

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of
Sylvia Palacios Whitman

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

Columbia University

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sylvia Palacios Whitman conducted by Alessandra Nicifero on June 5, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center

Session #1

Interviewee: Sylvia Palacios Whitman

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Alessandra Nicifero

Date: June 5, 2015

Q: I'm Alessandra Nicifero. I'm here with Sylvia Palacios Whitman and it's June 5, 2015. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project. I would like to start by talking a little bit about where you were born, where you grew up.

Palacios Whitman: Yes. I was born in the south of Chile in a town called Osorno, which is quite south—as south as you can get pretty much in South America. I went to school there and my parents lived there all their lives and most of my family is still there.

Q: Still your parents?

Palacios Whitman: No, they died. I used to go a lot more to visit when my parents were alive but now that they're not there anymore, it's a little bit harder. But I still have my sister and her children and my nephews and nieces. I'm very close to all of them.

Q: Is it the area where there are all the volcanoes?

Palacios Whitman: Yes, all the volcanoes and the lakes. It's lakes all over the place and volcanoes. You can't get away from them. You walk out of the house and there are volcanoes to the right, to the left, right in front of you, the same with lakes. It all ends up in a lake.

Q: And so where did you go to school?

Palacios Whitman: The first school I went to was a German school. Especially in the south of Chile, a lot of German people, during the war and right after the war, arrived because there was a German colony in the south. My parents wanted us to go to the best school and that was the best school. So I learned how to read and write and do mathematics in German first.

Q: Do you still speak German?

Palacios Whitman: A little bit but not really. I've forgotten. I don't have anybody to talk to.

Q: And did you start studying art as well?

Palacios Whitman: Well, yes. I would say I did some art, but it wasn't art. I just did stuff that I needed to do that I realize now probably was art. I remember when I was about eleven, like my granddaughter now, and I told my father that I wanted to learn how to paint. He looked at me and he laughed hard, but he said, "You little girl, where have you heard or seen any art world that you're so interested in studying it?" But I already was and that's what I wanted to do. So they sent me to this Spanish guy—I can't remember his name, but he was a Spanish painter who was in the south of Chile. He was addicted to several drugs, but my parents didn't know this.

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: I wasn't going to tell them because I wanted him to teach me painting, which he did, old-fashioned type of paintings. At least once a week, when I went, he would ask me if he could go with me to my father's office. My father was a doctor. He would go in the back part of the office with me where my father had all the medications to give to people and whatnot. He would go through them fast, fast, anything that had anything he could—

Q: Take.

Palacios Whitman: [Laughs] Until my father realized he was losing his medications. He asked me and I had to confess, it wasn't me. My father said, "What are you doing with them?" I said, "I'm not doing." But he said, "Whenever you're around." I said, "That's because he does it."

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: My father was stunned, but that was my first art teacher.

Q: What kind of art was he teaching you?

Palacios Whitman: He taught me how to paint marines and ships and waves and stuff like that. A lot of ocean stuff.

Q: Then did you move to study—did you go to college?

Palacios Whitman: Yes, later on I went to Santiago where I went to the fine arts school. My mother of course again didn't want me to go because she had heard all the young people who wanted to be artists were weird, weird stuff went on. She said, "No, no, no." So what she did is to send me and my sister to Santiago in a small apartment with a maid, a wonderful woman who brought us up practically, Tina. Tina stayed with us and was supposed to check— What time did I go to school? What time did I come back? Who did I come back with? What did I do? Of course Tina couldn't care less, but that's what happened.

Soon after that, that was it. The assistant teacher of drawing at the drawing class is the guy I ended up marrying when I was eighteen.

Q: You were very young.

Palacios Whitman: Yes.

Q: And what happened after that?

Palacios Whitman: He and I were married. Of course my parents didn't want me to get married but there was not much they could do. So I got married anyhow and we went to Mexico because his father lived in Mexico. His father was writing for *El Universal*, which is like the *New York Times* of Mexico, and lived with his second wife. We stayed with them for a year or so and we went different places and whatnot. From Mexico we came to America, to New York.

Q: So your first husband was also an artist?

Palacios Whitman: Yes. He was Chilean and he actually had some success in New York. His name is Enrique Castro-Cid. People know him.

Q: What was your idea of New York then?

Palacios Whitman: Well, I was extremely young. I didn't speak a word of English, not that I do now.

Q: Of course you do.

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: But I was just too scared that since I wasn't learning English and I was forgetting my Spanish, I would be completely out of it. Eventually I learned a little bit and he spoke a little bit more English than I did. Nevertheless we met a lot of people and are still good friends with some of the people I met when I was very, very young here in New York. Some of them were at the party [note: Robert Whitman's eightieth birthday party, May 2015].

Q: What were you expecting to find here?

Palacios Whitman: It was actually my husband at the time—he was a very ambitious young man. At the time Paris was already not the place to go. He knew New York was at the very beginning of the sixties, '60, '61. So he wanted to experience it and meet people and he did. He was very outrageous and he got very much into what he was going to do and I just tried to learn some English. It was hard. We didn't have any money and because of the way that I had been brought up, I didn't know you had to do something to eat, so if you're hungry, "Okay, so where's my food? Where is it coming from?"

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: So that was part of it.

Q: And where did you live in the city?

Palacios Whitman: The first part was actually 111th Street, I think. It was so many years ago. It looks so different. We were in one of those rooms for Columbia [University, New York] students. That's where we lived first. Somebody got for us a place. Of course it was too small. It was just one room. It was impossible for my husband at the time to do paintings or stuff. So then we moved down to the Village, to Second Avenue and Tenth Street. Oh, no, no. There was one place in between. It was on Avenue A and Ninth Street, I think. That was when I had a monkey. I needed a companion. My grandmother used to send me a little money once in a while. So she sent me one hundred dollars one time and I felt so rich, my goodness, and I went out in the street and first thing I saw was a monkey in one of those places where they sell animals, pets and stuff.

So I asked the person about the monkey—the monkey was cute and sitting with his hands holding and showing me his teeth. I said, “Oh my gosh. This monkey’s calling me. I need to care for him.” So they told me that it was going to be a little bit more than one hundred dollars and I said, “One hundred dollars is all I have,” and they said, “Okay, alright. We’ll give it to you.” They put him in a little box and then I took this poor monkey to starve with us because we didn’t have money to eat and neither did the monkey. But I figured out what to do for the three of us. I used to go down Avenue A where they had at the time a lot of those fairs outside, people sold bananas and pears. They were always old; they were not very good. They were very cheap. I took my monkey with me and people felt sorry for the monkey and me, I guess. They would say, “Please take these bananas for the monkey.” I said, “Thank you so much,” and then we would all eat the bananas.

[Laughter]

Q: That’s wonderful. So did you start going to see art?

Palacios Whitman: Yes. Well immediately we connected with a lot of people here in New York and eventually my husband at the time got a gallery—Richard [L.] Feigen Gallery [& Co., New York]. We met tons of people and whatnot. That’s how we met [Adelaide] Addie [de Menil] and Christophe [de Menil] and their parents. It was just a wonderful time and almost like a family kind of situation.

Q: And what happened after?

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: What happened after is—I missed one part there. Enrique was painting but he still wasn't making much money and we needed a larger place. So he said, "I think that you should work. You have to work." I said, "I don't speak English." I tried first to work in the restaurant and I went to this restaurant. Immediately they took me. They said, "Yes, yes, yes. Just put this thing on." Of course I didn't know what they were asking me for, so I went to the kitchen and said, "What?" I don't know. I would go back and ask again until I realized that wasn't working.

But at the time—life is like this, very weird. We had become friends with Anne [Clark] who had been married to Roberto Matta and she had the twins and then other kids. She said, "Sylvia, you can do something. Your face, which is something." This is a completely wacko story. She said, "I know these people. I'm going to send you there. Whatever they say, you just go along with it. You don't have to speak English." So I went and who do I meet? This woman called China Machado [Noelie Dasouza Machado] who at the time was the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. Next thing I know, China Machado is taking me in a taxi, we go off to this incredible place, walk in and there's this small, short, thin man, youngish but much older than we were. He grabbed my face to the right, to the left, made me walk, said, "She's going to be photographed." And the man was Richard Avedon. [Laughs]

Q: Oh wow.

Palacios Whitman: But I had not a clue of anything, all I wanted was someone to pay me for something. The next thing I knew, I was on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar*. At that time we didn't have a phone, couldn't pay for it, so China sent me a telegraph, "You're not going to believe this, you're going to be in there." I said, "What is that? What kind of magazine is that?"



Sylvia Whitman on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar*, October 1962. Photo: Richard Avedon. Courtesy: Sylvia Whitman and BROADWAY 1602

Once a month, I would write a letter to my mother. I said, "I don't want you to be very upset, but they told me I was going to be on the cover of this magazine, *Harper's Bazaar*." My mother wrote back immediately saying, "Watch out, I don't want you to turn into a prostitute." [Laughs] She had no idea. She just felt this could not be any good.

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: God knows what she's doing. [Laughs] So I worked a little bit there and I made a little money because they paid me not to appear in other stuff, just to do that. Imagine, that was over fifty years ago. Then Enrique started doing better and I stopped doing that. I got pregnant with my son so that took care of that.

Q: So you were still living in the city. And so your child was born.

Palacios Whitman: My child was born and his name was Bernardo. I don't think that he was very accepted by his father; not that he wasn't accepted but everything was more important than the child. The child—it was almost like a bother, he couldn't do this, he couldn't go to Europe, I couldn't go anyhow. So I decided to send him to my parents for a little bit. But I knew that that was not what I wanted to do, so I said, "While he's there, I'm going to leave this guy," and that's just what happened. Once my son was gone, I said, "Okay, now I don't have to be living with him here on Second Avenue," and I left him. Shortly after that, I met [Robert] Bob [Whitman], in East Hampton [New York] at Christophe de Menil's house.

Q: And Bob was working there?

Palacios Whitman: He was doing performances that Christophe was producing and whatnot.

Q: So we are talking about the mid-sixties, what year was that?

Palacios Whitman: About '67 maybe. Yes.

Q: And did you collaborate with Bob?

Palacios Whitman: No, no. He wanted me to be in that one piece he was doing. [Note: Robert Whitman, *Shirt*, 1967] I was there, but then I didn't—we did not work together at all. We can't. It's almost the opposite. [Laughs] So it's better to keep separate stuff, so I did my stuff and he did his stuff. That worked much better.

Q: So what kind of work were you doing then?

Palacios Whitman: Well, I started dancing. I danced with Trisha [“Trish”] Brown and we went to places. We went to Europe, we did this, we did that. I always drew and I always painted and I made little figures. It was always in my life to do stuff like that and I still have some of those drawings around. Yes.

Q: Can you tell me more about your experience with Trisha Brown? How did you meet her?

Palacios Whitman: Well, I met her through Bob [Whitman] because she was a good friend of Bob's and she had been in several of Bob's performances, performing for him. Then we just became friends. We both had kids about the same age. Adam [Brown] and Bernardo became good friends and so the two of us had a thing and we visited and the kids played and the two of us fooled around and, “Shouldn't we do this? Shouldn't we do that?” That's how it all started. Trisha of course had done stuff before but some of the first performances on the floor was all

done at that time and it was wonderful. But then I decided I wanted to do my own stuff. The first performance that I had of my own was done at Trisha's place, at her studio.

Q: When was that?

Palacios Whitman: When? I would say in the beginning of the seventies, yes.

Q: So Babette Mangolte was already around.

Palacios Whitman: Babette was very much, absolutely.

Q: Taking photos?

Palacios Whitman: She takes great photographs and those are the photographs that were shown at the Whitney Museum [of American Art, New York, *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970–1980*, 2013–14]. So that was done and then I did a lot of other stuff myself. I did some stuff in Stockholm. I did some stuff in different places and a lot in New York, I did a lot of performances. Then my son Bernardo died—he committed suicide—and well, it was bad.

Q: I can imagine.

Palacios Whitman: So I stopped and then we decided to go to the country [Warwick, New York] and that's where we still are. You saw me there.

Q: So the decision to move out of the city was probably because of that?

Palacios Whitman: Well, we had gotten the place there and he had been there a few times, but we went on weekends. When he died, we stayed—my daughter [Pilar Whitman] also wanted to stay there. She didn't want to come back to New York. I said, "Okay, this is perfect. I don't want to be there, I don't want to do anything of that type of stuff." So I kept up my drawings and paintings and stuff.

Q: So did you meet Bob Rauschenberg around that time?

Palacios Whitman: No, I remember meeting Bob before I met Bob Whitman. When I was married to my first husband I met him. Then when I met Bob [Whitman], I saw him [Rauschenberg] a lot more because they were good friends and we would go for dinner and he came over for dinner at our place, usually very, very late. That was Bob [Rauschenberg]. We invited him to come at eight and it would be ten-thirty, eleven.

Q: So you first saw Rauschenberg's work in galleries?

Palacios Whitman: Yes, completely. Of course, yes. I loved his work and he, as a person, was unbelievable. My experience is that I loved his sense of humor. What a sense of humor he had,

it's fantastic. His laugh was contagious and he was a very generous, funny person. We would go to Captiva [Florida] to see him sometimes.

Q: What is your memory of the place?

Palacios Whitman: Captiva? I remember—it was very wild. I understand that after that they built more stuff and we were not there at the time. It was a little bit more contained. I went with the children. I was in Puerto Rico for the summer and Bob was already at Bob's place in Captiva and I went there on my way back from Puerto Rico. Pilar was very little, she was hardly walking, and one day she disappeared. It was a horrible thing. "Where's Pilar, where's Pilar?" "I don't know, I didn't see her. She was here, she was there, I saw her crawling in that room," and then suddenly, there's no Pilar. We all went crazy, as you can imagine. We went outside looking in the jungle and there she was, in the middle of the jungle, just sitting, bitten up by mosquitoes like crazy but at least she was okay. So we took her home, gave her a bath, and everybody calmed down.

[Laughs]

Q: That must have been terrifying.

Palacios Whitman: It was terrifying, it was very terrifying.

Q: Was that your first time you went to Captiva?

Palacios Whitman: It could be the second.

Q: Did Bob [Rauschenberg] have already the studio?

Palacios Whitman: Yes, yes. I understand that after, he had another studio, added another addition to it, and now it's a tremendous thing. But at the time it was not so big there. He was living with [Robert] Bob Petersen at the time.

Q: And you would see him when you would come back to the city?

Palacios Whitman: Right, right, and we would meet in parties and openings, and openings at the museum and stuff like that, yes.

Q: So you were telling when you moved to the country and Pilar was young.

Palacios Whitman: Pilar was young, yes.

Q: So what happened after?

Palacios Whitman: Let me see. Bob [Whitman] was of course going to Europe, doing this, doing that, and I was kind of—I have a little studio there actually. So I'd take my things there. But Pilar was still little so I took care of her. She had to go to school. I had to take care of the places in the city because we still have those lofts. Pilar lives in one of them now. So I turned into a caretaker

of this and that. But I was always coming back to New York and seeing friends and they would come to my house and stay there.

Then recently, this young kid, Jay Sanders, he works for the Whitney, he called up and he said, “Sylvia, it’s me.” First of all, I couldn’t tell who was on, and then I said, “I’m not doing that, I’m sorry. That was the past, I’m not into it.” He said, “Well, can I call you in a week and you think about it?” So I thought about it, I said, “Absolutely not, that’s crazy. I’m not going to be doing this, I’m not going to do—” Then of course, Babette called me up and I saw Babette all along in here. Babette called and said, “Sylvia, you have to do it because if you don’t do it, I can’t show the pictures of yours and the pictures I have of your performance, they’re almost the best— they’re incredible pictures.” So I considered it. Eventually I did it. He wanted me to do a performance just to show the *Green Hands* [props from *Passing Through*, 1977] and some crazy stuff. [Laughs]



Babette Mangolte
*Sylvia Palacios Whitman “Passing Through” at
Sonnabend Gallery, 1977*
Vintage gelatin silver print
11 x 14 inches (27.9 x 35.6 cm)
© Babette Mangolte (All Rights of Reproduction
Reserved)

Q: That’s wonderful. You did also some performances at the Kitchen [New York]?

Palacios Whitman: Oh yes and all the performance spaces at the time, yes.

Q: What was the experience of the city in the seventies? Where were the venues? Where would you go to see also others performing?

Palacios Whitman: They were all the same—everybody used the same. First of all, at the time—and I understand they're still doing it now—there were a lot of spaces of an artist who would want their friends to be shown there, and then the Kitchen, the Idea Warehouse [New York]—What was the other place called? All the places that everybody knows, yes. And you just had a list and did this here and that there.



Babette Mangolte
*Sylvia Palacios Whitman "Around the Edge" at
Truck and Warehouse Theatre, 1978*
Vintage gelatin silver print
8 x 10 inches (20.32 x 25.4 cm)
© Babette Mangolte (All Rights of Reproduction
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Q: What was the relationship with the audience? Was the audience different according to the venues?

Palacios Whitman: I think they were different in different places, but since you always had friends that followed what you did, those would be all over the place always. Then I had a performance at the Guggenheim [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, *South*, 1979] and because it was a museum, tons of people were there. It was scary and I think that the space was a little bit weird. There was some concern that it was not the right place—I felt like it was falling up, going all over the place. My work had to be contained because they're images. But still I did two or three performances there and there were lines of people outside. That's what happens when it's a museum; the same at the Whitney, there were tons of people watching.

Q: What's your perception of the art scene now? Has that changed or do you find it's still—

Palacios Whitman: Well, it's so different. I feel like it's so very different from the time where all those people were much younger, when Claes [Oldenburg] was young and we went to parties. It was so different, it was in a silly loft and of course we all drunk danced and we all danced drunk. [Patricia] Patty Mucha [née Muschinski] is the one who could have told you. Patty was the queen of all those parties. At Rauschenberg's also, there were incredible parties. Now, I wouldn't even go to anything like that. I don't know if they have them. So I think it was very wild. I would say very wild and very different. Yes.

Q: Do you remember going to see the Happenings?

Palacios Whitman: Of course, yes and not just that. I helped redo all the Happenings for the Dia Art Foundation. This was all at the beginning of the Dia Art Foundation in New York [note:

Robert Whitman: Theater Works 1960–1976, 1976]. So I helped them and I did participate in just helping out. Yes and Happenings absolutely. In fact on Second Avenue when I was still married to my first husband, I could see out at the little Happening place that was on Fourth Street and Second Avenue—where Claes, and Bob [Whitman], and Jimmy [Jim Dine] and Red [Grooms], and they were all doing their stuff. Yes.

Q: Was it a different scene than other art galleries?

Palacios Whitman: Different, very, very different. The scene and the galleries, the way they handle it, the way they do stuff, I can see now with Pace [Gallery, New York] for instance, they're tremendous institutions. They're almost like museums. They hire almost more people than museums and it's all—it's like, phew. In the sixties, it was wild. It was fun too and the dancing parties would be in the galleries with the show hanging around and then we would all go out for dinners.

Q: So it was in a way a smaller community?

Palacios Whitman: Smaller community, much smaller. Yes. And now it's just tremendous. It's very, very different, but I'm not saying it's worse. It's probably good for the people who are there now; it's just comparing one thing with the other.

Q: So you're still in touch with some of the old friends?

Palacios Whitman: Of course, absolutely. I love my friends and we have a good time. We chat and we remember nonsense we used to do.

[Laughter]

Q: What was some of the nonsense that you used to do?

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: Oh, ay ay ay.

Q: Unspeakable?

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: That's pretty much it. That's pretty much what I could tell you that happened. About Bob, I wish I could say more. I'm sure everybody else had something to say. His work, his this, his that, of course, but it's repeating the same stuff. I can only tell you how I felt—when we had a wonderful time. He was a great dancer—good dancer, beyond good. Having fun, we danced, crazy.

Q: Do you remember seeing some of his performances where he was in it?

Palacios Whitman: Yes, at the [69th Regiment] Armory [New York, 9 Evenings: Theatre & Engineering, 1966]. What else did I see? I saw one that he did—where was that one, where he was on roller skates?

Q: That's *Pelican* [1963].



Rauschenberg performing his piece *Pelican* (1963), First New York Theater Rally, former CBS studio, Broadway and Eighty-first Street, New York, May 1965. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Peter Moore © Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA, New York

Palacios Whitman: But later on, he participated. Bob was extremely wonderful and generous. I remember him coming to one of my performances and saying, “Sylvia, use me. Use me and I’ll do whatever you want me to do.” But I couldn’t do it because the part that he wanted to do is the part that I enjoyed doing.

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: But I did tell Trish. I said, “Trish, he’s offering.” So there was a contact there.

Q: But that's not how he met Trisha?

Palacios Whitman: No, no. He knew Trisha from way before and I knew Trisha from way before. It's just that Bob at the time was doing stuff with other people. Not that—he always did it, like with Merce [Cunningham] and with this and that, with Steve [Paxton]. But with younger people who at the time were coming up.

Q: Right, then also he continued to collaborate with Trisha until recently, creating set designs for some of her works.

Palacios Whitman: Yes, yes.

Q: So you said that you used to return to Chile more often when your parents were alive and then you sort of stopped.

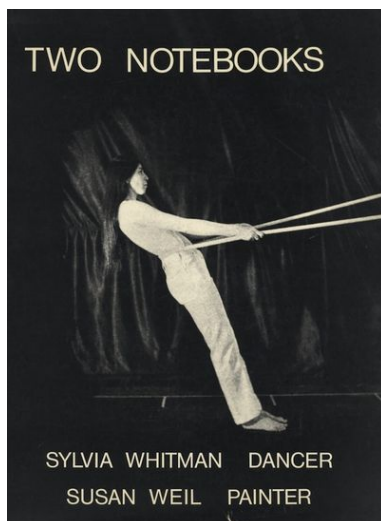
Palacios Whitman: I haven't stopped. I don't go the same way. It's not like going back to my parents' house, which was quite wonderful. Bob was there, Whitman, at the beginning many times. He loved it. We had a good time with them. But then that was undone and my sister has not been very well. She's a little ill and so the last time I went, I went just for the week to see her and see what was going on. But Pilar, my daughter, loves it, and my granddaughter; they love Chile. They like Santiago though, into the north. They like Valparaíso, they like Viña del Mar, that part. Yes, so they go. They love it.

Q: And is Pilar involved in the art world?

Palacios Whitman: With us always, but just like a lot of kids of artists. I think that they're so much into it all of their lives. They've been brought up with it. Everybody who is very well known was just your uncle sitting— Their lives are not the same as what other people are wondering about. It's the same with Hisachika [“Sachika” Takahashi]. She's still very good friends with Sachika. The two of them got married around the same time and the two of them have kids and the kids became good friends. It's just quite wonderful. But it's the same experience. They always hang around the art world and I don't think they want to have too much to do with it, though my granddaughter definitely does. She's jumped completely over it.

Q: Quite obviously, yes. So there was something else—I saw this wonderful book that was made with [Susan] Sue Weil [*Two Notebooks: Sylvia Whitman, Dancer; Susan Weil, Painter*, 1976].

How did that collaboration get started? What was the idea behind it?



Susan Weil and Sylvia Palacios Whitman, *Two Notebooks* (Captiva, Florida: Untitled Press, 1976), cover

Palacios Whitman: Sue wanted to do it and Bob put up the money for it, Bob Rauschenberg. He produced the book. First, Susan was going to have some more people in it and she talked to me about it. I said, “Sure, whatever.” Then when she went to Bob, Bob said, “No, that’s not the deal. You and Sylvia only.”

[Laughter]

Palacios Whitman: That was that and he does what had to be done and that’s the result of it. That was such a wacky thing to do anyhow.

Q: It is a very beautiful book. The Untitled Press was there on Captiva, obviously sponsored by Rauschenberg. Did he produce other books?

Palacios Whitman: I’m sure he did, yes. Small stuff like that. He also had that organization where he gave money to artists and to people and projects and this and that [note: Change, Inc. provided emergency grants to working artists]. He helped so many people, a very nice man. Bob was a very, very good man, I think.

Q: Were you involved at all during E.A.T. [Experiments in Art and Technology]?

Palacios Whitman: Not really. A little bit, for instance when they did the Japan thing in Japan [Expo ’70, Osaka]. Of course I went with Bob [Whitman] and with Bernardo at the time, no Pilar

yet. So we stayed there for several months and whatnot. Then all the E.A.T. stuff that he goes to and Julie [Martin] does. Julie's wonderful. She helped me out so much. She helped me a lot, a lot in doing the stuff at the museum because I said, this is just crazy. But she's good at calling people, organizing it, and, "This is who we're going to use. Don't worry." It was wonderful. So whatever they do like that, yes, I go see. I think it's great that they do it but I have nothing to do with that.



Pepsi Pavilion, Expo '70, Osaka, Japan, 1970.
Pictured: Fujiko Nakaya's *Fog Sculpture #47773*
(1970). Photo: Fujiko Nakaya. Courtesy:
Experiments in Art and Technology

Q: You spent some time in Japan—were both Bobs there?

Palacios Whitman: I think Bob [Rauschenberg] did go, but he was not part of the whole thing, as I remember it. No, no. There were other artists involved in it, yes. That was an interesting time, so Olga Adorno, who is now married to—what's his name? I forgot. She was married still to [Johan Wilhelm] Billy [Klüver] and we had kids. We just had a wonderful time going to Japan with the children while the other guys were worrying about the [Pepsi] Pavilion. Jean Dupuy, I remember, thank god.

Q: I see. So how has been returning to the art world?

Palacios Whitman: It was easy to do because it was bringing back something. Jay had a good idea of what he wanted and so he came over and he said, “I think we should do this, there.” He was very interested in the *Green Hands*. So I did an extra pair of green hands to perform and the other one was hanging in the show. The same with the other stuff and then Babette did a video of my walking with the *Cup and Tail* that was also at the museum.

Q: I saw.

Palacios Whitman: Yes and I don't know. This one piece that I think I would rather—I would like to do and I probably will do it, I don't know when or at what, but it's *Jumping Up a Pyramid*, that you saw in the book, where they put the pieces and they jump, and the piece and they jump, and the piece and they jump. It was very spectacular.

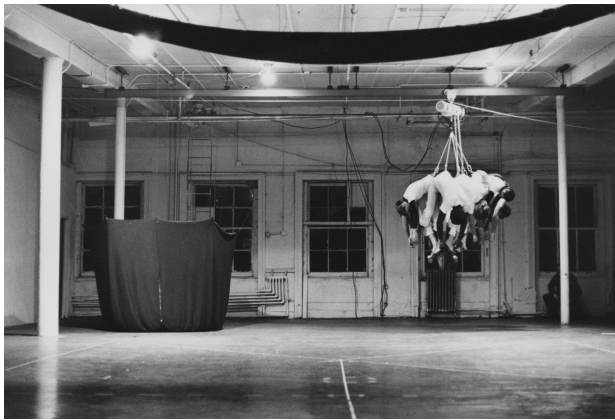
Q: The work was performed in a museum, correct?

Palacios Whitman: I don't know, you mean where it was performed first? At Trisha's we did it the first time and then I did it at the Whitney downtown, yes. I want to do that. I don't think that I couldn't at this point do it myself because I'm too old to do all this jumping, but perhaps one day it will be restaged.

Q: Do you still have the set design from then?

Palacios Whitman: No, but I have all the measurements. You know who helped me a lot with designing the stuff I was going to use during the performances was Bernard [E. “Bernie”] Kirschenbaum, who was married to Susan and still is. He’s very sick now but he helped me—I would call him, when I hang all those people [*Slingshot*, 1975]. Imagine to actually do that; that was insane and he was the one who decided how many people I could put there and how I could move them around. The same with this, he was the one who decided the size, what should they be made of? They had to be light too, so it’s a really hard foam. Yes. He helped me tremendously. Bernie was indispensable at that time for that. Yes.

So that’s it.



Babette Mangolte
*Sylvia Palacios Whitman “Slingshot” at
Idea Warehouse, 1975*
Vintage gelatin silver print
11 x 14 inches (27.9 x 35.6 cm)
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Q: Okay. Well, we can pause now, if you’d like.

Palacios Whitman: Okay, okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]