THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG (RR)**
INTERVIEWER:	**JOACHIM PISSARRO (JP)**
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JP: I'm sitting in front of Bob Rauschenberg, in the great studio that he once occupied, on Lafayette Street. We are going to conduct together, Bob and myself, one of the oral history projects. I would like to say that Aggie Gund has been absolutely wonderful in setting this up, and helping us to produce this project today. So, Bob -- hello, first of all.

RR: Hi, hi.

JP: Thank you so much for answering some of these questions. You know, just to tell you a few words about this project. A few years ago, several of the trustees and the Archives Department decided that it would be a great idea to turn to some of the major artists represented in the collection at MoMA, and ask them questions, not so much related to their lives, but more to ask them questions about their relationship with the Museum, what the Museum has meant to them, and so on. So this is what I'm here to do with you today, and I hope it's going to be fun and enjoyable for you.

RR: Me too.

JP: I noted that, interestingly enough, you were acquainted with the Museum very early on in your life, in the early '50s.

RR: With [Edward] Steichen. Steichen bought my first photographs that I ever sold. He recognized the style from the school of Black Mountain. After that, it was about twenty years before I sold another photograph.

JP: You're kidding. That's amazing. Amazing. So Steichen, yes, was right up there. So he bought two major photographs from you, which were *The Interior of an Old Carriage*? I love that photograph. It's so beautiful, so moving. Then *Cy, on a Bench*. How did he get to know you? Through other -- ?

RR: He didn't. I made an appointment, and he was generous enough to entertain it.

JP: And you say that he immediately recognized in you the Black Mountain school style?

RR: Yes.

JP: Was he familiar with the person you studied with there?

RR: Yes. Hazel Larsen.

JP: Hazel Larsen. Okay. Okay. But it was incredibly gutsy of Steichen, I guess -- wasn't it? -- to buy these two photographs? And you had never sold a photograph before? And it took you another ten years before you would sell another photograph?

RR: I think they were cheap.

JP: Were they? Do you recall the price?

RR: Twenty-five dollars. It was the standard price, for The Museum of Modern Art. But it helped. My rent, in New York, was only $15.00 a month. You can't try that again.

JP: Absolutely. Long gone days. Well, I must say, I had the chance -- I was with Peter Galassi a few weeks ago. He pulled those out for me, and I hadn't seen them in a long while. They're so beautiful. They really are gorgeous. And I was looking yesterday at a book of your photos, and they came in middle, early, late -- the photographs are so important in your work. They're like a major, major part of your career. Would you agree?

RR: Yes. They're about as important as my right hand was -- which I don't have anymore, because of a stroke.

JP: Could you expand a little bit on this, if you don't mind? As important as your right hand? Would you say that the photograph is central to your work?

RR: No. I can't take photographs, the way I do it, with one hand.

JP: Yes, of course. Of course, Of course. Yes.

RR: I think my son found me, over the internet, a camera that, very primitively, you could work with one hand. But it didn't set focus, or anything else, and I'm a traditionalist. I like to set my own photograph, in every detail.

JP: I think one sees that, don't you think? I think it's really very palatable, I would say, almost, the joy you seem to take in accentuating every detail. Their lusciousness is superb, is what I'm saying.

RR: Well, I just love photographing. There are two things I miss -- and the other doesn't have anything to do with a hand. It has to do with my walking. I miss dancing and photographing. Those are the two things I most miss, the most critical.

JP: It goes right back to the beginning of your life, right? Because, as I read Tompkins' biography on you -- you were brought up in a very religious background. Your mother was very religious, as I understand, and you were once thinking about --

RR: Well, I used to be. But when the church objected about my dancing, then I thought, "One of us has to go," and it turned out to be me and dancing. So I've been a free man ever since. I was going to be a preacher -- and happily -- but I saw nothing wrong in my dancing. The preacher we had at that time said, "But somebody else might," and I said, "Someone might see you eating, and say, 'What a glutton!' So how can you control sin, if everything reminds you of it?" So, anyway.

JP: You would have been a great preacher, if I may say so, Bob.

RR: I was going to be. They were concerned I would be too much.

JP: But I love the idea that you put together dancing and freedom, you said. You said, "I wanted to be free, and I was a free man ever since." I was going to talk to you about this. So you became an artist, it seems to me, through two forms of art, which are dancing and photography. Am I right?

RR: Yes.

JP: And it's only, perhaps, later on that you evolve other forms of art that became what you're known for, mainly, today.

RR:: Yes.

JP: But dancing and photography always remain crucial.

RR: Yes. Well, they're basics. Because photography has always been a major part of my vision; my excuse for meddling with what the world looks like.

JP: I love this quote. I forget -- David White[1] is sitting between Bob Rauschenberg and myself. He doesn't have a mic, but maybe we'll turn to him occasionally, to jog my memory. David, you might help me there. There is a great quote by Bob, where Bob says, "I wanted to photograph the United States inch by inch." It's an incredible quote.

RR: Well, ten years later I decided I would be in a ditch in Asheville. So I thought there must be a better way.

[1] [Robert Rauschenberg curator]

JP: It is a wonderful quote. If we're looking back today, 2005, I was beginning to tell you, Bob -- I was looking at your paintings downstairs, which look so fabulous, so gorgeous, and they're very much about photography. There is almost nothing but photography this time. You occasionally mix photography and painterly brushes. In this group there is no trace of painting. Am I right?

RR: These are quite pure.

JP: "Quite pure." I love that word. Because that's the sense I got, as well. They're very "mastered," they're very controlled, that sense of a great deal of purity, as you say. And here we are. So you started as early as '51, and more than a half a century later, photography remains almost truly essential to your art.

RR: It is.

JP: How do you work today? How does photography apply to your --

RR: I have an assistant who helps me transfer the photos, and I have a printing press that controls the enlargements. I've used nearly every poison that man made and I'm still alive. I'm a little banged up, but you know -- I now transfer with -- I'm out of poisons, so I use just water transfer.

JP: Do you?

RR: Yes. And we had to kind of design around that. I'm still working, as ever.

JP: Yes, yes, I would say. This is pretty remarkable. David was telling me -- this is only a small group of the works that are going to be shown at Pace, soon?

DW: A series [inaudible] -- scenarios.

JP: "Scenarios," they're called?

DW: A series type --

JP: -- of scenarios.

RR: I usually, in the period when I feel like I'm competent at it, and I'm not at all restless with the scenarios -- so I may bore the public for a while longer.

JP: I don't think there's any chance of that happening. The public is definitely not bored. I'd like to go back, between the present and the past, if you don't mind. I feel that your work really encourages us to do that, actually. It's very present, yet one feels your whole being, I guess, your whole career, almost, in it. I don't know if you agree with me, but this is how I see it.

RR: I don't have to agree or disagree. My next real-life encounter with The Museum of Modern Art was one Saturday morning, when Dorothy and Alfred Barr went to Castelli's, and they bought the *Dante's Inferno*.

JP: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Of course. Of course.

RR: So I've had not really constant encounters with The Museum of Modern Art, but once in a while ones that made me feel happy myself, and somewhat proud.

JP: Yes. Understandably.

RR: But I just love Dorothy and Alfred.

JP: Well, this great photograph, which I was showing you earlier on -- there are some wonderful photographs I found in the Museum. There's this photograph of you and Dorothy, at the time of your one-man show at the Museum, in '76. Do you want to tell us a little bit -- I know we're jumping time, back and forth. Now we're in 1976 and you wear a beard, Dorothy is very elegant, and there is a moment here of, I think, great tenderness. Don't you think, between you and --

RR: Yes, yes. It's all real.

JP: Can you tell us what's happening around then? This is a big moment? Obviously --

RR: I was happy, and she was, too.

DW: Is this photographed at the opening, I would guess?

RR: I think so. She's dressed up.

JP: And, you, too.

RR: And I'm wearing my beard.

JP: Well, you're absolutely right. Your presence at the Museum is so rich and so -- you know. There are few things that, I guess, we miss in your career at the Museum, I think maybe among them the white paintings -- which I would like to talk to you about. But look at this. We have this great, *Untitled, (Asheville Citizen)*, one of the early works of the "black paintings oeuvre." I don't know if you would like to say a few words about it -- what it reminds you of, what it brings up to your mind.

RR: Well, I was digging out of sort of a hang-over by Josef Albers, and that's when I got into the all-whites and all-blacks. This was sort of the breakthrough, of just easing my way into the real world again.

JP: I see. I see. Yes, yes, yes, yes. That makes total sense. So would you say that this is a transition moment?

RR: Yes, it is.

JP: And the real world appears through this newspaper?

RR: Well, how else would I have gotten into responding like I normally do, with any kind of activity? So this is a phase-in, cutting everything out, trimming everything back -- which is what -- the extreme of this is the all-whites and the all-blacks. This is my way of easing out into the world again. This project stopped when I arbitrarily did the red paintings.

JP: I see, yes.

RR: In the red paintings, I was able to encompass semi-red colors, and comic strips, and activity, and imagery. Then what was left was mine.

JP: That's great. But talking about the real world -- you're moving a lot, at that time, in 1951-52. What date is the black painting? It's '51, isn't it? Then there is a whole group of works that we have at the Museum, which are done very closely afterwards. So we don't have a red painting, but we have these two gorgeous objects, if I may say so, the gold-leaf paintings.

RR: Oh, yes. That was one of the by-passes -- from the all-black, all-white, the gold --

JP: -- and then the red?

RR: -- and the silver, and then the red.

JP: The silver? Are there any of the silver left?

RR: I have one.

DW: Is it gold and silver? Gold and silver, both.

JP: Gold and silver. Yes, I see. I see.

RR: I actually made it with Jasper Johns.

JP: And you still own that.

RR: Yes. I think he forgot about it. That's why I've got it.

JP: I see. I see very well what you say. Was this done in --

RR: Oh. I was doing the white version of the gold paintings, and the silver painting was made out of toilet paper.

JP: Yes, I've seen it. You showed me the photograph of that.

RR: Of course, it was no mystery to me, but I wanted to see which ones people would buy first. I was going all the way.

JP: So what happened to the toilet-paper paintings?

RR: Well, some of them -- I think there's a couple left. But other than just a couple, I think they were used as canvases to be painted over.

JP: But these are so gorgeous, the gold-leaf paintings.

RR: I know, I can't blame people --

JP: -- for preferring gold leaf over toilet paper?

RR: Yes.

JP: But there's another group that you were doing at the same time, right? The dirt paintings? Are they not done at the same time? The dirt paintings?

RR: Oh, yes. That was another group, yes.

JP: How do you see the relationships between the dirt paintings and the gold-leaf paintings?

RR: Well, the dirt paintings came because I wanted to do some paintings that would be alive. So they grew.

JP: Yes, yes, yes.

RR: I had rather modest living conditions, then, and I woke up, and the last remaining living painting was dead, just shriveled.

JP: You're kidding. Were you heartbroken, Bob?

RR: I was. I am.

JP: Gosh, Bob. I never heard the story. I knew you had exhibited those paintings, which had -- can you describe them, technically speaking? Which were like dirt on a meshed wire?

RR: They were planted.

JP: They were planted, yes.

RR: So each one was a garden.

JP: And I read that you were going to water them, occasionally.

RR: They each had their own watering device.

JP: And then suddenly they died.

RR: Well, not so suddenly. Slowly and painfully.

JP: Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear. Well, to me -- I was wondering -- This is a very beautiful story. I'm sorry, Bob, to bring back this sad memory, but --

RR: Oh, that's okay.

JP: -- there's something very alive in the gold paintings, as well. Would you agree? And the dirt paintings.

DW: My understanding is that the framing was just the top and bottom, and open on the sides, so they were alive in the movement of the --

RR: They would respond to the wind.

JP: Oh, I see. They must have been very beautiful.

RR: They were.

JP: Did a collector buy them?

RR: Yes.

JP: Amazing. Well, very shortly -- more or less at this time you move to Europe, don't you? Around this time -- '52-'53 --

RR: Yes.

JP: -- and then you stay with Cy for a while, in Italy.

RR: Yes, I do. He spent my share of his scholarship on heirlooms, at the flea market. So I ended up with like $37.00, and I was getting drunk one night in Rome, I was talking to another drunk, and we were discussing our lives. He said, "Why don't you come down to Casablanca, and get local hire?" They were building this airport. I had exactly the amount of money that I could fly to Casablanca, and I said, "This wouldn't

happen again in a thousand years. Go." So I did. I went to the employment office, and they had nine people lined up. I was interviewed -- ill prepared -- and the story that never works is, "I'll take anything." When you say that, you've just lost the only possibility you had.

JP: And that's what you did.

RR: So that's where I was. I went outside. It happened to be lunch hour in Casablanca, and some girl sat next to me. We started talking. She wanted to know what I did. I said, "I'm a painter," and she said, "Where are you from?" I said, "New York," and she said, "You don't know Larry Rivers, do you?"

JP: In Casablanca! On a building site!

RR: Without a job. Nobody.

JP: What was your response, Bob?

RR: I said, "Yes, I love him." Yes. She asked me what I was doing there, and I told her, in detail. She said, "Okay. How's your memory?" And I said, "Right now, it's never been better." She said, "I'm going to do a little research. I'll be right back." So she went in, and she found the laziest job, that paid the most, that was available that day.

JP: And what was that?

RR: So I went back in, to the employment agent, and what I had done was memorize the long references -- some really major pieces of memory. So, out of the nine people, I somehow got back with the same man that I'd just been with -- who had no job that I qualified for -- and he said, "Why didn't you tell me this before? These are wonderful. In fact, I have just the job." I just risked it. I said, "I didn't think that would make any difference," and held my breath. And I got the job. It was the easiest job I ever had in my life. I had to point at a box -- it was called "perpetual inventory," a small box. So I would point to a box, the Frenchman would climb the ladder, bring it down to the

Arab, the Arab would count the parts, then tell the Frenchman. The Frenchman would translate that into English, and the Arab would put the box back. And it paid a fortune.

You know what, though? I sort of followed this history of the airport, and the first flight of the airport, that went out of Casablanca -- the plane fell through the surface, because the Arabs had carried enough of the concrete from the concrete mix home, that -- so it's now my fault.

JP: I was going to ask you if they gave you credit for having helped in the building of the airport, the Casablanca Airport. But that's an amazing story.

RR: Well, I was actually flattered, because when I would go to town people would ask me -- well, somehow, it isn't really too exciting to be a painter, in a foreign situation, so when people would ask me what I did, I'd say, "Oh, I work for the air base, building the airport." So I had respect, money, a job, food --

JP: -- none of which you could have as an artist, at the time.

RR: No, not at all.

JP: But talking about those boxes --

RR: -- and my fake friend, Larry Rivers.

JP: I'm very struck by your description of the job you were carrying out there, the "lazy" job, as you put it -- putting a box in and out, etc. It seems funny, and it may be pure coincidence, that the box that you have here -- it's one of my favorite sculptures, to be honest, in the Museum. It's so beautiful, so simple, and so beautiful. We're looking at the photograph of *Untitled*, 1953, the box, that Rauschenberg did. Can you tell us -- what does this evoke to you today, looking back?

RR: It's just very extreme situations, in and out of the boxes -- the exoticness of it, the simplicity, and the fragility of the silk, and the sturdiness of the wood. I didn't examine it that way.

JP: It's very beautiful. You certainly describe it perfectly, to my mind. Can you recall whether this was made in Italy, or -- in Morocco, you didn't have time to --

RR: New York.

JP: Oh, this was made in New York? This is interesting. So it has nothing to do with the so-called “Scatole” series.

RR: No.

JP: No. Okay.

RR: It was after.

JP: It was after. Okay. So, going back to what you were talking about -- You stayed in Morocco for a while. You go to Tetuan, at some point, with Cy, and with Paul Bowles?

RR: Well, I had to pull out, because I got food poisoning, and couldn't drop it. So I was passing through Tangiers, where Paul Bowles was, and found, at a local drugstore, that shortcake and strawberries and whipped cream was the cure for my food poisoning. So I just hung around there, until I was cured. But I tried everything -- canned food, fresh vegetables only, and I just kept having the sicknesses that go with food poisoning.

JP: It's very unfortunate when that happens anywhere.

RR: Yes. However strange the food is, is about the length of time it lasts.

JP: Then you returned to Italy for a while?

RR: Yes.

JP: And there you have your first European show. Am I right?

RR: Yes. That was the *Scatole Personali*, "scatole" meaning boxes.

JP: Treasures. Is that what it means? You said, yourself, you were out of money. But suddenly you make money --

RR: Yes.

JP: Was this the break almost, in a way, in your professional career as an artist, would you say?

RR: Compared to what it had been, it was healthy. So I had two shows. One in Florence, the first one was in Rome. People actually bought them. When I made enough money to get back to New York, I left.

JP: Had you had enough of Italy at that point?

RR: Not really. I really loved it, too. Still do.

JP: What's interesting is that you come back to New York, and you continue to work a little bit in the same vein as you did in Italy, for a while.

RR: Yes. Well, they grew into the “Combines” -- multiplicity of diverse materials, illogically put together.

JP: Yes. That's a great description, a great description of what a combine is. That's a perfect lead to bring up the first Combine that the Museum acquired, of course.

RR: Leo Castelli owned that one.

JP: Yes. We have a great photo of Leo and you -- several photographs, actually -- that great moment when, here they are, the trustees of MoMA, that time in 1989 when this was given by Leo, in honor of Alfred. Do you recognize all those faces?

RR: Yes, yes.

JP: Can you tell us a little bit of what is happening in that photograph?

RR: It's just the presentation, "for money."

JP: Everyone is very gleeful.

RR: Happy.

JP: Very happy. *Bed* makes everyone very happy. I remember what you said a few weeks ago, at the Met, with Nan and Tad Tomkins, about *Bed*, and I was really very impressed by your description. Would you mind telling us, again, a little bit? This is a perfect Combine, isn't it? One of the early Combines. How did you go about it?

RR: It was very simply put together, because I actually had nothing to paint on. Except it was summertime, it was hot, so I didn't need the quilt. So the quilt was, I thought, abstracted. But it wasn't abstracted enough, so that no matter what I did to it, it kept saying, "I'm a bed." So, finally I gave in and I gave it a pillow."

JP: That's a beautiful story. It also says so much about you being in dialogue with the objects that you work with -- the famous words that you must be tired of hearing by now, that you work “in the gap between art and life.” But, you know, here, life is in the object. There's an amazing sort of liveliness in --

RR: Well, you're not really prepared to lose every battle! This was one that the bed got -- the victory!

JP: It kept screaming back, "I'm a bed, I'm a bed, and this is a quilt." But you don't give up completely, either. You don't give up easily, do you? Because there's plenty of paint around on that bed, and you seem to take your revenge on it, and throw your painterly-ness, telling the bed, "Shut up, you. I'm a painter, and I'm going to tell you what you are. You're a painting." Would you agree with that?

RR: Also, two of the honest ingredients in this painting -- *Bed* -- are red fingernail polish and green toothpaste.

JP: Really? I've never heard of this. Have you, David? Bob, there's plenty of pencil, as well. There's a beautiful drawing going on here, on the pillow, actually. Can I ask you this question? I've heard a rumor that maybe Cy, whom you saw frequently at the time, could have had something to do with this. Is this right?

RR: Not directly.

JP: Not directly.

RR: It's my scribbling, not Cy's.

JP: Okay. That's very good to hear. That sets the record right. It's a fantastic "contract." It's coming back.

RR: I'm so proud they have that. It always looks so good.

JP: It really, really does. Since I tend to be the curator who, as David knows, re-hangs -- well, with John Elderfield -- this room, where your works are shown, in the same room as Cy's works, and as Jasper's works -- is there anything you can think about where it could be improved? Where this major Combine is being shown? Can you think of anything we should be doing, or anything we should say on the label?

RR: I can't think of anything. I think they hang in together very well. They are different enough, and I think it's quite amazing that they were done at the same time; and, also, that they were done at the same time as what else was going on -- with Pollock, and de Kooning, and --

JP: Yes, you're absolutely right. Can you tell us a little bit about that? This was done in 1955, a year before Pollock died, while the AbEx School was going full-steam. How did you --

RR: I think I'll see my lawyer.

JP: As I say this, we hear the sirens screaming outside.

RR: They're coming already, to take me away. [Interruption] So, "Travelodge," which was the "bed" store, agreed that they would rent me twenty-nine more, if I bought one. So that's where Rokeby came from.

JP: I see.

RR: So I bought him, and printed his buttocks.

JP: So Rokeby's not a young thing.

RR: No, I've had him for fifty years, or more.

JP: And it's still going strong. Bob, I don't want to tire you too much, I just want maybe to ask you a couple of things, since we were talking about -- and thank you so much for doing this, by the way. This is just so wonderful. You know, for us, John Elderfield called you to tell you, recently, this great, great, major -- the news of this great, major acquisition of *Rebus*, recently, and it just sings. It's just symphonic in the galleries upstairs, and we just absolutely love having it.

RR: It's hanging in a nice place, too.

JP: Yes, absolutely. So can you tell us a few things about *Rebus*, in the context of the Combines?

RR: There isn't much.

JP: This color of photography doesn't do it justice, obviously, it's such a monumental piece.

RR: [Long pause] I think I'll let it speak for itself.

JP: It speaks for itself. Yes. Well, you know, we have, as David --

RR: It's so good, to improve your hearing.

JP: Well, we have so many incredible objects, and I'm not going to -- we're not going to be able to look at every one of them, but I discussed with David a lot, as David told you, *Factum I* and *Factum II*, which we're very lucky to share.

RR: Well, I got bored with hearing, over and over again, when you do a painting (and, obviously, it isn't true), somebody would always come up with the remark, "There couldn't be another way." Meaning, you were perfect. So I decided I would illustrate how it could be another way, and I didn't copy one from the other, I just did them both at the same time. I just tried to do what I had just done. And that's what those are.

JP: Well, this is wonderful. David has told me that we should not, perhaps, go too long. So maybe we could conclude. I would like to ask Bob maybe a couple of very general questions, about MoMA. In a very broad sense, Bob, if you think back about more than half a century -- 1951 -- Steichen invites you -- has a meeting with you and buys your first two photographs. He's the first person to ever buy two photographs, for $25.00. Today, you are one of the artists who is most represented

in the last thirty to fifty years. What does MoMA mean to you, in this very big sense? How do you see MoMA?

RR: Probably about the same thing it does to you.

JP: How do you see the new addition? The new building?

RR: It's gorgeous. And it's such a generous space. I've heard people say that it dwarfs the smaller paintings. But I think it doesn't; I think it enhances them.

JP: I agree with you.

RR: Good. Yes.

JP: Anything in particular that you think could be improved about the Museum, when you see it, today? What would you think . . .?

RR: Not really. I think it's in great shape.

JP: Well, this is a wonderful vote of confidence, I must say.

RR: It gets my vote. And I hope we win the election.

JP: Well, *Rebus* is very much about the election, isn't it? We discovered that there are a few elements -- this woman running for a race, an election race.

RR: Well, I tried to, always (still do), try to get the high points of any situation in, and that was one. I was living downtown --

DW: It was either Grand Street, or Pearl Street, or what's the third one?

RR: Front Street.

JP: Front Street. That's where you were living, yes.

RR: Yes.

JP: It's a big piece of canvas, two -- three, actually. Three canvases. It must have taken a very long --

RR: If you're going to paint extremely, you need a big piece of canvas.

JP: That's absolutely true. Actually, this canvas is made up of smaller pieces of canvases.

DW: It's three.

JP: Three canvases, yes. Three stretchers.

RR: I strung it out with the classic red, yellow, and blue, and that quickly got lost.

JP: Is that what Jasper was working on? What Jasper was working on at the time? Because he was doing a lot of work on red -- maybe not in those particular -- because he was very into red, yellow, and blue, as well. Jasper? Jasper Johns? Were you in dialogue with him at the time?

RR: No, he was using both language and the physicality of primary colors. He reduced it to this simplicity that, say, the alphabet had, or the flag had.

JP: Yes, I see what you mean.

RR: In fact, he didn't do that with the flag, always. He painted it in its complementary colors, too.

JP: Yes. Yes. Well. So were the two of you really discussing a lot about this kind of thing, in those days?

RR: Yes.

DW: This is really the first Combine that the Modern got. First they got *Junk*, before *Bed*.

JP: Yes, that's correct. Actually, that was acquired quite early on. First, *Landing Jump* was acquired, in '72.

RR: I don't know. Philip Johnson bought that, and later gave it to the Museum.

JP: Philip has been an incredibly generous donor, over the years, of your work and many other artists. It's really extraordinary, what he's given us. This is a great, great piece. I love it. I love the blue "bulb" here, that's quietly sending its little "glitter." Was this any particular reference, the "bulb" in question? How did you come about it? It's a very complex piece, and very difficult to read, in a way, as beautiful and poetic as it is.

RR: It's just one of its secrets.

JP: Yes, it's very secretive, but very poetic, as well. You know, one piece I discovered, which, David can tell you, I'd never seen, is this one that we put up recently (*Franciscan II*, 1972), because the Met borrowed all the Combines, so we suddenly had to -- and gladly, we had all the very important works by you. And this is, I thought, a great, great work, and that is consistent with one of your "Hoarfrost" series, would you say?

DW: No, it precedes that.

JP: It precedes the "Hoarfrost" series.

RR: My mother was down here when I was working on this, and every time she got into the room with it, she had a very strange look on her face. I said, "She's up to something." So when you all bought it, I called her and told her, "You remember that

piece that you wanted to wash?" See, I figured out what it was. She said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, the Museum of Modern Art just bought it," and she said, "Tsk, tsk, tsk. Isn't that something. There's just no accounting for taste."

JP: But she didn't say anything about the fact that it hadn't been washed before you sent it to the Modern.

RR: No. I asked her why she wanted to wash it, and she said, "Do you think I want anybody to know that you sleep in such a dirty bed?" I said, "Mother, in the first place, it's not a 'sheet,' and it was used to cover merchandise of all sorts. The stains are its character." That's when she came out with, "There's just no accounting for taste." I've always thought that The Museum of Modern Art would just love to quote her!

DW: We should put that on the label.

JP: Yes, we should think about the label. Thank you. Bob, you've been absolutely wonderful.

RR: I had a good time.

JP: Good. This is absolutely mutual, and thank you so much for --

RR: -- and thank you for reminding me of Dorothy and Alfred. I think of them often.

JP: Yes, this is such a beautiful -- I'm looking at another one, of you and Aggie [Gund] together. That's the day when *Bed* was acquired, because this is Aggie again, with -- she's wearing the same dress you see in this photograph, between you and Leo. Everybody, again, looks so perfectly happy. It's a great, great moment. This is a beautiful photograph. This is you, embracing Dorothy. You were very close friends?

RR: Oh, yes. Now I'm a new favorite, I think, of Agnes's, because of my interest in the dance world.

JP: Oh, yes, of course.

RR: With Merce, and Tricia. There's plenty of room for interest, there.

JP: But this has never left you. We began talking together about the fact that you started in your life as an artist, as a photographer and as a dancer. This is still with you, today.

RR: Yes.

JP: I must say, I was so taken by, almost a fashion show, the other day, with Merce's dancers, showing your costumes.

DW: Did you get one of those catalogues?

JP: I did, I did. But several of these costumes -- David knows I looked at your archives for many, many weeks -- months, years maybe -- and I'd never seen some of those, like one that is very beautiful, a very complicated one, where they were wearing caps on their heads, and seemed to be suspended by --

DW: -- with like four braids [inaudible] -- from photographs, too.

JP: I'd never seen those. When did you do those, Bob, those great costumes?

RR: Throughout my life!

JP: They were stunning. And, I must say, the dancers were great, as well.

RR: They were.

JP: This was a wonderful evening.

DW: [Inaudible] -- just sent over the contact sheets from making that catalogue, which, apparently, Merce helped to [Inaudible] --

RR: It was a gorgeous catalogue.

JP: The Merce catalogue? Absolutely. Yes.

DW: Just the contacts for the [Inaudible] --

JP: This is great -- so colorful, and full of joy. Look at this -- the way they interact with each other and they almost form one being, those dancers, together. This is going to be a great catalogue, isn't it, etc.

DW: Carolyn[2] was talking about that -- the one with the seams down the back of her legs.

RR: They kept missing dresses, and they wanted something that was as graceful as a dress. So I got as close as I could get to it. This one, I also like. That one, on stage, is just gorgeous.

JP: Which one?

DW: The travelogue.

JP: Oh, the travelogue, yes. Have you done any costumes recently, Bob?

RR: No, but I have another one coming up -- a piece by Morton Feldman, for Merce.

DW: Here's "Travelogue," on stage.

JP: Okay. I'll just give the reference here. In the Guggenheim catalogue it's page 256, Illustrations 2261-23. This is the "Travelogue." I see, indeed, yes, absolutely. This is

[2] Carolyn Brown, choreographer and a founding member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation

what -- One of the dancers was wearing it the other night. Gorgeous. Yes. Well, thank you. Thank you, David. If you want, Bob, I'll send you a copy of this photograph.

RR: Yes. Please.

JP: Well, thank you, again. I think we're done.

END INTERVIEW