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Interviews: Diamonstein, Barbaralee / "Robert Rauschenberg and Leo Castelli" / Inside New York's Art World, 1977, 1979

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"INSIDE NEW YORK'S ART WORLD"

Interviewer: Barbaralee Diamonstein
Interviewees: Leo Castelli and Robert Rauschenberg
Date: March 17th 1977

(Welcome) to Inside New York's Art World. I am Barbara'ee Diamonstein and our celebrated guests today are Mr. Robert Rauschenberg and his dealer Leo Castelli --- a friend and dealer. It has been said that it's doubtful if the art of the 60s would have looked quite the way it did if Leo Castelli had not assembled his group of artists and promoted them into international prominence, since he first opened his gallery 20 years ago (8) ~~at just about the same time, actually~~ Six years earlier, Robert Rauschenberg popped into American art with his first one-man show, what was then called a prophetic show of pictures) some white (Joint kick)

Voice: But not niggardly

Q: Some black.

Voice: (laughter)

Q: Actually what I'd like to do is read the review of that first show for you.

Cr. Castelli (?): You have it?

Q: I do.

Castelli: I've never read it.

Q: And needless to say it is about nine lines, and the very first show was in May 1951 at the Betty Parsons Gallery and reviewed in the Art News magazine says, "Robert Rauschenberg, who studied at Black Mountain College and the Art Students League, in his first one man show offers large scale, usually white grounded canvases naively inscribed with a wavering and whimsical geometry; on vast and often heavily painted expanses, a wispy calligraphy is sometimes added to thick abstract patterns, and in other instances collage is introduced, either to provide textural effects -- as in a picture whose background is made entirely of road maps -- or to suggest a very tenuous associational context. Prices unquoted." And that is the entire review.

(go to p 3)

Rauschenberg: No one asked? (laughter)

Well, that's really the question. What was the reception to that first show, and how did it come about? You had only recently arrived in New York. How did you get a show at Betty Parsons Gallery?

Rauschenberg:

I was a student. I wasn't too sophisticated. And there were so many things that I didn't understand. I kept going back to the Betty Parsons Gallery not so much for answers as for questions, and finally I had reached a very serious impasse, and finally I just took a bunch of paintings and went up there and asked if I could see her, and she came out and said, "I only look at paintings on Tuesdays." This was on a Monday, so I said, "Couldn't you pretend that it was Tuesday even though it's Monday?" And she said, "Aw, all right, okay, put them in there, in the small room on the side." Then I am standing there in this small room surrounded by these inferior creatures that I have made, trying to figure out whether I should just flee or whether it would be better just to stand there in this loneliness, and before I could make up my mind she was back and she said, "Well, what are these?" And I said, "These are my works."

~~A very bad idea, Judy.~~

~~Then~~ She started to say, "You are showing them to me too fast." I ~~am~~ was trying to get out of there.)

Then she said, "Well, I can't give you a show until May." I said, "I don't want a show."

~~(crosstalk)~~

I just wanted her to ~~like~~ see ~~my~~ if there was anything that I was doing that related at all to the energy in her gallery, because I was upset by seeing all those works.

So I had a show in May. ~~(laughter)~~ But there is more to that story.

Q: Will you tell it to us?

Rauschenberg: Uh huh. I was just about to.

Q: Okay!

~~Rauschenberg: I just met somebody today that reminded me of it. They had just seen Clifford Still. Well, I didn't realize~~ I had never seen Clifford Still. ~~I mean,~~ He was part of the magic that was there in that gallery, and I wasn't influenced by Clifford Still but he was part of my problem.

~~So it was~~ about four months ~~that~~ went past, ~~there,~~ and Betty Parsons came to my ~~house.~~ ~~(laughter)~~

~~Q: Have seen pictures of that first studio.~~

~~Rauschenberg: You haven't seen this one. (laughter) This one wasn't photographed. (laughter)~~

~~I have paintings on the floors and the walls and the ceiling and no furniture. You just couldn't tell what time of day it was. There were only two times a day.~~

~~Q: Day and night.~~

~~Rauschenberg: Yeah, those were they.~~ And ~~she came in~~ studio with this man and they sat and picked pictures for the show, and I thought it went really pretty smoothly.

Then I brought the paintings for the show a couple of weeks later, and she said, "Oh, I have never seen those." And I said, "Of course not. I just did them yesterday." And it was the truth because ~~if you were~~ I was using the materials five times, ten times, 12 times, as many times over as you could, and I always thought that the next one was going to be better, ~~and if you are doing it you usually think it is right or wrong. Society figures out some of the standards of judging.~~

~~Then I found out that~~ She said, "Well, Clyfford ~~xxxxxx~~ won't understand this," and I found out there was Clyfford Still sitting there picking those things, and ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ I had been scrutinized, my work had been scrutinized, ~~which would have probably petrified~~

##

~~it. (laughter)~~ It's funny that I didn't realize who he was.

~~Q: If Clyfford Still was one of your problems, so to speak.~~

~~Rauschenberg: Who else isn't? (laughter)~~

~~Q: Oh I didn't want to sound too sharp.~~

Q: In the summer of 1948 you were still a student at Black Mountain College, and ~~then came~~ soon after that you came to New York, and are credited with having been an enormous influence, in fact the major conditioner of neo-Dada among the young artists of the New York school, ~~and~~ I can recall a sculpture of about ~~xxx~~ two or three years ago that is an homage to Duchamp as well. How heavily does he figure as an influence in your life and ~~in your~~ work?

Rauschenberg: ~~Umm~~ I guess heavily but ~~later than he could be an organic, I mean~~ too late to be a direct influence. I remember the first Duchamp that I ever saw was ~~a~~ Bicycle Wheel on a Stool, and I saw it at the same time that I saw a sculpture by Maillol, in the Museum of Modern Art, and ~~there was absolutely no problem, and there was~~ something there by the Japanese.

~~Q: Castelli: Noguchi?~~

~~Rauschenberg:~~ Noguchi. I saw Noguchi, Duchamp and Maillol, and I didn't see any discrepancy. There was no conflict.

~~But I didn't know him until much later.~~

Mr. Castelli,
Q: ~~Leo,~~ you knew Duchamp in that period, didn't you?

I
Castelli: Yes, I did. ~~Let me see, when did I meet him first?~~
met him
~~It~~ must have ~~been~~ right after I got back from the war, I
Let's say the Second World War, not to make me too old.
~~(I have some vanity. (laughter)~~

Rauschenberg: That was my war too.

~~Castelli: You, too.~~

Q: Is that how you ended up in Paris?

Rauschenberg: No. I went to Paris from the Kansas City Art Institute.

~~Q: How did that take place?~~

~~Rauschenberg: Going to Paris? From Kansas City Art Institute.~~

Q: And how did you get to Kansas City?

Rauschenberg: I had a girlfriend in Los Angeles. ~~(laughter)~~

~~Q: Was she an artist?~~

(lc) ~~Rauschenberg:No, but she.~~ Her mother was sick. ~~there. (laughter)~~ And she was going to go away, ~~and she thought~~ ~~I was packing a~~ ~~bathing suit, and she thought that I was lonely,~~ so ~~and~~ she said, "If I can get you into Kansas City Art Institute would you go?" And I said yes.

Q: How long did you stay there?

Rauschenberg: Long enough to change my name.

STET ~~Q: You were Milton Rauschenberg?~~

~~Rauschenberg: Right, yes.~~

Q: And what happened that made you change your name ~~there~~?

Rauschenberg: I didn't like being called Milton. ~~(laughter)~~

~~Q: As a poet it was quite good, but not for an artist?~~

~~Rauschenberg: Yeah, well, all sorts of things occur to you when you . . . like waiting for . . . all these arrangements have been made, like you are waiting five hours in a Bavaria coffee shop in a train train depot, I mean . . .~~

~~Q: You have lots of time to think.~~

~~Rauschenberg: Yes, you have lots of time to think about, like you can move to a new place; nothing is going to be the same ever again; it's going to be marvelous this time, what kind of a headstart can you anticipate; what could you change about yourself, you know. And I started right from the top -- my name. (laughter)~~

~~Q: Let's carry that progression through several other geographical locations.~~ So from Kansas City you wended your way. . .

Rauschenberg: ~~I went~~ to Paris, ~~-- that was your question -- and that was because. --~~ I went there and took all the courses they had. I ran from class to class, and I had three jobs at night, including

~~Q: What kind of work did you do?~~

Rauschenberg: I did. . In those days ~~they had~~ five sets but you had to make the sets for local. . they were taped in for arts houses, they had originally been there. . where you during intermission get your popcorn and candy, and all the local stores would advertise, and some of the more progressive ones would want something more imaginative, and I was called more imaginative. So I got these jobs. So I did that and I did some window work ~~and --~~.

~~It was the company that~~ Nebraska Furniture called Kelly Dash, and they had a big ~~huge~~ their company affairs, and so

I stopped dose and made papes caché, anything.

Q: You did window work in New York too, didn't you?

Rauschenberg: Yeah.

Q: Where was that?

Rauschenberg: I would answer your other question.

Q: Okay.

Rauschenberg: I just talked to. . .

Q: Let's finish that; where did you the window work in New York?

Rauschenberg: Bonwit Teller's and Tiffany's. Anyway,

Q: Let's go back to the other question.

Rauschenberg: Okay, the idea was that I believed the joke that you have to go to France, because by then I am picking up some information that a great artist has to be French. Ha!

(cross talk)

Q: Mr. Castelli, how

Q: Do you going to make you go to New Rochelle in a few minutes. Actually it may be a good time now. You told me story [illegible] just now that you were looking at one of the early shows in your gallery that year was that and she were the artists? did you,

Her does a businessman from Trieste, turn out.

(cross talk)

Castelli:

Q: I know it pains you but a long time. . .

(cross talk)

A long time ago, before you even start an art gallery,

(cap) did that ever come up, your first gallery?

Castelli: My first gallery, that was in Paris. You see, again.

(cross talk)

The

The fact is that for me it was much simpler because I had never been to America, I was in Europe, and to go from Rumania, was I at the time? I was in Roumania at that time, and to go, well, to Paris was not so difficult. I began my life in Trieste just briefly; I had made studied in Milan and then I went to work in Trieste, briefly for an insurance company and things like that. (C.U. p. 12)

(an awful lot of cross talk)

Rauschenberg: I'll be dead or be bored (?)

~~Castelli: After being in Roumania for a few years, there I worked~~ for an insurance company first and then ~~I did work~~ in a bank, ~~after that, then~~ that bank sent me to Paris where they had a branch, so I was there in the bank, as dissatisfied as ever.

I had a friend who was a decorator and a designer of furniture. At that time the furniture was what we call now Art Deco.

~~So~~ one day, going by ~~[illegible]~~ the Place Vendôme, ~~many of you must know where Place Vendôme is in Paris,~~ he saw a storefront where there was a sign, that the store behind the front was for rent, and to apply at the Ritz, which was next door ~~to find out what the conditions could be.~~ So this friend of mine and I, who had never ~~didn't~~ done anything in art until then, went in ~~and asked how much it could be to have that place. But first we wanted to see this piece, of course. So, we wanted to see this piece, and then we asked how much it could be to rent.~~ This place was just incredibly beautiful; one room after the other, all covered with velvet in soft colors, chartreuse and all that. ~~It was a succession of~~ five marvelous rooms, something like 50 feet high, and there were windows on one side on the gardens of the Ritz. It couldn't be more beautiful. And it turned out that the rent was very, very modest for the first three years. They wanted to give us a chance to make good, and then of course the rent would be increased steadily.

~~I hit some money.~~

~~Sally I didn't hit any money, but my father-in-law hit a lot of money.~~ ~~(cross talk, laughter, ha-has, etc)~~

~~He felt that it was a worthwhile thing for me to get interested in something.~~

Q: What was your first show there?

~~Castelli: My first show was. . .~~

~~(cross talk)~~

~~(laughter)~~

~~Rauschenberg: You talk too long too.~~

~~(cross talk, half muttered remarks, false starts of speech etc)~~

I

Castelli: This friend of mine and ~~myself~~ were very naive and very young, and immediately ~~as~~ we were taken over by the surrealists. You see, I had a friend from way back who was from Trieste like myself, and she was called Leonor Fini. ~~Maybe a few of you. . .~~

~~Unica: I've heard of her (I've met her?)~~

~~Castelli:~~ She found out that we had this marvelous place and she said, "All right, now let's see what we do with this." And she, Max Ernst, Tchelitchew, Dali and many others --

decided that we had to do something very, very grand, and they even designed all kinds of things -- panels, furniture. Leonor did some furniture too, but it looked awful next to theirs, which was so much more imaginative.

~~Rauschenberg: You designed furniture?~~

~~Castelli: No, Leonor did.~~

~~(Cross talk, laughter)~~

~~Castelli: My friend.~~ And then we opened the thing in May 1939 with an enormous bang -- it was a great event.

~~Q: This was on a three year lease in May 1939?~~

~~Castelli: On a three year lease. Then after the show was up for about two months summer came along and then I went away for a vacation.~~

~~(New tape)~~

~~Castelli:~~ My gallery in New York ~~as called it.~~ ~~This~~ started in 1947 or so. I came to America in 1941, little after that, ~~so~~ or a

Rauschenberg: It started that early?

--

Castelli: Yeah, sure.

Q: When did you the two of get together?

(Cross talk)

Q: You did you ever come together?

--

Castelli: I think we got to know each other at Betty Parsons, just vaguely, we don't you think so? (or)

Rauschenberg: Vaguely.

--

Castelli: Can you remember?

Rauschenberg: No. (laughter)

Q: They you remember everything.

(cross talk, inaudible remarks, laughter)

Rausch: I think vaguely was close enough

--

Castelli: We got to know each other. . .

(interrupted by cross talk)

Rauschenberg: Then ? was doing the. . .

and he was interviewing both of us together.

Castelli: Oh yes, we had the same problems.

Rauschenberg: The same problems.

Q: And what was that?

(cross talk)

--

Castelli: It's still with us.

Q: Well, this is vague. When does it get a little more precise? Some time between 1951 and 1957, I guess. (laughter)

(cross talk)

Castelli: Anyway I saw his work at the first show at Betty Parsons, which was in May, 1951 and then he was in a show.

Rauschenberg: With Tworkov

Castelli: With Frank Kline, DeKooning, Pollock and who knows? We did a great show together called the Ninth Street Show, and this was in May 1951, too, right after he opened the show at Betty Parsons.

Q: Was he in the show?

Rauschenberg: Off and on.

~~Castelli:~~ We had something like 90 artists in the show.

~~(cross talk)~~

Yes,

Rauschenberg: And ~~then~~ each artist that came in wanted to ~~would like~~ to rehang the show.

Q: (laughs)

Rauschenberg: That's what I mean by off and on, I mean really off and on.

Castelli: So we had the show, and there I was very dissappointed about somet. came across, the other day. that Kline ~~[illegible]~~ designed. ~~[illegible]~~, that It said 3rd 9th Street ? ' narrow and wide and

(laughter)

because I didn't. . . I'll tell you why. Because I saw your show at Betty Parsons, I saw your work for the first time, and the catalogue had already been printed, and you got into the show after the catalogue had been printed. That's why your name isn't there.

Mr. Rauschenberg, I read

Q: ~~It has bothered him for two weeks. It has! Actually another casual comment was taken very seriously. It was~~ something that

you said in 1963. In fact it became a cornerstone of 1960s criticism. You were quoted by Allen Solomon in the catalogue of your Jewish Museum show in 1963 as having said that painting relates to both art and life ~~neither can be made~~ And neither can be made "I try to act in that gap between the two," you said.

~~Rauschenberg:~~
~~(cross talk)~~

~~It actually Suzy Gabor quotes that as an Allen Solomon citation. In any event it was repeated.~~
~~(cross talk)~~

~~Rauschenberg: And I didn't make it clear so I don't~~ say
have ~~to explain~~.

~~Or You have to say anyway because I'd like to know~~ what did you mean by that? ~~then?~~

Rauschenberg: ~~Nothing, nothing.~~
~~(cross talk)~~

I don't think any artist sets out to make art. You love art, you live art, you are art, you do art, but you are just doing something, you are doing that so one can stop you from doing, and so it doesn't have to be art, and that is your life.

But you also can't make life, and so there is something in between there, because you flirt with the idea that it is art.

Q: You are saying that in art, painting works more in ideas than in the painting itself? ?

Rauschenberg: No, I think the definition of art would have to be more simple-minded than that, about how much use you can make of it, ~~because~~ if you try to separate the two, art can be very self-conscious and a blinding fact. But life doesn't really need it, so it's also another blinding fact.

Q: ~~Bob~~ He talked a moment ago about surfaces, and one of the things ~~at least to a person such as myself~~, that ~~were~~ was so significant and ~~were~~ was often referred to as your "iconoclastic approach to art," was to rid yourself of the tyranny of a four-edged, two-dimensional surface, ~~and~~ the first way ~~at least~~ that I know of that you did that was by making what came to be called combines. Can you tell us the evolution of them? the combines?

Rauschenberg: It was economy.

~~Q: What do you mean?~~

~~Rauschenberg: Well,~~ It was hard ~~enough~~ to get materials. I had to have this feeling before I would accept it because there were

lots of other artists who would have done that, and I was embarrassed by . . . during the abstract expressionist days, . . . of sort of by some kind of self-pity, self turning over. . . . or. . . remorse, and was working out of. . . like art still is my major happiness -- I mean making it. Afterwards it's some-thing else. But I used like the bed that you are on (:)

Q: The painting that you shared. . .

Rauschenberg: I didn't have anything to paint on. It wasn't an idea.

Q: I think what you are referring to is the image that you shared on the cover of. . .

(cross-talk)

Rauschenberg: I've painted on everything. Have you ever tried to put a college on a bath towel? It's hard. (laughter)

And then we interview ?

That's on a bath towel. That was ~~first~~ wintertime, so I didn't need a bath towel, because I didn't have water anyway.

Q: How did you come to use the quilt on the bed, the patchwork quilt?

Because
Rauschenberg: ~~Because~~ I lost my car; the quilt used to be over the hood of the car to keep the radiator from freezing. ~~(Laughter)~~ I moved to New York and ~~I lost~~ my car wouldn't work.

~~--~~

~~Castelli: Originally how did you lose it?~~

~~Rauschenberg: It wouldn't work.~~

~~--~~

~~Castelli: Oh I see.~~

C: Now I think we know how you got the tires though.

Rauschenberg: ~~And it was there, and you'd [illegible]~~ Those weren't my tires. That was my quilt. ~~(laughter)~~ That was my towel. They were somebody else's tires.

You can't hate New York. It's a marvelous place to grow up as an artist.

~~I am just. . .~~

~~(cross talk)~~

It's marvelous from the viewpoint of a young artist. ?

It's incredible.

I have trouble walking around here.

C: Is it the objects that lie in the streets that distract you?

Rauschenberg: ~~Everything to do something with. And I've always had a guilt feeling like about~~, if there is something down there, ~~I like~~ I pick it up and see what ~~you~~ I can do with it.

Q: Has New York been a source of inspiration to you?

Rauschenberg: Absolutely, not only because it resists everything but also because it can hold everything.

Q: You spend a great deal of your time now in another place, in an almost enchanted strip of land in Captiva, Fla. ~~What~~ Why is that?

Rauschenberg: ~~That's enchanted today, and out there, and I hope I don't miss it. (laughs)~~

~~Uh,~~ I find it complementary. I couldn't live without New York. I think New York is just an incredible place; all along the line are rewards ~~in a way that you cannot. . .~~ in being here.

I used to tell people this before I was so sure that you have to go to New York, ~~and~~ But now I really know it, because there is no plan, there is no continuity, every change seems very dangerous and it's unexpected, but there is room for you. (go to p. 23)

~~Q: You said that you see yourself as a. . .~~

~~Rauschenberg: Excuse me, I have one more thing to say.~~

~~Q: I am sorry.~~

~~Rauschenberg: I friend came down to Florida to take care of the dogs I was talking about, and . . . and . . . (laughs), and there are only~~ two restaurants on the island, and they are not really restaurants; they are two places where you can eat and not cook it yourself. And different people asked me about New York, and aren't you terrified to live there? And the only place where I ever got mugged is the enchanted island! ~~(laughter)~~

Q: You said that you see yourself as a reporter, and that painting is one of the vehicles that you use to give these reports.

~~Rauschenberg: I am looking for information and I pick it up in the hands. (voice trails off) And this is where the thoughts start.~~

Q: How much of your work is autobiographical?

Rauschenberg: Probably all.

Q: And how heavily do you rely on technology -- film, photography, all sorts of technological devices?

Rauschenberg: As little as possible, but it is necessary.

Q: But it seems to me that film and photography and other technological things have absorbed you for a long while -- your involvement in experiments in art ~~(circa talk)~~.

Rauschenberg: It works in that. ~~You can use any media in which you can do it.~~ Each house has a lot of experience in it, that I am mostly involved in changing what I am doing. And sometimes it has been quite a strain.

I got into both technology and theater and printing because I don't like the single ego.

Q: You've said that the work that interested you the most was working in some combined effort with other people.

Rauschenberg: Yes, right.

Q: And is that an attempt to reduce the involvement of one ego? Why did that engage you so much?

Rauschenberg: I just didn't want to have one. ~~I think . . . I mean~~ It might be good for some other artist, but. . . Some kind of self-assurance would for me be death. ~~(certain kinds of assurance)~~

Q: You told us how the combines evolved. Why don't we talk about the jammers for a moment? How did they happen?

Rauschenberg: ~~When~~ I was working with fabrics already, and doing transfers, and I'd been to India, and I had ~~for years been~~. put off the idea of ~~mine~~ mostly working in trash.

~~(Robert Indiana)~~

And the idea of ~~this~~ a beautiful piece of silk, a beautiful color silk, consumed with its own vanity and all that, didn't interest me. ~~I thought that xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ . . . and ~~dualistically I thought that was like~~ the other side.

It wasn't until my second trip to India that I realized ~~that. . .~~ how that kind of excess ~~xxxxx~~ worked, no matter how small a shred you have of it, how that worked into your life, to support you.

~~So you had~~ There were people wandering around in mud, starving and all that, and they have one little rag and they look better than we do.

~~It was it in India that . . .~~

~~Rauschenberg~~ So I broke down that prejudice. It was a prejudice.

Q: ~~Was~~ was it there that you became involved with those limp and sensuous fabrics that have come to be known as bearfrost, which I think is a rather apt metaphor for those frosty, silken, almost veil-like layer upon layers that have photos and prints placed on the silk?

~~(cross talk)~~

Dante.

Rauschenberg: I read the word in Dante.

Castelli: Translation in English.

(cross talk)

Q: ~~Rauschenberg,~~ in what context was this in Dante?

~~Rauschenberg:~~ Hoarfrost is like ~~dock~~ mock frost, but it's a warning about the change of seasons.

Q: ~~And you used layer on layer that often have newspaper. . .~~

(cross talk)

Rauschenberg: ? ?

Q: Have you exhibited the hoarfrosts?

Rauschenberg: Sure. (to Mr. Castelli) Didn't we?

Castelli: We did.

~~(cross talk)~~

Mr. Castelli?

Q: Where and when was that, Leo?

do you want to leave out all first names & use last names - I'm assuming so?

(1c) Castelli: In my gallery in Vienna -- the gallery -- and at the same time, . . . in Los Angeles.

Rauschenberg: In Los Angeles.

Castelli: In Los Angeles at approximately the same time.

(cross talk)

And of course seeing all the other things, especially in Italy, where they pay great ? to this visitor in the last. . .

(cross talk)

Rauschenberg: I am still more busy now in Europe than I am here.

Castelli: Than he is here.

Q: How do you explain that?

(terrible static in tape)

Rauschenberg: I don't know. (voice trails off, then laughs)

Castelli: They We don't look ! (laughs)

Q: What do you think of all these rather unusual and sometimes unorthodox procedures that you use? What would you

Mr Castelli

consider to be one of your major innovations? (pause) Too, what his do you think?

Castelli: Ask him first.

Q: I will. (pause)
I know something you once told me. . .
(cross talk)

Voice: That's a very difficult question.
(cross talk)

Castelli: There are so many.

Q: Well, what are some that are. . .

Castelli: What he thinks about is the common trait, all these innovations I think he's gone through now, or even earlier, when he was at Black Mountain where he started doing things.
(cross talk)

Q: So you think. . .

Castelli: Apart from that photographic, he was a very interesting, innovative photographer, too. Well,

Q: ~~Printmaker~~ Printmaker.

--

Castelli: No no, photography, pure photography. Well, in ~~print~~ print-making, of course, he's been immensely innovative. He has revolutionized the medium completely.

~~Q: In what way?~~

--

~~Castelli: Thanks to the strength . . . technical~~ the coterie ?

thanks to Tania Grossman he is a very good. . .

Rauschenberg: Curiosity.

--

Castelli: Curiosity, let's put it that way.

~~Q: How did you. . .~~ Well, ~~One of the things that Leo has described . . . (cross talk)~~

Q: One of your major things is that you dare -- that you dare to keep pushing the limit. One of the things that I know about your printing is its immediacy. How do you achieve that? ~~so quickly?~~

Rauschenberg: By not making up your mind before you are going to do it. It has to be immediate if you don't know what you are doing. And you take that chance, and it's very embarrassing. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don't. But you don't have

the security. ~~If you decided that you don't have the security.~~

Q: Do you plan your major pieces before you execute them?

Rauschenberg: No. I just go to work, and I work every day, and I never know what I am doing.

Q: You work directly on the piece?

Rauschenberg: Yes.

Q: ~~Actually I once saw a piece about half the size of this that had about four lines on it and you said that was the design of the piece at least, and then that you did the entire piece?~~ Beanboring

Rauschenberg: ~~Right. I have to get started sometime. Four lines doesn't make me a liar. (laughter)~~

Q: ~~No no, I am supporting your theory.~~
~~(circus talk, laughter)~~

Q: ~~I am supporting you!~~

~~Rauschenberg:~~ That's one of my tricks, ~~the~~ I never pay any attention to what I think. (~~laughter~~) ~~I'll have~~ You get away from the house, you've done all your business, you've fed the dogs, every-

thing, supper is ready, and ~~the~~ everything is going to move very smoothly, and then it's time to go to work and you go, and you ~~trick~~ trick yourself by saying, "Oh, I am really thinking of a really fantastic thing now." And then you make four or five lines and you say, "That's it!" And then you go over it ~~(you think it over?)~~ and do something else. ~~(laughs)~~

~~(cross talk)~~

~~voices~~ ~~statement~~

~~Rauschenberg: I think that was part of~~

But I worked continuously because every time I stopped working somebody would ask me a question, and so. . .

And I got lead poisoning because cleaning the screens -- I was using silk screens, and I usually had the fan on, but I used to have the fan on in order to dry the canvas quicker. I didn't know that I had it on to save my life. (laughs) And they turned the fan off because it made too much noise, but every time I went back over to the other side of the room somebody would ask me what I was doing. So I finished a very big painting in a very short time.

Castelli: It's 33 feet long and about eight feet wide.

Rauschenberg: If you want a big painting very fast you get a TV ~~crew.~~ (laughter)
(~~cross talk~~)

Q: ~~While you are talking about waterborne vehicles like a barge~~ I wonder if there is something that you'd both clarify for us, ~~and~~ I am thinking about ~~an event that took place in~~ 1964, when Robert Rauschenberg won the top prize at the Venice Biennale, amid a swirl of rumors, most of them relating ~~though~~ to some of your activities in a gondola, as I recall. Perhaps at long last you would clarify your version of the events ~~and your (to Mr. Castelli) version of the events that happened~~?

Castelli: It's very simple. Bob had just had a show at the ~~Jewish~~ Jewish Museum -- that incredible show -- and became obviously very well known even here in America, ~~but~~ before that he had had ~~my~~ shows in Paris ~~, he had had shows in Paris at the Allan~~ Solomons and his work had made a tremendous impression on ~~the~~ French artists and on the French art world (x) ~~. . . (cross talk, which Mr. Castelli disregarded) . . .~~ than he had ~~had here in America, in spite of~~ the big ~~at there being that Jewish Museum show~~. Of course Allan Solomon had recognized Rauschenberg's merits ~~already~~ quite early, I think in the late 50s, when he first appeared, ~~and~~ he was director of a small museum up in Ithaca, at Cornell (x)

Rauschenberg: Cornell.

Castelli: Yes, Cornell.

Q: Who else represented the United States at that Biennale?

Castelli: It was an incredibly complex show that Allan had organized (F) -- incredible the way he constructed it. He just put into the show all the important trends of the moment, trends that had come up after ~~an~~ abstract expressionism, so he had two key abstract people -- (Kenneth) Noland and (Morris) Louis -- and two key, well, whatever they were calling them, new people --

Q: What were you calling them?

Castelli: I don't know.

Q (to Rauschenberg): What were you calling them?

Castelli: We couldn't have called them pop~~p~~ artists at that time because the pop movement had not yet materialized. But anyway here were these too, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who had gotten away from abstract expressionism, had used it too, but then were doing something that was an indication of something entirely different. new, and then we had these two abstract artists. Well, these were the major figures in the show. And then there were also

six other artists, some relating to Rauschenberg and Johns and some relating to Louis and Noland. ~~Stella~~ Clyfford Still for instance was in there, and Jim Dine was in there, and John Chamberlain was in there.

~~Rauschenberg~~ And Claes Oldenburg too.

~~Castelli: Oldenburg too was in there.~~ So you see it was an incredibly well constructed show that presented in Venice everything that we had to offer at that moment, an incredible feat. The loss of Allan Solomon when he died too young seven years ago was just one of the greatest losses that American art has suffered, because he was [illegible] and there is not one like him has appeared since, and this is my homage to him, today.

Q: Now let's go back to 1964 for a moment.

Castelli (to Rauschenberg): Now you say a word about Allan too.

Rauschenberg: You did it.

Castelli: I did it?

Q: In 1964, that was all that controversy about Leo? that really happened?

--

Castelli: The controversy was about the fact that it seemed to many people that we had influenced the jurors after that gave the prize to Bob. They couldn't believe, the Americans especially, that suddenly there was a prize here for Rauschenberg, ~~and I just mentioned before briefly that Rauschenberg was very well known in Europe -- he had many adherents and supporters there -- so actually it was Europe that gave him the prize, not (America). (voices talk)~~

Rauschenberg: And I had to keep switching day by day, arguing with Noland, about, who ed you went the place on the island? That's the official place.

~~So, if you want it, Noland, you have it.~~

(1c) ~~That was in~~ Castelli: The two locations, where they did the show. (1c)

~~Rauschenberg: Right, and then Morris also was in the~~ ~~Then the next day he would say, "Why do you want the console?"~~ ~~"Okay, I want the console."~~

(1c) And so this switch kept going around, and finally it was off the ground, so I almost won it illegally.

~~It wasn't that one of the factors that . .~~ ~~(voices talk)~~

--

Castelli: ~~They were~~ it was not on Biennale grounds, some

~~(Here Mr. Rauschenberg interjects "I didn't care.")~~
people/-- hostile people -- maintained that he was not entitled to have the prize because he was not on Biennale grounds, and that's the story of this so-called gondola which was actually a big barge.

Rauschenberg: Right. I did get a few pieces over there using the gondola ~~(laughs)~~

~~Q: You traveled then?~~
~~(cross talk)~~

Castelli: Again it was the fantastic imaginative feat of Allan Solomon who didn't want to get no for an answer, so he said, "Well, if the paintings have to be on the grounds. . ."
He built a little something. You see the Venice Biennale pavilion, is U-shaped so there is a part which is a sort of an open space between the two branches of the U. So he quickly built a plastic roof over that and put a painting from each artist ~~those of all the people that were in the complex~~ ? in effect ? so each was represented also on Biennale grounds.

~~Rauschenberg: Right.~~

~~Castelli: But the fact is that. . .~~

~~Rauschenberg: I was sorry that I didn't know that. I was with~~ ~~as they found out. You found out and you believed it and I~~ ~~back it.~~

~~(cross talk)~~

Q: Did ~~it~~ winning make a big difference in your career?

~~Rauschenberg: We were in that bar. . .~~

--

Castelli: That's right, she is here now, today. Pity we didn't get her over here.

~~Q: Bob, did it make a big difference in your career?~~

--

~~Rauschenberg: Actually. . .~~

- --

~~Q: Psychologically?~~

Rauschenberg: It probably did. ~~It involved Ivy. . .~~ There've been so many dirty ideas about it, ~~because both~~ Leo and Ileana and Allan Solomon ~~-- that's three, can you have three in both ?~~ suffered for a time from ~~like~~ being accused of doing something Shady because nobody could believe that I could win, ~~which is marvelous,~~ ~~and~~ that's the response I got in America, ~~too,~~ you know ~~I~~ I would pick up Art News ~~there were only two art magazines then~~ and it'd say, "You won't believe this, we don't know why, but . . ."

Q: But obviously that's changed considerably. ~~I don't know of another artist certainly that I can think of. . .~~

(Only because of)

Rauschenberg: Perseverance. (~~laughter~~) Curiosity and perseverance! (~~laughs~~) -

(~~cross talk~~)

--

Castelli: It's something that we had all of us there, ~~Jasper and myself and. . . . that was~~ total faith, you know, total enthusiasm, ~~and that's. . . well. . . er.~~ .

(~~cross talk~~)

Rauschenberg: ~~In the entire scene though.~~

--

~~Castelli: Yeah.~~

~~(cross talk)~~

~~Rauschenberg:~~

Castelli: I don't ~~godly~~ remember thinking, well, here is a show and maybe he can get the prize, ~~and things like that.~~ If just took it for granted that he'd get the prize. He just believed in him.

STET (~~That was really what did it.~~

Rauschenberg: ~~Sure,~~ I didn't know that one of the ground rules was. ~~. . . I'm. . . er. . . . If I had thought that it could be possible that I would get the Venice Biennale prize, I had a damn difficult problem about the ground rules, because~~ I was ~~. . . thousand~~ over there working for Merce Cunningham in ~~the~~ theater?

that I had to be present, available.

the La Fenice

~~La Fenice.~~

~~Castelli: He headed the program.~~

~~(organ talk)~~

Q: ~~And~~ you knew both Cunningham and (John) Cage from your Black Mountain days, didn't you?

Rauschenberg: I ~~was looking for him~~, yes. ~~Like~~ I just happened to be on the scene and wandering around there, and one of the ground rules was that the artist had to be there, and I was in a lousy little hotel where nobody could find me, but I knew everybody was looking. ~~(crossed out)~~

~~(cross talk, laughter)~~

Q: Maybe that's one of the reasons that you devote so much of your time ~~-- and I don't say this to embarrass you --~~ to younger artists and artists' rights. ~~I'd like to talk for a moment, to begin with, about~~ The ~~how much of your time and energy has been given to a number of causes? One of them~~, artists rights, because perhaps culminated at a highly publicized auction when an earlier work of yours that had been bought by a collector for $900 ~~dollars~~ was sold at auction -- was it ten years later? -- for $85,000 ~~dollars~~ and, ~~cost~~, of course, the artists did not participate in any of that good fortune.

Rauschenberg: ~~Well, like there's~~ I founded ~~a foundation called~~ Change, Inc., which provides ~~Or what does that do?~~ ~~Ra~~ emergency funds for artists. So this is part of that. My interest doesn't start solely from wanting directly back a ~~the fine~~ percentage resale of my own work, but also from thinking about other artists in the future too.

Q: You pointed out that ~~young artists, and octogen young artists but~~ many artists can't even get a credit card. So you founded Change, Inc. to help the more financially distressed artists. How ~~does~~ did that come about?

--

Rauschenberg: We haven't really had an enormous sum of money. I think that the largest grant we've gotten is from the National Endowment, 10,000 dollars. Several artists got together for Mobil Oil and put out a portfolio and then we got some money from that, and we are about to have a show. ~~Oh, this sounds like a commercial.~~

~~Q: Put this a worthy one, so why don't you go on.~~

--

~~Rauschenberg: All right. I guess you love art. Ileana is having~~

~~Q: for the benefit of change, Inc.?~~

~~(cross talk)~~

~~Rauschenberg: And artists. . .~~

~~Q: How does an artist apply for a grant?~~

~~Rauschenberg: Successful artists have donated works, and we don't like to be selective, but we are only interested in the money, you know. So there are some work, that is very sweet, give us anything, you know, but we have a storage problem too, and so I think it's very nice that the successful artists have supported this all the way through and we have kept people from having their legs chopped off. I mean it's really terrible to~~

~~(cross talk)~~

Q: How does an artist in distress get funds from Change, Inc.?

Rauschenberg: They write.

Q: Are you on that board, ~~Leo?~~ Leo? ~~Mr. Castelli?~~

Castelli: Yes. They get whatever they need, I mean up to a certain amount of money.

Rauschenberg: ~~Well,~~ 500 ~~dollars~~ is ~~N/A~~ about our maximum.

Castelli: ~~About the limit,~~ but then also they may just need 50 ~~dollars~~ because they don't have enough to pay their rent.

~~Rauschenberg: Right. Those are the hard ones to get.~~

~~Q: True.~~

~~Rauschenberg: I mean if you apply you are turned upside down because you don't have 75 dollars or so something. It's really . . . That's it.~~

~~By the time you qualify to need 15,000 dollars. . .~~

~~Q: They don't need you anymore.~~

~~Rauschenberg: You don't need 15,000 dollars.~~

Q: How much of your time is spent on the whole cause of artists' rights?

Rauschenberg: A lot.

(1c) Q: Do you think the Government will ever establish some legislation? Like an IRS check-off? Who can ~~anybody~~ YOU ever impose some control?

Rauschenberg: I think Carter is going to help us. ~~I have to figure out. . .~~ He sent me a letter ~~last week~~ asking my advice ~~and it was a very nice reward for being too outspoken.~~

Q: What did he ask you to comment on ~~and what did you say~~?

Rauschenberg: To help him figure out what to do for artists' legislation.

Q: You've spent a lot of time testifying.

Rauschenberg: But I also know . . . And it bothers me now because ~~like I don't know exactly how to move back.~~

~~Castelli: Move back to where?~~

Rauschenberg: Well, I got the letter, right? I ~~think it's~~ an enormous responsibility, and I am not sure that I want all of it. I am not going to get all of it, but I feel an urgency about it, ~~where while I would still like to, if somebody is really asking you (?) to have just a little more time to figure out what we could~~ do so that ~~where it wouldn't hurt everybody, and could help everybody.~~ barely ~~But I know~~ that the way the Government is set up, within a few weeks ~~from now~~ everything is going to be locked in.

Q: So you say you are better off without it.

Rauschenberg: Yes. I will have casted my invitation. But I mean

Q: But early on -- and I don't mean to remind you of words said at earlier times and perhaps not always with careful thought -- you said, if the Presidency of General Motors or the Presidency of the United States were available they would be jobs that interested you.

Rauschenberg: You have to tell what the question was.

Q: What was the question? I only know the reply.

Rauschenberg: "Which would you prefer?" And it was from -- no offense -- a communist newspaper and my first Paris show, and. . . they thought. . . that Leo was responsible for that show, and the only way it really happened was because of Mr. Cordier, and Leo gave up his commission and then the show was economically feasible, so then being interrogated by this guy, and he says, "Which job would you prefer?" So the question is. . .

(cross talk)

Q: That's never quoted tough, so I am glad that you told me that. But let me ask you another thing.

Rauschenberg: He also offered me a job after he brought in three

more translators to make sure that what I was saying was what his first translator was saying, and after the interview was over offered me a job on a newspaper. (laughter)

Q: That would have satisfied your reporter's instincts. Let me ask you a question if I may, both of you. Did you ever expect your life to unfold the way it did?

Rauschenberg: Has it unfolded? (laughter)

Q: It continues to on a daily basis, doesn't it? (laughter) In this body language.

Rauschenberg: I don't think I ever expected anything, which makes me lucky.

Q: How about you, Mr. Castelli?

Castelli: The same answer. I didn't expect it to. . . (voice trails off)

(cross talk)

Q: Let me try another thing on both of you, and that is. . .
(to Mr. Castelli) Please go on.

~~Castelli: I really didn't expect it to unfold, in quotes, the way it did. Well, it's been constantly surprising to me.~~

Q: Let me ask the next question of both of you (X) ~~first, and that is,~~ If you had to live your lives over again, what would you do otherwise?

Castelli: Oh, probably I'd do all the wrong things, and my life would not have unfolded the way it did, ~~because it was like he-~~ ~~(cross in the gap between the two that I noted.~~

~~(cross talk)~~

I left very much to chance and to accident, and my whole activity still remains very accidental. I do not decide about shows much ahead of time. They will happen ~~(cross)~~ when sufficient material of one painter or another is available.

Sometimes we force the issues a little bit, ~~like~~ for (Cap) instance now, with Bob being so busy doing so many things, ~~— having his show in Washington and other things —~~ we decided to have a show of his, Ileana and I, one month after the opening of the Kent show (X) ~~and so really have to get that show.~~ (Cap?)

~~(cross talk)~~

~~Rauschenberg: Stop that, Leo.~~

~~Castelli: Uh?~~

~~Rauschenberg: Don't make her come back. (laughs)~~

~~Castelli: Don't laugh, just wait and see. (laughter)~~

~~Q: What do you have in mind?~~

Rauschenberg: I have six paintings already done. I am not bragging. ~~Well, actually I am bragging.~~ Some aren't quite finished.

Q: What are you working on now?

Rauschenberg: A series of rather large pieces called either Spreads or Eagles. ?

~~Q: How do they. . .~~

~~Rauschenberg:~~ It's my present to me. I just went to use anything, ~~that. . . but~~, the Albers were restricting, there was a kind of a discipline, ~~and you know then you need discipline, you need~~ restraint. I think excess is expressionless without restraint, and basically I have been excessive, so thanks to (Josef) Albers and my parents and all the people that tried to knock me down I've learned restraint, ~~but I found my free that into the unnecessary . . .~~

New Tape.

~~Rauschenberg: . . . got to work back just for this one time or something, and I think it's a big honor to have shows of this size, and so I give my present. (?)~~

~~Q: Who deserves it more? How did you express. . .~~
~~(cross-talk)~~

~~Rauschenberg: Who knows what I want more?~~

~~Q: It's with the truth. How did. . . What did you want and how did you express this record case?~~

~~Rauschenberg: By what I was (I guess) by, (I expressed it)~~ by consciously saying to myself that I would like to just indulge in all the excesses, all the things that I had made available to me, and strangely enough I am starting off kindof stiffly.

Q: After all that freedom?

Rauschenberg: You get freedom through it too. But I am working into it.

I know it's going to be a very short period. Leo hasn't heard this. ~~(from p. 44)~~

~~(cross talk)~~

~~Q: Will there be. . .~~

~~Rauschenberg:~~ It's very hard, Leo. I mean to be self employed. You don't get a day off, you can't fire yourself, what's a vacation? ~~(laughter)~~

~~(very bad static on tape)~~

~~Q: He doesn't think of it that way. He works every day, all day.~~

~~(cross talk) It's just the sunshine helps also.~~

I do enjoy it. ~~Rauschenberg: I don't like all the other things, like~~ traveling with a show, but it's necessary to me to be on the location where something is shown and talk to the people who are looking at it, because that encourages my growth and my openness. I mean I don't close the door on anybody. I invite people in, turn on the TV, the radio, lights, everything.

Q: ~~A lot of people.~~ You have quite a group that work with you all the time. How did that group evolve?

Rauschenberg: They change. That's one of the most difficult things and one of the most painful things about it.

Q: You said that one of the values of the retrospective is that it brings you up to date, and that as a result you feel liberated. Is that what makes for the Spreads?

Rauschenberg: It does, at least in a few key points somebody is going to see like all the way from there just example to all the way from here, and then they can just have it them. And then I will do something else, because you have a responsibility if you know things, I mean if you know something and you have a feeling that the information is useless unless you can share it. And I work through my work ⊗ and that's for you.

#

Q: You are indulging us, both of you, with your presence here tonight, and sharing so much of yourselves. Special thanks to you to. . . Robert Rauschenberg & Leo Castelli. We're very privileged (cross talk) to have you here with us tonight.

Voice: strides

Q: We are going to, we are going to share in the process for several minutes. Special thanks to. . .

Voice: Drinks?

Q: (Special thanks) to Robert Rauschenberg and Leo Castelli.

It's every special privilege to have you both here with us tonight.

[cross talk] (applause)

Q: And now it's time for the class to share in this process. If you have a question please raise your hand and I'll call on you. Is that Dorothy?

Dorothy: Yes.

Q: How was your show?

Castelli: Do you know everybody out there?

Q: No, but a lot of them. Dorothy just had a show and we've announced it several weeks ago, but I wish I knew more. I do know her number.

Dorothy: I have a question. I'm a neighbor of yours. I look down through my fire escape into your studio.

~~Rauschenberg~~

~~(cross talk)~~

Q: Aha! Voyeur! (laughter)

Rauschenberg: Would you like to come up here and whisper this

question? (laughter)

Voice in background (very faint, inaudible):

(We need to know what? was to keep this exchange + otherwise out)

Rauschenberg: Oh yes, that plane ~~(plain ?)~~

Voice: It's hard to get it

Rauschenberg: Part by part.

Voice: Part by part.

Rauschenberg: Yes, it was for . . when I was working with experiments in art and technology and a very active group in Ann Arbor wanted to help out with the ~~xxxx~~ cause cost, so there was an auction of two thirds lifesize plane models, but made from a model kit. It was an auction there to raise money for artists. One guy bought two, and he didn't know how to explain it to his wife that he even bought one, so he gave me the other one. (laughter)

Voice:

Castelli: Actually the Artists Association came about I would say 12 years ago, and I was one of the original founding members of the Association. It has some uses (laughter). . .

Q: Actually the IRS thinks so. Andre Emmerich was here one week and explained. . .
(cross talk)

Castelli: Mostly to give appraisals.

Q: But he said artists can no longer deduct that.

Rauschenberg: It's very low profile. It's not for the artists. . .
(cross talk)

Castelli: It has a low profile as you say.

Rauschenberg: It actually protects the artists. It's not for the artists. (??)

Castelli: The dealer.

Q: And the collector.

Castelli: Well, not even the collector, no. It's just a professional group. . .

Rauschenberg: There should be another group.

Castelli: . . . mostly of galleries that are really commercial galleries, not galleries of the type. . .

Rauschenberg: But they don't deal with artists' problems or young collectors' problems either.

Castelli: No. No, they are dealing with problems of galleries.

Q: Are there other questions?

Gates: How are members chosen?

Castelli: Well, they do apply. First there was a group of original members, and then other people do apply and they are scrutinized and you see if they are worthy in every respect to belong to that august assembly. . .

Rauschenberg: I am embarrassed that he belongs to it myself, even though (laughter). . .

Castelli: No, I've been of some use there.

Q: It's better than being expelled.

Castelli: . . . in the contemporary scene to belong to the Association. . .

Rauschenberg: I can (he can't?) do you some good there.

Q: Bob, Mr. Sheaffer is an artist too.

Mr. Sheaffer: Your explanation of art and life, the photographs and the objects that you use, they partake both of art and life, ~~is based on a particular place and value~~

~~Is that right?~~

~~You are talking about art and life, and~~ gave us ~~explanation.~~

You use a lot of photographs.

Rauschenberg: Yeah.

Sheaffer: Now those things partake of ~~life~~ art and they partake of life.

Rauschenberg: Yes, it's working both ways, but against each other. Once you make up your mind that it's about this, then it's not . . . I think of all the objects and colors, whatever material I am using, and there is one material that's freeing the other. ~~Arrestingness~~ A restlessness that would make you ask.

Voice: I was just curious, looking at the ? St. Louis Symphony

~~Q: The~~

Voice: When you started it you knew precisely what it was that you wanted to do, whether an experiment. . .

Rauschenberg: I had such duppy material you couldn't believe it. That was a hard one because material was so uncolorful. I had a series of little photographs about the conductor looking this way, the conductor looking that way, you know, and the first violinist and . . . So I had to work that one out. That was a tough one. But there was no original drawing for it, if that's what you are asking, ~~or anything.~~

Voice: Did you finish it. . . was it all there, or did you work it around and came up with several possibilities and. . .

Rauschenberg: No, this was all one thing because I had exploited every possibility that I could think of in order to do this thing. (laughs)

Q: Are there other questions?

Voice: surrounded by

~~American impressionism~~

(laughter)

Rauschenberg: I have no idea. That's why I said earlier that they'd better act fast. (laughter)

--

Voice: Actually these pictures were described in today's Times in an article about the new curator of the White House, Clement Conger, who brought two pictures to the study right off the Oval Office. You did describes them today.

--

Voice: Was that done as a collage first?

Rauschenberg: Uh yes. No, it was done as a drawing. Uh, a collage, yes, I get mixed up. It was a single piece, translated into this

Q: The Women on the Isle ?
(cross talk)

Q: Washington International.

-- --

Castelli: Well, they did one last year, I think, and I really didn't believe that they would be able to do it ,but they did somehow or other. Now this year they approached us again that they wanted to have at least four good galleries participating

in the show, and so five of us finally consented to participate, and they gave us a free space and told us to do what we wanted, so I think that we'll have a good room there.

Q: That will be held at the Washington Armory? (pause) Maybe you should tell us about the Washington International. . .
(cross talk)

Castelli: The man who is the organizer is really a very courageous and persistent guy, I must take my hat off because. . .

Q: Who is that?

Castelli: He's called Follus, F.C.L.L.U.S., and in spite of all the gebuffs that he got from me and others he persisted and finally he got himself this super gallery.

Q: There is a recurring theme, these men are telling us.
(cross talk)

Voice: I wonder if you would comment a little bit about the press for Tania Grossman.

Q (referring to preceding voice) Miss [redacted] has a gallery in

Voice: And was this a different experience? That was the experience there?

Rauschenberg: Uh, you make any place that you work like I work in Gemini, this place in Tampa, the Pyramid and whatever. I don't work with any preconceived ideas, but you work with the people, and it's like music or something, like who is doing the printing, who is doing the etching, and how you get along together, and what comes out. In Gemini I can always. . . their bend is towards impossible technology. Tania Grossman wants quality only, but she will permit in my case abuses, as long as it turns out to be quality.

Q: You have your own press in Florence?

Rauschenberg: Yes. Press. That was established to. . . because print making is a very expensive business and very few artists have the privilege of being able to afford supporting the expense working on a stone, lithography and printing. And that's understandable, because of the economics, but

(pause talk)

Castelli: Artists who can't afford it. . .

(cross talk)

Rauschenberg: Actually Cy never worked on a stone. Brice Marden never worked on a stone.

Q: I wonder if you would explain something. I saw you at that press make immediate x transfers. How does that work? ~~You~~ Mr. Castelli mentioned that you have revolutionized some of the aspects of the art of print making. I don't understand that immediate transfer from the fact that at the time you were using the comic strips and newspaper collages.

Rauschenberg: Yes, uh, press cleaner.

Q: What do you mean?

Rauschenberg: Press cleaner is a solvent.

Q: Like turpentine?

Rauschenberg: Yes, that's how you clean the presses. Yes, it's like turpentine. It released the pigment from the paper.

Voice: Mr. Rauschenberg, if I understand correctly, ~~you have~~ . . . you don't particularly like to have your precious mind being involved (terrible static in tape) in the creative process.

Rauschenberg: When everything else fails, Jack Daniels.
(uproarious laughter).
(end of recording)

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Robert Rauschenberg and Leo Castelli

BLDD: It has been said that it's doubtful if the art of the sixties would have looked quite the way it did if Leo Castelli had not assembled his group of artists and promoted them into international prominence, since he first opened his gallery twenty years ago. Six years earlier, Robert Rauschenberg popped into American art with his first one-man show, what was then called a prophetic show of pictures, some white, some black. What was the reception to that first show, and how did it come about? You had only recently arrived in New York. How did you get a show at Betty Parsons Gallery?

RR: I was a student. I wasn't too sophisticated. And there were so many things that I didn't understand. I kept going back to the Betty Parsons Gallery not so much for answers as for questions.

I had reached a very serious impasse, and finally I just took a bunch of paintings and went up there and asked if I could see her. and she came out and said, "I only look at paintings on Tuesdays." This was Monday. I said, "Couldn't you pretend that it was Tuesday even though it's Monday?" And she said, "Aw, all right, okay, put them in there, in the small room on the side." Then I am standing there in this small room surrounded by these inferior creatures that I have made, trying to figure out whether I should just flee or whether it would be better just to stand there in this loneliness, and before I could make up my mind she was back and she said, "Well, what are these?" And I said, "These are my works." She told me, "You are showing them to me too fast." I was trying to get out of there. Then she said, "Well, I can't give you a show until May." I said, "I don't want a show." I just wanted her to see if there was anything that I was doing that related at all to the energy in her gallery, because I was upset by seeing all those works.

So I had a show in May. But there is more to that story. Clyfford Still. He was part of the magic that was there in that gallery, and I wasn't influenced by Clyfford Still but he was part of my problem. About four months went past, and Betty Parsons came to my studio with this man and they sat and picked pictures for the show, and I thought it went really pretty smoothly.

Then I brought the paintings for the show a couple of weeks later, and she said, "Oh, I have never seen these." And I said, "Of course not. I just did them yesterday." And it was the truth because I was using the materials five times, ten times, twelve times, as many times over as I could, and I always thought that the next one was going to be better.

She said, "Well, Clyfford won't understand this," and I found out that Clyfford Still had been sitting there picking these things, and I had been scrutinized, my work had been scrutinized. It's funny that I didn't realize who he was.

BLDD: In the summer of 1948 you were a student at Black Mountain College. Soon after that you came to New York, and are credited with having been an enormous influence, in fact the major conditioner of neo-Dada among the young artists of the New York School. I can recall a sculpture of yours, about two or three years ago, that is an homage to Marcel Duchamp. How heavily does he figure as an influence in your life and work?

RR: I guess heavily but too late to be a direct influence. I remember the first Duchamp that I ever saw was *Bicycle Wheel on a Stool,* and I saw it at the same time that I saw a sculpture by Aristide Maillol, in the Museum of Modern Art, and something there by Isamu Noguchi. I saw Noguchi, Duchamp and Maillol, and I didn't see any discrepancy. There was no conflict.

BLDD: Leo, you knew Duchamp in that period, didn't you?

LC: Yes, I did. I must have met him right after I got back from the war—let's say World War II, not to make me too old.

RR: That was my war too.

BLDD: Is that how you ended up in Paris?

RR: No. I went to Paris from the Kansas City Art Institute.

BLDD: And how did you get to Kansas City?

RR: I had a girl friend in Los Angeles. Her mother was sick. And she was going to go away, so she said, "If I can get you into Kansas City Art Institute would you go?" And I said yes.

BLDD: How long did you stay there?

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BLDD: And what happened that made you change your name?

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BLDD: So from Kansas City you wended your way . . .

RR: To Paris. I went there and took all the courses they had. I ran from class to class, and I had three jobs at night, including some window work.

BLDD: You did window work in New York too, didn't you?

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BLDD: Leo, how did you, a businessman from Trieste, start an art gallery?

LC: My first gallery was in Paris. For me it was much simpler because I had never been to America, I was in Europe, and to go from Rumania to Paris was not so difficult. I had studied in Milan and then I went to work in Trieste, for an insurance company first and then in a bank. That bank sent me to Paris, where they had a branch, so I was there in the bank, as dissatisfied as ever.

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BLDD: What was your first show there?

LC: My friend and I were very naive and very young, and immediately we were taken over by the surrealists. You see, I had a friend from way back who was from Trieste like myself, and she was called Leonor Fini. She found out that we had this marvelous place and she said, "All right, now let's see what we do with this." And she, Max Ernst, Tchelitchew, Dali and many others—decided that we had to do something very, very grand, and they even designed all kinds of things—panels, furniture; Leonor did some furniture too, but it looked awful next to theirs, which was so much more imaginative. And then we opened the thing in May 1939 with an enormous bang—it was a great event.

My gallery in New York started in 1947 or so. I came to America in 1941 or thereabouts.

BLDD: When did you two get together?

LC: I think we got to know each other at Betty Parsons', at the first show, which was in May 1951. Then he was in a show with Tworkov, Frank Kline, De Kooning, Pollock, and others. We did a great show together called the 9th Street Show, and this was in May 1951 too, right after he opened the show at Betty Parsons'. We had something like ninety artists in the show.

BLDD: Bob, I recall something that you said in 1963, that became a cornerstone of 1960s criticism. You were quoted by ~~Allen~~ Solomon in the catalogue of your Jewish Museum show in 1963 as having said that painting relates to both art and life. And neither can be made. "I try to act in that gap between the two," you said. What did you mean by that?

RR: I don't think any artist sets out to make art. You love art, you live art, you are art, you do art, but you are just doing something, you are doing what no one can stop you from doing, and so it doesn't have to be art, and that is your life. But you also can't make life, and so there is something in between there, because you flirt with the idea that it is art.

BLDD: You are saying that in art, painting works more in ideas than in the painting itself?

RR: No, I think the definition of art would have to be more simple-minded than that, about how much use you can make of it. If you try to separate the two, art can be very self-conscious and a blinding fact. But life doesn't really need it, so it's another blinding fact.

BLDD: One thing that ~~was significant and~~ often referred to as your iconoclastic approach to art, was the fact that you rid yourself of the tyranny of a four-edged, two-dimensional surface. The first way in which you did that was to make what came to be called combines. Can you tell us of their evolution?

RR: It was economy. It was hard to get materials. I had to have this feeling before I would accept it because there were lots of other artists who could have done that, and I was embarrassed, during the abstract expressionist days, by some kind of self-pity. I didn't have anything to paint on. It wasn't an idea. I've painted on everything. Have you ever tried to put a collage on a bath towel? It's hard. That was wintertime, so Ididn't need a bath towel, because I didn't have water anyway.

BLDD: How did you come to use the quilt on the bed, the patchwork quilt?

RR: Because I lost my car; the quilt used to be over the hood of the car to keep the radiator from freezing. I moved to New York and my car wouldn't work.

BLDD: Now I think we know how you got the tires.

RR: Those weren't my tires. It was my quilt. It was my towel. They were somebody else's tires.

BLDD: Has New York been a source of inspiration to you?

RR: Absolutely, not only because it resists everything but also because it can hold everything. You can't hate New York. It's a marvelous place to grow up as an artist. It's marvelous from the viewpoint of a young artist. It's incredible. I have trouble walking around here.

BLDD: Is it the objects that lie in the streets that distract you?

RR: If there is something down there, I pick it up and see what I can do with it.

BLDD: You spend a great deal of your time now in another place, in an almost enchanted strip of land in Captiva, Florida. Why is that?

RR: I find it complementary. I couldn't live without New York. I think New York is just an incredible place: all along the line there are rewards in being here.

I used to tell people this before I was so sure that you have to go to New York. But now I really know it. Because there is no plan, there is no continuity, every change seems very dangerous and it's unexpected, but there is room for you.

There are only two restaurants on the island in Florida, and they are not really restaurants; they are two places where you can eat and not cook it yourself. And different people asked me about New York, and aren't you terrified to live there? And the only place I ever got mugged was the enchanted island!

BLDD: You said that you see yourself as a reporter, and that painting is one of the vehicles you use to give those reports. How much of your work is autobiographical?

RR: Probably all of it.

BLDD: And how heavily do you rely on technology—film, photography, all sorts of technological devices?

RR: As little as possible, but it is necessary.

BLDD: But it seems ~~to us~~ that film and photography and other technological things have absorbed you for a long while—your involvement in experiments in art.

RR: I am mostly involved in changing what I am doing. And sometimes it has been quite a strain. I got into both technology and theater and printing because I don't like the single ego.

BLDD: You've said that the work that interested you the most was working in some combined effort with other people.

RR: Yes, right.

BLDD: Is that an attempt to reduce the involvement of one ego? Why did that engage you so much?

RR: I just didn't want to have one. It might be good for some other artist, but for me some kind of self-assurance would be death.

BLDD: You told us how the combines evolved. Why don't we talk about the jammers for a moment? How did they occur?

RR: I was working with fabrics already, and doing transfers, and I'd been to India, and I had put off the idea of mostly working in trash. And the idea of a beautiful piece of silk, a beautiful color of silk, consumed with its own vanity and all that, didn't interest me. It wasn't until my second trip to India that I realized how that kind of excess worked, no matter how small a shred you have of it, how that worked into your life, to support you. There were people wandering around in mud, starving, and they have one little rag and they look better than we do. So I broke down that prejudice. It was a prejudice.

BLDD: Was it there that you became involved with those limp and sensuous fabrics that have come to be known as hoarfrosts, a rather apt metaphor for frosty, silken, almost veil-like layers upon layers that have photos and prints placed on the silk?

RR: I read the word in Dante. Hoarfrost is like mock frost, but it's a warning about the change of seasons.

BLDD: One of your characteristics is that you dare—that you dare to keep pushing the limit. One thing I know about your printing is its immediacy. How do you achieve that ~~so quickly~~?

RR: By not making up your mind before you are going to do it. It has to be immediate if you don't know what you are doing. And you take that chance, and it can be very embarrassing. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don't. But you don't have the security.

BLDD: Do you plan your major pieces before you execute them?

RR: No. I just go to work, and I work every day, and I *never* know what I am doing.

BLDD: You work directly on the piece?

RR: Yes. That's one of my tricks; I never pay any attention to what I think. You get away from the house, you've done all your business, you've fed the dogs, everything, supper is ready, and everything is going to move very smoothly, and then it's time to go to work and you go, and you trick yourself by saying, "Oh, I am really thinking of a really fantastic thing now." And then you make four or five lines and you say, "That's it!" And then you go over it.

BLDD: I wonder if there is something that you'd both clarify for us. Leo, ~~I am thinking~~ about 1964, when Robert Rauschenberg won the top prize at the Venice Biennale, amid a swirl of rumors, most of them relating to some activities in a gondola, as I recall. Perhaps at long last you would give us your version of the events?

LC: It's very simple. Bob had just had a show at the Jewish Museum—that incredible show—and became obviously very well known even here in America. Before that he had had shows in Paris and his work had made a tremendous impression on French artists and on the French art world. Of course ~~Allen~~ Solomon had recognized Rauschenberg's merits quite early, I think in the late fifties, when he first appeared. He was director of a small museum up in Ithaca, at Cornell.

BLDD: His selections represented the United States at that Biennale?

LC: He put the show together. It was an incredibly complex show that Allan organized. He just put into the show all the important trends of the moment, trends that had come up after abstract expressionism. He had two key abstract people, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, and two key—well, whatever they were calling them—new people, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who had gotten away from abstract expressionism; they had used it too, but then were doing something entirely new. Well, these four were the major figures in the show. And there were six other artists, some relating to Rauschenberg and Johns and some relating to Louis and Noland. Clyfford Still, for instance, and Jim Dine, and John Chamberlain were in it. And Claes Oldenburg too. So you see, it was an incredibly well-constructed show that presented in Venice everything that we had to offer at that moment, an incredible feat.

BLDD: But what was the controversy about? What really happened?

LC: The controversy was about the fact that it seemed to many people that we had influenced the jurors who gave the prize to Bob. They couldn't believe, the Americans especially, that suddenly there was a prize here for Rauschenberg.

RR: And I had to keep arguing with Noland about who was going to exhibit on the island. That's the official place on the grounds, where the rules said you had to show. There wasn't enough room for all of us, so we kept switching, and finally I was off the grounds, so I almost won it illegally. I didn't know that one of the ground rules was that I had to be present, available. I was working for Merce Cunningham in the La Fenice theater, and living in a lousy little hotel where nobody could find me, but I knew everybody was looking. I just happened to be on the scene that day, wandering around.

BLDD: You've devoted much of your time to younger artists and artists' rights.

RR: I founded Change, Inc., which provides emergency funds for artists.

BLDD: You pointed out that many artists can't even get a credit card. How does Change, Inc. help financially distressed artists?

RR: We haven't really had an enormous sum of money, I think that the largest grant we've gotten is from the National Endowment, $10,000. Several artists got together and put out a portfolio for Mobil Oil; we got some money from that. And we are about to have a show.

BLDD: How does an artist in distress get funds from Change, Inc.?

RR: They write.

BLDD: Are you on that board, Leo?

LC: Yes. They get whatever they need, up to a certain amount of money.

RR: Our maximum is about $500.

LC: But then also they may just need $50 because they don't have enough to pay their rent.

BLDD: The artists' rights cause culminated at a highly publicized auction, when an earlier work of yours that had been originally bought by a collector for $900 was sold at auction—was it ten years later?—for $85,000 and, of course, you did not participate in any of that good fortune.

RR: It's all part of the same thing. My interest doesn't come solely from wanting back a percentage of my own work, but also from thinking about other artists in the future.

BLDD: How much of your time is spent on artists' rights.

RR: A lot.

BLDD: Do you think the government will ever establish some legislation?

RR: I think Carter is going to help us. He sent me a letter asking for my advice.

BLDD: What did he ask you to comment on?

RR: To help him figure out what to do for artists' legislation.

BLDD: Let me ask the next question of both of you. If you had your lives to live over again, what would you do otherwise?

LC: Well, probably I'd do all the wrong things, and my life would not have unfolded the way it did. I left very much to chance and to accident, and my whole activity still remains very accidental. I do not decide about shows much ahead of time. They will happen whenever sufficient material of one painter or another is available.

Sometimes we force the issues a little bit. For instance now, with Bob being so busy doing so many things, we decided to have a show of his, Ileana and I, one month after the opening of the MOMA show.

RR: I have six paintings already done. I am not bragging. Well, actually I am bragging. Some aren't quite finished.

BLDD: What are you working on now?

RR: A series of rather large pieces called either Spreads or Scales. It's my present to me. I just want to use anything. The Jammers were restricting, there was a kind of discipline, a restraint. I think excess is expressionless without restraint, and basically I have been excessive, so thanks to Josef Albers and my parents and all the people that tried to knock me down I've learned restraint. But I moved away from that by consciously saying to myself that I would like to just indulge in all the excesses, all the things that I had made available to me, and strangely enough I am starting off kind of stiffly.

BLDD: After all that freedom?

RR: You get freedom through it too. But I am working into it. I know it's going to be a very short period. Leo hasn't heard this. It's very hard, Leo. I mean, to be self-employed. You don't get a day off, you can't fire yourself, and what's a vacation? But I do enjoy it. I don't like everything, like traveling with a show, but it's necessary to me to be on the location where something is shown and talk to the people who are looking at it. That encourages my growth and my openness. I mean I don't close the door on anybody. I invite people in, turn on the TV, the radio, lights, everything.

BLDD: You said that one of the values of the retrospective is that it brings you up to date, and that as a result you feel liberated. Is that what makes for the Spreads?

RR: It does.

And then I will do something else, because you have a responsibility if you know things, I mean if you know something and you have a feeling that the information is useless unless you can share it. And I work through my work.

Inside New York's Art World

BARBARALEE DIAMONSTEIN

RIZZOLI NEW YORK
1979

INTRODUCTION

In 1974, at a small supper party given by John Everett, president of the New School, I got to talking to the school's vice-president, Al Landa. He asked me what I knew of the school. Other than vague recollections that it was a haven for European scholars driven from their homelands by tyranny and persecution in the Thirties—and the fact that I had once taken a course there in what was still called "underground film"—my knowledge was limited. Nonetheless, Mr. Landa, who knew of the class that I was teaching at Hunter College (Inside New York, which dealt primarily with politics, city and cultural affairs), suggested that I now teach a course at the New School about one of New York City's most tangible assets—its remarkable art world. He quickly arranged for Jerome Liblit, associate dean of the Center for New York City Affairs, to see if we might devise some sort of program. Out of that conversation, with amazing dispatch, grew the course that I have been giving at the New School For Social Research since 1975: Inside New York's Art World, a series of informal conversations with distinguished members of the art community.

Actually, the course's title is a misnomer; New York's art world is the whole world's art world, and has been for more than a generation, ever since the abstract expressionists burst on the scene. The first semester was a hectic one. Starting with the Guggenheim Museum, we moved from museums to galleries to artists' studios. By the second semester, class size had ballooned to almost two hundred, which all but ruled out such itinerancy. From the beginning, it seemed obvious that the interviews should be preserved on audio- and videotape to create a permanent record that would be available to students and to the larger public. Leo Castelli, the gallery owner, and Professor Louis Starr of Columbia University, made this possible, through their kind support and continuing encouragement. In April 1978, and again at the time of publication of this volume, a selection of the videotapes was shown at the Castelli Gallery.

All of the videotapes are stored and distributed by Castelli/Sonnabend. Films, so ably directed by Patti Brundage, who was also responsible for the imaginative organization of the exhibitions. The audiotapes are on file at Columbia University's Oral History Research Department. In addition, *Partisan Review* has published two of the interviews, one a joint conversation with Roy Lichtenstein and Leo Castelli, the other with Robert Motherwell. For everyone involved, the entire enterprise has been a labor of love rather than of commerce. It would not have been possible without such generosity, especially on the part of the interviewees, who shared their thoughts so freely.

The high level of interest in the interviews persuaded me that a wider audience might appreciate them. This book is the result—twenty-seven informal interviews with a significant slice of New York's art world—painters, sculptors, architects, critics, museum directors, gallery owners. In each conversation, I tried to learn how and where they evolved; why they turned to the world of art; what forces helped shape them and their work; their philosophical approaches; their likes and dislikes in art; their roles in art history. The interviewees do not constitute a definitive group, perhaps not even a representative one; but any group that includes the likes of Robert Motherwell and Robert Rauschenberg, Louise Nevelson and Tom Hess, Philip Johnson and I.M. Pei, Ivan Karp and Christo, surely qualifies as a fascinating one.

Of course, spoken and written words lead very different lives, and translating oral interviews into print can be very tricky. Some of the interviewees are far more articulate than others, explaining themselves and their theories with grace, clarity, and succinctness. Others grope through several false starts before finally saying what they want to say. Still others are far better artists than talkers; they never quite manage to make their points, circling around them, getting close, but never quite arriving. Yet in every case, I think, these interviews have a vigor, a spontaneity, a special life that more than compensates for any shortcomings the spoken word may have. All of the photographs in this volume have been taken directly from the videotapes of the interviews.

While the transcripts have been edited for space reasons, and in some cases, to make certain passages somewhat clearer to the reader, the words that appear here are very close to the words as they were spoken. I hope you will agree that, taken together, they help comprise a vital, informal history of one of the most exciting artistic periods in memory.

Barbaralee Diamonstein
New York City
27 June 1979

INSIDE NEW YORK'S ART WORLD

both of the creator and the spectator. What do you mean when you say that?

BP: Well, it may be an attempt to defy the sense of alienation. Despair. Separativeness. But I want the participation as an extended art experience—not another Luna Park or playground. I live in the country, I live in Todi, an hour and a half north of Rome. One of the more positive aspects to living there is that I rarely read the newspapers and when I do, I know what I read belongs to the past, so my anxieties are calmed.

We are living in a very difficult time, and what I am trying to do is to make works of art that will have some kind of sense of the Querencia. You know, the idea of the Querencia? In the bull ring it's a spot where the bull goes to feel safe from the matador.

I think we all need a Querencia in our lives. I don't know how successful I am, but I try at least in many of my works to give people a sense of their own space—a space to go into. I also try, when possible, to bring nature into it, to link my work to the changing season which becomes part of the work. You might see the sky in reflection or find the work interlocked with land, or sand, the water, or whatever. That's what I mean by trying to relate man to his environment.

Robert Rauschenberg

(Painter. Born Port Arthur, Texas, 1925)

and Leo Castelli

(Art Dealer. Born Trieste, Italy, 1907. Came to U. S. 1941)

BLDD: It has been said that it's doubtful if the art of the sixties would have looked quite the way it did if Leo Castelli had not assembled his group of artists and promoted them into international prominence, since he first opened his gallery twenty years ago. Six years earlier, Robert Rauschenberg popped into American art with his first one-man show, what was then called a prophetic show of pictures, some white, some black.

What was the reception to that first show, and how did it come about? You had only recently arrived in New York. How did you get a show at the Betty Parsons Gallery?

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was anything that I was doing that related at all to the energy in her gallery, because I was upset by seeing all those works.

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BLDD: In the summer of 1948 you were a student at Black Mountain College. Soon after that you came to New York, and are credited with

having been an enormous influence, in fact the major conditioner of neo-Dada among the young artists of the New York School. I can recall a sculpture of yours, about two or three years ago, that is an homage to Marcel Duchamp. How heavily does he figure as an influence in your life and work?

RR: I guess heavily but too late to be a direct influence. I remember the first Duchamp that I ever saw was *Bicycle Wheel on a Stool,* and I saw it at the same time that I saw a sculpture by Aristide Maillol, in the Museum of Modern Art, and something there by Isamu Noguchi. I saw Noguchi, Duchamp and Maillol, and I didn't see any discrepancy. There was no conflict.

BLDD: Leo, you knew Duchamp in that period, didn't you?

LC: Yes, I did. I must have met him right after I got back from the war—let's say World War II, not to make me too old.

RR: That was my war too.

BLDD: Is that how you ended up in Paris?

RR: No. I went to Paris from the Kansas City Art Institute.

BLDD: And how did you get to Kansas City?

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BLDD: How long did you stay there?

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BLDD: And what happened that made you change your name?

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BLDD: So from Kansas City you wended your way . . .

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BLDD: Leo, how did you, a businessman from Trieste, start an art gallery?

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I had a friend who was a decorator and designer of furniture. At that time the furniture was what we now call art deco. One day, going by the Place Vendôme, he saw a storefront with a sign that the store was for rent, and to apply at the Ritz, which was next door. So this friend of mine and I, who had never done anything in art until then, went in. The place was just incredibly beautiful: one room after the other, all covered with velvet in soft colors, chartreuse and all that. Five marvelous rooms, something like fifty feet high, and there were windows on one side on the gardens of the Ritz. It couldn't be more beautiful. And it turned out that the rent was very, very modest for the first three years. They wanted to give us a chance to make good, and then of course the rent would be increased steadily.

BLDD: What was your first show there?

LC: My friend and I were very naive and very young, and immediately we were taken over by the surrealists. You see, I had a friend from way back who was from Trieste like myself, and she was called Leonor Fini. She found out that we had this marvelous place and she said, "All right, now let's see what we do with this." And she, Max Ernst, Tchelitchew, Dali and many others—decided that we had to do something very, very grand, and they even designed all kinds of things—panels, furniture; Leonor did some furniture too, but it looked awful next to theirs, which was so much more imaginative. And then we opened the thing in May 1939 with an enormous bang—it was a great event.

My gallery in New York started in 1947 or so. I came to America in 1941 or thereabouts.

BLDD: When did you two get together?

LC: I think we got to know each other at Betty Parsons', at the first show, which was in May 1951. Then he was in a show with Tworkov, Frank Kline, De Kooning, Pollock, and others. We did a great show together called the 9th Street Show, and this was in May 1951 too, right after he opened the show at Betty Parsons'. We had something like ninety artists in the show.

BLDD: Bob, I recall something that you said in 1963, that became a cornerstone of 1960s criticism. You were quoted by Alan Solomon in the catalogue of your Jewish Museum show in 1963 as having said that painting relates to both art and life. And neither can be made. "I try to act in that gap between the two," you said. What did you mean by that?

RR: I don't think any artist sets out to make art. You love art, you live art, you are art, you do art, but you are just doing something, you are doing what no one can stop you from doing, and so it doesn't have to be

art, and that is your life. But you also can't make life, and so there is something in between there, because you flirt with the idea that it is art.

BLDD: You are saying that in art, painting works more in ideas than in the painting itself?

RR: No, I think the definition of art would have to be more simple-minded than that, about how much use you can make of it. If you try to separate the two, art can be very self-conscious and a blinding fact. But life doesn't really need it, so it's another blinding fact.

BLDD: One thing that is often referred to is your iconoclastic approach to art, the fact that you rid yourself of the tyranny of a four-edged, two-dimensional surface. The first way in which you did that was to make what came to be called combines. Can you tell us of their evolution?

RR: It was economy. It was hard to get materials. I had to have this feeling before I would accept it because there were lots of other artists who could have done that, and I was embarrassed, during the abstract expressionist days, by some kind of self-pity. I didn't have anything to paint on. It wasn't an idea. I've painted on everything. Have you ever

tried to put a collage on a bath towel? It's hard. That was wintertime, so I didn't need a bath towel, because I didn't have water anyway.

BLDD: How did you come to use the quilt on the bed, the patchwork quilt?

RR: Because I lost my car; the quilt used to be over the hood of the car to keep the radiator from freezing. I moved to New York and my car wouldn't work.

BLDD: Now I think we know how you got the tires.

RR: Those weren't my tires. It was my quilt. It was my towel. They were somebody else's tires.

BLDD: Has New York been a source of inspiration to you?

RR: Absolutely, not only because it resists everything but also because it can hold everything. You can't hate New York. It's a marvelous place to grow up as an artist. It's marvelous from the viewpoint of a young artist. It's incredible. I have trouble walking around here.

BLDD: Is it the objects that lie in the streets that distract you?

RR: If there is something down there, I pick it up and see what I can do with it.

BLDD: You spend a great deal of your time now in another place, in an almost enchanted strip of land in Captiva, Florida. Why is that?

RR: I find it complementary. I couldn't live without New York. I think New York is just an incredible place; all along the line there are rewards in being here.

I used to tell people this before I was so sure that you have to go to New York. But now I really know it. Because there is no plan, there is no continuity, every change seems very dangerous and it's unexpected, but there is room for you.

There are only two restaurants on the island in Florida, and they are not really restaurants; they are two places where you can eat and not cook it yourself. And different people asked me about New York, and aren't you terrified to live there? And the only place I ever got mugged was the enchanted island!

BLDD: You said that you see yourself as a reporter, and that painting is one of the vehicles you use to give those reports. How much of your work is autobiographical?

RR: Probably all of it.

BLDD: And how heavily do you rely on technology—film, photography, all sorts of technological devices?

RR: As little as possible, but it is necessary.

BLDD: But it seems that film and photography and other technological things have absorbed you for a long while—your involvement in experiments in art.

RR: I am mostly involved in changing what I am doing. And sometimes it has been quite a strain. I got into both technology and theater and printing because I don't like the single ego.

BLDD: You've said that the work that interested you the most was working in some combined effort with other people.

RR: Yes, right.

BLDD: Is that an attempt to reduce the involvement of one ego? Why did that engage you so much?

RR: I just didn't want to have one. It might be good for some other artist, but for me some kind of self-assurance would be death.

BLDD: You told us how the combines evolved. Why don't we talk about the jammers for a moment? How did they occur?

RR: I was working with fabrics already, and doing transfers, and I'd been to India, and I had put off the idea of mostly working in trash. And the idea of a beautiful piece of silk, a beautiful color of silk, consumed with its own vanity and all that, didn't interest me. It wasn't until my second trip to India that I realized how that kind of excess worked, no matter how small a shred you have of it, how that worked into your life, to support you. There were people wandering around in mud, starving, and they have one little rag and they look better than we do. So I broke down that prejudice. It was a prejudice.

BLDD: Was it there that you became involved with those limp and sensuous fabrics that have come to be known as hoarfrosts, a rather apt metaphor for frosty, silken, almost veil-like layers upon layers that have photos and prints placed on the silk?

RR: I read the word in Dante. Hoarfrost is like mock frost, but it's a warning about the change of seasons.

BLDD: One of your characteristics is that you dare—that you dare to keep pushing the limit. One thing I know about your printing is its immediacy. How do you achieve that?

RR: By not making up your mind before you are going to do it. It has to be immediate if you don't know what you are doing. And you take that chance, and it can be very embarrassing. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don't. But you don't have the security.

BLDD: Do you plan your major pieces before you execute them?

RR: No. I just go to work, and I work every day, and I *never* know what I am doing.

BLDD: You work directly on the piece?

RR: Yes. That's one of my tricks; I never pay any attention to what I think. You get away from the house, you've done all your business, you've fed the dogs, everything, supper is ready, and everything is going to move very smoothly, and then it's time to go to work and you go, and

you trick yourself by saying, "Oh, I am really thinking of a really fantastic thing now." And then you make four or five lines and you say, "That's it!" And then you go over it.

BLDD: I wonder if there is something that you'd both clarify for us, Leo, about 1964, when Robert Rauschenberg won the top prize at the Venice Biennale, amid a swirl of rumors, most of them relating to some activities in a gondola, as I recall. Perhaps at long last you would give us your version of the events?

LC: It's very simple. Bob had just had a show at the Jewish Museum—that incredible show—and became obviously very well known even here in America. Before that he had had shows in Paris and his work had made a tremendous impression on French artists and on the French art world. Of course Alan Solomon had recognized Rauschenberg's merits quite early, I think in the late fifties, when he first appeared. He was director of a small museum up in Ithaca, at Cornell.

BLDD: His selections represented the United States at that Biennale?

LC: He put the show together. It was an incredibly complex show that Alan organized. He just put into the show all the important trends of the moment, trends that had come up after abstract expressionism. He had two key abstract people, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, and two

key—well, whatever they were calling them—new people, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who had gotten away from abstract expressionism; they had used it too, but then were doing something entirely new. Well, these four were the major figures in the show. And there were six other artists, some relating to Rauschenberg and Johns and some relating to Louis and Noland. Clyfford Still, for instance, and Jim Dine, and John Chamberlain were in it. And Claes Oldenburg too. So you see, it was an incredibly well-constructed show that presented in Venice everything that we had to offer at that moment, an incredible feat.

BLDD: But what was the controversy about? What really happened?

LC: The controversy was about the fact that it seemed to many people that we had influenced the jurors who gave the prize to Bob. They couldn't believe, the Americans especially, that suddenly there was a prize here for Rauschenberg.

RR: And I had to keep arguing with Noland about who was going to exhibit on the island. That's the official place on the grounds, where the rules said you had to show. There wasn't enough room for all of us, so we kept switching, and finally I was off the grounds, so I almost won it illegally. I didn't know that one of the ground rules was that I had to be present, available. I was working for Merce Cunningham in the La Fenice theater, and living in a lousy little hotel where nobody could find me, but I knew everybody was looking. I just happened to be on the scene that day, wandering around.

BLDD: You've devoted much of your time to younger artists and artists' rights.

RR: I founded Change, Inc., which provides emergency funds for artists.

BLDD: You pointed out that many artists can't even get a credit card. How does Change, Inc. help financially distressed artists?

RR: We haven't really had an enormous sum of money, I think that the largest grant we've gotten is from the National Endowment, $10,000. Several artists got together and put out a portfolio for Mobil Oil; we got some money from that. And we are about to have a show.

BLDD: How does an artist in distress get funds from Change, Inc.?

RR: They write.

BLDD: Are you on that board, Leo?

LC: Yes. They get whatever they need, up to a certain amount of money.

RR: Our maximum is about $500.

LC: But then also they may just need $50 because they don't have enough to pay their rent.

BLDD: The artists' rights cause culminated at a highly publicized auc-

tion, when an earlier work of yours that had been originally bought by a collector for $900 was sold at auction—was it ten years later?—for $85,000 and, of course, you did not participate in any of that good fortune.

RR: It's all part of the same thing. My interest doesn't come solely from wanting back a percentage of my own work, but also from thinking about other artists in the future.

BLDD: How much of your time is spent on artists' rights?

RR: A lot.

BLDD: Do you think the government will ever establish some legislation?

RR: I think Carter is going to help us. He sent me a letter asking for my advice.

BLDD: What did he ask you to comment on?

RR: To help him figure out what to do for artists' legislation.

BLDD: Let me ask the next question of both of you. If you had your lives to live over again, what would you do otherwise?

LC: Well, probably I'd do all the wrong things, and my life would not have unfolded the way it did. I left very much to chance and to accident, and my whole activity still remains very accidental. I do not decide about shows much ahead of time. They will happen whenever sufficient material of one painter or another is available.

Sometimes we force the issues a little bit. For instance now, with Bob being so busy doing so many things, we decided to have a show of his, Ileana and I, one month after the opening of the MOMA show.

RR: I have six paintings already done. I am not bragging. Well, actually I am bragging. Some aren't quite finished.

BLDD: What are you working on now?

RR: A series of rather large pieces called either Spreads or Scales. It's my present to me. I just want to use anything. The Jammers were restricting, there was a kind of discipline, a restraint. I think excess is expressionless without restraint, and basically I have been excessive, so thanks to Josef Albers and my parents and all the people that tried to knock me down I've learned restraint. But I moved away from that by consciously saying to myself that I would like to just indulge in all the excesses, all the things that I had made available to me, and strangely enough I am starting off kind of stiffly.

BLDD: After all that freedom?

RR: You get freedom through it too. But I am working into it. I know it's going to be a very short period. Leo hasn't heard this. It's very hard, Leo. I mean, to be self-employed. You don't get a day off, you can't fire yourself, and what's a vacation? But I do enjoy it. I don't like everything, like traveling with a show, but it's necessary to me to be on the location

where something is shown and talk to the people who are looking at it. That encourages my growth and my openness. I mean I don't close the door on anybody. I invite people in, turn on the TV, the radio, lights, everything.

BLDD: You said that one of the values of the retrospective is that it brings you up to date, and that as a result you feel liberated. Is that what makes for the Spreads?

RR: It does. And then I will do something else, because you have a responsibility if you know things, I mean if you know something and you have a feeling that the information is useless unless you can share it. And I work through my work.