI [Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, 1984–1991] project. So Schenker was basically responsible for the international freight forwarding stuff and Crozier was responsible for the local trucking and local crating and packaging. They worked with Bob, I think previously?

David White [DW]: Yes. They did.

MS: Yeah. That was Bob Crozier who did that and so he was basically a sub of Schenker's. I was working with Schenker basically as a summer job at the time.

DW: And so how old were you at that point?

MS: I was, geez, when was that? That was . . . I'm trying to remember what year that was. It must have been when I was about eighteen.

DW: But I think that the first ROCI venue was 1985 [Museo Rufino Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo Internacional, Mexico City, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI MEXICO*, April 17–June 23, 1985]. So there's probably a couple of years prior to that when it was getting under way.

MS: Actually you know what, it was . . . I can't remember specifically if that's how I met Crozier or the other way around, because I had also worked with Crozier's when they were just starting out. They were fairly small. They had just gotten a small warehouse over on Twenty-sixth Street, about three thousand square feet of space. For them, that was a big expansion. And there was a lot going on at the time, but it must have been before that because my father was still at Schenker at that point. And it was later when my father was no longer at Schenker that I put him [Crozier] together with Bob and they partnered up and built the company up even much, much bigger after. It was through that connection that I got to know Bob and there were some gatherings that would take place over at the Great Jones Street studio and everybody meeting up there and with Bob and there was always something going on there, always lots of activity there.

DW: Actually, can I just interrupt one second? I think when you're saying the Great Jones studio, actually the house that Bob lived and worked in was right around the corner on Lafayette Street. There was a storage on Great Jones Street [25 Great Jones Street], but I think you're probably remembering get-togethers with lots of other people at the Lafayette Street space?

MS: Yeah. They would call it the Great Jones studio though. When you talk about this, the Great Jones and—

DW: Oh, maybe that's because of pickups and deliveries and stuff, that's certainly where all the art was stored when—

MS: Yeah. It was the brownstone basically that used to be the orphanage with a part of the church in the back.

DW: No, that's 381 Lafayette Street.

MS: Yeah, okay. Like I said, everybody called it the Great Jones Street place.

DW: Sure. Got it.

MS: Although I do remember it was 381 Lafayette and everybody would meet up there and . . . What was it up on the first floor? There must have been the big, big space there. In terms of the back [on the third floor], there was this area where there was this dining table that was set up, there was always a TV on at least one, maybe two with the sound turned down. And then there was this little kitchen where Bob used to make this fantastic pumpkin soup and some other things, but pumpkin soup was one of his specialties. I spent probably about three years altogether on and off working with Bob on different things.

And ROCI was one of them and it started off with me at Schenker in sort of an information coordination role where I had to coordinate all the information between Schenker and Crozier's and the museums and the insurance companies and Bob's team. And on a big mainframe computer that Schenker had at the time, working on a workstation that was linked to the mainframe and basically putting together spreadsheets, coordinating all this information, making sure everybody was up to date on the same information. So that was my role. It was just basically: here, make sure Markus gets all the information, make sure everybody is up on the same level of information, and put it into a spreadsheet basically. It wasn't very glorious work, but it was important. So as sort of a flow of information, making sure everybody's up to date.

DW: Very important because if that's not kept up right everything falls apart. Of course, and it was certainly a most complex form of exhibition, moving around to different places with different artworks and so on.

MS: Absolutely.

DW: And so, I know exactly what you're talking about. Wow.

MS: Yeah, exactly. So we had to track which piece was there, where, which piece was already made, had to get all the information about those pieces, whether it was being crated or not, where it was going, where it was and all values. And even sometimes with getting the stuff onto the plane, I think there was, if I remember correctly, this crazy, crazy situation where there's some big pieces that had to be transported by plane. And there was a C-130 cargo plane that was used

to get these pieces in there because it was the only one that had a big enough opening in the back to get some of these pieces in there. And I remember being out at the airport (JFK), loading some of these crates up, or being there when they loaded it.

DW: Now were you working on this with Thomas Buehler a bit at that time? Does that name sound familiar? Because he was in charge of activities in our warehouses and was very involved with a lot of ROCI moving around. I would've—

MS: Yeah, I do remember the name. I also remember working with Terry [Van Brunt], but Terry was just basically at the studio all the time and one of the people there. There was another, I can't remember his name, a Japanese fellow.

DW: [Hisachika] Sashika Takahashi.

MS: Yeah, Sashika.

DW: Right. And he was pretty much based in the Lafayette Street building.

MS: Yeah. That's where I spent most of the time. I was down in Captiva [Florida] only once and that was a completely different story, but it was a little bit later on because during this time I had also started my studies at Cornell [University, Ithaca] for architecture and it was a time when I wasn't sure whether I really wanted to follow architecture or go into the art world and become more creative on that side as an artist rather than as an architect. But I ended up going the architecture route.

DW: Good enough.

MS: But the experience with Bob was absolutely phenomenal in that sense, because I actually got to work hands on with him on, for example, the *Set and Reset* (1983) project. And that came about when there was a party over at the Lafayette Street studio and Trisha Brown was there and Bob and Trisha were talking and I happened to be just a few feet away from them. And Bob turned to me and asked me if I'd be interested in helping work on that project. And I said, "Sure, why not?" And ended up getting fairly involved on that, helping him build the stage set, those three pieces that were made out of the aluminum tubing that span with that silver sort of semitransparent translucent fabric, which was all really cool. Because Bob said, all space age stuff, the tube was woven aluminum tubing that was supposedly developed either by or for NASA.



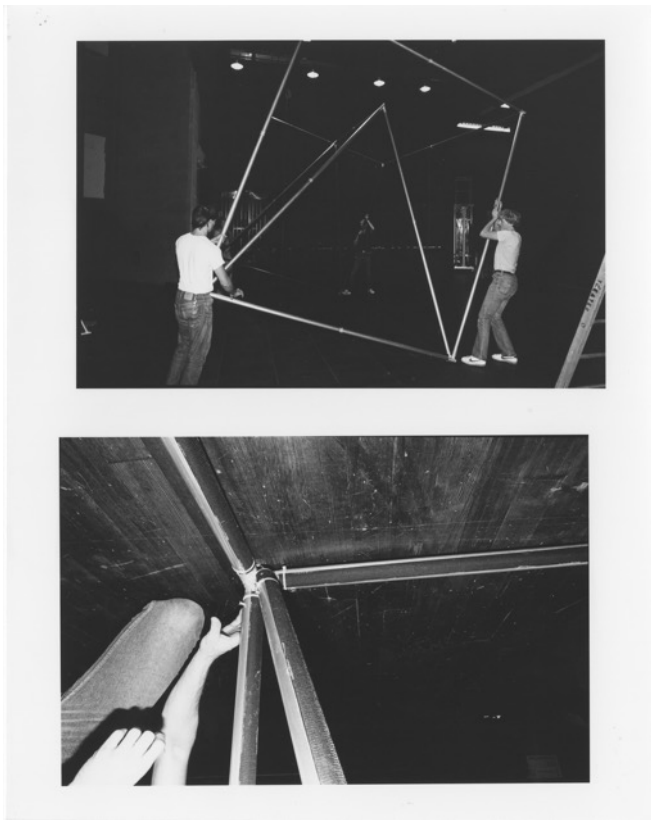
Trisha Brown Dance Company's *Set and Reset* (1983) with set, costumes, and lighting design by Robert Rauschenberg, 1983. Photo: Beatriz Schiller. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

DW: So, it must have been quite lightweight, I would imagine.

MS: Oh, it was. The interesting thing was he had somebody that was specialized in aluminum welding, I think down in Captiva.

DW: Lawrence Voytek. Does that name sound familiar?

MS: Yeah. And he welded these special corner joints into which the tube sort of fit into each other—one of those technical building blocks type of systems, just put everything together and all of a sudden you had the frame and then you could take it apart again for transport. And all the tubes were I think maximum of maybe five or six feet long. And then you could put these into sacks and the whole thing folded down into these sacks with the tubes and the corner pieces, and then the fabric there was spanned onto the frame with Velcro. And so, there were these two triangular pyramids, and then there was this rectangular frame as well.



Assembling Rauschenberg's set design for Trisha Brown Dance Company's *Set and Reset* (1983), entitled *Elastic Carrier (Shiner)*, unknown venue, ca. 1983. Photograph Collection. Photo: Unattributed. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

DW: So, since dance companies are always on the move, then it moved fairly easily and it's a very impressive set when it's installed. And my recollection is that, that central shoebox shaped piece with those pyramids at either end was on the stage floor when the curtain opened and the film of news reel footage was projected on those things. And then at one point it would slowly raise above the stage floor, and then the dancers appeared.

MS: Exactly. Like I said, I helped him build this thing and then with . . . Who else was there? Terry was on that and at least one other person and, Lars. And in the big space at the back, that's the rest of the church [the chapel space at Rauschenberg's 381 Lafayette studio], that's where we built this thing to try and put it together. And then he wanted to test it out on a stage. So, he rented a day at . . . there was one big stage, big enough that was comparable to the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) stage where the grand opening took place.

And it was up in the Bronx? I think Lehman College [CUNY]. They had this theater with a big stage, so we tested it out there and I don't know whose beat-up old station wagon, but somebody had an old station wagon with the wooden sides. And we packed everything into the back of that thing and drove up to the Bronx to Lehman college and to this theater, to the stage and set it up there to try it out because it was too big to be actually set up completely in the Lafayette Street studio.

DW: Fascinating.

MS: So, we built that thing up there and it worked and it was fine and everybody was really happy. And then we packed it back up and drove back down to the studio in pouring rain down the West Side Highway—under construction—in this beat up old station wagon. And so that was a bit of an adventure. I was the one driving. I drove it and I was just [crosstalk].

DW: You're responsible for all parts of it, including—

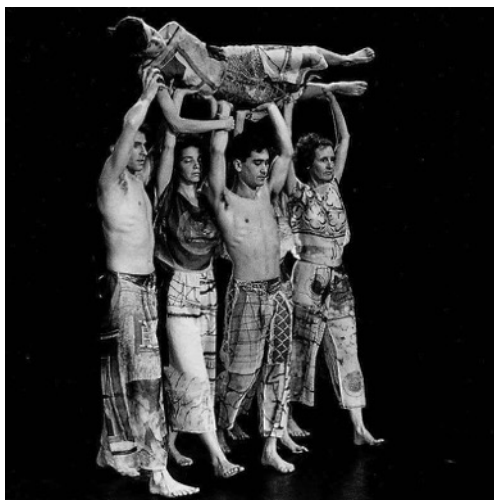
MS: Yeah, all the people and everybody in it as well. And so, we had a great time and everybody's always in great spirits and it was a lot of fun and a lot of creative people. And then when the big day came around for the show at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, I think it was the day before we were out there already, and my role was sort of stage managing it for the setup for Bob. And we set it up on the stage and made sure that worked there. And it was very fascinating because we were in the Brooklyn Academy of Music and it was empty. We were just a small group of us there setting it up on the stage. And at one point I remembered Terry being up on the upper tiers of the seating area, way up at the other end of the theater, and the acoustics in that place were incredible. Because he could just talk in a normal voice and we could talk to each other in a normal voice. We could understand each other perfectly clearly.

DW: Wow.

MS: Amazing. And that's where I learned that the two theaters with the best acoustics in New York were Carnegie Hall and the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

DW: Very interesting. I wasn't aware that BAM was in that category with Carnegie Hall.

MS: Yeah. Neither was I and it was a great, great place to do this show. And then of course Bob made the costumes for Trisha Brown and the dancers, and he made the side banners on the side of the theater of the stage and all of it was the printed silk, the black-and-white printed silks. And I was also there with him when he was on Lafayette Street, splicing all those news reel images together for the . . . I think those were sixteen-millimeter projectors that he used, like five of them or nine of them—I can't remember exactly—to project onto the different sides of the stage set as it was sitting there and then moved up.



Robert Rauschenberg's costume design for Trisha Brown Company's *Set and Reset* (1983), ca. 1983. Pictured: Diane Madden carried by Stephen Petronio, Vicki Shick, Randy Warshaw, and Brown.

DW: So, it was certainly an incredibly complex stage design and costumes. And it's one of the most renowned of all of Trisha Brown's pieces. They may be doing a repeat of it this coming spring at BAM.

MS: Wow. That'd be great. I remember Trisha Brown also performed in Frankfurt with that and some other places. And we also visited Trisha at her studio in SoHo and that was interesting to see them rehearsing and preparing. Trisha Brown was also a fantastic personality and oh, just wonderful. And also Laurie Anderson, when she was doing the music, she was there once and it was an incredible group of people to be around.

DW: For sure. It's very lucky that you happened to be part of all that.

MS: Yeah, absolutely.

DW: But I think they were all lucky to have you as well, so it worked both ways.

MS: Yeah. Bob and I got along really, really well and we talked about all sorts of things and creative things, and we had a very similar eye, and we would travel around New York from time to time doing whatever needed to be done. And sometimes I'd drive Bob somewhere and we talked about . . . because he also did a lot of photography work and he also at one point gave me a copy of one of his books that he did of the photography where there's . . . I forget what it's called. There's an image, it's all black-and-white of two pigeons flying in front of the facade of, I believe it was a Metropolitan Museum [of Art, New York] and this one's in on a black background and it's white and the other one's white on a black background.

It's just a nice coincidence of perfect timing that he caught that image. And of course, with all the found objects and he'd see beauty in all sorts of things that most people wouldn't notice, and we both viewed things in a very similar manner. And so, we had a great time together in discussing that and he even suggested—unfortunately I never took him up on it—that we do some photography together.



Robert Rauschenberg
New York City, 1980
Gelatin silver print
19 x 13 inches (48.3 x 33 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation
RRF 80.P034

DW: That would've been fantastic.

MS: And that would've great fun, but I never got around to it because then I was continuing with my studies and then I was so busy with all sorts of other things. And then by the time I was twenty-one, I met my future wife and got married and my life took on a whole different direction. And I was then up in Massachusetts and that was basically it. But in between, I did also visit Bob down in Captiva and that is where he was making those panels where he did the outlines of the people and where he asked me to lay down on one of the canvasses to outline me.

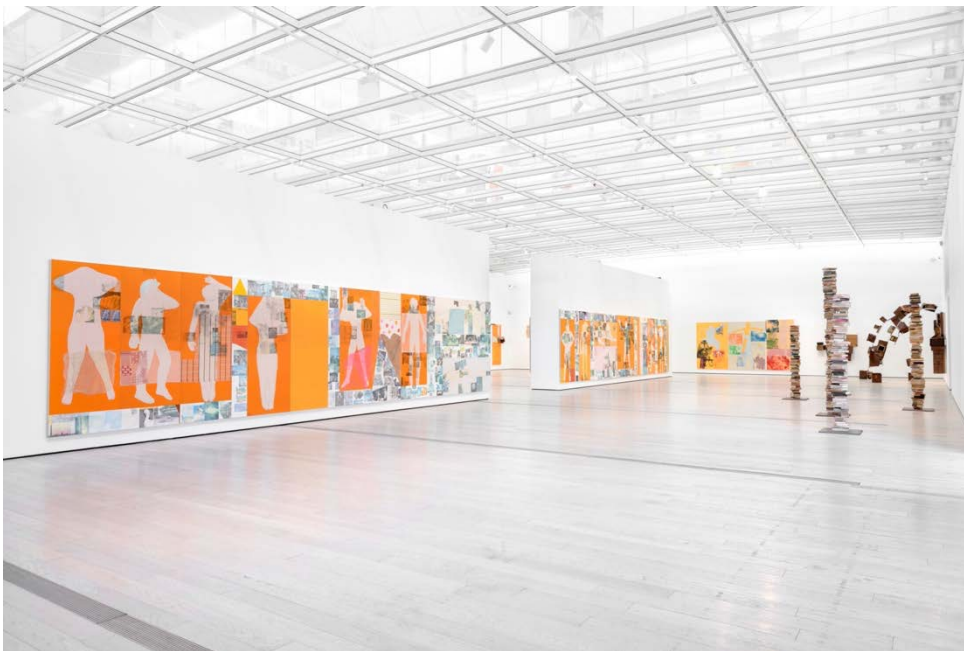
DW: That's for what's called *The 1/4 Mile* painting [*The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98)].



Robert Rauschenberg
The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece, 1983 (detail of Stebich's outline)
Solvent transfer, acrylic, fabric, and ink on plywood
96 x 48 1/2 inches (243.8 x 123.2 cm)
RRF 81.061

MS: Yeah, exactly. For *The 1/4 Mile* painting.

DW: Tell me how that works. I know he was outlining various people that he worked with and friends that he called his soldiers.



Installation view of Rauschenberg's *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981–98; detail) at the exhibition *Rauschenberg: The 1/4 Mile*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Oct. 28, 2018–June 9, 2019. Photo: Laura Cherry.

MS: Yeah. Well, one of them was his mother, one of them was Terry. I don't remember who the other people were. I wasn't around for any of those. A friend and I from college, we had decided to take a trip down to Florida and Bob said we could visit him at Captiva, which we did. And he

let us stay in the house on the other side of the island, on the inland side. There's the one that's on the end of the pier and the one that's just inland from that. And so, we were in the house just inland, we weren't in the house on the pier.

DW: I think the one that you're referring to is called the Bay House. I know exactly which ones you mean. The Fish House is the one out in the water.

MS: Yes, the Fish House is the one out at the end of the pier, and the one just when you come back on land from pier and then take a few steps into the left—there's this white house, it was white at the time and that's where we stayed. And then he had another one a little bit further up. My parents had stayed there at one point too and I remember my mother went on about how Bob went on about every single detail, including selecting the color, the toilet paper, and all that. And that was typical. He really paid attention to every single detail.

DW: He really did. So, there was some canvas laid down or something that for the background and you said you lay down on the floor, on the table or on something?

MS: Yeah, on a table. On one of those tables in the studio and it was just a large blank piece of canvas. And then he took this big, thick marker and did an outline of me, that's sort of like one of those police outlines. And then afterwards—I wasn't there when he then continued working on it—adding the colors and the collages and all of that in the prints that he did like silkscreens to it. I didn't see that, only saw the result afterwards at some point.

DW: Yeah, I think very often what was added was sometimes in reference to the person that was outlined if he knew there was something that were particularly important to you or he would try to make that part of that panel there. And have you seen *The 1/4 Mile* painting installed one place or another ever?

MS: Yeah, actually I have. I saw it over up in—

DW: MASS MoCA [Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, *Robert Rauschenberg: The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, May 30, 1999–April 9, 2000].

MS: MASS MoCA, yep. In Massachusetts.

DW: Oh, terrific.

MS: And that was fascinating. What a great space for it too. And that panel and those panels happened to be there when I was there.

DW: That's been shown in different configurations. As it was being made, he would show the first twenty-five panels, for example, at the Edison Community College exhibition space [Gallery of Fine Art, Edison Community College, Fort Myers, Fla., *The First Footage of the 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*, Feb. 6–26, 1982]. And then the second batch of panels. So, it wasn't until later on that he had a chance to show the entire work in several places. Even when it was at the Metropolitan Museum in New York [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Selections*

from Rauschenberg's 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece, Feb. 3, 1987–Jan. 3, 1988], the space was a very large gallery space, but at that point there were too many panels to get them all in, so he did some editing.

MS: Yeah, I remember that.

DW: So, it can be a flexible painting in a way.

MS: Yeah, I remember there were many different exhibitions of it in different parts and in different developments and that was for many years an ongoing piece of work.

DW: Right. It started in 1981 and I think it was updated up until the time of his death, because it was always a thought that he might add another panel or two [panels were added through 1998, Rauschenberg died in 2008], but it's basically quite close to a quarter mile long, so it's the most—

MS: I thought at one point it was actually longer depending on how you measured it, but he was very prolific. He was always doing lots of work.

DW: For sure. So then also back to ROCI, you went to Mexico at the time of the opening?

MS: Yeah, I was at the Museo Rufino Tamayo [Mexico City] when they had the opening. That was a great space because, like I said, I was part of the team that was responsible for getting the whole thing organized. And of course my parents went down, my father being president of Schenker at the time. Bob and my father they knew each other as well, but I was the one that was really spending more time with Bob because I was working with him directly then on the projects. And then I remember there's this great saxophonist who played at the opening there. It was beautiful space.

DW: Dickie Landry.

MS: Yeah.

DW: He is a fellow artist and friend of Bob's. Bob really was incredibly inclusive in all those exhibitions. If there was a way to work in some music that involved some other people, he would do that often.

MS: Yeah. He did so many collaborations with so many different people which I always found very inspiring.

DW: Are there any other specific recollections about Bob; in the way he worked or, his working attitude? If there's any other particular—

MS: There's lots of little sort of anecdotes like the turtle he had. He had this great sense of humor. He was always joking and laughing and that was a period when it was often combined with a drink in his hand and such. But the turtle for example, his turtle was named Rocky. And

he said the whole ROCI show was named after his turtle. The turtle would be with him either in New York or on Captiva and we would joke about how his turtle preferred hardwood floors to the sand of the beach,



Robert Rauschenberg with kittens and Rocky the turtle in the kitchen of his home and studio at 381 Lafayette Street, New York, 1968. Photo: Shunk-Kender. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. © J. Paul Getty Trust.

DW: That's what I had heard as well, preferred Manhattan.

MS: Yeah. With the hardwood floors in the studio. And then also lots of collaborations with various artists. He knew so many of the people that were in the art world in New York and spent a lot of time with them. He would go to various people's studios; various artists would come to his house. There's a whole list of people that you would see from time to time at his studio where we would just head on over to some artist studio nearby and see what was going on there. And I remember being over at Jasper Johns's studio once and who else was there? A couple of other people and—

DW: He was particularly supportive of younger artists too. I think Mel Bochner says that Rauschenberg was the first person that ever bought a work of his and so supportive both in actually buying something or support in companionship and encouragement.

MS: Yeah, absolutely. And he was very generous too. He very much appreciated anybody that worked with him, that supported him, but also that was creative and would try to support them as well. And as you said, I noticed this and experienced this lots of times. It was pretty much a constant with him.

DW: Yes. For sure. Well, this has been wonderful.

MS: Actually, I do remember one more story.

DW: Lovely, lovely.

MS: There was this big opening at the Met—at the Metropolitan Museum—and I can't remember exactly what the show was, but there was a huge reception. Also, it was kind of a big event and reception where the Temple of Dendur is and everybody with black tie with tuxedos and very formal evening. It was a huge event. I can't remember exactly what it was.

DW: But this was during Bob's lifetime that—

MS: Yeah, absolutely. This was early eighties. This was absolutely during the time that I was working with him, there's this event there and I went along as well. Like so many of his people in his circle, but I can't remember exactly what it was. I can't remember, if it was the new collection—the modern collection—that was being shown at the Metropolitan or if it was specifically just Bob's work.

DW: Well, there was a reception following when *The ¼ Mile* painting was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum [in 1987], which was the introduction to some of the new contemporary galleries. That would make sense. That's easy enough to do some research and figure out which—

MS: Yeah. It must have been somewhere around 1984, I think, but I'm not exactly sure.

DW: Sure.

MS: '83 or '84 but—

DW: After Bob's death, there were memorial events, one at the Museum of Modern Art, and then also at the Metropolitan Museum, but that's another thing.

MS: Yeah. No, I wasn't there or part of that. The last time I saw Bob was . . . I think it must have been in the nineties. There was an exhibit in Düsseldorf at the museum, which is now known as the K20 Museum. It was known back then as Kunstsammlung, I believe in Düsseldorf. So in the nineties and he had some beautiful work there too [Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, *Robert Rauschenberg*, May 7–July 10, 1994]. And I went by there when he was there and I saw him and was able to say hello to him. We hadn't seen each other in a long time and he remembered me, which was really nice.

DW: Oh, that must have been nice to have a little reunion of sorts.

MS: Yeah, exactly.

DW: I'm aware of that exhibition. It was a beautiful exhibition.

MS: Absolutely, gorgeous stuff. The works on metal, which are some of my favorite pieces actually, because I've worked with metal in the past myself. It's one of my favorite materials. I've done lots of soldering work and metal work and working with copper and things like that. And then he did these beautiful etchings and prints on these huge sheets of brass and copper and stuff. Just gorgeous stuff.

DW: A lot of what's called the later work is on those various metal surfaces. It's absolutely beautiful. I agree with you too. And that show was combined with some of the assembled found metal works that are called *Gluts* (1986–89/1991–94) because he worked on those kind of simultaneously. While either waiting for the silkscreens he would work on *Gluts*, or when he was waiting for a trip to the scrapyard for more metal, he would work on the paintings. So, they're both wonderful series that were just done concurrently.

MS: Absolutely. Oh, by the way, when the opening of the *Set and Reset* took place at BAM, afterwards there was a big party at Leo Castelli and there were several buses that took the whole Trisha Brown troop, and Laurie Anderson, and Bob's complete team, and some of the people from BAM, over to the Castelli Gallery in SoHo. There's all these tables set up and there were also pieces there from Bob that were hanging on strings basically. It was prints on this handmade white paper from China, I think it was, with ribbons and Chinese themed—

DW: Oh, exactly. It's a series called *7 Characters* (1982) and there he went to a paper mill in China and it's a very, very heavy multi-ply paper and—

MS: Almost like cardboard.



Robert Rauschenberg
Individual (from 7 Characters), 1982
Silk, ribbon, paper, paper-pulp relief, ink, and gold leaf
on handmade Xuan paper, with mirror, framed in a
Plexiglas box
43 x 31 x 2 1/2 inches (109.2 x 78.7 x 6.4 cm)
From an edition of 70 unique variations, published by
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles
RRF 82.E017

DW: Exactly. Although there are multiple examples of each of the seven Chinese characters, each one is unique; part of each one is the same as all the rest of whatever that character is. But then in each of those, there are images that are unique to just that one. And those circular pendants that hung below are made from fabric of wedding costumes or something like that. It's a terrific set.

MS: Yeah. It was such an incredible setting. And then the party in the middle of all of that, it was a great evening.

DW: Nice way to end and sounds like a very special day for sure.

MS: It was. A lot of people put a lot of work into it. It was a great way to celebrate that and the appreciation and to celebrate an event that was really well done, that came across really well.

DW: It did. Okay, then I'll say goodbye and I can't thank you enough. It's been wonderful to talk with you.

MS: David. It was an absolute pleasure talking to you.

DW: Very good. Bye Markus.

MS: Bye-bye.