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The relationship between repetition and originality : selected paintings of Robert Hodgins

Cohen, Robyn Yael

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the time I have summed you up, you have already made more work which then has laid waste to much of the summing up.

RGH: First, I must tell you, this exhibition has shown me something about my work: I'd love to be able to go back to some of my old work... All I can talk about when I talk about a work is: conscious intention, conscious experience and generalization; well you know if you give a history it's like saying, "well in 1066 England was invaded and in 1250 invaded France."

There is an awful amount of space inbetween - what I am conscious of when I live with this painting which I have now finished - which is now over for me - now part of my past - is how different it is; even as a spectator myself (let alone you or anybody else), when looking at works ... [I wonder] how it got to be there.

You know I have talked with you a lot about subject and parody and history (personal and general) etc. etc. etc. What I am conscious of in this exhibition , or **through** this exhibition or **because** of this exhibition, is that all those excuses for the act of making a painting - the act of making a painting is terribly exciting, terribly vital, terribly ... like breathing oxygen. Now, to me, you can start a painting (and because I have very long and wide experience, I have read a lot and suffered a lot and haven't suffered a lot; all the kind of things one does up to the age of seventy); the mere result is that I have about forty times more starting-off points than say the average student who has not read as much, lived as much. It doesn't mean that it's necessarily better [that RGH has the experience] it is just different. It is much more difficult for you or me to pin down what a work is actually about; essentially, 'essentially' ... is a word about making it - certain ideas, certain subjects, certain impulses, do launch one into this business of making work but it can be very various.

Now, at the moment I am living with a family, for the first time in about fifty five years, I suppose. I am happily living with a family: wife, husband and two small children, ... intimately - I am not just living on their premises I am living with them. Now, the interesting thing about that is, it has brought out a whole slew of family pictures: Married Love here [RGH points to the picture], the Family Portrait. These [paintings] had nothing to do with that directly [moving in with the family] - nothing to do with any of those people - but it suddenly stimulated me into using certain possibilities about family life as a source of making painting. It is not that I am living with them, or that is it about that family or indeed about any

specific family but suddenly, somewhere out of the blue, the ideas of families and closeness and contiguity.

This has set up a series of **opportunities** to make a painting, which is not the same thing as subject matter. I am really convinced that we all attach a great deal too much value to subject matter - really ... subject matter launches a guy into a painting - once he is there; what happens next is sometimes relevant to the subject matter, but very often, ninety percent of it is really besides that point; except that point for **that** artist is the starting point. Now this is important in South Africa because there is a great deal of quite loose talk: "people must paint for the struggle" -

RYC: "meaning-ful painting"

RGH: ... (so it goes) people must paint ideologically correct painting, people must paint paintings which are about South Africa. If you are **not** stimulated into art by those things, you are not going to do it; you are just going to make false pictures.

I also feel very strongly that students are often bullied as much by themselves as by their tutors, as getting stuck to subject matter. The tutor is forgetting that it is no use looking at subject matter and discussing that, you have to discuss what happens when the student with **that** subject matter in his head sets it to make something called a painting or a work of art. I have never been as conscious of this before, as I am over this exhibition, just looking at these paintings and remembering the **general** reason for painting; just as I remembered the general reason I painted any of the paintings we discussed in relation to parody or to, Sarialism or any of those things.

I realise now that what I was talking about is the beginning of the journey. Now, as you know yourself, when you are painting at full stretch so many things are happening, so many adjustments are being made - it's balancing, it's adding; it's thinking "yes, that can be added, no that can't, keep that for later ..."

All those wonderful things and they go through your head at electronic speed; you're making selections or abandoning ideas, changing your original idea all of the time and it's that stretch of time before you say, "enough - it's finished - it's over" ... or ... "I am going to paint an assassin, I am going to paint 'Family Life'... or in one case that Mindless Youth.

He [Mindless Youth] started off because very simply, on a Saturday morning I went off to buy **white** acrylic paint. By the time on Saturday afternoon I came to put

it on the canvas it was **green** acrylic paint - I had got the wrong paint. And then I either had to wait till Monday or to use it (that green acrylic paint was exactly the colour the old Renaissance boys used for their underpainting of flesh.) So, there I had this big green canvas and the first thing it suggested to me was flesh. So, he [Mindless Youth] grew out of a pure accident but an accident plus a lot of history - the idea of flesh. Gradually, he turned into one of these South African, bully boy, mindless rugby playing, beer swilling chaps; but he could have equally turned into a beautiful girl.

RYC: But, you **chose** to make him that ...

RGH: Well it drifted in that kind of way ... things like that, the fact that he is holding that landscape ... he is almost screwing the landscape up in his left hand, is part of his brutality.

Originally, I just thought, "well, this is a terre verde square, I must put some flesh into this because I want to see, how the old boys [Renaissance guys] used to start off with terre verde and paint flesh over it." He [Mindless Youth] gradually turned into that bully boy - when I painted the whites of his eyes, I suddenly realised they're exactly the same colour as the sky so therefore his head is actually a hollow - you're looking right through his eye ... so all these things got built in; but at no stage did I particularly, consciously say, "well, I'll make that or this ... it grew organically from a whole lot of things I've thought about, a whole lot of things I have done - but its initial 'thing' was pure accident ..."

RYC: Yes, but at some point you decided, "yes, I am going to keep that, I like that and I am going to use it."

RGH: Okay, at some point I said, "this is fruitful; all kinds of things are happening which are interesting, all things and ideas are being suggested; discarded or incorporated." So the whole thing started building and you get that 'pace' thing - you know, once a painting gets a kind of identity and you go along with it, it is very fast and very and rapid and it just goes ...

RYC: It almost takes over - has its own persona...?

RGH: It's a bit like (I think I have used this analogy before) - when you watch guys surfing - they bob up and down in the waves, they bob up and down in the waves, they bob up and down in the waves. Sometimes when one paints a painting for a very long time, bobbing up and down a wave and then suddenly it begins to get its

identity, it begins to be very rich, to throw ideas at you; it begins to suggest possibilities, some of which you use and some of which you don't. It's exactly like surfing, you don't stop and think, "I am going to lean over to the right, or to the left or you're going too fast" - it's practice and experience ....

RYC: Yes, but ... even in surfing in that split second you have to decide whether you want that wave or not but then somebody else can come and push you out the way or you can fall over ... but there are decisions which are made -

RGH: Yes, but they're almost subconscious which you don't almost know you're making ... you have to labour [in painting], it's not as mindless entirely [like surfing] in that you do say, "that shouldn't be lemon yellow, it should be chrome yellow, it should be warmer yellow." You do make that kind of decision - why you make that kind of decision is ... well, what one is communicating to the public is, I think an immense richness of experience, great subtlety, balancing, decisions; all those things. And if it comes off, then they [the public] will pick out of all of that what they want but there is something left over for the next viewer even for the next generation, if you are lucky. That's the inclination I have why certain great works of art just go on and on - so much is packed into them - more than the artist consciously knew -

RYC: Or could conceive -

RGH: ... more than he could **consciously** conceive because there is a limit to the human mind ... when Michael Godby discovers X clue to Y fragment of Michelangelo, I am bloody sure that Michelangelo or Masaccio didn't think of that, but I don't think Michael is wrong. What I am saying is that Michelangelo and Masaccio didn't say, "I will do that" or "echo that limb with that piece of arch" - but he [they] did it because he was working very hard with his whole persona ... very anxious to use everything. He had to use his total persona which means that he doesn't rule out [anything].

There are people [today] who say if I want to paint a pretty girl, I am not going to paint a pretty girl because it's wrong for the political climate. I think that's bullshit. If you want to paint a pretty girl and it will make you paint a good painting, go ahead. It will turn into a good painting - you don't have to worry but you mustn't rule out anything ... it's so easy to make little neat lines in your personality to what you can and can't do - those respectable things you don't want to do. That's not what the act of painting is

about. The act of painting is a very full one. It's immensely subliminal - all things are happening at the same time, often connected to childhood - why you like the colour pink ...

RYC Well, I think more and more, that there are certain painters or artists of any kind who do place importance in the specifics of their particular environment... For example, Solzhenitsyn was criticized [negatively] because it was said that the minute he came out of Russia he didn't write anything very good again because his work was rooted within that whole [Russian] experience; once that frame of reference was gone, he could not work anymore ... I think that if you draw very specifically from an environment and that environment changes, your influences change, maybe it just throws your painting totally ...

RGH: Ja, but surely if you continue my argument then that change of environment is something else to be put into painting.

RYC: It is for me and you but other people (or rather certain kinds of artists) don't see it that way.

RGH: At what point, did Solzhenitsyn say, "well now I am out of Russia I can't work" instead of saying, "now I am out of Russia, I am slightly a new person, I must write out of that new person." And, that's how I think you make art.

RYC: But, on the other hand is it fair to demand that artists, of any kind continuing making art all their lives? ... Maybe that was it, he had enough!

RGH: Now, we're hovering on a very interesting thing ... painters and sculptors do continue ... Picasso was painting the night before he had his heart attack at ninety one. There is an article by Kenneth Clark in one of his last essays ... and he points out that writers generally fold around sixty. Very few writers write anything notable after sixty (they can live till they're eighty but that's not the point), the main body of their work is between twenty five and sixty, whereas he points out most visual artists simply go on forever till they stop. The only one I know of who didn't paint right up to his death was Piero [della Francesca] but that was because he was blind and couldn't see and had to be led around by a little boy. No doubt he would have [continued painting] if he would have had his sight. Titian we know was either eighty nine or ninety nine when he died, and he was still painting.

I think with writing, it's in a way always more laboured

and artificial than say painting. I just wonder about this in sculpture and architecture. But painting if you get it right (and this is what most people struggle to do), it comes very fluidly and this is the big danger -

RYC: It can become too easy.

RGH: Right, but the point is, on the other hand if you get it right it does mean ... well, the immediacy of what you are doing can flow into what you are doing very quickly. Whereas actually sitting at a typewriter, pushing a pen, choosing words and wondering what the meaning of words is going to mean to somebody else is a much more laboured thing ... So perhaps in the act of writing, there is that sense of remove ... in painting it is more direct; the act of making the work of art actually educates you for more art.

The extraordinary thing about painting is that every painting you have done makes you feel you want to do the next one and makes you know something about where you are going to start the next one (not where you will finish but where you will start with it.) So you are always driven, because you have been making a painting [in order] to make another one. I don't know if that's true in writing...

Look, there are a couple of paintings here, (which I am not ashamed of) which literally took twenty minutes. This was the result of having done a couple of my ceramics and they went very quickly. (Now of course the point about ceramics is it is a very limited thing - you can't get certain colours - you've got lots of parameters.) I thought, "why do I sit and struggle with a painting for three months?"

I took three small canvasses and said, "these are going to be finished within a limit of a half an hour and I have got to finish them. There is no use laying the ground work, I have got to finish them." Well, the moment I finished them I wanted to do serious ones of those subjects, of those paintings ... So even in that short time I educated myself to some small degree towards my next paintings. I don't know if you write a book whether you can do that.

RYC: Just on that point. There was that famous story about Picasso (although I have never been able to find the source myself). Somebody came along to Picasso's studio and asked him if he would do two drawings for him. Picasso said "sure, wait here." And Picasso came back twenty minutes later with the two drawings. And the man said, "very nice, how much do I owe you" and Picasso said, "it will be two million dollars for the two of them. I'll just sign them quickly." The man paid and

then the man's friend who had accompanied him said, "are you mad it took him twenty minutes and for that you are paying him so much m[illegible]y." And then Picasso said, "hang on my friend I have been practicing and working for sixty years to make these two drawings, without all that hard work these drawings wouldn't have happened."

That's a very important point, even though you timed yourself and set that limit ... all those ideas were floating around for a long time before...

RGH: Oh yes, if I had done those twenty minute drawings when I was a student I would have made a total mess up.

RYC: You may, you may not have ... The thing is, you have often spoken about what you don't see on the canvas - what you have taken away: the ghosts, traces [of the painting], the decision to take stuff out and how that bears on an image. In a similar way when you make a painting like that [the quick twenty minute paintings], it is what it is because of what you had done **before** ...

RGH: I am more interested in this discussion and the fact that it's not just a flourish of the **past** it also has an element of the **future**. It's not as if one practiced a step like a tap dancer - even in those twenty minute paintings there is a sense of adding to the future ...

Painting and drawing are (out of all the visual arts) so fluid and (they) can react so quickly to your thinking - you can twitch a brush to convey a thought in seconds flat. This is possibly why there is this enormous continuous curve, particularly when you're painting full-time... There is this immense continual continuity.

There is really no such thing as 'paintings' There are a series of instants on a painting stream. You know the way I paint - I have (in my studio), twenty, thirty, forty paintings, some barely briefly sketched in, some pretty near completion. But they can be 'bounced' into at any time, any of them. I can bounce from one picture to another. Each painting is at the same time feeding into all the other paintings ... (Because) other people work differently ... they look at an exhibition and think, "well that's a January painting, that's a February painting ..." But it's nonsense I may have started in January and finished the day before the exhibition.

RYC: I also work like that and I always feel that I am walking on a tight-rope.

RGH: Yes, but that is the exciting part, don't you think?

RYC: It's very organic because you don't usually know what is going to happen next ...

RGH: I don't want to know. One does want to be surprised by ones own work. (I think that is very important) ... If I think now that in ten years from now I'll be painting like I am now - well, it fills me with an enormous sense of boredom! It would mean that I had done nothing in those ten years ... like so many South African painters one does know of, especially over fifty, who just produce the same painting after they were forty because it sold. That would bore the hell out of me ... unless you 'feed' the vitality, the act of painting into the painting, it will just get more and more boring.

RYC: And yet there are a lot of shifts [in this exhibition], differences, new themes (well 'themes' is a bad word) and yet you've also got a lot of your 'old friends'.

RGH: Everyone recogni[illegible] I don't, you know. That's the interest[illegible] always think I have no style and yet they [illegible] a Hodgins a mile off which is odd to me.

RYC: In the ceramic plate, Man [illegible] empty Room there is an an empty chair and a figure. It immediately reminded me of that small painting of a cell you did...

RGH: Yes, I know the painting.

RYC: You may say that you were not conscious of that at the time, but to me the knowledge of the one [The Cell] informed my experience of the other [the ceramic plate - Man alone in an empty Room] straight away *15*.

RGH: That happened to me too but there is an addition to it which is so interesting. To draw those one, two walls [of the 'cell' in the ceramic plate]; the two perspective lines and the base line (which is) ... five lines is the easiest way of making a space. It's the simplest way of making an empty space which relates to that little 'cell' painting.

The interesting is that one set of lines on the right hand side (if you look at it), the lines are straight; the lines are straight - ordinary perspective. On the other side those lines are curved, following out the shape of that bowl ... both [lines] are straight forward space but one is theoretical space and one is space

series of things. One loves it that one gets problems in paintings. It's absolutely marvellous. What could be better? Whereas if you ever got to a situation in a painting where you said, "right, that's exactly what I am going to do - stop, stop, stop ..." Whereas you actually asking, "How am I going to get this right? I can't get this right ... now I am going to get this area right. What's it doing?" ... Are you going to put colour in it? Are you going to sub-divide it? Are you going to put tone in it, are you going to match it to whatever is in front of it? ... All those things are lovely.

RYC: And with Stoning?

RGH: With Stoning, I think I have solved that simple one really by having on the right hand side, two very peculiar forms hanging. You are not sure whether they're on a wall or they are hanging in space. I don't know what they mean ...

I have a feeling that for the next period I am going to take a canvas ... (I have a curious feeling) and sit in one of those absolute featureless pieces of Karoo, in which all you get is a stretch of ground and the sky, and just say, "well, what can we do with this?"... Just because it is hard and it is a wonderful problem between me and that landscape and that canvas. What does one do with Mont Saint Victoirre which you sit and look at every day? So you sit down like Cezanne and you paint the bloody thing because it's hard, because it's difficult.

RYC: And, for you it would be different to anything you've done before - a challenge... One of the things I really used to like at Wits, as an undergraduate, when was 'forced' to do these awful revolting still-lives, or studio set-ups. Everybody would moan and groan and say, "No, we don't want to do that: Robyn is busy with her pram, so and so is busy with their mountain and so and so with their structure..."

RGH: " - and now we've got to go and do shoes."

RYC: Yes, something like that. I remember, I would sit down and look at it and think, "well, what do all these things in this space say to me; in this horrible little artificial set-up. What can I do with that." I made some very interesting works from those set-ups because I was 'forced' to sit down and contemplate that 'given' situation. That is something I would also like to talk about: freedom and choice. Sometimes, we have so many ideas. You talk about your experiences - war-time experiences and so much more ...

finger at the Empire State building, amongst other images. He [Rauschenberg] puts it all together in a way that it interests you as a spectator - it engages you. It doesn't just come across as things which have pulled out of a hat. You also said that all those things [in the painting] are the man [Rauschenberg] and in the man's mind. You said, they [all these images] are part of his personality, part of what he thinks. In a way they are a portrait of him [what he is and thinks]. Okay, bear that in mind.

The second thing is titles. You said (in fact you've said this often) how the minute a painting becomes a painting it has its own persona. The same way as you say to someone, "please pass the spoon", not, "please pass me that thing that one stirs tea with", so a painting also has its own particular identity. Now if you take that idea of the painting having its own persona together with what you said about Rauschenberg [paintings as portraits of the artists], maybe those ideas connect.

Each image you make has its own persona. All these images added up, inhabit a space that is Robert Hoggins and the spectator connects or puts them together ... But it isn't (at least for me) an easy connection... It's never like those 'connect the dots up' pictures where you proceed systematically from one point to another, (from one to twenty five) ... with your work everything criss-crosses... tremendous continuity ... Do you see this [connection] as a bad thing? - I don't ...

RGH: No, I don't see it as a bad thing, not at all. It is just the way my mind works when I am making certain kinds of paintings, not all (paintings). As a side issue, you have seen quite a lot of paintings where I have had loose paintings [various canvasses]... and fiddled them around until they made some kind of sense.

RYC: Like that long green painting *17*: you obviously juggled and cut it up and now on this exhibition it's a different/new work [<u>Five characters in search of a painter</u>], on this exhibition. Is that correct?

RGH: Ja, I just couldn't stand it. Now I put it together so that the four of those heads almost spin with the one 'plopped' on top. Now it's an entirely new painting to me although the only thing I've done [besides juggling the individual canvas components around] is re-painted the background green ... It was a slightly different green, although not very much. The [position of those four things] has made a new painting.

But, going back to your point, I don't think it's a bad thing [that people make connections] because at every

which is following the curve of that bowl. Even in the act of drawing those few simple lines so a whole lot is added to the 'old cell' drawing. That interests me.

In a kind of way, the line space of that painting called Family, Radio & T.V. is a kind of a perversion of that linear space structure that you find in the little The Cell.

RYC: While we're talking about this painting [Family, Radio & T.V., and since we're talking about 'old' and 'new' and making more images, the colours in this painting remind me, I think it was the central panel of The Triple Gates of Hell [1985-86, Images, C31] (where there is that mirror area and dressing table) which reminded me very much of early Miro' [c.1925]. So I am saying that elements in "Family Radio" and in "Gates" remind of Miro and yet both these paintings are very different...

RGH: Yes - great whites and blacks - Do you see Kitaj in it?

RYC: Possibly. Why, was Kitaj a conscious thing on your part?

RGH: Well, I have always admired him... I wanted these three people in a space but floating ... that's where the early Kitaj comes in, I suppose, like the early Kitaj The Ohio Gang [1964, Oil and crayon on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York], where the people are in a space but they are floating in a space in some strange way. I think, possibly I wanted that [that sense of floating] ...

I drew them [Family, Radio & T.V.] vaguely. I had no plans for the people but what I did have plans for is: I wanted to put down two strong colours which were tonally strong (red and black in the corner); and then two colours which were strong but not tonally strong (the green and red) - I wanted those two areas beating against each other - eventually those three figures began to fall and then suddenly I thought, "well, what are they all looking at, in that mad kind of way..." One does watch an awful lot of T.V. and you look around at everybody and we're all gazing at this mad kind of space and suddenly I realized they [in the painting Family, Radio & T.V.] were all watching T.V.

The title: Family, Radio & T.V. [RGH sings it in a whiny voice] - Do you remember it? ... It [the jingle] used to drive one crazy - then one could see the old fat lady and those awful pantoffels [slippers] and the cat who is looking at you while they're all watching television. The little boy is kind of - Ivor [Powell] said he is

kind of a gorilla or monkey. My feeling, is he's a little boy who somehow got into a business suit so he is already doomed to be a rather ordinary businessman. Now all those things crept in but of course the colour crept in ... an enormous range from raw burnt sienna to crimson ... strange painting.

RTC: Lets go back, for a while to 'cultural specifics' - that interests me a great deal - as you say a lot of people come in for a lot of flak for not painting the 'angst', for not doing this or that ... I mean that painting [Family, Radio & T.V.] could be a family any where in the world, watching T.V.

RGH: Ja, it's actually even more American than South African.

RTC: That kind of insulated, boring person staring at the box, it could be anywhere. It happens to come from your own environment, is pertinent but at the end of the day you've got a painting.

RGH: That, I would hope. Look, I think that if the South African situation -it's politics, socialism, materialism - actually make you go into the act of painting that's fine, but it is still not what the act of painting is about and is not what the act of making art is about. Art is ambiguous, rich, varied, suggestive, as well as specific. Once the specifics have faded, once no one watches T.V., we all have something else to do; this painting I hope will still last. It is about more things than watching T.V. - a gelling together of family - melting into each other.

RTC: It [Family, Radio & T.V.] is reminiscent of the way the figures huddle together in the Laocoon *16* sculptural group - this mass of flesh.

RGH: Yes, they're [Family, Radio & T.V.] one lump of flesh ... And also the ambiguities - They're all one lump and yet look at them: her pantoffels and his shoes... [they all have distinct features.]

RTC: I keep on going back in my mind to the use of cultural specifics ... I still think that there are different kinds of artists - those that can only operate with their specific frame of reference, for whatever reason.

RGH: Yes, but you see politics is a frame of reference, if you are passionate about it. I just don't feel that you can make art out of an ideology (which is very different from a belief) ...

Obviously, if you go through a Holocaust it is going to effect the way you react forever. It doesn't necessarily mean you are going to make better art (unless you can find a way to turn it into art). It is that magic that covers everyone from cool old Seurat to mad repulsive "let's get going" van Gogh. It doesn't matter too much where it comes from ... it's a kind of humility almost ... what I know and what I believe is not all that there is. I sense and understand and experience a whole lot of things and there are a whole lot of things I don't understand but they must go in as well.

There [is] the richness of being a human being - a member of an extraordinary species on this planet. But, you pump it in; you let it in. You don't bar things! That painting of Seurat in the National Gallery is a terribly moving painting - you can see how the machinery works, you can see how the colour works - - - the spacing of those proletariat boys on that summer afternoon in that heat ... is very moving. It transcends but it adds to Seurat saying, "well you know the cool colours must do this, and the lines and the diagonals must do that." But there he manages to pump so much extra and it's a very moving picture.

RYC: And maybe he wasn't aware of how much he was pumping -

RGH: I don't think he was ... But you see if you are making art you don't have to be **aware** of everything.

RYC: You just have to be tuned into it which is a very different thing.

RGH: 'Tuned into it' is a very nice phrase - but the point is, it is quite different from the moment you start. Another point about this tuned in thing - well now I object to that tuned in thing because tuning in does imply you are deciding which part of the radio band you are going to get;

RYC: Yes, but often one just stands there [at the radio], with nothing in particular in mind, fiddling with buttons and something comes up.

RGH: What I am groping for is the thought that you must be careful that you don't tune in to only those parts which either you feel are respectful or desirable - somehow even when you are painting from the top of your head (or from your stomach or wherever), you have got to be aware of other areas. I think this is a trick - it takes you a long time to perform. It's almost impossible for younger students to pursue ... they've got an enormous amount [of images] ... they mustn't dismiss

anything. ... The academic discipline largely consists of 'dismissing'.

The awful thing about being a painter (or the intoxicating thing) is, there is **nothing** you should dismiss. You must be prepared to look at your sadisms, your hates, your sentimentalities, and say; "can I use them?" ... Now obviously it makes it very difficult to write an essay like that or to study history of art or theology or whatever else and it makes it very difficult in the University for people to understand how to paint.

It takes you a long time to learn the trick of saying, "all the doors are open, now what am I hearing, what am I looking at, what am I smelling?" - not , "I shut that door, I don't want to hear that" - you don't do that!. You let it create the moment when you want to paint. I think that's why in a certain sense one is always surprised, in the long run, with what you are seeing when you are finished a painting.

RYC: This brings me back to the 'problem' I have had: in a thesis one has to find some kind of framework, no matter how loose ... the point is how does one write about all this? [what RGH was saying above] ... you have to talk about the 'unseen', the silence.

RGH: Yes, but not only that; why does one choose to flick a piece of paint down - you don't actually say, "it needs a touch of colour there, now I have everything from Cadmium Red to Scarlet Lake; which of those reds am I going to use?"

RYC: Ja, and you don't say, "which brush am I going to use and shall I flick my wrist here? ..."

RGH: But you know it's right and if it's not you wipe it off. The more you paint, you pick up, say, a dollop of Windsor Red and you put it down and it's 'right'. It's right partly because you've got the right [brush] size as well as the right colour but you don't have time to register the decisions - you **make** them ... And then the next thing comes up - how you **write** about that, I don't know.

RYC: Yes, but I'll say it again here ... I think that there are different painters. I have been in a situation where someone has walked into my studio and said to me, "how did you get that effect?" or "how did you get that colour?" or "how did you (looking at your painting Robert A Sunday Stroll) get that scumbled line?"... And I've said, "well I actually don't know" -

RGH: - or don't remember.

RYC: Or don't remember.

RGH: You do know but you don't remember.

RYC: And they have said, "well could you do it again?" And I have said, "yes I probably could, ..."

RGH: Don't you find it is the most difficult thing when someone says "do it again"; you can't necessarily.

RYC: You probably could get it to look like that, because technically you can use paint and you know what it does and you can get it together - ... and they have said, "I can't get things like that."

You look at some people's paintings and they are very ordered as if they thought to themselves: "yes, I am going to do a painting of someone going for a stroll and there is going to be a butterfly above them, and there is going to be a tree". And they've gone home and done that and it's been boring ... very ordered. If you say, "I want you to do another one", they could do another one without even looking....

RGH: I used to say to students that you must understand that you cannot write about painting - what happens in a painting - .. it is impossible to talk about everything that is is there and everything that you have felt about it. If you did, there would be nothing left to add. Ruskin (and God knows how many people) tried to talk about Michelangelo. They're still yakking on about it. If you read Ruskin, you wouldn't think you're looking at the same painting but that is what he saw ... Therefore, I think when you do come to write about painting, you can say, 'this is how it started off, this is the intention. This is how it relates to?important issues". (In your case: i.e. "the issues I am discussing in my thesis"). But of course it is not all that is there. Certain things which are there modify what seems to be a very cut and dried result ...

Supposing I am writing about that painting Family Portrait. To start off with, I had these visions of these slightly caricatured people sitting around. It became a bit Surrealist so I put in an armchair just to bring it back to some kind of real life. The final decision which makes that painting come to life for me is the yellow background, which came quite late and the fact that there are two yellows - a very rich, hot, butter-ly yellow and a very cold lemon yellow. Those two play against each other.

If I talk about that in a thesis, and say I talk about it in terms of 'domestic interiors' in painting, I cannot say much, except that I felt that that yellow was

right and the one yellow wouldn't do the trick. Two yellows would do the trick, they would create space behind them, throw up the figures, do certain things to the figures and I hope that it is there. That's all I can say but the actual decision is a kind of flicker - well let's see... let's try putting that on here ... let's try and bring that warm yellow here ... let's let that yellow swamp into the background... I couldn't tell you why I made the final decision, where those two yellows met over that ...

RYC: And yet certain artists will able to say (or so they think) why they did things.

RGH: They might say they can. If they are honest, there are a lot of areas in ... the older the artist, the more honest he'll be that certain areas are instinct, training (self training that is), a certain feeling about the way a line lies, the way a line dents.

These are things in which he believes he can use, and when he is doing them, he is really creating something called art: something meaningful to him, (hopefully meaningful to other people) but he is not going to sit and say ,"why is it meaningful to me?" ... I do believe that Seurat's painting got more and boring towards the end. It got more and more controlled. You should look at those tiny little sketches that he made in the seaside port. He wasn't [in his earlier work] sitting there thinking: "octangle lines, diagonal lines mean this and upright lines mean that and horizontal lines mean that" - when he wasn't doing that he was creating something very original ... when you think of some of his paintings particularly the 'circus' one when the dolly is doing the acrobat thing. I think by the time he got to working those out he had begun to .., well he had become highly sophisticated.

RYC: Maybe he had thrown away some of his recklessness.

RGH: Ja, maybe he had.

RYC: I also think - maybe you have to be like an adventurer...

RGH: The excitement of painting is not that it is the first painting you've ever made but it is the first time these thoughts, in this moment in time have come together and I can feel myself expanding it by doing it.

Rauschenberg said (in his famous quote): "If you look at a painting and it doesn't change you, slightly, either you are not looking properly or it's a very bad painting." Now, this is the feeling I have about making a painting. If you are making a painting and somewhere

it hasn't changed you even very slightly, a little shift, either it's not a very good painting or you're not seeing it properly.

RYC: One of the the things that always strikes me about your work is the fact that you very rarely make definite decisions about images. There is always ambiguity. Many critics have in writing about Kafka, said how he, Kafka, very rarely says a person is one thing and not another - not because he [Kafka] doesn't know but because it would be too easy and presumptuous [on Kafka's part] to make such an arbitrary decision. And so it is with you.

RGH: Well, growing up in South Africa, (I came back here when I was thirty three, so I've had a lot of life in South Africa - more in South Africa than outside), I am terribly conscious how easy so many South African painters have had it in the past. (I am not sure your generation is going to do it), but my generation even the generations after me have very easily settled for the easy solution - once they started to sell, once they get successful, they just carry on doing the same old thing, over and over again and it seems to be boring. It seems to result in very dull and uninteresting paintings. I don't think it results in art at all.

One of the points about this, (if you are discussing my work in this particular instance), is if you look at Stoning and Assassination Attempt you will find, for the first time, I think: Hodgins is trying to use space not as a stage setting in which [the] forms do something - [but as] no space at all - basically flat. I think that ... it's very difficult for [me] to do that. The figures in Stoning came 'easy peasy' but the space around them, (and not the space that shows them off like a stage shows off an actor or ballerina), the kind of space that belongs to the quality, function, purpose of those human beings (all the kind of things I have felt about); the guy cowering under the stones, the classical figure throwing the stones (half Raphael and Michelangelo). I had to find a space that wasn't Renaissance space and it was very, very hard. But I loved it.

You see one of the great things about painting, about art, is that your problems are lovely problems. You love problems. I mean they're great to solve, they're great to the end - but they don't come to an end, suddenly they're no longer there. Isn't that lovely in painting? It doesn't happen in business. That gives you a headache. No problem in painting gives you a headache because you know if you push at it and you expand it and you play at it and you pull it around like a wonderful piece of Plasticine, you are going to find the answer.

The answer won't be an end. It's a beginning to a whole

RGH: - and things I have read.

RYC: Maybe we find [experience] too much - how does one ... choose ... put things down, make a choice what to use ... in this space [canvas] this is going to happen and in this something else...

RGH: Well, sometimes I actually know. Sometimes I don't know what is going to happen in the empty space ... sometimes I almost doodle with a pencil, a piece of charcoal or a brush until suddenly it begins to take shape ... and then I think, "well let's find out what it is..." It's again the act of painting almost creating itself out of the raw materials..."

RYC: But you are creating - at some point you are putting all those things together, even if on a conscious level they **seem** to be quite haphazard and you seem to be just doodling. It always amazes me, (and in fact seems more clear now because I have this series of exhibitions and interviews to look at) how a lot of these things gel so logically together; all kind of fit in.

RGH: They shouldn't.

RYC: They don't fit comfortably, they jar. They all connect (or dis-connect) in some way or another.

RGH: What do you attribute that to? Why does the spectator [think they gel] - well obviously anything that comes from my subconscious (I can put a fart and a sunflower together) and because they both come from me, they relate, right?

RYC: Right!

RGH: But why should they relate to you? ... I am puzzled why people so often say, "why yes, because it says so in the work" ... I know I put a concentration camp here, and a clump of people stoning people there, and a bunch of guys marching.

All these things have (got) no relation, except in my mind, except at my **feeling** at the appalling part of the twentieth century - the way we all behave towards each other in the twentieth century... it doesn't worry people [spectators] that they're all disjointedly together. It is as if you threw a whole lot of objects on the floor and said, "well, yeah they connect"...

RYC: Okay, let me quote you to yourself (in two instances). The one instance was when you were talking about Rauschenberg and the way he puts things together. He takes, (you said) a picture of Kennedy wagging his

point, at many points in a picture, an artist says to himself, very often aloud, "that's right". He doesn't sit down and analyse it ... now he has got to get the rest of the picture right too. When I put these assemblages of images together, obviously in the end, they are 'right' (for me). It does puzzle me that other people accept that 'right-ness'. I couldn't explain it to them why I think it's right. Why do they understand it for themselves that it is right...

One is a creature of ones style. The only sensible thing Salvador Dali said was that no matter how you paint you are going to be a contemporary.

RYC: Where is that source? I have never been able to find it. You have mentioned it regularly.

RGH: I don't know I have read it in one of his books, or in an art magazine or something where he actually said this. One thing a twentieth century artist is [Dali said] is a twentieth century artist. It doesn't matter if he is trying to be other. He can't move on because he belongs to the twentieth century. The result is: well if you want to paint a beautiful nude now, she is not going to be the beautiful nude of a Titian or Renoir. She's just not going to be. She can be a beautiful nude (although it is very rarely done ... people are almost immensely suspicious of attempting that ...)

But earlier on I wanted to ... you this question: what do you, you personally as a painter, think about painting something which is intrinsically in itself, held to be beautiful? Say for example, a bunch of roses; a beautiful girl, say for example a Miss World kind of girl. If I think of painting any of those things, my mind goes into a kind of 'block'. I can't see myself with a brush in front of a beautiful bunch of flowers. (And I am a mad gardener - I love flowers.) ... It's because there is no way that I at the moment know how Miss World or a bunch of flowers can set this activity called painting, going. How do you feel about that?

RYC: Well, I quite like having flowers in a vase, (in my studio) when I am painting. People pick flowers and bring them in to me...

RGH: Yes, I've seen them in your studio.

RYC: And that is when I have been able to paint flowers (when they have been part of that studio space), not when I have gone past a flower and thought: "yes, I would like to paint those flowers". It just hasn't worked for me in that situation.

RGH: Have you ever thought of painting Cosmos?

RYC: No!

RGH: I mean it looks beautiful - once a year I am ravished by Cosmos - but when I think of painting -

RYC: You think of George Boys?

RGH: I don't think of anything. I just think of total paralysis.

RYC: I think a lot of this comes back to the idea of 'choice', which I am quite interested in (as an artist) in the twentieth century and in South Africa. We keep on saying: "we can't paint flowers because it's not meaningful; we can't use beautiful women or beautiful men because it's too hedonistic; we can't do this we can't do that".

I thought (when I was a student): "I can't use pink". When I was a student (in first and second year) a lot of the students were using lush pink all over the show. I thought: "no, it's too pretty, I am not going to use it, I am going to ban it".

RGH: It's an absurdity, isn't it?

RYC: Ja, I thought it was too 'feminine' a colour, too pretty. (There were at the time a whole spate of pretty pink posters...)

RGH: - too seductive.

RYC: Too seductive... eventually I did 'allow' myself and it is one of my base colours. But my point is that, well, you've spoken about this many times: we are so bombarded by **everything**, our own experiences, the media, everything. Perhaps we sometimes impose these restrictions on ourselves; we say [to ourselves]: "we can't do that".

RGH: Out of sheer necessity, you mean?

RYC: Ja, "I won't allow myself to use that and thereby I impose [much needed] limits/boundaries for my self ..."

RGH: You see then you add yet one more perturbation to my mind about painting a truly beautiful women or a bunch of roses: (A) I think it is absurd that I **can't**. It is absurd that if I sit in front of these [a bunch of roses or beautiful girl], the whole process of making a work of art **stops** dead as if someone switched off the engine or drained out the petrol. But it also makes me

feel that perhaps I am doing it out of sheer laziness. It is so easy to say to myself: "I can't paint roses, I can't paint pretty flowers; why must I bother?" Whereas there are other reasons why I can't or can or won't. Maybe because I am putting off little restrictions, not quite respecting a bunch of flowers or a pretty girl.

I don't know - because I painted a very beautiful pair of nudes [on the exhibition - A Female Nude and A Naked Man]. I shall never paint such a beautiful pair again. I don't know how it ever happened.

I know how they started... If you take a brush [with paint] and put it at right angles to the canvas and use the canvas almost to scrape off the brush, you get the most subtle effects - most wonderful subtle effects. And I was doing this [applying paint with brush at an angle], when suddenly out came these nudes... One of these is a nude female. In other words she is in the long line from Titian, to Renoir, to Velasquez; all those beautiful nudes. Whereas he is ... just an old guy who has taken off his clothes and that is it.

RYC: One of your ageing beach bums ?

RGH: No, we had a model when I was at Goldsmiths. He was about sixty. He wasn't flabby but he was just thickset and aged. It appeared that he had when he was a young boy (say fifteen or eighteen) posed for the Eros in Piccadilly Circus. He was the original model and he turned into (well we all turn into) his ancient figure. If you are sixty, you don't look like you are seventeen. And I don't know why that happened in those two paintings [of the two beautiful nudes]. If anyone had said to me that I was going to paint two beautiful paintings, one of which would be of a classical nude in an armchair, one of which would be a naked man, I would have laughed my head off - because I have never painted a painting, in the sense of a Renoir, in the sense of certain Titians, in the sense of Botticelli... Out of the blue come these two paintings... I didn't set out to make beautiful paintings.

RYC: Maybe you did paint beautiful paintings in your your student days and you have now forgotten.

RGH: No, I never did - never wanted to and never did. I never wanted to now. I mean I don't ever want to paint like that again.

RYC: Why not?

RGH: It was a bit like eating too many cream buns. I felt most peculiarly about doing that. And it wasn't because of any the restrictions, [like] it's not on

South Africa; and it's not to do with the twentieth century.

RYC: So why are you saying, you felt peculiar about it then?

RGH: I don't know. It's very interesting - I really don't know.

RYC: Are you not contradicting yourself?

RGH: I looked at those paintings and thought: "they're very beautiful, but I am never going to paint like that again?"

RYC: But what is wrong with that? [being beautiful].

RGH: I am never going to paint like that again.

RYC: But you see you are prescribing. Saying you're not going to paint like that again.

RGH: I don't think I can.

RYC: You don't think you can. You don't know.

RGH: I don't think I have the combination of that moment and that desire, and that slackness and willingness to do it.

RYC: You may, you may not.

RGH: I may, I just don't see it happening.

RYC: But is it important, if it does or doesn't happen again? The important thing is that it happened ... and that you are sitting here with two beautiful paintings on your exhibition. That's what is important. Maybe, as artists we legislate too much for the future. All the time we're worried, "why did we do this or that...?"

RGH: I am not worried about it. I regard those two paintings as if suddenly I had done a perfect high dive off a fifty foot board. And I can't dive at all. They're [the paintings] so atypical of my whole life and everything I have ever done everything I have, not wanted to do. [But] everything that has ever happened to me in painting set off these two beautiful paintings.

Almost, in a kind of way, they are appalling - how did it happen.. Well if I think of a gallery full of paintings like that I get depressed. I would hate to spend two and a half years producing paintings like that. But what happens if I do? If in the pursuit of this activity which excites me so much called painting,

I suddenly produce yards and yards of those truly luscious colours and luscious surfaces; what am I going to do? I don't know. I don't think it's going to happen fortunately because I don't think I could do it again. It's one of those things that -

RYC: Is a one off?

RGH: - totally one off... If the person who bought those two paintings said: "I would like a third, could you make me a painting of a small boy or girl; a child as beautiful as them, to match those two?" I am bloody sure I wouldn't bring it off, not because I don't want to. I am not that prescriptive.

RYC: I keep on coming back to this idea of continuity... I am willing to wager (although I don't like that word) that in some painting in the future you are are going to quote yourself making those paintings...

RGH: Okay, let me pin you down, where in the continuity of my work do those two strange beautiful paintings belong?

RYC: Well, to me they speak first of all, of flesh - that fleshy carnal feeling. In many of your figures one gets such a feeling - fleshiness coming through. In some of your paintings, there are quite 'ugly' figures, so-called 'badly drawn' figures which you love to use ... And then you yourself have often said: "well look at this delicious piece of paint here." The precedent (if one could call it that) for the two beautiful paintings would be in the flesh you have painted so often... I am constantly surprised by that because, well even in this painting Married Love, it is quite a violent painting and yet there are these delicious [paint] areas of fleshy pinks...

RGH: Yes, it is very violent. Well I am told that a man cannot be a good feminist, only a pro-feminist; it is for me a very feminist painting of the brutality, very often of marriage, of relationships. There obviously is the sexual aspect. I thought that he [in Married Love] should be brutally censored [with a black censor strip across his face]. In these cases, it's usually the girl whose identity is hidden. The girl is ashamed [usually]. I made him censored because I thought he should be ashamed of what happened. The drawing [of the figures] is almost as violent, as whatever he is doing ... pinks against greens. And look at this beautiful piece of painting of the curtain, it so ravishing...

RYC: And you always say you can't paint drapery. *18*

RGH: No, I have suddenly discovered how to do drapery: I love drapery! I am very tempted to the Leonardo thing - drawings of draperies. It's very nice the way folds come to edges with points and folds ... Look how beautiful he is and yet he is so brutal... that's why he is censored by that strip...

RYC: That [censor strip] looks like a hat, like the rim of a hat -

RGH: No, it's not a hat at all. I just instinctively thought that censorship and banning should be on him and not on the poor bloody girl, his wife. Now, who is that voyeur there [left hand side of painting], that was what interests me. I don't know who he is. Is he the public who loves cruelty?

RYC: Maybe he is part of the whole scene.

RGH: I just felt he was right - he was there from the beginning ... maybe he is kissing the guy's bum - male complicity.

RYC: He does look like a participant.

RGH: Well then he is a male agree-er ... an accessory after the fact who has contributed to the crime... These red lines here are very violent ...

RYC: My eye keeps on coming back to that space between the penis and the breast -

RGH: A friend of mine said he hasn't got a penis he has got a club! He hated the painting. He felt that that is the kind of painting you don't make... And I thought, he [the friend who made these comments] really revealed a great deal about the source of that painting: the sex act as a club that a male inflicts on a female in certain situations. Sex has a great deal to do with power.

I tell you where it came from: I had a friend who helped to run one of those refuges for battered women and she told me stories which were horrific. And what seemed to be most horrific was how often women went back and didn't think they had any alternative.

Just to go back to those beautiful paintings we were discussing. I think perhaps, (maybe you've given me an insight into those two paintings), perhaps what is the disturbing thing about those beautiful paintings is there is no element (pictorial, narrative, whatever you like) that disturbs the beautiful-ness [of the paintings]. If you look at the beautiful-ness of the

paint in Married Love there is a whole number of elements which sets your teeth against that beautiful paint ...

It's the Bacon thing: the painting is so beautiful - what it describes - two guys on a bed who could be devouring each other, probably having sex with each other ...

RYC: But what you are not talking about is that your two paintings are set in the context of the whole show. You don't just see them; you see them in relation to everything else ...

RGH: When I paint, well you know how it is; when you are painting it is the only painting in the studio, as it were -

RYC: Yes, but when they [paintings] are seen it is within the context of a whole show and the fact that you put them on a show. They are set up against other paintings. They are not just sitting there as beautiful paintings.

RGH: - [they are] sitting next to that wonderful The Assassin from Tennessee - that bleached out white painting with the one funny tooth.

RYC: Consider how those beautiful paintings could be taken and hung in a beautiful pink bedroom. They would [illegible] totally different to the way they are reading, next to the Assassin.

RGH: Supposing they are put in the Wallis collection in London which is full of beautiful 18th Century furniture and beautiful paintings by Titian, Boucher and Watteau; what would they become? See, the other thing I find very fascinating about this exhibition, is the impact on me: never before have I quite been aware of the schizophrenia, this involvement. You make this painting and you're involved in it and it is experience, it's adventure, it's a problem, it's a puzzle, it's a labyrinth, it's mountain climbing; all sorts of things. But one is totally involved in it.

And then you say, "it's finished" and you put some wood around it and you take it and put it against a white wall and you put a label which has a title on it. And suddenly it's another thing completely. It's no longer part of the life you lived. You are no longer so intimate with it. You [the artist] start drifting back into the public who now stand and look at that painting; who as you have just said, stand and look at it in a particular context. Before it was in a work context. It has related to the painting [in the studio context] on

the other wall or next to it, because certain aspects of them were engaging and then suddenly it's something else.

RYC: It gets its own life.

RGH: Apart from that it is for sale for X number of Rand. But there is a terrible schizophrenia involved in that. You paint a painting and now you have to sit and write about it for your thesis. It's another object entirely from what it was when you made it. I am peculiarly puzzled by that. I don't know where it really fit in with that understanding of a painting on the wall of the Goodman Gallery or Jo'burg museum.

RYC: But then we get back to the point (which I keep on bringing up): if we leave it, we don't try and talk about it and think about it and puzzle it out a little bit, then we are not going to learn anything about ourselves, either.

RGH: No, you can't do that because it is also a very vital part of your life; as vital as a love affair or a marriage or a disappointment or a death. The fact that you made it has altered you. It is, in an indirect metaphorical way, a bit like the love affairs of one's youth which fundamentally altered one and yet half the time one can barely remember.

Can you remember the first boy you looked and thought, "Huh, isn't that gorgeous," Can you? And yet the fact is that person has affected you; shifted your life channels somewhat.

RYC: But everything shifts for you - life does that.

RGH: Every painting does that and yet when the painting is finished it is finished. Strange thing that is a painting - it's all very weird. It is like life. That's why no-one including yourself totally understands your [own] painting.

RYC: But you can't 'understand' your painting because it would be totally dead - then it's dead...

RGH: When it becomes a solution to a mathematical problem ... once it's solved what have we got?

RYC: Where do you go from there?

RGH: You go from there like you went from the last love affair to the next love affair.

RYC: Let's just go back to terminology again. Parody, and all those terms didn't give enough space for all

these permutations. And I think the point is that we all at times say, (and you have done it many times), we say "yes, I am prepared to commit myself at this moment in time: that tree came from the Zoo Lake." And then some other time we are sitting and I say -

RGH: "Where did that tree come from?"

RYC: And you say, "I dunno, it just happened ." And I say, "but Robert, you said to me two months ago it was a tree from the Zoo Lake." And then you say, "Oh, did I?" Now, those are both valid.

RGH: They are both true. One of the things about making an image is that that image refers to all the other images you have made, refers to all the other images you've read about, that you've ever thought about. That tree may be the tree of the Zoo Lake but it is also all the trees I have seen in England, in Egypt, it's the trees I have read about in Thomas Hardy stuff from a Shakespeare Sonnet - it's all those things... Although in putting down that image it is a moment of 'now', and excitement and puzzlement and all those beautiful things.

RYC: And that you choose at one point in time to talk about the one reference, or source or whatever and other times to ignore all those things and talk about other sources.

RGH: It cannot exist [only] as a painted tree in my mind ... [end of tape]

This is a kind of summing up: one of the things that does, it seems to me, come out with these interviews and it may be something that you personally do to me; or it may be that you are a painter; you ask me painter's questions. One thing which seems to come out so often from them, the way you question me, the things you illicit from me is that one can only say about painting what one is feeling about painting at this moment. Possibly, two interviews four years ago, I didn't say the same thing and possibly two years from now I wouldn't say the same thing. What excites me when I read your transcripts, you mention things I have said or you give me ideas (about my work), is that at no point has the act of making art become a static, gelled, tedious, totally resolved, totally un-puzzled-out thing.

The vital kick for me in art, the electricity, the voltage in art is that I can't make up my own mind. It's too big a subject. Making art is not something I just do for a living or sell paintings to pass the time. It's [painting] involved in some kind of mystery of life itself of solving; of realising there are problems.

RYC: Hang on, I don't think you want to make up your mind, then all the excitement is gone.

RGH: I don't think I would have a chance. I think how complex the 'buzz' is when I am making a painting. I don't think I have a hope of sorting it out into neat strands and layers. (I think we have to end.)

RYC: Can I just ask you one more thing about that big Sphinx painting, which you see from outside of the gallery?

RGH: Which one, the big Sphinx?

RYC: The one which says "MAN!" [The Riddle of the Sphinx].

RGH: Ah! If you look there is a little sphinx who says: "4+2+3=?" This [riddle] is what the Sphinx asked: "what animal is it that goes on four legs, two legs and three legs?" And the reason is as you know, Man. But the reason for that huge figure there is as a painter - well ... That English painter Edward Burra has in quite a lot of paintings in which he uses big, black lettering on white and it's very brutal. I liked that ... If you look at some of his paintings in the late thirties he used - he did a wonderful painting of a record shop in Paris ... it has DISK or something like that in black letters on a white background and I wanted to use that. It gives the feeling [in RGH's painting] that the Sphinx has asked his question and he triumphantly knows the answer ... It also has to do with brutality. Well you know the point about Oedipus' mean sore foot. Oedipus was discarded by his parents with two thongs on his feet so he was lame. Now, I have compacted the brutality of that story by giving him a modern surgical boot ... placed in that picture, right next to his genitals. There is a cruelty and harshness about that which related to the cruelty and harshness of the whole story.

Of course there are lots of visual brutalities like that, kind of Karoo Landscape he is set against; like the funny little path which leads up to the rather absurd figure of the Sphinx sitting on the ground. There is a whole series of brutalities involved because I think it is a very brutal story ... and of course the whole Freudian/Oedipus complex. Oedipus is a much more resounding metaphor in the Twentieth Century than it was before. Now I wanted all that in a picture and I think I have got it, I think have got the brutality. The sky is beautifully painted and the brutality of that word [MAN!] and the brutality of the black [paint] on that white. It's a sort of 'shout painting'. It shouts MAN! at you - boom!

RYC: I was telling you before the interview (before the tape recorder was on) that on the way to the gallery I was thinking to myself how (when you use lettering in your paintings) you don't often say man, women, dog. It is usually ambiguous. Remember in A Beast Slouches, (1986, Images, C32)) there were the letters FAM on an image -

RGH: Of a van.

RYC: of a van and I said, "What does it mean...?"

RGH: ... And I didn't know - I said it could be FAMILY, FAMINE, FAME.

RYC: So, I was thinking about that painting and the ambiguities and then I arrived at the gallery and saw the Sphinx painting - I didn't see the rest of the painting - I just saw this word MAN! And I thought, "Oh, shit!"

RGH: "Now he has done it!"

RYC: Well, I thought it was quite nice. You surprised me yet again...

RGH: Well, anyway look at Burra... everybody ignored him up to about ten years ago; a bit like Grosz twenty years ago, you couldn't find anything about Grosz - now you can get all the books you want on Grosz. One of the things I am teased about (in the art scene is) when an artist's 'moment' has come - nobody was interested in that artist and suddenly his moment comes. Suddenly everyone wants to buy.

That lady from Pietermaritzburg (who was in the gallery) tried to persuade her committee to buy a Burra and it was very expensive... She could have bought the same thing fifteen years ago for about two or three hundred rand... Well, the same sort of thing with my work - everyone is so mad for my work at the moment. They really are, I am not bragging. You can tell by the red stickers. Have I always been like this, and my 'moment' has come ..?

RYC: "What am I doing right or what I am doing wrong!"

RGH: Well, I actually said to Linda [Linda Givon of the Goodman Gallery] that I must be doing something terribly wrong because I am suddenly selling like crazy. What's happening? That's pure autobiography, of no importance; but it's all very strange...

Just to go back to Burra: I sniffed at him when I was a student. I used to see his little watercolours which were in the Tate Gallery. I still don't like the ones I was looking at then, but I like the late ones enormously. These mad scenes in Haarlem - stone houses with negroes sitting around and sitting on stoeps - marvellous paintings... You know, you wander down the centre of Jo'burg and you are aware of words coming at you all the time: names. You could do a whole painting.

I was looking at the little painting of Venice by Carppachio. It's one of the canals - quite a narrow canal. One side is lined with houses which fall straight into the lagoon. But the other side is lined with shops. In those days they [the shops] didn't have names. They had signs. And suddenly [there is] this strange little cluster of objects which **now** to us mean very little to us today. If an iron ball and a chain hangs outside a shop it doesn't mean anything [to us]. In those days it was like having, Smith & Company.. I thought, you could do a whole painting of Modern Times, of just words and apertures; words and apertures; words and apertures. It would be street scene, just words and apertures.

RYC: But you have made a lot of street scenes. If I look at Married Love, those red lines, those diagonals, immediately (and you may say it is because I am so familiar with your work) those lines immediately read to me like those mad street demarcations - dotted red lines. I think of your 'street scene' paintings and the violence of the street.

RGH: Probably I did that without thinking [consciously] that was what I was seeing.

RYC: This takes me back to the point about knowledge, myself as a Twentieth Century person. You can't undo what you know. I know what I know about you; I am familiar with your work. I will make all sorts of connections... [because of those connections.]

RGH: The point is if it is ever useful to you, you will rob those paintings and you would be quite right... If you use them you won't be plagiarizing them you will be **using** them ... there is no point in standing there and saying, "that's Kitaj", "that's Picasso" - sure, in the Twentieth Century we are terribly informed. The number of Titians that Rembrandt may have seen would be mostly reproductions or perhaps if he were very lucky two originals. We recognise a Titian just from a black and white photograph these days. Now, with that visual information, it's impossible not to use it. It's impossible, **somewhere** not to use it. All this stuff that gets stuffed into you at university.

There was once a very funny (short) movie made by the art students at Harvard. It lasted exactly three minutes and what they did was they took pictures from the Stone Age to Picasso and they flashed them on, just quickly enough for you to recognise the Mona Lisa, Madonna of The Rocks; _ _ _ , and I think you saw about three thousand pictures in a very short while and just long enough for you know what you were looking at - not long enough to dwell on. And then they [the Harvard students] said, "you now know the history of art. You've seen all the world's famous pictures (in three minutes)." And in a kind of way it is terribly true, one has seen all the worlds' 'famous pictures'. Something of them is embedded in there, (particularly after university education); now you can't just wipe that out and pretend it never happened. It has got to float in somewhere and it does float.

RYC: So, maybe it's the same with the way I 'know' your work.

RGH: You've looked so strongly at my paintings, that certain signs and insignia ... You've seen so much of my work, you must have seen easily three hundred/four hundred paintings.

RYC: And I have seen them well - dwelled on them.

RGH: Ja, and you've looked at them very hard. Those become essays. You've read those essays. You know the basic ideas, probably bett r than I do because I haven't read the essays over and over again and looked them that hard.

/... Two-Way Traffic ...

4. Two-Way Traffic:-

April, 1987, Johannesburg Art Gallery.

This was a joint audio-visual public presentation given by Robert Hodgins and Ivor Powell on Hodgins' retrospective exhibition Images, April 1987, Johannesburg Art Gallery.

(Note: Most of the works on the Images exhibition were previously shown on the New Works, 1986 exhibition and therefore are discussed in the interview of May 1986.)

In addition to the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Images also ran from June until July 1986 at the 1820 Settlers' Monument in Grahamstown, as part of the Grahamstown Festival of Arts of that year. Over the next twelve months Images, (a large exhibition of 111 works) was shown at the following venues:

S.A. National Gallery, Cape Town
King George VI
Gallery, Port Elizabeth.
Durban Art Gallery, Durban.
Jack Heath Gallery, Pietermaritzburg.
Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria.
University of the Orange Free State Art Gallery, Bloemfontein.
William Humphreys Gallery, Kimberley.

IP: We've decided to do this in a fairly unconventional way. This isn't going to be a lecture in any traditionally structured sense of the word. We don't have any particular argument, axe to grind or point to develop about Rob's work. Instead, we want to [illegible] and trace in a way, the nature of image making; or at least if that sounds a big thing to do, trace some aspects of what goes into making an image.

This works in two ways. We've called the lecture Two-Way Traffic (in a moment of forgetfulness, I think). The "Two-Way Traffic" refers to the artist almost as the centre of a universe of language; as an image receiver - at the same time as a maker of images. We want to trace both of these things - at least look at the ways in which images received from, (say) studying art, newspapers, photographs; things you see in the world - the way those things are transformed and brought into the image which is actually created. At the same time, the other direction of traffic, I think, is the way in which images are made in the context of art relate to and inform the way in which we perceive the world around

us. I'd like [you] to have these ideas in consciousness, those 'two directions of traffic': the image coming out, the received image and the transmitted image transmitting back into the world again. I think that's all we really have to say by way of introduction - unless you have anything to add to that, Rob?

RGH: I would add one very small thing which is pretty obvious in the wave of slides that Ivor has selected for us, but may get forgotten. A lot of this exhumation. It is digging up the picture, digging up the references. In one astonishing example, it wasn't until Ivor pointed it out to me that I even realized I had retained an image for years and years and used it, and quite forgotten the 'original' image. So that, although this looks fairly rational and organized, there is a great deal to be added, which one cannot add in the lecture). For instance, the point at which an image flows into your mind as appropriate for inclusion in a picture. And this I really want you to bear in mind - more like a 'perfume' than something you can put on record.

IP: Yes, perhaps it should also be brought out very much in the open that the connections that are being made aren't necessarily Robert's own process of [image] making - so these aren't necessarily 'influences' but they are things that in one way or another, either in the 'received' image or 'transmitted' image, do relate to the images that Rob is making. I should also perhaps say that very selective themes have been taken for the lecture. Obviously we could not include the whole body of Rob's work. So, we've just taken particular themes, often at great cost because some of the nicest paintings just had to be discarded.

The first theme we are going to look at is (a basically), male nude theme, (although not always nude). It starts off with a very strong set of references to the heroic. The heroic, so termed in Western Art, is a kind of idealized version of the human figure. Michelangelo is probably the most accessible example of this kind of use of the male figure; where lots of values , lots of ideas are actually conveyed by means of the human figure - but actually the specificities of the human figure are not so much the point.

The herbic figure is obviously idealized, and belongs (if you look at it in a very broad perspective) to a kind of fantasy world in culture, a whole cultural fantasy of a better world in which everything is beautiful and so on. Here we have Rob's painting The Nude Warrior [1958, Images A10] and Kouros Warrior [c.510 from pediment of Aphaia]. The parallel is visually clear enough.

Let us go on to the next one. Here we have early works [of Hodgins'] still the fairly heroic male figure: Men Bathing [19 , Images A11] and Michelangelo's Doni Tondo [1504] *19*. The male nudes (in both works) and the way they are used are, I think, related in one way or another.

Here we have Sangallo's copy of Michelangelo's "The Battle of Cascina" and [Hodgins'] Ubu in the Last Judgment Steambaths [1981, Images B4]. Now, clearly these figures are related. There's a kind of memory that is being drawn on, a memory of that particular kind of heroic male struggle.

RGH: Correction, it's an absolute theft - I went to the book and looked!

IP: Oh. But, something else is starting to happen. Often these male figures, especially with Michelangelo, have a kind of erotic overtone to them. In a way, Michelangelo's Ignudi are actually being exploited as sex objects as well as being exploited as this kind of heroic figure we were sketching earlier on. The figure in Michelangelo [in the Doni Tondo] is being used in a slightly different way. There is a definite sexual thing starting to happen in Michelangelo which I think Rob is obviously parodying in Ubu in the Last Judgment Steambaths - Ubu is a sort of Egyptian Becher inside a steambath. It's all about lust and it's all about flesh.

A later exploration of the same kind of theme is in the Golden Lads and Girls [1985, Images C24] - a bit of a cheeky device [Powell pointed to geometric like triangles which allude to bathing costumes] to draw attention to absent genitalia; clearly related to flesh running into muscle.

Now, in Female Apollo, [1961, Images A23] we are going to trace a different kind of development - going back again to the Greek, the heroic, to the Ideal ... [in Female Apollo] there is a sort of (fairly) clear reference to the Apollo from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, although it is a female figure.

And something else is starting to happen, of course the idealization is starting to despoil. The mood, the messages that are conveyed are different. There is a kind of parody that is going on here. In General Ubu [1960, Images A21] the same pose is being quoted. And I think this was deliberate.

RGH: Oh yes, it was deliberate.

IP: Coming now to the Durban Apollo [1970, Images A26], in which the external mechanisms are the same ... and yet something very, very different is happening here. That slightly decayed flesh, that obscenity that goes into rendering this figure. The slightly accentuated genitalia. Everything has been taken in a different direction. This is about ageing flesh, about lust, about - in fact exactly the things that are suppressed inside the heroic male nude.

RGH: Can I just add one point. This very sequence of Apollos [i.e. of Hodgins' work] indicates a kind of disbelief in the heroism of the human figure. This is continually evident through this exhibition which runs from 1953 to now. For me, the Olympic Apollo is the authority of the mind. (Apollo was the God of the intellect.) And obviously running through this last sequence of paintings (and indeed through most of the paintings) is a disbelief in the power of the mind to totally control and produce something called Art.

IP: On the left screen we have a Diane Arbus photograph of a Naked man intending to be a woman [1968] - an image which is very much on the 'edge' of something. On the right is the Durban Apollo. In the Durban Apollo there is a particular quality of flesh , and the fleshiness turning to decay, to over-ripeness, overblown-ness. The [visual] parallels between these two [Hodgins and Arbus] are quite strong.

On the right screen we have Three Actors [1981-86, Images C7]. One can see the quality of flesh especially where the leg joins the torso of the one figure. It's about decay, an overblown-ness inside the classical tradition.

Starting another sequence of [Hodgins'] paintings from the beginning. The nude on the right screen [Figure, c.1956, Images A8] and the Bacon [image] of a man taking a shower *20*. And this is what happens to that Figure as he ages, as things get worse and worse, he becomes the Poor Old Bugger [1983, Images C9]. And, on the left we have a slide of a late Roman Imperial Portrait [Trebonainus. gallus Portrait Statue, bronze, New York Metropolitan Museum] where something of the same process seems to be happening in the development of an art style.

RGH: There is a lack of confidence in the spirituality of the male and the human being. By the time we get to the 4th or 5th Century A.D., the whole Roman-Greek ideal of the male nude has slipped until the Roman Empire itself is portrayed as an image which is almost grotesque -dwarf legs and giant body. And I think that's quite interesting to find that same thing,

deterioration happening through those pictures [of Hodgins' paintings] Ivor chose.

IP: Parade [1984, Images A59] on the left, on the right Ed Kienholz's Solly 17 *21*. If you look at the figure looking out the window in Solly 17 [the back view of the figure] and if you look at the central panel of Parade there is a very clear relationship. In both works, instead of the nude youth you're getting a naked man. You're getting a tradition being quoted against itself - a tradition of the heroic nude. I think what Rob has done, is to make his figure more of a beach boy, maybe an ex-beach boy; someone very much decaying. This reinforces an even stronger reference to the classical heroic male nude tradition.

RGH: There is something which doesn't come across from the slide but which you can see in the painting. The paint on the actual figure in Parade has been allowed to crack and so it has within it a sense of decay, against its own white background - The actual paint is beginning to feel the weight of its years, as it were.

IP: We have a Bruce Davidson photograph on the left Los Angeles [1964] of a bodybuilder and on the right screen Ubu and Mr America [1981-82, Images B7]. The Ubu, the eternal watcher, thinking dark thoughts of one sort or another. What has happened now, is that the heroic Man has just turned into Bodybuilder. The same tradition is being taken in a different direction. In a way the Davidson photo parallels the development of that heroic tradition into the 20th Century; into our own time where bodybuilders, musclemen are very much a carnal re-incarnation of the ideal of the heroic male (but obviously a very reduced one at the same time).

RGH: I would like to add to that. You all know the work of Tom Wesselman where he turns the Great American nude into a plastic product. She could have been churned out by a very efficient factory. And the sense (of that) must remain; that they have been churned out by factories. They've long ceased to bear much reference to the actual bones and structure we carry around with us.

IP: On the left, Blake's Nebuchadnezzar [1795, Tate Gallery] and on the right A Beast Slouches [1986, Images C32], for me one of Rob's most powerful images. There are still ... references to the heroic male nude, Athlete (in a funny way) coming through. We wanted to get a slide of American Footballers going down into the huddle. There is something of that coming out of this guy/beast ... He is a kind of athlete, a kind of heroic male figure. He is also a casualty. He is also being turned into a machine or 'something' with this peculiar

crutch which is one of his legs. There is a whole cluster of often contradictory images around that figure/beast giving it its image 'quality'.

The next slide is Dog by Francis Bacon [1952, New York Museum of Modern Art] which has something of the same quality of the 'beast' [discussed in the last paragraph].

The next slide is Kienholz's The Mort Soul Searcher [1960]. It's a very peculiar image and oddly related to the posture of the Beast. Another slide is Kienholz's The Carnivore [1962] also related to the posture of the Beast and finally, a photo of a wounded soldier in Vietnam. The bandages of the soldier obviously relate to the bandages of the Beast. But also, if one looks at the quality of the shoulders of the soldier, there is a kind of defeat as well as triumph. This [the Beast] is obviously a symbolic figure, capturing a feeling of the present or future.

RGH: All I want to say is that these images, the slides chosen by Ivor and their relationship to the Beast, are all totally new to me. The Nebuchadnezzar is at least the one I should have known, but it wasn't until a friend of Ivor's displayed it to me that I even knew I had been carrying it around in my head for thirty years, without thinking very hard about it. At a suitable moment, out it came.

IP: Man Considers his Fate [1985, Images C23] on the right and a photograph of Edward VIII, deep in thought, concentrating hard just after his abdication ["King Edward VIII, the Duke of Windsor, leaves Windsor Castle after his last speech"]. Those two images obviously relate to one another. Rodin's The Thinker [1880, Bronze] also could relate to it [Man Considers his Fate].

The central figure in Oh Oh Oh She Cried with a Cracked Voice [1983-4, Images C10] clearly has something to do with this Michelangelo Sistine Chapel drawing [pendentive detail showing the punishment of Arman - the figure lying legs apart on ground]. Michelangelo's study for the punishment of Arman [British Museum, corner spandrel] again is another example where a connection may be made with the figure in Oh Oh Oh She Cried with a Cracked Voice.

Here we have an early Hodgins on the right Cairo [1944-55, Images A5] and Max Beckmann's Reclining Woman [1923]. We are moving into a different theme having looked at what happens to the male figure; now we are going to do this the female figure. Let's begin with the fairly traditional, Art School type nude image in

Cairo. This is an image in a so called traditional 'style' - obviously about the nude, similar in style to the Beckmann.

Hamburg [1985, Images C25] is another brothel scene. [Cairo is also a brothel scene.] In Hamburg something is happening which certainly relates to the use of the heroic nude. One figure is more or less interchangeable with another, so that you can create for yourself a whole sense of action - a whole development, a lot of different figures.

The next two Hodgins slides: on the left the central panel [Desire] from the The Triple Gates of Hell [1985-86, Images C31] and on the right Tart [1978, Images A50]. I think both are visually self explanatory, unless you [Hodgins] want to explain?

RGH: Ivor chose these paintings [Desire and Tart] because he was interested in the fact that there was very nearly twenty years between these two paintings and yet certain constant themes and feelings survive that change over twenty years. So, I must say it was as much a revelation to me as it was to him.

IP: There is also a fairly clear relationship between Desire and Tart to Otto Dix's The Dancer [1925]. The use of the same sort of pose and interesting enough the same sort of use of red and the sense of "Scarlet Woman". And, I think they are unrelated pictures in the end. And in this slide we have the almost identical figure in George Grosz's Fair Spain, far away in the South [1919] and produced in an independent context. A lot more of the environment of a whore (I think) is being read into Rob's paintings.

RGH: A point I would like to make about all the picture of prostitutes, is that none of them condemn the prostitute. In fact looking at all these pictures re-assembled after a very long time, I realized that one of the things I felt about prostitutes is that they are members of the proletariat. They are really workers and the same goes for The Worker [1958, Images A12], a slide we didn't really look at. They [prostitutes] have a very hard time and a very nasty job. It affects them. But there is neither condemnation nor disapproval or even disgust. There is a feeling that they are part of the real, real world in which you somehow have to buy bread and you somehow have to have a roof over your head. I would like to bring up that point particularly at this point, where one feels very strongly about the Grosz prostitutes - that they are operating in society - not victims of society, entirely.

IP: In the Andy Warhols on the screen [Marilyn Silkscreen Series] the same colours are being used, very similar colours. In fact, the same incredibly unnaturalistic effect as the colours [greens and reds] in Amsterdam [1977-86, Images C14] - the use of these funny artificial, almost industrial colours.

On the right screen we have The Lineaments of Gratified Desire [1985, Images C14] - a sort of woman and man very replete -

RGH: - the man is self congratulatory.

IP: And Fragonard on the left screen Girl with dog [1783] *22* ... (Obviously a good Freudian would have quite a lot to say about that dog there. But we won't.) Stylistically there is a very clear relationship between the next slide: Miro's Standing Nude [1918] *23*, and Rob's male figure in the the "Lineaments". The next slide is of Picasso's The Aubade [1942, Museum of Modern Art, Paris], I think the "Lineaments" painting was actually based on this Picasso. Is this correct?

RGH: The female reclining on the bed [in "Lineaments"] was founded upon a very long memory of that Picasso painting which came to England in 1947. It was the first of those war time Picassos I ever saw. It never ceases to be, for me an absolutely stunning painting. I wanted to quote it but in a different manner entirely.

IP: It might be quite interesting to put a Wesselman next to the The Lineaments of Gratified Desire, to look at the way the woman [in "Lineaments"] is being reduced to an assembly of sexual parts.

RGH: For the feminists she has her own charms - an assembly of dis-used parts.

IP: The next slide is Ubu's Adolescence [1985]. It is about adolescent sexual fantasies. I heard Rob talking about this painting and about young boys and how they don't really understand much about how women are put together. They get very 'hung up' about this. This painting is a lot to do with that. The bottom female figure turns into a bowl of fruit, and [she] is obviously related to the Ingres on the left screen, Odalisque and Slave [1842] *24* -

RGH: What interests me, is not only that particular Ingres but the whole icon of the Odalisque - the practically boneless woman who is created simply for one purpose. She haunts the whole of the 19th Century French Art, right from Ingres and Delacroix through to Manet. I was quite interested in quoting that, because I feel in a kind of way when Ingres is looking and

thinking at that female, he is being much more adolescent than his actual chronological years. It is an image of what Frenchmen would like women to be, I think. (I don't think Englishmen would like the same.)

IP: - still looking at Ubu's Adolescence ... Looking at the top half of the painting - the swirl of female parts that don't actually belong to anything but are somehow sexually related. Compare this to Fragonard's The Bathers *25*. In this slide here [Boucher's Pan and Syrinx, [1759] *26*. There is an odd bit of of pre-Cubism. The front and back view being shown by interchangeable nudes. So, one gets a kind of multiple view point. But, it has been stretched apart. At the same time you get a single huge mound of quivering flesh, which is what I think the top area in Ubu Adolescence is very much about. And again if you look at the buttocks area of Boucher's lady in Mademoiselle O'Murphy en Odanesque, you get the same kind of swirl of flesh happening: flesh disassociating itself, almost from its references, and just becoming 'flesh' for its own sake.

In the next slides you're seeing the same theme, Dix on the left [Miss-matched Lovers, [1925] *27*, a really obscene piece of painting. Look at that hand on the buttock. And on the right screen, Robert's Ubu and the Art School Nude, [1984, Images B20] with slightly more taste and reserve but exactly the same idea.

Ubu Voyeur [1982, Images B11] is on the right screen - Ubu, the watcher. He has disembodied eyes and almost a disembodied pair of jaws, watching lovers. The same sort of voyeurism is coming across in the Grosz on the left screen [Man and Wife, 1926]. The obscenity which is concentrated into Ubu is then taken out into both of those figures in the Grosz.

And now a simple bit of cheek in the next slide: Four skulls and A Broad [1984, Images A58] and Ingres again, Odalisque with Slave [1858, Louvre]. The figures are related. I think, what is interesting here, is how ambiguous the nude is becoming in Hodgins' work. The nude is actually becoming much more about sexuality rather than sensuality. The difference between those two things is incredibly wide as any feminist could tell you: sensuality in the traditional western sense of the word has much to do with the male point of view and a male fantasy and so on. Whereas, something much cruder is coming out in Rob's painting. At the same time the references are pretty clear. So, you are getting the decay of the Art School Nude, in the same way as you get the decay of the heroic male figure.

And while we are on the subject of decay, on the right in the next slide is Medea in Middle Age [1985, Images C20] and Dix's Madame [1923] on the left. It is an interesting concept the way paint on the canvas is being used as paint on the face in Medea. The gaudiness is being created in a homologous sort of way.

Berlin [c.1977, Images A47] is another one of the brothel series and is also clearly related to the Dix.

RGH: Actually it's not a brothel painting specifically. I had seen that Dix [Madame] when Paul Stopforth showed it to students. And, partly I was interested in the very curious reality of that earring and I did it [Berlin] by making those eyes in Berlin out of doll eyes - they have a rather nasty, evil glitter in that slightly warped face. That's the real relationship to that Dix painting. And at the same time my Weimar interest began to be very strong indeed.

IP: - changing themes - having traced a decay in each female image, we are now going to a 'violence' theme, I suppose. It is about war, killing, death. The slide on the right is Ubu in Alexanderplatz 1923 [1984, Images B18]. And on the left we have a photo from the Russian Revolution [1917] *28*. Now, this would be I think, a very subliminal thing. But the relationships are very clear. In an odd way the colour (perhaps less here than in the next painting Ubu in Berlin 1923 [1981-82, Images B5]), refers to pictures, photographs rather than to 'real' perceived scenes. This similar kind of scene is also seen in the next slide, Panic [1985, Images C17].

We have Five Rude Gestures [1985, Images C22] on the right and on the left, a photo [Children with toy gun] *29*.

RGH: I think the Five Rude Gestures is a very odd painting for me because of what Ivor has been saying about the heroic male nude and the 'powerful' male nude gets summed up fairly satirically in this painting. ... [end of side - inaudible]

[Hodgins is talking about Ubu and The Black Politician [1983, Images B17] -both small and large versions, making connections with a photograph of Nixon with Brezhnev in Moscow, [1972] *30*. In my painting I'd say that 'patting' [of Ubu and the politician] is an equivalent of this very confidential leaning together of two politicians obviously swopping some kind of secret or some kind of insincere greeting. But, I was very interested in the way that white hand [in Ubu and The Black Politician] is pushed aggressively into the area of the Black Politician. It seemed to me, to set up a very uneasy, visual relationship which is perhaps

parallel with the uneasy personal relationships between these two men. [Another slide example shown was of a photograph of Begin and Sadat in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem.

IP: The next slides are: a Grosz comment on the military, The Proletariat is disarmed! *31* and Robert's Anger, first panel of The Triple Gates of Hell [1985-86, Images C31]. There are very clear references from the Grosz, in Robert's painting, except that the Anger figure becomes this peculiarly sexualized, transvestite type.

RGH: He started off as an African sculpture and ended up as himself. At the time I was painting that painting, I was reading about the Kaiser and apparently one of his officers complete with must[ache] was a transvestite and he decided to do a ballet dance, complete with tutu, in front of the Kaiser, and had a heart attack. It's always struck me as such an improbable, but such a funny story that when the African Lady [sculpture] started turning into a Prussian Officer, I didn't have the heart to take his tutu away. [Slides of August Sander's photograph of an Official, [1925] and Grosz's Pimps of death, 1919, were also shown during this discussion.]

IP: In the next two slides the connections are pretty clear: Industrialized Peasants [1920] by George Scholz and Rob's News out of Weimar, [1985, Cape Town Triennial]. Rob's painting is very similar in theme and vision to the Scholz although very differently realized.

RGH: The thing about News out of Weimar is that it is a 'rehashing' of so many memories of my reading about Weimar, looking at Weimar, (not quite old enough to have been there) but at the same time I wanted to make a picture that was of the eighties. So, the material is strictly speaking sixty years old but the painting, I hope, is not. The painting was essentially 'threaded' through and connected to a magazine, a very important magazine which ran to only a very few issues in Berlin. It was called 'Everyman his own Football' [Jedermann sein Eigner Fussball], a kind of Dada title which had no particular meaning. It interested me to convert everything [in "News"], every human being into a kind of football headed monster; including the Nazi stormtrooper in their midst. He worked out very nicely because the lacing of the football turned into one of those Heidelberg scars that Germans of a certain kind who went to University got so they could be both men and high class gentlemen. So the whole thing knitted together from very disparate sources into a very firm total image.

Well, we've run out of time. Thank you for your forbearance. I think what one is trying to demonstrate is what what one tries to demonstrate over and over again in art; that the sources of any painter are multifarious, that they can be disentangled to the surprise of the artist himself as indeed I have been through this whole lecture with M. Powell. The answer is of course that we have not even begun to scratch the surface (at least I hope not) and the paintings will produce even more surprises, even more interesting reverberations (to use Ivor's word) and even more counter echoes - hopefully giving you a taste of what we've found in the paintings. I hope that you may find ever more, even richer counter associations.



/5. Notes to Appendix B ...

5. Notes to Appendix B

a. Interview with Robert Hodgins:- New Works, May 1986 - Gertrude Posel Gallery, Johannesburg.

1. 1925, oil, visual reference; p. 115 The New Sobriety - Art & Politics in the Weimar Period, 1917-33, John Willet, Thames and Hudson, 1982.

2. Fra Angelico worked on the frescoes (to which Hodgins is referring) in the monastery of Saint Marco in Florence between 1437-52.

3. Donatello was born in 1386 and Mantegna was born in 1431.

4. Masaccio was born in 1401 and died at the age of twenty seven.

5. Editing this interview in 1990, I have to mark here of course that there are fast food stores in Russia of 1990. Macdonalds hamburgers opened stores in both Moscow and in cities in China in 1989. Nevertheless, this development does not cancel out Hodgins' examples of the comprehension or non-comprehension of signs and images which correlate, and must be informed in some way, by what we are familiar with, within our own societies.

6. Picasso's Guernica of 1937 (on extended loan to The Museum of Modern Art, New York), of course was inspired by, and is about, the horror and devastation that the Spanish Civil War left on the Spanish town of Guernica. Art historians, even those writing in general art books such as Arnason in his A History of Modern Art (1979, Thames & Hudson, p. 393), have suggested that Picasso who was deeply affected by the War, had been "unconsciously preparing for" the Guernica since the end of the 1920's. Various images from Guernica had appeared first in such works as Three Dancers (1925) and in Crucifixion (1930). In the thirties Picasso's brutal paintings of bullfights appear to also be precursors to the bull-like animaloid forms in Guernica. In these various paintings, Picasso was, as it were, preparing for a painting, a major work which he did not yet know he was going to paint, since the event that was to inspire the work had not yet taken place. So, with Hodgins, he has during the course of many discussions, spoken about images which he had made and how these images have eventually come together in a major work as if they were made specifically, and intentionally, only for that major work.

7. The Execution of the Emperor Maximillian, 1867 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

8. Hodgins sometimes refers to his painting, which is entitled Golden Lads and Girls (1985, Images C24) in the catalogue, as "Golden Boys and Lasses".

9. A Winters Tale, Act IV, Scene IV.

b. Interview with Robert Hodgins:- Recent Works, November 1987, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.

10. A similar image of a figure with a gun, occurs in Five Rude Gestures, 1985, Images C22.

11. Hodgins and I were experimenting at the time with charcoal, pencil and pastel drawn into oil painting gels.

c. Interview with Robert Hodgins:- New Work, April 1990, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.

12. The Gallery did not supply a list or catalogue of the paintings. Most of the works on show were made in the last two to two and a half years (1988-90).

Two-Way Traffic was the title of a joint lecture given by Ivor Powell and Hodgins in April 1987 at the Johannesburg Art Gallery on the occasion of Hodgins' retrospective exhibition, Images at the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

13. New Works, 1986, Gertrude Posel Gallery, Wits University, Johannesburg.

14. "Last Night's dream on canvas", by Ivor Powell, Weekly Mail, May 30 to June 5 1986, p, 21.

15. The Cell was exhibited at the Gertrude Posel Gallery during May 1986 on the occasion of Hodgins' New Works exhibition.

16. The Laocoon Group, by Agesander, Athenodorus and Polydorus of Rhodes Late 2nd century B.C., marble, Vatican Museum Rome.

17. The painting was in its original state called Green

suite [Images (21]. The painting was exhibited on the Images exhibition and consisted of five separate canvasses, placed horizontally in a row. In the re-worked version [Five Characters in search of a painter] Hodgins has re-organised and changed the positions of four panels from the original painting.

18. Recent Work, 1987, p. 223.

4. Lecture given by Robert Hodgins and Ivor Powell:- Two-Way Traffic, April 1987, Johannesburg Art Gallery.

19. Oil on wood, Uffizzi, Florence.

20. Study from the human body, (Man Showering), 1949, Melbourne National Gallery of Victoria.

21. 1979-80, mixed media environment.

22. Louvre, Paris, Veil Picard Collection.

23. Oil on canvas, Matisse Gallery, New York

24. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

25. Detail from the Louvre version.

26. London National Gallery?

27. Tempera on wood, Marta Dix Collection.

28. Crowd Scene in Leningrad, 1917, Anonymous.

29. Howard Sochurek, 1952, from Prairie County Essay.

30. Richard Avedon (photographer).

31. Prost Noskel, 1919, title page, Die Pleite.

All the slides used in this lecture were taken from the History of Art slide Library at the University of Witwatersrand.

/IX Selected Bibliography ...

IX Selected Bibliography

A. Robert Griffith Hodgins

Most of the following make actual references to Robert Hodgins' work. However, also included are assorted critical references cited during the discussion on Hodgins. Some references to published reproductions of Hodgins' work are also included in this section.

Interviews

Three interviews I conducted with Hodgins (ranging from 1986 to 1990) are transcribed and included in **Appendix B**; also included is a transcription of **Two-Way Traffic**, a joint lecture by Robert Hodgins and Ivor Powell on Hodgins' **Images** exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1986.

Articles and Critiques

1. Geers, Kendell. "That certain fever." Vrye Weekblad, March 16 1990, p. B4.

2. Ludman, Barbara. "Ubu: the heart of his art." Rand Daily Mail, October 20, 1984, p. 9.

3. Powell, Ivor. "One of my own fragments: an interview with Robert Hodgins." de Arte 31, September 1984, p. 42.

4. Powell, Ivor. "Last night's dream on canvas." Weekly Mail, May 30 to June 5, 1986, p. 21.

5. Powell, Ivor. "A soul of beauty sheltered by heroic ugliness." Weekly Mail, March 30 to April 4, 1990, p. 21.

6. Stevens, Muffin. "Youthful, vibrant exhibition." Pretoria News, March 28, 1990, p. 6.

Essays

7. Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. Arendt, Hannah (ed. and introduction). Translated by Harry Zohn. Jonathan Cape, Great Britain, 1970.

(Note: Essays on Hodgins are listed in **Exhibition Catalogues**, below.)

Books

8. Godby, Michael. Hogarth in Johannesburg. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1990, pp. 21-49. [The section on Hodgins contains superb monochrome plates of his 1987 etching series: A Rake's Progress]

9. Ogilvie, Grania. The Dictionary of South African Painters and Sculptors. Johannesburg: Everead ad Gallery, 1988, pp. 297-298.

Excellent colour reproduction:

Sphinx and so forth (as above)

10. Williamson, Sue. Resistance Art in South Africa. Cape Town: David Philip, 1989, pp. 52-54.

Excellent colour reproductions:

p. 52 A Massacre and three witnesses [Images C15, 1985, oil and acrylic on board, 39.8 x 51.4].
p. 52 A Beast Slouches [Images C32, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 170 x 117.5, coll: University of Witwatersrand].
p. 53 Ubu-The Official Portrait [Images B1, 1981, tempera and oil on pressed board, 35 x 35.7].
p. 54 The Cell [1985, oil on board, 27 x 42].

Selected Exhibition Catalogues

The criteria for inclusion in this bibliography were good visual and biographical references relating to Hodgins. Additional catalogues with scant reference to Hodgins have not been included in this list. Horizontal measurements precede vertical dimensions and are given in centimetres. Painting collections are only specified when they are of a public nature and accessible to the public.

11. **4 Johannesburg Painters**. May 1984 to March 1985 at the following venues: S.A. National Gallery, Cape Town; 1820 Settlers Monument, Grahamstown; Durban Art Gallery, Durban; U.O.F.S. Gallery, Bloemfontein; Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria; Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg. Introduction by Raymund van Niekerk (former Director of South African National Gallery)

Excellent colour reproductions:
Pink Suit [c. 1984, oil on wood and canvas, two units, each 54 x].

12. **Tributaries - A view of contemporary South African Art: 1985.** Burnett, Ricky (edited on behalf of BMW South Africa). Introduction by Ricky Burnett.

Good colour reproduction:

p. 37: Memories and Allusions [c. 1985, oil on canvas, 1 990 x 1 540].

13. **Vita Art Now, 29-04-86 - 31-05-86** Martin, Marilyn (Compilation, and introduction). Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1986. (No page numbers). Hodgins was Quarterly Award Winner of this Annual Award Exhibition].

Good colour reproductions:

The Civil Servants [1987, acrylic and oil on masonite, 206 x 51].
Days of Miracle and Wonder [1987, oil and acrylic on canvas, 164 x 124].

14. **Images** - June 1986 to July 1987 at Johannesburg Gallery; S.A. National Art Gallery; King George VI Gallery; Durban Art Gallery; Jack Heath Gallery; Pretoria Art Museum; University of Orange Free State Gallery; William Humphreys Art Gallery. Introduction by Alan Crump.

Excellent essays in order of appearance (no page numbers):

- Pankin, Elizabeth. "Biographical notes: based on reminiscences of the artist."
- Arnold, Marion. "Robert Hodgins: the artist as painter."
- Powell, Ivor. "I remember Uncle Ubu: Hodgins and memory."

The catalogue is divided into various sections: Section A - Retrospective Works; Section B - Ubu Series; Section C - Recent Works. Selections of Hodgins' works, from 1953 to 1986 are extensively documented. Titles, catalogue numbers, collections, media, dimensions of works are given.

Excellent colour reproductions (in order of appearance):

The Lineaments of Gratified Desire [C14, 1985, acrylic and oil on canvas, 116 x 76].

Ubu's Daughter Ruby [A5, 1981-1984, oil on canvas marouflaged on masonite, 75.3 x 100.3].
The Trible Gates of Hell [C31, 1985-1986, acrylic and oil on canvas, 147.2 x 197.8, coll. Johannesburg Art Gallery].
Oh Oh Oh She Cried with a Cracked Voice [C10, 1983-1984, oil on canvas, 91.5 x 214].
Five Rude Gestures [C22, 1985, acrylic and oil and enamel on canvas].
Ubu and the Black Politician (small version), B8, 1981-1983, tempera and oil on pressed board, 40 x 26.6].
Ubu Interrogator II [B15, 1983, oil, enamel and tempera on pressed board, 33.4 x 23].
Ubu in the Last Judgement Steambaths [B4, 1981, tempera on pressed board, 42 x 28.5].
Ubu Voyeur [B11, 1982, tempera and oil on pressed board, 28.3 x 28.6].
Ubu in Alexanderplatz, 1923 [B18, 1984, tempera and oil on pressed board, 51.2 x 35.6].
Ubu - The Official Portrait [B1, 1981, Tempera and oil on pressed board, 28 x 35.7, coll. Johannesburg Art Gallery].

Monochrome reproductions:

Drunks and Wives [A3, 1954, oil on masonite, 44.5 x 54.5].
Men Bathing [A11, 1958, oil on masonite, 68 x 30.6].
General Ubu [A21, 1960, etching, 15 x 21].
Figure on a Blue Field [A35, 1971, oil on masonite, 45.2 x 45.2].
Pope Alexander VI as Cardinal Borgia [A42, c.1975, acrylic and oil on canvas, 61 x 91.5].
Punk [A50, 1984, oil and duco spray on masonite, 118.9 x 122].
Portrait of the Poet Max Herrmann-Neisse [C8, 1982-1986, oil on masonite, 44.5 x 61.1].
Golden Lads and Girls [C24, 1985, acrylic and oil on canvas, 152 x 75.2].
History may say alas ... [C30, 1985-1986, acrylic and oil on reinforced blanket, oil on canvas, 155 x 38, top and bottom panels; 112.5 x 23 (centre panel); coll. Market Gallery].
A Beast Slouches [C32, 1986, acrylic and oil on canvas. 170 x 117.5].

15. Vita Art Now 11.05.1988 - 12.06.1988
Thompson, Sally and Meintjies, Julia (compilation). Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1988, pp. 9-11. Introduction by Rayda Becker. [Hodgins was Annual Award Winner].

Excellent colour reproductions:

p. 10 Sphinx and so forth [1987, oil on canvas, 201 x 231,5, coll. University of Witwatersrand Art Galleries].

p. 11 Night Panics [1987, oil and acrylic on canvas, 222 x 1987].

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