

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Oral History Project

Regional Oral History Office  
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SFMOMA 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

DAVID WHITE  
Curator, Robert Rauschenberg Studio

Interviews conducted by  
Richard Cándida Smith, Sarah Roberts, Peter Samis, and Jill Sterrett,  
in 2009

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**Interview 1: November 18, 2009**

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Cándida Smith: Let's have everybody introduce themselves. I'm Richard Cándida Smith.

Roberts: Sarah Roberts.

01-00:01:45

White: I'm David White.

Barger: I'm Michelle Barger.

Johnson: Amanda Hunter Johnson.

De Cristofaro: Paula De Cristofaro.

Cándida Smith: It would be nice to start with some basic information about where you came from, where you were born, where you went to school, how you got interested in art.

01-00:02:31

White: I was born in St. Petersburg, Florida, but my family was from New Jersey. Before I was a year old, they moved back to New Jersey. I went to grammar school there until I was eleven years old, and then we moved to Cape Cod, in Massachusetts, where we lived until I went away to Rhode Island School of Design. I was always interested in art. My father also was; he was making watercolor paintings.

Cándida Smith: Was he a businessperson or something like that?

01-00:03:04

White: He worked for an advertising agency. When we moved to Cape Cod, he started painting watercolors for the tourists. He was really in the art business, in one sense.

Cándida Smith: You went to school at the Rhode Island School of Design. You studied studio art or—?

01-00:03:24

White: I studied something called interior architecture, which is— You didn't have to have all the math and those courses needed for architecture. It was there that I met David Whitney. We were classmates and became very close friends. When I moved to New York, he got me the job at Leo Castelli Gallery, in 1965. That was my first contact with [Robert] Rauschenberg and the other Castelli artists. It was completely by chance that he phoned and said, "Hey, you want a job?"

Cándida Smith: That was not interior design, I take it.

01-00:04:26

White: Who knows? It's what they called the course. In fact, almost as soon as I moved to the city, after I graduated from school, I got the job at Castelli. So I was involved with gallery work and exhibition.

Cándida Smith: So what were you doing for Castelli?

01-00:04:45

White: Oh, I was the emptier of the ashtrays and the trash baskets, the stamper of the envelopes, sending out invitations, to begin with. Then I became the registrar there.

Cándida Smith: How long did you work for Castelli?

01-00:05:03

White: I worked maybe two years, and then I took a little time off and went to Europe. I came back and he asked if I would work there again, and so I worked a couple more years. Then at that point, David Whitney opened his own gallery, and I went and worked with David.

Cándida Smith: Doing the same sort of thing, or a little—

01-00:05:25

White: He started a gallery called Castelli/Whitney Graphics. But then at the last moment, Leo asked if his wife Toiny could work with David, and they did not work well together. The graphics gallery did not last very long, and David opened his own exhibition gallery. At the same time, there were the younger artists that were around New York at the time. I think there was a group that had a name: lyrical abstractionists, although probably not many people know too many of their names now. Bill Pettet and Ken Showell, Lawrence Wofford. David, having worked for Dick Bellamy at Green Gallery and then at Leo's, was very friendly with the successful contemporary artists in New York, and got to curate some of their museum exhibitions. He did the [Jasper] Johns exhibition at the Whitney Museum [of American Art], in '79 I believe, and a Cy Twombly exhibition, also at the Whitney Museum. I worked with him on those things.

Cándida Smith: How did you come to work for Bob Rauschenberg?

01-00:06:51

White: Well, through working at the gallery, I met Bob. He was outgoing and friendly and fun to be with. I was involved in helping install his exhibitions at Leo's, and he was very gregarious. There were parties and events at his house. Then at one point, David closed his gallery. I continued to work freelance, but only on a part-time basis, so I had days available that I was looking for work. It happened I was in Captiva [Florida] visiting Bob, and at that point, they were talking about putting the archives or the registry on the computer and thought,

who can we get to organize this thing? It was a specific project. I said, “Well, I’m free two or three days a week, and I’d be happy to work on this project.” It started, and then it just kept going, since 1980.

Cándida Smith: So 1980 is when you started. So that’s twenty-nine years or thirty years. Soon to be thirty.

01-00:08:15

White: Yes.

Cándida Smith: Could you describe your responsibilities, how they changed over time, so that you became ultimately curator of the Rauschenberg estate.

01-00:08:34

White: It started with this specific project. It was years before the database really got set up and going. We used these ring binders, and there was a page for every artwork, and we tried to keep as much information about it as possible. Of course, once work left Bob’s and the studio’s hands, it’s hard to keep track when they move around unless somebody offers us the information. I was there doing that, and then somebody would come and say they were working on a book about Bob, for example. Since I had lots of information about the work, just poring over it day after day, I would be asked to contribute some information. That’s how it got more rich.

Cándida Smith: I wonder if you could describe the operation of the studio a bit—how many people worked there, and how Bob was as a studio manager, if we want to put it that way.

01-00:09:52

White: Well, basically, he had this house on Lafayette Street in Manhattan, where the offices still are. But right around 1970, he moved to Captiva, Florida. At that point, he set up his studio there and pretty much stopped making art in New York City. He had studio employees that worked with him in Captiva, as well as office employees that did office work in Captiva. So there was this double office, in a sense, and still is. In New York, there are four of us that handle the mail, the phone calls, and the day-to-day activities. More often than not, if people were coming from outside of New York to get information and talk about things, they headed for New York. They often were very delighted if they proposed to go to Captiva, or Bob suggested that they come down. So that was obviously the center of the Rauschenberg set-up. But in part, because Captiva is an island in the Gulf of Mexico, it’s very vulnerable to possible hurricanes and humid weather, it’s not a good place to store artwork. So when Bob would have enough made, he would arrange to have it trucked up to New York to be stored there, just for safety’s sake and convenience.

Cándida Smith: Then you were involved in—I'll use the word accessioning, but making sure that it was catalogued properly and put in the right place.

01-00:11:54

White: The initial registry work did happen in Captiva. Before the paintings or the artwork left the studio, it was given a registry number. A registry sheet was filled out, that came up. But then it was entered into the New York database and their warehouse in New York. One of the colleagues I work with pretty much set that up as a system of knowing where each piece is. There's an interesting piece by the writer who's in Las Vegas, Dave Hickey, who wrote for a PaceWildenstein catalog, remarking how at first glance, it all seems very laid back and casual, but he recognized how incredibly smart Bob was about using the people around him who were good at things, and how it was much more organized than it appeared. It was done in the most wonderful, relaxed, convivial way. It didn't seem like a bureaucratic, distasteful set-up in any sense.

Roberts: Can we backtrack for one minute to 1980 and the project of getting the information in order and into a computer, and talk a little bit about what the state of the information was?

01-00:13:39

White: Actually, it was in very good condition, in that Castelli was a wonderful record keeper and was very open with it. My having worked at Castelli before, I had access to the three-by-five file cards, where you wrote down the comings and goings of each work, and the registry sheets to do with the work. Castelli was basically Bob's dealer so all the work that went from the studio to Castelli was photographed by Castelli's photographer. It was the other things that Bob might have given to a friend from the studio that there was less official information about. So I was adding to already wonderful records.

Cándida Smith: Was Bob concerned that all these kind of random, out-there pieces be accounted for? Was that a priority for him?

01-00:14:53

White: I'm not sure you'd say a priority. He was more interested in what he was doing in the studio, of course, as with pretty much any artist. He had a real sense of his own history, and from very early on, he saved announcements and newspaper clippings. There were boxes of clipping files and that kind of information. Being a photographer himself, he took pictures of his works in stages of completion, sometimes, in the studio. So he was concerned that the information be kept.

Cándida Smith: It sounds like your primary—correct me if I'm wrong on this, but you were there to work with curators who wanted to use Bob's work in

shows, and with writers who were doing research, and perhaps with people who were interested in buying major pieces who wanted to find out more about them?

01-00:16:07

White:

Not so much the buying because first Bob showed at Leo's, and then Ileana Sonnabend, after she was no longer Mrs. Castelli but became Mrs. Sonnabend and had a gallery in Paris. Leo was the one that consigned work to secondary dealers, including Sonnabend Gallery. The selling of the work was taken care of by various dealers. But the other part is as you say. Letters would come in constantly, asking for loans of specific works for specific shows. I would either do things on the phone with Bob, since he was mostly in Captiva and I was pretty much always in New York. So by phone and by fax. When he would come to town, I'd always have a folder of things and, "Here's what's come in lately; let's go over this."

Cándida Smith:

You would have questions? So the way you learned about the development of his body of work was through questions?

01-00:17:26

White:

Yes, because often, there'd be specific questions from a curator working on a show. I wouldn't know the answer, so I would go to Bob and he would have something specific to say about it. I came across a letter specifically about the installation of the *Pyramid* drawings, a question from Gary Garrels. Bob was quite specific about how they be installed. I'm sure you have the record of it. Those kinds of things.

Cándida Smith:

In terms of his recollection of things in the past, oftentimes, memory is fragile. Did you have to double check some of his statements? Were there inconsistencies?

01-00:18:18

White:

Yes, he was the first to say that. His dyslexia may have been part of the reason, but dates or things, that wasn't all stored in his memory. When he was being interviewed by people, he often asked if I would sit in just in case. He would turn to me and say, now, when did such-and-such a thing happen? Not that I had that all stored in my head, either, but I knew where to look usually.

Roberts:

I'm curious about the early gathering of clippings and his sense of being a historian of his own work. I'm wondering if you could talk about that a little bit more.

01-00:18:59

White:

They existed when I arrived on the scene. I guess he would just come home from an exhibition with the invitation in his pocket, and if there was something about it in the paper the next day he would cut it out.

They were kept in the box. By the time I got there, since it goes back to the late forties and early fifties and I didn't start working till 1980, there was already thirty years worth of things. People had been working for him before I started, too.

Roberts: There had been other people essentially in the same role.

01-00:19:39

White: Right.

Roberts: Who would those people have been?

01-00:19:42

White: Charlie Yoder, who had also worked at Castelli Gallery and then worked for Bob. A woman named Susan Lewis, I'm not sure exactly how she got hired. Early on it was Dorothea Rockburne, who had been a classmate of Bob's at Black Mountain [College], she helped him out with office work and correspondence. I know she worked with him and for him. Brice Marden also was an assistant at one point. There's a man named Nick Howey who did the work, as well.

Cándida Smith: Did he talk to you much about his working method, about how he put specific pieces together? Would that come up?

01-00:20:40

White: Not so much. He was very open and delighted to have company in the studio. It was rare that I was there in Florida, a couple times a year, but if he was making something—and he was making something more often than not—he would certainly say, come to the studio. He didn't so much say, now I'm going to do this because of that or something like that. He's quoted often in interviews about his love of materials and letting the materials suggest what to do. I think he was not particularly keen to have people spell out all the specifics of things. He would say things about hoping that wasn't taking all the magic out of the piece.

Cándida Smith: I did wonder the degree to which he might be able to answer questions like the specific paints that he used in a given painting, if that were to come up for some reason. Not even the why, just the what. If there were, say a conservation problem, would he be able to reconstruct some more specific detail about what went into the piece?

01-00:22:11

White: I suppose if he was shown a combine that had the most varied group of elements. I think there was something that looks like a squeeze of paint from a tube of paint, and in fact, I think it's a squeeze of toothpaste. So at one point, he said, "Oh, that's toothpaste." He had almost no money early on and he talked about playing games with

himself, where he'd decide to limit himself to a circuit of one block within New York City, to find elements for making a piece. It was about having a good time, as well as making art.

Roberts: Did he use word games? I'm curious about that idea of setting a problem for oneself or very specific parameters, and whether it was a game or was there a problem to be solved?

01-00:23:20

White: He may not have used a word game, but he would propose a limitation or a rule, so it seemed game-like. I'm not sure he would have objected to a word game. There's an early piece that you are probably familiar with, which is a block of wood with some pebbles scattered on it. He said that the notion of the piece was for the spectator to arrange the pebbles in some way that is not interesting. That sounds like a game of sorts.

Cándida Smith: Was he concerned about particular works and how they were holding up over time? Some artists are not particularly, or at least they *say* they are not.

01-00:24:18

White: He was concerned, although maybe his responses were not typical. I remember a time when a collector came with a collage on paper that some elements had been affixed with Scotch tape from the period when Scotch tape turned orange over the years. She was asking for permission that that be removed and replaced with a more contemporary Scotch tape, so it would look the way it had looked when it left the studio. Bob felt that these artworks had their own life and their own history, and if that was part of the history of this painting, or collage, he liked it to be the way it was and said he did not agree that the decay should be reversed.

Roberts: Was there a point, you think, where he started to choose materials a little more consciously for their longevity?

01-00:25:26

White: He may well have. I know there was concern about the use of the materials in the transfer works. In part, they had been solvent transfer, which are toxic. When he was able to do vegetable-dye transfer that was water soluble, rather than using the other transfer solutions he was using, he was pleased. I don't know if that was that it would last longer, but it was better for the environment, better for his lungs. He certainly was aware of the situation. If he had an inspiration and felt like doing something, if someone said, "Well, that's not going to last 200 years," I don't think that would have been a reason not to do it.

Roberts: It seems such a common trajectory with artists. When they start working, they don't have money, they are working with whatever materials they can. Then as they have worked into their career and things start to age and they see what happens, that brings on a change of materials. I'm wondering when and if that arc took place.

01-00:26:53

White: It's hard to say. In the case of the fabric pieces, like the *Hoarfrost* and the *Jammers*, I know he said at one point that he used natural materials like cottons and silks, rather than polyesters. That had to do with that they took the inks better. It was to achieve a look that he wanted, not that one would last longer than the other.

Cándida Smith: The example you gave before about the Scotch tape, there's a principle articulated about letting the piece have its own life. There's also maybe he looks at the piece and he likes the effect. There could also be something to do with the personality of the individual who's made this request.

01-00:27:43

White: That could be, too. At this point, I don't remember even who it was or when. I don't remember any kind of comment after the person left the room or anything that would indicate that it was done in any way as a spiteful thing or anything like that.

Cándida Smith: Well, maybe not spiteful.

01-00:28:03

White: But to be uncooperative or something.

Cándida Smith: But maybe this person needed to learn something about art.

01-00:28:09

White: The early gold-leaf paintings, as I understand it, had a glazing that floated in front of the gold leaf. The gold leaf was affixed in part, but then it wasn't solidly on the surface, so there was a lot of flutter. He purposely made the frames with a piece of wood on the top and the bottom, and left the sides open so the air could move through and flutter the things. The nature of gold leaf, it's so fragile that inevitably, pieces would detach and fall down. Again, Bob felt that was the nature of the material and the piece, and he was not concerned that, "Oh, now it's no longer the Rauschenberg I made."

Cándida Smith: The underlying question I was asking is to what degree his response to these things was motivated by a set of principles that maybe he only incompletely articulated to himself; or was it a response to a situation, how he felt at the time?

01-00:29:24

White:

Yes, truthfulness to the materials; things have lives, whether they are animate or inanimate. There's an early piece, when he did a series called *Elemental Sculptures*. In one of them there's a little box that has a tiny nail in the edge, and a piece of twine that's knotted to the nail, and it goes to—wrapped around a rock, and the rock fits in the box. He talked about the box being like a home for the rock. So there was this wonderfully playful or open feeling about whether it was a rock or a person or— He very much loved animals.

Roberts:

That sounds like a pet on a leash attached to the doghouse, right?

01-00:30:19

White:

Yes, we could think of it like that.

Cándida Smith:

Did you ever hear him talk about work that was in progress, after you joined him, after 1980? Was there a sense of how he was critiquing pieces that were in development? I know he was in Florida and you were in New York, but maybe sometimes he would say something about a body of work or an individual piece that wasn't maybe going quite the way he wanted it to?

01-00:30:54

White:

I can't give a specific quote about something. Of course, when you see artists working, there's a lot of silence. One wonders what's going on in the artist's head. Those films of artists working often are strange things to look at because there's often not much to see, in one sense. He might have said something like, oh, this still needs some more work, or general kind of remarks.

Cándida Smith:

But he wouldn't necessarily verbalize what he thought was wrong.

01-00:31:47

White:

No, not that I can think of at the moment.

Roberts:

What about pace and pattern of work habits? Was he someone who worked in bursts?

01-00:32:02

White:

He worked. That seemed to be his main pleasure, so he worked pretty much every day, I would think, when he wasn't going off to be involved with an exhibition. So even what you would call his recreation seemed like work because he would be photographing then, with the idea that this could be used in future artworks.

Roberts:

Did he photograph all the way along, from the late forties all the way through?

01-00:32:37

White:

Apparently, there was a break. He had taken photography classes at Black Mountain. There's a quote of his saying he wanted to photograph the surface of the United States inch by inch. Then at one point, he seemed not to do it. I was not around him at the time. At one point, a camera may have been taken, stolen from him, but I would think he could replace a camera. Or he just got involved in other things. To my knowledge, there wasn't a lot of photography after the mid-sixties, up until 1979. Or whenever Trisha Brown did a dance called *Glacial Decoy*, I think it's '79. She approached him about doing the set decoration and costumes, and he used photographs. Since then, he did it up until the time of his death. One thing, in the transfer-art work with the images, early on he used photographs and images from magazines and newspapers. Then there started to be copyright issues. So he chose to use his own photographs because it solved that potential problem.

Roberts:

Was there a moment in time when he completely stopped using found photography and only used his own?

01-00:34:43

White:

There most likely is. In the early eighties, I would say. [Narrator added in editing: This is basically true, as far as his major series of works are concerned, but I know sometimes he'd do an odd-ball piece and use media photos if it suited the situation, or the image was the inspiration for the piece.]

Roberts:

Can you talk a little bit about how he thought about photography? Was it purely raw material? Or was he interested in it as an art in its own right after that time?

01-00:35:00

White:

I think both, because he did have exhibitions of his photography that were matted and framed and hung on gallery walls as photographs. I think other times, he probably took things because of the texture or the color or the imagery that he thought would be useful in an artwork. But he never said, this is this and that it that. It's fluid.

Cándida Smith:

Did you work with him in the preparation for exhibitions?

01-00:35:39

White:

Earlier on, when they were at Castelli and Knoedler Gallery and Pace [Gallery], that was usually the gallery people and Bob making decisions about what was being shown, so I wasn't having much of a curatorial role earlier on.

Cándida Smith:

But then later, you did.

01-00:36:03

White: Later, more so.

Cándida Smith: I was wondering how involved he was in the question of how to mat things, how to present things that he did. Was that part of the process for him?

01-00:36:21

White: He had preferences for framing. If something that was unframed and just in a flat file, and there was a request to loan it for a show and an institution was going to frame it, he would say he had a preference for this kind of wood or that kind of wood or not. There are some series of works on paper called the *Sri Lanka*, *Kyoto*, and *Thai* drawings. When he was traveling around to do the ROCI tour, he made these three series of works. But it's typical that he was in a hotel room with time on his hands, and he was working all the time. He was very specific about the matting and the framing of these. The mats are colored. So, yes.

Cándida Smith: Would he want to approve the hanging, before the show opened?

01-00:37:25

White: I think early on, he was at the galleries when the installations were taking place. Castelli was a dealer who let the artists really have their way, for the most part. I would say Bob probably was very instrumental in the look of those shows. Toward the end, the last couple of years, after he'd had some strokes and it was much more difficult to move around, then in some cases he, in the last year or two, didn't get to exhibitions. But he, at that point, felt comfortable with the people that were working for him. He would then sometimes show up just in time for the opening, and be wheeled through the exhibition. He never came to me the next day and said, you shouldn't have done this or that. He may have *felt* it; he never said it.

Roberts: I'd like to ask one more question about Castelli. You arrived there in '65?

01-00:38:47

White: Right.

Roberts: That's pretty heady times at the Castelli Gallery. I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about the energy there and the artists that were around and what it was like to be there at that moment.

01-00:39:03

White: I suppose it seems headier in retrospect. It was going off to a job at the time. At the same time, it was all these artists whose work I quickly got involved with and liked very much. The interesting thing about it was they, all the various artists, got followings, committed followings,

very quickly, so their openings were loaded with people. Then every day, curators and museum people, art-related people, would come to the gallery to see the exhibitions and talk with Leo. It was a tremendously wonderful place to work, just to get to be involved in what was going on.

Cándida Smith: Who were some of the artists that you were working with, in addition to Bob?

01-00:40:07

White: Well, in the sense that I helped, along with David Whitney and Ivan Karp, to install all the exhibitions, we worked with every artist that was there when it came time to put up the shows. [Jasper] Johns was there, [Andy] Warhol, [Roy] Lichtenstein, [Donald] Judd. I left in the early seventies, to work for David Whitney.

Cándida Smith: If you think about Bob's ideas about how he wanted his work presented, would you be able to think of ways in which that differed or coincided with some of the other artists whose work you helped hang? Was there something distinctive about the Rauschenberg exhibition feel?

01-00:41:07

White: He was more open to chance than a lot of other artists. If something came up at the last moment, if the catalog was all printed and then he did a wonderful piece the night before, it didn't matter what the checklist said or what was in the catalog. If he thought this should be in the show, he would try to have it included in the show. Leo was wonderful that way, as well as being incredibly accommodating. The one thing, just a slight variation on your question, is Bob's feeling about how things should be exhibited as compared to how conservators feel they should be exhibited. Bob loved the work very brightly lit. Conservators were always saying, turn those lights down, and Bob was saying, turn those lights up. The silkscreen-painting show for the paintings from 1962 to '64 at the Whitney Museum, Bob went the day or two before the opening, to see the installation Roni Feinstein had curated. It was a beautiful show, and Bob *loved* the show. He just said, "Double the light." There was always a problem with certain loans, of course, coming from private collectors, and they have the foot candles indicated on their loan forms. It has to do with longevity or the life of a thing. If a piece disappeared because of too much light, that was what happened to a piece. To keep it tucked away in a dark drawer, so it was there 500 years later but nobody saw it, Bob didn't go along with that thinking, I would say.

Roberts: So part of the life of the piece is being seen.

Cándida Smith: You mentioned that you started going to parties that he held at his New York studio. You probably went to parties at other artist's studios. I think of Warhol's Factory. If you might sort of compare the difference of the social ambiance between Bob's events and others, Warhol, most famously.

01-00:43:57

White:

Well, that was a time, in general, when everyone was just excited about what they were doing, and enthusiastic. There was this very happy time in the art world. Through David Whitney, even before I worked at Castelli, he'd gotten me a project job in the Warhol Factory, working on those helium-filled pillows that were shown at Castelli. That was before I started working at Castelli. Again, it was just this incredible place to be around, with the Velvet Underground rehearsing in one corner and the various superstars holding forth. But the artists were very serious about the work. Andy, like Bob, worked constantly. Although it seemed like this raucous, out-of-control situation, he was making use of everything that came his way, as you know, for sure. Bob and Warhol were friendly with one another and admired each other's work. There's that wonderful quote of Andy saying, "Oh, I think Bob's the best artist, after Walt Disney."

Cándida Smith: Was there a difference in the crowd that would hang out at Bob's parties?

01-00:45:38

White:

Probably a lot of the same people, going back and forth. Warhol, there was that group of the people who were all involved in the movies, they were very much Warhol people. But those events were quite open. When the word got out that there was a party at Bob's or Andy's or Roy's or wherever, there weren't door lists and checking who couldn't come in or anything like that.

Cándida Smith: I wonder if we move into discussing some of the individual pieces, but maybe there are questions about the studio and how it operated, before we do that.

Roberts: I think maybe we can frame those around works of art, so maybe we'll start with the *Black Paintings*.

01-00:46:32

White:

Okay, here we go into territory I wasn't around.

Cándida Smith: But you obviously talked to Bob at some length about the works that were made before you came. Maybe even you talked about them more, because it was like archeological digging, to some degree. So you want to start with the *Black Paintings*?

[interruption]

Roberts: This is dated “circa 1951.” I would like to just hear from you what that “circa” meant, in the lexicon that was developed around the catalog. Does that mean pretty sure? Not quite sure?

01-00:47:58

White: I think during the course of working on the early fifties show, Walter Hopps determined there seemed to be two periods of *Black Painting* paintings. I don’t know, the first, was it Black Mountain, maybe? Then some others in New York. I’m very shaky on dates on all this kind of stuff. I don’t know if that meant Bob couldn’t recall if he had started it one place and then had taken it to the other to finish. I think certain dates got changed among some of the *Black Paintings*, too, based on Walter’s and Susan Davidson’s research.

Roberts: Between the early fifties show and the later show?

01-00:48:47

White: I’d have to look at the catalogs to see if, some of them, the dates have changed between how they are listed in the early fifties show and the later ones. Or if it was just changed from what we had in our record keeping, prior to the early fifties show catalog going to press or not. I don’t know.

Roberts: There’s also a section in the Guggenheim catalog that talks about how the *Black Paintings* grew out of the *Night Blooming Paintings*, or emerged from the *Night Blooming Paintings*. I’m wondering how you would characterize the relationship between the two.

01-00:49:26

White: I’m most familiar with a couple of those *Night Blooming Paintings* that are very black, although there’s often a circular or orb-like object or image near the top. So in one sense, it’s a color connection. It’s best, of course, to read all those quotes of Bob’s in the Guggenheim catalog and the early fifties catalog. I think simultaneously, he was working on *Black Paintings* and *White Paintings*, but I guess the *Night Blooming Paintings* preceded those. I guess he felt there was plenty to investigate with a very limited palette. From there, he went to the red ones.

Roberts: Kind of getting back to that idea of setting a problem for oneself, strict parameters.

Cándida Smith: Can you recall when you first saw this painting, you personally, and when you think it was entered into the registry, as it were?

01-00:50:39

White:

I would imagine it was in the registry when I first went to work at Bob's, for sure, and probably at Leo's, as well. If it had been in some early exhibitions that Leo had been involved with, that would have been added, even if it hadn't been shown at Castelli. They were very conscientious about trying to keep the records of as much as they could. Walter and Susan did a lot of sleuthing for that early fifties show and came up with things that people had been unaware of, or had seen very early on and then had pretty much forgotten about.

Roberts:

I'm trying to understand how Castelli kept things. Was everything under their purview and watch and being tracked by them? Or were there things that were held in the studio that were none of their purview?

01-00:51:47

White:

That's more the case. What went to Castelli was usually works consigned for sale, usually connected with an exhibition. This was something that Bob had in his own possession when I started working. The same is true with the *White Paintings*.

Cándida Smith:

Do you have a sense of why he didn't put them up for sale? Or why they were still in his possession?

01-00:52:14

White:

Oh, I think often, things had been put up for sale and had not sold. It was not a calculated, I'm-keeping-a-cross-section-of-my-work thing, as much as by accident it was still in his possession. He was always interested in what he was working on. If he had just finished a new batch of paintings, if it was in the seventies and he was doing *Hoarfrost* works on fabric, his notion would be to show those, not "Oh, why don't I pull out my *Black Paintings* and show those?"

Barger:

Would there be pressure on him to sell the *Black Painting* later on his career, say after the early fifties paintings, when people came to appreciate these more? Yet he retained it in his collection till quite late.

01-00:53:07

White:

I don't think there really was a lot of pressure of people pounding on the studio door. More and more, people recognized his importance as an artist, but I don't think it was a case of his saying no to dozens of people trying to get things.

Roberts:

I'm interested, though, about that idea of the impact of a major exhibition on the profile, people's awareness of these paintings.

01-00:53:41

White:

Well, it does happen, as with the San Francisco purchases after the retrospective.

Roberts: But it doesn't sound like there was a surge in interest, in people buying the early fifties work after that show.

01-00:54:00

White: I don't recall if there was much activity. The show seemed to meet with incredible enthusiasm. People were so quick to say, oh, this is a whole body of work I was unaware of. Then this influenced so many people.

Cándida Smith: I have a related question, which actually has to do with the impact of the value of a painter's work going up, in terms of the number of buyers that can afford the work and then the number of works that an artist needs to sell in order to maintain his operation. The degree to which his work became increasingly valued, in both monetary and critical terms, did that lead to a change in who was buying the work, and a kind of difference in how many works were being sold, would you say?

01-00:55:12

White: Apparently, there are certain collectors that hardly look at something until it hits a million dollars. So there's that part. Bob was always busy with ideas, like his Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, the ROCI tour. That was an expensive thing to finance. He sold things in order to pay for an activity that he was very passionate about. I think another time, he had to sell a number of early things. Not that he'd even kept them, particularly, but there was— I don't know if it was property buying or whatever it was, that he could use some more money. So certain things were offered at the time, I think to Victor Ganz, for example. But through Castelli Gallery. It did happen sometimes, but for the most part, it was the newer work being sold.

Barger: Were there certain works that he kept in his studio, either in New York or in Florida, that he just wanted to have around? Would he display them? Rotate them out? Personal favorites that, through the years, reminded him of where he was coming from?

01-00:56:45

White: Oh, yes, he did have his favorites. When I say a lot of these things were still in his collection because there were no buyers, that's not completely the case. I think there were always ones that he particularly liked. Certainly, in the later years, when I was more involved with stuff, when a new batch would be finished in the studio, he'd indicate certain ones that he preferred not to offer for sale. Sometimes they would be in an exhibition at the gallery with a not-for-sale sign. Other times, they wouldn't be.

Barger: Can you give us some examples?

01-00:57:36

White:

Well, it's hard to remember names of things, but just of more the recent things, from the last ten years of the series called *Gluts*, the metal sculptures. They are ones that he just very much liked. Didn't mean that he had them hanging in his house, but he was just not prepared to offer them for sale.

Roberts:

On a related question, the Lafayette house, were you surrounded by work on the walls? Was it treated like a gallery? You mentioned that works went there for storage.

01-00:58:20

White:

It was a former orphanage, so it's this five-story, generous-spaced building. The third floor was the kitchen and the living space, and the second floor had a bedroom. There are gallery-like spaces, so they were used. If new work came up from Captiva, we would often hang it there to look at it. It was not an open-to-the-public kind of place. If a curator was working on an exhibition and knew works only from catalogs and reproduction and wanted to see some things, we would install works there. Or things would be set up to be photographed for a catalog or an exhibition. It was a working place. Bob loved the building, and he would often indicate specific things that he liked to see, even though he would come to town for three or four days, and then not be there for four months or something like that.

Roberts:

Maybe we can turn our attention a little bit to just the construction of this. One thing that we are all curious about—and I don't know how much you know about it—is the order of things being done, because the texture of the paper is so extraordinary. Do you have an understanding of how the paint was applied to paper and how the paper was applied to the surface?

01-01:00:01

White:

It's best if I just say I don't.

Roberts:

Or any experience from having worked with conservators on this painting or others?

01-01:00:12

White:

I never worked with conservators on this one, particularly. I think often things, there was when something was wet on a lower level and then you could attach things and that acted as a glue. It would appear that there was an overall painting, once things were attached. Although it's very interesting that there's both matte black and shiny black.

Roberts:

I haven't seen the other *Black Paintings*, but is that matte and glossy, is that evident in some of the other black works, *Black Paintings*?

01-01:00:54

White:

I think the big four-panel *Black Painting* that the Whitney Museum owns is entirely glossy. Then there's one called *Untitled (Asheville Citizen)* that the Museum of Modern Art owns; it is not glossy at all. It has a crackle to the surface, which again, was a specific way— If you apply something over something when one is wet and one is dry, it's what happens. Bob knew that would happen and wanted it to happen.

Roberts:

Do we know what kind of paint it is?

01-01:01:37

White:

I don't. I'd have to look. I think certain things were just indicated as house paint, which I'm assuming, because of the time, meant oil paint. Often, there was very little money and he'd tell stories about his going to the paint shop and buying the cans that the labels were missing because it was cheaper. But I think it was a surprise what color he was getting. So he liked the chance-ness of something like that.

Barger:

We think this might be a painting that Susan Weil had originally constructed on canvas that he painted over.

01-01:02:23

White:

Is this the back of—

Barger:

Yes. I know that she used very bright colors.

01-01:02:28

White:

Oh, I see.

Barger:

So this is the reverse, with the reinforced tacking edge, and a very different, colorful palette. I'm wondering if there are instances where he would have reused her canvases.

01-01:02:43

White:

It looks quite likely from this. One of those paintings that had belonged to Merce Cunningham, that was auctioned last week, is the same kind of situation. There's indications of the Sue Weil painting underneath. That's a question for Sue Weil, I guess, if she has a specific recollection, I think they worked so closely together and had a let's-do-a-painting-a-day kind of thing.

Roberts:

Do you know if she worked in this scale?

01-01:03:15

White:

I really don't. Wow! How bright. My sense is that the *Red Paintings* followed the *Black* and *White* paintings, so it's hard to imagine it was a *Red Painting* that became black. There is that one small painting that's in the museum in—is it Basel, Switzerland?—that had been a collage-like painting called *Should Love Come First?* Which is surprising

because it looks so much like the later work. Then Bob covered it over and turned it into a *Black Painting*. I can't say positively that that's not Bob's paint. The thought that it's Sue's, it seems very likely.

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Cándida Smith: Is there a way of testing whether this was a Weil or his own multi-colored?

Roberts: Well, since it's black, but I think just looking at the edges and doing kind of anecdotal research is really how we are going to tackle it.

Barger: I wonder, has she been interviewed?

02-00:01:48

White: Oh, I think that's probably another painting behind it, I would guess. It was often very hard to get Bob to sit down and discuss all this kind of stuff.

Roberts: This one seems the closest to ours.

02-00:02:08

White: Right, and that's the one that's glossy all over.

Roberts: That's at the Whitney now?

02-00:02:14

White: The Whitney, right. This is the one, I think, that's not glossy at all.

Cándida Smith: Oh, the *Asheville Citizen*.

02-00:02:26

White: Right.

Roberts: The surface of ours is so much more complex, it seems to me.

02-00:02:33

White: Yours is unique. It's more like the *Gold Paintings*.

Barger: It's interesting how he opens up the surface later to include the newspaper as part of the—

02-00:02:56

White: Oh. Right. This reminds me more of that, in one sense.

Cándida Smith: Does it have the same kind of tears or pasting of small pieces?

02-00:03:13

White: Not exactly. So this is really unlike any other works that I'm familiar with.

De Cristofaro: I was interested to see that Aaron Siskind photo—I think it's in the earlier part of that catalog—with the peeling paint on the side of the structure. Then that effect brought to this picture plane in a truly wonderful style. We were talking about trying to make a mock-up of this work to understand how the materials were manipulated. If you dipped them, they would be covered on both sides. But we do have some little flakes, which indicate that the pieces of paper were not uniformly covered with black paint.

02-00:04:00

White: So there's black on the back.

De Cristofaro: There's staining black and then black where it's—I'll show you under the flakes, where you can see the newsprint below. Then there's one area I can show you where it's fallen off or just there's a flake that's detaching that was treated earlier. You can see underneath the newsprint again, where it wasn't overall poured layers, but perhaps poured on the surface after most of the black flakes were in place. They seem to be adhered by underlying layers of black paint. Then you get the alligatoring effect in the center if you drip-pour vertically, as if he would have added this last part of paint after the completion of most of the process. But then this final layer, which has alligatored and has a much different surface texture than the overall—

02-00:04:52

White: That's a term I don't know, "alligatored."

De Cristofaro: It's a crinkling.

02-00:04:55

White: Oh, okay.

De Cristofaro: It's an effect caused by overly rich— Then you get the contraction shrinkage as well, which we referred to earlier. We'll point that out when we go back to the work.

[interruption]

Roberts: Paula, maybe you want to point out the alligatoring?

De Cristofaro: I'm thinking of these areas, which have dripped, and those surface-seen changes, and whether he would have added some of these layers if the painting were flat to begin with. Just because it's quite even overall, except for this area. This is the detached flake with the newsprint underneath that you can see, where it wouldn't have been covered overall.

- Roberts: So after your Scotch tape story, I'm wondering if we should even retouch that.
- De Cristofaro: Well, this shows a lovely variance, too, because the matte of where it's soaked in—maybe this is media.
- Roberts: Oh, that's almost like ink.
- De Cristofaro: Then that paint and then the gloss. So this detached flake, which is from an earlier repair, is really serendipitous for us to study. Little areas here, where there are skips. We think if we were to make a mock-up of this technique, we would learn a lot, also how the paper reacts when soaked with the paint and solvent, and that you get these curls, but that those happen when the paper was torn, and he added the paint. So we are anxious to try our hand at a black painting and see what happens. So we'll reattach this flake before it's reinstalled. But here's another one that fell off. You can see, here's the newsprint. But it's more stained with media, rather than being coated overall. Then on the other side, it's quite—
- 02-00:08:04  
White: It's solid.
- De Cristofaro: On the surface.
- Roberts: You know, it's interesting your comments earlier about both the *Gold Paintings* with loose leaf falling off, and the tape. We get little pieces. Sometimes we know where they belong; a lot of times we have no idea. But when we do know, this is the life of the piece, this brittle paper; that's what happens.
- 02-00:08:38  
White: In the case of the gold leaf paintings, when something fell off, I don't think it was necessarily revealing a black support underneath or something like that. So if the idea, the notion, was to be an all-over black— I know certain of the *Black Paintings* did get painted at a later date. Did you read the to-do with the Merce Cunningham painting that was auctioned just last week where Bob repainted it? I guess he liked the density of the black, in that case.
- De Cristofaro: Oh, how interesting for him to go back that many years, to recreate a process that he had done thirty years earlier on an original work, and then make it look like a very retro process.
- 02-00:09:33  
White: I don't know what brought that about; if the painting was being lent to a show and John Cage said, Bob, take a look at this before it goes out to the craters, or how that happened.

Roberts: Do you remember that piece coming back at all at that time? Or the repainting process, anything about it?

02-00:09:56

White: I was around the studio. There was another smallish *Black Painting* in his possession at the time, and he gave that another coat of paint, as well. Like, haul out the *Black Paintings*, we'll give them all—

{Woman}: Do you know what kind of paint he used to repaint them?

02-00:10:16

White: That I don't.

Cándida Smith: Did he keep records of that, in your registrar record, at least the more contemporary ones?

02-00:10:25

White: There's sometimes, like in the case of the *White Paintings*, the notion of those, he didn't want them to have a patina. It had to do with their anonymousness and their freshness. I think someplace we have written down it's Benjamin Moore number whatever it is.

Cándida Smith: But whatever it was, it's certainly not manufactured anymore, right?

02-00:10:58

White: Could well not be, because all that stuff changes.

Johnson: Are there a lot of old materials, old paint cans, tubes that have stayed in the estate as a reference collection?

02-00:11:19

White: That, I'm not sure. I'd have to check with somebody in Captiva, since the work went on there. When he was working on Lafayette Street, before he worked at the Captiva studio— When I started working there, there was a glass-door cabinet in the basement that had some things. Every once in a while, you would be requested to go down and bring up one or the other thing. I don't know if that was just by chance that when the studio moved to Florida, this was, oh, I'll buy a new one down there and just leave it here. Even those, since that was that many decades ago, I don't think there was a conscious thought, oh, this should all be saved for— As it should have been thought. Just to have brand names and color numbers.

Roberts: I thought the description, to say one thing more about that, the auction catalog described the repainting process in terms of him adding to the history and adding to the conversation between his paintings.

02-00:12:35

White:

Well, Bob loved that part because it was this ongoing thing. There's something a little confusing in that book because I think they call the black painting *Painting Number 1*, which is not really correct because the painting underneath was called *Painting Number 1*, and then it was painted over. I believe it's called *Untitled*, then parentheses, (*Black Painting*).

Roberts:

So he re-titled it?

02-00:13:04

White:

Because the *Painting Number 1* had an image, although no one knows what it is; it wasn't photographed. Other works in that show, simple lollipop-shape forms and in the case of the other one that's in the museum in Switzerland, it was called *Should Love Come First?*, which was written on a fragment of collage. Then it became *Untitled (Black Painting)*. I'm thinking it was this kind of same situation.

Roberts:

Just so I'm sure I'm understanding, the title *Number 1* was the painting before it became a *Black Painting* the first time around.

02-00:13:42

White:

Correct.

Roberts:

So this *Number 1* became a *Black Painting*?

02-00:13:44

White:

Prior to that, it had been a Sue Weil painting, and her signature is on the back.

Roberts:

We don't know what *Number 1* looked like?

02-00:13:52

White:

Right. There are other photographs of other works that were in that same Betty Parsons [Gallery] show, so there's a hint it might have been that sort of painting.

Roberts:

I'm curious about the fact the *White Paintings* versus the *Black Paintings* have a different titling approach, which is that the *White Paintings* have the words *White Painting* in the title. Even though they are untitled, then it says *White Painting*. But these are not titled that way. They are just untitled, and then they have that descriptor. Can you talk about how that convention came around?

02-00:14:30

White:

I don't know how it came around. Bob seemed to be nonchalant about some things, and then be very specific. Because in something, if it was number 2 of a painting, he would be very specific whether it was an Arabic numeral or a Roman numeral, or if something was

abbreviated—W-H-T-period for white, he would very much want it done a certain way. But I don't know when or how that decision came that these were called the *White Paintings*, but these are not called the *Black Paintings*.

Roberts: Is there a way in which the *White Paintings* are a cohesive series, in a sense that's different from the way the *Black Paintings* are?

02-00:15:13

White: Well, they are more a series, in that the surface of every one looks the same. If you look at this much of any one of them, the difference is the number of panels, going from one to seven. Whereas the *Black Paintings* are much more varied. The *White Paintings* are varied in scale, but there's much more variety among the *Black Paintings*. It's in the look of the surface. There is one three-panel *Black Painting* that is most close to the *White Paintings*, in that it's an uninflected, non-glossy black surface of three panels put together, probably the same proportions as the three-panel *White Painting*. I think the notion for that one is if that got scuffed or had too much of a history of indignities, it is to be painted over. In fact, I *know* because, in fact, Bob okayed that that be done before it was shown in Hiroshima one time.

Cándida Smith: Do you have any understanding as to why Bob wanted this particular painting to come to this museum as part of the acquisition?

02-00:16:35

White: I don't know whose decision that was, if Gary Garrels put a wish list together or—

Cándida Smith: Well, he did put a wish list together, but I gather that there was a lot of back and forth, and that Bob had some very specific ideas about things he wanted to include.

02-00:16:56

White: I wasn't involved in the conversations of, should it be this one or that one.

Roberts: How many *Black Paintings* were in the studios?

02-00:17:08

White: Well, maybe half a dozen at the most, I would think.

Roberts: Do you still have some?

02-00:17:15

White: This is that one I mentioned that's of about this scale, that got a second coat of black paint at the same time as the John Cage one did.

Johnson: Who applied the paint? Was that Bob himself or studio—

02-00:17:36

White: I think it was Bob himself, although Sachika Takahashi had been a studio assistant when the work was done in New York. Then when the studio moved to Captiva, he stayed on in New York as an employee and helped in other ways. When Bob was in town, Bob could have turned to him and said, “Put the black paint on.” I really don’t know for sure.

Johnson: But the descriptors in the title, such as *Untitled (Glossy Black)*, do you think he would have originally called it *Untitled (Glossy Black)*, or was the glossy black a later title addition?

02-00:18:19

White: I think part of that is from Walter and Susan. If it’s in a bracket, as opposed to a parenthesis, it was a descriptive addition by Walter and Susan, is my understanding.

Roberts: We have had a lot of discussion about that, because our title currently, when we put it on the wall, says *Untitled*, and then in parentheses, *(Glossy Black Painting)*. Clearly, I think that’s wrong. It seems to me it should just be *Untitled*. I think that came from the original gallery invoices and it came from quick glances at the catalog, and not understanding the subtleties.

02-00:19:02

White: I’d have to look at the catalog to see how it’s done in the catalog. Also early transfer drawings that Bob did that went to Castelli Gallery ended up in registry books with specific names—*Mona Lisa*, because there was a *Mona Lisa* image in that one, I can’t think of the other ones. At one point, there was to be an exhibition at Acquavella Gallery of those early works combined with some later ones. At that time, Bob said, “These are not my titles.” So a gallery registrar had put them down as identifying things. Bob, at that point, re-titled those. I’m sure he was consulted by Susan and Walter about the titling and the noting. That would be a good question for Susan.

Johnson: This work was restored or received conservation treatment by Dana Cranmer in 1980, at which point a honeycomb panel was put on the reverse of the painting to give it some rigid support. The edges were also reinforced with material. Can you talk a bit about the relationship with Dana Cranmer and works that she’s conserved for Robert Rauschenberg, and particularly this one?

02-00:20:31

White: I don’t know when she first came on the scene for Bob. He seemed to be agreeable. She had done paper conservation, I think, for the [Mark]

Rothko Foundation, and she was very knowledgeable in lots of different areas. She always sent proposals of what she was intending to do. Those things were always sent down for Bob's approval. It's hard to know how much he concentrated on them. If he felt things were being taken care of, he may not have gone over them line by line, or he may well have. I know he was more interested in studio work than office work and paperwork.

Johnson: Perhaps it was done for a loan request, just to make such a fragile painting more stable.

02-00:21:37

White: It wasn't the case, usually, of my going to Bob and saying, oh, this needs some attention. Those things usually came about if it was going to go out to an exhibition and we thought, oh, this is too fragile to go out the door. Sometimes Bob did not agree to loans of things if he thought it was tremendously fragile. But he was more apt to say yes than no, his general, completely enthusiastic, open, generous personality.

Johnson: Was there concern if he saw a work in his collection that he hadn't seen for a few years and maybe noticed a change? We talked about this a bit earlier, in that change is acceptable. But were there any instances where he was concerned, that you recall, saying, oh, this really needs some intervention, or worried about its present state?

02-00:22:43

White: For the most part, things were in good condition for hanging on the wall and looking at. Here's another example of his feeling about how an artwork can change. In the *Hoarfrost* series of the imagery transferred on fabric, there was one of about this size, and a small handkerchief-size piece that was attached right at the upper edge, sewn just at the top so it floated free. In an exhibition, somebody detached that and made off with this image, which had been an image of a bowl of salad. That just happened to be it. Bob replaced it with a very similarly sized piece of fabric, but the image he chose was a piece of classical statuary. I don't know if it's something that he had already just in the studio that he grabbed, or something he printed particularly for this piece. I don't remember the original name of the piece, but he then re-titled it *Ex-Salad*. He even found something humorous and upbeat in something that was really a terrible thing. You could say it was destroyed, because it was no longer its original way. But he gave it a new life.

Roberts: The *Hoarfrosts* are editioned, correct?

02-00:24:37

White:

Well, there are unique ones, and then there is a Gemini [G.E.L.]-produced edition group. This is one of the unique ones. That's one thing that's often very difficult to know, unless you would see an edition number on the surface of the work. The works from the early seventies called the *Cardboards* are unique pieces, and then, again with Gemini, they did an edition called *Cardbirds*. So Bob did a specific one, and then it was editioned in a group. I don't know what the edition size is, twenty or something like that. But people have a difficult time knowing if they are looking at a single one or an editioned one.

I'm sorry, I don't feel I have much good solid information about Bob's relation with Dana. I think there's some joke, when he talked about thinking something came back looking fresher than— Not from Dana, but from someplace where there was the fear that something would come back looking fresher than the day it left the studio. If he started with a piece of something that already had a history, that he found in the gutter, and all of sudden [laughs] it's being dry cleaned.

Johnson:

It would be interesting to talk to Susan about her work being transformed to Bob's painting. I don't know if she's been asked that question and how she feels about her work becoming that of someone else's.

02-00:26:31

White:

It might have gone both ways, too, I don't know. You'd have to ask her. She would certainly be an interesting person to speak with. She continues to be a working, producing artist, and has exhibitions. In Manhattan.

Cándida Smith:

The *Black Painting* that John Cage owned, would Bob have seen that on a semi-regular basis? So he would have had a sense of how it was aging, do you think? Would he have been keeping in touch with its state?

02-00:27:10

White:

I think semi-regular is too frequent. Once he moved to Captiva, there were infrequent visits to New York. He did see Merce and John, and I suppose sometimes he would go over to a meal at their house. So he may well have.

Cándida Smith:

I was wondering the degree to which he, because there was this friendship network and exchange of works, the degree to which, in a casual way, he was keeping in contact with some of his older pieces and was seeing how they were holding up.

02-00:27:58

White:

I guess there're some other things that belonged to his sister and his mother that he probably saw with some regularity, when going to make family visits. I never heard him make any remark one way or the other. I think some of the works that John Cage and Cunningham had in their loft on Sixth Avenue, with big windows, and it's a very busy, traffic-y street, and with windows flung open, because of their wonderful views and air and plants. Certain things got layers of dust and city grime. Bob would never suggest, oh, keep the window closed because of my painting or anything like that.

Roberts:

I have another question about Dana Cranmer. It seems from our records that he did work with her for a very long period of time, which in and of itself, suggests a level of trust. Is that something you'd agree with?

02-00:29:04

White:

Yes. I never heard a negative remark about anything that she had worked on.

De Cristofaro:

Well, this work certainly presents certain challenges for its installation, as well as its continued preservation. Certainly, we keep track of the chips, when they do fall off, and try and re-adhere them. It's difficult to handle because it goes right against the wall. We don't have handles attached to the reverse because they would project out too much. But it's interesting to keep in mind Bob's wanting the works to be accessible. I know we have loaned it fairly recently, and with quite a bit of trepidation and giving it the best care and transport options. So we think that's keeping true to Bob's legacy, to make this work very accessible.

02-00:30:06

White:

He would be very, very pleased with that thinking, I'm sure.

De Cristofaro:

I think our mock-up will be a wonderful experience, when we get to it, just to learn more about this painting and trying to recreate the method and technique by which it was produced.

Roberts:

Newspaper now is different. So how will you think about the paper?

De Cristofaro:

I think it has a lot of the same characteristics. It's so thin and it really doesn't have a lot of strength. Newsprint today, it still yellows in the sun if you leave it out a couple of days. I think we are going to be able to do a pretty good re-creation. It is really just curious how the pieces that don't have a lot of strength can stand upright, with the heaviness of the paint when it's applied. So that's my big question.

Johnson: I think we could find newspapers in any basement, too. Certainly, there's some in mine that will have been aged.

02-00:31:28

White: From the period?

Johnson: Just about.

Roberts: Well, he was working with new, fresh, really supple paper, rather than an old paper.

02-00:31:44

White: That would make a difference, wouldn't it? So the little pagoda-like edges, that's just the double layer of the canvas in the corners that keep it from being—you know it's not completely horizontal, that it goes up slightly at the edges, I assume is because there's a thing of fabric going one way and then another, which just makes it twice as thick at that part than that part.

De Cristofaro: It also has these corner braces. Once you stretch it over that extra thickness— It's on its original stretcher, which is wonderful. It's what we call a funky original stretcher, which we love. When Dana did her treatment, these rectangular braces were taken off, but they were really what was keeping the original stretcher together. The insert was placed and then these were attached, and then the fabric, which is now thicker because of the reinforced strip lining pokes out a bit at the corners.

Roberts: So it is just strip lined. If we ended up ever taking this panel off, we would see the back.

De Cristofaro: Apparently, there's documentation of the back somewhere, which Dana might have if we don't in our logs. They did take pictures of the reverse.

02-00:33:15

White: That would be fun to see.

De Cristofaro: Well, since David mentioned that the small *Number 1* had Susan Weil's signature on the back, maybe that was her location. So maybe we could find that.

02-00:33:34

White: I think Dana often photographs when she has things removed.

De Cristofaro: I don't know if we got those images when we received the work, but they are around so we'll find them.

Roberts: We are getting close to lunch, but before we leave 1951, I wanted to ask a little bit about Black Mountain and whether that was an experience that continued to loom large in his imagination. Or whether it was this formative moment, but not really a touchstone for him. Whether you have a sense of what it meant to him.

02-00:34:15

White: Well, it was a touchstone, in that his being a student with [Joef] Albers was something that affected him for the rest of his life. So in one sense, it shaped him. At the same time, I think he started to get impatient because over the years, Black Mountain took on a mythical quality. More and more people were writing books about it, and Bob would get this request for an interview and he said, "I have said the last word I have to say about Black Mountain." I don't think that meant at all that he was dismissing what it meant to him.

Roberts: He felt he'd told the story.

02-00:35:00

White: He'd said everything he had to say. Is that on exhibit with any kind of regularity?

Roberts: This one has not been shown that much. *White Painting, Collection*, they are almost always on view. This one less so.

De Cristofaro: You can see through the cracks.

02-00:36:21

White: That's really interesting.

Roberts: It has an inner life, as well.

De Cristofaro: Red paint in there, too.

02-00:36:27

White: Is there any interesting info on the back of this one?

Roberts: We haven't taken it off the backing board yet. I don't know that we have images of the back of it, do we?

02-00:36:39

White: I can't remember when I ever saw.

Roberts: We are planning, as part of the process in the next couple of weeks, to take it off the backing board and turn it around, so we'll certainly get good images of it at that point.

[Tapes 3 and 4 (open-ended conversation between White and SFMOMA Conservation Department staff) available in video only]

**Interview 2: November 19, 2009**

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Roberts: We started yesterday just by going around having everyone introduce themselves, and I think maybe we should just do that again for the record. November 19, 2009, we are in the conservation studio at SFMOMA with David White. I'm Sarah Roberts.

Sterrett: I'm Jill Sterrett.

Samis: I'm Peter Samis.

Cándida Smith: Richard Cándida Smith.

Roberts: We are going to look at the video in a minute, but we'll start with the story you started to tell out there about the *Pyramid* series.

05-00:01:41

White: There was just another thought, talking with Peter and looking at them, about what happens when works get glazed. I had said, and I think I said yesterday, that the works had originally been shown at Castelli gallery with Plexiglas boxes covering the paper part, and the rags hung freely below. But when they were installed at these various exhibitions in Italy, the Plexiglas boxes were dispensed with and they were just pinned to the wall. I particularly recalled at Ca' Pesaro in Venice, the installation there, it was in a very romantic palazzo, with French doors that opened onto the Grand Canal. The wind was coming in and the cheesecloth or the rags were just blowing ever so slightly in the movement of the wind. It was just the most beautiful, poetic thing you could imagine. The contrast of the simplicity of these works with the ornateness of the palace itself, with the coffered ceiling and the very ornate stone floor, it was a very beautiful exhibition. They looked as I'm sure Bob would have loved them to have looked most.

Sterrett: You know what you were making me think of is this same discussion with a different environmental variable, which was the light in Naples. Do you remember how hard we tried to get the M.A.D.R.E. [Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina] to open the windows? Because the look of the *Pyramid* series with all that natural light was *spectacular*.

05-00:04:25

White: Yes. Yes, it was— They are tricky things to get.

Samis: I think there's something fundamental about that vitality and that living-ness, and contact with breeze elements and light, that is something we have to kind of keep in the record.

05-00:04:49

White:

Oh, very much so. The series of fabric pieces, the *Hoarfrosts* and the *Jammers*, sometimes you see ones that have been encased in Plexi coffins, and they really are deadened. The wind is absolutely part of the piece. At the time of the combine exhibition a number of years ago— One of the pieces is called *Pantomime*, and it has two old-fashioned fans attached to either side of the canvas. There's very exuberant paint handling between, which you could imagine the wind from the fan blowing this around. The owner of the piece said, "The fans cannot be run; it's too dangerous for the piece." That was the one thing that seemed to really upset Bob the most when he walked around and he said, "The wind is one of the elements of that painting." So they were able to convince the owner that it be turned on very briefly, periodically. It was filmed with it running, so there's some record of the way it should have been.

Samis:

At least to have it filmed that way. We have a film, a video of Bob slapping the boot in the *Trophy [IV] (For John Cage)* against the corrugated metal.

05-00:06:08

White:

There's movement, there's sound. There's humor.

Samis:

Not something we can allow our visitors to do. But it was so clear. In one moment, we understood that the piece was a completely different piece than what we thought we had, in a way. It was just great.

05-00:06:24

White:

The *Gluts* exhibition that started in Venice and is traveling around in Europe at the moment, one of the pieces has a button you press and it makes a very large horn sound, which is really startling and alarming, has everyone jumping. Luckily, the museum there seemed to be all right with the idea of people touching the pieces, because it's always that conflict of can you or can you not touch the works?

Roberts:

Well, perhaps we'll turn to video. I actually would like to start just from the very beginning, and we'll just look at two sections. This video was taken in 1999, on the occasion of the Rauschenberg show here, right after our acquisition of all the major pieces. What I'd like to do is run through the first about four, four-and-a-half minutes of it.

*Lightly edited excerpt from David Ross's interview with Robert Rauschenberg, May 6, 1999:*

**Rauschenberg:** Well, these—this particular group of works were somehow sort of the icons of eccentricities and [are] exceptional, in the sense that they didn't fit into the art world at that time. And I just knew that they were unique. And they

couldn't be done again, and—and there was no reason to. And they were dear to me.

**Ross:** Did you keep them stored away and locked up or were they works that you—

**Rauschenberg:** They were sold—I mean, [they were] not for sale.

**Ross:** Right, even though they were shown. But when you had them in the studio all these years, did you look at them often? Did you often look at the *Erased de Kooning* drawing and just use that as a touchstone? Or was it something that was literally stored away in the back of your mind, as well as physically stored away?

**Rauschenberg:** Most of these works were on view in my various studios all the time. I had my sort of muse wall. And they were personal to me. And celebrated, but not available. And it wasn't 'til the retrospective that Walter and I put them out publicly together.

**Ross:** But when I looked at the back of the *Erased de Kooning* drawing, it had more exhibition labels than any other object I'd ever seen. It tells the veritable story of your career, in a way. Because that piece has been in so many important exhibitions over the years. So I know that that object, as well as so many other works in this group, are very hard for you to part with. Why did you decide to part with this group now? What led to that decision? I'm sure it wasn't anything you approached lightly.

**Rauschenberg:** It had to be done sometime. Because the reason that I hadn't sold any of the pieces individually was because I wanted to somehow keep them together. It seemed like, I don't know, that they— they seemed like sort of a core of an attitude that—that only was responsible by me. I mean, it wasn't— Most of this work could not have been done by any other personality. And I was protecting it. Because you know, I've done other works that I would have in series. And not to criticize the series or evaluate 'em, but—these— this seemed... very special. In—in the sense of not fitting into what was going on in the art world.

**Ross:** “Not fitting in” is a good way of putting it; but also, creating a very new approach to art making and art, from the very first time shown—it is more like the reality of the trajectory that your career has taken. So “not fitting” is a nice way of putting it. [inaudible material deleted]

**Rauschenberg:** Well, most of the works in this collection scared the shit outta me, too. And they didn't stop frightening me. And so . . . there was a kind of courage that was— that was built into them, in their uniqueness, that—in the individuality that I didn't wanna forget about, either.

*[End of excerpt]*

Roberts: At the beginning, he talks about this idea of the muse wall. I wanted to hear more about that. Are some of them hung in a particular place in the studio that he would visit?

05-00:15:38

White: Actually, it was in his living quarters, both in Lafayette Street and in Captiva. So not so much the studio itself, where he was making the new work, but where he was every single day. He collected other people's work as well, in a nonchalant way, I would say. He didn't have a program: oh, now I must have a so-and-so. But if he would come across something in an auction catalog or wherever, he would then try to pursue it. So there's a kitchen wall in Lafayette Street, very often, they were smaller scale things so he would cluster them on that wall. There was a wall in the house in Captiva that he used the same way. The things were generally stored in New York, but often he would then ask that certain things be sent down. So what he was saying is very much the case.

Cándida Smith: Were they changed on a regular basis or some kind of periodic basis?

05-00:16:56

White: If he were not in New York for a period, then the things on the kitchen wall, something else might be put up for some other reason. Then he would reinstall things. Actually, in the bedroom, as well there were items that were of particular interest, for whatever reason, that he chose and changed around. Including, there was a long shelf so there could be sculptural items, as well as wall-hung works.

Roberts: Were there particular favorites that you remember kind of recurring frequently in either place?

05-00:17:43

White: They changed, but it was often earlier works, small things of Johns, Lichtenstein, Warhol, and a little circular de Kooning drawing, which I think was a sketch that de Kooning made at the Cedar Tavern, on a coaster. So often the situation of how it came about was intriguing, and so it had a certain sentimental value. There was a [Marcel] Duchamp piece which is pencil on paper and it was at some sort of symposium at the Museum of Modern Art that both Rauschenberg and Duchamp were on. Then Bob went up to Duchamp afterwards and said, "Oh, I saw you writing the whole time." It was this, which then Duchamp gave to Bob. That became a treasured item.

Samis: So things like the *Tire Print*, which was, I guess, smaller than it is in its full extent now, were they up anywhere in the house or the studio?

Sterrett: Not that much smaller, by the way.

05-00:19:00

White: It may well have been from time to time. I don't recall it specifically.

Samis: The *Erased de Kooning*, do you remember?

05-00:19:13

White: Yes, because that's a much more manageable-sized piece.

Sterrett: So this muse wall, there's this idea of Rauschenberg living with these pieces in his personal space. But then also there were these decisions that were made to send these works out into public exhibition. How did that process work? Were you a part of that?

05-00:19:38

White: No, I think he speaks of how, with Walter, working on the exhibition of the early fifties work, they decided that these works, which were practically unknown to the art-going public, should be seen. Bob said that he was not trying to hide them away. They were not for sale, and people were not aware of them. So there was no interest because there was no awareness of them.

Roberts: The part at the end, where he talks about how they scared him. He talks about a sort of fear and courage in a couple of places throughout. I'm just curious as to whether that early period—and then you also mentioned that he kept early Lichtenstein and Warhol and things—whether they are almost a way of being in touch with a kind of courage that he had early on in his career.

05-00:20:40

White: He did say he didn't want to forget it. So it sounds, as you are suggesting, that it was a reminder. He's often quoted as saying if he knew what he was going to do when he went into the studio at the beginning of the day, that was not the right attitude. He liked to be surprised and that it should all be an adventure in the unknown. I guess that was a reminder of that, for sure.

Roberts: He also says something in the video about— I think the question is asked, why did you let them go at this moment? He mentions in the answer, the lead-up to the retrospective. I wonder about what that process was like for him and for you all, sort of the years of research and build-up to doing a major exhibition like that, and how that might have led to kind of being ready to let go of something.

05-00:21:45

White: I guess it changed his thinking about, now is the moment to do it. It's something I never discussed with him. He was certainly aware of all of what was going on with the preparations for the retrospective, and he was very involved with it, with Walter and Susan. I'm sure it was

jogging his memory and his recollections about things and his thinking about things.

Roberts: You mentioned yesterday that you were very involved with the preparations for the early fifties show. I'm curious about how that process compared to the later retrospective.

05-00:22:39

White: Well, in either case, I was not the curator. I was just working with them because I had the information about the works and that kind of stuff. There's a similarity of putting any kind of exhibition together. In the early fifties thing, there was all this work that was pretty much unknown to many people. Certain things had been shown at the Eleanor Ward Stable Gallery, but the number of people that saw it was probably not so many. For Walter, it was this wonderfully exciting moment of discovering this stuff and bringing it to light. He probably felt like an archaeologist. Susan Davidson is not listed as the co-curator, but she certainly should have been. She worked every moment of the show with Walter, and she could fill you in with lots of other things that I'm probably unaware of.

Roberts: Well, I don't know if anybody else had questions based on that first part of the video or—

Cándida Smith: Well, there is the central question, which I touched on a little bit yesterday, is why these particular set of pieces? It did seem like they, as an ensemble, had meaning for Rauschenberg. But then also why SFMOMA, as opposed to *the* MoMA or the Menil [Collection]?

Samis: Or the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum], which was mounting a retrospective.

Cándida Smith: The Guggenheim, right. Or the Tate Modern. There are a number of places where he could have said, this is where I want this particular record of my work to go. I suppose alongside of that is, was he thinking simultaneously of other bodies of work that might go to other museums, besides what came here?

05-00:25:07

White: Not that I'm aware of. In fact, I have never heard him speak over the years that, oh, I have this in mind for this place and that in mind for that place. So I don't know if it was just your museum being on the ball and coming with the proposal that caught his fancy.

Sterrett: I have heard somebody say that actually, *Collection* had such a lasting impact on him that he saw it as being an anchor, around which these—

05-00:25:47

White:

Well, that makes sense as a possible thing. I think the fact that the Museum of Modern Art seemed to be slow to embrace his work, unlike the early collecting of Johns' work—I don't think he felt a strong affection for the museum from the beginning—not that he didn't like a lot of the people that were there. So we didn't have any set agenda that certain things should go there, for example. It is interesting about the Guggenheim, since they had done all the effort of the exhibition.

Samis:

Were there other works that they did acquire at the time of the retrospective, and from other periods in his—

05-00:26:49

White:

I don't believe so.

Cándida Smith:

Did he ever talk about how he felt working with museums, in particular. It's very different, I'm sure, than working with Castelli Gallery or any of the galleries.

Samis:

Or working with the studio. There's a difference between the studio practice and then even working with Castelli, as you talked about with the Plexiglas containers on the *Pyramid* series. That's already a compromise from the freshness and the vitality of the work as it lives. But then when you go to a museum, it's a couple of steps further down the road, it feels like. But what's your thinking?

05-00:27:34

White:

He didn't speak to me about that.

Cándida Smith:

Is the personality of the curators a critical thing? If he clicked with people, then it was a go.

05-00:27:53

White:

I'm sure that meant a lot. He was immensely fond of Walter Hopps, respected him, and enjoyed working with him. He seemed to be very connected with Tom Krens, as well, at the Guggenheim. All the work on the retrospective was smooth going, for the most part. The ROCI tour, which I guess we really haven't spoken of, that he started in the mid-eighties up until 1990 or '91, which was an idea of his to travel to third-world countries or less-privileged countries, gather objects and images by photographing, make works that reflected that country somehow, and then exhibit in the different countries at museums. That was pretty much connected with the National Gallery [of Art]. That all went pretty smoothly. He worked well with museums; it wasn't an antagonistic situation.

Roberts:

Who was he working with at the National Gallery?

05-00:29:13

White: Jack Cowart was there at the time, and he did a lot of work with him.

Sterrett:

I didn't realize that there was an institutional partner.

05-00:29:25

White: It was something that Bob conceived of on his own. At first, he thought that there would be corporate sponsors running to open their purses, and then there was not that response. Then Bob decided he preferred to be the funder of it, so he didn't have to in any way be beholden to a sponsor. The National Gallery was not funding it in any way, but they were helping with the logistics of it.

Cándida Smith: Had he been traveling in these countries and meeting artists?

05-00:30:11

White: We spoke yesterday about when he and Twombly were in Rome and meeting [Alberto] Burri and other artists. He was a very gregarious, open person. Over the years, as his reputation grew, if he was in a country where there was to be a Rauschenberg exhibition, often other artists would come to it and then introduce themselves. Bob was very open and happy to meet with them.

Roberts:

Another question about ROCI, which is where the bulk of that work is. Did the National Gallery acquire some? Is it mostly still at the studio?

05-00:30:57

White: The arrangement was that for each of the countries that was involved in the tour, one work remained in the host country museum, and then a second work became part of the collection at the National Gallery. It was about a dozen countries, so there's a dozen works at the National Gallery, which is part of their ROCI works. Other than that, Bob chose to keep most of the rest of the work. Over the years, a few of them have been sold, but he liked the notion of keeping them. Although often, then there were offers to do some sort of repeat of the ROCI exhibitions. He felt that those were things of their time, and didn't seem so anxious to have a ROCI revisited show.

Samis:

ROCI II.

05-00:31:53

White: Yes.

Roberts:

Well, maybe I'll see if we can fast forward on to the next section here, which is a few minutes in. We don't have time code on the video itself, so bear with me.

*Lightly edited excerpt from transcript of David Ross's interview with Robert Rauschenberg (with Walter Hopps), May 6, 1999:*

**Rauschenberg:** Well, we just left the white painting. And so, I was working with no image. And I love drawing. And I was trying to figure out a way to do drawings for this series. And [they would] be all white. I thought: The only way to do it is like—like, with an eraser. And when I just erased my own drawings, it wasn't art yet. And so I thought: Ah-ha; it has to be art. And Bill de Kooning was the best known acceptable American artist—[so] well known that [it] could be indisputably considered art. And so—

**Ross:** And so how did you approach de Kooning?

**Rauschenberg:** I'm doing it—I bought—I was in a very low-budget situation. But I bought a bottle of Jack Daniels. And hoped that he wouldn't be home when I knocked on his door. And he was home. And we sat down with the Jack Daniels, and I told him what my project was. He understood it. And he said, "I don't like it. But, ya know, I understand what you're doing." And so—He had a painting that he was working on, and he went over and put it against the door to the stairs. And as though, you know, being closed wasn't enough. By now, [laughs] I'm really frightened. And he said, "Okay, I don't like it, but I'm going to go along with it, because I understand the idea."

And he went through one portfolio, and he said, "No. It'll have to be something that— that I'll miss." So I'm, you know, just sweatin' shitless, ya know? And then I'm thinkin', like: "It doesn't have to be something [laughs] you're gonna miss." And then he went through a second portfolio. Which I thought was kind of interesting, things he wouldn't miss and things he would miss—and he pulled something out, and then he said, "I'm gonna make it so hard for you to erase this." And he had a third portfolio, that had [works in] crayon, pencil, charcoal, and— and it took me about a month—and I don't know how many erasers—to do it. But actually, you know, on the other side of this is also— I mean, if there's ever any question about this, this is gorgeous drawing of Bill's.

**Ross:** So you chose a two-sided drawing—or he chose that for you.

**Rauschenberg:** No, I think that was just on the other side of this one.

**Ross:** Uh-huh. Do you remember what the drawing looked like in your mind?

**Rauschenberg:** It was part of the woman series.

**Ross:** Uh-huh. I mean, do you have image, though, burned into your —

**Rauschenberg:** Sorta. It's burned in. And so when I titled it, it was very difficult to figure out exactly how to phrase this. And Jasper Johns was living upstairs. So I asked him to do the writing.

**Ross:** He's still very proud of that.

**Rauschenberg:** [laughs]

**Ross:** After he learned that we'd acquired this, he— he told me that.

**Rauschenberg:** Oh, good, yeah.

**Ross:** He said, "You know, the only thing added to that picture was by me." The lettering on the title, you know. I love the pentimento that is on here, though. Is this imagery that we see in the dark areas, is this bleed-through from the drawing on the other side?

**Rauschenberg:** No. No, no.

**Ross:** Or is that the crayon that you couldn't get off?

**Rauschenberg:** No, I just—just the grease, that I couldn't get off.

**Ross:** Uh-huh. And I imagine that it had to be done very delicately, so that the paper wouldn't tear.

**Rauschenberg:** Yeah.

**Ross:** I mean the idea of erasure there was a very delicate piece of surgery. But was it also about a kind of negation? I mean, there seems to be—

**Rauschenberg:** No

**Ross:** Something kind of—

**Rauschenberg:** No. Like, neither is the white painting. It's not a negation, it's a celebration. It's just—the idea.

**Hopps:** Twenty years ago, when I first had a chance to exhibit this with Bob, he was very passionate about the fact that this only would have meaning if it were a drawing that he really thought was great, from an artist he admired enormously; and it was not a negative act. Going to de Kooning and working that was sort of a miracle. But as you say, he under[stood]—and respected what you were doing, even though he didn't like it.

**Ross:** Was this work ever taken as a sign of an aggressive stance—

**Rauschenberg:** [speaking over Ross] Oh, if it was only read that way.

**Ross:** One generation to another?

**Rauschenberg:** [over Ross] If it was only—yeah. It was a— it’s anti-abstract expressionism and—

**Hopps:** Jane Fitzsimmons, who wrote in a serious criticism in *Arts and Architecture Magazine*, and later Hilton Kramer—they hate this thing. There’s been nothing but—there’s been a constant kind of negative [view] in people approaching to me what is a very extraordinary work. I think it’s a really beautiful work.

**Rauschenberg:** It’s a very positive gesture.

[End excerpt]

Roberts: Well, it’s a wonderful story.

05-00:44:14

White: Oh, it certainly is. [they laugh]

Roberts: It’s one that’s been written about from fairly early on, and told many, many times. You mentioned yesterdays that Bob sort of got to the point, with the Black Mountain story, where he was sort of done with telling the story. I wonder how he felt about this de Kooning story.

05-00:44:39

White: Maybe he wasn’t asked that often, but he seemed to be delighted to tell it, as he appears to be on the screen.

Sterrett: You know what I was struck by is, in reading the 1964 interview from the *New Yorker*, is how much his telling of this story in 1964 actually is very much the same as this retelling in ’99.

05-00:45:04

White: So he really seemed to have it down.

05-00:45:10

White: He said it was burned on his brain.

Samis: Maybe not the original drawing, but the whole incident was burned in his brain.

Roberts: I’m curious though, because in Calvin Tomkins’s telling of the story, the quote from Rauschenberg at that point is that de Kooning says he *won’t* give him one that he’ll miss. I don’t know whether that’s something that was mis-told at one point or part of the story that changed.

05-00:45:40

White: That’s something I can’t elucidate.

Roberts: We also talked yesterday a bit about him collecting clippings from very early on, collecting his own history and telling his own history. I'm curious about how story telling sort of fit into that.

05-00:46:03

White: Well, he was, as you can tell, a good story teller and a good talker, and he seems to be enjoying himself in this situation.

Roberts: He didn't mind being interviewed, generally?

Samis: Did he ever do an oral history? Do the Archives of American Art or anyone—

05-00:46:23

White: I think Joaquim Pissarro spoke with him at the time he was at the Museum of Modern Art. I know he was often approached to get involved with that kind of thing. As I said yesterday, he was always more interested in what he was doing in the studio. Or maybe it was just dredging too much that he didn't necessarily want to dredge up. I don't know. But when he was involved with an exhibition or a situation like this, where he felt it was appropriate and necessary that he partake, he certainly did. He would do that show business quote of the show must go on, even if there was some difficulty at the last moment or something. He just dealt with it.

Sterrett: Did that drawing [*Erased de Kooning*] always look the way it looks there?

05-00:47:39

White: As I recollect it. I think I saw it often enough. It's harder to detect changes if you are looking at something regularly than if you don't see it for ten years or something. I never knew what those splotches, what that was about. It's interesting to see that it was the un-erasable part.

Samis: The grease from the crayon.

Roberts: De Kooning wouldn't give up.

05-00:48:13

White: Of course, it's interesting where he says he knocked on the door and hoped he wouldn't be there. Of course, he wanted him to be there. So it's this very audacious idea.

Roberts: It *is* a very audacious idea.

Samis: Then of course, the moment where, it doesn't have to be something that you like. Really. We don't have to go *that* far. Don't take me *that* seriously. I'm just a young pup.

- 05-00:48:51  
White: Bob did do some photographing in de Kooning's studio at one point.
- Roberts: Oh, did he?
- 05-00:48:56  
White: I don't know how that came about, but just in going over photographic archives, there—
- Roberts: In the fifties, or—
- 05-00:49:04  
White: Yeah. There are pictures of some women paintings in the studio situation.
- Roberts: Do you have a sense of how their friendship or relationship developed, and what it meant ongoing?
- 05-00:49:20  
White: Only certainly, Bob's intense admiration for de Kooning's work, and de Kooning the man, I believe. I don't think they had a lot of or much contact at all after I got to know Bob. I think de Kooning was pretty much out in Springs [Long Island, New York]. But certainly, when de Kooning died—I don't know what year that was—there was an exhibition just being installed someplace. I know Bob made a point of dedicating the exhibition to de Kooning. There was a little sign put up at the entrance to the museum.
- Roberts: Since we seem to be veering towards de Kooning, it might be a good time to take a bit of a break and bring that in and move the video out?
- Samis: The only other thing I would say that it says in the video is, "the best acceptable artist" was de Kooning. So obviously, there are vast numbers of artists that he could erase, that are recognized by the New York art world, that he could have asked to erase a drawing by. But he chose—
- 05-00:50:49  
White: The number one, in one sense.
- Cándida Smith: Was he friends with de Kooning before this?
- 05-00:50:58  
White: Oh, yes. I believe so. I don't think he just knocked on a strange—
- Cándida Smith: Because an alternative would have been [Jackson] Pollock, obviously. If he really wanted to go after the king of the hill, it would have been Pollock.

- Samis: Well, they were both king of the hill, in their own ways. In the Cedar Tavern world, in the downtown scene, de Kooning was God for a lot of people.
- Roberts: I think he's thought of as slightly older generation, as well.
- 05-00:51:25  
White: I don't know what made his choice be de Kooning.
- Samis: But also acceptable tends to imply there were other artists who would be unacceptable. So I'm thinking Edith Halpert, Downtown Gallery, Social Realism. There are all these other trends that are going on in New York that don't feel like vanguard practice anymore, that might have been vanguard of the thirties and aren't in the fifties. So this is the dialogue he's instigating, is with the lions of the previous generation.
- Cándida Smith: But it also has to be a friendly act, because if it were the opposite of the way he explained it, you could acquire a [Pablo] Picasso somehow, and then it would be a provocation. In this case, it has to be—
- Samis: It has to be consensual.
- Cándida Smith: He has to be a collaborator.
- 05-00:52:24  
White: I think their friendship was added to that part of it; so it was *not* a negation if you are doing it to somebody that you really admire and respect.
- Roberts: It's like the *Trophy* series. It's something that's an act of homage.
- Samis: In the process, you are actually really re-experiencing every mark they made on that page.
- 05-00:52:47  
White: Of course.
- Samis: There's an intense intimacy that's going on when you are decomposing or deconstructing or effacing something.
- [interruption]
- 05-00:53:06  
White: It must have been a wonderful show. Was it just the acquisitions that were shown, or was *Collection*— Oh, yes, *Collection* was there.
- Samis: *Collection* was there, and *Scanning* and *Port of Entry* and *Cy + Roman Steps*.

05-00:53:27

White: Which was part of that acquisition. *Hiccups* came slightly later.

Roberts: Came in a little bit later. So *Hiccups* wasn't in that show, was it?

Sterrett: *Hiccups* was a gift in the following year, but there was such a buzz in the museum at the time, with this. This actually enlivened our museum almost more than any time I can remember.

05-00:53:51

White: Well, it's interesting, in traveling around with— Because I had to with the early fifties show. Whenever the *Erased de Kooning Drawing* was coming out of the crate, that got the art handlers and everyone in the museum more excited than practically anything else. It was this legendary icon that most people had not ever seen, and here it was.

Sterrett: Do you think he had the sense that it was legend from the minute he thought about the idea?

05-00:54:22

White: That's hard to know. What did he say, he was scared of some of the things he'd done. He certainly thought it was an unorthodox idea. He seemed to recognize its importance, at least to him, right away.

Roberts: Well, it's far and away, one of our most requested objects for loans and for reproduction in publications. It's in a category of its own.

Samis: In our multimedia feature about it, we have, among other things— aside from a drawing, which we should replace, because we should have the conserved version of it; we have the early, un-conserved version of the drawing on the back—but we also have the back of the frame, with this proliferation of all the labels and all those art handlers who were handling it. [laughs] You get a sense of its history.

Roberts: Before we leave the 1999 moment, I have these photographs with Walter, some Gary Garrels and Phyllis [Wattis].

05-00:55:37

White: They are wonderful. They are wonderful to see.

Samis: Did you ever meet Phyllis? Did she ever visit the studio?

05-00:55:50

White: I met her at her home once, I forget what the situation was. There was some event out here. I don't know if that had to do with the early fifties exhibition. It was a big event, with a lot of people there.

Roberts: Did he talk about her much?

05-00:56:14

White: Well, he seemed to admire her very much, just to make that extraordinary gift of the *Hiccups*. It's in her honor or something, I believe, is it? I think her spirit and her— What's her quote? "What fun is a bequest?" She always wanted to be part of the party, right? Not have the lawyers working out the— So I'm sure he liked that idea.

Roberts: I haven't heard that quote before. That's wonderful.

Sterrett: You do get the sense that it was a match in spirits.

Samis: They really saw each other on some fundamental level. Despite their differences of age and gender and everything else, there was a real connection.

Sterrett: Did you get the sense that relationship formed around this period in the late nineties, when this purchase was being negotiated? Or did it predate that?

05-00:57:11

White: I'm not aware of his knowing her before, although he may have and I was just unaware of it.

Samis: It sounds like the party that you attended at her house would have been in the early nineties, so they would have at least met at that point.

05-00:57:22

White: That may well be. Susan Davidson might know that, or Darryl Pottorf from the Captiva studio might be helpful.

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Roberts: The *Hiccups*.

Sterrett: He made this before you were working with him, right?

06-00:00:09

White: I didn't start until 1980, and this is late seventies.

Sterrett: '78.

06-00:00:13

White: Although since I'd worked at Castelli—I started in the mid-sixties—I was aware. I knew him, but it was before I was officially working.

Roberts: Well, one of my real interests in this piece is its early history, because it wasn't shown. But clearly, it was kind of a legend early on. I'm curious as to if you know anything about that early history, particularly

whether it was in and out of Castelli's inventory or whether it just was kept in the studio.

06-00:01:01

White:

I really don't know. I would doubt it was in Castelli's. Their inventory seemed to be about things that were sent there on consignment for sale, for the most part, or if something was being lent to a show that was being organized through Castelli. I don't think there was a notion that Bob was offering this for sale, ever. Nor was there even a notion of having an exhibit of it at Castelli or Sonnabend. So it may not have been in their registry.

[interruption]

Roberts:

[*Erased de Kooning*] was not exhibited publicly until 1964. So one of my primary research interests is where was it from '53 to '64? How might we get at that? How might we get at who saw it? How well known was it?

06-00:02:33

White:

Oh, I'd have to look at the database for the information in the office. I think Castelli was very careful about registering all the stuff that came to them. But I don't think they made a point of trying to keep up with other works. They were in business about that kind of stuff. So I'm not sure if it is in Castelli's registry, even now.

Samis:

Because it was never offered for sale through them.

06-00:03:12

White:

Correct.

Samis:

Another question might be what kind of record keeping did Rauschenberg have in place in the fifties and sixties? Is that material part of the archives today, that you would have access to?

06-00:03:31

White:

When I started working in 1980, these ring binders already existed, with a page for each artwork and a photograph of each artwork, as much as was known. I don't really know who instigated that originally, but could find out.

Samis:

The exhibition history on the artwork, when it was loaned out and things like that, were they on that record?

06-00:03:58

White:

Yes. But if it was stuff prior to those pages coming into existence. As I said yesterday, there are these clipping files that Bob was good about keeping clippings from magazines and invitations to exhibitions and checklists of exhibitions and stuff like that. So there is a good record

of what happened to things, even if it wasn't written on a specific piece of paper.

Roberts: So for something that wasn't shown, though, we'd be looking at conversations with people who were around in the time period. If it weren't an exhibition that produced a clipping there might be—

06-00:04:44

White: Right, there may be little early, after it was erased and labeled and framed, and then Bob kept it in his possession. It would be interesting just to look over the labels on the back side to see— '64 is then the earliest.

Roberts: Is the earliest, right. Wadsworth Atheneum. Then the Guggenheim showed it that same year, in an American Drawings show in the fall. It wasn't in the Jewish Museum retrospective in 1963, just the year before. So that's curious that it was left out of that.

06-00:05:23

White: Alan Solomon was the curator.

Samis: Is Alan Solomon still alive?

06-00:05:33

White: He's not, unfortunately.

Samis: Or if his notes are around, to see whether he was even aware of it and whether it was in his notes for that show, as a consideration.

06-00:05:47

White: You would guess that he was aware of it, if it was something that Bob was pleased to have done or pleased with the result.

Cándida Smith: The exhibition dates, how do they coincide with the *New Yorker* article?

Roberts: The *New Yorker* article came out just after this Jewish Museum retrospective.

Cándida Smith: But before the Wadsworth Atheneum [Museum of Art]?

Roberts: I'm not sure I have it. I'm just trying to remember the date of the *New Yorker* issue. It's February of '64, which would have been towards the end of the Wadsworth Atheneum show and before the Guggenheim American Drawings show, but after the Jewish Museum retrospective. So it does, it mentions the retrospective in here.

Cándida Smith: Were there other Rauschenberg drawings in the Guggenheim show?

Roberts: I don't think so.

06-00:06:50

White: In the Guggenheim or the Jewish Museum show?

Roberts: The Guggenheim show was a drawings show, in particular. I haven't investigated the check-list for that.

Cándida Smith: What I wonder is if it's not Calvin Tomkins who creates the legend. It's not so much an art world legend as an interesting media story that then takes on legs, particularly given what's going on in the mid-1960s. The timing would suggest that Rauschenberg was not self-dramatizing himself through this drawing; it was, in fact, an investigation of his *into* something.

Samis: It wasn't *his* need to get it out there, it was like a popular way in, an anecdote that gave an insight into the artist, for the public.

06-00:08:01

White: Because as I seem to be repeatedly saying, he was always interested in what he was working on at the moment. So he may have had a strong feeling for this and want it on his muse wall, but he was on to something new and other.

Samis: Which would potentially explain why it wouldn't have been in the Jewish Museum show. Because this would have been ten years prior, and it wasn't the identity that he had formed. What he says in this video is, these are kind of the icons of my eccentricities. None of these were series; they were kind of testing the water here, testing the water there. Okay, and then you get into a kind of a stream and you have got this kind of amazing efflorescence, this body of work that's being produced in the late fifties and early sixties. There's plenty there, without having to have the anomalies and the exceptions.

06-00:09:07

White: Well, it would be interesting to see the checklist of the Jewish Museum show and see what was included.

Samis: Whether it was the outliers or the mainstream. Yeah.

Sterrett: There's an aspect to this drawing which, it seems to me, go back to the way that Rauschenberg tells the story, with de Kooning. Actually, when you look at the piece—and we can't look at the back today—but if you look at the piece, what you see is that it was mounted. It was glued to cardboard. We know that because Dana Cranmer actually did the backing removal in 1988. It's very interesting because okay, here's the photograph of the drawing; here's what's on the reverse. So that is the drawing on the reverse.

06-00:10:00

White: Oh, that Bob speaks of.

Sterrett: That he speaks of. But in fact, between the time that he collected the drawing and 1988, it had been glued to cardboard. One of the things that we have never really understood is, when did that happen? The amount of rubbing that had to go into erasing that drawing meant that a solid support was going to be essential, absolutely essential. In a way, that drawing on the reverse was covered and then revealed.

Samis: Do you have a conservation photo of the earlier state, before it was removed. Because the one that's in *Making Sense of Modern Art*, which we have online, shows these enormous patches of cardboard.

Sterrett: No, it was removed before we acquired it. So that's the picture that you have.

06-00:11:08

White: You mean with patches of cardboard?

Roberts: It's a very interesting part about the way the story gets told, as well, the drawing on the reverse. It's changed in status over the years, as well.

Samis: Right. Right, the revenge of the repressed. The de Kooning drawing talks back!

Roberts: So in any event, Dana's been very generous with the paperwork. That was 1988. Would that have been anything you were involved with?

06-00:12:00

White: Yes, in that I was there to release it from the studio and keep track of where it was and get it. She always sends treatment proposals to be approved before the treatment begins. Those would have been shown to Bob, to make sure he was comfortable with what was happening. I can't remember even the situation that prompted that, if it was to go to an exhibition and someone said, oh, something's getting weak or needs attention. I don't know if that's anything in any of her remarks or not.

Roberts: If it was '88, that may have been the beginning of research for the early 1950s show.

06-00:12:58

White: Could be.

Roberts: Do you have the date on the reframing? That was earlier, right? '85 or something?

- Sterrett: No. It was reframed in '88, as well.
- Roberts: At the same time. I wonder if it was with the thought that it would be a centerpiece.
- Samis: What was the reframing? Was it a different molding, or was it just a new mat?
- Sterrett: Well, that's why I was asking if it looked always as it does right now, because I wasn't so much referring to the way the drawing looked, but everything about its presentation. I have a feeling the mat was changed, and we *think* it's the original frame, we *think* it's the same.
- Samis: He writes on the back do not remove drawing from frame; frame is part of drawing. It seems pretty emphatic.
- 06-00:14:04  
White: I think it's more apt to have been the mat.
- Sterrett: It might be interesting to look at earlier reproductions, because until 1988, it's not on a single sheet of paper.
- 06-00:14:31  
White: Do you mean this cardboard backing projected past the edge of the paper?
- Roberts: It would have been thicker.
- Sterrett: It would have been really flat.
- Roberts: We had some correspondence earlier in the year about the hand lettering story. I wonder whether you have any more to say about that, if you have looked into it at all.
- 06-00:14:58  
White: No, I just had heard, as Bob says on the thing, that he asked Jasper to do the lettering. Bob, because of his dyslexia, writing was, I guess, slightly more difficult. I don't know if that was the reason he chose Jasper. It's interesting, Jasper's remark in that video, that he was the only person that added something to it.
- Roberts: Added something. The rest of it was all removal, and that was the one addition. It's incredibly precise.
- 06-00:15:26  
White: Oh, yes, indeed.
- Roberts: It's just unbelievably beautiful how tiny and precise those letters are.

06-00:15:49

White: Did Dana take any photographs when the mat was removed?

Sterrett: We don't have those.

Samis: I might be able to bring it up online, if I'm mistaken, because I think I have a different photo from these.

Roberts: We covered a lot of my notes before we ever brought the piece in so I don't know if other people have more—

Samis: I'm looking at it right now and I'm seeing, in addition to kind of the woman figure which I imagine in the upper right center, it also feels like there's almost a male torso seen from behind. Or it could be a woman, I suppose; maybe it's a woman. Maybe that's a woman down there.

Roberts: Bottom left.

Samis: Bottom left. There's more than one figure going on there.

06-00:16:38

White: Yes, two separate elements?

Samis: It could be a woman, as well. There's something up here, too.

Sterrett: When you invert it, you can create this torso figure from what's going on at the top of the drawing.

Samis: So it could be upside-down. The whole thing could be upside-down, if that's kind of a head and torso and a breast there. Is that what you are thinking?

Sterrett: Or it's a combination of studies.

Samis: Several different studies, several different studies.

Roberts: Yeah, that are all on one sheet.

Samis: So there's one here, see? Then you can definitely make out a figure over there.

06-00:17:11

White: Right, they are separate.

Samis: Then maybe this could be something up above.

- Roberts: It's interesting to think about how it's been reproduced, too because you see it sometimes it looks like there's absolutely nothing. The image has been sort of bleached and isn't accurate, and it looks like there's very, very little left. Yet when you see it in person, there's quite a bit.
- 06-00:17:35  
White: What's interesting is his remark saying how he wanted to do drawings that tied in with the *White Paintings*. I don't recall ever hearing that before.
- Sterrett: Do you see the star? We have looked at this for so many hours, there's this star shape.
- Samis: At what point?
- Sterrett: It's right here.
- Samis: Yeah, yeah, at the top. Well, at least part of a star, right? But it could also almost be like a profile. You can almost see a mouth and lips and a chin. See, if you look there, that kind of mouth, and there's the chin and nose in profile, potentially.
- 06-00:18:20  
White: That was interesting, Bob's remarking how de Kooning had this division between ones I would miss and ones I wouldn't miss, as a way to divide your drawings in your studio.
- Samis: Then one with lots of different media on it.
- 06-00:18:34  
White: That was the third point.
- Samis: That was the other criteria. I'm going to make it so hard for you to erase this.
- Roberts: I wanted to think about it, also just as a drawing. He refers to it as a drawing for the *White Painting* series, as you just said. We talked yesterday a little bit about the *Pyramid* series, which often are also referred to as drawings. Just this idea of a drawing being perfectly white and of nothing, using an eraser as a drawing tool. Do you see any connections with later? I'm thinking of the *Dante's Inferno*, which are also not drawings, but are considered drawing. Not drawings in the traditional sense of using a pencil or ink on paper. I'm trying to get around this idea of what drawing meant to him.

06-00:19:40

White: He said he loved drawing, and yet there are very few examples existing of what you would call traditional drawings. I don't know if there were a lot of other ones that no longer exist or not.

Samis: I'm glad that we are lingering on this because this whole thing of, I love to draw, he says, but what does drawing mean?

Roberts: Well, he doesn't say, I love *to* draw; he says, "I love drawing."

Samis: "I love drawing." I love that question of, what does drawing mean to him? Artists have sketchbooks or sheets all over. What would be his equivalent of that?

06-00:20:38

White: Certainly, I guess sketches often, for other artists, precede doing a finished work, where for the most part, it seemed Bob would go into the studio and there would be elements of the finished piece, which got assembled. There are some drawings for pieces, which I assume were done prior to their being made. The piece the museum of art in Houston has, the Museum of Fine Arts, which is a *Venetians* series of a bathtub and a large piece of wood with a crumple of metal floating, cloud-like, above it, I have seen a drawing for that piece—which I assumed had been done first, but I can't even say that for sure. I don't know if he was wanting to visualize on a piece of paper what he thought that might end up looking like.

Roberts: I think there are drawings for *Monogram*, too, aren't there?

06-00:21:40

White: That's the most finished study for a piece.

Roberts: Do you know whether that came first, during, or after?

06-00:21:51

White: I always assumed it was first.

Samis: It sounds like when he was working really in three dimensions with objects, as opposed to with paint or with collage materials, maybe drawing served him as a way of architecturally plotting out the space or the configuration of the objects?

06-00:22:13

White: Possibly so, but not so often. He seemed to often work that out just in his head, and then with the pieces.

Sterrett: I think the other thing that I heard in your question was not so much how he uses drawing, as we define drawing, but perhaps there's this other definition of drawing, that's what we are trying to explore here.

06-00:22:37

White: Well, in this case, he felt erasure was a method of making what he would call a drawing.

Sterrett: The *Pyramid* series, as well.

Samis: There's no erasure there per se, is there?

Sterrett: But they are often referred to as drawings. Isn't that what you were saying?

06-00:22:55

White: We talked about that yesterday a bit, because they are referred to as the *Pyramid* series in the Guggenheim retrospective catalog, and they are registered as drawings in the Castelli registry. That was the registrar's choice. It was a somewhat smaller scale than a painting, and it was something that was a piece of paper, if that might have been the criteria.

Samis: I think that's common, actually. I think that's relatively common in the art world to assimilate works on paper to drawings.

06-00:23:33

White: Bob seemed to really like the blurring of categories. He certainly made editions of prints where each print in the edition is unique in one way or another. From being utterly unique, like the *Page 1* prints from the *Pages and Fuses* that he did at Gemini, where it's the hand-poured paper pulp, at a place in France, this edition of twenty or so. In each case, it's paper pulp and the rag for making rag paper, rather like the *Pyramids*, that hangs down from the paper, but every one is completely unlike the other, as far as the shape. Then other prints have uniform portions and unique portions. Then there's a large work called *Currents*. There's a group of maybe thirty-some-odd individual collages, which are called *Studies for Currents*. Then they were reproduced in two editions of works called *Features From Currents* and a *Surface Series From Currents*. But they were also reproduced, all thirty-three of them or however many, on one enormously long sheet of paper, which he called *Currents Drawing*, except it's an edition of six of them. But he specifically used the word drawing to refer to it.

Samis: When I think of Rauschenberg and drawing, and this idea of the equivalent of studies or sketchbooks, with other artists, I look at *Hiccups*. To me, these feel like studies or drawings. They are not big paintings that he's making in real time, with all of these big components that he's moving into place. There's a delicacy and intimacy about them that feels like they are poetic studies. They feel

like drawings to me, even if they are not figure drawings or abstract drawings. Does that resonate in any way?

06-00:26:04

White:

The larger-scale works, he had studio assistants working with him over the years. He did a series of smaller-scale works, like the size of an individual *Hiccup*, which he referred to as Sunday drawings, because a day when the studio assistants had a day off, he still was wanting to work, as always. This was something of a scale that he was completely comfortable with on his own and didn't need any assistance. I have no idea if these [*The Hiccups*] were made on Sundays, when other people were not around, or it was done just in the course of the work week, with other people. We could find out that, probably, from people that were working with him at the time.

Samis:

So this could be four months of Sundays?

06-00:27:15

White:

It's interesting that those often were really called the Sunday drawings. I think it may even be written on them with writing and a numeral.

Roberts:

It's interesting to think about the effect of collaborators in the studio on scale, and whether there might be other examples where scale is an indicator of how many hands were at work.

06-00:27:41

White:

Well, if it gets over a size then it's very difficult for one person to, if it's a three-dimensional object, just lifting the other end of it or—

Samis:

But how about the early works, like *Monogram*, or the *Bed*, things like that? Did he have studio assistants that early on?

06-00:28:04

White:

I'm not sure. Those are small enough scale that for the most part, I think he could have done them on his own. But he was very gregarious, and over the time I knew him, he was very happy to have company in the studio while he was working. He was not going off to his ivory tower to do something. If someone was there and he needed somebody to lift the back legs of the goat or something like that, whether it's an official studio assistant or a neighbor—

Sterrett:

Did you talk about assistants yesterday?

Roberts:

With different projects, different people's names came up.

06-00:28:59

White:

Who might be helpful to try to gather some more information.

Samis:

And Brice Marden actually did versions of the *White Painting*.

06-00:29:08

White:

I think Sachika Takahashi did at one time, and Darryl Pottorf did them one time. We talked about that yesterday, patina was never to be part of the notion of those works.

Samis:

Which in a sense, brings us back to the *Erased de Kooning* and *Pyramid* series, in terms of for someone who was so kind of refulgent with imagery, to have this other side of his work. Maybe you could talk a little bit about that.

06-00:29:53

White:

I don't know if it's something he talked of or other people talked of about his work, that there was this kind of pendulum swing, often. If he had just been very involved in very lively, image-filled, object-filled works, then there might be a switch to the other extreme. The late sixties, the works that preceded the *Pyramids* were the time when he was involved with electronic pieces or electricity and light bulbs and clock mechanisms. The revolvers have silkscreened images on disks, where you press a button and the layers of disks revolve either forward or backward, depending on how the viewer pushes the button. So that seems to be a pretty extreme contrast to blank sheets of paper.

Samis:

That's a great way to think about it, though. They stand on their own, yes, but they also have an implicit dialogue or are born out of something else.

06-00:31:11

White:

Even within one series, like a series called *Spreads and Scales*, which for the most part, are full of lots of imagery and attachments and three-dimensional shaping of the painting support. A number of them are blank pieces of fabric or panel and colorless fabric additions. So even within a series, there'd be great extremes of investigating.

Roberts:

We talked a little bit yesterday about this idea of setting a problem for oneself. You mentioned the idea of a game. This seems to me the ultimate setting up of a problem for oneself to try to work out. It sounds as though he went through multiple iterations of how to accomplish this.

06-00:32:15

White:

Exactly. Another example of a problem-solving thing is *Factum I* and *Factum II*, obviously. The idea is so extremely important.

Roberts:

I'm always struck with those too, that they get talked about as trying to reproduce fairly exactly, one from the other. But if you stand and look at them, there are places where the paint in particular, that signature swatch of paint across the middle, is clearly applied quite differently.

06-00:32:52

White: Or maybe if it's even applied in the same manner, it was not an attempt to have it look exact. I would say that was part of the question. How close does it get? Drips have their own life and liveliness. At the time of the Guggenheim retrospective, one of the owners, MOCA, agreed to lend their painting, and the other owner would not lend. Bob's response was, "I knew I should have painted a third one."

Roberts: They are together now, aren't they?

06-00:33:51

White: One is now owned by MoMA and one by MOCA. I think they have an arrangement where they are often shown at one museum or the other. Which is just terrific, to be able to see them side by side.

Roberts: Not having them together seems sort of useless. They need each other, to have a conversation.

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Roberts: Here we are with *Hiccups*. We talked a little bit about Phyllis Wattis. I think maybe we'll just dwell for a second that this was given in her honor. We have a really beautiful quote in the correspondence that says, "Within the urgency of a museum purchase of *Hiccups*, I turned my sweet thoughts to Phyllis Wattis. Both priceless."

07-00:01:04

White: Ah. Wonderful. Beautifully put.

Roberts: The poignancy to the way that it's worded there that doesn't necessarily come through in an official credit line that was nice to capture. Also in reviewing our documentation, there's a note that the installation must be linear and extensive. I wondered if you might elaborate on what you think we are getting at with those words.

07-00:01:40

White: I guess as far as possible, just keeping it, stretching it in a single line, as opposed to this kind of arrangement, where it's stacked because of the catalog. I know when it was installed at the Menil Collection, they have a long bisection hallway that runs the length of the gallery, and it was in one single line on the wall.

Roberts: It fit the entire length?

07-00:02:10

White: Right, it was just a flat thing. I think at the Guggenheim retrospective, it was broken somehow. I forget if it was in a couple of lines or it was on one area and then went around a corner. Obviously, Bob had to be

flexible since there are not so many instances when there is one long—I don't know how many running feet.

Samis: It's over sixty feet, right?

07-00:02:45

White: The one thing is, I don't know, is it a work that Phyllis Wattis was aware of in any way and had ever remarked on to him? That's something I know nothing about.

Roberts: I don't know that from our end, no.

Sterrett: Not from our files.

Samis: Gary would probably know.

Sterrett: Rauschenberg didn't say anything specific about why *Hiccups*?

07-00:03:13

White: Not that I recall. If he felt it was the rounding out of the rest of the— Now, *Port of Entry* came to the collection with the other group so it covered a wide period of years, certainly.

Roberts: This definitely fills a gap. The only work from the seventies would have been the *Pyramid* series and the large paper piece.

07-00:03:41

White: So unlike this. So Bob could have had that in mind, what would be an important work to give, as far as the collection, too. Is there any kind of identifying marks on the back to indicate this should follow that, particularly?

Roberts: No.

07-00:04:17

White: Certainly, the implication is that you can unzip them all, shuffle them, and have them any way, right?

Sterrett: In fact, that's written as intended in the file, actually, that any order, but they all have to be up at once.

07-00:04:31

White: Ah, okay.

Sterrett: No partial viewing.

Roberts: But we are finding, in fact, that the zippers are difficult enough that the way that they are zipped together now is not likely to be changed.

07-00:04:53

White: I remember, you had to put a lot of pressure on them.

Roberts: Yes, we had talked about bringing up a section and hanging it on this wall, and to get a small enough section, there was not a zipper that Amanda felt good about unzipping.

07-00:05:12

White: I remember some of them were much easier than others, but some were really you had to use a needle-nosed plier and yank very, very hard.

Sterrett: We spray it. Not necessarily provoked by the stickiness of the zippers, but the zippers themselves have such presence with the piece. It goes back to Rauschenberg's selection of materials. Would he have selected that zipper?

07-00:05:43

White: Oh, I would imagine so. I don't know if there were a lot of choices in a zipper that size. I don't know if the zippers came first and then he chose the paper to fit, or vice versa. It's a very nice fit, whichever came first.

Roberts: Do you know, this one, was it made in Captiva?

07-00:06:11

White: Yes.

Roberts: Do you know about the paper making? Because it's specifically noted as handmade paper, and I'm wondering if the paper was made at the studio.

07-00:06:19

White: No, I think not. The one time he was involved in paper making that I mentioned, at that paper mill in France, had to do with a Gemini project.

Samis: Was that Moulin?

07-00:06:34

White: Exactly. That's where it was, yes. Often if it said handmade paper, that was just what he got his hands on. But obviously, that's part of the variety in the shapes. They are rectilinear, but certainly lively variations from one to the next, and the edges and the—

Roberts: The yellow paper, I think, is actually a yellow paper color.

07-00:07:08

White: Is it?

Roberts: I think it's actually a yellow sheet. Because some of them, it's color that's applied. You know what? It's white.

Samis: On the back. Oh, but it's the same yellow that he's using over here, where there's white at the edge, isn't it?

07-00:07:25

White: Well, this is a piece of fabric, because you see the selvage of the fabric itself. I would have thought they were all the same pieces of paper, but this, there's that other grayish one, three from the end, that also looks like it's almost a paper color, as opposed to a— Or is that—

Roberts: That one's got a fabric overlay, as well.

07-00:07:54

White: Oh, it does, okay. But it's a complete fabric overlay that covers the entire sheet of paper.

Roberts: It is. You can see it's trimmed quite carefully to match the deckled edge.

Sterrett: When I look at this piece, it's got all those qualities of spontaneity that I associate with Rauschenberg, but it's really fastidious, too. I was wondering if you have any comment on that.

07-00:08:18

White: Well, when I was looking at them before, I just thought how each one works compositionally on its own, and yet they work so wonderfully together. I would assume that he did the original ordering of the works. Although if he said that it was not necessary that they be that way— I think there was a print project that had some random elements in it. It's my understanding, the paper was stacked and the collage elements were stacked, and it was a chance thing of what came next. They could have been a stack of drawings that, "Okay, next, next."

Cándida Smith: Is the lettering, the code system, was that his?

Roberts: No, that's our registrar numbers.

07-00:09:27

White: Now, I don't recall if there is any kind of a—

Roberts: I don't think so.

07-00:09:34

White: Which adds to the sense of being interchangeable.

Cándida Smith: Did they come attached or detached?

Roberts: They came in sections.

Cándida Smith: Like this, or smaller?

07-00:09:46

White: I think even less long than that, just for moveability of crates.

Roberts: It was between like eight and ten, right?

07-00:09:52

White: I think.

Roberts: We have the drawing of the Foamcore. It looks like there may be six or eight sheets in each Foamcore sleeve.

07-00:10:00

White: That was a practicality issue for moving crates around, handling things, storing things.

Cándida Smith: There would have been no necessary special meaning for the order in which they were shipped, the way in which they are linked when they were shipped?

Roberts: Packing considerations, probably, more than anything.

07-00:10:25

White: They'd do X number of sheets of paper, then make the crates that size, then break it at that point each time. Certainly, all the classic Rauschenberg images of tires and wheels and sports figures and animals and the fabrics of all sorts.

Roberts: We were trying to identify that tennis player. Is that Vitas Gerulaitis, does anybody know?

07-00:11:01

White: I'm sure it can be identified by the right person.

Samis: The one thing that he is determining is what's vertical, what's top and what's bottom.

07-00:11:14

White: Yes. That's indeed correct.

Samis: The left-to-right extension of it and sequencing, it's completely up in the air. But the top and the bottom are clear.

07-00:11:27

White: Then the hole in the pull of the zipper was used for the hanging device, the pin or whatever goes through it.

Roberts: Would these all have been found images, then?

07-00:11:45

White: Yes, images from newspapers or magazines.

Roberts: How did he go about collecting and storing, do you know?

07-00:11:56

White: I think he must have had subscriptions to lots of magazines where he was living, and he would pick up things. I think he might have often had multiple-copy subscriptions. There were cardboard boxes in the studio that were identified loosely by category, say sports or nature or technical, something like that. I think that was one of the jobs of people helping, going through magazines, retrieving images, and then putting them in these categories.

Roberts: So the actual culling might have been given to studio assistants to do?

07-00:12:43

White: Sure, yeah.

Cándida Smith: You mentioned yesterday that he shifted to using his own images because of concerns about, I guess, copyright issues. Do you remember when that happened, approximately? Was there a court case or anything specific?

07-00:13:07

White: Well, there were a couple of things. One had to do with an image in the *Hoarfrosts*. It's a diver image of one of those young men diving off a cliff into water in Mexico or someplace like that. I can't remember the name of the photographer, but those *Hoarfrost* editions were made in 1974 or '75, so it might have been right around that time. Although this is from later, though, right?

Roberts: This is '78, right.

Cándida Smith: So did somebody file an infringement claim?

07-00:13:47

White: I think the photographer said, that's unfair use of my image. It might have happened with another image. Then with Warhol, the woman that took the flower image that was used in all the flower paintings—I'm not sure exactly when that happened. It was in the air that photographers were getting more protective of their images. There was always a question of how much did it have to be altered before it was usable? But Bob had always been enthusiastic as a photographer, and so it was this combination of this difficulty arising and then seemingly going back to something that he'd put aside, for whatever reason.

- Roberts: He started taking his own photographs, again, which we talked yesterday. There was a lull where he wasn't photographing much, and then around when he did *Glacial Decoys*, which was I think was '79, he began photographing with a vengeance again. He had a burst of activity. Was there a particular focus to that?
- 07-00:15:00  
White: Well, the focus was, I think, the *Glacial Decoy* commission. Then there was this series of photographs called *In + Out City Limits*, where he traveled— He got an old Ford Phaeton, an open-topped car. It was arranged through Bill Goldston, I believe, at ULAE. He drove maybe from Long Island down to the South, I'm not sure. There was this notion of taking photographs in one city, and then having a photography exhibition in that city, and a book published at the same time. There are a couple of books, *In + Out City Limits*, New York and Boston. I think those are the only two that got completed. But there were *City Limits* photographs from Los Angeles, that a book never was published. So that was another focus and project. There's a series of prints called *The Razorback Bunch*. Those were images taken when he was traveling down South. That wasn't a specific one city. You wouldn't necessarily know it was the South, I don't think. Often it's a tire against a tree trunk or something like that, which could be pretty much anyplace.
- Samis: The *In + Out City Limits* actually sounds like a precursor to the ROCI model.
- 07-00:16:51  
White: In a smaller scale.
- Roberts: Were any of those photographs then turned into raw materials for—?
- 07-00:17:02  
White: Oh, yeah, I'm sure that the ones in the *Glacial Decoy* stage set were primarily done in and around Ft. Myers, Florida, close to home. But then they became material for paintings, as well, yes.
- Roberts: Was *Glacial Decoys* one where there were projections, as well, that he produced?
- 07-00:17:31  
White: Yes. The set was four projectors, and they were made into slides, 35-millimeter. The four slides were side by side horizontally and filled the entire back wall of the theater. Each increment was one click to the right. One new one kept being added, and one kept going off. It wasn't till sometime later that I was reading about the dance itself, and Trisha Brown explained it was all about entrances and exits of the dancers, too. Bob picked up on what she was working on and made that part of

his concept. The costumes do not have imagery on them. Or, “In this case.”

Samis: We have got a Gary Hill video piece that has the same principle operating in it. An image comes on, moves down—

07-00:18:44

White: It’s a very tricky piece to watch the first time, because you are so interested in this movement of the images. Of course, they are *very* large scale and compelling. At the same time, there are the live performances in the foreground. There’s no accompanying music or soundtrack of any sort. The click of the projector, apparently was an important element of it. Recently it was— All the slide projectors are no longer made, and getting harder to repair, so they wanted to change it to a newer way of projecting them. But then the click was missing, so there was some sort of way of trying to incorporate that, even though there’s not a click anymore in getting the images a click sound, right. It was done. So they always try to keep the essence, in this case, of what was happening at the time.

Roberts: Did he use projection in the studio at all? There’s a visual resonance with the way that the transfer of images appear, the thin translucent effect that’s there, with the effect that a projection would have. I’m curious as to whether he ever played with layering of projection in the studio.

07-00:20:18

White: Not that I’m aware of. Which is kind of interesting, since he did *everything*, played with everything and worked with everything.

Samis: Or even just the slide projection as part of his working process?

07-00:20:42

White: I don’t recall the use of it.

Samis: There’re so many artists who do. Yet with Rauschenberg, with all of these images that are grabbed from the media sphere, he just transferred them.

07-00:21:20

White: But it’s interesting. Are all those images transferred images? Or some of those are most likely collaged, as well, I’m guessing.

Sterrett: There’s definitely collaged fabric elements, yes.

Roberts: Back to the issue of video for just a minute. In our process of going through our basement and putting together the SFMOMA archives, we have got videotape that we haven’t been able to view yet because it’s

on an incredibly old format. It's called *Brazos River*. My understanding is it's from a Dallas dance performance. What do you know about *Brazos River*?

07-00:22:03

White: Pretty much just the name. I'm aware that this thing took place. It may be described somehow in there.

Roberts: There's a bit of description in there, and I read something about it in a book, as well, that mentioned that it started out as a documentary of this dance piece, but by the time he was finished playing with it, it became something quite more than that. I'm wondering if that is sort of an instance of him really working in video.

07-00:22:34

White: Well, apparently, it is. There's a woman named Anne Livet, who probably was involved in dance and museums. She's in New York, and I'm sure she would have some information about that.

Roberts: Well, we are working on getting it migrated to something we can actually look at, or finding a machine that will play it.

Samis: I wonder if that's in our archives because it was perhaps shown as part of the retrospective that traveled here in the seventies?

Roberts: That's right around when it's dated. That retrospective, I think, came here from Dallas. It certainly makes sense that it was part of that moment in time.

07-00:23:31

White: Which retrospective are you speaking of?

Roberts: The very first one, '76, '77. I think it was here.

Samis: Didn't Walter do that for the National Gallery?

07-00:23:30

White: Right, it started in Washington and was in New York. But it wasn't in Dallas, was it?

Roberts: It wasn't? I thought it was. I have got it downstairs.

07-00:23:48

White: It was New York, Buffalo, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington. Yes, that's it.

Roberts: But not Dallas?

07-00:23:59

White: I believe not.

Samis: Walter wasn't in Texas yet at the time, for sure.

Roberts: But then the other Texas connection is Henry Hopkins, who might have been aware of it from having been in Dallas-Fort Worth when it was being done.

07-00:24:19

White: What's the year on that piece?

Roberts: I want to say '76.

Samis: We have got the poster up on the second floor, in the Koret corridor, from that show, from the Rauschenberg show.

07-00:24:37

White: Oh, I should take a look.

Samis: Because that's something that Bob did for the show in San Francisco.

07-00:24:48

White: Oh, for the retrospective show?

Roberts: The San Francisco show yeah.

07-00:24:51

White: That's a wonderful suite of posters; you should have all five of them. There's a single background image, and then the typeface handled in five different ways. At one point it looks like enlarged typewriter type, in one case it looks like handwritten. I forget all the variations. It's wonderful to see the suite of them together.

Roberts: Once he makes the transition to using his own photographs, were they collected and categorized similarly, in boxes for him to use? Or did he work from negatives and print things out as he needed them?

Samis: How did his studio process work?

07-00:25:56

White: I think at that point, as far as collecting the photographs, that was when they were then being used for silkscreening on the work. There was an elaborate system, which any of the Captiva workers could tell you much better. I don't know if they used the numbering that was on the negatives. They were all marked in some way, and then the frames of the silkscreens were similarly marked, so they could all be stored in a rack. I think the images were, again, in ring binders so Bob could flip

through and say, “I want to use this and this and this,” and then somebody was given the numbers and could retrieve those screens.

Cándida Smith: Did he work from contact sheets or from prints?

07-00:26:44

White: I think after the photographs were first taken, they were contact sheets and he could choose which ones he wanted to make into screens of whatever size. Yes.

Samis: It sounds like once he had the notebooks, they represented the silkscreen inventory, as it were.

07-00:27:04

White: Right. In some cases, maybe they are divided by location, particularly when he was traveling someplace, and these are the Sri Lanka photographs, for example. I’m really not sure if it was by date or by subject matter or by whatever. Easy enough to find out.

Sterrett: Are those what all those screens are as you drive into the garage at the warehouse?

07-00:27:30

White: Yes. Those are the silkscreens.

Sterrett: So the inventory is right there.

Samis: The assistants are, at a certain level, the librarians who are going to the stacks to pull down the screens that could be used for the next piece. Fantastic.

07-00:27:50

White: There’s the story about the silkscreens that he’d used in the ’62 to ’63 paintings on canvas. That was the time he’d won the Venice Biennale. The story is that he was in Italy and sent the message back home that he wanted the screens destroyed before he got back, because he didn’t want to be repeating himself.

Samis: Is it true?

07-00:28:18

White: Apparently so. I know the screens don’t exist. This is well before I worked for him.

Sterrett: That’s an interesting question, about repeating himself.

07-00:28:30

White: And yet, screens are repeated everywhere.

Samis: Well, inevitably, there are images that keep coming back.

07-00:28:35

White: Oh, by all means. Sure.

Samis: The images in *Port of Entry*, I imagine parts of them are in other pieces.

07-00:28:41

White: Oh, very much so, yes.

Samis: He does have this vocabulary of images that he's using again. We talked about the muse wall and this idea of the courage he had had, wanting to have that as a reminder. Inevitably, over the course of decades and decades of career and production, you have your high moments and then maybe some lulls along the way, also. Do you have a sense of a rhythm, of the time that you were with him, when he felt maybe really, really like a house afire, and other times where he might have felt a little bit more fallow?

07-00:29:28

White: Well, I wasn't around the studio most of the time, but I have the feeling that he was engaged in going to the studio pretty much all the time, unless he was traveling or sick. I don't know if, at the end of the day, he felt better about what he did one day than another day. He is quoted as saying if he worked on a series long enough, he eventually felt he had investigated as much as he wanted to and then there was a danger of repeating himself there. So that's when he would put that aside and turn to something other. But it's interesting, in the silkscreens, I can't think of any examples of two screens of the same image done at different scales, where when he got involved in the later work, of the time of *Port of Entry*, where you could change the scale because of computer stuff and he could say, "I want this done this big, this big, and this big." So often, in the same work, there can be the same image at two different scales.

Roberts: How did the advent of digital photography play out for him? How quickly did he adopt it and see its potential?

07-00:31:02

White: Oh, that I really don't know. He photographed all the time and had all the rolls of film that went to the developer. He certainly didn't resist new developments. If they helped with the work and was a new area of exploration, he was quick to explore it. He wasn't so necessarily interested in all the specifics and the mechanics of how you use a computer. If he had people at work for him that could do something and he could say, I want it this big and I want it this big, he was happy to get them those two sizes.

Sterrett: You know what I'm thinking, is that it's really the IRIS print. It wasn't so much the taking of the photograph with a digital camera, but this idea that he had an IRIS print that just took water to transfer the image. That was a big transformation for him, to be able to—

07-00:32:00

White: Exactly. That's when the silkscreens were put aside at one point, in favor of this.

Cándida Smith: In terms of the photographs, when more traditional paper prints were made, did he do the printing or did somebody else do the printing? Do you know?

07-00:32:21

White: In terms of his photographs?

Cándida Smith: Photographs on photographic paper.

07-00:32:26

White: I'm not sure if early on, he was in the darkroom himself. I think by the time I started working for him, there were other people that did darkroom work, certainly working with him. He had very specific ideas about contrast and density and how things should be. I don't know how often he was in the darkroom himself with all the chemicals.

Samis: In fact, how many paper prints was he making? Because most of these photographs were going to silkscreen, the ones that he was choosing, right?

07-00:33:16

White: Both. Because there's a whole body of ones that got printed at exhibition size and were matted and framed and hung in exhibitions as Rauschenberg photographs.

Roberts: We have one from, I think it's 1981. It's a billboard of a donut. *Untitled*, 1983.

07-00:33:57

White: You sure it's not a Boston cream pie? We could find out easily enough. It's not one I'm familiar with. He took many, many photographs so it's hard to know. Maybe we talked about this yesterday, when he was taking a photograph, he had in the back of his mind whether this was to be a photograph in an exhibition or part of the palette, or both. Certainly, they were used often both ways.

Roberts: I'm curious about the title [*Hiccups*].

07-00:34:45

White: Perfect title, don't you think?

Roberts: It is a perfect title. I think in this catalog, it says that the zippers are the hiccups, the pause between each. Which was the opposite of how I think of it, as the visual hit of each is the hiccup as you are moving on.

07-00:35:04

White: Oh, I never heard him elaborate one way or another, just the notion of these repeating things, *Hiccups* seems particularly appropriate.

Sterrett: How about titling in general? How did that happen?

07-00:35:23

White: Well, he loved titling. He said it was the last dollop on the artwork, something to that effect. Certain things are untitled, but more often than not, the titles are something that you can connect with, such as *Hiccups*, and sometimes the imagery. Other times it's not so easy to understand why the title got chosen.

Samis: Like *Pyramid*, you can see because of the form.

07-00:36:03

White: That seems to be a connection in that case.

Samis: But *Factum* or—

Roberts: Or *Charlene*. I have always been curious about *Charlene*. Was Charlene someone he knew?

07-00:36:13

White: I don't know. I would imagine that's probably written about someplace where it's described.

Samis: Did he read poetry? Because his work is so visually poetic, and then the titles that he gave have a kind of another. as you say, the dollop, another flourish of poetry, to inflect it.

07-00:36:42

White: I'm not sure if he did, because being dyslexic, reading was difficult.

Cándida Smith: Well, what about poetry readings?

07-00:36:58

White: I'm not aware. He certainly had a love of language. His vocabulary was wonderful, too, so you wondered where all that came from, if he was secretly reading. Which I don't think was the case.

Cándida Smith: With the dyslexia, the mass media for him were images floating on blurs, in a sense.

07-00:37:41

White: The times he talked about it, he would say would look at a page and all the O's would pop out. It would be this compositional thing. It's hard to know. But it's so interesting, the forwards and backwards and the reversals of dyslexic seeing and how the work reflects that so much, the transfer, where everything is reversed.

Roberts: Turning the language into a visual experience.

Samis: Also, it helps understand why the pictures in the magazines are infinitely more appealing than the articles. He'd flip through the magazines, and he was seeing the pictures.

07-00:38:27

White: That may be true for all of us, at first glance, when you are going through the thing.

Samis: But especially if the text puts you off, in a way.

07-00:38:36

White: Sure, sure.

Cándida Smith: Was he diagnosed? Apparently, there are different types of dyslexia. It's a word we use to cover a broad variety of things. I wonder if he was ever actually officially diagnosed.

07-00:39:13

White: I think it's something that they didn't know what was the situation when he was younger and going to school. He just had a hard time in school, and it had to do with reading, as most dyslexics do. I don't actually know when he was first told that that's what he was.

Cándida Smith: To come back to what you learned from Bob, in terms of how to hang things, his work, a piece like this, the judgments that one might have to make. As I understand, you, at a certain point, got proxy rights, you would be going out to supervise the hanging of his shows, instead of him.

07-00:40:22

White: Actually, that's really the case with only a few very recent exhibitions in the last few years, when I was most often co-curator with Susan Davidson on exhibitions. We would determine the works and how they were installed. Bob was always an enthusiastic installer of his own work at the galleries, and I assume at the museums, working with Walter. There are pictures of them side by side at the National Gallery during the 1976 or '77 installation. I think when he went to the galleries he pretty much made the choices of what went where. The more recent exhibitions, at Pace Gallery for example, were installed sometimes before his arrival in town. He would come in, and there was

always a moment to make any changes that he asked for, but he would certainly let it be started without his saying what goes where.

Cándida Smith: For him, I can understand the whole process would be intuitive, rather than maybe directly and overtly intellectual. But as you have taken on these responsibilities, and now as curator for the estate, you have to make decisions in the spirit of what you think he would have done. So you probably have had to think about this a little bit.

07-00:42:29

White: I have thought about it, yes. Bob was, in one sense, like a mother hen that loved all his chicks. I often didn't see eye to eye with how he would choose to install an exhibition, because he would want to put this in. And, oh, yes, this should be in; oh, yes, that should be in, too. Then pretty soon, I felt they were overcrowded. So it's not that I think, "What would Bob do," necessarily. As far as the intuitive part, I remember in one of the ROCI tours, there were a lot of photographs of all the different countries, and they accumulated as the tour went on. Often, they were installed separately in a gallery. I remember just stacks of photographs on the floor at one point and this empty space. Bob just said, "Give me that one and give me that one." He just worked his way around, and when we got to the end, there was one last space and one last work. It wasn't in any kind of organized line-up. My recollection was it was more scattered. But I guess he looked at that pile and looked at the— and just had this sense of how many it would take to get around this corner. It was quite thrilling to watch.

Sterrett: How does that factor in now to what you do in galleries to install this work? Does it at all?

07-00:44:02

White: Oh, I prefer working with models and maquettes and doing stuff, and removing something this big around rather than asking art handlers to lug paintings back and forth.

Roberts: We just spent a few minutes with *Collection*, and were talking along the same lines, about the height that it's hung at because of the mirror. The way we hang it, the mirror is hung well above most people's eye level. David, maybe you could just say one more time what you told me in the gallery, which was fascinating.

07-00:44:35

White: In general, Bob seemed to hang things on the low side, or what people would often consider low. I don't know what that was based on. He was not a small man, so it didn't have to do with matching his stature or his physical height. I don't know if he thought it was just a more intimate contact the closer it got to the ground. Of course, often the works were a combination of things that hung on the wall, but

elements went down and rested on the floor. So certain works, the hanging height is predetermined. It can't go over a certain height or the floor element won't reach the floor. But in general, he liked things on what I would call the low side; I don't know how else to put it.

Samis: Specifically then, around *Collection*, we were thinking that the mirror should be at an accessible eye level.

07-00:45:32

White: That was my reaction seeing it, that I would have imagined, if I were imagining how Bob would have installed it, that he most likely would have put it lower. Particularly, the mirror being that notion of viewer participation in the work. There's another image of a human head at mirror level in *Collection*, so you would have another interesting juxtaposition, if you were seeing your own face and this other face at the same time.

Samis: Is that the kind of Queen Victoria face?

07-00:46:11

White: Yes, that one, whomever that is.

Cándida Smith: If you apply the principle to *Hiccups*: You have got the whole ninety-seven. Where would you put it on the wall? Where do you think would be the ideal location?

07-00:46:26

White: Most museums have a standard hanging height, which doesn't seem to vary too many inches. I don't know what it is here or what it is anyplace, really.

Cándida Smith: But if somebody wanted to read it like a book?

07-00:46:43

White: Low-ish eye level, I would say, if you are thinking of younger people looking at it.

Samis: If you have got a standard height, go a couple of inches lower. I see, Sarah, in your notes, you have this issue of temporality. I thought maybe you could bring that up.

Roberts: Well, when we started at the beginning, we were talking about the quality of it being linear and extensive. It seems to me that it's a piece that really requires your body to experience it. It requires a length of time and it requires a physical progression, which is quite different from the other works in our collection, certainly, but there are other large-scale ones from around this time period that are even more so, correct?

07-00:47:36

White: It is certainly something that was of interest to Bob. When you think of the big painting *Barge* and the *Currents* drawing, these were long, linear things.

Samis: The *Automobile Tire Print*, in some ways, was a precursor for that.

07-00:47:51

White: Exactly, exactly.

Samis: I remember when he was here for the '91 show, he was talking about, his *Furlong* piece.

07-00:48:03

White: Oh, right, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*.

Samis: He said, you have to show the whole thing, of course. It's like do you have enough walls to accommodate this endless itinerary of variegation? This is a microcosm of it, in a sense. So that sense of a visitor—bodily engagement, involvement—moving through it; but also the sense of like this is how art plays out. It plays out in space. In time, yes, but also in space, and with the constant changing like a palpitation or constant refreshing of the image stream. It's really this river of images. One thing leads to another.

07-00:49:00

White: Because certainly, when he started the *1/4 Mile* painting, he couldn't have known what the rest of it was going to look like in any more than the vaguest sort of way.

Samis: That makes me think more about what you said about those stacks of photographs that he said, oh, we'll just lay them out this way. They become an itinerary around the room. There's something about his intelligence, his kind of spatial intelligence, his visual intelligence that played itself out in this way that is very unique for those of us who don't have that same form of intelligence.

Roberts: There's something parallel that goes on in *Collection*, too but in a different spatial sphere.

White: Exactly.

Roberts: There's no way you can get the whole thing in five minutes or ten minutes.

07-00:49:56

White: It really takes an intimate reading of all those elements. It's another version of this. Those other large ones, *Barge* and *Currents*, both those names are indicating long things in motion. One thing I don't know

about the *Currents*, where it's the thirty-four studies for *Currents*, which were the original collages, if he had all the elements for those at the time he started, or if that was done over a series of days and it was each day's newspaper. I'd have to see what you saw in the way of datelines on pieces of newspaper.

Roberts: Where is the *1/4 Mile* piece?

07-00:51:37

White: It's in storage in New York.

Roberts: So it comes apart in panels, obviously.

07-00:51:42

White: Oh, yeah, it was panel by panel.

Samis: Was it finally shown at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] once, do I remember hearing?

07-00:51:47

White: It's been shown a number of times, once at the new wing at the Met. It was, in fact, a somewhat edited version because there was a gallery of a certain size, and it was not as large as the running feet of the piece at that point. So Bob's preference was that it all be shown, certainly, but he did some editing. It was not the front part left off, or the back part left off; it was in fact taking out.

Sterrett: Did he keep everything he made? Did he ever do something and say, take it away, I don't want it?

07-00:52:33

White: Very, very seldom. I was saying yesterday that if a piece was seemingly going wrong for him, I think he would then try something else and alter it in some way. There are very few pieces that I'm aware of that he said, oh, this doesn't work. There was a large-scale sculptural piece that involved some cast bicycles and geese and something, that got underway and never finished. So it was put aside. Who knows if it might not have been picked up again at another point and finished? Some earlier piece of the red period, I think he said he had done one large painting that didn't work, and he cut it up and made twelve masterpieces.

Roberts: When we were talking about *Erased de Kooning*, I mentioned that it's one of our most requested pieces. There's activity around the *Automobile Tire Print* lately, too, being requested very frequently for loans and for reproduction. It seems that objects get hot or certain periods get hot. I wonder, in the course of your work with Bob,

whether you have seen trends in scholarship around certain pieces or certain periods.

07-00:54:11

White:

I don't know about scholarship, necessarily, but I guess that goes hand in hand with it. There have recently been some exhibitions of works like the *Cardboard* pieces that were shown at the Menil Collection. They were originally shown in 1971, and then occasionally there'd be one in a group show. There was not much sales activity at the time they were originally shown and not much demand for them over the years. So it was a reinvestigation of these kinds of ignored pieces.

Roberts:

Is there anything that's hot right now?

07-00:54:54

White:

Well, the exhibitions that we have been working on, of the sculptural pieces called the *Gluts*, that were from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties, it's what we are involved with. We are involved with catalogs. It's interesting the number of people that come up to me at openings and say, oh, I hadn't been aware of these works. Even though they were shown at Castelli when they were first made, and at other galleries, both in America and in Europe. It's not that they were hidden away. I think Bob was just always so prolific it was hard to keep up with what was going on.

Sterrett:

Same with the *Cardboard* pieces, as you mentioned, too. It was my impression that those really weren't as well known prior to that couple-year tour.

07-00:55:49

White:

Right. Then that evolved into a show called "Traveling 1970-1976," where it enlarged to the fabric pieces, the *Hoarfrosts* and the *Jammers*, which again, have gotten less attention. Certainly, the combines were the pieces that people knew the best and most often wanted to borrow. At this point, they are pretty much all in museum collections. If people are trying to acquire Rauschenbergs still, then they have to start thinking of other periods.

Roberts:

Lesser known pockets.

Samis:

The market focuses elsewhere.

07-00:56:37

White:

Yes.

Sterrett:

Any ambitions for display with the foundation, the estate now?

07-00:56:52

White:

Well, those are all things that the foundation will have to deal with, as the body of work that the foundation will have in its collection. Over the years, it's always been a case of not going out and looking for exhibitions as much as the requests coming in, and then you decide whether this is a good idea or it fits in with scheduling. It's a tremendously wonderful position for an artist to be in, where they are coming to you instead of you going out hunting for venues.

Samis:

You have alluded to the silkscreens and the inventory, and before the silkscreens, the studio assistants who were clipping magazines. Are there photos of that inventory, or of the studio and the process by which things were done?

07-00:58:17

White:

I think there are studio photographs, often with something in the works and either studio assistants or visitors around. That series right around the time of the *Cardboards* called *Early Egyptians*, which are these cardboard boxes which were covered with sands, there are pictures of Bob and crew out in the sand in front of the house in Captiva, where they put matte medium or glue of some sort on the cardboard and then put the sand on it.

Samis:

It would be interesting to show some of the things that you are describing here.

07-00:59:26

White:

I'm sure there are studio photographs. There was what he called his muse wall in the studio, as well, which was not so much favored finished works of his or other people, but a clipping from a magazine or something that caught his eye, an object. I know that photographs of that ended up being used in posters, and in part of a label on a champagne bottle. Things were just for all kinds of uses.

Samis:

What kind of music did he like to listen to?

07-01:00:02

White:

He liked Erik Satie music. For the most part, when I was around, the television was on as opposed to music. He talked about Satie from time to time. Of course, he was a very good friend of Cage's, but I don't know how well he knew the music. And Morton Feldman. He was involved with musicians.

Roberts:

What did he like to have on the television? While he was working, he had the television on?

07-01:00:36

White:

The television seemed to be on pretty much all day long. If it was Saturday morning and there was nothing but kiddie cartoons on, there

were some kiddie cartoons. It doesn't mean he was sitting glued to the television. It was an element, like a view from the window or something coming over a radio. Although he was able to be aware of an awful lot of it. I remember instances where Bob would be sitting at the kitchen table on Lafayette Street, talking with other people and a television on. He'd be following the story, and I'd be saying something to somebody at the other end of the room, and then he'd say, "David, that's not true." He just was aware of everything. Certainly, particularly the period of *Spreads and Scales*, where it's such a conglomeration of images, you can't help but think of the television and the way it pours in.

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Cándida Smith: 53.D-1, on the back, matches that. So that would have been from the studio?

08-00:02:42

White: Actually, I think this is my handwriting, but that's not. Yeah, those are both studio.

Cándida Smith: So you would have numbered this after 1980?

08-00:02:58

White: Yes, I think when I first started, I used this numbering registry system that the first two numerals were the numbers of the date.

Samis: Then D would be drawing, and this would be one?

08-00:02:13

White: Right. Now it has to be 001, because of computers, I guess.

Samis: Whose handwriting would this be?

08-00:03:26

White: It looks like Charlie Yoder, who worked for Bob before I did. I can't say for sure.

Roberts: Did you do a physical inventory when you first started doing all of that first project?

08-00:03:38

White: Yes. Often, things had a Castelli registry number on the back. The thing about the Castelli registry number, it just started at one and continued. So if they found a 1953 work in 1990, it ended up at the end of things. It wasn't something I devised, it was just another way that I was aware that things got registered by year, so you could tuck it into the correct time.

Roberts: That must have been quite an experience, just to start with, to go through every single thing that was there.

08-00:04:20

White: A five-story building with a basement and a sub-basement. Lots of stuff. But things really were quite well organized, so it wasn't that you were walking into chaos. I have heard of photographers that just have a big drawer and a pile of negatives with no numbers on them, and trying to figure out what's what and what's when. It was never anything like that.

Roberts: So you inherited a system, not just the body of work?

08-00:05:01

White: Right. Then once this system was worked out, those numbers were put on the backs of the artwork in the studio, before they even left the studio. Things were very well recorded.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: I have one last question. It has to do with the relationship of the artist to critics and art historians. Critics and art historians have to interpret, they have to come up with stories, which may or may not connect to what the artist ever thought—and that doesn't matter. I wonder how Bob, and now the estate, thought and thinks about this question of the different interpretive strands that are woven around a work. You got a sense that Bob wanted to set the story straight about some of the aspects of *Erased de Kooning*. Not offering another interpretation, but just telling what he recalled.

08-00:07:31

White: I think certain things, he would read and just say that was not the case or not what he had in mind. I guess there's more all the time, but for a long time, there didn't seem to be a lot of really critical writing about Bob's work. He often said that he thought you could almost explain the magic out of a piece if it got absolutely bludgeoned to death with talk and theory.

Cándida Smith: Some artists want to control the story; others are more, people are going to say what they are going to say.

08-00:08:22

White: Sometimes when he'd be asked something, he'd say, it was my job to make the work and it's your job to write about it. So in one sense, he's not trying to control it. He's just saying, that's your territory.

Roberts: Another layer of the life of the piece is how people react to it.

Cándida Smith: Was he interested in what critics had to say? Did he follow the reviews of his work?

08-00:08:56

White: I imagine so. My not being around him, if a magazine came out with a piece about him, I wasn't there when he—

Cándida Smith: A critic's name might have been mentioned in passing; he didn't beam sometimes or wrinkle his nose other times?

08-00:09:16

White: He was fond of Bob Hughes as a person and a personality, and so I assume he was sympathetic to what Bob Hughes wrote about him. Bob Hughes had some sort of operation, when he was supposed to not talk for a while. He went and stayed in Captiva, and I guess it was almost impossible for him not to talk. Every time he saw Bob, he started talking. He's the one that comes to mind most. Certainly, Calvin Tomkins was involved with a lot of Bob's life over the years, in writing two profiles. So there had to have been some sympathetic rapport, you would think.

[End of Interview]

**Richard Cándida Smith** is professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, where he teaches the intellectual and cultural history of the United States and directs the Regional Oral History Office. He is the author of *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California*, *Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience*, and *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century*, and the editor of *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection*.

**Sarah Roberts**, Associate Curator of Collections and Research, conducts research on the permanent collection and the institutional history of SFMOMA. Prior to joining SFMOMA, she worked as Adjunct Curator at DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, MA, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art cataloguing the twentieth century sculpture collection. She received her bachelor's degree in Fine Art from the University of Texas at Austin and her master's degree in Art History from Brown University, where she focused on early twentieth century American and European art.

**Peter Samis** is Associate Curator of Interpretation at SFMOMA. In 1993, he served as art historian/content expert for the first CD-ROM on modern art, and then spearheaded development of interactive educational technology programs for SFMOMA's new building. Since that time, programs produced by SFMOMA's IET team have received widespread recognition and numerous awards. Samis holds a BA in Religion from Columbia College in New York, and an MA in the History of Art from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Jill Sterrett** is Director of Collections and Conservation at SFMOMA where she has worked since 1990. Jill began her career as a conservator and has worked at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Library of Congress, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the National Library of Australia. She has published and taught on the subject of museums, art conservation and the legacy of contemporary art, including as a Fulbright scholar at the Universidade do Porto in Portugal.