

the gallery today, and we're talking more about the state of the art world in general, and, it's like Bob opened up the door to the candy store. And now we can't figure out, everything tastes good. We can't figure it all out. What's next? What is it?

It's hard to know what's next.

Bob changed the way we looked at art. And we're right here in the front row. We know what happened in the last 50 years. And he absolutely changed the way we perceive art and what is possible. We got to be a part of something pretty big. Just by witnessing it.

And part of the beauty of it was, it was often the materials or the images or the little things that you and I might walk by and never even see.



COURTESY PHOTO

Robert Rauschenberg's work: from the left, *Earth Day* (1970), *Signs* (1970), and *Mono-gram* (1955-59).

I remember one of his staff said to me, that maybe in the last year, they were given cameras. And the instruction Bob gave was: "Take lots of photos, and if you think it's interesting, don't take it." He just wanted the little stuff.

MARY LYNN KOTZ
art historian, Rauschenberg biographer
author of "Rauschenberg: Art and Life"

I'm a contributing editor to *ARTnews*, and I was doing an article on Rauschenberg about the "1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong" piece, which was the biggest piece in the world. At that time, he lived very modestly in a little beach house, and had a most unpretentious studio behind it. His house now is quite grand. But this was 1980, and I was very moved by the fact that he was so accessible, so unpretentious.

The interview began at about 10:30 in the evening because he had Roy Lichtenstein and his wife Dorothy for dinner, his New York art buddy. So they had been over for dinner, which of course he cooked, in his tiny little kitchen -- and he's an extraordinary gourmet chef. They had gone home, and he began his interview with me. It was absolutely fascinating.

I had just a very deep empathetic understanding with his background, his odyssey of a creative person who comes from a repressive society, but does not lose the positive values of a strict biblical background.

At 2:30, I asked him, "Where do you go when you want to be alone?" And he said, "Well, I have a fish house. I go there when I want to be alone."

So...we went over there. It was the most marvelous experience. Because he said, "I like to just come out here and look out at the stars. And wonder what it's like out there."

I said, "Where do you think it comes from, this creativity you have, this unquenchable creativity?"

And he said, "When I go into the studio, I just go belly-down, like the monks used to

do, to rid themselves of worldly thoughts." In other words, they would go and prostrate themselves before the altar.

He said the same thing that Faulkner said when asked the same question: "I just sit down, and it just comes, flows through me from somewhere else." He said, "I don't know where it comes from." And he looked at the stars and said, "Maybe from out there."

To me, that was the beginning of the story. I went [to the Edison College gallery and saw his exhibit.] It was where he always tried out these pieces. He never had a space big enough so that he could see them all together. Here he is making the biggest painting in the world! I sat for the whole day in the middle of the room at Edison College.

They allowed him to have his shows there first, before anything, so he could see how the pieces looked up on the wall, because he makes them on a table.

I called it "The State of the Universe Message," because he was finding beauty in everything from the common to the cosmos.

There



was an old wicker chair, kind of smashed up, that looked a bit like he had it across a map of Europe, going north, and it looked like a dog sled. I...thought then, he has probably the most egalitarian aesthetic that I had ever seen.

Whenever he started something new, the critics just didn't care for it at all. However, the younger artists got it. They saw it, they got it! And they went on to tweak his ideas and translate them into their own style, their own mediums. But he opened the doors.

His use of the language was stunning, absolutely stunning. He was exquisite. Some of his titles are puns in three levels. But all of his images meant something to him. When he finished it, it was a visual puzzle. Sometimes reading the imagery is like reading an encyclopedia with the alphabet scrambled, with the imagery that was in it.

There's an adjective: Rauschenbergian. You see it over and over and over again. He's made his imprint on art, on everything, on the aesthetic of the entire world.

And he made art all the time. He had to. He had to.

LAWRENCE VOYTEK
artist, fabricator for Bob Rauschenberg

In some ways, Bob's my man. I like talking about Bob. I started working for him in '82, 26 years ago. A lot of people who spend time with Bob say it's the most memorable thing. Since '82, I've been going out there 340 days a year, for 26 years.

Bob is an extremely mysterious shaman. John Cage at one point said he was really upset with Bob, because he tried to be Zen his whole life long, and Bob was just Zen. There

was something about Bob, that he was there at all times, in all senses. It was like a grand celebration of being here.

I just wanted to help him do whatever he wanted to do. In some ways, it was a glorious gift, thinking that this man is more important than me, and solving his problems is more important than solving my problems. Just loving somebody more than yourself, that's a great gift.

I have memories of being in the old studio. He would roll out this white linen canvas, and we had the best pigment paint, Golden Acrylic. To be under the bright studio lights, there was this sense that Bob was in charge of this creation of a new world. And to be a witness to this man and people working, of doing what they did to the best of their ability, it was like a great performance of a musician or a great chef; everything was coming together. And then to come in the next morning and see it on the table, and try to fathom: "How did this happen?"

I've assisted in setting up shows around the world, retrospectives, different museums. We bring these frozen moments in space out of their crates. To see them, it's like a religious experience, reflecting back, like a mirror, seeing that frozen time coming back. It's like a re-experiencing of a time, in life: I was on this planet, and this is what was happening, and I existed during it.

He wanted all senses firing at all times. And so the TV set was blaring, the food was being cooked, the music was being played, and all the textures available were being touched. He wanted to absorb everything that he could, and he was this child, amazed in the wonderment of it all.



And his love of everything was this intoxicating experience to be around, just love of all things. He didn't want to miss anything. I think he often said that he didn't want to die, because he was afraid he might miss something.

I remember one special moment when we were in his old beach house. At the end of the day, I had a beer, Bob had a Jack. He called me over and said, "Look at this!" In the window was a large spider, and a wasp got stuck in the web. The spider was big, the wasp was big, and we were standing side-by-side, watching this big battle go on. We didn't even breathe, we watched, as time went on.

The spider just tied the puppy up and wrapped him really well. I don't think the spider bit it or put any poison in it, so the strong insect body was fighting inside a really intense cage.

When we photographed things, he didn't want an Ansel Adams kind of set-up; this is a beautiful photograph. He wanted people just to witness what was out there. He would pick things that had some sort of life of its own which was not rewarded by being a really fancy thing, but just happened to be a beautiful time in the way things are. It could be a garbage bag blowing across a parking lot, a septic tank pumping out stuff.

A lot of people who worked for Bob traveled to really wild places. But when you got your film developed, the film store would say, "Well, why didn't you take pictures of the monuments?" You'd be shooting the trash in the alley and the dirty laundry, the strange moments. And people that worked for Bob

just knew what a Rauschenbergian moment would be like.

And there was no better feeling than Bob liking something that you saw and using it in his artwork. Then when you see these paintings hanging on the wall, wherever they traveled, it's like your life, your diary of a moment of your life is hanging right in front of you. And it was cool, because there'd be five or six different people in that same painting, and all of those people would have that same moment, whenever they ran into that piece, wherever it would go.

Viewers would make the connection with their own life.

That's one of the interesting things about Bob's art: it lets you come into it and make your own world, your own feeling and your own connection, some sort of nerve that is close to a universal that affects people.

It's funny, because he would always like to find things that sometimes he would say were like orphans, and he still loved them. It's sort of like being able to love everyone. He always felt sorry for objects that were abandoned, the ones he picked up and used. A lot of the combines and the found object stuff, things that people have abandoned, he thought were beautiful. They weren't lovely, they weren't accepted. And he saw the beauty in them.

After I met Bob, I just knew what I wanted to do. And I never questioned what I was doing. It's not going to be easy to know what to do now.

I feel really blessed I had the opportunity to have helped the guy. And I'm really going to miss the nights when I had something really tough to try to figure out. I would try to sleep, and I would think about: how am I going to do this? And then finally getting everything done, and getting it to the show on time. Those were the best of times.

I always knew that Bob was a true love of mine. I loved his work before I met him, and I wouldn't leave him after I met him.

Bob working was always this celebration of everything. I don't think anybody else there wanted anything else. Nobody wanted to leave, everyone wanted to help. I like to call Bob the shaman of the century. It just seems like he knew why we were here, and he knew what to do.

Artists are often symbols of their times, and Bob has always seemed to be at the epicenter of what this wet dirt ball in space was doing.

MARY VOYTEK
artist, Assistant Professor of Art, Florida Gulf Coast University

We spent 26 years with Bob. Every move we made, our first and foremost thought was Bob. A family vacation or going out to Captiva: What's Bob doing and does it fit into the schedule?

He was foremost. That's so strange now, not being able to have that anchor, not having the nucleus of Bob.

Even after 26 years, every time I spent time with him, he was so creative and unique in his perspective. I would learn something every single time. I just never met anyone else like him.

And he was brilliant right up to the end. Even though the outside package looked like it was hurt and damaged in some way, the inside was still sharp and beautiful.

He really was a wonderful man. I don't know quite what we're going to do without him. My kids are different people because of Bob. His spirit will go forth in them, and in me, and I continue to remember that. I really want to be true to him and to what he taught me.

I know he's been quoted about operating in the gap between life and art. ["Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"] I used to describe that, when people wonder what that is: when you're in-between two channels on the radio, and there's this strange static energy that is that moment...that's where he operated. ■