

Interview with KENNETH TYLER

Master Printer

Interviewed by KAREN THOMAS

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Sharon, Connecticut

KAREN THOMAS: Today is August 9th and I am talking with Ken Tyler. If we could talk about what the world of printmaking was in the years just before Bob Rauschenberg came to Gemini, when you first met him. How would you describe them?

KENNETH TYLER: Well I'd say it was the beginning of a rebirth in many ways of printmaking in the last part of the 20th century. The biggest difference probably was that for the first time the East Coast and West Coast was being recognized as two art centers and so I, being on the West Coast and working with Joseph Albers as the first publication that we [Gemini G.E.L.] did as a publishing company. Before that I worked with many local artists and [Alberto] Giacometti and a few New York artists.

But starting out my publishing career working with Joseph Albers and the *16 White Squares* that we did was a breakthrough both technically and artistically. It was my portfolio to sell if I wanted to go east and get top-notch people, which I wanted to do. At this point in life I had already been primed by Bill Lieberman at the Modern [Museum of Modern Art] to think that "Don't waste your time on art that doesn't matter. Work with the very best you can because great art is made by great artists." This was a very good morality tale to tell a young man starting

out and I certainly bought into that, believed in it, and I thought, "Well where to go? Leo Castelli." So I went to Leo and I said that I would like to work with some of his artists. [Laughs] And he was very, very quick to say you should start with Jasper and Bob but maybe you should start with Rauschenberg first. Well, knowing all about Tanya Grossman, the chicken noodle stories, etc. I was fearful that she would put the "kibosh" on any artists going out there to work with that brash Ken Tyler. That it wasn't going to work, but it was worth a shot.

So Leo arranged for me to meet with Bob and I went to Lafayette Street, to the brownstone, and I met with Bob and somehow we hit it off with a lot of laughter and a lot of drinking and I invited him over and he said, "Yes", and had no idea what he wanted to do but that was par for course and that follows pretty much his history in almost all of his projects with me.

THOMAS: Unique to Bob Rauschenberg or most artists were that way when they entered the print shop?

TYLER: No, no, unique to Bob. Bob got turned on by environment, by circumstance, by things, objects, headlines, whatever, and as we all know he was a consummate recorder, constantly recording both visually and through photography. So I would suspect that he was going to come and do photo collages of some sort. I mean that was in the back of my mind. All I had to do was look at what was going on at U.L.A.E. and I knew that the one thing that I had [as] an ace in my hand was that, even though I was just beginning, my first designed hydraulic press was bigger than anything they had. So I was going to push scale and lo and

behold Bob [was] very much interested in scale. This pushed the magic button and when he got there he decided he wanted to really do something big and it started off as a challenge right away. He looked at the press and said I want to do something that's bigger than that. I said, "Well, Bob look at these beautiful stones. I mean they are 40" by 48". Blah, blah, blah. "No, I want to do something bigger than that." He said, "I'd like to do a self-portrait, a full length self-portrait."

I said, "Okay. I can, I can do that." He said, "How are you going to do that?" "Well, you know, whatever you do, do it on two separate stones and I'll run one stone through the press once and then turn it around and run the paper through the other way and we'll get double the size of this press bed." Oh well that won the day and we got him off to Kaiser medical facilities and had a full x-ray made of him which was going to be the start of this print, it was going to be *Booster*, and he came back with the results and was thrilled to death that both his hob nail shoes and his penis were in the x-ray. Oh, he was so happy about that. And he was looking forward to this. [Laughs] So our beginnings were quite wonderful in every respect. He started out doing smaller prints which built up to the big one. And it was a pretty quick project in many respects for the first time out. Bob had all the disciplines of a person who had known process. He was already very technologically advanced in many respects. He had been making prints now for, what, some 5, 6 years. Had a good curiosity, was a good listener, was a good raconteur. I mean he could joke and keep everybody entertained as he was trying to seriously work out something that he was working on. He would meander sometimes, but basically he was pretty focused. And then there would be the bouts of time when he was *not*

focused and then that's the time you weren't kind of "with" Bob. So it was a lesson for me on how to deal with a very temperamental artist, in [the] respect that he was temperamental, and also to deal with a major artist from the East Coast and one that had a very gregarious nature so that he was all over the place. I don't think it took him more than a week before everybody in Los Angeles knew who he was. Pretty much like David Hockney in many ways.

The subject that we were starting with, an x-ray, a full body x-ray, was kind of revolutionary. But it also echoed the blue prints before that and there was a lot of things that were historical -- these were the signposts that -- these were the ways that we were going to be going -- and taught me that I was always going to have to challenge this guy if I was going to get him back because it was obvious that he wasn't going to leave *anybody* to work with me full time. And I also needed to be very successful here. Because I was very successful with the Albers I had to be even more successful with Bob because I was going to be under the scrutiny of the New York scene. So.

When we came out with *Booster*...- I remember sitting there with my two partners at the time and I said, "You know, this print has to sell for a thousand dollars" and they looked at me and they said "You're nuts!" I said, "I may be nuts but it's going to be sold for a thousand dollars, not a penny less, not a penny more and I want to send a signal that if we're going to make the largest lithograph printed by hand, ever," which was the case, "we're going to get the biggest price first time out, ever. It had to be that way because we're going to have to knock on other doors and have something to sell here, guys." And I proved to be

right. Because when we came out, we got lambasted. That was a wonderful....

THOMAS: What do you mean?

TYLER: Well a lot of people said, "What? How dare you charge a thousand dollars? Who do you think you are, Metro Goldwyn Mayer?" And of course that stuck, and everyone said, "Oh Ken Tyler Metro Goldwyn Mayer Hollywood mad man" and it was wonderful. Years later Michael Crichton and I were just kidding and joking about this and having lots of fun at just the impact that this had, because it did have an impact. I think a lot of people were more interested in the price tag and the size than they were in the art. And as time went on, *Booster*, you know, it sold out like crazy, 38 prints.

THOMAS: Sold out.

TYLER: Bam. Which was wonderful. [I had] bragging rights to go back and make sure I secured Jasper. But for Jasper I had to go through David Whitney. I had to go through a whole new litany of players. So that set the stage.

So, staying with Bob. I knew that if Bob was going to come back and do anything it was going to have to be quick because his life was becoming more and more busy and after the success of *Booster* and what have you he'd bought Captiva and then that meant he had another place he was going to and then [it] was shortly thereafter that Don Saff started the Florida workshop in the '70s. So that was another place to work and I thought, "Well it's going to get more and more difficult." And it did get more

and more difficult to get him. In fact, how I got "*Bonnie and Clyde*" [Reels B+C] was, again...-, A couple days was all I was given by him and we did "*Bonnie and Clyde*" in two days. Sixty some odd hours. It took us 4 months more to print the project but the collaboration was really condensed. An "around the clock" sort of thing. It also became the first time that I was exposed to the inner sanctum of Bob's world because I think he got comfortable with me after *Booster* and its success. I wouldn't say we were drinking friends but we got to be friends on a different level beside just the business relation, the professional relationship. And so when we did "*Bonnie and Clyde*" it was like a kind of trust that he was going to leave me with this stuff and it was like kind of half-cooked in many ways. They were fast and they were very much like a movie in the sense that they were just shots put down with various strong colors. So "*Bonnie and Clyde*" went out there and did okay but I mean it was not nothing, no great shakes, and I think everybody around me knew it was no great shakes but after all it was Bob.

THOMAS: He got to spend some time with Warren Beatty.

TYLER: Oh yeah well he had spent time with both of them anyway. They were hanging around the studio like crazy.

THOMAS: During this process?

TYLER: Before that. Before he even did *Reels* he had already made friends with them. So what really took place after that was a lot of a lot of trips to New York. A lot of walking to Lafayette from the Hilton Hotel trying to get Bob to come back and it became...- Well this is kind of like how it was with David

Hockney, and that was constant, constant wooing, trying to get him to get back into the studio.

It became more difficult as time went on to get these people into any sort of advance work schedule so that you could plan, so you can plot a course, so you can do all the things necessary to make for a real great project. With Bob it was getting more and more impossible to do that. So when we knew about the NASA thing, the Apollo 11, we had known right away that I wanted to work with him and we should really do something big, you know, get big, big, big. And so he put the screws to me, he said, "How big?" So I said, "All right we've done the six foot print. How much further can we go?" "I remember I was in the studio with him, my biggest press which was not that big and I was starting to think, how far could I reach over the press bed? How big of a roller could I handle? What was the length of paper that we could manipulate and all these things? And by this time I had been working with Arjomari-Prioux paper company and I had already developed the roll paper with them and so I was in business in terms of getting the large paper but I hadn't quite determined whether we could go beyond the 52 inch width and whether I was capable of really physically manipulating the stone and of course I didn't have a stone that large anyway. So, this fictitious measurement that I had in my mind suddenly emerged as 89 inches. Well, okay, all right.

So I laid down a piece of butcher paper on the floor of the studio one Saturday by myself and I tried to figure out how many times I'd have to navigate across with this little roller to ink a surface and I thought well it's possible we could do "this". So then I went out searching for how I could laminate some of my

stones together to make one big stone on a large marble slab which I got made and then figure out how to grind it, surface it, get it prepared for making the print and getting the press built so it kind of all simultaneously took place at one time. The press being built; the stone being laminated. Little, little exercises being done in preparation for Bob's visit. So this time around we had preparation. The *Stoned Moon* series really was in many ways a project from the beginning. And by the time Bob got there with all of his photographs from NASA and all this stuff, then I was busy making enlargements and making photographic reproductions of these for continuous tone plates, half tone plates, and then photographic stones were being prepared. Photo stones, I should say. And by the time we began making this project...- We started again small, knowing that it was going to wind up being that big print which was going to be *Waves* and then *Sky Garden*. Just didn't know how many times it would take us to get there. Well it took 30 some times to get there. 30 some prints before we got to the last two big ones.

THOMAS: 33, right? 32 or 33?

TYLER: Subtotal is that little edition of 500 that became 33. That wasn't counting to...-, there's a story about that that I'll talk about.

So now we get to the point where we've had this experience of staying up all night working, getting smashed, lying on the couch, having food brought in, printers sleeping on the presses. *Bonnie and Clyde's* done with but now it's *Stoned Moon*. My goodness. There are stones all over the place, there's transfer paper and plates all over the place. I'm processing night and

day, I'm over there 7 days, 24/7, and I too, am getting to the point where I think exhaustion must be the operation that you've got to go through in order to qualify to be one of these people on this project.

After a while we looked like a bunch of zombies running around that studio. And Bob was always alert. I mean it was like he just got up, like he just had a shot of B12, and he was off and running. We were just dragging our fannies around there. It's hard work this business of printing stones and moving them and constantly exerting yourself. And then you're under the gun to make sure you don't do anything stupid and lose the image because after all of this work that had gone into it. So there was a lot of pressure. Needless to say adrenaline was wide open, flowing freely and one was making one edition after another and seeing them accumulating and everybody wondering when is this going to stop and everybody on the side just thinking "Wow, isn't this unbelievable what's going on here?"

So, you know, the 11 printers were at this point just like on an Olympic team. We trained, we had been ready for it, we were going for the gold. And Bob is over there cheering us on, bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger. More color, more color. Although most of them were monochromatic in many ways. It was only a few prints that really had a lot of color. By the time we got into the big ones it was months later. Bob coming back and forth from the East Coast. We published these prints in three different, I think, three different publications, to get them all out. When we got to the big one, *Waves*, that was pretty remarkable but when we got to *Sky Garden*, that was the real issue. This huge luscious color print and we all knew what

we had. We had the biggest lithograph and we had a juicy color lithograph. We also had a beautiful big black and white. I had the foresight to do black and white studies of *Sky Garden* as it was being made. And this was my habit, I think, of always doing these proofs. Either the "black proofs" as we call them, or the studies of different colors, "color trial proofs" in order to show the artist possibilities. Also, in a greedy kind of way thinking, "Maybe we can do this one, too." [Laughs] And in many cases some of the color trial proofs we made were more gorgeous than the editions we printed so there was no rhyme or reason why I wouldn't be trying to push that button whenever I could.

So Bob allowed me to push that button and we made the black ones that are now in my Australian archive. They were gorgeous prints. What happened at that moment in time I think is that Bob reached the point where he realized that anything was possible if you just asked for it, and unlike the theater that he worked in where there was limitations as to amount of money, amount of time, what have you, it seemed as if you know this nut Ken Tyler would spend as much time and money as necessary ...- "Look what he just did for me." I think in many ways let's say that I had set myself up for failure in this regard and there was a limit to how much more I could go size wise and there was also a limit to how much more I could spend. And there was also this business...- well now by this time I've had had a lot of artists I had been working with. So it wasn't just Bob, it was other artists and their programs going on in multiples, programs going on in print making and so I'd be careful that I... - My time got to be more and more precious. And so some projects that we probably could have gotten involved in I missed out on because I couldn't get to New York to be in the studio to see the

beginnings of another thing going. And I was also so much involved in pushing the medium and this building block sensibility of mine that I said, you know, "Take this information. Give it to the next artist." It took 2 years for Sam Francis to use that big laminated stone to do 2 prints but then after that the stone just broke up and we had to get rid of it and I never tried to make another laminated stone that big. So the press was only used for metal plates that large.

From a collaborative point, you that artists change, printers change, workshops change, markets change, and attitudes change. All these changes, which is a word that Bob loved because that was his foundation's name, Change Inc., is that the workshop became less and less a place for Bob as it was a place for all these other artists I have worked with.

THOMAS: What do you mean by that?

TYLER: Well I think in many respects the shop that he thought he must have felt the biggest person there in, was no longer, because other artists were making superb projects and Bob's projects were just one of many. However, when we had the Museum of Modern Art show [Technics and Creativity: Selections from Gemini G.E.L.], he graciously threw a terrific party for us on the rooftop of his house.

THOMAS: This is the '71 show.

TYLER: Yeah. And that show did me in. New York was very nasty to me and I was very disturbed by it all and I think that also I was going through a mid life crisis in many respects. What I

wanted out of this endeavor I didn't think I was getting, and I thought that we had scaled up too much. When I say "we", I should really say "Ken" had scaled up too much. I had pushed the buttons too many times. I needed more time to reflect and I didn't have it. I mean the place was just filled up with projects. (THOMAS: And wildly successful.) And wildly successful. And that was not going down well with Ken at all and I was feeling very upset by it. And there were not very many people I could talk to at the time. Michael Crichton was one of my dear friends at the moment and we talked a lot about it. And when the *Stoned Moon* project was completed, I asked Michael to write an essay about it. At this time, he was getting very involved in looking at Jasper and at Bob. And so he wrote a wonderful beginning, a draft I just recently got actually, several years back. And I got Bob to do in one day a bunch of collage boards explaining his project and I invited Henry Hopkins from LA County Museum, the curator who was a good friend, over to kind of monitor Bob on this and to kind of get it off so it was Bob's words with Henry kind of helping. And then we were going to do this picture book and the foreword essay would be by Michael Crichton, I thought, "Oh another winner." You know? I really wanted to do this.

It fell apart. I don't' really know why but it did. This is one of those things that kind of got out of hand and I guess I was just too ambitious and it just...- it backfired or something so the property of those boards...- I think Bob has them. Henry's notes I don't have but I do have Michael's, which is at my archive in Australia. And it was a very insightful piece, a very good analysis of what was going on at that time. And part of it was "What it is about - collaboration." "What is it about

an artist going somewhere and working with people?" "What is it about this, this technique that has to be discovered for each artist" and "What about this innovation number?" All these kind of questions were being answered and we were discussing, talking about how do you represent process to the public. What do you tell them and how do you get this thing across and above all how do you keep the momentum that was established going at the rate it was going. And constantly coming out at the other end of the tunnel with good projects because that's asking a lot. We had very few failures. We had mostly successes. And that was unheard of. So I think that the next step along the line would have to be coming down and doing *Pages and Fuses*. (THOMAS: Not *Cardboards*? [*Cardbirds*])

TYLER: Well the *Cardbirds* we'll get back to a little later. That's another one of those little excursion trips that I don't think was very successful.

THOMAS: But *Pages and Fuses* was.

TYLER: I think it was. I think it was ground breaking for many reasons, ground breaking for my paper "revolution" that I was starting single handedly, I thought, in color, and ground-breaking also in the sense that...- All the years that I had spent collaborating with Arjomari paper company developing new papers and working with hand-made paper, commercial paper people, I had gotten to the point where I needed a project from a major artist that I could put on front stage to keep pushing this because I was going nowhere with my other stuff, and I'd gotten also to the point where I thought a way to slow down this whole thing that was going on there [*Gemini G.E.L.*] was to get

into the handmade all the way. Start out with the hand made, just keep it hand made and somehow get rid of the machinery for a while, get rid of the scale thing for a while, get down to this little hand stuff for a while and then see what *this* does to the medium, just see what we can kick start here. And mind you, we had just been working on these very small eccentric polygons for Frank Stella, which were this size. This was the same period of time, actually, '73. I was trying to get back to small. I was trying to get back to the more intimate. Not that these big prints weren't intimate. They were, in a funny way, extremely intimate.

But it was just part of what I was going through and I needed another DNA marker and the paper was going to be it. So, sitting in New York with Vera Freeman, Andrews/Nelson/Whitehead, who was my paper supplier in America, I came up with this idea, saying let's rent a mill, a hand-made paper mill in Europe so I could do this. And then let's get Elie d'Humières at Arjomari in France to help us out. So we made a phone call to Paris that evening and Elie was absolutely thrilled that he could again be a part of what was going on. So we set up this three-way thing and we got it to the point where Elie was able to commission the Richard de Bas mill in Ambert, France for a week and get all the parts and pieces together. And so I assembled my concept of what this was in my head and I went to Bob and I said, "You know Bob this is what I'd like to do and would you like to partake in it?" and of course he just jumped at it and I said, "Well we need to make some preparations because after all it's going to be long distance, we may be doing this without a studio. Going somewhere else." So he thought, "Oh, well, okay, I'll do some photographic things and we will print them on tissue and maybe

we can imbed that tissue in the paper." I said "Absolutely." So I said, "We'll use watercolor inks so they'll bleed into the pulp and fuse all together. That would be fine." And I said, "I'll get Swiss dyes. Real strong Swiss dyes so we can get all the color we want. And you know the rest is up to you, when you get there we'll pull it off." So Vera Freeman, Kay my wife and I rented a car in Bordeaux, France, having flown to Europe and we drove first to, to the Georges Duchêne's paper mill in Berjac France, and visited with him, who was also a supplier of hand made paper for us, and then we drove to our hotel in Clermont-Ferrand which was some 80 kilometers from the Richard de Bas mill and I got the flu.

I was sick as a dog. And we arrived I think a day ahead of Rauschenberg and Bob Petersen and Gianfranco Gorgoni who I commissioned to do the photography. And so Vera went to the pharmacy and got the best she could get from French pharmacists without a doctor. And she and Kay started administering tea and all sorts of medicine to me to try to get me on my feet. Bob came in and was absolutely furious. "How dare you have me come all this way and you're in bed sick. Get out...[rants]." So the next morning I, this weak trouper, go off to this carved out granite cave that we were going to make paper in. Damp as hell and just [an] unbelievable experience from beginning to end and it was just heroic and I mean Kay and Vera were just right there attending to everything I had to be attending to, lifting things, keeping me as insulated from getting worse. And Bob turned on and he started to do his thing and his thing was brilliant, and [he] went off with some plumbers and got some galvanized cookie cutters made and came back and started to improvise and it was wonderful. And as long as the French were

drinking red wine, and he was drinking his Jack Daniels everything was fine except we ran out of Jack Daniels very quickly and so Elie had to fly in a case from Paris. So he came flying in with the Jack Daniels under his arm, which endeared him. [Laughs] And also by this time we were having one hell of a problem with the owner, a Mr. Patrice Peraudea, because we were damaging his floors with color dyes and we were damaging the felts with color dyes and we were screwing up the beater with all this work. And the workers were absolutely indifferent to everything going on. They could care less. This nut. Do whatever you want. Piece of crap, they're making here. And you want us to press it down? So, you know, at the end of the day you'd pile up all the papers you made into this screw press and then a long 20 foot telephone pole was brought in, and stuck into the press lock and then you'd all run around like donkeys in a circle bringing it into the screw down position to squeeze the papers. So that was the end of every day you'd be doing this.

THOMAS: Including Bob?

TYLER: Yeah. Yeah everybody, everybody'd get down on the thing and push. Well Bob was willing to stand at that point, sometimes he wasn't. It was remarkable. And then at the end of that project, Elie picked up Kay and me, drove us to Lugano, Switzerland to stay for a while for me to get well to come back home.

Bob took off to Paris. Somewhere along the line our relationship got suckered. I don't know how it happened but it happened and then he gave an interview to a French magazine not mentioning

me, or Elie d'Humières that made this possible, or Vera Freeman that made it possible. Or Kay, who was there working her rear end off. Or Gianfranco Gorgoni or Bob Petersen. It was just him. Like it was his idea and he did this project. And it was the beginning then of R.O.C.I. It was the beginning of this whole thing he was going to start doing these excursion trips around the world making projects, all fine. And I thought okay. We'll get back. But by the time we got back, this was in August; I had made the decision I was going to leave Gemini. Everything at first was going along smoothly with the partners and what have you. And then one day I was notified that I was being sued for non-competing. I couldn't compete. They were going to put a covenant on me. They were going to put a gag order on me so I couldn't talk to anybody. Artists, printers, et cetera. Couldn't take any printers with me, couldn't do anything, couldn't blah, blah, blah. So you could imagine just what all this had done. Now I couldn't go back to Bob and mend a fence cause I couldn't talk to him. Now I couldn't go back and do anything. I was trying to figure out what in hell am I going to do here.

California law is that in a partnership of equal partners the majority of partners have the say over what's going to happen, period. Financially. So my assets were frozen. Along comes [James] Mollison from Australia National Gallery. Recommended by Bob Hughes, my friend, and Henry Geldzahler, to come see me and talk to me about buying my collection. I had a lot of proofs and drawings. So Mollison comes. Mollison was very hungry for everything I had and was most generous in his offer. And that Australian purchase was the money I got to get out of LA. Hire the lawyers, the accountants. Get to New York and sustain me

for the period of time I had to be sustained as this lawsuit went on.

When I got back, two of the printers defected and one of the secretaries defected and despite the gag order, they violated it, they came to Bedford to work with me. And they were trying to get Bob to come over to Bedford or me to New York to make peace with him, but he wouldn't do it. So then that was the end of it. I'd see Bob at openings. Or I'd get a big French kiss and a big hug but the other thing was gone.

So the story unfolds and in the course of events I had to sell a lot of my prints and the two artists that of course that were gaining the most money at that time were Rauschenberg and Johns so they all went. So that's why you don't see very many of these prints in my collection.

As time went on I have to tell you that, as I look back it was, what 70, some odd prints that we made in 5 years and I look at them and I have to say you know there are some big and ugly ones and there are a lot of wonderful ones and the whole experience was really quite important to what was going on in the print world. I think he's a magnificent print maker. I think he's an artist that was perhaps the only one who was capable of going out and doing a *Pages and Fuses* project just like that. Other artists would have taken a lot of time to plan it and would probably never succeed in doing such a wonderful job. Although the [Ellsworth] Kelly paper project we did in Bedford was on the spot and just unbelievable as was the [Kenneth] Noland, and Hockney *Paper Peels*. But at that time to pick up your sticks and go to another country in a language you didn't speak and work

with a bunch of people that weren't even interested in what you were doing was, was quite a feat. And then to come back and not have the person who organized the project with the mill not recognized. Even to this day the Gemini catalogue raisonné doesn't even recognize him or my wife at the time Kay. So shame on all those people.

THOMAS: Doesn't recognize?

TYLER: They never mention Elie d'Humières, or Kay. It was a very, very tragic thing so it got buried. So *Pages and Fuses* never really got the attention it should have gotten. It never got the analysis it should have gotten and I was just too busy trying to fend off my creditors and keep going to really protest in any public way and also it became very distasteful after a while. I just said, "the hell with it. It's not going to happen."

But you have to look at something else that happens here. There is often under adversity wonderful art that's made and this is a wonderful example of that. I mean you couldn't ask for any comfort there. There was no comfort. It was really very primitive, and in this little town that could care less that you existed, with a bunch of papermakers that were, -- the owner was a fascist for god's sake. He was part of the Vichy government and during World War II. When I look back on it, a pretty awful situation and then even in spite of that when I got back home I got a bill for all the felts that I had damaged so I owned a lot of paper felts. [Laughter.] It just didn't stop.

So that was it. But you know every artist you work with, there is a certain drawing style, a certain approach to process. A certain approach to how you proof and how you study those proofs, the time lags that are involved in all this. What do you do with that time, how do you position yourself in those foreign place, and then what kind of relationship do you have with the staff, and what have you. Bob would win on all those checklists. He'd win as the most gregarious, the most friendly and the most wonderful to work with, the most jovial, the most calm, the most collected, except for moments. And probably the least prepared. [Laughs] Probably, but also, the most inventive on the spot of anyone. Also the one who cared the least about what he made. He could give a damn whether you liked it or not. He could care less. I mean it's made, it's done. Except for those big prints. Those big prints he really took a great deal of interest in.

THOMAS: *Booster, Sky Garden, Waves.*

TYLER: Yeah. Those prints for him were very special.

THOMAS: He was a bad editor of his work?

TYLER: Yeah. Yeah. You know sometimes you would think that if that proof on newsprint was just kept on the wall long enough he'd sign it and let it out, and you knew better. You'd take it away because he was capable of doing that, and it also brought me to a problem years later that I discussed with [Robert] Motherwell to great ends. This kind of connection between artist and publisher -- what's acceptable for selling and what's not acceptable. When does one violate the standards of the craft for

the sake of the art? When does the artist have total control? When does the artist have partial control? All these kind of things which Motherwell was great at because his brain was organized that way, to analyze ideas to the nth degree and we had these wonderful conversations and so one day he said, "Well would you let me publish a group of torn up, ragged up old proofs?" And I said, "Yeah now I would. Five years ago I wouldn't."

THOMAS: Because now you trusted his [judgment.]

TYLER: No, I'd just grown up, to understand what I was doing. It also explains that Motherwell, that age, after making prints for a long, long...-, and he was a good print maker for a long, long time, came to the conclusion that a lot of this "keep the margins clean", "keep the paper pristine" was all BS, you know? Who gave a damn? You know? And if Picasso would have made a print and torn the edge or something and put it out it would have sold.

THOMAS: It would have been a unique.

It would have been unique so when Rauschenberg published the fragmented stones that are broken and there's all this ragged torn up paper on the inside, where it got into the cracks, they were signed. They were sold. So how much did we really have to be worrying about this pristine business? But because your reputation is based upon your technical wizardry and your pristine kind of print making workshop because you came out of Albers, right? You carry that baggage on and then when you go

to start making things that are a little sloppy looking you get hammered.

THOMAS: Are we talking you, we're talking Bob, we're talking both?

TYLER: No, talking about me. But this was something Bob was capable of doing. And so when you look at *Pages and Fuses*, no other artist would have allowed those works to have gone through without more finessing, more finishing. For Bob it was okay. Ken said it's okay. We're going to go with it.

THOMAS: It's real.

TYLER: Yeah, let the rope hang out. Yeah let it bust out. It's okay, it's okay. Unfortunately we didn't make all of them. We only made the first six and then Peraudea and his henchmen made the rest, copying what we did but the copies are not as good as what we did. Because, again, they're formulized. They are made in a systematic way. Where ours were not made in a systematic way.

THOMAS: They were actually unique pieces all of them.

TYLER: They all were unique pieces that we made.

THOMAS: Where are they now?

TYLER: They were part of the edition and they went out. Don't know where they are. There was no distinction between what Peraudea's papermakers made and what we made which was

unfortunate but I wasn't in charge, you see. I was gone by then. I would have taken those pieces and gave them to the museums only. I would never have let those gone into the public.

I learned from that because when we did the paper pieces back in Bedford after that, I was very certain that whatever the artist made all by himself was kept unique. Made as a proof and not thrown away. You want to keep this work catalogued. I mean, documentation is important. It can go crazy with it, as I did, and you can put too much of that information out there and the people can't absorb it because they are not that process minded and some of it is *only* for the people involved. Or the people that are studying it and other than that, it's not. But you have to remember, too, that the five years that I worked with Bob there was Art and Technology, LA County Museum¹, there was Billy Klüver and Bob's art and technology in New York.

There was a lot of technology going on, a lot of experimentation, a lot of stuff in the air. A lot of pushing and pulling and trying to invent new systems, and new concepts, and new thoughts about all this were constantly happening. And no one was really keeping score as to who was being more inventive, who was *not* being inventive. It was just all happening. You know? And all of a sudden ugly Warhol silk screens appear on the market. Nobody gives a damn. There are 250, 6000 of these. They're just out there. They're poorly printed and they're selling like hotcakes. You know? And we're over there polishing, making everything pristine and on the other side of the street they're hawking these ugly silk screens. [Laughs]

¹ Reference being made to the Art and Technology Program at the LA County Museum, 1967-1971.

It seemed to me to be a change, a change that was taking place and good, good that it was happening. I do think you reach levels in any kind of discipline (THOMAS: Cycles?) Yeah, where you get perfection and then you have to get rid of perfection.

THOMAS: Right. We've run that out and now let's try something else? Bob does do that, seemed to do that in his work.

TYLER: He does that instinctively. I mean that's in his DNA. He can't stop that. I think if you ever said to Bob, "Here you have to stay here and do this until it's really honed in", he couldn't do it. He couldn't do it at all. The most wonderful thing to do when you were working with Bob was to watch him draw. He would start out vigorously and then all of a sudden it was just like this just gentle little kissing of the crayon. Or the pencil to just do this little thing, which in the final result of the print, you wouldn't even see. You'd almost have to have a magnifying glass to see those last little strokes, which were like, I don't know, like a little love note he was making to what he just did.

THOMAS: This was on the stone.

TYLER: Yeah, or on the plate. He was extremely gifted. He had good hands. And he had a good eye, a sharp eye and whether it was the photographs that he had taken, or whether it was his just looking around and seeing things.

THOMAS: And he liked to meld the two, it appears.

TYLER: He liked to meld *everything*. Everything. He was in the shop one day. It must have been *Stoned Moon* project. We had been working around the clock. We were all dead tired and my studio, my office was part of the shop and you opened the door and you were in my studio and you opened the other door and you were in the artists' studio. But it was like a kind of like a configuration that meant those two doors. Where the two doors to go to and the two doors to come out of and then go into the workshop and some sort of symbolic thing in my head when I designed the shop. So, Bob has a bucket of fried chicken or something and he goes back in the studio to work on a couple of transfer papers. And I'm looking out the door and there he is with a chicken wing drawing on the transfer paper.

THOMAS: With the chicken wing?

TYLER: With the chicken wing. (THOMAS: Using that to draw with.) Using that to draw with. Taking the wet ink from the transfer paper and taking the chicken wing and moving it, moving ink with the chicken wing and when I went over there and said "This is probably going to print, you know that," he said, "I'm looking forward to it." [Laughs] Those were the kind of moments you really think are great when you're a collaborator because they are everything you want about collaboration. You want that trust. You want that competence. You want that kind of spontaneity. You want that creativity. You want to be able to share it. You want to be able to embrace it and make it work. And so you try like hell to make sure all the little grease was going to record ink eventually when you process the plate or the stone that that paper was transferred to. Yeah, it works.

THOMAS: Judith Goldman called him a natural print maker.

TYLER: There's no such thing as a natural print maker but he was a natural draughtsman. That, I think, is a better word for him. He was just a natural with drawing, whether it be a paintbrush or the crayon or whatever; it was a natural thing to him. He was like an uninhibited child.

THOMAS: Left handed or right-handed?

TYLER: Right handed. But I think he could draw with both hands. He certainly could smear with both hands. You know I think there's too much said about being a print maker. First you've got to be a very good artist to make great prints. Go back to Lieberman. And then second, you have got to be a damn good editor if you want to improve your skills as you go along. Too many artists just make prints, and some are good and some are bad, but most of them are bad because they don't edit their own work. They don't edit as they go. They don't get better as they go. They just keep making.

There are very few artists that are critical enough in their making that they get better at it. Those are the true print makers. I think Jasper keeps working at it and I say "I think" because I haven't seen his recent prints. So I have to say that but I would imagine that he is still doing the same thing, analyzing, working, studying, carefully editing. It's important. I remember Joan Mitchell once telling me "You know not every pastel I make is worth it. You've got to tear it up right away when you know it's not worth it. You've got to get rid of it;

you don't want it lying around because that speaks of your sloppiness. You don't want that. You want to be serious."

Every artist has a different take on these things. Bob was a clutter artist. I mean, the more clutter the better. If you looked at his studio you didn't know what was finished and not finished, that clutter mattered to him. It was the way his brain worked. You know, if the turtle was crawling across the piece so what, what does that matter? And if there is a trail of the turtle crawling, that's even better. So if you spill coffee on your stone so what? Use it. Make it work. That's missing in a lot of people's work habits when they're making prints. But these are the people who really have been able to push the medium because of this, because of their ability to use the serendipitous situation. (Phone)

TYLER: We want to cover *Horsefeathers XIII* and *Cardbirds*.

THOMAS: Yes, but can I ask you something... (TYLER: Sure) When we were walking around, you used the term "vocabulary", of an artist bringing a vocabulary into the studio. I was wondering if Bob brought his work or you said, "Well he has been doing *this* these past eight months so we'll bring some things together that might be appealing to him.

TYLER: What I said was he was one of the few artists that didn't bring preparatory material. He'd have photographs that he could bring and stuff like that because he didn't plan. Other artists did plan, very elaborate plans in some cases. So that the time was all mopped up. In their mind it was pretty clear what they were going to do and it was a matter of doing it and of finding

new developments along the way, whatever way we could use them. But to what degree one wanted to spend time investigating and enlarging their scope of knowledge in the print business varies, tremendously, so you really have to talk about things. We talk about the series called *Cardbirds*. That was just something that happened and it was not a very interesting moment in time, I don't think. It was a project. It got done, I mean, but we had printed offset before, big deal. We had silk screened before, big deal. Making archival cardboard pieces, big deal. The big deal was the door. The cardboard *door* was the big thing. That was the wonderful object made at that point (THOMAS: because?) because it was just a wonderful object; it truly was a wonderful object. So in that case it worked. But that's all I have to say about that.

THOMAS: The other pieces were derivative of what it was that he had done before.

TYLER: Yeah and I got so frustrated I took one of the pieces to the foundry and I had it made into a silver bronze casting and Bob liked it and I thought, "Ah ha, I'll just move him into casting. It'll be better than what we've got here". But that didn't work so those two things bit the dust. And then when we get to the *Horsefeathers*, I mean that's an interesting project only that it was only hand made paper that we used. We used Jeff Goodman's hand made paper. We use Hawthorne of Larroque, we used John Kohler. We used some of the papers I got out of working at Cranbrook with their papermakers and it was like a precursor to going to Richard de bas. And there was talk about how beautiful the paper was and there was talk about the oriental papers versus the western papers and that sort of thing during the

makings of that project. But then again that's a collage project that's not very interesting when I look back on it.

THOMAS: If I remember correctly, it has little to no printing.

TYLER: It's all about varnish, embossing and collaging and it gets a little boring. But these were the filler projects. This was a mistake on my part to let these kinds of projects happen, because it was just a matter of "Get another publication from this famous person" concept, not a good one. I have to take full responsibility. I should have just said, "No. This is not what we should be doing. We should be plowing new ground; we should be doing better things.

THOMAS: And *Booster* and *Stoned Moon* and *Pages and Fuses* really did plow that ground. Who chose the papers?

TYLER: It was papers that we could get. Papers we'd get from New York Central Art Supply. Papers we could get from Andrews/Nelson/ Whitehead. They were all small, some I had in stock.

THOMAS: [Within each series, there are different types of papers.] And that's the artist deciding "I like the way that looks?" or you saying, "For what you want to do this is the one."

TYLER: No, no the papers were there and then Bob would just pick them and use them, and that was it. I had been working towards the hand made thing for some time with Elie d'Humières. I must have been for at least 4 or 5 years trying to get into [it], and

it all started when I went to Osaka Worlds Fair with Claes Oldenburg's "Ice Bag" and saw the Japanese washi [paper] being made and the monks airing the papers once a year and I just got turned on by it and I wanted to continue that investigation but I just didn't have the time, or the whereabouts, to do it until *Pages and Fuses* happened. Hand made papers like Hawthorne of Larroque we used on quite a few projects. That was not the same thing. I wanted to get to actually making the substrate for a particular work. Having the artist run it through from the very beginning to the very end. And that did eventually happen so the paper pieces did come to fruition later on but it didn't happen with Bob after *Pages and Fuses*.

THOMAS: What made the two of you a good team was that pushing those boundaries didn't scare either one of you.

TYLER: No. In that respect it was a very compatible relationship. You have to love what you're doing to take risk. And Bob loved to make art. So taking risk was there. I love to make prints, so taking risk was there. I think neither one of us was willing to give anything up in the process and so we kind of held tightly to what we thought and that was okay. That was fine. Bob had great respect if you stood up for what you thought. I think what he didn't like was wishy-washy in any sort of way. He just didn't like it. Unless he was being friendly, jovial and having a great time at a party or something then that didn't matter. Life was different then. But, I think of Bob now very fondly in his Armani suits, his Indian garb and his rags, as I used to call them, whatever garment he put on, and it was like all these various different phases... (THOMAS: You mean handkerchiefs when you're talking rags?) ... Yeah, to the

sophisticated Bob walking around with his very expensive Armani suit. To us, in LA our hick town LA, right? Armani suits, walking around? Holy mackerel, what did that cost you? Were did that just come from? Or the Indian headdress that just cost \$10,000 that he was wearing into the shop. You know, or the embroidered deerskin. Man, that was incredible.

THOMAS: When he walked into the studio was he serious about what he was going to do? Or not?

TYLER: I can't answer that. I don't know. All I know is that when he walked into the room, he took command of it, pretty much so. Drunk or sober. Well probably mostly drunk but no, he was able to command. He enjoyed the adulation that came to him. He liked the idea that people ran up to be kissed and be hugged. He liked that. The more hugs, the more kisses the better and he loved doing it himself. So. I remember a Museum of Modern Art opening shortly after I had moved to Bedford. No, it wasn't shortly after I moved to Bedford, it was quite some time. It was shortly after I had met Marabeth and Bob had not seen Marabeth before. And he made a beeline towards her. He gave her a French kiss that I thought he was going to choke her with his tongue. It must have lasted for 20 minutes! It just seemed forever and I was so fucking jealous. I was ready to kill him. [Laughs] But, he was a rascal. He liked that. He just loved doing that sort of stuff. And he had women who idolized him. I mean absolutely they would have killed to have taken Bob home. I mean it was incredible the effect he had on people.

THOMAS: He liked being around attractive people I think.

TYLER: Oh yes he did. Oh yes he did. Faye Dunaway once told me, she said, "You know, I'd take him home any time." It was incredible.

THOMAS: Did his reputation precede him?

TYLER: No when we first met most Californians didn't know much about Bob Rauschenberg. We were still pretty much of a hick town back then in the '60s, early '60s. But that changed very quickly. Once he got running around with the Hollywood group because that group was constantly in New York so that was an invitation back and forth.

THOMAS: When you first met him, was he what you expected when Leo introduced you?

TYLER: I think pretty much so. Yeah. From what I read or what I saw from whom I talked to, I think so, yeah. None of these artists came as a surprise to me. I pretty much knew who they were.

THOMAS: Did Albers talk about him to you?

TYLER: Yeah, yeah he did. Albers thought he was a bad boy and I guess he was in his class a bad boy. He didn't like his irreverence. That didn't go down well with the German, not at all. When he heard about him erasing the de Kooning, he was furious. He just thought that was sacrilegious. I don't know whether he liked his art at all. I think he liked the ideas involved in the theater and that sort of stuff. That went down

okay. But Josef was very guarded too about how much he'd talk about these various things.

THOMAS: He didn't like his art at all or he didn't think about it at all?

TYLER: I think he thought about it. Yeah, I think he thought about it. After all he knew that I took the Albers' *White Line Squares* to New York to show to Bob because I told him so and he was interested as to what Bob thought. He also was interested in what Jasper thought. He was interested in all this. It was somewhat curious.

You know I'll tell you another funny story is when I was trying to get De Kooning I took things over to show him. [It was] a song and dance act altogether and one of the artists that he really was impressed with was Ellsworth Kelly. And that struck me as very, very strange. So I gave him a green/black Ellsworth Kelly. One of the little prints. Not that I wanted him to give me a drawing in exchange. I just did this as a gesture. I was absolutely enthralled that he was interested in even looking at this work. And then in a subsequent later visit, I said, "Well who are you really interested in, Bill, that are out there, you know, these youngsters that are out there?" I phrased it in such way that he would feel like the old master. And he said, "Well let me see," he said, "Now I'm not so sure that I buy into those combines." Then he said, "They're a little sloppy aren't they?" [Laughs]

These guys all look, they all see, they all hear, they all know. They are all competitive. I mean they are to the nth degree.

There wasn't one artist that was worth anything that I worked with that didn't have antenna out there looking and feeling and sounding out what was going on and I guess that's part of being in the contemporary scene is to know what's going on.

THOMAS: So when Bob would be out at Gemini when you were there, if Jasper was there and had been working on something...

TYLER: No, no never had those two together, please.

THOMAS: But would Bob look at the drawer and see what he's doing, or see what somebody else is doing?

TYLER: He would know, he would know, he would know. He would know. And they'd go to other people's houses for dinner and there would be collectors that would have the edition right after we'd print them so they'd see them. (THOMAS: Oh sure.) They saw them. (THOMAS: That was a good business model.) They always knew, they always knew. If they didn't they'd ask. And some artists like David Hockney who were curious would ask, "Can I see all these?" And we'd show them all. Would be very happy to. After all they were my jewels. Why not. If you were interested in seeing them. (THOMAS: Sure. You're in the store.) But it's like you could have given the best candy store in the world to Bob and he would have picked probably the runt in the backroom. You'd never know what he would pick. There was no way of knowing. I think that the guy was very, very complicated. I don't know if any of us really knew Bob. You'd have to talk to Bob Petersen, who was one of his partners, or somebody like that who knew him as a collaborator, printed and then lived with him for a while.

It's these people that you'd have to talk to, to get information about Bob. Because Bob in the theater, and after all we were a theater, we were part of the theater in many ways. So he was on stage, he was performing. And he may be making stage sets and everything else, but he was performing. It was a role he played. And he knew it. And, as long as you were involved in that project you saw Bob socially as part of that project, you didn't see Bob socially separate of the project. See that would be different when you get to Roy [Lichtenstein]. Roy was mechanically invoked in making the art in the studio. And when he got into the social thing, it was the social thing. Which he was not that enamored with. He didn't particularly like the social life, but when he was doing that it was a different Roy.

THOMAS: Didn't mix the two.

TYLER: Didn't mix the two. See, Bob just threw a switch, and went from this room to that room.

THOMAS: Or sometimes brought the whole room together?

TYLER: Or sometimes brought it together.

THOMAS: I saw pictures of Gregory Peck in the studio and I thought well he must have been there for a visit. And someone said, "Oh no, he was just there."

TYLER: Hanging around. He was a very, very good host in many ways, a very gregarious guy. And I think he needed people, needed people like crazy, couldn't live without them and so as time went on I think he needed more people.

THOMAS: When I was in Captiva there was a television set going on all the time. Was that the same in your studio?

TYLER: It was the same in most studios. Same in Lafayette, Lafayette never turned them off. I didn't have the television in the studio. No television in my studio. No, no, no, no.

THOMAS: For some people it's white noise.

TYLER: No, for Bob it was images. It's current images. He was interested in current images. It was like the newspapers. He was interested in those images going by. He was recording them, he was looking at them. Bob would say that you want to make paintings that you have to walk by to see. Now what is that about? What do you do in a barroom when you walk by that big TV? Okay? It's walking by images that fascinated Bob and he liked the "big" because he knew you had to move in order to see it all. And, you know, that's when you made the big prints for the wall, he wanted to see the prints on the wall, big, big, big so you had to walk around them, by them. (THOMAS: So that you are part of the story?) They have a presence. He wants to bring the viewer in. He wants to have you to be a part of that. He doesn't want it by itself. Once he makes it he still wants it to be out there. He doesn't want it to be put away.

THOMAS: Did he articulate what he was going for when he was putting something together?

TYLER: No. The closest thing you're going to get to Bob articulating is like the little thing we did with the book he did on *Stoned Moon* where he's writing his thoughts down or when

he was doing the word picture book with Forge, Andrew Forge. It's those instances where you get Bob writing and when you get to hear Bob talk at that point. Even in interviews he's not always that coherent as to who he is.

THOMAS: It's a stream of consciousness. His work is like that sometimes also. It has that feel to it.

TYLER: Yeah it's always moving, it's always moving. I think Bob had a great memory, I'm not sure but I think he had a great memory. I say that with hesitation. See, I never measured it in those terms. I measure Bob now many, many years later. I think when I worked with him I must have had many definite thoughts about him and this is probably true in most of my collaborations when I am working with--. I'm so engrossed in what I was doing, so much involved in the nuances that I would pick up and remember all sorts of details and now of course I don't because I am no longer doing that. The time has passed. Part of my reluctance to even be talking about it is that I keep thinking, "How much of this is really touching the tuning fork the right way and how much is just listening to the vibrations?" And that's what they become, vibrations after a while. As time goes on you forget a lot of the nuances. I pick up little things of, Bob leaning against a press, watching. And if you think of that lanky figure doing that, it's kind of haunting. Trying to think, "What's that creepy guy doing over there watching me. He knows what I'm doing. Why doesn't he go away and do something else?"

But you're stuck with Bob, leaning against the press watching you for 20 minutes at a time. Not saying a goddamn word, just drinking his Jack Daniels and watching you. It's creepy.

(THOMAS: Taking it in.) It's creepy because that's so out of context to Bob the blithering laughing kissing hugging guy. What's this lanky guy doing there with his Jack Daniels just looking at you? Watching you? Malcolm Lubliner [photographer] caught him quite a few times doing that with me. Standing behind me, watching me. He did a lot of that. Observation, he was observing the process, observing the act. Why? Maybe he was going to do a theater piece on it. Who knows? I mean you don't know what was going through his mind but I'm sure it was a creative thought or two that was going through. I don't think it was just staring at me. He was thinking, right? But I don't know what he was thinking. (THOMAS: He was processing in some way.) Right, he was processing, in some way. It's a sign of intelligence. It's also a sign of complete confidence, in space. I mean some artists are shy. They don't want to really be seen that much. Bob was not shy about that. Bob, dressed or undressed, "Look at me". You know, "I'm Bob."

THOMAS: You could also say it bespeaks a certain level of comfort, being in that environment.

TYLER: But Bob made home, home no matter where he was. In a car, in a restaurant, in a hotel, in your shop, no matter where it was, home was where he was. He made himself at home. Whether he kicked off his shoes and got his feet up on the table or not or lay down and fell asleep on the couch, or whatever. He was at home. He was not uncomfortable. I think he lived in his skin but pretty much as he was.

THOMAS: You were talking about Picasso, and there is a quote from Tomkins that says that Bob had invented as much as Picasso.

TYLER: Baloney. (THOMAS: Baloney?) No way. Sorry, Tomkins.

THOMAS: That's what Jasper said. Jasper said that he put Bob on the level of Picasso.

TYLER: Well you know many people have said that Bob was a genius. Many people have said that Bob was a consummate print maker, one of the great ones of all time. Many people have said a lot of things about Bob that were very grandiose. Let history tell the story. I think Picasso's history has been told to a great extent.

THOMAS: How much time does it take?

TYLER: I think it takes a lot of time. And it takes a lot of great scholars to look at this stuff, not these fly by night journalists who think they know what they're doing or think they know what they're talking about when they have never made a piece of art in their life. Or really been around working with somebody for a period of time to really understand what's going on. I think there's a lot of criticism to be leveled against these people making these remarks that are so unbelievable. I mean to call Picasso a genius at this time in the 21st century is certainly legitimate by all reasoning. All you have to do is look at the volume of work out there that's been studied and analyzed to the nth degree. How many artists have been influenced, how difficult it is to do some of that stuff today even knowing what we know from the ceramics to the sculptures to the paintings, to, you name it, I mean the guy was there.

If you put Picasso's goat against the best combine Rauschenberg did and you walk away and tell me that Rauschenberg is equal to Picasso I would just think you're a stupid idiot like all the rest that say things like that. And let's hope you never say that because I don't want to think that way about you but you know I wouldn't trade one of my Picasso for a Rauschenberg. No way.

I mean, I think you can become, you know, a real sycophant here and think too much about Picasso [Laughter] and I don't certainly want to do that but you can't draw that dove just like that but you look at Matisse and you say, "Come on!" Look at Cézanne. The heritage that we had when we grew up as young adults, all these great people who came, (dog barking) they are simply great. They are unbelievably great.

I think that Picasso was always the guy in the background for (dog barking) every artist I worked with. And every artist I worked with spoke about Picasso in one way or the other when we were collaborating because they all realized that printmaking was *his* domain. He owned it. They were just visitors to it. And anything they were going to do in it was going to have to be so fantastic to even compete on the most elementary levels.

I think, you know, a broken stone --, printing it just because it's a cracked stone is a crock. I don't find that interesting. As a technician I am a bit insulted by it but I know what that means. I think erasing a De Kooning is a bad move but I understand that. I understand the PR of all this, I absolutely do because I was a salesman. I blew it so... [Laughter] and I think you don't want to get so irrelevant to what life is about

to start putting yourself above Picasso. You know there's no need to do that. I mean he is the giant he is, as DaVinci is, as Michelangelo is, as Caravaggio is. As Frank Stella said, "You know, you don't compete with people like Caravaggio." You just learn. You look and learn. You can't compete. There's no such thing as competing with these people. Picasso didn't compete with Matisse. He was *competitive* with Matisse. There is a difference, you see. Do you understand what I'm saying?

THOMAS: Tell me more about it.

TYLER: I mean, there's a great love and a great admiration that took place there and when Matisse died Picasso was alone, and he knew it. Who was he going to compete with? He was the only other guy out there that he had great respect for.

THOMAS: Who made him pump a little harder.

TYLER: Made him pump a little bit harder, maybe the other way around too. Maybe Matisse pumped a little harder because of Picasso. My great complaint right from the very beginning was [that] people don't look at history. They don't learn from history. They just keep running around making all these stupid mistakes because they are not looking. They are looking for the easy way to explain something, the easy answer, the easy route and there is no such thing. Art is complicated. It's dangerous. You get caught up with it. You can get swallowed up in it and you've got to be strong to be able to be a part of it. I think being an artist is a tough, tough business. Contemporary artists especially. They're under the gun right from the beginning. They have a lot of baggage. Hard to get rid of that

baggage. Hard to be your own person over a period of time, and those artists that succeed have my undying admiration because I know how difficult it is. It's very, very difficult. To invent yourself all the time, to be out there all the time, that's a tough business.

THOMAS: Did you follow Bob's work after Gemini?

TYLER: Yeah, off and on. (THOMAS: Off and on.) Not too closely. I was busy and I didn't--, I have blinders, and my projects were my projects. That was the only think that mattered in my life at that moment. And so I would have great periods of time where I saw nothing of the world. I only saw my projects. (THOMAS: And you had all these great people you were working with.) Right, and so, you know, even my socializing with the artists was limited. I've spent more time socializing with them now since I've retired because I can cook the dinners and have the leisure time to do it.

THOMAS: When you think of the places where you and Bob together pushed the boundaries...

TYLER: We pushed it in scale, and that perhaps is one of the most important things that we did because it broke the ground for everyone who came afterwards. There wasn't one technique that we did, except for *Pages and Fuses*, that were inventions of the time. Photo stones were done before, photo plates were done before. Transfers were done before, you know, all this was done before so we can't attribute any of that to the projects. Bob's projects didn't contribute to my printmaking reservoir of techniques. *Pages and Fuses* did so we put that down there. The

marathon project *Stoned Moon* certainly was unique and made a statement that was different. It was part of the beginning of the team activity where a lot of printers worked on something, you know, like four printers and I making an impression called *Sky Garden*. That's what it took just to do that one impression, four people and me. I with the roller, another person handing me another roller, people sponging. (THOMAS: Because it all had to be done...) That's right, team, team. So his projects did bring that into focus. Later, Stella augmented that to, eventually we had 29 people on Stella's projects. So, yeah, it did set up the groundwork for my pushing big projects later on with Frank Stella. Would it have happened without Bob? I don't know. Mind you, a lot of my collaborations outside the workshop were with many, many people. Krofft Enterprises making the ice bag. All the projects I did at Amsco. All that work outside was involving team activity much larger than I had in my workshop so it was not a foreign thing to me. It just became more and more accessible as time went on because of the mixed media, because we were combining stuff. Silkscreen with intaglio with lithography, what have you. (THOMAS: It's astonishing.) And add hand made paper to that. Starting out making the Stella's by first making the colored paper and all the rest of the techniques that comes afterward. Also spending more and more time. I mean there is no other workshop in the world that would spend 5 years doing what I did to do those sculptural pieces of paper printed on, or the big Fountain print, or any of these works. Now Bob should have done the Fountain print, Bob should have done something that big. But Bob didn't have the shop to do it with. You see? He couldn't do it himself.

THOMAS: And liked increasingly being in Captiva, it seems.

TYLER: Yeah, and along with whatever goes down in Captiva. Where Frank and I devoted silently, unpredictably 35 years of working together, we developed the scale that went along with that. Because there was no way to do that in one project. It had to be done over a long period of time. And eventually you arrive at the point where you can do it And then it still takes a year or so to complete.

When we finished *Welcome to the Water Planet*, Rosenquist said, "You know I never imagined that I could do something like this." Thank you. He was joyfully out of his mind. So he went back to Captiva, went back to the studio, and he bought the spray guns that we use to spray our paper pulp. And he went out in a parking lot and he tried to spray-paint the painting like he had made with the paper pulp. He couldn't do it. Came back and said, [whispers] "Ken, I couldn't do it." I said, "No problem. One medium doesn't transfer to the next. I mean it just doesn't work that way but bravo for you for trying. It doesn't work that way." (THOMAS: Oh, that's so funny.) But you know, they were so damn good. I mean those pieces are some of the best pieces he's ever done. But here again, how do you measure, if I had to sit down and look at all of Rauschenberg's work right now and tell you what I think, I think I could be quite critical because I think I understand his art but, and I still think he's a marvelous artist. I still get chills when I look at those combines. I just don't get chills with everything. I don't think the *Currents* are very good prints. I mean sophomoric beyond belief. I was around when it was being done. And I know why it was being done. It was done by a commission. I know what money does. I know all about that. I would think the critics would also know about that. I think the people who write about this

stuff would have enough sense to do a little research and figure [it] out [for] themselves. When Bob did the huge 44 x 6 foot *Current* screen print, he was so proud of that. And if you look at that today, you tell me what you think.

THOMAS: What else did you want to include here?

TYLER: I think it's good enough to say that this was a very talented artist who made some great prints. Certainly made *many* great paintings. What else do you have to know? I mean isn't that enough? That's pretty damn good and to have done that with the handicap that he had, with his substance abuse, I mean it's amazing, amazing that his brain held out. Amazing that he held out. And he did have a lot to say, and he did say it, and he said it in a very unique way, and he *is* unique and that's pretty fantastic.

And he was very lucky to work with a lot of good people, a lot of good people. The shops he worked with were by and large very very good situations to work in, with very talented people and he pulled off some marvelous work but you have to separate the slick from the real juicy stuff and that's what people aren't doing. You see, that's one of the faults of trying to put things in perspective so quickly. Even when people are alive and then shortly after they are dead. Everyone is scrambling to put it on the charts as to where it belongs. Well, I don't know if that's good. I don't know if that helps anything. I wish people would just be inspired to go back and look at Whistler and look at Caravaggio and go back further yet, just keep, go look at the caves. I'm going to do that in September and look at Pompeii. You don't want to get immersed and caught in this traffic jam of

what's on top and what's second and what's third. I mean that's a ridiculous thing to do in life. A waste of time as far as I'm concerned. Spend time analyzing other stuff.

THOMAS: Whistler has a speech he gave in 1885 called the "Ten O'Clock Lecture," 10 PM. And he and Helen D'Oyly Carte produced it. It's quite long and it lays out his aesthetic. He talks about this one man who rather than going out and hunting and working in the field stays inside the cave with the women and with his stick in the coals, takes that stick and makes marks on the walls. And this, says Whistler was the first artist.

TYLER: He had to put in stay with the women didn't he? Well I'm happy you didn't ask me the question what was it like to work with a homosexual.

THOMAS: I wouldn't ask you that question. As I said, Bob seems to have enjoyed being in the company of attractive people.

TYLER: Period. That's a very good way of putting it. It didn't matter to him one way or the other. He swung both ways anyway. One of the great problems in talking about artists is that everyone is interested in their lives more so, I think, than their art, than what they created and how difficult it was for them to do that, to create that stuff day in and day out. And then what does it matter in the scheme of everything. I mean did they influence other people or did this have an impact on society in a bigger, bigger way as time went on. These to me are the important issues and not really that they had 2 feet, 2 hands and whether they went to bed with this person or that person. It doesn't really matter. A handicap does matter,

however. And I think people that have handicaps, like Bob had one, that the guy who runs the Olympic with no legs, with false-running legs. Yeah these are great things.

THOMAS: I would add to that list of challenges for Bob the dyslexia because..

TYLER: Yeah but there's been a lot of people that are creative, have dyslexia so it's almost like a good handicap. That's not a bad one. So we now know that. [Laughter.]

THOMAS: It's just a lead sentence in somebody's article, right. But the way the brain works, again looking at your marvelous collection and thinking of all the different processes and what you have to wrap your head around in order to, once you begin to think, "I think I'd like to layer these things" you have to really understand a quite complicated set of instructions.

TYLER: Let me read you something. "Everyone is familiar with the idea that an artist's intent and a viewer's perception may diverge. Artists go one step further. They are comfortable with the idea that their original intent in beginning a work may differ from their final intent at the end of the work. They are also comfortable with the experience that the finished work may not accurately reflect any intent, any earlier conception but instead take on qualities of its own as if the work had an autonomy." Pretty good, huh? That's Michael Crichton writing the essay for the book that we didn't print.

I have known some pretty fantastic people. I have worked with fantastic people, no question about that and I still every day

of my life I wake up and I still have many of the same questions. About art, and about what it is, what it means. And what this whole business of creating means, and I think if I ever found an answer to any of it I'd be bored.

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