

**RAUSCHENBERG**

COLLECTING & CONNECTING

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## INTRODUCTION

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) was a prolific, curious artist, who experimented widely in every medium, drew inspiration from everyday life, and altered the history of art. He also advocated for peace and dialogue among nations and peoples, as well as protection of the environment and animals. Rauschenberg travelled throughout the world, and in the 1980s he launched exhibitions in eleven countries, including the first one-person show by an American since 1945 in the former Soviet Union and in China. Fostering the role of art in awakening vision and encouraging compassionate communication and collaboration, Rauschenberg commented in a 1984 statement at the United Nations:

[A] one-to-one contact through art contains potent peaceful powers. . . . Art is educating, provocative, and enlightening even when first not understood . . . creative confusion stimulates curiosity and growth, leading to trust and tolerance. . . . It was not until I realized that it is the celebration of the differences between things that I became an artist who could see.

Honoring his fundamental aims, *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* features selections spanning six decades from the artist's personal collection of his own work, now in the trust of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, in dialogue with art from the Nasher Museum's collection. Special highlights from the museum's collection include works by San Francisco artist and filmmaker Bruce Conner, and by Soviet nonconformist and conceptual artists of the 1980s and 1990s.

The two facing chairs atop Rauschenberg's sculpture *The Ancient Incident* (1981) signify the critical role he accorded exchange, and are a metaphor for the conversations staged among the works. *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* cultivates what Rauschenberg cherished most: the act of looking long and thinking hard in order to bring new eyes to art and to life.



## THE EXHIBITION

*Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* is installed in eight thematic sections:

- Black and White (with Red): Variations on the Monochrome
- North Carolina and Italy: Rauschenberg's Photographs, 1949–52
- Rock Paper Scissors: Materiality, Process, Society
- Light, Mirror, and Mirage: Capturing Ephemeral Nature
- Auditions in the Carnal House: Picturing Eroticism
- Soviet/American Array: Part I, Politics and Friendships
- Soviet/American Array: Part II, Cacophony of Cultures
- Bruce Conner One Man Show (with Rauschenberg): A Visual Dialogue

### **Black and White (with Red): Variations on the Monochrome**

Following the completion of his black and white monochrome paintings in 1951, Rauschenberg considered how to make monochrome drawings. Deciding that the erasure of his own work did not constitute art, in 1953 he requested a drawing from Willem de Kooning that Rauschenberg then erased, christening the final result “monochrome no-image.”

This section contains works that amplify Rauschenberg's notion by becoming “monochromes with-image,” or works that incorporate vague figurations, abstractions, different textures, and texts. Such works augment the monochrome in appearance but depart from its emphasis on the visual to include a wide range of subject matter.

My black paintings and my *White Paintings* are either too full or too empty to be thought—thereby they remain visual experiences. These pictures are not Art. —Robert Rauschenberg

### **North Carolina and Italy: Rauschenberg's Photographs, 1949–52**

Rauschenberg attended Black Mountain College near Asheville, North Carolina, for the 1948–49 academic year. He began working with the artist Susan Weil on blueprint monoprints in 1949. *LIFE* magazine featured the artists in its April 9, 1951 issue.

Returning to Black Mountain for the summer session of 1951, he enrolled in photographer Hazel-Frieda Larsen's class and was exposed to guest lectures by photographers Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, and others. That summer and the next, he produced multiple portfolios of photographs. Enraptured with the medium, Rauschenberg expressed his desire to photograph the entire continental United States "foot by foot." Instead, he photographed the artist and fellow Black Mountain student Cy Twombly and his work, helping Twombly to win a travel fellowship to Europe. The two artists departed in August of 1952, settling in Rome and traveling to Morocco, where Rauschenberg worked for a time. Bringing only a Rolleiflex camera, Rauschenberg continued to experiment with photography while abroad. Photography remained central to his art throughout his career.

I never stopped being a photographer. —Robert Rauschenberg

### **Rock Paper Scissors: Materiality, Process, Society**

Materiality and process reside at the foundation and execution of every work of art. From the beginning of his career, Rauschenberg demonstrated an acute sensitivity to the value and dignity of materials. Creating stark monochrome paintings, erased drawings, sculptures comprised of elemental units with participatory potential, and grass and dirt paintings, all between 1951 and 1953, Rauschenberg's work anticipated minimal, conceptual, and process art. The artists presented here share with Rauschenberg an interest in harnessing rudimentary materials to explore social, political, and cultural modes of visual discourse.

I put my trust in the materials that confront me because they put me in touch with the unknown. —Robert Rauschenberg

### **Light, Mirror, and Mirage: Capturing Ephemeral Nature**

The physical and metaphysical conditions of light have preoccupied imagination throughout time. Light reflected on water may have provided the earliest mirror, followed by polished stone, then silvered glass, and finally synthetic materials like plastic. Bent light, together with atmospheric effects, produces the mirroring phenomenon of mirage, an illusion of the existence of the nonexistent. This paradox is not unlike the variegated ways that the psyche transforms impressions in a mirror.

Capturing the ephemeral properties of nature in representational form has always preoccupied and challenged artists. The works in this section attend to the optical refraction of light through fabric, metal, neon, and photographic exposure.

The function of art is to make you look . . . into your own life—  
see the secrets that are in the shadows, or in the way the light falls  
somewhere. —Robert Rauschenberg

### **Auditions in the Carnal House: Picturing Eroticism**

The imagery of eroticism is as ancient as art itself. These works embody a spectrum of representations of sexual identity, from the intimate to the more graphic. While demonstrating how erotic imagery enriches culture, these works address, inform, and contribute to social and political discussions of gender and sexuality.

My flesh tells the time marked by real people who are all still  
living. Part of the project [of *Carnal Clocks*] was embarrassment  
as a medium, because it was about my working out my shyness to  
photograph my friends' intimate parts. —Robert Rauschenberg

### **Soviet/American Array: Part I, Politics and Friendships**

Rauschenberg sought to address the politics of peace constructively through art and friendship. He carried out his aims primarily in the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI), which included research, exhibitions, and making connections with artists, critics, and poets in eleven countries. As part of ROCI, in 1989 Rauschenberg became the first American artist since World War II to be given a solo exhibition in the Soviet Union. For his Moscow show, Rauschenberg created the print series *Soviet/American Array*. The Russians invited him to exhibit in the Soviet pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 1990, and he became the first artist to represent a country other than his own in that venue.

Rauschenberg and the Soviet “unofficial” artists represented in this section have all maintained a visual and/or conceptual dialogue for decades.

I felt as though I had a brand new family I had adopted and nobody was more than twenty-one. —Robert Rauschenberg

### **Soviet/American Array: Part II, Cacophony of Cultures**

Soviet experimental, or “unofficial,” artists long shared with Rauschenberg a passion for examining the discordant world of the commonplace with microscopic clarity, poetry, and political awareness. Together with Rauschenberg, these artists draw us into shimmering surfaces where we become part of an array of images of the everyday world, which constructs and mirrors us and our life.

The strongest thing about my work . . . is the fact that I chose to ennoble the ordinary. —Robert Rauschenberg

### **Bruce Conner One Man Show (with Rauschenberg): A Visual Dialogue**

Bruce Conner and Robert Rauschenberg both experimented with identity as a means to evade limiting art historical categories and refused to be classified by only one of the many mediums in which they worked. Rauschenberg concerned himself primarily with autobiography and conceptual means of self-representation, while Conner considered the multiplication and illusive qualities of identity. Their dialogue also includes Conner’s interest in the visual dynamics of the mandala and Rauschenberg’s concept of oneness in the monochrome, as well as Rauschenberg’s use of photographic montage and Conner’s unique style of film editing.

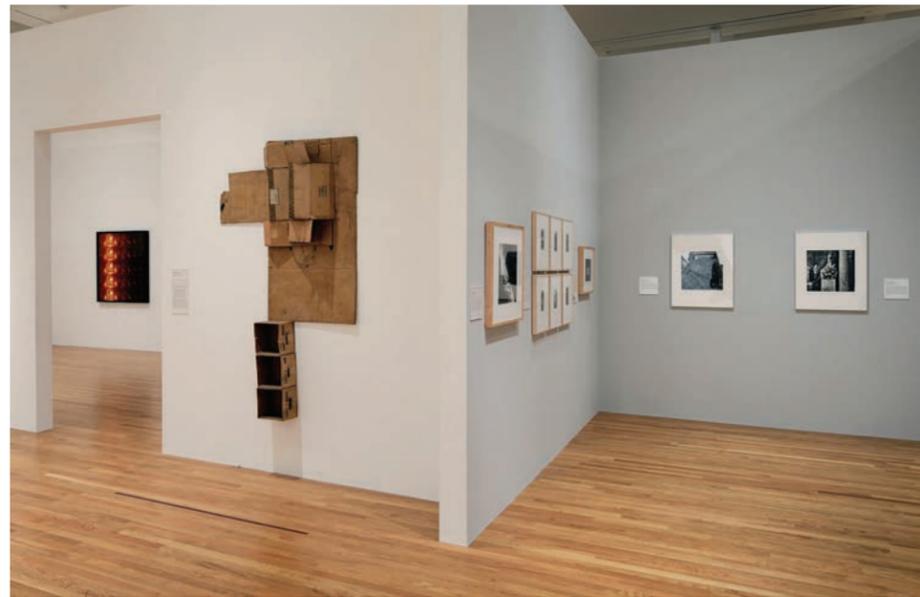
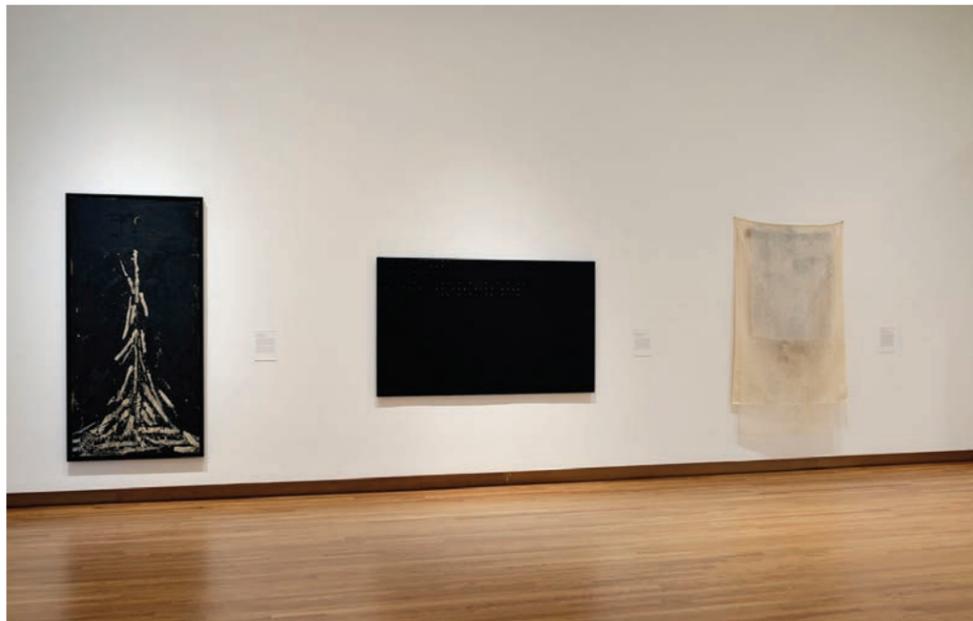
Your consciousness and your mind start restructuring the world according to whatever values are already there. —Bruce Conner

Understanding is a form of blindness. Good art, I think, can never be understood. —Robert Rauschenberg

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***Rauschenberg Collecting & Connecting*, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (2014–15), installation views**

Following 14 pages.



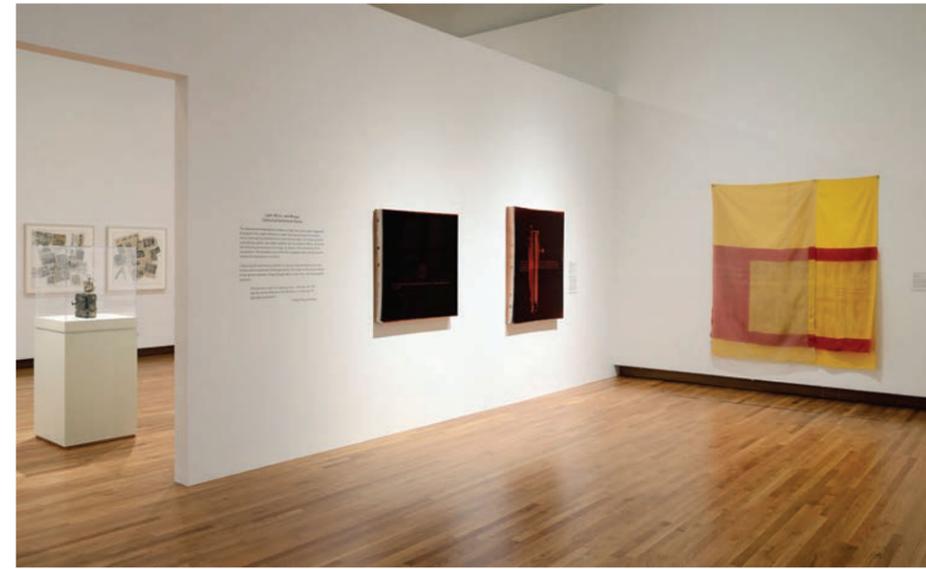
**Pictured top:** Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting [seven panel]*, 1951; Ai Weiwei, *Marble Chair*, 2008; Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Stalin with Hitler's Remains* from the series *Anarchistic Synthesism*, 1985–86; Rauschenberg, *Untitled [matte black triptych]*, ca. 1951. **Pictured bottom:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Night Blooming)*, ca. 1951; Yuri Albert, *About Beauty* from the series *Alphabet for the Blind*, 1988–89; Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Hoarfrost)*, 1975

**Pictured top:** Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Stalin with Hitler's Remains* from the series *Anarchistic Synthesism*, 1985–86; Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled [matte black triptych]*, ca. 1951; Ai Weiwei, *Marble Chair*, 2008; Paul Graham, *Man walking with blue bags, Augusta* from the series *American Night*, 2002. **Pictured bottom:** Lyle Ashton Harris, *Untitled (Oak Bluffs)* from the series *The Watering Hole*, 1996; Robert Rauschenberg, *Olympic / Lady Borden (Cardboard)*, 1971; Rauschenberg, *Quiet House—Black Mountain*, 1949; Rauschenberg, *Portfolio II (I–VI)*, 1952 (printed 1998); Rauschenberg, *Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (II)*, 1952; Rauschenberg, *Rome Flea Market (III)*, 1952; Rauschenberg, *Cy + Relics, Rome*, 1952



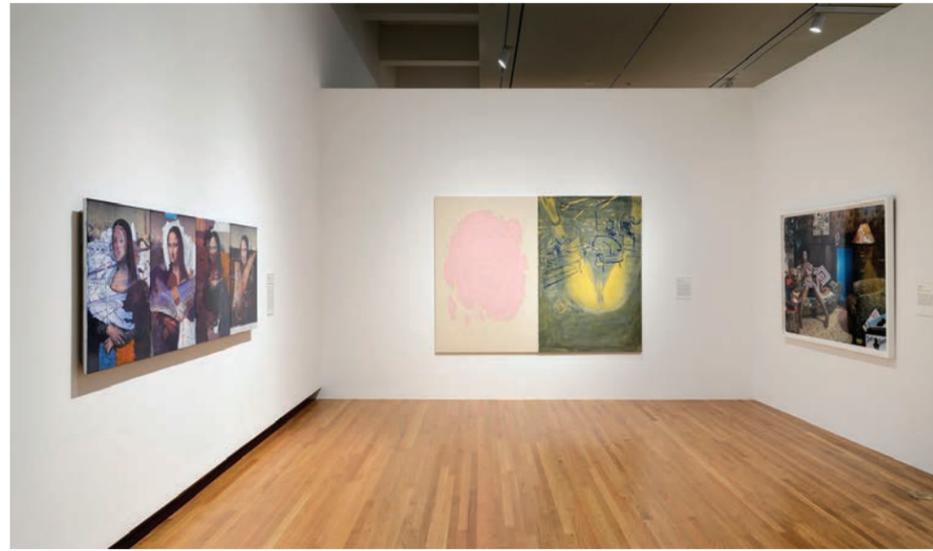
**Pictured top:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Rome Flea Market (III)*, 1952; Rauschenberg, *Cy + Relics, Rome*, 1952; Rauschenberg, *Cy + Roman Steps (I, II, III, IV, V)*, 1952; Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, 1984. **Pictured bottom:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Quiet House—Black Mountain*, 1949; Rauschenberg, *Portfolio II (I–VI)*, 1952 (printed 1998); Rauschenberg, *Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (II)*, 1952; Rauschenberg, *Rome Flea Market (III)*, 1952; Rauschenberg, *Cy + Relics, Rome*, 1952

**Pictured top:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, 1984; Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Night Blooming)*, ca. 1951; Yuri Albert, *About Beauty* from the series *Alphabet for the Blind*, 1988–89; Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Hoarfrost)*, 1975; Rauschenberg, *San Pantalone (Venetian)*, 1973. **Pictured bottom:** Yuri Albert, *About Beauty* from the series *Alphabet for the Blind*, 1988–89; (partial) Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Hoarfrost)*, 1975; (vitrine) Lia Perjovschi, *Our Withheld Silences*, 1989; Rauschenberg, *San Pantalone (Venetian)*, 1973; Rauschenberg, *Studies for Currents #15, #9, #13, and #24*, all 1970



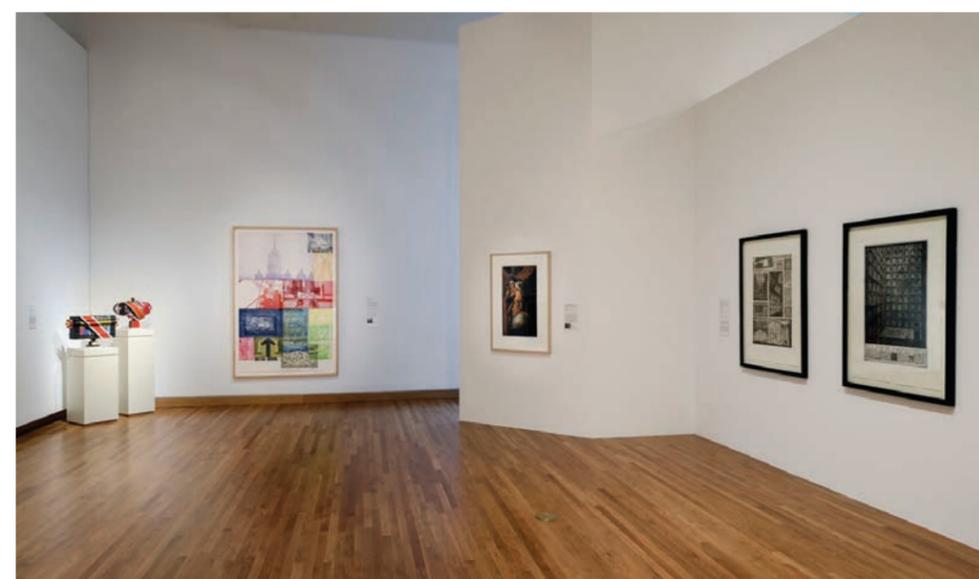
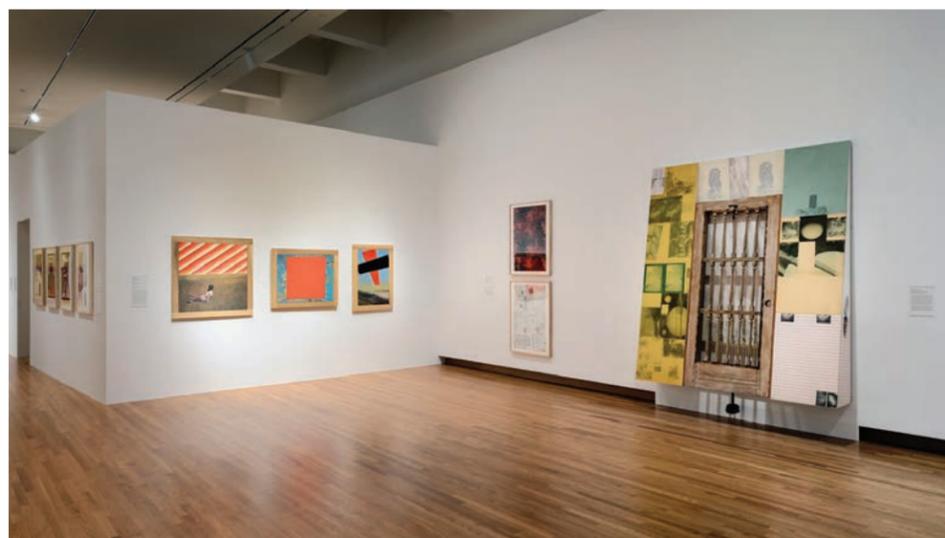
**Pictured top:** Nikolai Panitkov, *Stuff Up the Hole, Stuff Up the Crack*, 1987; Oleg Vassiliev, *Image #24* from the series *House with an Attic*, 1992; (vitrine) Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)*, ca. 1953; (partial) Rauschenberg, *Olympic / Lady Borden (Cardboard)*, 1971; (partial) Rauschenberg, *Cy + Roman Steps (I, II, III, IV, V)*, 1952; (vitrine) Lia Perjovschi, *Our Withheld Silences*, 1989; (partial) Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, 1984; Rauschenberg, *San Pantalone (Venetian)*, 1973; Rauschenberg, *Study for Currents #15*, 1970. **Pictured bottom:** Shimon Oksheteyn, *Armchair*, 1995; (vitrine) Lia Perjovschi, *Our Withheld Silences*, 1989; Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Venetian)*, 1973; (vitrine) Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)*, ca. 1953; (partial) Bruce Conner, *WHEEL COLLAGE*, 1958; Nikolai Panitkov, *Stuff Up the Hole, Stuff Up the Crack*, 1987; Lyle Ashton Harris, *Untitled (Oak Bluffs)* from the series *The Watering Hole*, 1996; Rauschenberg, *Olympic / Lady Borden (Cardboard)*, 1971

**Pictured top:** (vitrine) Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)*, ca. 1953; (partial) Rauschenberg, *Studies for Currents #13 and #24*, both 1970; Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko, *Untitled* from the series *Controlling the Inorganic Control*, 1992–93; Savadov and Senchenko, *Untitled* from the series *Controlling the Inorganic Control*, 1991; Rauschenberg, *Mirage (Jammer)*, 1975. **Pictured bottom:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Mirage (Jammer)*, 1975; Lyle Ashton Harris, *Untitled (Oak Bluffs)* from the series *The Watering Hole*, 1996; Rauschenberg, *Audition (Carnal Clock)*, 1969



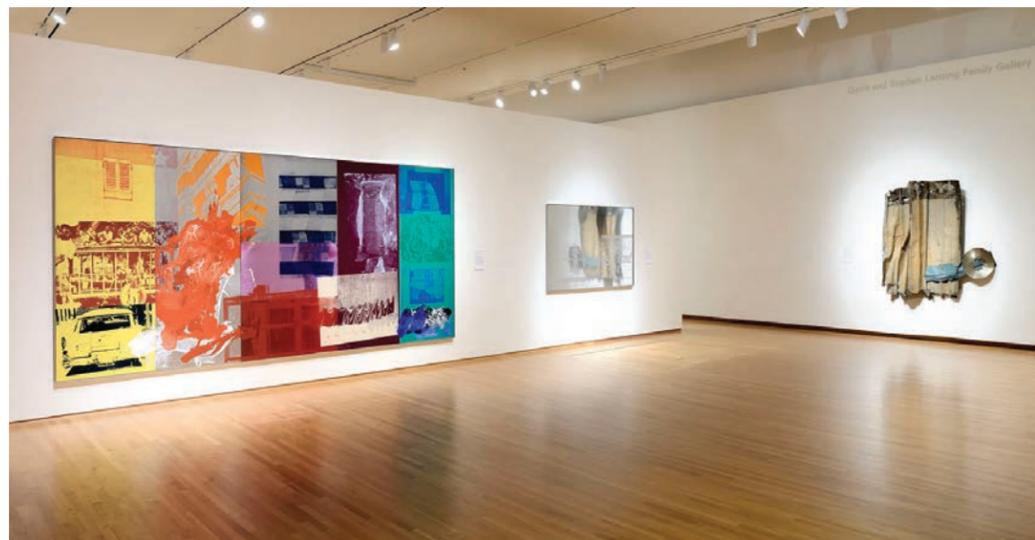
**Pictured top:** Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Clothes (Panni)* from the *Drape Suite*, 1981; Oleg Vassiliev, *Images #7, #21, and #24* from the series *House with an Attic*, all 1992; Vassiliev, *Chistoprudny Boulevard*, 1992; Robert Rauschenberg, *Soviet/American Array VII*, 1988–91; Glenn Ligon, *Warm Broad Glow*, 2005; Rauschenberg, *The Proof of Darkness (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1981; Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, 1984. **Pictured bottom:** Andy Warhol, *Nude Model (Male)*, four Polaroids, all 1977; Warhol, *Steve Rubell*, three gelatin silver prints, all 1982; (top) Warhol, *Jon Gould*, n.d.; (bottom) Warhol, *Unidentified Man*, n.d.; Robert Rauschenberg, *All Abordello Doze 2 (Japanese Recreational Claywork)*, 1982; Rauschenberg, *Audition (Carnal Clock)*, 1969

**Pictured top:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Pneumonia Lisa (Japanese Recreational Claywork)*, 1982; David Salle, *The Monotonous Language*, 1981; Mickalene Thomas, *Lovely Six Foota*, 2007. **Pictured bottom:** Oleg Vassiliev, *Images #21 and #24* from the series *House with an Attic*, both 1992; Vassiliev, *Chistoprudny Boulevard*, 1992; Boris Orlov, *Russian General*, 1990; Orlov, *The General*, 1989; Robert Rauschenberg, *Soviet/American Array VII*, 1988–91; Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *The Wings Will Grow* from the series *American Dreams*, 1999



**Pictured top:** Oleg Vassiliev, *Images #7, #21, and #24* from the series *House with an Attic*, all 1992; Vassiliev, *Chistoprudny Boulevard*, 1992; Leonid Lerman, *Study for Other Horizons*, 1992; Lerman, *Improvisation in Red and Blue*, 1993; Lerman, *Evening at Volga*, 1992; (top) Pavlo Makov, *Fountain of Exhaustion* and (bottom) Vera Khlebnikova, *Wallpaper*, both from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996; Robert Rauschenberg, *Solar Elephant (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1982. **Pictured bottom:** (top) Pavlo Makov, *Fountain of Exhaustion* and (bottom) Vera Khlebnikova, *Wallpaper*, both from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996; Robert Rauschenberg, *Solar Elephant (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1982; (top) Leonid Tishkov, *Wallpaper* and (bottom) Igor Makarevich, *Wallpaper*, both from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996

**Pictured top:** Boris Orlov, *Russian General*, 1990; Orlov, *The General*, 1989; Robert Rauschenberg, *Soviet/American Array VII*, 1988–91; Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *The Wings Will Grow* from the series *American Dreams*, 1999; Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, *Columbarium Architecture (Museum of Disappearing Buildings)* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1984 (printed 1990); Brodsky and Utkin, *Columbarium Habitabile* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1989 (printed 1990). **Pictured bottom:** Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *The Wings Will Grow* from the series *American Dreams*, 1999; Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, *Columbarium Architecture (Museum of Disappearing Buildings)* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1984 (printed 1990); Brodsky and Utkin, *Columbarium Habitabile* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1989 (printed 1990); Robert Rauschenberg, *Contest (Arcadian Retreat)*, 1996; Brodsky and Utkin, *Forum de Mille Veritatis* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1987 (printed 1990); Brodsky and Utkin, *Island of Stability* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1989–90



**Pictured top:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Summer Glut Breeze*, 1987; Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Faux-Tapis)*, 1995. **Pictured bottom:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Wild Strawberry Eclipse (Urban Bourbon)*, 1988; Rauschenberg, *Litery (Phantom)*, 1991; Rauschenberg, *Summer Glut Breeze*, 1987

**Pictured top:** Shimon Okshteyn, *There are many forms but few classics*, 1988; Robert Rauschenberg, *Meditative March (Runt)*, 2007; Rauschenberg, *Wild Strawberry Eclipse (Urban Bourbon)*, 1988. **Pictured bottom:** Georgy Kiesewalter, *Ars Brevis*, 1988; Shimon Okshteyn, *There are many forms but few classics*, 1988



**Pictured top:** Mimi Jacobs, *Untitled (Photo of Bruce Conner)*, 1975; Robert Rauschenberg, *Self-Portrait [for The New Yorker profile]*, 1964; (far wall) Bruce Conner, *DEUS EX MACHINA* from the *CHRIST SERIES*, 1987 (with two documentary images). **Pictured bottom:** Elizabeth Sher, *Untitled (Bruce Conner taking pictures at a Johnny Rotten press conference, San Francisco)*, 1980; Bruce Conner, nine gelatin silver prints from *MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS*, 1978; (vitrine) Conner and Michael McClure, *CARDS*, 1970–71; Conner, #117, 1970–71; *ANONYMOUSE (Conner)*, *INKBLOT DRAWING*, JULY 25, 1999; Conner, #125, 1971; (vitrine) Robert Rauschenberg, *Page 2 (Pages)*, 1974; Conner, *UNTITLED D-1 (INK DRAWING MADE TO BE HUNG IN THE SUN TO DISAPPEAR OVER TIME)*, 1965–71

**Pictured top:** Robert Rauschenberg, *Meditative March (Runt)*, 2007; Bruce Conner, #115, ca. 1970–74; Conner, #100 *MANDALA*, 1970; Conner, Lower center element from *SAN FRANCISCO DANCERS' WORKSHOP POSTER*, 1974; (vitrine) Conner and Michael McClure, *CARDS*, 1970–71. **Pictured bottom:** (vitrine, foreground) Bruce Conner, *PRINTS*, 1974; Conner, *THE DENNIS HOPPER ONE MAN SHOW, VOLUME II, NO. 7*, 1972; (top) Conner, "I AM BRUCE CONNER" *BUTTON*, 1964 (issued 1983) and "I AM NOT BRUCE CONNER" *BUTTON*, 1964 (issued 1967); (bottom) Conner, "1972 BC" *BUMPER STICKER*, 1972; Conner, *BRUCE CONNER for SUPERVISOR*, 1967; Conner, *BRUCE CONNER MIDNITE FRIDAY, MAR. 9 . . .*, 1979; (vitrine) Conner, *Film canister for REPORT*, 1967; Robert Rauschenberg, *Autobiography*, 1968

## DIRECTOR'S PREFACE

*Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* is the result of a unique collaboration between the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in New York and the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. In 2012, Christy MacLear, executive director of the Foundation, approached the Nasher Museum, inviting us to devise a project that would expose a new generation to Robert Rauschenberg's art, allowing undergraduate students to meaningfully engage with his work. The Foundation was interested, MacLear said, in a non-traditional exhibition and would lend works from its major holdings of Rauschenberg's collection of his own work.

The museum sought the advice of Dr. Kristine Stiles, France Family Professor of Art, Art History & Visual Studies, who was scheduled to organize a small exhibition with students featuring a recent gift to the Nasher Museum of almost sixty works by Bruce Conner, Rauschenberg's West Coast contemporary. With her characteristic enthusiasm and can-do attitude, Kristine embraced the Foundation's challenge, arriving at an ingenious solution. Her curatorial concept was to stress the importance of Rauschenberg's influence and legacy by creating an exhibition that juxtaposed selected loans from the Rauschenberg Foundation with works by contemporary artists from the Nasher Museum's permanent collection. The exhibition would explore artists in visual conversation with Rauschenberg's work, especially as related to mass media, the incorporation of materials of everyday life into otherwise traditional artistic modes, and the examination of a wide range of themes and subject matter in dialogue with Rauschenberg. Works would be chosen from the Nasher Museum collection that, in Kristine's words, "both contribute to and diverge from the special status that Rauschenberg's oeuvre has achieved in world art history."

I was privileged to be involved in the beginning stages of the project in my previous capacity as senior curator and interim director. Kristine and I spent a delightful summer thumbing through the 1997 Guggenheim catalogue by Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson, choosing prime examples of Rauschenberg's work, from his earliest photographs taken at Black Mountain College to his very last creations. We would then descend into the storage areas to comb the Nasher Museum collection for relevant works from 1950 to the present. By this process, we created a working

checklist. It was rewarding to work with a like-minded colleague who is a great scholar and has the same “eye” and sensibilities. Making these connections with Kristine was a lot of fun, and I will forever value that special time.

In the next phase of the project, Kristine articulated and illustrated the concept, and presented it to the Foundation. Her presentation was met with enthusiasm. It was wonderful to accompany Kristine and witness her inspired, impassioned mind at work. The Foundation was impressed by Kristine’s creative intellect and keen visual approach, as well as her dedication to using the exhibition as a teaching tool. Kristine proposed a two-semester, yearlong seminar centered on the project, which would provide students with the opportunity to learn about Rauschenberg and the Nasher Museum’s contemporary collection in depth. The Rauschenberg Foundation generously agreed to fund major aspects of the exhibition.

The project was awarded an innovative teaching grant from the Office of Academic Affairs, Trinity College, Duke University, so that Kristine, her students, and our exhibition designer, Brad Johnson, could travel to New York to examine the Rauschenberg works directly, interview the Foundation’s curator and Rauschenberg’s former assistants, and work in the Rauschenberg archive. With Kristine’s guidance, Lauren Acampora, Katherine Hardiman, Emma Hart, Jacqueline Samy, and Taylor Zakarin judiciously studied the literature on Rauschenberg and other artists in the exhibition, and executed original essays on their art. These five undergraduates also assisted in refining the exhibition checklist, selected the topics for their catalogue essays, wrote one comprehensive essay and one focused essay on a particular theme, discussed the exhibition section themes identified by Kristine, and assisted in writing exhibition labels and wall texts.

With the curatorial assistance of her students, Kristine has created an unprecedented exhibition, spanning six decades of Rauschenberg’s career and placing his works in direct conversation with works from the Nasher Museum’s collection. Organized into eight sections, the exhibition highlights Rauschenberg in an interchange with the unique visual vocabularies of the other artists in the show. Special emphasis is placed on the museum’s significant group of Russian nonconformist and conceptual art of the 1980s and 1990s, many of these works on view for the first time, as well as its newly acquired collection of works by Bruce Conner. The works in the exhibition

cover a wide range of media, such as painting, drawing, collage, printmaking, sculpture, ceramic, fresco, assemblage, photography, and film, illustrating the diversity of materials employed not only by Rauschenberg, but also by his peers and successors.

We are deeply indebted to Kristine for her work as guest curator and inspiring teacher. Kristine’s tireless dedication to this project is evident in the catalogue and exhibition, and her innovative approach and brilliant eye have produced an exciting new way of seeing Rauschenberg and interpreting his legacy. We are equally grateful for the participation and scholarship provided by Lauren, Katherine, Emma, Jacqueline, and Taylor, and for their work on the exhibition, which far exceeded standard requirements of undergraduate students’ distinction projects. Their insights provide significant contributions to our understanding of Rauschenberg and other artists included in the show.

The Nasher Museum is much obliged to the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in New York. Christy MacLear, executive director; David White, senior curator; Thomas Buehler, senior registrar; Laurence Getford, digital archive manager; Helen Hsu, assistant curator; and Shanna Kudowitz, media administrator, were all a joy to work with. Their commitment and assistance throughout the exhibition and online catalogue process, as well as the generous loan of thirty-four of Rauschenberg’s works, made this exhibition a reality.

Thanks also to additional lenders to the exhibition: the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California; Nancy A. Nasher and David Haemisegger, Dallas, Texas; and the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

*Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* is made possible by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. At the Nasher Museum, the exhibition is made possible by Trent Carmichael; David L. Paletz Innovative Teaching Funds; Office of Academic Affairs, Trinity College, Duke University; Parker and Otis; and Nancy A. Nasher and David Haemisegger. We also wish to thank Deans Lee D. Baker and Srinivas Aravamudan for providing the travel funds, and the Art, Art History & Visual Studies Department, under the leadership of Hans J. Van Miegroet, for its support of the exhibition booklet.

Creating an exhibition publication of this scale is a Herculean task and a complete team effort. In particular, I wish to thank the Rauschenberg Foundation's collaborators Son&Sons of Atlanta for their beautiful design, and Heather McEntire for her incredible editing skills. Through their hard work and commitment to the project, this publication effectively conveys the significance of the scholarship and art represented herein.

I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to the entire Nasher Museum staff for their dedication and work, with special thanks to Katharine Adkins, assistant curator, who impeccably coordinated every single detail of the project. Thanks also to Molly Boarati, academic program coordinator; René Cagnina Haynes, exhibitions and publications manager; J Caldwell, image specialist and social media coordinator; Charles Carroll, registrar; Juline Chevalier, curator of education; Chanelle Croxton, curatorial assistant; Alan Dippy, preparator; Kenneth Dodson, facilities manager; Rachel Goodwin, graphic designer and web content manager; Wendy Hower, manager of marketing and communications; Brad Johnson, exhibition designer; Patrick Krivacka, wood shop manager; Lee Nisbet, assistant registrar and visual resources manager; Jessica Ruhle, associate curator of education; Marianne Wardle, Andrew W. Mellon Coordinator of Academic Programs; Kelly Woolbright, associate registrar; and Kathy Wright, special events coordinator.

SARAH SCHROTH

Mary D.B.T. Semans and James H. Semans Director  
Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University

## CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In an act befitting the legacy of Robert Rauschenberg's renowned altruism, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation offered to lend works to the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, leaving the choice of works and the design and subject of the exhibition open to the curator. Such magnanimity is rare. I have done my best to do exactly as requested: bring new eyes to Rauschenberg. The unforeseen opportunity to guest curate such an exhibition is a great honor and the gift of a lifetime bestowed on me in 2012 by Sarah Schroth, Director of the Nasher. My gratitude is boundless.

Unexpectedly immersed in Rauschenberg's art, which had seemed so familiar, I was continually surprised by his profound insights into the world of relationships, difference, and things in themselves, or, as he wrote at the age of twenty-five in 1951: "(therefore it is)." Although it is doubtful that he knew Martin Heidegger's concept of "the Being of things," Rauschenberg's peerless attention to and perception of everything in itself recalls the German philosopher's description that something "is, as it is." In Rauschenberg's voracious hunger for life in and through art, he renewed mine. I am sincerely grateful to all those at the Rauschenberg Foundation who initiated, supported, and, with cheer and generosity, worked with me, my students, and everyone at the Nasher on this exhibition: Christy MacLear, David White, Susan Davidson, Helen Hsu, Thomas Buehler, Laurence Getford, Shanna Kudowitz, and Bernard Lagrange. My special thanks goes to Christopher Rauschenberg for blessing the project.

Katharine Adkins, the exhibition's coordinator, expertly guided it through many stages to completion, attending to a myriad of details, including editing a wide variety of texts and much more, with patience and professionalism. It was a pleasure to work with Brad Johnson on the exhibition design, and with Wendy Hower, Rachel Goodwin, René Cagnina Haynes, Chanelle Croxton, and J Caldwell on everything from the catalogue, banners, and online images, to design. With cheer and goodwill, Charles Carroll and Kelly Woolbright added all the new research we discovered about the works in the Nasher's collection to the registrar's records, and Kristen L. Greenaway was a staunch supporter of a paper catalogue for the

students. Everyone on the Nasher staff contributed his or her labor and support to this exhibition. My thanks to Molly Boarati, Juline Chevalier, Alan Dippy, Kenneth Dodson, Jamie Dupre, Patrick Krivacka, Lee Nisbet, Marshall Price, Jessica Ruhle, Trevor Schoonmaker, Marianne Wardle, Stephanie Wheatley, and Kathy Wright.

In the fall of 2013, Duke undergraduates Lauren Acampora, Katherine Hardiman, Emma Hart, Jacqueline Samy, and Taylor Zakarin joined me in a two-semester seminar as curatorial assistants and authors of essays in the catalogue, for which they each earned the honor of Graduation with Distinction. They stood up to the unruly demands of an ambitious and complex exhibition, grappling with and surviving a professor whose motto, following Ralph Waldo Emerson, is “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” I adored and hounded them; they coped with me; their individual essays attest to each student’s investment in the project. Each chose a very challenging topic and arrived at original conclusions, making unique contributions to the history of both Rauschenberg’s work as well as that of artists in the Nasher’s collection.

Thanks, too, to Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemisegger for lending an important drawing by Bruce Conner to the exhibition, as well as to the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library for lending Bruce Conner ephemera. The curatorial aim of *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* was always to put Rauschenberg’s art in dialogue with selected works from the Nasher Museum collection, but no dialogue is more prominent than that featured in the section of the show titled *Bruce Conner One Man Show (with Rauschenberg)*. This intentionally ironic title builds on Conner’s notorious games with identity and showcases twenty-four works from the Nasher Museum’s newly acquired collection of Conner’s art in many media. I have worked closely with the artist Jean Conner (Conner’s widow) and the Conner Family Foundation—especially Robert (Bob) Conway, its director, and filmmaker Michelle Silva, its curator of films. Jean thoughtfully answered questions about Conner’s art and history, and she and Michelle graciously fact-checked the students’ essays on Conner. Michelle also advocated for the exhibition; and Bob tirelessly helped sort out details of Conner’s titles, answering my seemingly endless questions.

Another major aspect of the exhibition is the visual conversation it sets in motion between Rauschenberg’s and major Soviet artists’ work in the Nasher Museum’s

little known, but extremely important, collection of Soviet nonconformist art from the 1980s and 1990s. The learning curve on this aspect of the exhibition was steep, but rewarding. I have many of the artists in the show to thank, including Leonid Lerman, Vitaly Komar, Shimon Okshteyn, Arsen Savadov, and Georgii Senchenko, all of who personally responded to my queries. The American artist Dennis O’Neil, founder of the Moscow Studio, generously narrated the history of the unique print workshop that he founded in Moscow in 1991, and shed critical light on four *Wallpaper* works in the exhibition by Vera Khlebnikova, Igor Makarevich, Pavel Makov, and Leonid Tishkov.

Jane Ashton Sharp—Associate Professor of Twentieth Century Art, Russian and Soviet Art, and Soviet Nonconformist Art, as well as Research Curator of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection, the premier collection of Soviet nonconformist art in the U.S., at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University—was the authority I frequently turned to with questions about works in the Nasher Museum’s collection selected for this exhibition. Jane generously lectured to the seminar on Soviet conceptual art, as did Pamela Kachurin, Visiting Assistant Professor of Slavic and Eurasian Studies at Duke University. Pamela also answered my own and students’ questions about the Nasher Soviet collection, as well as translated material from the collection. Valerie Hillings—Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Associate Curator and Manager of Curatorial Affairs for the Guggenheim’s Abu Dhabi Project—also answered questions about the Soviet works. The art historian and curator Bettina Jungen, at the Mead Museum of Art at Amherst College, tutored me on the history and iconography of Oleg Vassiliev’s *House with an Attic* series (1992), four prints of which are in the exhibition. Last, but most importantly, I would like to recognize Dr. Michael Mezzatesta, the director of the former Duke University Museum of Art, for his uncommon vision, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and courage to collect what is now the Nasher Museum’s significant corpus of Soviet unofficial art of that period.

KRISTINE STILES

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ESSAYS



CAT. 78 Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *The Ancient Incident (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1981. Wood-and-metal stands and wood chairs, 86 ½ × 92 × 20 inches (219.7 × 233.7 × 50.8 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## Rauschenberg, Looking Long and Thinking Hard

KRISTINE STILES

During an interview with Robert Rauschenberg and his dealer Leo Castelli in 1977, the writer and impresario Barbaralee Diamonstein read aloud Rauschenberg's famous 1959 statement from the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition catalogue for *Sixteen Americans*: "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"<sup>1</sup> Diamonstein's slow, dramatic reading perhaps reflected her respect for the definitive role that the twenty-one-word statement had on art and its histories. By 1977, Rauschenberg's "act in the gap" had become a maxim for experimental art, from assemblage, happenings, Fluxus, body and process art to art and technology in the 1960s, and from performance and installation to pluralism in the 1970s. Rauschenberg's appropriated imagery, combined with photography and painting, would soon also be recognized as the antecedent for visual aspects of postmodernism, especially neo-expressionist painting in the 1980s;<sup>2</sup> and his worldwide travels and insistence on collaboration and interactivity would inform "relational aesthetics" in the 1990s and collectivity in the 2000s.<sup>3</sup> But, following her recitation, Diamonstein just looked at him.

Rauschenberg picked up the conversation in his careful manner, speaking with determined forethought:

I don't think that any honest artist sets out to make art. You love art. You live art. You are art. You do art. But you're just doing something. You're doing what no one can stop you from doing. And so, it doesn't have to be art. And that is your life. But you also can't make life. And so there's something in between there that, because you, you flirt with the idea of that, that it is art.<sup>4</sup>

Diamonstein interrupted him to ask "Are you saying that art, painting, rests more in ideas than the painting itself?" Rauschenberg answered, "No." Then continued:

I think the definition of art would have to be more simple-minded than that, and it's about how much use you can make of it. Because if you try to separate the two, art can be very self-conscious and a blinding fact. But life doesn't really need it. So it's also another blinding fact.<sup>5</sup>

After his introspective analysis, full of many thoughtful pauses, Rauschenberg stopped talking. Diamonstein avoided, or did not grasp, the sweeping implications



fig. 1  
Robert Rauschenberg creating artwork using a nude model on blueprint paper with a sun lamp, New York, NY, 1951. The LIFE Picture Collection. © Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images. Photo by Wallace Kirkland

of his arresting commentary and, failing to explore its philosophical depth, ironically followed up with a question about his approach to “surface.”

Diamonstein was not the only critic, just the first, to miss the broader implications of Rauschenberg’s thought. Curiously, it appears that no scholar has remarked on his 1977 comments. Despite omission in the abundant literature on the artist, Rauschenberg’s 1977 amplification of his 1959 statement provides his most expansive explanation of his process in the interstice where he “just” did “something” that “no one could stop [him] from doing.” His 1977 commentary is also Rauschenberg’s most incisive remark on artistic integrity in the act of making,<sup>6</sup> the clearest identification of his emotional states in the gap, and the most commanding example of his conviction that the significance of art resides in its “use” value. This essay explores these lines in Rauschenberg’s thought, attending closely to the meaning implied by his process in the gap, the site of his sense of immediacy between the incommensurability of one blinding fact (art) and another (life).

In 1949, a full decade before he articulated the gap as the space within which he did “something,” the artist Susan Weil introduced Rauschenberg to creating mono-prints on blueprint paper.<sup>7</sup> By exposing the paper to the ultraviolet light of a sun-lamp, it turned a rich ultramarine blue, leaving the covered areas of underexposed paper in varied tones of pale blue to white. Using this paper, Rauschenberg made striking blueprint images of his friend Patricia Pearman, who posed nude in various positions, one picture of which *LIFE* Magazine published in its April 9, 1951 issue, along with images of Rauschenberg and Weil making other types of blueprint images (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup>

The famous photographs that Hans Namuth took in 1950 of Jackson Pollock standing over and on his canvas while painting on the floor appeared for the first time a month later in *Portfolio* magazine, as well as in the May 1951 issue of *Art News*. Harold Rosenberg’s theory of action painting followed in the December 1952 issue of *Art News*.<sup>9</sup> That same year, Georges Mathieu began having himself photographed while painting and would soon begin to perform action paintings publically. In October 1955, the Gutai artist Kazuo Shiraga would perform *Challenging Mud* in Osaka, Japan, wrestling on the ground with viscous pigment mixed with mud; and, on June 5, 1958, Yves Klein would begin experiments using a female nude model

who immersed herself in his patented International Klein Blue paint, printing her body on canvas placed on the floor of his friend Robert Godet’s Paris apartment.<sup>10</sup> As *LIFE* was distributed worldwide, it is certain that Mathieu knew the image of Rauschenberg working with the nude model, and it is highly possible—even probable—that Klein and Shiraga also saw the images at some point. In this regard, a historical relationship exists between Rauschenberg’s concept of using a live nude to create images and artworks that followed throughout the world.

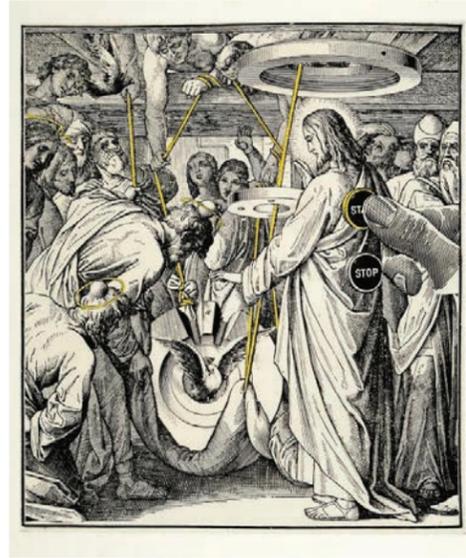
Yet, by describing his artistic process in 1959 as an effort to “act” in the gap, it may appear that Rauschenberg aligned his approach with the history and theory of action painting associated with the events just cited.<sup>11</sup> But while especially admiring of Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, Rauschenberg rejected the notion of art and life collapsed into an undifferentiated unity and, instead, marked out a place that distinguished, even as it imperceptibly interconnected, the two. In the 1949 blueprint works, Rauschenberg remained the maker, not the work itself, even as he posed in several of the mono-prints.<sup>12</sup> His conceptually nuanced position vis-à-vis the fusion of art and life would earn Rauschenberg the sharp criticism of John Cage. “I think there’s a slight difference between Rauschenberg and me,” Cage explained in 1968, adding, “And we’ve become less friendly, although we’re still friendly. We don’t see each other as much as we did.”<sup>13</sup> Cage explained the breach this way: “I have the desire to just erase the difference between art and life, whereas Rauschenberg made that famous statement about working in the gap between the two. Which is a little Roman Catholic, from my point of view.”<sup>14</sup> When the interviewer, Martin Duberman, an authority on Black Mountain College, asked Cage what he meant by this last comment, Cage responded, “Well, he makes a mystery out of being an artist.”<sup>15</sup>

Cage’s comments reflect his own unease with how Rauschenberg had, in only a few words, unsettled the idea of either the unity or the dualism of art and life, fundamentally exposing the claim for unity as utopian, and for dualism as falsely oppositional and potentially hierarchical.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Rauschenberg would “try,” as he wrote, to establish his own position, one of presence between the blinding facticity of art and life.<sup>17</sup> “I am in the present,” Rauschenberg stated in a 1961 interview, “with all my limitations but by using all my resources.”<sup>18</sup> In *Autobiography* (1968; see CAT. 66), his over sixteen-foot-tall, three-panel lithograph, Rauschenberg ends the spiral text in the middle panel, which also resembles a thumbprint, by stating that he is “creating a responsible man working in the present.”<sup>19</sup> Read in this context, the blueprint works anticipated Rauschenberg’s identification of the gap, which both constituted the site of presence and provided the resource of an open space where he was neither completely in art nor in life. As for Cage’s characterization of Rauschenberg’s thought as “Roman Catholic” and his mendacious charge that Rauschenberg “mystified being



CAT. 40

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid (b. 1943 and b. 1945), *Stalin with Hitler's Remains* from the series *Anarchistic Synthesism*, 1985–86. Oil on canvas, 84 ¼ × 60 ¼ inches (214 × 153 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1992.8.1. © Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



CAT. 34

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *DEUS EX MACHINA* from the *CHRIST SERIES*, 1987. Print with hand coloring on paper, mounted on board; 6 7/8 × 6 inches (17.5 × 15.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.40. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

an artist,” Cage knew better that both were untrue, shades of which I explore in more detail below.

Taking the model of Rauschenberg’s art and practice, *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* presents his work in interrelation to a range of international artists’ as interlocutors. Staging eight thematic rooms, the exhibition emphasizes visual conversations and connections among the artworks rather than comparisons of likeness and difference. Each room brings together works from Rauschenberg’s own collection of his art with works from the collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. These surprising combinations offer new perspectives on a heretofore tacit dialogue between Rauschenberg and the Nasher Museum’s significant, but little known, corpus of Soviet nonconformist artists of the 1980s and 1990s, and its newly acquired collection of Bruce Conner’s art. The Soviet collection includes such works as Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid’s monumental *Stalin with Hitler’s Remains* (1985–86; CAT. 40), with its white monochrome panel hinged to the bottom; and the Bruce Conner collection includes *DEUS EX MACHINA*, the only hand-colored print from Conner’s *CHRIST* series of 1987 (CAT. 34). The eight rooms cluster around the following themes: *Black and White (with Red): Variations on the Monochrome; North Carolina and Italy: Rauschenberg’s Photographs 1949–52; Rock Paper Scissors: Materiality, Process, Society; Light, Mirror, and Mirage: Capturing Ephemeral Nature; Auditions in the Carnal House: Picturing Eroticism; Soviet/American Array: Part I, Politics and*

*Friendships; Soviet/American Array: Part II, Cacophony of Cultures; Bruce Conner One Man Show (with Rauschenberg): A Visual Dialogue.*

The icon for these visual exchanges is Rauschenberg’s conceptually epic sculpture *The Ancient Incident* (1981; CAT. 78). Supported by two identical sets of rough, wooden stair-steps with metal fittings, twin wooden chairs hover seven feet above the floor, seats facing each other and just touching across a space at the summit. Precariously balanced, the interface between the chairs is an analog for the unrestricted opening that Rauschenberg sought for doing and being in the “gap” that is unmediated by the more calcified categories of “art” and “life.” The conversation suggested by the prodigious structure of *The Ancient Incident* equally serves as a model for parallel sites of multidimensional discussions about connecting two collections. These discussions invite viewers to consider each work as a discrete entity *and* as part of overlapping, intersecting, and diverse set of relations with other artworks, materials, approaches, and subjects. Such unrestricted visual dialogues reintroduce the “use” value, upon which Rauschenberg insisted, and cultivate what he cherished most: the act of looking long and thinking hard in order to bring fresh vision to art.

A prolific and curious artist, who altered the history of world art, Rauschenberg advocated for peace, cooperation among nations and peoples, and protection of the environment and animals. Travelling throughout the world for over thirty years, Rauschenberg commented in a 1984 statement at the United Nations:

I feel strong in my beliefs . . . that a one-to-one contact through art contains potent peaceful powers and is the most non-elitist way to share exotic and common information, seducing us into creative mutual understandings for the benefit of all. Art is educating, provocative, and enlightening even when first not understood. The very creative confusion stimulates curiosity and growth, leading to trust and tolerance. . . . It was not until I realized that it is the celebration of the differences between things that I became an artist who could see.<sup>20</sup>

## Rauschenberg’s Ethics

Rauschenberg expressed an abiding personal judgment that ethical principles prevail in making “something” when, in his initial retort to Diamonstein’s reading of his 1959 statement, he said: “I don’t think that any honest artist sets out to make art.” His first and next fourteen sentences on the topic deserve closer attention. The following interpretation seeks to contribute to a better appreciation of the stakes for Rauschenberg when he positioned the “act” of making something in the gap, as well as to the meaning of his art in general.

The historical context for his insistence on artistic integrity, the honesty of the artist, is worth considering here. Rauschenberg entered the art world during the height of what he called the abstract expressionists' "self-confession and self-confusion," a mode of existence he rejected for himself.<sup>21</sup> He was instrumental in bringing about the shift from what he understood to be egocentrism to the ambiguous social commentary of pop art, from whose equivocal cultural positions he also removed himself. He was internationally renowned by the late 1970s when postmodernist irony arrived as the cultural iteration of poststructuralist questioning of inherited beliefs and structures of knowledge. But while Rauschenberg would remain distant from the extremes of postmodernist radical relativity, his art modeled aesthetic paradigms for radical *visual* relativity and respect for difference.

Among the many works in *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* that exhibit traits associated with postmodernism are *Solar Elephant* (1982; see CAT. 82), or what Rauschenberg called a "free-standing picture" (another term he used for Combine), with its juxtapositions of technical drawings, organic forms, and objects from popular culture; and his four-paneled, ceramic version of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503–17), the feverish *Pneumonia Lisa* (1982; see CAT. 81) that Rauschenberg superimposed with a variety of images, from a horse and the face of Venus in Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (ca. 1486) to a motorcycle fender decorated with a Mickey Mouse decal.<sup>22</sup> These works evince the narrative instability characteristic of postmodernism, as well as what Sam Hunter described as Rauschenberg's "mercurial consciousness."<sup>23</sup> Rauschenberg would put it this way in 1963: "My fascination with images . . . is based on the complex interlocking of disparate visual facts . . . that have no respect for grammar."<sup>24</sup> Five years later, he would observe: "Now we have so much information. A painter a hundred or two hundred years ago knew very little. . . . It wasn't natural for him also to take into consideration cave painting and fold it into his own sense of the present."<sup>25</sup>

Despite Rauschenberg's proto-postmodern consciousness of the random function of images in contemporary society, his unrestrained appropriation of images, and his careful juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images, some observers might view his steadfast insistence on "honesty" as old-fashioned, particularly in cultural circumstances favoring irony. This would be true especially for those who claim that they no longer know "what art is,"<sup>26</sup> no longer "believe in" the values once attributed to art,<sup>27</sup> or find such principles laughable in the context of the soaring global market for art, which transmogrifies the Nietzschean "transvaluation of values" into its obverse: rather than exalt life and creativity, the market reduces everything to capital.

"[O]nce irony is admitted," conceptual artist Michael Asher noted in 2009, "nothing can be innocent."<sup>28</sup> Rauschenberg was anything but innocent. Yet while he deployed

paradox in his work, he did not share the pervasive cynicism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as a letter he wrote in 1999 regarding *The Happy Apocalypse* (see fig. 19), a project he undertook for the Vatican, makes clear. Firmly declaring the purpose of his art, Rauschenberg wrote: "Healing with faith is paramount. My art work is filled with hope, courage, and strength; it will work to support inspiration and life."<sup>29</sup> Asher did not refer to Rauschenberg when he wrote the following, but he may as well have been describing Rauschenberg's stance as an alternative to the insouciance of our era:

It takes a strong act of will to reassert that a certain phenomenon—a painting, a gesture, a dumb object—is just what it purports to be. . . . Once one reinvests art with some consideration to the real, this yawning from one extreme to the other [high vs. low and art vs. life] has to cease. The specific relationship between work and viewer reasserts its importance, as the body becomes the site of a different kind of interplay between the visceral and intellectual aspects of the experience.<sup>30</sup>

Rauschenberg demonstrated strong acts of will at an early age. As "a shy child [who] often hid from people,"<sup>31</sup> he survived his father's "physically violent, abusive, and alcoholic" behavior;<sup>32</sup> and, as an adult, endured "his father's dying words: 'I never did like you, you son of a bitch.'"<sup>33</sup> Biographers seldom reveal these unsavory details of his life, or the fact that when Rauschenberg returned home from military service in World War II, his family had moved to another town without telling him or leaving a forwarding address. Usually Rauschenberg's decision to change his first name from Milton to Bob is attributed only to the moment he determined to become an artist and entered the Kansas City Art Institute in 1947, rather than to the fact that he bore his father's name, an identity he shed in order to leave his past behind. Yet, to the question, "How much of your work is autobiographical?" Rauschenberg replied: "Probably all."<sup>34</sup>

What is often repeated about his biography is that during his teenage years, Rauschenberg began rejecting the religious dogmas of his Texas fundamentalist Christian community and the Church of Christ, especially taboos against dancing. But one anecdote—which underscores his loneliness—is not often told. Rauschenberg explained that when he was just fifteen, in response to a preacher insisting that the Bible advocated marrying a virgin rather than a widow, he "stood up in church," he remembered, "and flung my arms out and said, 'Why? You can't help but sometimes be a widow!'"<sup>35</sup> Forty-seven years later he was still upset by the idea and remarked to Barbara Rose: "How could God say something like that?"

People get lonely.”<sup>36</sup> They do, and he did, often referring to the “loneliness of painting,” which, in part, accounted for his devotion to collaboration in art and technology, and his decades-long participation in dance and theater.

In college, after refusing to kill and dissect a frog, Rauschenberg was expelled. When he entered the Navy at eighteen and announced that he was not going to kill anyone, he was trained as a neuropsychiatric technician, running three different wards with only one doctor. “No, I was not forced to fight,” he said. “What I witnessed was much worse. I got to see, every day, what war did to the young men who barely survived it. . . . Every day your heart was torn until you couldn’t stand it. And then the next day it was torn up all over again. And you knew that nothing could help. These young boys had been destroyed.”<sup>37</sup> Rauschenberg also compared his psychological state at the time to those of his patients: “If an analyst had written mine down, I would have been right on top.”<sup>38</sup> To these experiences add his self-doubt, rooted in severe dyslexia, his bisexuality, voracious appetites, and his alcoholism.

Then consider his many accomplishments and high international profile in the media, from newspapers and popular magazines to art journals and television. His prominence makes it easy to understand that Rauschenberg’s strong will could cause friction and even provoke jealousy.<sup>39</sup> After all, as one of his high school teachers said, Rauschenberg was “a DEFINITE leader. . . . He always had ideas: Milton always had some solution to suggest.”<sup>40</sup> Ileana Sonnabend described him as a “strange mixture of boastfulness and humility, depression and high spirits,” and she especially noted “a spiritual quality in his works, as well as a poetic and ephemeral quality.” Finally she observed an aspect of his personality that unsettled some: “People like to hold on to what they know. Bob likes to shake them out of their habits.”<sup>41</sup>

I recount these and other biographical factors for how they inform about Rauschenberg’s concept of “honesty,” which comprised his determination to be truthful to himself as a maker of “something,” forthright in his devotion to the object in all its material complexity, committed to engagement with everyday realities, and dedicated to the interplay between the visceral and intellectual aspects of viewers’ experiences. Rauschenberg best expressed this honesty when he commented in 1963:

My morality is not to walk in my own footsteps.<sup>42</sup>

What he meant by this poetic statement was that, while “all” of his work was to some degree autobiographical, the integrity of his art depended upon bringing the viewer into the work.

Thinking of not walking in his own footsteps, Rauschenberg incorporated his classmates into his work in 1949 while a student at the Art Students League in New York by putting canvas on the floor at the entrance and recording everyone’s footprints



fig. 2

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled* [nine *Feticci Personali*, Rome], 1953. Gelatin silver print, 13 × 15 inches (33 × 38.1 cm). © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

CAT. 64

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)*, ca. 1953. Bricks, mortar, steel spike, metal rod, and concrete; 14 ¼ × 8 × 7 ¾ inches (36.2 × 20.3 × 19.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

as they entered the room. Two years later, he painted his series of modular *White Paintings* (see CAT. 58), which Walter Hopps observed were “of acute importance” to Rauschenberg for how they “became palpable objects subject to ambient light and shadows.”<sup>43</sup> What the *White Paintings* pictured for Rauschenberg was the presence of anyone and anything in the room, shadows that captured a quixotic and ephemeral history of everything that had once been there. What is also fascinating about the *White Paintings* is that under certain light conditions, one can see one’s own shadow, as well as a faint double of it. This is possible when viewing the seven-panel *White Painting* in *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting*.

In 1952–53, during what he called his “nine-month trip to the Mediterranean and into North Africa,” Rauschenberg made boxes and “Constructions,” exhibiting them at the Galleria dell’Obelisco, which titled the works *Scatole Personali* (Personal Boxes) and *Feticci Personali* (Personal Fetishes) (fig. 2). In his exhibition statement, Rauschenberg wrote that he had chosen the materials for the “Constructions” for “the richness of their past . . . or for their vivid abstract reality,” and he suggested how to interpret and use both the boxes and constructions:

In other [boxes] one or several compartments are left empty for you to add bits of your own choice, to rearrange the contents, or to leave them in their emptiness which signifies unknown possibilities. . . . A hanging construction of mirrors to mirrors is visual infinity. Other stringlike totems hang pretentiously boasting of their fictitious past. A contemplative instrument is made with a

bead on a coil of wire. You may develop your own ritual about the objects. The order and logic of the arrangements are the direct creation of the viewer assisted by the costumed provocativeness and literal sensuality of the objects.<sup>44</sup>

To photograph the *Feticci Personali* in 1953, Rauschenberg suspended his works from trees and statuary in a park, a temporary installation that anticipated the Japanese Gutai's eccentric structures and first outdoor exhibition in 1955. The *Feticci Personali* also suggest the "poor," or non-aesthetic, materials and modes of presentation that interested artists associated with the Italian art movement Arte Povera, founded in 1967.

*Scatole Personali* and *Feticci Personali* were also foundational for Rauschenberg's own series of *Elemental Sculptures*, made in 1953 after returning from Italy to New York. Some of these works are uncompromisingly minimal in structure and brute in materials, like *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)* (CAT. 64) with its bricks, mortar, steel spike, metal rod, and concrete. But others in the series are more yielding and interactive, consisting of found blocks of wood and rounded stones often tethered together with twine. Rauschenberg encouraged the public to manipulate the component parts of such works, and a photograph of him sitting irreverently, but with a solemn expression, on one of the *Elemental Sculptures* suggests the interaction with these works that he sought from the public. He exhibited the sculptures together with a black monochrome, a matte-black monochrome, and two *White Paintings* in a two-person show with Cy Twombly at the Stable Gallery in New York in September of 1953.

Whereas the *Elemental Sculptures* ask for actual physical involvement, all of Rauschenberg's art requires a highly active visual engagement with his superimposed and transposed images, words, and signs. But his most aggressive, inescapable technique for including viewers in his work was his extensive use of mirrors and/or reflective surfaces: works like the *Carnal Clock* series (1969; see CAT. 67), which included mirrored Plexiglas, and *Wild Strawberry Eclipse (Urban Bourbon)* (1988; see CAT. 86), which, like many of his painting series of the 1980s and 1990s, featured enameled and mirrored aluminum surfaces.

Considered together, these three means of enticing or capturing viewers—cast shadows on paintings, actual manipulation of objects, and mirroring or reflecting in sculptures or paintings—relate to what seems to have been three primary objectives for Rauschenberg: to offer the possibility to viewers for an exchange of fields of vision; to activate viewers by bringing their presence into the work; and to emphasize the present, whereby one literally enters into the charged space Rauschenberg himself inhabited, the gap to which the public literally contributes through the presence of viewers in the works, bodily reminders that reinvigorate the immediacy and



constantly changing imagery in his art. As he said in 1960: "Immediacy, the only thing you can trust."<sup>45</sup> Once bodily engaged in the operation of a sculpture, or virtually embodied within the mirrored surface of a painting or sculpture, viewers have no choice but to be "honest," in the sense that in the now of the present any act or image is what it is: one cannot hide from, or alter, one's reflection or shadow or action. In these ways, Rauschenberg's concept of the gap existed apart from, while enveloped in, art and life, an interstice like that between water and air.

### *Litercy*

Many of these elements come together in *Litercy (Phantom)* (1991; CAT. 87). Like so many of his works, *Litercy* feels monumental but is human-sized, modest, like Rauschenberg himself. A silvered monochrome, resembling *grisaille*, *Litercy* includes photographs and silvered pigments that Rauschenberg transferred onto its mirrored aluminum. The work brings viewers into direct contact and interaction with images, signs, and texts, more than most of Rauschenberg's works on reflective surfaces, and it is for these, and many other, reasons that I explore this work in depth, proposing that it is the quintessence of Rauschenberg's relation to the gap and how he brought the world into that fissure in reality that is art.

CAT. 87

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Litercy (Phantom)*, 1991. Pigmented varnish on mirrored aluminum, 49 ½ × 85 inches (125.7 × 215.9 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

A brief introduction to *Litercy*, from left to right, will help. On the left, a man paints the word Wate[r]; ghostly shadows of trees appear in the middle ground; and on the right, a building strewn with pennants also sports a sign that reads “Bob’s”, as well as the word “Hand”, and a sign painted on the side of a building of a hand with its index finger pointing. The latter doubles the concept of hand while visually reinforcing the word and creating continuity and difference through word and image. This is just the first of many doublings in the work. Standing and moving before the painting, one sees oneself reflected near, or on top of, the figure, words, and images. A riveting overlap occurs when the viewer comes into contact with the words Bob’s Hand, which then forms a textual allusion to the artist and the appendage responsible for the work’s making.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, as we become part of the image and make contact with the words in *Litercy*, we enter a sea of sign painters: first, in the literal figure of the man painting the sign; second, in the metaphorical figure of Rauschenberg, the maker of signs; and, third, in the form of one’s own reflection as it joins the sign makers who create and comprise the content of the painting. Seen in the space with the hand of the maker, the viewer’s action is doubled, becoming simultaneously the object of one’s own gaze and that of the gaze of other viewers as well a creator of the picture.

The symbol of the pointing finger continues the multiplication of signifiers, as its gesture summons one both into the space where the painting lives, and out beyond its parameters. While reflected in the painting, a viewer may reach out virtually to touch the pointing finger, fingertip-to-fingertip, as if re-enacting God’s finger touching Adam’s finger in Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* (1511–12) on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Yet, this pointing finger is not that of God, but only the deictic sign of a command to look: but not *just* look and not *just* look anywhere. Pointing from inside the picture to outside its frame, the finger returns viewers to the space of the museum, to art, and to life. Thus can Bob’s hand be said to touch the viewer and to signal, or indicate, his or her exit from the painting by pointing beyond it. In this way, the pointing finger is an overt directional guide that may be understood to refer to all aspects of Rauschenberg’s concepts in his 1959 statement: art—try to act in the gap—life.

As long as viewers move before *Litercy*, they continue to act upon its imagery, maintaining its liveliness in the present. But as soon as they depart the space of the painting, *Litercy* becomes an obdurate object, datum in the territory of the blinding fact of art and the blinding fact of life. Rauschenberg had already identified the facticity of an object in 1958 when he commented upon and described “an Etruscan hand,” which he owned, as “that’s just that. It’s just so literal. It’s a fact. A hand.”<sup>47</sup> Rauschenberg’s fascination with this Etruscan hand resurfaces in the reference to

three hands in *Litercy*: the sign painter’s hands; Bob’s hand; and the hand with the pointing finger. Rauschenberg explained that his paintings “are all facts [that] your mind . . . adds up to something.”<sup>48</sup> These facts are literally visual or invisible (as the sign painter’s hands), and play off one another to awaken the viewers’ imaginations to the liveliness of the gap in which they are participants in contributing to the life and imagery of the painting. This process is something akin to how Rauschenberg described his practice: “I work very hard to be acted on by as many things as I can. That’s what I call being awake.”<sup>49</sup> However intriguing the vitality of *Litercy*, the painting is much more than a tutorial in Rauschenberg’s effort to “try to act in the gap,” or how he involves viewers in and awakens them to that site.

*Litercy* is, to my mind, one of the great (overlooked) paintings of the twentieth century, an assertion that becomes clearer when the painting is placed first in conversation with René Magritte’s *The Treachery of Images*, more commonly known as *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* (1928–29), and secondly, when it comes into dialogue with Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656). Beginning with Magritte, as in *The Treachery of Images*, so in *Litercy*. Neither the images nor the words represented are what they appear to be. The painted representation of a pipe is not a pipe; the digit pointing is not Bob’s finger; the words “Bob’s” and “Hand” are not Robert Rauschenberg or his hand. *Ceci n’est pas un homme ni une main*. In addition, the exterior world that appears in *Litercy*, or, for that matter, in the *White Paintings*, is not the thing itself. The former is only a mirror reflection, the latter a shadow diffraction that, as I suggested above, even doubles itself under certain lights. Diffraction is the action of light as it bends in passing around an obstruction or through a slit to become an indistinct form. Deploying such operations in painting, Rauschenberg takes *Litercy* to the depths of the chicanery Magritte identifies in his title *The Treachery of Images*.

In a 1966 letter to Michel Foucault regarding the philosopher’s meditations on the relationship between words and things in his book *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), Magritte concentrated on the difference between the words “resemblance” and “similitude,” as well as on how painting brings viewers into a confrontation with the slippery interrelationship between the visible and invisible.<sup>50</sup> “Things do not have resemblances, they do or do not have similitudes,” Magritte announces, and proceeds:

[G]reen peas have between them relations of similitude, at once visible (their color, form, size) and invisible (their nature, taste, weight). It is the same for the false and the real, etc. . . . Only thought resembles. It resembles by being what it sees, hears, or knows: it becomes what the world offers it. It is as completely invisible as pleasure or pain.<sup>51</sup>

*Litercy* is a visual symphony of reflected and diffracted similitudes that render viewers present in the painting. Like green peas, we bear similarities (or not) in color, form, and size, while retaining our invisible nature, thoughts, pleasure, and pain. “But,” Magritte cautions, “painting interposes a problem” for the visible and invisible, since,

[T]here is the thought that sees and can be visibly described. Las Meninas is the visible image of Velázquez’s invisible thought. Then is the invisible sometimes visible? On condition that thought be constituted exclusively of visible images.”<sup>52</sup>

Again, *Litercy* not only proves, but augments, Magritte’s thesis by further throwing realism into question and unraveling representation through visible paradox and contradiction.

Rauschenberg constitutes thought in two visible ways in *Litercy*: first from within the work proper, as the painting requires viewers to think through what they see in words (Wate[r], Bob’s, and Hand) and in images (sign painter, shadows of trees, building, sign of a pointing hand), and think these words and images through in relation to Rauschenberg’s actual production of the painting; and, secondly, from without, by bringing viewers and their worlds into the work with all the attendant invisible thoughts and emotions that surface as we see ourselves constituted as signs, and as we act in, and think about, the psychological and conceptual significance of our experiences in that space. Thus does Rauschenberg increase, in manifold ways, the consequences of the concepts in *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*. No one would “seriously argue that a word *is* what it represents—that the painting of the pipe is the pipe itself,” as James Harkness observes in his introduction to Foucault’s *This Is Not a Pipe*. “Yet,” as Harkness adds, “it is exactly from the commonsense vantage that, when asked to identify the painting, we reply, ‘It’s a pipe.’—words we shall choke on. . . .”<sup>53</sup>

All this makes perfect sense, until Rauschenberg throws down the gauntlet to both Magritte and Velázquez. What if *what* we see in *Litercy* is *what* it represents? This *is* my hand reaching out to touch the pointing finger, and so on. Here the discussion turns to *Las Meninas* (1656) for how Velázquez staged the viewer—in view—by painting a representation of a mirror in which two figures, standing outside the picture, look into its scene and become part of the events that the painter himself is still painting. If, following Harkness, we ask: “Is that the king and queen?” The answers might be, “Yes, certainly.” Or, “Perhaps people of the court?” More words to choke on. But what if one asks, “Who *is* that in *Litercy*?” We would have to acknowledge that they are we. This *is* I standing near the sign painter’s scaffolding, and it *is* also me as a representation, a mirror image that is neither here nor there. This is the

territory of heterotopia where, as Foucault notes, things become “disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that . . . and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*.”<sup>54</sup> In these many ways, Rauschenberg’s interests dovetail with Magritte’s fascination with verbal/visual non-sequiturs, with Foucault’s conceptualization of heterotopia, and with Velázquez’s distortions of space, time, and politics. Such a space for Magritte was the epitome of the surreal. For Foucault, it was the non-hegemonic space of utopia. For Velázquez it held the enigmas of representation and the illusions of identity. For Rauschenberg, it was the space of now, the intangible crack between artifice and reality, which he insisted throughout his career we must inhabit with him, even if only momentarily.

Rauschenberg’s title, *Litercy*, could equally be said to entertain Magritte’s terrain of revelation and concealment, insofar as it could be seen as a trope of the visible and invisible. We might assume that Rauschenberg’s initial misspelling of the word “literacy” was an unintentional dyslexic mistake, a spelling error that he eventually intentionally decided to retain. Suggesting this order of intentionality is not just guesswork: Rauschenberg was fanatical about using the dictionary to correct his many spelling errors.<sup>55</sup> Thus in maintaining the misspelt title, Rauschenberg pointed (like the pointing finger in *Litercy*) to the fact that literacy, or the assumption of education, competence, and knowledge, may reveal nothing of the invisibility of education, competence, and knowledge. In other words, good spelling can hide ignorance, just as bad spelling may have nothing to do with intelligence.<sup>56</sup> *Litercy* could also be seen as pointing its finger at the visually illiterate just as the finger was pointed to Rauschenberg for not being textually literate. Apropos of Magritte’s words “painting interposes a problem,” *Litercy* hangs as visible evidence of otherwise invisible thought.

Magritte’s point is further borne out in Rauschenberg’s non-singular act of elision: The deletion of the “a” from the title echoes the absence of the letter “r” in the sign painter’s “Wate[r].”<sup>57</sup> Viewers and readers fill in what is missing with their experience, or as Magritte adds, a painted image is “intangible by its very nature” and thus “hides nothing, while the tangibly visible object hides another visible thing—if we trust our experience.” He then reminds us that while the invisible “hides nothing . . . the visible can be hidden.”<sup>58</sup> Magritte is simultaneously talking about the arbitrary condition of signs, what *can* be immediately known, and what *may* be discovered in the interrelationship of thought, trust, and experience.

For Rauschenberg, experience was everything: “I put my trust in the materials that confront me, because they put me in touch with the unknown.” Only then does he “begin to work,” and only “when I don’t have the comfort of sureness and certainty.”



CAT. 74

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Venetian)*, 1973. Rope, string, and stone; extended: 178 inches (452.1 cm), dimensions variable. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



CAT. 73

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *San Pantalone (Venetian)*, 1973. Barnacle-encrusted tar paper, wood, metal, rope, and coconut; 70 × 92 × 8 inches (177.8 × 233.7 × 20.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

But how does he arrive at such a mental condition? He answers:

Sometimes Jack Daniels helps too. Another good trick is fatigue. I like to start working when it's almost too late . . . when nothing else helps . . . when my sense of efficiency is exhausted. It is then that I find myself in another state, quite outside myself, and . . . things just start flowing and you have no idea of the source.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, to become fully conscious Rauschenberg lost himself in any number of techniques, from inebriation and exhaustion to the prudent abandonment of the arrogance of self “efficiency” and “sureness and certainty.” He claimed that by becoming “quite outside” himself he could open his consciousness to the “unknown.”

Care must be taken here, however, as Rauschenberg exaggerates. The fact remains that his “trust in materials” anchored him to the facticity of things, and that facture tethered him to reality, not unlike how the rocks and other objects he fastened to his paintings, sculptures, and Combines secured the work to the world around them. These objects might be considered metaphors for Rauschenberg’s effort to reach out

of the gap and into the world through his work, ultimately securing it (and himself), however blinding, to art and to life. *Untitled (Venetian)* (1973; CAT. 74) and *San Pantalone (Venetian)* (1973; CAT. 73) are two such works in this exhibition. With a rock in the former and a coconut in the latter, Rauschenberg met reality.

Perhaps the most subversive tactic that Rauschenberg marshaled in *Litercy* was the visualization of the phenomenon of similitude in the relationship between the painting’s reflective surface and the sign-painter’s unfinished word: “Wate[r].” Like water, the surface of *Litercy* shimmers. The painting is elusive, furtive, and seemingly transparent and liquid, so much so that it is almost impossible to photograph. Like water, *Litercy* has the capacity to plunge viewers into a tenuous, vague space: the pool of Narcissus where one is split from one’s self and others, but incapable of leaving the mesmerizing reflection of our own presence in the painting. The missing “a” and the missing “r” in *Litercy* play another role in this context: both may be understood as forms of diffraction that reinforce the action of the surface of the painting itself, its watery condition. Accordingly, *Litercy* carries within it—just as the shadows of his *White Paintings* do—consequential visual, psychological, and narrative meanings, as well as the invisible history of all that has passed before it: its invisible sociological record of art and life.<sup>60</sup> Or, as Rauschenberg stated in 1987 about his abiding “obsession” with reflection, mirroring, and projected shadows: “I don’t want the piece to stop on the wall. And it has to somehow document what’s going on in the room and be flexible enough to respond.”<sup>61</sup>

### (therefore it is)

While it may seem that we have traveled a convoluted path, seemingly far afield from the question of honesty and what is at stake in Rauschenberg’s act in the gap, *Litercy* takes us to the core of the matter. It sets in motion all that occurs in the gap, before the decision will be made to regard the “something” that Rauschenberg makes as art, and before that art becomes institutionalized as Art. Such circumstances require another detour.

Rauschenberg knew very well the difference between “something,” “art,” and “Art,” as a letter he wrote, postmarked October 18, 1951, to the New York art dealer Betty Parsons, proves.<sup>62</sup> Written in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, only four days before turning twenty-six, Rauschenberg explained that “since putting on shoes” he had “sobered up from summer puberty and moonlit smells.”<sup>63</sup> The poetry of his opening line refers specifically to his first series of black paintings, works like *Untitled (Night Blooming)* (ca. 1951; CAT. 57). With its thick sticky surface, pitted with gravel from being pressed wet against the ground, the painting displays a tiny waning crescent moon barely visible above dashes of white paint that symbolize the



CAT. 57

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Night Blooming)*, ca. 1951. Oil, asphaltum, and gravel on canvas; 82 ½ × 38 ¾ inches (209.6 × 97.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

fragility and brevity of the petals of the night-blooming cereus.<sup>64</sup>

The lyricism of this line is followed by the power of his next: the *White Paintings* were “almost an emergency.” After acknowledging that his monochrome paintings were “not Art” because their status as “art has not been” recognized, Rauschenberg asserted that the series was original and “deserves . . . a place with other outstanding paintings” in the history of art. Seizing the moment with youthful confidence, Rauschenberg expressed an urgency to exhibit these paintings “this year.” As part of his persuasion, he boldly risked never exhibiting again in the gallery that prided itself on such artists as Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, and Ad Reinhardt. He promised to forgo any future exhibition in Parson’s gallery if she would show the new works within the next two months. She did not. Rauschenberg had to wait another twenty-three months before the *White Paintings* were exhibited at the Stable Gallery in September 1953.

Why did Rauschenberg throw his fate to these works that were not-yet-art, rather than join the vaunted group of abstract expressionists? He grasped the immanent honesty and uniqueness of his work, writing to Parsons: they “take you to a place in painting art has not been.” He followed this declaration with two stunning sentences:

(therefore it is) that is the the [sic] pulse and movement the truth lies in our peculiar [sic] preoccupation.<sup>65</sup> they are large white (1 white as 1 GOD) canvases . . .<sup>66</sup>

In making these enraptured pronouncements, Rauschenberg uses parentheses twice, the only place they are used in the entire letter. The parentheses mark off a break from the rest of his thoughts. “(therefore it is)” heralds a sentence later “(1 white as 1 GOD).” This is the same parenthetical technique that he used in his famous statement: “Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)” In his use of parentheses, Rauschenberg could be said to have introduced a textual device for framing and for offering readers a visual means through which to enter the gap with him.

Several sentences after (therefore it is) and (1 white as 1 GOD), Rauschenberg becomes perfectly clear about the task that he has set for the *White Paintings*: “They are a natural response to the current pressures of the faithless and a promoter of intuitional optimism.” Testifying without ambiguity to the role of faith in his life as the source of “intuitional optimism,” Rauschenberg names joy, brightness, and positivity, precisely the same qualities that he continued to promote forty-eight years later in 1999 when he explained that his life came from a place of “hope, courage, and strength” in order that his art “support inspiration and life” (as cited above).<sup>67</sup> Rauschenberg never deviated from the aim he expressed in his mid-twenties in 1951. The *White Paintings* have proved to be momentous for numerous reasons over time, but they must also, and perhaps above all, be understood as the artist’s manifesto of faith, a foundation from which he never waived, notwithstanding the preponderance of critical and art historical ink to the contrary.

Rauschenberg’s unshakable faith and intuitional optimism appears to have embarrassed many critics, art historians, and curators, who tend to find ways to discuss the works without addressing his potent conviction represented in them. Walter Hopps associated the *White Paintings* with “rectilinear minimalism and flat surface articulation,” even as he admitted, albeit with a caveat, that in his earlier *Crucifixion and Reflection* (ca. 1950), Rauschenberg may have suggested “a reconsideration of the iconic meaning of the cross as an abbreviated reflection.”<sup>68</sup> Hopps also summons comparisons to “Abstract Expressionist art of this time” and, most curiously, writes about another early work, *Mother of God* (ca. 1950; see fig. 3):

Although Rauschenberg had no direct connection with the contemporaneous Beat (as in spiritually beatific) world of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, this work resonates synchronistically with their mix of seriousness and wildness, spirituality and play, as well as their explicitly American wanderlust. The work reveals that Rauschenberg sees urbanity as part of nature.<sup>69</sup>

The strained effort to transform Christian references into “urbanity as part of nature,” as well as to connect Rauschenberg to the Beats with whom Rauschenberg

“had no direct connection” in 1951, Hopps admits, is proof enough of the lengths to which Hopps felt he needed to go in order to dissociate the artist from the spiritual sentiments that he expressed in his letter to Parsons, the letter that, ironically, Hopps reproduced in full in the very book in which he distances Rauschenberg’s work from such intentions.<sup>70</sup>

Susan Davidson associates early works like *Crucifixion and Reflection* and *Mother of God* with “Abstract Expressionism,” avoids engagement with Rauschenberg’s religious concepts, and calls the *White Paintings* “proto-Minimalist statements.”<sup>71</sup> While her next point is obviously true, Davidson remains resolutely non-committal when she writes: “No single interpretation of these works suffices.”<sup>72</sup> Sam Hunter writes off the Christian content of the work altogether. “Rauschenberg’s role in [the *White Paintings*] is more medium than creator,” Hunter states, and then credits Cage’s “non-volitional esthetic” for the direction that Rauschenberg’s work took even while acknowledging that, while they met in 1951, Cage and Rauschenberg did not become friends until the summer of 1952, and Cage was not at Black Mountain when Rauschenberg made the works in 1951.<sup>73</sup> For her part, Mary Lynn Kotz ignores the religious connection to the pre-white and *White Paintings* altogether.

Only Barbara Rose, Rauschenberg’s close friend for decades, is unapologetic. His depiction of God as a satellite dish for the Vatican, she notes, was Rauschenberg’s effort to show that this object represented “the sacred receiver and broadcaster of all communications.”<sup>74</sup> Rose further asserts that all of Rauschenberg’s prolific production, “this manic activity . . . is a vast idealistic project.” His “penchant for ringing certain images with painterly frames” may be nothing less than a way of creating “haloes for what the artist considers sacred.” Moreover, his “acts of the salvation of the humble, the mutilated and the discarded are not arbitrary,” but rather deeds of “a poet who can barely read, a preacher whose sermons are his life and work.” Though he “tried,” Rauschenberg “failed to save the world.” Instead, he “put his best efforts into saving the grand manner and the great tradition of painterly painting.”<sup>75</sup>

A more moderate position is that of the art historian Branden W. Joseph, who addresses the religious issues in Rauschenberg’s letter to Parsons, even though citing “unpublished notes” from a 1991 interview with Rauschenberg by Hopps that has Rauschenberg testify against himself to a “short lived religious period” in the early 1950s. (Oddly, Hopps does not quote this comment in his essay in his book on Rauschenberg.)<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, Joseph acknowledges that a number of the pre-white and *White Paintings* seem to be symbolic of the divine, with Rauschenberg’s paintings representing a sort of “incarnation,” a term Joseph credits to the art historian Thierry de Duve.<sup>77</sup> Despite admitting the symbolic “divine” in Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings*, Joseph concludes that the works represent only “the residual traces

of religious implications,” and then presses forward with a “modernist” interpretation of them.<sup>78</sup>

Rauschenberg’s “urgency,” Joseph is at pains to explain, “seems also to have resulted from a newfound engagement with the developmental logic of modernist painting.”<sup>79</sup> Joseph then describes Rauschenberg’s “parenthetical, elliptical reminder ‘therefore it is’” as Rauschenberg’s confirmation that the works belong to avant-garde canons of transgression, which Joseph argues is confirmed by the rest of Rauschenberg’s sentence, “that is the . . . pulse and movement[,] the truth [of the] lies in our peculiar preoccupation.”<sup>80</sup> This conclusion leads Joseph to interpret the *White Paintings* as evidence of the “specter” of Clement Greenberg’s 1950 lectures at Black Mountain, which Rauschenberg did not hear, as he was not in attendance at the college at that time. Finally, Joseph reads Rauschenberg’s interest in the monochrome as belonging to the modernist “zero degree of painting.”<sup>81</sup> This deduction is based on Rauschenberg’s explanation to Parsons that he was “[d]ealing with the suspense, excitement and body of an organic silence, the restriction and freedom of absence, the plastic fullness of nothing, the point a circle begins and ends.” But Rauschenberg follows this sentence by stating “they are a natural response to the current pressures of the faithless and a promoter of intuitional optimism,” thoughts that have nothing in common with formalism or the “logic of modernist painting.”

Finally, like so many before him, Joseph presumes from Rauschenberg’s language: “[W]e must look . . . to the context of Rauschenberg’s collaborative relationship with John Cage—whom he met in 1951, but would come to know only in the summer of 1952—. . . to understand this transformation in the discursive framework surrounding the *White Paintings*.” It is not only Cage that Joseph recommends, but also Cage via Henri Bergson and Antonin Artaud, among other individuals and philosophic traditions. Just as Hopps joins Rauschenberg to the Beats, while acknowledging there is no connection, Joseph links the *White Paintings* to Cage, who Joseph acknowledges only came into Rauschenberg’s life in a substantive way a year after the paintings were made. It was during this period in the summer of 1952 that Cage, so rapt with the *White Paintings*, composed 4’33”. Not only impressed by Rauschenberg’s accomplishment, Cage felt that he “must” compose 4’33”, the composition that emphasizes what Rauschenberg identified in the *White Paintings* as their “organic silence,” otherwise, Cage explained, “I’m lagging.”<sup>82</sup>

While such distinguished authors as Hopps, Davidson, and Joseph display similar discomfort or ideological conflict with the artist’s determined spiritual relation to his art, Cage was the first to commandeer Rauschenberg’s art away from his faith or spiritual purposes, judging from the leaflet that Cage wrote and had passed out during Rauschenberg’s 1953 exhibition at the Stable Gallery. It read:

To Whom  
No subject  
No image  
No taste  
No object  
No beauty  
No message  
No talent  
No technique (no why)  
No idea  
No intention  
No art  
No feeling  
No black  
No white (no and)

After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in these paintings that could not be changed, that they can be seen in any light and are not destroyed by the action of shadows.

JOHN CAGE

Hallelujah! The blind can see again: the water's fine.<sup>83</sup>

Rauschenberg seems never to have commented on Cage's leaflet. Regardless, it is hard to overlook Cage's pervasive pejorative tone or his disparagement of Rauschenberg's black and white monochromes and *Elemental Sculptures* as "No talent," "No idea," "No art," "No feeling," "No black," or "No white."<sup>84</sup>

Rauschenberg's passion and the innate sophistication of his monochrome works defy Cage's description, and it is difficult to imagine that Rauschenberg appreciated the leaflet. He was, more likely, perplexed, perhaps even hurt, by its terminology and implications, which were so far from his own aims. Furthermore, as Cage's list includes "No message" and "No intention," these terms imply that Rauschenberg's art had none. What could be farther from the goals of the artist who pondered "(therefore it is)," who conceptualized "(1 white as 1 GOD)," who was concerned about "the pressures of the faithless," and whose outlook was informed by "intuitional optimism"? Moreover, what could Rauschenberg have thought of Cage's 1961 discussion of his 1959 statement in Cage's oft-cited essay "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Works"? There, Cage continued in the vein of the 1953 leaflet, describing the "gap" as "the nothingness in between . . . where for no reason at all every practical

thing that one actually takes the time to do so stirs up the dregs that they're no longer sitting as we thought on the bottom." As if this was not insulting enough, Cage added: "All you need to do is stretch canvas, make the markings and join. You have then turned on the switch that distinguishes man, his ability to change his mind."<sup>85</sup> Given Cage's deprecation of Rauschenberg's reverent approach to art and life, Rauschenberg must have suppressed his spiritualism in the composer's (and other's) company. It may be telling, however, that following his break with Cage in late 1964, which accompanied his resignation from the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, in 1965 Rauschenberg purchased an orphanage at 381 Lafayette Street in New York and made its chapel his studio.

Cage's insistence upon inserting himself into the arena of Rauschenberg's art succeeded in shaping the reception of Rauschenberg's work. Much more research needs to be done to untangle Rauschenberg from Cage, but in the meantime it is unconvincing to suggest that it is necessary to "look . . . to the context of Rauschenberg's collaborative relationship with John Cage" for an understanding of Rauschenberg's work, as Joseph suggests. On the contrary, what must be considered is how Cage shifted the meaning of Rauschenberg's intentions away from Rauschenberg's purposes, even as, or perhaps because, Cage knew very well that Rauschenberg often disagreed with him. Merce Cunningham offers a ready example, for instance, of Rauschenberg's resistance to Cage's interest in the application of the workings of chance to painting. "You can't use chance in painting without turning out an intellectual piece," Rauschenberg told Cage. "You can use it in time, because then you can change time."<sup>86</sup> Given such wrangling, it seems unlikely that Rauschenberg was the person interested in Cage's 1953 leaflet.

I think that the artist who was drawn to Cage's text was Ad Reinhardt. Cage's leaflet reads like notes for what would become Reinhardt's famous "Twelve Rules for a New Academy," published in the May 1957 issue of *Art News*.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, in earlier publications, the date 1953 is given for the inception of "Twelve Rules for a New Academy."<sup>88</sup> In Reinhardt's many versions of his biographical "Chronology," for example, one dated circa 1966 lists 1953 as the year that Reinhardt "[p]aints last paintings in bright colors,"<sup>89</sup> while another version, circa 1965, adds that in 1953 he "[gave] up principles of asymmetry and irregularity in painting."<sup>90</sup> What is particularly interesting about the circa 1966 version is that it lists for 1956 the following: "Is called by Emily Genauer 'a frightening example of a man of talent but with so much ego as to insist that what he refuses to do is more important than what other artists do.'"<sup>91</sup> Genauer was none other than the critic who published Cage's leaflet "in its entirety" in the *New York Herald Tribune* on December 27, 1953, and she was clearly someone that Reinhardt had enough interest in to add to one version of his Chronology.<sup>92</sup>

No one has commented to my knowledge on the close relationship between the Cage and Reinhardt texts, and early writers on Reinhardt, like Lucy Lippard, take pains to distance his later monochromes from Rauschenberg's antecedent monochromes of 1951 to 1953. According to Lippard, Rauschenberg's monochromes were, for Reinhardt, merely "suggestive, but not necessarily seminal to Reinhardt's project" because they "were a kind of skeptical nihilism."<sup>93</sup> Lippard closes this commentary by pointing to the fact that "Reinhardt makes no mention of Rauschenberg's matt black work."<sup>94</sup> I have found no mention either of the fact that Reinhardt's *Black Quadriptych* (1955) four-panel painting is identical to Rauschenberg's four-panel *White Painting* (1951), both of which join four identically sized canvases together in a larger square. Perhaps more importantly, Lippard insisted that "a distinction should be drawn between the significance that the monochrome held for these artists in the early 1950s." She concluded: "In contrast to Rauschenberg's neo-Dadaist gesture, Reinhardt's monochromes are constructive."<sup>95</sup> But the association of Rauschenberg's monochromes with a "neo-Dada gesture" has to do with the reconfiguring of their reception in Cage's leaflet and nothing to do with the actual content Rauschenberg intended for his works. As a photograph of his installation at the Stable Gallery proves, this context was anything but "neo-Dada" and Reinhardt knew that too.

In 1964, Reinhardt mentioned in an interview: "Even when I was writing *Twelve Rules for an Academy*, and I was setting up the -- it was sort of humorous because there was only one artist that was qualified to be a member of this academy."<sup>96</sup> Reinhardt never explained what the "the" was, nor did he identify the "one artist," and neither did he ever mention Rauschenberg in the interview. But could the "one artist" have been anyone other than Rauschenberg, even if, by 1957, he had left monochromes long behind? If not Rauschenberg, the "one artist" must have been Reinhardt himself. Rauschenberg later remembered, no doubt with pointed irony, that Barnett Newman "hated" his *White Paintings* and Reinhardt "hated" his black ones.

## Use Value

Though it is well known that Rauschenberg wanted to be a "preacher" when he was a boy, and though his dealer Leo Castelli claimed at one point, "He still is [a preacher]," what I want to insist is that Rauschenberg was simply a man of faith. As he matured, he drew sustenance from every living creature and every produced thing. The world and everything in it served to increase his endless source of belief that, "Healing with faith is paramount," as he expressed to Monsignor Mario Codognato in August of 1999. Early on, he set apart a space to enact that faith between the otherwise overwhelming circumstances and demands of art and life, which he later understood as "blinding fact," a phrase that suggests the more common expression "brute

fact," which stands for something that cannot be explained, something that contradicts the principle of sufficient reason. A statement that Rauschenberg made in 1991 pushes that understanding in yet another direction, one that expands on what "blinding fact" might have meant to him. "Understanding is a form of blindness." Rauschenberg observed, adding, "Good art, I think, can never be understood."<sup>97</sup>

Blinded by the infinite possibility of the fact of art (in its abstract, visible invisibility) and the fact of life (in its literal, experienced reality), Rauschenberg sought ways to get outside, but also to remain in proximity to, these inscrutable totalities, not only for himself but also for his viewers. At the same time, he invented ways to keep the act of "making" a vital pursuit and to bring viewers into the genesis of the "something" that he "tried" to make happen in the gap, with the poignant "understanding" that his and their "acts" might eventually lead to blindness as well.<sup>98</sup>

I have now come full circle back to Rauschenberg's 1977 comments to Diamonstein. Especially critical are the next four sentences that he uttered, after first establishing his view of the honesty of the artist. They were:

You love art. You live art. You are art. You do art.

At this moment in the interview, the cadence of his speech changed, and as Rauschenberg spoke these short declarative sentences, he seemed to chant, clapping quietly in time to the sound of each verb: You love art. You live art. You are art. You do art." This is the most intimate statement that Rauschenberg ever made about his state of mind in the gap. In 1991, he would observe:

Whether I am working in shadows or silks or atrocities or just the street corner, it's headed toward . . . a realization of "you are here."<sup>99</sup>

Focusing on the behavioral and emotional forms of process in life, rather than on its objective ends, Rauschenberg's clapping enacted the affect that took over when he loved, lived, was, and did "something" in that space where "you're just doing something [that] no one can stop you from doing" because it "is your life" and it "doesn't have to be art." Taken together with his further observation that "you can't make life," Rauschenberg separated the process of making an object from making a life. At the same time, he acknowledged that doing *is your life*, because that is where you love, live, are, and do (in his case) "art." Rauschenberg's "act in the gap" thus denotes the distinction of loving, living, being, and doing art, from the disparity between being *in* life and *making* life; and he succinctly identified the intersection of mental states in the "act" as differentiated from the social conditions of the ends of production—that is, "how much use you can make of" art.

Many intriguing accounts of Rauschenberg in the studio exist, but none more exhaustive and comprehensive than the valuable contribution of Robert S. Mattison.

He explains in detail how the artist drew on the “constant running banter [and] jokes” of his studio assistants to arrive at associations and solutions in his art through “small talk [that was] seemingly unrelated and apparently inconsequential to his immediate activity,<sup>100</sup> but whose “common energy” was essential to “his creative process.”<sup>101</sup> Mary Lynn Kotz quotes Stanley Grinstein, an art collector, who recalled witnessing Rauschenberg’s energy while working and participating in his own late-night habits, which made “every day . . . like a party. Rauschenberg with a contingent of friends, everybody helping, everybody laughing.”<sup>102</sup>

Juxtaposing this festive atmosphere with the importance that Rauschenberg gave to organization—“Everything I can organize I do, so I am free to work in chaos, spontaneity, and the not yet done.”<sup>103</sup>—provides a fuller picture of the care that he put into systematic organization in order to free himself to see “the not yet done.” In other words, to the best of his ability, Rauschenberg tried to live daily life as if in the gap in order to find what had not yet been discovered or “done.” To reinforce his aim to dwell in the constant present, Rauschenberg kept virtually no earlier examples of his art either at his studio or at his house, explaining, “What interests me is the here and now. . . . Reality is you and I here at this moment.”<sup>104</sup>

“Few people have the imagination for reality,” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe observed. Rauschenberg was one of those few. For him being *in* reality was like a creed. “To break down barriers [and] see as an alien does,” he advised, “to get lost in the city, or the country, to see things . . . that maybe you are blind to.”<sup>105</sup> Here are the stakes of the gap for Rauschenberg: “I am in the present. . . . The past is part of the present.”<sup>106</sup> Dave Hickey would keenly observe that Rauschenberg “invariably devoted all his generosity” to the “task of inventing the present.”<sup>107</sup>

Over-familiarization with the conventions of living, even with seeing his art hanging on the walls of his own home, threatened to become stultifying to Rauschenberg by proximity. The best example of how anesthetized routine and destruction of imagination both horrified and emotionally affected Rauschenberg comes from his experience in China in 1982, only six years after the soul-crushing Cultural Revolution ended with Mao Zedong’s death in 1976. A shocked Rauschenberg reported: “I think [the Chinese] really were just beaten down. They had exhausted any initiative, any hope of anything changing. Once you kill the curiosity everything else goes.”<sup>108</sup> What devastated him even more than witnessing desire and inquisitiveness drained from so many people was “this big water buffalo [working a water wheel] walking around and around and around blindfolded with an old dirty rag. That was his life. If one isn’t moved by that . . .”<sup>109</sup> Rauschenberg never finished his sentence. As his own existence depended on sight, witnessing the huge beast of burden blindfolded wounded and psychologically distressed the artist.

Rauschenberg felt that everything required his keen attention so that he might unlock the simplicity of something’s deceptive complexity, or vice versa, and thereby discover its mystery. This is why, returning to his discussion with Diamonstein, when she asked him if he thought that art rested “more in ideas” than the thing itself, he answered: “The definition of art would have to be more simple-minded than that, and it’s about how much use you can make of it.”<sup>110</sup> For the writer Stephen R. Dolan, Rauschenberg implied that “if you can’t make art, you can’t destroy it; creating with the intent to create, which limits creativity; and it’s the action that counts as opposed to its being.” In the end, Dolan observed about Rauschenberg’s aim: “Art’s ‘use’ is in the mileage you get out of leaving what you have made out there for others: that’s where your act is its most effective.”<sup>111</sup> The “use” of art, for Rauschenberg, required not sequestering it as Art outside of life, which rendered it “very self-conscious and a blinding fact” for the vaunted social position and prestige that stripped Art of its life. Rauschenberg’s last sentence on the matter delivered a *coup de grace*: “Life doesn’t really need [art]. So it’s also another blinding fact.” With this closing sentence, the Diamonstein conversation veered off in another direction. But certainly Rauschenberg never had the hubris to believe that life needed the “something” that he made, and so he preserved the “gap.”

## Curator’s Comments on Collecting & Connecting

Bringing Rauschenberg’s collection of his own art together with selected works in the Nasher Museum’s permanent collection was a unique and welcomed opportunity, notwithstanding the constraints of organizing an interface between two very different bodies of art.<sup>112</sup> I am indebted to an early discussion with art historian and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum curator Susan Davidson, an authority on Rauschenberg, and David White, senior curator for the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, for the language of “collecting and connecting.” These terms succinctly captured my goal to establish the principle of a dialogue between the two collections, and to bring together in conversation overlapping investigations and themes irrespective of medium, social background, and divergent cultural traditions, as well as to challenge viewers to look long at, and think hard about, how similitude enriches difference. I wanted art history to offer room for mutual artistic interests to converge visually, and for previously unimagined perspectives to emerge conceptually, in order to enrich consideration of otherwise undiscoverable commonalities in multiplicity and diversity.

Organizing artworks into “conversations,” I also sought to bypass art historical, pedagogical, and even social norms in which debate over comparisons, as well as demand for proof, often take priority over dialogue. Comparison has long been the model

for art history, where judgments of precedent, style, value, and much else, still hold as the primary methodological approach in both teaching and scholarship. Other disciplines have not done much better in overcoming the comparative approach, as discussions of race, class, gender, and sexuality are inevitably framed as adversarial discourses, as are theories of modernism versus postmodernism, postcolonial versus decolonial, and so forth and so on. The goal—from scholarly endeavors to sports—is habitually to use comparison as a means to prevail, a paradigm perpetuated in every aspect of life, from media to museum. By shifting rhetorical strategies from comparison to visual conversation, this exhibition attempts to open the discussion to unconventional relationships among the works and, in so doing, enable the art to be experienced from nuanced alternative standpoints. This opening out of the meaning and interconnection encourages equality rather than competition.

The experience expressed in “AH POEM” by the Russian poet Vsevolod Nekrasov, a member of nonconformist Moscow conceptualism and, for many, “the foremost minimalist to come out of the Soviet literary underground,”<sup>113</sup> captures for me the optimum joy and surprise that could be a response to an encounter with the conversations in *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting*:

Ha haha haha haha  
 Ah ahah ahah ahah  
 But ah ahah ahahahah  
 Ha haha hahahah<sup>14</sup>

Let me now walk through three rooms in the eight sections of this exhibition in order to present different ways of seeing, and then thinking about, the conversations. *Black and White (with Red): Variations on the Monochrome* is the first room in the exhibition and takes its motif from three Rauschenberg works: *Untitled (Night Blooming)*, the seven-panel *White Painting*, and *Untitled [matte black triptych]* (ca. 1951; see CAT. 56). The addition of the term “(with red)” in the room’s title alludes to the red in the figurative painting by Komar and Melamid, *Stalin with Hitler’s Remains*. Together these four works begin a chain of multifaceted associations, from Rauschenberg’s approach to the monochrome through a semi-abstract, semi-figurative work like *Untitled (Night Blooming)*, to his austere white and matte-black monochromes, and on to what I have called a “monochrome with-image”: the white monochrome panel hinged to the bottom of *Stalin with Hitler’s Remains* with the work’s title discreetly printed in block letters across its middle. Taking my cue from Rauschenberg’s term “monochrome no-image,” the phrase he invented to describe his 1953 erasure of Willem de Kooning’s drawing (see fig. 7),<sup>115</sup> for the idea of “monochrome with-image,” permit me to invite Yuri Albert into the conversation



CAT. 1

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957), *Marble Chair*, 2008. Marble, 47 ¼ × 22 × 18 ½ inches (120 × 56 × 46 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase with funds provided by the estate of Wallace Fowle, 2011.15.1. © Ai Weiwei. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

in this room with his black monochrome *About Beauty*, its title spelled out in Russian braille.

Together these five works alone could comprise an entire course in the history of modern and contemporary art, from figuration to abstraction, and from non-representational (or monochrome painting and sculpture) to conceptual art. At this point, it becomes possible to see that room one is already embroiled in a lively discussion. But what of the remaining three works in the room: Paul Graham’s *Man walking with blue bags, Augusta* (2002; see CAT. 35), Ai Weiwei’s *Marble Chair* (2008; CAT. 1), and Rauschenberg’s own *Untitled (Hoarfrost)* (1975; see CAT.

77)? It may come as a surprise, but the first conversation I imagined, when selecting works for this exhibition, was the dialogue between Rauschenberg’s seven-panel *White Painting* and Ai Weiwei’s *Marble Chair*. Not only are these two works stately in their austere beauty, they are dense in historical meaning.

*Marble Chair* derives from the life of the artist’s father Ai Qing (1910–1996), a poet educated in Paris between 1928 and 1932, and one of the founders of modern Chinese poetry. In 1957, Ai Qing was denounced for “rightism,” despite being a communist, and banished as an enemy of the state with his wife and one-year-old baby (Ai Weiwei) to a remote town near the Gobi Desert. There, for nearly two decades, he was consigned to clean public toilets for a village of about 200 people. One of the only objects Ai Qing was permitted to bring into exile was a Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) yoke-back chair. That chair was the model for *Marble Chair*. After Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, when Ai Weiwei was nineteen, the family moved to Beijing. Thirty-one years later in 2007, Ai Weiwei was invited to participate in the international exhibition Documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany. As a section of his

three-part installation *Fairytale*, he included 1,001 wooden Qing Dynasty chairs positioned as “stations of reflection” in and around Kassel, especially for use by the 1,001 ordinary Chinese citizens that he also brought to Kassel for the exhibition. Ai Weiwei then commissioned an edition of sixty handcrafted marble chairs, each carved from a single block of marble. In China, white is the color of mourning and funerals. White marble was used for terraces in ancient Chinese royal buildings and may also have associations with rank. In these ways, Ai Weiwei honored his father.

Rauschenberg’s *White Painting* and Ai Weiwei’s white *Marble Chair* absorb the two artists in history, spirituality, dignity, and suffering. In this context, not only the misery of the Ai family before and throughout the Chinese Cultural Revolution must be remembered, but also Rauschenberg’s youth and his letter to Parsons, which contains the enigmatic reference to “the truth of the lies,” as well as the problem of the “pressures of the faithless.” We may never know what lies are told in truth, nor what pressures are exerted from whom, or who he considered the faithless. But when these two works of art meet, one might imagine their philosophical reach across the stony and chalk white divide of a painting and a sculpture.

Drawing Rauschenberg’s *Untitled (Hoarfrost)* and Graham’s *Man walking with blue bags, Augusta* into the discourses of room one, the first thing to be said is that, like the graining in *Marble Chair*, both of these works have nearly indistinguishable imagery, which qualifies them also as monochromes with-image. And what of their representations? One is clouded by the solid deposition of water vapor turned crystalline from humid air, the other the steaming vapour of Georgia humidity. The former brings to mind Dante’s description of the white cold fields of Virgil’s troubled look “on seeing that the world has changed its face,”<sup>116</sup> while the latter conjurs the sultry, malevolent segregationist south of William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, and Zora Neale Hurston.

These thoughts are only the murmur of what might be seen in room one. Yes, the metaphors are mixed, including both sound and sight. But listening conjurs images and images invoke sounds, even whole conversations. Is this not the process that viewers experience simultaneously in their mind’s eye when viewing art or listening to music? Such is the rigorous process the visual invitations in each room offer in *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting*.

Peeking into room four, *Light, Mirror, and Mirage: Capturing Ephemeral Nature*, one finds a surprising range of physical and metaphysical meditations on light, the phenomenon that has preoccupied artists’ imaginations throughout time, especially as a metaphor for God and for secular consciousness. Light reflected on water may have provided the earliest mirror, followed by polished stone, then silvered glass, and finally synthetic materials like plastic. Bent light, together with atmospheric effects,



CAT. 76

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Mirage (Jammer)*, 1975. Sewn fabric, 80 × 69 inches (203.2 × 175.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

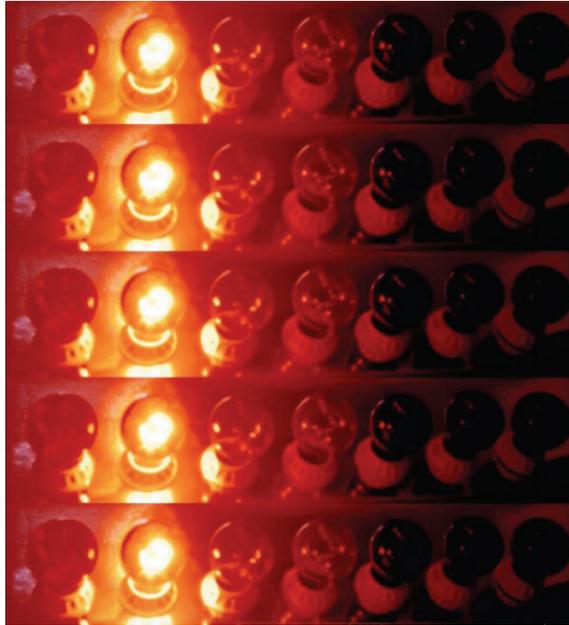
CAT. 79

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *The Proof of Darkness (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1981. Fire hose, lead plate, and blue airport runway light; dimensions variable. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



produces the mirroring phenomenon of mirage, an illusion of the existence of the nonexistent. This paradox is not unlike the variegated ways in which the psyche transforms mirror impressions in one’s mind. Even secular color theory is dependent on a combination of psychology, physiology, and physics, since perception of a distinct color is not necessarily the result of a single frequency of light.

Rauschenberg worked with light and its effects from the beginning of his career, both creating monotype blueprint images and taking up photography in 1949. Light was also requisite for his monochrome paintings, which he observed captured light and shadows. He selected the Chinese character for “Light” as one of the seven words for his *7 Characters* series (1982), produced in Xuan, China, at the oldest paper mill in the world; and he used reflective surfaces as the ground for many of his series in the 1980s and 1990s: *Borealis*, *Night Shade*, *Urban Bourbon*, and *Phantom*. Rauschenberg also served as set, costume, and light designer for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for nearly a decade, and Cunningham described him as “the finest lighting designer in American theater.”<sup>117</sup> Light appears as a factor in the aesthetics of the gossamer fabrics of Rauschenberg’s *Hoarfrost* (1974–76) and *Jammer* series (1975–76). The majestic *Mirage (Jammer)* (1975; CAT. 76) achieves



its psychological impact from the light passing through the overlapping geometric patterns of its highly saturated yellow and red silks, modified by a tissue-thin rectangle of white silk.

Rauschenberg also introduced mirrors and electric lights into his Combines, and lights on timers illuminate such technological works as his erotic series *Carnal Clock* (1969). *The Proof of Darkness* (1976; CAT. 79), a work also with erotic inferences, sports a flexible fire hose and a blue airport runway bulb that rests on a lead plate, offering evidence of darkness by paradoxically providing light in its reflected glow. Indebted to the imagery of the nineteenth-century Japanese woodblock printmaker Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1830–1892), Rauschenberg may have been prompted to use the fire hose as a sexual innuendo by the erotic content of Yoshitoshi's *The Battle of the Wrestlers and the Firemen at Shimmel Shrine* (March 22, 1886).

*Untitled (Oak Bluffs)* (1996; CAT. 36) is one of the most abstract and illusive works in Lyle Ashton Harris's *The Watering Hole* series, a collection of macabre photo-collages and photographs in which the artist meditates on what he identifies as “self-portraiture, collage, and the personal and the political.” The series is also a consideration of the erotic representation of black men in advertising, pornography, and homoeroticism, as well as the psychological and physical violence to black men in American culture. Harris explains that the theme of “the watering hole” relates simultaneously

to “a place of rejuvenation,” “a site of violence,” and a position that is “Dahmeresque.” His last reference is to Jeffrey Dahmer, a serial killer, child molester, and sex offender who, between 1978 and 1991, raped, murdered, and dismembered seventeen, primarily queer, black and Asian men and boys. Convicted in 1992, Dahmer was beaten to death in 1994 by fellow inmates, who refused to live with the predator who had also cannibalized some of his victims. In this photograph, Harris depicts the lights on the “Love Tester,” a carnival game at Flying Horses Carousel, the oldest carousel in the United States, installed in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. Only one line of five bulbs is lit, the one registering the “hotness” factor of the player. Given the artist's identification of the series with sex and violence, the lighted bulbs assume an ominous meaning.

Michelangelo Pistoletto, also a master of mirroring, concentrates on transposing the metaphor of art as “life's mirror” into the real time of the viewer seen in his reflective paintings. Pistoletto arrived at the use of mirror-finished, stainless steel panels by transferring figures directly from paper or photographic silkscreen onto their surfaces. Initially painting self-portraits, he realized that “[his] drama” was that of “a man in search of his own dimension and his own space, an impenetrable glass cage, in which the man lived in a state so dramatic it suffocated him, deprived him of voice and space.”<sup>118</sup> In 1961, he made a series of black-ground paintings titled *The Present* that reflected viewers. Pistoletto quickly gained notoriety for these works and was immediately associated with European Nouveau Réalisme, the English proto-pop Independent Group, and American Pop artists. But by the mid-1960s, he had abandoned the mirrored paintings to which he did not return for over a decade. In the interim, Pistoletto was identified with the international art movement Arte Povera, founded in Italy in the late 1960s. Using “poor” materials such as cotton and newspapers, as well as plants and animals in conjunction with technologically advanced objects and machines, Arte Povera artists addressed the intersection of social, environmental, and technical dilemmas of the late twentieth century. During this period, Pistoletto frequently worked with rags and clothing. *Clothes (Panni)* (1981; CAT. 54) unites his early mirror paintings with themes from Arte Povera, not only in its emphasis on four unidentifiable pieces of “poor” material hanging over a clothesline, but also by reinvigorating the link between abstraction and figuration that Pistoletto initiated in the mirror paintings.

Light for the Ukrainian artists Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko illuminates political and philosophical subjects, from awareness of “intangible concepts [to] childhood memories [and] ancient apocrypha” in the social circumstances during which perestroika transformed the former Soviet Union. As Senchenko explains, the phrase—“appear in whatever you may to mend (with good intentions) whomever

CAT. 36

Lyle Ashton Harris (b. 1965), *Untitled (Oak Bluffs)* from the series *The Watering Hole*, 1996. Duraflex photograph, edition 2/6, 48 × 44 inches (121.9 × 111.8 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of Blake Byrne (T'57), L.4.2007.10. © Lyle Ashton Harris. Courtesy the artist and CRG Gallery, New York, New York



CAT. 54

Michelangelo Pistoletto (b. 1933), *Clothes (Panni)* from the *Drape Suite*, 1981. Screenprint in colors on polished mirror stainless steel, edition 17/60, 47 ¼ × 39 ½ inches (120 × 100.3 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Mrs. Stanley Levy, 1986.7.1. © 1982, Michelangelo Pistoletto. Courtesy the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



you may”—exemplified their mentality at the time, and was drawn from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, their “go-to book” during that period. To create the Nasher’s two photographs (and others in the series), Savadov and Senchenko “gathered everything we had at our disposal. Some objects from our previous installations, parts of theatre props, papier-mache bath tub, skulls, flowers, small busts of Tolstoy, Gorky and Gogol, cowboy boots, punching bags, and mixed it. We photographed all of this in semidarkness lighting the scene with ‘internal light’—locally, with candles placed inside (nearly setting fire to my most expensive pair of boots).”<sup>119</sup>

They photographed the assemblages within the “shabby walls” of the “Paris Commune,” a squatters’ building named after the street on which it was located. The edge of an evocative old doorframe from this building appears to the left of a barely visible Christ figure on a crucifix in the blackened middle ground of *Untitled* (1991; CAT. 92). This work is endowed with mysticism reinforced by the quality of its glowing reddish-orange light, and the overlay of the text that reads something like a hypnotist or a psychotherapist’s instructions: “You are relaxed, very tranquil, you sleep. Though you sleep, you can speak to me. You answer my questions without awakening. You will speak in a manner of one who speaks during his sleep.” The second photograph is dominated by the faint specter of the façade of Notre

CAT. 92

Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko (b. 1962 and b. 1962), *Untitled* from the series *Controlling the Inorganic Control*, 1991. Photo emulsion on linen, 48 × 40 inches (121.9 × 101.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Robert E. Falcone, 1998.21.5. © Savadov & Senchenko. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

Dame Cathedral in Paris, which the two artists built in papier-mâché, its rose window obscured with an image of an old fashioned Russian radiator. The text advises that the soul cannot be eliminated from the world even if the body and spirit are destroyed by death. “Yes, we did use religious symbols, which I now regret,” Senchenko admits. “[S]ometimes that which appears to be a metaphor turns out to be more real than reality itself.”

These two works belong to Savadov and Senchenko’s series *Controlling the Inorganic Control* (1991–93). By “inorganic control,” Senchenko explains, “we meant something that is not human, that is almost inexistent yet can affect our thoughts and feelings. Half-jokingly we called it the ‘inorganic bodies.’” In a poignant afterthought, Senchenko recalled “one more thing. . . .” He and Savadov coated the photographs “with reddish-orange lacquer. It was a product of conversion. It appeared on the market for some time at that point and then vanished. Never seen it afterwards.” What Senchenko refers to as a “product of conversion” is the brief period of perestroika that, poignantly, like this colored varnish, was short-lived.

While Savadov and Senchenko overlay language on image, words comprise Glenn Ligon’s *Warm Broad Glow* (2005; CAT. 45), his first neon sculpture. An allegory for stereotypes of African American identity, Ligon culled the text from “Melanctha,” the second story in Gertrude Stein’s first book *Three Lives* (1909). Stein narrates the tale of Rose Johnson, a “real black negress,” who had been raised as a white child and never learned “the wide, abandoned laughter that makes the warm broad glow of negro sunshine.” Stein’s caricature of black identity is a stereotype that Ligon asks viewers to question. Just as Ligon based his theme on a story in Stein’s *Three Lives*,

CAT. 45

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960), *Warm Broad Glow*, 2005. Neon and paint, edition 1/7, 4 × 48 inches (10.2 × 121.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of Blake Byrne (T’57), L.4.2007.22. © 2005 Glenn Ligon. Courtesy the artist; Luhring Augustine, New York, New York; and Regen Projects, Los Angeles, California. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



Stein had followed Gustav Flaubert's *Three Tales* (1877), commencing with the story of a servant girl. In the long genealogy of artists drawing on other artists, Ligon expands on Stein to critique racism, while she develops the structure, narrative, and plot of Flaubert, who, in turn, was inspired by a stained-glass window in Rouen Cathedral, which depicts the biblical tale of Salome and John the Baptist. This stream of artistic convergences epitomizes the kinds of conversations that might be found in *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting*.

Moving out of room four, let us recall that Rauschenberg identified the purpose of art as its "use." Thus, using Rauschenberg as the pivotal lens through which to view the Nasher's significant collection of Soviet non-conformist art, the result is that a new encounter with Rauschenberg emerges, as well as a new view of some former Soviet artists. Two rooms in this exhibition are devoted to Rauschenberg and the former Soviets non-conformist artists. Here we will consider only room seven *Soviet/American Array: Part II, Cacophony of Cultures*.

Rauschenberg's fascination with the diversity of peoples and foreign places began in 1948 when he studied at the Académie Julian in Paris. Between 1952 and 1953, he travelled to Cuba, lived in Rome, and worked in Morocco. In 1964, the same year that he won Grand Prize at the Venice Biennale, Rauschenberg went on an international tour with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, which took him to thirty countries in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as India, Thailand, and Japan. According to the art historian Hiroko Ikegami, Rauschenberg's "physical presence in many different cities opened up a new kind of transnational network for the post-World War II art . . . foster[ing] exchanges and collaboration among artists from different backgrounds."<sup>120</sup> Not without his detractors, some complained that "the cosmopolitan avant-garde . . . resulted in the centralization of American art, with Rauschenberg emerging as the 'winner'" of the international vanguard.<sup>121</sup> A Parisian art journal confirmed this view in June 1965 by naming him the "greatest artist" in the "past twenty years."<sup>122</sup>

Then, between 1984 and 1991, Rauschenberg collaborated with artists from the eleven countries on the "Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange" (ROCI) tour. As Rauschenberg explained to his friend Donald Saff, who also served as the artistic director of ROCI, many of his friends found ROCI "too extravagant, a waster of energy." Saff, responded:

They would have to have been me or you or one of the others who traveled with us for the entire tour to see Soviets coming from every republic to Moscow, taking weeks to travel and, for all I know, spending their last ruble to see the show. Or to hear

the Chinese talk about "art before Rauschenberg" and "art after Rauschenberg." Or to see the lines at the Tretyakov.<sup>123</sup>

Tretyakov is the state-owned gallery in Moscow founded by the Russian merchant and patron of the arts Pavel Tretyakov with a collection of Russian art that spans a thousand years. Tretyakov donated his collection to the city of Moscow in 1892, and it is now a world-famous exhibition space. Rauschenberg exhibited there in 1989, the first American artist to have a one-person exhibition in the former Soviet Union since World War II.

Two years before his exhibition in Moscow, Rauschenberg offered these remarks in a toast he gave at an opening at the Kaj Forsblom Gallery in Helsinki on March 7, 1987:

The Soviet Union and the United States are now discussing, like two frustrated old accountants, how many missiles you can have that will wipe out the world, and how many missiles I can have that will wipe out the world, and they are going to lie to each other anyway. . . . And these are "peace talks." What we were talking about is that the reasons peace is not popular as an energy is because it is looked at as a lack of war. It is looked at as a void. And peace is the best of life. . . . If somehow somebody could present peace as an active energy that had to be worked at even harder than war, then I think it just might break out all over. It is not a void. . . . We are at the point where somebody has got to get the message through. . . . I think it really is up to the artists to be the negotiators for peace.<sup>124</sup>

Few artists are better known than Rauschenberg for a panoply of images culled from world culture. But his greatest scavenging adventure was at the Gulf Iron and Metal Junkyard outside Fort Myers, Florida, where he collected "truckloads" of urban debris that "found its way into the poetic, humorous assemblages of the *Gluts*."<sup>125</sup> These sculptures represent his attempt to reconcile the Texas he grew up in between 1925 and 1945 with the state ravaged by the 1970s oil glut. Barbara Rose considers the *Gluts* to "speak of poverty and deprivation" associated with "Rauschenberg's early Fifties photographs of peeling posters as well as the collage paintings of the French and Italian *affichistes* of battered street posters," and sees a "kind of sadness about them that is absent from the body of Rauschenberg's works," even though she notes that "Rauschenberg described the pieces as 'souvenirs without nostalgia.'"<sup>126</sup> Yet while many of the works in the *Gluts* series are whimsical, an elegant, even monumental, exception is the majestic *Summer Glut Breeze* (1987; CAT. 84).



CAT. 84  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Summer Glut Breeze*, 1987. Assembled metal, 71 × 70 ½ × 15 inches (180.3 × 179.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



CAT. 48  
Shimon Okshteyn (b. 1951), *There are many forms but few classics*, 1988. Neon and screenprint on stainless steel, 80 ½ × 124 ⅞ inches (203.5 × 315 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Robert E. Falcone, 1998.21.10. © Shimon Okshteyn. Image courtesy the artist



CAT. 39  
Georgy Kiesewalter (b. 1955), *Ars Brevis*, 1988. Paint, wood, and neon; 41 ¼ × 67 ½ inches (104.8 × 171.5 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of 17 Contemporary Russian artists, 1995.16.8. © Georgy Kiesewalter. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

With its commanding, bent, crenulated, monochrome brass, a playful arm appears to spin a record. The form recalls that Rauschenberg borrowed his title from the American soft rock duo Seals and Crofts’ hit song *Summer Breeze* (1972), a title that Rauschenberg punctuated with a sobering reminder of “glut.”

Very different from the *Gluts* are the five large collage works that belong to the multiculturalism of Rauschenberg’s *Faux-Tapis* series (1995; see CAT. 88), with its imitation of Sri Lankan tapestries. A similar mix of cultural sources inform *Meditative March (Runts)* (2007; see CAT. 90), with its seemingly random images, and *Wild Strawberry Eclipse (Urban Bourbon)* (1988; see CAT. 86), whose cacophony of images and brilliant colors were collected from photographs Rauschenberg snapped in such places as Cuba, while the idea for painting on mirrored aluminum was sparked by his visit to Chilean copper mines. *Wild Strawberry Eclipse* also belongs to the *Urban Bourbon* series, a series that Barbara Rose described as “a huge glamorous celebration of energy and motion,”<sup>127</sup> which exhibits how Rauschenberg “evolve[d] into a great colorist with an extraordinarily varied palette, ranging from modulated *grisaille* tones to the pure hues of the primary and secondary colors and ultimately to a florid range of combinations chosen from the infinite possibilities that recent technology has made available.”<sup>128</sup>

The same year that Rauschenberg painted *Wild Strawberry Eclipse*, the Ukrainian artist Shimon Okshteyn created *There are many forms but few classics* (1988; CAT. 48). The left side of the large, polished, steel diptych contains only the neon words of the title and its reflective surface that makes the viewer part of the picture, while the right side sports Okshteyn’s photorealist painting of a “classical tire,” painted during the period when he was interested in depicting “classical objects like women’s lips, part of a shoe” and so on.<sup>129</sup> As viewers’ reflections merge with the light from the neon title, they become part of the “many forms,” perhaps equally suggesting that all people are, in their own ways, “classics.”

Georgy Kiesewalter’s *Ars Brevis* (1988; CAT. 39) takes seriously the well-known Latin translation of the fourth century BCE Greek physician Hippocrates’ aphorism: *Ars longa, vita brevis* (Art is long, life is short). Flipping the phrase to read *Ars Brevis* (Art is short), Kiesewalter paints the phrase throughout the background of the work that features a neon zigzag with circles in the center like eyes. In each of the work’s four corners, Kiesewalter adds statements uttered by cartoon-like figures discussing the idea work:

- Upper Left: “I would hang this piece in my own corridor.”
- Upper Right: “Maybe, it is eloquent yet primitive.”
- Lower Left: “Why is the author so pessimistic?”
- Lower Right: “Yes, such ‘art’ does not last for long.”<sup>130</sup>

The artist satirizes common comments that viewers often make about art: how it would look in one's home; what its aesthetic qualities might be (“eloquent yet primitive”); the emotions of the artist; and the value of art. The entity that Kiesewalter takes seriously is viewers ourselves. In reinforcing what the cartoon figures suggest, *Ars Brevis* implies that ultimately it is we who look upon the work of art that make the work of art. In many ways, art becomes what we see it to be, as Kiesewalter seems to propose.

Having considered the conversations in several of the exhibition rooms, let me add that some of the visual arguments posed in this exhibition are calm, others are strident, some stately, others brash, some meditative, others playful, some sensual, others austere. Some are about the pure splendor of cloth, color, and light. Others are loaded with history, memory, society, and politics. Uniting all of these approaches in *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* provides an incident and a forum for experimenting with similitude and semblance, visibility and invisibility. No work in any of the eight thematic rooms is “paired” for comparison, and wall labels only introduce the artist and his or her work, without directing readers how to interpret its “conversation” with any other work in the show. This point is critical since the aim of the exhibition is to respect viewers’ interest in and ability to grapple with visual associations and impressions, and to elicit their investment in thinking through how one work informs another. In other words, *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* is organized to encourage one to see, to think, and to feel without the regimentation of classifications and categories; and a concerted effort has been made to unburden the works from aesthetic doctrines and dogma, and thereby to contribute to dismantling art historical hierarchies, even as Rauschenberg remains the guest of honor.

Rauschenberg once said: “Being a painter, I probably take a painting more seriously than someone who drives a truck or something. Being a painter, I probably also take his truck more seriously.”<sup>131</sup> Far from an imperious statement of superiority, Rauschenberg took “seriously” the act of concentrating on and thinking about all things *in* themselves and *in relation* to each other in order to become one “who could see.” Perhaps, as Rauschenberg might say, the message is more “simple-minded” than that: it is about looking long at and thinking hard about the gift of the world.

## NOTES

I am grateful to Kathy O’Dell, Stephen R. Dolan, Julie Tetel Andresen, Bruce Lawrence, Simon Deakin, Jane A. Sharp, Valerie Hillings, Pamela Kachurin, Sarah Schroth, and Wendy Hower for conversations on topics related to this essay that enriched my thought; to Lauren Acampora, Katherine Hardiman, Emma Hart, Jacqueline Samy, and Taylor Zakarin, all students in the two-semester seminar whose thinking and research contributed to my own; to Katharine Adkins, Assistant Curator and project manager, for her tireless efforts on behalf of every aspect of this exhibition, her brilliant organizational and editing abilities, her dependability and communication skills, and her grace under all my fire; to Helen Hsu for exhaustive work on the online catalogue; and to David White and Helen Hsu for so graciously responding to my own and my students’ many inquiries.

1. Robert Rauschenberg “Statement” in Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *Sixteen Americans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 58. Diamonstein mistakenly introduced Rauschenberg’s text as a “casual comment” made to Alan Soloman, curator of his first retrospective at the Jewish Museum in 1963.
2. In his famous discussion of Rauschenberg’s horizontal (or “flatbed”) approach to painting, Leo Steinberg has already identified his art with “post-Modernist painting [that] has made the course of art once again non-linear and unpredictable . . . a shakeup which contaminates all purified categories . . . deepening inroads of art into non-art.” See Steinberg’s *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 91.
3. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Traffic* (Bordeaux: CAPC musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1996), followed by Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon, France: Les presses du réel, 1998), published in English in 2002 as *Relational Aesthetics*.
4. Robert Rauschenberg in Barbaralee Diamonstein, ed. *Inside New York’s Art World: Robert Rauschenberg and Leo Castelli*. Video, Dick Cook; Editor, Brian Connell in cooperation with the New School for Social Research, New York, 1977.
5. Parts of this interview are quoted in Kristine Stiles, “Material Culture and Everyday Life,” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 2012), 322–23; Second Edition, 374–75.
6. Integrity is an issue that emerges in Rauschenberg’s reflections on the *Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange (ROCI)*: “I think our failures in making ROCI run smoothly gave it a lot more honor and integrity. With the exception of contributions from personal friends, we never took a dime from anyone. That protected one side of us from criticism. . . . The whole world is very suspicious, still, even after ROCI. Somehow ROCI maintained its integrity by my being able to say, ‘I did, through my work or selling my collection of my favorite things.’ Continuing ROCI was definitely worth it and this was a decision I had to re-make every time I parted with something that I loved so much.” In order to finance ROCI, Rauschenberg “sold [his] big 1951 black and white Cy Twombly that he had done in [Rauschenberg’s] studio on Fulton Street. And [he] sold the first cartoon, *Alley Oop*, the first non-monocolored Jasper Johns. That had a kind of family history because he lived above [Rauschenberg] and came down one Sunday morning and said, ‘I can’t paint in more than one color at a time.’ And that’s serious; that’s a serious problem.” Rauschenberg,

- “A Conversation about Art and ROCI: Robert Rauschenberg and Donald Saff” in *ROCI: Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange* (Washington, D.C. National Gallery of Art, 1991), 156–57.
7. Rauschenberg met Weil in Paris at the Académie Julian in 1948, where they studied art together, and married her in 1950. The following year their son, Christopher, was born. They divorced in 1952, remaining friends for the rest of their lives.
  8. Rauschenberg met Pearman in California, and she encouraged him to study at the Kansas City Art Institute where, in 1947, he discovered his vocation as an artist.
  9. Namuth’s photographs accompanied Robert Goodnough’s article, “Pollock Paints a Picture,” *Art News* 50 (May 1951): 38–41, 60–61, which inspired Harold Rosenberg’s “The American Action Painters,” *Art News* 51 (December 1952): 22–23, 48–50.
  10. Denys Riout, *Yves Klein, L’Aventure monochrome* (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard Arts, 2006), 67. The first public performance of what Klein called *Anthropométrie de l’Époque bleue* took place in concert with his “Monotone Symphony” on March 9, 1960, at the Galerie internationale d’art contemporain in Paris.
  11. See Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters.”
  12. Rauschenberg would engage in performances, especially throughout the 1960s, associated with theater, and explained, “I don’t call my theatre pieces Happenings. Because of my involvement in theatre through dance, I think I’d refer to them as dance theatre or maybe just theatre or anything else, because my understanding of Happenings is that they came out of a desire painters had who were working with objects, or objects were their content, their subject, a desire to animate those materials. I think mine comes out of really quite a traditional response to dance.” Rauschenberg quoted in Dorothy Seckler, “Oral History Interview with Robert Rauschenberg,” 21 December 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute (1965), page 35–36. Nancy Spector notes that Rauschenberg reiterated this position in July of 1991 in an unpublished interview with Miranda McClintic for her proposed book *Recycling Reality: The Found Object in Twentieth-Century Art*. Copy in the Rauschenberg archives in New York, n.p. [p. 3]. See Spector’s “Rauschenberg and Performance, 1963–67: A ‘Poetry of Infinite Possibilities,’” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), footnote 82. Spector appropriately identifies “the performative sensibility of Rauschenberg’s art” and his “theatrical sensibility,” both of which were product of his intense interest in “temporality, collaboration, and the elemental presence of a viewer” (p. 227).
  13. Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 379.
  14. Ibid.
  15. Ibid.
  16. Branden W. Joseph reads Rauschenberg’s interest in “multiplicity” through Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000) in order to argue for how Rauschenberg “critique[d] the transcendent and dialectical structure of modern sovereign or disciplinary power,” and to how he “open[ed] . . . the appropriated, commercial realm to subrepresentational forces of multiplicity and temporal difference.” My interest in the “gap” is directed to the phenomenology of Rauschenberg’s approach rather than its political or economic affect. See Joseph’s *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant Garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 17–18.
  17. See Joseph’s excellent discussion of the antecedent role of Antonin Artaud in Cage’s work as “representation’s larger expropriation of life” in *Random Order*, 255–58.
  18. Robert Rauschenberg quoted in André Parinaud, “Un ‘misfit’ de la peinture newyorkaise se confesse,” *Les Arts et Spectat Arts* [Paris] 821 (May 1961): 18.
  19. Ibid. I would like to thank Molly Renda for pointing this part of the text out to me.
  20. Robert Rauschenberg, “The Tabago Statement,” (22 October 1984) in Jack Cowart, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 154.
  21. Sam Hunter, “Robert Rauschenberg: Art and Life,” *Robert Rauschenberg: Works, Writings and Interviews* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2006), 37.
  22. Rauschenberg first appropriated an engraving of da Vinci’s famous painting in 1952 for his small collage *Untitled [Mona Lisa]*, comprised of fabric, foil paper, Arabic texts, and several unrelated engravings—one of classical columns, another of cupids, and a third sporting jellyfish-like form.
  23. Hunter, *Works, Writings and Interviews*, 109.
  24. Robert Rauschenberg, “Note on painting,” (31 October–2 November 1963) reproduced in Hunter, *Works, Writings and Interviews*, 123.
  25. “A Conversation with Robert Rauschenberg,” *Partisan Review* 35 (Winter 1968), 92–106; reprinted in Hunter, *Works, Writings and Interviews*, 134.
  26. The critic Irit Rogoff commented in 2012: “I genuinely have no idea what anyone means when they say ‘art.’ This was not a rhetorical gesture. I genuinely have no idea what anyone means when they say art. I think that the sort of knock on impact of a lot of what I see is the fact that this kind of evacuation of a set of ordinary meanings within our field has had a kind of knock on affect in evacuating a whole set of meanings. But not just as a kind of epistemological lesson—‘well if they don’t know what art is then we don’t know what art is,’ and everything is destabilized—but by kind of cross-collaboration between, sort of between practices.” “Discussion with Ruth Sonderegger and Irit Rogoff,” in “3rd Former West Research Congress: Beyond What was Contemporary Art, Part I (19–20 April 2012), Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and Secession,” between 8:52 and 9:48 minutes into the discussion, <http://vimeo.com/41625855>.
  27. This is a comment that a number of prominent scholars, as well as graduate students, have expressed personally to me.
  28. Michael Archer, “The Moral Gap between Art and everyday Life,” in *Political, Minimal* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2009), 175.
  29. Robert Rauschenberg fax to Monsignor Mario Codognato, 20 August 1999, in the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation archive box “Padre Pio,” New York City.
  30. Archer, “The Moral Gap,” 175.
  31. Hunter, *Works, Writings and Interviews*, 24.
  32. Rauschenberg to Walter Hopps quoted in Lynn Wainwright, “Robert Rauschenberg’s Fabrics: Reconstructing Domestic Space,” in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 200.
  33. Ibid.

34. Rauschenberg's answer to Barbara Lee Diamonstein, *Inside New York's Art World: Robert Rauschenberg and Leo Castelli*.
35. Rauschenberg in Barbara Rose's *Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 10.
36. *Ibid.*, 18.
37. Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 56.
38. Rauschenberg in Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 14–15.
39. For example in Robert Morris's well-known 1970 *Artforum* essay "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," Morris did not cite Rauschenberg together with those artists Morris identified as demonstrating a "commitment to the means of production. . . . Duchamp, Cage, Pollock, Johns, and Stella." The oversight is especially odd, as Morris worked closely with Rauschenberg in Judson Dance Theater and in his Surplus Dance Theater. Perhaps the answer to the absence of Rauschenberg as an example of one devoted to the "phenomenology of making" lies in a comment by Yvonne Rainer. "[T]he truth of the matter," she explained, was that during this period younger artists such as herself, "Carolee Schneemann, Alex Hay, and Bob Morris . . . were simply not in [Rauschenberg's] league as far as previous accomplishment went." See Morris's "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 8 (April 1970): 62–66. See also Rainer's *Feelings Are Facts, A Life* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2006), 240. On minimal and process art as they relate to Rauschenberg and Morris's writings, see Sarah Roberts's "White Painting [three panel]" in *SFMOMA On the Go* (July 2013): [http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/essay/white\\_painting](http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/essay/white_painting).
40. Hunter, *Works, Writings and Interviews*, 25.
41. Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, 98.
42. Robert Rauschenberg, quoted in Alain Jouffroy, "Barge," *Quadrum* 15 (1963): 182.
43. Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: The Menil Collection and the Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), 65.
44. Rauschenberg, "LOBELISCO" statement (3–10 March 1953), reprinted in Hopps, *The Early 1950s*, 232.
45. Robert Rauschenberg quoted in "The Emperor's Combine," *Time Magazine* 75 (18 April 1960): 92.
46. The images on this side of the painting are derived from Rauschenberg's gelatin silver print *New Jersey* (1980).
47. Robert Rauschenberg quoted in James Schuyler, "Is today's artist with or against the past?," *Art News* 57 (Summer 1958): 46.
48. Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 114.
49. "A Conversation with Robert Rauschenberg," 134.
50. See René Magritte, "To Michel Foucault," (23 May 1966) printed in Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 57.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*
53. James Harkness, "Introduction" to Foucault's *This Is Not a Pipe*, 5–6.
54. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 48.
55. The archive of Rauschenberg's correspondence demonstrates that he took special care with spelling by making multiple drafts and correcting spelling errors. Dave Hickey noted that when he visited the artist at some point, Rauschenberg had "a large dictionary on a stand." Dave Hickey, "Apogamy Pods: Rauschenberg Erases Rauschenberg," in *Rauschenberg Apogamy Pods* (New York: PaceWildenstein, 2000), 6.
56. Hickey explained that Rauschenberg has often been taken to be "un-intellectual," but that the artist "invested a lifetime of tactical and strategic understanding into the creation of a rational support system that facilitates his ongoing, instantaneous visual decision-making [which displays] his deep understanding of the position of intellect in the art-making process." Hickey, "Apogamy Pods," 7.
57. I am indebted to a discussion with Julie Tetel Andresen on the point of the missing "a" as Rauschenberg's intentional aim to resonate with the missing "r".
58. Magritte, "To Michel Foucault," 57.
59. Robert Rauschenberg: An Audience of One," interview with John Gruen, *Art News* 29 (February 1977): 48, quoted in Hunter, *Works, Writings, and Interviews*, 28.
60. In these broader considerations of diffraction as related to history, memory, society, and more, Donna J. Haraway and Thyrza Nichols Goodeve informed my thinking. See the chapter on "Diffraction as Critical Consciousness" in Goodeve's *Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 101–09.
61. Rauschenberg in Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 110.
62. Robert Rauschenberg letter to Betty Parsons, postmarked 18 October 1951, reproduced in Hopps, *The Early 1950s*, 230. For the full text of the letter, see also Katherine Hardiman's essay "Monochromes & Mandalas" in this publication.
63. Rauschenberg was often barefoot, as decades of photographs of him attest in every possible circumstance. One of the first of these photographs is the 1951 blueprint described in *LIFE* magazine as "Underwater Nymph," a picture of Susan Weil that captured his bare foot in the image while exposing her with light on the blueprint paper.
64. The cereus cactus blooms only once a year in the dark and was particularly popular in the South during the Depression years, as well as in the period when Rauschenberg studied at Black Mountain. Eudora Welty named a group of her literary friends the "Night-Blooming Cereus Club," and when her plant began to show buds each year, Welty held parties at her Jackson, Mississippi home to watch the flower unfurl and die. Describing the plant as "a naked, luminous, complicated flower" in one of the short stories in her book *The Golden Apples* (1949), Welty also concluded that when it died, the beauty of the night-blooming cereus ended up resembling "a wrung chicken's neck."
65. The phrase "the pulse and movement the truth lies in our peculiar preoccupation" is the most inscrutable section of the letter. One can only speculate on its meaning. But his emphasis on "pulse and movement," or time, might relate to *This is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time*, the series of fourteen woodcuts he created at Black Mountain sometime during the year 1948–49. It might also be that he was thinking about movement in dance as, in the fall of 1948, he illustrated Joel Oppenheimer's poem, "The Dancer," a poem commemorating a performance by Black Mountain College dance instructor Katherine Litz.

66. Rauschenberg amplifies his zealous comparison of his paintings to the one white (light) of one God by describing his experience of “dealing with the suspense, excitement, and body of an organic silence, the restriction and freedom of absence, the plastic fullness of nothing, the point a circle begins and ends.”
67. Rauschenberg, fax to Monsignor Mario Codognato.
68. Hopps, *The Early 1950s*, 29.
69. *Ibid.*, 29–30.
70. *Ibid.*, 230.
71. Susan Davidson, “Early Work: 1949–1954,” in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson, 44.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Hunter, *Works, Writings and Interviews*, 14.
74. Barbara Rose, “Rauschenberg: on and off the wall,” in Gilbert Perlein, Susan Davidson, and David White, *Robert Rauschenberg: on and off the wall: Works from the 80’s and the 90’s* (Nice: Musée d’Art moderne et d’Art contemporain, 2005), 69.
75. *Ibid.*, 72.
76. Joseph quotes “Rauschenberg from notes of an interview with Walter Hopps at Captiva Island, Fla., 18–20 January 1991, in the Rauschenberg archives in New York.” See Joseph, *Random Order*, 26. I have not been able to locate these notes.
77. *Ibid.* See also n4, p295.
78. *Ibid.*, 29.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Joseph corrects the sentence by leaving out the repetition of “the,” adding a comma after movement, and correcting the spelling of “peculiar.”
81. *Ibid.*, 30.
82. See John Cage quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 67.
83. Cage’s handout was quoted in its entirety in Emily Genauer, “Art and Artists: Musings on Miscellany,” *New York Herald Tribune* (27 December 1953): sec. 4, p. 6. The text was also printed with the title “[Robert Rauschenberg] *John Cage*,” in *John Cage An Anthology*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1970), 111–12. See the text also reprinted in a different form in Joan Young and Susan Davidson, “Chronology,” in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson, 553.
84. Cage seems to have been competitive with Rauschenberg right from the beginning of their friendship in the summer of 1952, as I noted regarding his comment about “lagging” behind Rauschenberg. Regarding their collaboration on *Automobile Tire Print* (1953), in his 1961 essay on Rauschenberg, Cage made both little of Rauschenberg’s originating concept and strategy for executing the print, and much of his own role in the work, writing: “I know he put the paint on the tires. And he unrolled the paper on the city street. But which one of us drove the car?” See John Cage, “On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work,” in *Silence* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 98. There are so many snide remarks in Cage’s essay that it deserves careful reading and analysis. This

is also the essay in which Cage preempts Rauschenberg’s unique attention to the register of shadows on his *White Paintings*, writing, “The white paintings were airports for the lights, shadows, and particles (page 102).” Cage’s comment is the one most often cited, rather than Rauschenberg’s more sophisticated understanding of how his paintings functioned. But it was in 1964, when Rauschenberg won the grand prize at the Venice Biennale and commented in an interview that he “regarded the Merce Cunningham Dance Company as [my] biggest canvas,” that Cage’s enmity surfaced. As Alastair Macaulay has written, the comment offended “John Cage, who seems to have felt it sounded too proprietorial.” But, as Macaulay adds, Rauschenberg’s comment “was completely justified, [as] at that time there was no better place to see the range of Mr. Rauschenberg’s inventiveness than the Cunningham repertory.” Hiroki Ikegami also discusses this comment, as well as Rauschenberg’s resignation from the Cunningham Dance Company at the end of the tour in 1964, when he was hurt by Cunningham and Cage’s late appearance and early departure from his public performance at the Sogetsu Art Center, Tokyo, during which he painted the Combine *Gold Standard*. See Macaulay’s “Rauschenberg and Dance, Partners for Life,” *The New York Times* Dance section (14 May 2008): <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/14/arts/dance/14coll.html>; and Ikegami’s *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010).

85. Cage, *Silence*, 105–06.
86. Rauschenberg quoted in Merce Cunningham, *Change: Notes on Choreography* (New York: Francis Starr, 1968), quoted in Rose, “Rauschenberg: on and off the wall,” 54.
87. It is worth recounting Reinhardt’s twelve points, which are very close to those of Cage, although many were followed by Reinhardt’s textual amplification not cited here: “1. No texture; 2. No brushwork or calligraphy; 3. No sketching or drawing; 4. No forms; 5. No design; 6. No colors; 7. No light; 8. No space; 9. No time; 10. No size or scale; 11. No movement; 12. No object, no subject, no matter. No symbols, images, or signs. Neither pleasure nor paint. No mindless working or mindless non-working. No chess-playing.” See Ad Reinhardt, “Twelve Rules for a New Academy,” *Art News* 56 (May 1957): 37–38 and 56.
88. For example, in my own and Peter Selz’s book *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 113, the copyright owned by Anna Reinhardt required the date of 1953 to follow the title of the work. Reinhardt’s text, thus, is listed in our volume as “Twelve Rules for a New Academy” (1953) in *Art News* 56 (May 1957): 37–38, 56; reprinted in Barbara Rose, ed., *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* (1975) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 203–07.
89. “Ad Reinhardt draft chronology, circa 1966,” Smithsonian Archives of American Art: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/viewer/ad-reinhardt-draft-chronology-15181/43621>.
90. “Ad Reinhardt draft chronology, circa 1965,” Smithsonian Archives of American Art: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/viewer/artists-chronology-10289/26793>.
91. “Ad Reinhardt draft chronology, circa 1966,” Smithsonian Archives of American Art: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/viewer/ad-reinhardt-draft-chronology-15181/43622>.
92. See Genauer, “Musings on Miscellany,” sec. 4, p. 6, cited in Young and Davidson, “Chronology,” in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Hopps and Davidson, 553.
93. Lippard, 77.
94. *Ibid.*

95. Ibid.
96. Harlan Phillips, "Oral history interview with Ad Reinhardt, circa 1964," Archives of American Art: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ad-reinhardt-12891>.
97. Rauschenberg, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, 177.
98. Rauschenberg used blindness in a number of works, like *Map Room II*, when he had nineteen performers blindfolded onstage while they made "nonsensical sentences by switching places and flipping through sign cards painted with words." See Nancy Spector, "Rauschenberg and Performance, 1963–67: A Poetry of infinite Possibilities," in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 329.
99. Rauschenberg, "A Conversation about Art and ROCI," 178.
100. Robert S. Mattison, *Robert Rauschenberg: Breaking Boundaries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 14.
101. Ibid., 18.
102. Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, 153.
103. Rauschenberg in John Richardson, "Epic Vision," *Vanity Fair* 445 (September 1997): 281.
104. Rauschenberg in Mattison, *Breaking Boundaries*, 10.
105. Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, 37.
106. Robert Rauschenberg in André Parinaud, "Un 'misfit' de la peinture newyorkaise se confesse," 18.
107. Dave Hickey, "Open Charms," *Artforum* 36 (September 1997): 152.
108. Rauschenberg, "A Conversation about Art and ROCI," 161.
109. Ibid.
110. Drawing on Harold Rosenberg's famous reference to the action painter's "encounter" in the act of painting, Cage would write in 1961: "There is in Rauschenberg, between him and what he picks up to use, the quality of an encounter." Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," 103.
111. Stephen Rogers Dolan in a telephone conversation with the author, 22 May 2014.
112. The larger discussion of "collecting" and "collections" is beyond the scope of this essay even if the exhibition *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* is a modest effort to engage some of the issues raised by Susan Stewart. A goal of the exhibition is to enable two collections to address each other in the present, rather than through either the past or through art historical classification, both of which destroy use value through what Stewart describes as the "total aestheticization" of the collected, historicized object. See Stewart's "Objects of Desire" in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 150.
113. Vsevolod Nekrasov, "Ah Poem," in *I Live I See: Selected Poems*. Translated from the Russian by Ainsley Morse and Bela Shyevich, introduction by Mikhail Sukhotin, afterword by Gerald Janeczek (Brooklyn, New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2013), 1.
114. Ibid., 58.
115. Rauschenberg quoted in Maxine de la Falaise McKendry, "Robert Rauschenberg," *Interview* 6 (May 1976): 36, cited in Joseph, *Random Order*, 63.
116. Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*, Inferno, XXIV, 1–15.
117. Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, 117.
118. Michelangelo Pistoletto, "Interview with Germano Celant," in *Michelangelo Pistoletto, ed. Germano Celant and Ida Gianelli* (Florence: Electa, 1984), 23.
119. Georgii Senchenko, email to the author, 11 May 2014. All quotes in this section are derived from this email.
120. Ikegami, *The Great Migrator*, 11.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid., 54.
123. Rauschenberg, "A Conversation about Art and ROCI," 158.
124. Rauschenberg, "Toast," in Rose, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 129.
125. Susan Davidson, "Ideas Have Elbows," in Susan Davidson and David White, *Robert Rauschenberg: Gluts* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2009), 18–19.
126. Rose, "Rauschenberg: on and off the wall," 71.
127. Ibid.
128. Ibid., 70.
129. Shimon Okshteyn, telephone conversation with the author, 21 February 2014.
130. Many thanks to Pamela Kachurin for translations.
131. Rauschenberg, "Photographs," in *Robert Rauschenberg Photographs* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), n.p.



CAT. 58

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *White Painting* [seven panel], 1951. Oil on canvas, 72 × 125 inches (182.9 × 317.5 cm).  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## *Monochromes & Mandalas*

KATHERINE HARDIMAN

Robert Rauschenberg began attending Black Mountain College in North Carolina in the fall of 1948 with the artist Susan Weil, whom he met earlier that year while studying at the Académie Julian in Paris on the GI Bill.<sup>1</sup> Black Mountain had been founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, a Rhodes Scholar and a liberal educator, who focused the college on the arts, eventually attracting an impressive array of distinguished faculty and students in photography, poetry, literature, dance, music, architecture, and art.<sup>2</sup> Rice fostered an atmosphere of experimentation that included a curriculum encouraging students to move through the program and graduate at their own pace. This liberal attitude brought Black Mountain to the attention of some of the most progressive intellectuals in the United States, as well as European artists like Josef and Anni Albers of the Bauhaus, who immigrated to the U.S. soon after the Nazis closed the Berlin Bauhaus in 1933. That November, Albers was appointed head of the painting program at Black Mountain, and Rauschenberg would become his student fifteen years later.

Rauschenberg first read about the college in *Time* magazine upon his return from Paris. The article referred to Albers as a teacher noted for being “the world’s greatest disciplinarian,” who taught Bauhaus experimental principles, including preliminary training in form, material, and color, as well as relationships among rectangles of various monochrome hues.<sup>3</sup> Eager to hone his craft, Rauschenberg arrived at Black Mountain ready for discipline and instruction from Albers, who took an immediate dislike of him. “I was Albers’s dunce, the outstanding example of what he was *not* talking about,” Rauschenberg explained, adding:

He’d pick up something of mine and say, “This is the most stupid thing I have ever seen, I dun’t even want to know who did it.” If I hadn’t had such great respect for him I could never have put up with the treatment.<sup>4</sup>

In fairness to Albers, as Martin Duberman writes, it was Weil who “had been considered more of a serious painter . . . though everyone had been amused at [Rauschenberg’s] childlike charm, his whimsical designs, his imaginative costumes,

his vats of dye that cooked on the kitchen stove—and the violet underwear that emerged from them. But Albers, for one, had found Rauschenberg frivolous and told him he ‘had nothing to teach him.’”<sup>5</sup>

Despite Albers’s exasperation, Rauschenberg spoke of the artist favorably, calling him a “beautiful teacher and an impossible person,” and explaining that he continued to learn from Albers “years later.”<sup>6</sup> Rauschenberg even partially credited Albers with inspiring the idea for what would become his *White Paintings*, begun in 1951, and his interest in monochromes may be derived, in part, from Albers’s schooling. Rauschenberg said that Albers instilled in him “such respect for all colors that it took years before [he] could use more than two colors at once.”<sup>7</sup> Albers, however, did not return Rauschenberg’s appreciation, and years later he claimed that he could not remember Rauschenberg, who left Black Mountain in the summer of 1949.<sup>8</sup> In January 1950, he began attending classes at the Art Students League in New York where he met Cy Twombly. That year, Rauschenberg also met the art dealer Betty Parsons, who offered him his first solo exhibition. It opened in May of 1951, and soon after Rauschenberg resumed his studies at Black Mountain. When he returned that June, Albers had departed to become the chair of Yale University’s Art Department.

That summer, Rauschenberg also began his *Night Blooming* series, which included eighteen primarily black paintings, and his *White Paintings* series. For the latter, he carefully covered a number of canvases with Benjamin Moore white paint.<sup>9</sup> Each panel of the mostly multi-paneled paintings was exactly the same size, covered with exactly the same paint, applied with a roller in exactly the same consistency. After finishing the *White Paintings*, Rauschenberg wrote to Betty Parsons:

I have since putting on shoes sobered up from summer puberty and moonlit smells. Have felt that my head and heart have moved through something quite different than the hot dust the earth throws at me. the results are a group of paintings that I consider almost an emergency. they bear the contradictions [sic] that deserve them a place with other outstanding paintings and yet they are not art because they take you to a place in painting art has not been. (therefore it is) that is the the [sic] pulse and movement the truth lies in our peculiar [sic] preoccupation. they are large white (1 white as 1 GOD) canvases organized and selected with the experience of time and presented with the innocence of a virgin. Dealing with the suspense, excitement and body of an organic silence, the restriction and freedom of absence, the plastic fullness of nothing, the point a circle begins and ends. they are a natural response to

the current pressures of the faithless and a promoter of intuitional optimism. It is completely irrelevant that I am making them— Today is their creator.

I will be in N.Y. Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> and will forfeit all right to ever show again for their being given a chance to be considered for this year’s calendar.

Love Bob

I think of you often Brave woman.  
Hello to Monica.<sup>10</sup>



fig. 3

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Mother of God*, ca. 1950. Oil, enamel, printed maps, newspaper, and metallic paint on Masonite; 48 × 32 ½ inches (121.9 cm × 81.6 cm). Collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California. Fractional purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis and promised gift of an anonymous donor. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

This letter conveys Rauschenberg’s powerful, emotional, and intellectual conceptualization of his *White Paintings*, which embodied for him a oneness and godliness comprised of “the plastic fullness of nothing” and “the point a circle begins and ends.” A number of his earlier works, particularly *Mother of God* (ca. 1950; fig. 3), anticipated the religious references in Rauschenberg’s letter. A collage/painting, *Mother of God* contains a fragment of text from the *Catholic Review* in its bottom corner that reads: “An invaluable spiritual road map. . . . As simple and fundamental as life itself.” This fragment reinforces an understanding of the many maps of U.S. cities with which Rauschenberg papered the surface and which could be interpreted as metaphorical representations of the multiple paths to God. It is possible that the cream-colored monochrome circle in the center of the painting also foretold the “1 white as 1 GOD” of the *White Paintings*.<sup>11</sup>

Moving toward a secular reading of the work, Branden W. Joseph points out that when Rauschenberg was in New York during the summer of 1950, the art critic Clement Greenberg had lectured at Black Mountain on “Kantian aesthetics and the history of modernism.”<sup>12</sup> Joseph’s assumption is that Greenberg’s teaching left a legacy at Black Mountain, for he instructed that the “one way to take painting where it had not yet been would be to pursue it further towards its ‘essential’ two-dimensionality.”<sup>13</sup> While discussions of Greenberg’s theories may have found their way into Rauschenberg’s impulse to create the *White Paintings* and the subsequent matte-black paintings,<sup>14</sup> the spiritual content of the *White Paintings*, as Rauschenberg laid them out for Parsons, distinguished the works significantly from Greenberg’s formalist concepts of the autonomy of art, even if Rauschenberg would soon cease talking about them in a spiritual way.

Moreover, Greenberg did not embrace the *White Paintings*, though he would accept that they were “art . . . albeit certainly not good art.”<sup>15</sup> For many, the works were devoid

of artistry, and after Rauschenberg exhibited them at the Stable Gallery in 1953, the critic Hubert Crehan wrote: “Their exhibition is a *chef-d’oeuvre* [masterpiece] of duck pressed to the point of no return. . . . White canvas . . . conceived as a work of art, is beyond the artistic pale.”<sup>16</sup> For wholly different reasons, the *White Paintings* equally upset but also impressed the painter Ellsworth Kelly, who, upon seeing them for the first time in Rauschenberg’s studio in 1954, showed Rauschenberg sketches he himself had made in Paris between 1951 and 1952 of plain white monochromes, also in a series and also multi-paneled.

While the *White Paintings* even shocked some members of the progressive Black Mountain community,<sup>17</sup> they deeply moved the composer John Cage, who met Rauschenberg in 1951 and became friends with the artist in 1952. Cage invited Rauschenberg to exhibit the *White Paintings* in what many consider to be the first “happening,” Cage’s *Theater Piece No. 1* (1952), staged at Black Mountain.<sup>18</sup> Cage organized the raucous production, arranging the audience seats “in the center of the performing area, facing each other, and broken by diagonals into four sections.”<sup>19</sup> He invited Charles Olson and Mary Caroline Richards to read their poetry, Merce Cunningham to dance, David Tudor to play the piano, and Rauschenberg “to show his paintings and also to play recordings of his choice.”<sup>20</sup> Cage stood on top of a ladder and read a text before descending to read it again from a lectern.<sup>21</sup> Rauschenberg hung his *White Paintings* on the ceiling.

Galvanized and inspired by how the *White Paintings* absorbed shadow and light, Cage composed *4’33”* (1952), the celebrated composition in which a pianist sits at the piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds while the sounds of the concert hall provide the music. Cage remarked that he “must” compose *4’33”* after being confronted with Rauschenberg’s radical monochromes, or else “I’m lagging, otherwise music is lagging.”<sup>22</sup> A decade later, Cage devoted a chapter of his first book, *Silence* (1961), to Rauschenberg, whose *White Paintings* Cage described as “airports for the lights, shadows and particles,” which caught “whatever fell on them.”<sup>23</sup> “Why did I not look at them with my magnifying glass?” Cage asked himself.<sup>24</sup> According to Rauschenberg, Cage also considered the *White Paintings* to function like a “clock of the room”<sup>25</sup> for how one could tell the time of day by reflections on their surfaces.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, Joseph points out that the Hungarian Bauhaus master László Moholy-Nagy, an artist particularly admired by Cage, had written about Kazimir Malevich’s *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918; fig. 4) in his book *The New Vision* (1938). Describing how “the plain white surface . . . constituted an ideal plane for kinetic light and shadow effects which, originating in the surroundings, would fall upon it,” Moholy-Nagy even referred to the white square as “the final simplification of the picture.”<sup>27</sup>

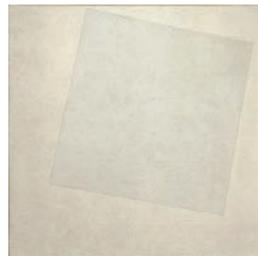


fig. 4

Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935), *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 31 ¼ × 31 ¼ inches (79.4 × 79.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. 1935. Acquisition confirmed in 1999 by agreement with the Estate of Kazimir Malevich and made possible with funds from the Mrs. John Hay Whitney Bequest (by exchange). Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York, New York

Malevich had begun to move towards *White on White* already in 1913 when he introduced a drawing of a black quadrilateral on a white field (known as the “Black Square”) in his stage designs for Aleksei Kruchenykh’s Futurist opera *Victory Over the Sun*. In 1915 in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) in the exhibition *0.10*, the first showcase of his Suprematist paintings, Malevich presented *Black Square* (1915) and *Red Square* (1915),<sup>28</sup> both quadrilaterals on a white field. Such works paved the way for *White on White* with its tilted white square on a white field.<sup>29</sup> Three years later, the Russian artist Aleksandr Rodchenko arrived at the first monochrome paintings in his triptych *Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color* (1921). “I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue and yellow,” Rodchenko wrote in 1939. “I affirmed: It’s all over. Basic colors. Every plane is a plane, and there is to be no more representation.”<sup>30</sup>

Rodchenko’s conclusion that the monochrome signaled the end of representation could not have been more different than the supremacy of “pure feeling” that Malevich described of his Suprematist works in 1919 immediately following the Russian Revolution. Malevich wrote: “I have overcome the lining of the colored sky. . . . Swim in the white free abyss, infinity is before you.”<sup>31</sup> Malevich pictured his interest in the Russian philosopher Peter D. Ouspensky’s metaphysical theories of time and motion, themselves inspired by the spiritual teachings of the Greek-Armenian George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, who philosophized about achieving higher states of consciousness. Given this history, many have interpreted Malevich’s square as a “spiritual icon.”<sup>32</sup>

Malevich’s point of departure was not dissimilar to Rauschenberg’s original understanding of his *White Paintings* as metaphysical and spiritual.<sup>33</sup> Rauschenberg also grasped that his own monochrome paintings “deserve . . . a place with other outstanding paintings.” Moreover, Rauschenberg wrote that his *White Paintings* expressed his “natural response to the current pressures of the faithless and a promoter of intuitional optimism.” In this last statement, Rauschenberg threw down the gauntlet: he would pursue optimism in his work, no matter how discouraged he might feel in private.<sup>34</sup> Rauschenberg would come to adopt Cage’s secular discourse about the *White Paintings*, but it is highly possible that he maintained his faith nonetheless.

## Monochrome black paintings

Rauschenberg began his black paintings slightly earlier than the *White Paintings*, according to the curator and museum director Walter Hopps.<sup>35</sup> The black paintings went through five phases. One of three surviving works from the first phase, *Untitled (Night Blooming)* (ca. 1951; see CAT. 57) is a work enlivened with broad brushstrokes atop a black background, evoking the night-blooming cereus plant under a sliver of



moon.<sup>36</sup> Like this work, other paintings in the *Night Blooming* series included gravel that adhered to the surface when Rauschenberg pressed the still wet, “pretty tacky” works onto the ground.<sup>37</sup> The black monochromes of the second phase, exemplified by *Untitled* [matte black triptych] (ca. 1951; CAT. 56), were painted in flat black akin to the flat white of the *White Paintings*, and this example may even have once been a *White Painting* as, lacking funds, Rauschenberg often resorted to repainting his canvases during this period.<sup>38</sup>

Groups three and five of the black series were primarily painted in black applied over highly textured newspaper bases that had been dipped in glue to adhere to the canvas. Rauschenberg would then cover the newspaper with multiple layers of more thick black paint, and although identified usually as *Untitled*, these works are often subtitled “glossy black painting.”<sup>39</sup> Though Rauschenberg understood black to be a color, it was also, as Nicholas Calas has written, “a condition in which paper, paint, ink, canvas are to be found.”<sup>40</sup> “Careful not to confuse repainting with action,” Calas also observed that Rauschenberg “assemble[d] different blacks, placing a glossy one alongside a rough one, a thick one, or a torn one, and fit them over the surface of the canvas.”<sup>41</sup> In group four, Rauschenberg often displayed the newsprint while still covering much of the canvas with black paint, as in *Untitled (Asheville Citizen)* (1952), whose surface reveals the newspaper in its lower center register. His combination of the “physical qualities of paint [and] the textural qualities of newsprint [produce] an

CAT. 56

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled* [matte black triptych], ca. 1951. Oil on canvas, 72 × 108 inches (182.9 × 274.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

opaque depth which extends his ‘palette,’” according to Lana Davis.<sup>42</sup> Working thus in collage would soon lead Rauschenberg to his combine works two years later in 1954.<sup>43</sup>

After first exhibiting the black paintings (along with the *White Paintings*) at the Stable Gallery in 1953, many viewers experienced their color as “nihilistic, destructive, and outright terrible.”<sup>44</sup> Disappointed by these negative interpretations, Rauschenberg insisted that neither series was narrative: “My black paintings and my *White Paintings* are either too full or too empty to be thought—thereby they remain visual experiences. These pictures are not Art.”<sup>45</sup> With slight variation, Rauschenberg restated points that he made in his letter to Parsons in 1951: the works were “not Art” quite simply “because they take you to a place in painting art has not been.” Without antecedent, such objects had no reference *within* art to be considered as Art in Rauschenberg’s view. It is important to remember that Rodchenko’s revolutionary monochrome triptych was not known in the U.S. in 1951, and would only be discussed by scholars in the late 1960s or early 1970s.<sup>46</sup>

Rauschenberg understood black and white to be colors. This view differentiated his monochromes from the black paintings of Ad Reinhardt, who titled them *Abstract Paintings* (1960–66; fig. 5) and would famously describe black as a “non-color.”<sup>47</sup> Reinhardt had begun to move toward the use of a single color applied in a brick pattern of varying tones as exemplified by *Number 107* (1950), a work comprised of several different values of white paint with brushstrokes in varying lengths and widths atop the underlying linen canvas. Reinhardt continued the brick forms with greater modularity into the black *Abstract Paintings*. Typically 60 by 60 inches, Reinhardt divided his black works into three horizontal and three vertical rows with nine subdivisions, and he painted each square in a variation of black mixed with blue, yellow, red, or green pigment. When first encountering the works, they appear black. But the subdivisions became more obvious after long viewing and, in this respect, are quite different from Rauschenberg’s earlier stark monochromes of 1951.



fig. 5

Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967), *Abstract Painting*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 inches (152.4 × 152.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Gift of Mrs. Morton J. Hornick. © 2014 Estate of Ad Reinhardt / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York, New York

Rauschenberg’s vision was also different from that of Yves Klein, who in May of 1954 first presented monochromes in two books of prints, *Peintures* and *Haguenault Peintures*, which featured color plates of “single-colored rectangles,” each related to “a different place of creation: Madrid, Nice, Tokyo, Paris.”<sup>48</sup> The following spring, Klein entered an orange painting, entitled *Expression of the Universe of the Color Orange Lead*, in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris. The painting, known as Klein’s first monochrome, is signed in the lower right hand corner of the front of the work: “K. mai. 55.” Klein’s signature dramatically affects a view of the work as a monochrome, and Klein would immediately abandon this conceit, leaving the surfaces of his subsequent monochromes blank except for color. Regardless of the signature

and the committee for the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles's request that he add only "a small line," the painting was rejected for being "not enough" and "impossible!"<sup>49</sup>

Five months later, Klein had his first public exhibition of monochromes, *Yves Peintures*, in the private salons of the Lacoste publishing house. There he also distributed a text describing his concepts for "single color" paintings, based on "research" that had led him,

to believe that there is a living world of each color [which] in some way [is] an individual, a being who is not only from the same race as the base color, but who definitely possesses a distinct character and personal soul . . . [and] definitely a "presence," a living being, an active force which is born and dies after having lived a sort of drama of the life of colors.<sup>50</sup>

The following February of 1956, after Colette Allendy exhibited *Yves, Propositions Monochromes*, Klein began to be widely associated with monochrome painting.

In 1957, Klein developed and patented International Klein Blue (IKB), leading to his *Blue Monochrome* paintings (fig. 6), eleven identically formatted works, uniformly painted in IKB that he exhibited in *Proposte monocrome, epoca blu* at the Apollinaire gallery in Milan. In an essay on the works, titled "THE MINUTE OF TRUTH," the French critic Pierre Restany described the monochromes as "phenomena of pure contemplation" and a "highly enriching cure of asthenic silence."<sup>51</sup> Klein also claimed in 1957 that "around 47–48, I created a 'monotone' symphony whose 'theme' is what I wished my life to be."<sup>52</sup> The striking similarity between Klein's *Monotone Symphony* and Cage's *4'33"* (1952) is worth remarking, especially as Klein presented the first performance of the symphony in 1961, in the context of a live performance of his *Anthropométries*, consisting of nude models covered with IKB paint who imprinted their bodies on canvas.<sup>53</sup> The combination of the symphony and the monochromes bear a striking resemblance to the pairing of Cage's inspiration for *4'33"* and its inspiration: Rauschenberg's 1951 *White Paintings*.

Unlike Klein, Rauschenberg insisted on the materiality of his monochromes: "I wanted to show that a painting could have the dignity of not calling attention to itself, [and] that it could only be seen if you really looked at it."<sup>54</sup> In his black paintings, as Andrew Forge points out, "There was much to see but not much showing. . . . In [them] there was none of the familiar aggressiveness of art that says: 'Well here it is, whether you like it or not.'"<sup>55</sup> Rauschenberg also unveiled black as a deep and glorious, reflective color, demonstrating his "growing conviction that a work of art need not remain fixed and unchanging."<sup>56</sup> Rauschenberg further explained: "I did them as an experiment to see how much you could pull away from an image and still have an image. . . . How far can you push something that doesn't have a center?"<sup>57</sup>



fig. 6

Yves Klein (1928–1962), *Blue Monochrome*, 1961. Dry pigment in synthetic polymer medium on cotton over plywood, 76 7/8 × 55 1/8 inches (195.1 × 140 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York / ADAGP, Paris, France. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / License by SCALA / Art Resource, New York, New York

What few realize is that the *White Paintings* prompted Rauschenberg to want to make monochrome drawings. But, the challenge of blankness proved difficult to render. He reasoned that only through an erasure would this be possible and that erasing his own drawing "wasn't art yet."<sup>58</sup> He felt that he must erase a drawing that was already "art," and settled on asking Willem de Kooning since he was "the best known acceptable American artist" and his work would be "indisputably considered art."<sup>59</sup> "I bought a bottle of Jack Daniels," Rauschenberg remembered, "and knocked on de Kooning's door." After explaining his concept, the abstract expressionist replied: "Okay, I don't like it, but I'm going along with it because I understand the idea."<sup>60</sup> Determined to make Rauschenberg's task as difficult as possible, de Kooning selected a drawing that he would "miss," full of charcoal, pencil, and crayon. It took Rauschenberg about a month to erase the work with an unknown quantity of erasers. Some viewers argue that *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953; fig. 7) is the defilement of an artist's work. But for Rauschenberg the work was "a celebration,"<sup>61</sup> one that he christened "monochrome no-image,"<sup>62</sup> a term that, while rarely cited, offers an opportunity to think about the monochrome in an expanded field.

### Monochrome no-image / Monochrome with-image

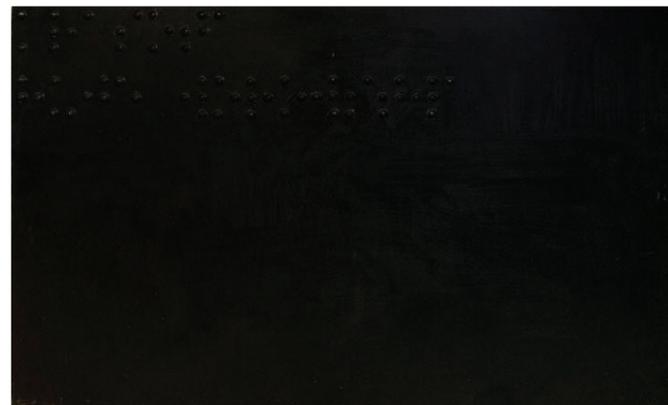
That same year, Rauschenberg began making red monochromes full of visual detail that, following his "monochrome no-image" erasures, Kristine Stiles has suggested might be labeled "monochrome with-image."<sup>63</sup> Such a monochrome might contain any number of types of images, from figurative and abstract forms to textures and words, while still maintaining an overall monochrome appearance. But the "monochromes with-image" would move away from a stress on the visual to include topical subject matter. Rauschenberg's *Litercy* (1991; see CAT. 87), from Rauschenberg's *Phantom* series, might best be described as a monochrome with-image for its silvery-violet shimmering surface that reflects viewers as they interact with "Bob's Hand," the text Rauschenberg transferred from photographs onto the work.

So, too, might the Russian artist Leonid Lerman's *Improvisation in Red and Blue* (1993; CAT. 44) be considered a monochrome with-image, as one of the many works in his *The Phantom Malevich* series. In this work, Lerman painted a representation of Malevich's red quadrilateral from *Suprematist Composition: Red Square* (1915) over an appropriated section of Vincent van Gogh's *Blossoming Almond Tree* (1890). Meditating on the heritage of the Russian avant-garde, Lerman wanted "to test" Malevich's "cosmic" concept against "the very heart and vibrancy of landscape painting." He selected a van Gogh for its "energy, warmth and humanity" and juxtaposed it with Malevich's Suprematist red square.<sup>64</sup> Lerman also turned to the Russian landscape painter Isaac Levitan, who he compared to "Chekhov and Dostoyevsky"



fig. 7

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953. Traces of drawing media on paper with label and gilded frame, 25 1/4 × 21 1/4 inches (64.1 cm × 55.3 cm). Collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California. Purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Ben Blackwell



CAT. 44

Leonid Lerman (b. 1953), *Improvisation in Red and Blue*, 1993. Oil on offset print, 32 ¾ × 40 inches (83.2 × 101.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.14.1. © Leonid Lerman. Courtesy McKee Gallery, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

CAT. 2

Yuri Albert (b. 1959), *About Beauty* from the series *Alphabet for the Blind*, 1988–89. Paint on Masonite, 48 × 79 ¾ inches (121.9 × 202.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of 17 Contemporary Russian Artists, 1995.16.1. © Yuri Albert. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

for Levitan’s ability to convey the mood of a deeply felt landscape. Blending Levitan and Malevich, Lerman sought a greater “unity” of abstraction and representation, thereby producing the “monochrome with-image” in dialogue with Rauschenberg’s concept of the “monochrome no-image.”

The monochrome with-image plays a critical role in Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid’s *Stalin with Hitler’s Remains* (1985–86; see CAT. 40), a painting that belongs to their *Anarchistic Synthesisism* series, in which the artists focused on appropriating various stylistic trends from the pluralism of the 1980s.<sup>65</sup> Having immigrated to the U.S. in 1978, Komar and Melamid quickly began to focus on the art world around them in New York. In *Stalin with Hitler’s Remains*, they hinged a monochrome white panel to the bottom of the socialist realist painting above, adding the work’s title in small lettering in the center of the monochrome. Juxtaposing figuration and abstraction and nodding to the conflict between the governments of the Soviet Union and the United States, Komar and Melamid’s anarchistic synthesis “satirized the New York style wars,” as much as it simultaneously acknowledged painters who painted white monochromes from Malevich and Rauschenberg to Robert Ryman.<sup>66</sup>

The Russian artist Yuri Albert’s *About Beauty* (1988–89; CAT. 2), from his *Alphabet for the Blind* series, is a stark black monochrome that contains a Braille inscription reading “About Beauty.” While in principle related to Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* and matte-black paintings, Albert’s monochrome may also be understood as a monochrome with-image for its textual and visual embellishment.<sup>67</sup> One of nine works in the series *Alphabet for the Blind*, Albert initiates a string of paradoxical negations in this work. Although intended for the blind living in semi-blackness, the work’s elite status in a museum collection prevents it from ever being touched and therefore read. Thus, the work—for the blind—remains completely inaccessible,

available only to conceptual discourse in the narration of its visual and textual properties. For those with eyes, but who do not know Braille, the artist’s meaning remains equally elusive.

Braille on a monochrome serves as a multiple signifier for the highly conceptual status of the monochrome in the history of art. Moreover, by virtue of appearing on a monochrome, the Braille text may index the frequent incomprehensibility of monochrome painting even among elite audiences. Associated with Moscow Conceptualists, Albert’s work is also involved with researching “relationships between an artwork and its interpretation, art production and art consumption, labor costs and instant effects, between the visible and the invisible in art.”<sup>68</sup> In this regard, Ekaterina Degot suggests that Albert’s work poses the following questions:

What does it mean to be a viewer? What do we see, when we visit a museum? And what remains outside our field of vision? How do we interpret the artist’s message? What does it mean to understand it correctly or incorrectly?<sup>69</sup>

Similar to Albert, the British photographer Paul Graham takes up the trope of blindness as a form of social commentary in his series *American Night* (1998–2003). Working exclusively in large-scale photographs, Graham chronicled American life, attending to American poverty, as seen during his travels throughout the United States.<sup>70</sup> Many of the images appear as if in a thick fog such that their figuration becomes so faint that it disappears into a work that is nearly monochromatic.<sup>71</sup> *Man walking with blue bags, Augusta* (2002; CAT. 35) displays such an effect; through the dense whiteness of the image, one can just see a man that appears to be walking along a road lined with trees. The social implications of Graham’s bleached-out

CAT. 35

Paul Graham (b. 1956), *Man walking with blue bags, Augusta* from the series *American Night*, 2002. Lightjet Endura chromogenic print, edition 3/3, 74 ¾ × 93 ¾ inches (189.5 × 238.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Floyd H. Bradley III and Martha Hummer Bradley in honor of Floyd H. Bradley, Jr. (T’45) and Carol Lake Bradley (WC’43), 2010.11.1. © Paul Graham. Courtesy Pace Gallery and Pace / MacGill Gallery, New York, New York



CAT. 11

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), UNTITLED D-1 (INK DRAWING MADE TO BE HUNG IN THE SUN TO DISAPPEAR OVER TIME), 1965–71. Black felt-tip pen on paper, 29 3/8 × 23 7/8 × 3/4 inches (74.6 × 60.6 × 1.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.22. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

images suggest that the urban poor, often brown and black, are “invisible to majority-white America.”<sup>72</sup> The bright photographs have also been interpreted as “rejecting the photographic tradition of using darkness and shadow to reflect poverty or deprivation.”<sup>73</sup>

It is impossible to confirm if the content of the newspaper articles that Rauschenberg transferred onto the gossamer fabrics of his *Hoarfrost* series address social issues, but a work like *Untitled* (1975; see CAT. 77) has an illusory, haunting quality not unlike Graham’s photograph and may index similar content impossible to access both because the transfer images are so faint and because many are under layers of fabric. Nonetheless, the distinct melancholy of *Untitled (Hoarfrost)* speaks to similar qualities in Graham’s *Man walking with blue bags, Augusta*.

## Mandalas

While Rauschenberg accepted the place of light in shadows on his black and white monochrome paintings, Bruce Conner rejected the effect of light on his black and white mandala drawings. With one exception: Conner used the action of light on UNTITLED D-1 (INK DRAWING MADE TO BE HUNG IN THE SUN TO DISAPPEAR OVER TIME) (1965–71; CAT. 11), a drawing belonging to his mandala series, as a visual corollary to events and emotions in time. In May of 1980, Conner gave the work as a wedding present with the precise verbal instructions: “Hang the drawing in the sun, because the image will last only as long as your marriage.” When

the marriage ended after fifteen years and Conner subsequently saw the still intact drawing, he remarked: “You did not hang it in the sun, but I was right.” The owner had deliberately placed the drawing in the darkest place in her home, which is why a faint image remains today.<sup>74</sup>

Conner’s mandala drawings originated in Mexico, where he moved in 1962 with his wife, the artist Jean Sandstedt Conner, and their baby son Robert, fearing what appeared to be impending nuclear war.<sup>75</sup> Conner spent most of his time in Mexico drawing, as paper was inexpensive and portable.<sup>76</sup> He also began using peyote during this period, although he strongly maintained that he never made art while using drugs, as it would be impossible to draw with the precision demanded by his technique.<sup>77</sup> Though he created his first mandala drawing in 1963, one work that suggests the influence of his Mexican experience is the hybrid SAN FRANCISCO DANCERS’ WORKSHOP POSTER (1974; CAT. 23). The unique drawing has pyramid-like triangles that interpenetrate circles and is decorated with forms reminiscent of Pre-Columbian art and architecture. Such ornate markings make up the middle ground, morphing into a triangular shape at the top, circular at the base, and punctured by a blank line that creates yet another triangle, one leg of which is surrounded by a ring. Conner created this work as a poster design for the San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop founded by pioneer of modern dance Anna Halprin. He appropriated parts of the drawing for the cover of Halprin’s *Collected Writings* (1974).<sup>78</sup>

Conner devoted eight months to his first mandala drawing, 23 KENWOOD AVENUE (1963), on which he worked for up to ten hours a day.<sup>79</sup> Other examples are the extremely complex drawing #100 MANDALA (1970; CAT. 14) and the smaller scale circular drawing #115 (ca. 1970–74; CAT. 15). For such works he would sit at his drawing table for hours, using pens to create small, exact ink marks on paper and never allowing the marker to cross over an existing line.<sup>80</sup> Both works are intricate and delicate, exemplifying Conner’s meticulously detailed method of drawing and his effort to find a technique through a “sort of automatic consciousness . . . to work on a drawing to the point that awareness is happening with the hand, and the eye, and the entire body in relation to the paper [as] it would progress as a thought form across the page.”<sup>81</sup> No two lines are the same in any drawing, and “every stroke changes the work existentially even though the a priori structure is perforce predetermined.”<sup>82</sup> Conner also considered that such “drawings existed as total and complete every time I’d put a mark on the paper and the marks would continue to change.”<sup>83</sup>

Also in 1963, Conner began to use the newly introduced Pentel felt-tip watercolor pens for his drawings in the hopes of halting their tendencies to fade.<sup>84</sup> The Pentel pens were ideal for the execution of the mandala drawings, Conner maintained,

CAT. 23

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), Lower center element from SAN FRANCISCO DANCERS’ WORKSHOP POSTER, 1974. Offset lithograph on paper, 8 1/2 inches diameter (21.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.9. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

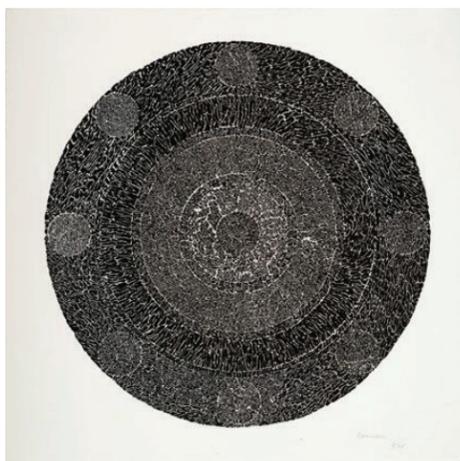
CAT. 14

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), #100 MANDALA, 1970. Offset lithograph on paper, edition 10/50, 29 ½ × 29 ¼ inches (74.9 × 74.3 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Anonymous gift in honor of Blake Byrne (T'57), 2012.7.2. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



CAT. 15

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), #115, ca. 1970–74. Offset lithograph on paper, edition 8/85, 12 ¼ × 12 ¾ inches (31 × 32.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.8. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York



CAT. 18

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), #125, 1971. Offset lithograph on paper, artist's proof, 14 ¼ × 14 ¼ inches (36.2 × 36.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.14. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York



because he never had to lift his hand from the paper and could work for hours at a time without taking a break. He would draw until the pen ran out of ink, an effect that can be seen in some of the drawings where black ink marks gradually give way to gray. Once the line becomes very light, it suddenly changes to black again, signaling that he had replaced the pen with a new one. Despite the initial hope that the marks from the felt-tip pens would endure, the drawings continued to dim over time. Exasperated, Conner commented: “Well, let me tell you about felt-tip pens. Felt-tip marker pens, which are labeled permanent, are not. They fade and disappear in sunlight.”<sup>85</sup> Even though Conner drew undulating black forms, leaving a white ground in the mandalas, he also used the felt-tip to create abstract patterns in other works such as the zebra-like forms of #125 (1971; CAT. 18).

Conner’s drawings occupied him for his entire career. By the end of his life, suffering from liver disease and declining a transplant, Conner was severely weakened and too debilitated to work on almost anything other than his drawings, so he spent his days creating intricate works at home. He would sit at a tiny desk that was his studio and he “would do what [he could there].”<sup>86</sup> Later in his career, Conner spent

much time working on his INKBLOT drawings, each of which, like the mandalas, follows a specific formula while still retaining unique qualities (see CAT. 3). The works would include precise lines and groups of inkblot shapes and would vary in density and size. Conner said that in his weak state he could make four or five inkblots before draining himself and needing to return to bed.<sup>87</sup>

## Monochromes and Mandalas

Conner would eventually retitle 23 KENWOOD AVENUE, his first mandala drawing, THE NEW ROSETTA STONE, a reference to the ancient artifact containing the same text written in three different languages: Egyptian hieroglyphs, Demotic script, and ancient Greek.<sup>88</sup> Able to read Demotic and Greek, scholars then deciphered the hieroglyphs, which had remained an enigma for centuries. By renaming his work THE NEW ROSETTA STONE, Conner gave it the importance of a groundbreaking archaeological discovery, implying that the work was a key to the languages of his own oeuvre, much in the manner that Rauschenberg’s letter to Betty Parsons served as an interpretive key for understanding the initiating languages of his art.

In addition, both Rauschenberg and Conner paid tribute to black and white as colors for visual meditation. Almost all of Conner’s works are rendered in black and white, because, as he put it, “[with color] the abstractness of the drawings becomes less so and it becomes . . . too decorative for me.”<sup>89</sup> Also akin to Rauschenberg’s monochromes, Conner’s drawings are as much about his method as they are about the finished works. But Conner and Rauschenberg differed in how their work addressed the viewer. While for Conner the mandalas were “for the private eye, not the public eye,”<sup>90</sup> for Rauschenberg, the monochromes were for the public. Regardless of this difference, both Rauschenberg’s monochromes and Conner’s mandalas require close examination. The more one contemplates, the more they reveal. With Conner’s mandalas, a new line or ink mark will suddenly pop into focus for a viewer, in a way similar to how one might notice a new shadow play on the surface of a *White Painting*, or how a subtle reflection in the glossy paint of a black painting might change how one regarded the work.

While it is a truism that no two people see art in the same way, this adage is even truer in the case of monochromes and mandalas, with their mysterious and simultaneous emptiness and fullness. Conner’s mandalas are filled with complicated, looping, winding, and circling lines and exact marks that, from afar, meld black and white into seas of monochrome gray, causing one to strain to see the variations in tone and the subtle circular forms throughout the works. As one draws closer, the extreme intricacy of the drawings becomes clearer, absorbing the viewer. Similarly,

the monochromes are at first deceptively simple, but concentration reveals their surfaces to produce complex visual effects. In addition, neither monochromes nor mandalas have political associations, even as they both have a role in spiritual and meditative contemplation, freeing the mind and opening the imagination. A critic analyzing Conner's drawings might equally have been musing on Rauschenberg's monochromes when he or she wrote:

[The] drawings require the spectator to become a vicarious participant, moving close to the surface, becoming involved and consumed in their ambiguities of reference and scale, matte and glossy surface and subtlety of gesture and composition, qualities which command recognition at close range but which attenuate to gray blurs and reflections at a distance of more than a few feet.<sup>91</sup>

Conner concentrated on being present through the act of drawing, especially in rendering a mandala, which helped him to still his mind and permit "awareness [to be] happening with the hand, and the eye, and the entire body."<sup>92</sup> The mandala is a symbol of the cosmos, historically used as a meditation device, and it was linked to the Beat Generation's interest in Eastern philosophy. This association led some to correlate Conner's work with Buddhism, a comparison that Conner disdained for how it "limited" the mandala, which could "imply a universal concept" as the circle is "a common, universal, ordering structure, one of the most fundamental in the world."<sup>93</sup>

Similarly, Rauschenberg's monochromes have been connected to Zen, as they can be found in religions like Sufism where the monochrome is associated with "the realm of God" and given "special priority and meaning."<sup>94</sup> Like the mandala, the monochrome also evokes "Indian and tantric . . . objects of meditation."<sup>95</sup> But as Conner rejected such associations, so did Rauschenberg. Moreover, it was not Rauschenberg, but John Cage, who believed that a "white environment could evoke Zen-inspired contemplation."<sup>96</sup> Although Rauschenberg had already met Cage, he painted his monochromes before their friendship developed, and Rauschenberg never identified his monochromes with Eastern philosophy. "Yes," Rauschenberg said, "John [Cage] used to tease me that he'd spent years studying Zen and that I was just naturally Zen." But, Rauschenberg continued, adding the following critical point:

I'd never been particularly curious about what Zen is because I think to understand it is to not understand it. It's beyond reason. But what it does is it gives you acres of intellectual airtime to wander around in.<sup>97</sup>

No concept better or more eloquently captures the essence shared by the monochrome and the mandala than that to think about them is not to understand them, for together they provide space and time in which the mind may wander.

Just as drawing persisted throughout Conner's career, the monochromes maintained a role in Rauschenberg's life. For example, in 1968 when Leo Castelli wanted to exhibit the *White Paintings* in an exhibition titled *White Paintings, 1951*, Rauschenberg had none to give him quite simply because he had painted over all of them. Undaunted, Rauschenberg had his studio assistant, the artist Brice Marden, remake all of the works.<sup>98</sup> As David White, senior curator of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, commented, Rauschenberg "did not feel that an artwork was necessarily sacrosanct the way it was."<sup>99</sup> This point is especially pertinent to the *White Paintings*.

As the originator of the idea, Rauschenberg reasoned that anyone could produce the works with his permission and instructions, but that he would remain their creator and that he could, and would, date them 1951, for the obvious reason that 1951 was the date of their first inception. As such, Rauschenberg had his *White Paintings* repainted if their surfaces yellowed or became polluted with dust, which he felt compromised the works. The process of remaking the *White Paintings* reached an apogee in 1965 when the Swedish curator and museum director Pontus Hultén wanted to exhibit them at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Rauschenberg agreed to their display, but not to their shipment, explaining that it would cost too much. Instead, he authorized Hultén to recreate the works and gave him written instructions for how to do so. Hultén reproduced only the two-panel painting, but failed to destroy it after the show, as Rauschenberg had stipulated.<sup>100</sup> Once this oversight was discovered, the painting was destroyed to prevent the existence of two extant versions.<sup>101</sup>

Some criticized Rauschenberg for remaking his objects or for having others refabricate them. But right from the beginning Rauschenberg had proclaimed an aspect of the works to Betty Parsons that should never be forgotten. "It is completely irrelevant that I am making them," he wrote, "Today is their creator."<sup>102</sup> In his emphasis on "today" as the "creator" of his art, Rauschenberg stressed the significance of being present and embracing the now. Few works make the now more present than Robert Rauschenberg's monochromes, especially his *White Paintings*.

## NOTES

1. He would marry Weil in June of 1950, and their son, Christopher, would be born in July of 1951. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: A Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Picador, 2005), 24–25.
2. Among the faculty were Bauhaus master Josef Albers and painters Ilya Bolotowsky, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Jacob Lawrence, Jack Tworkov, and Robert Motherwell, sculptor Richard Lippold, photographer Aaron Siskind, composers John Cage and Lou Harrison, architects Walter Gropius and Buckminster Fuller, dancer Merce Cunningham, poets Robert Creeley and Charles Olson, and ceramicists Peter Voulkos and Robert C. Turner. Albert Einstein and Clement Greenberg were among those who came to guest lecture at Black Mountain. Students included Ruth Asawa, John Chamberlain, Elaine de Kooning, Ray Johnson, Kenneth Noland, Dorothea Rockburne, Kenneth Snelson, Stan VanDerBeek, Cy Twombly, and others.
3. Barbara Rose, *Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 23.
4. Rauschenberg quoted in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 28–32.
5. Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 366.
6. Rauschenberg quoted in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 32.
7. Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 23.
8. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 29.
9. Walter Hopps states that there were six white paintings—one-, two-, three-, four-, five-, and seven-panel works—but the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art maintains that there were only five paintings, leaving out the five-panel work. See Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: The Menil Collection: Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), 65; and Sarah Roberts, “White Painting [three panel], *Rauschenberg Research Project*,” *SFMOMA On the Go* (July 2013): [http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/essay/white\\_painting](http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/essay/white_painting).
10. “Robert Rauschenberg, letter to Betty Parsons (18 October 1951),” *SFMOMA On the Go* (July 2013): [http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/research\\_materials/document/WHIT\\_98.308\\_034](http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/research_materials/document/WHIT_98.308_034).
11. Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 26. For more on the subject of Rauschenberg’s spirituality, see Lauren Acampora’s essay “Rauschenberg’s Photography: Documenting and Abstracting the Authentic Experience” in this exhibition catalogue.
12. Joseph, *Random Order*, 29–30.
13. *Ibid.*, 30.
14. Joseph notes that he uses “the titles of Rauschenberg’s artworks (for example, *White Paintings* but black paintings),” p. xiii. In this Joseph follows the conventions established with Rauschenberg by Walter Hopps in his 1991 catalogue *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, as well as by Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson in their 1997 catalogue *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997). My essay follows these conventions.
15. Joseph, *Random Order*, 31.
16. *Ibid.*, 30–31. Hubert Crehan, “The See Change: Raw Duck,” *Art Digest* 27 (15 September 1953): 25, quoted in Joseph, *Random Order*, 30–31.
17. Hopps, *The Early 1950s*, 65.
18. Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 370.
19. *Ibid.*, 371.
20. *Ibid.*, 370.
21. *Ibid.*, 371.
22. Cage quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 67. Although he attributed the work’s inception to the *White Paintings*, Joseph argues that Cage had begun to develop the idea for 4’33” in 1948, when he lectured at Vassar College and described a concept for a composition called *Silent Prayer*. This work, he said, “will be 3 or 4-½ minutes long. . . . It will open with a single idea. . . . The ending will approach imperceptibility.” Joseph, *Random Order*, 45. Regardless of his concept, Cage learned from Rauschenberg *how* to realize his idea.
23. John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 103.
24. *Ibid.*, 108.
25. Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 65.
26. Katy Siegel, *Since ’45: America and the Making of Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2011), 54.
27. László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist*, trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann, 4th rev. ed. (New York: George Wittenborn, 1947), 39, quoted in Joseph, *Random Order*, 36, 38.
28. The full title of the painting is *Suprematist Composition: Red Square: Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*.
29. The full title of the exhibition was *Poslednyaya futuristicheskaya vystavka kartin: 0.10* (The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings: 0.10).
30. Aleksandr Rodchenko, “Working with Maiakovskii” (1939), quoted in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914–1932*, intro. Richard Andrews and Milena Kalinovska (New York: Rizzoli; Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1990), 47.
31. “Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*,” Museum of Modern Art, New York: [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=80385](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80385).
32. Barbara Rose, *Monochromes: from Malevich to the Present* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 27.
33. Gary Lachman writes, “There’s good reason to suspect that Malevich as well as other artists attended the several lectures Ouspensky gave in St. Petersburg and Moscow between 1912 and 1915. In February and March of 1915, after his trip to India . . . Ouspensky gave a series of lectures in St. Petersburg (then renamed Petrograd). At the same time, an influential Russian Futurist exhibition, *Tramway V*, featuring works by Malevich and the Constructivist Tatlin, was also held. By the end of the year, Malevich held his *0.10 Last*

- Futurist Exhibition*, and of the thirty-nine paintings included, five dealt with the fourth dimension.” See Lachman’s *In Search of P. D. Ouspensky: The Genius in the Shadow of Gurdjieff*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 2006), 65.
34. It is well known that Rauschenberg struggled with alcoholism and depression, but he never made his struggle part of his work.
  35. Hopps, *The Early 1950s*, 63.
  36. Stephanie Rosenthal, *Black Paintings* (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2006), 26.
  37. Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 36.
  38. Hopps, *The Early 1950s*, 87. The result is that none of the original *White Paintings* remain, and the transformed canvases became *Untitled* [matte black triptych], *Trophy II (for Teeny and Marcel Duchamp)* (1960), and *Stripper* (1962), among others. See *Robert Rauschenberg* (Washington: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 1976), 66.
  39. Helen Molesworth, “Before Bed,” in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Branden W. Joseph (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 76.
  40. Nicolas Calas, “Robert Rauschenberg” in *Art in The Age of Risk, and Other Essays* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1968), 169.
  41. Ibid.
  42. Lana Davis, “Robert Rauschenberg and the Epiphany of the Everyday,” in *Poets of the Cities: New York and San Francisco, 1950–1965* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1974), 44.
  43. Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 32.
  44. Ibid., 31.
  45. Robert Rauschenberg quoted by Hubert Crehan in “Fortnight in Review: Rauschenberg,” *Arts Digest* 29 (1 January 1955), 30. Rauschenberg’s description of the works as “too full or too empty” is in direct reference to their color. At first, the blankness or emptiness of the canvases is striking. There is no line or figuration for one to focus his attention on, but, instead, a field of solid white or black confronts him. However, the works are full of these colors, as Laurence Getford (digital archive manager at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation and former staff member at the artist’s studio) points out: “white and black were colors to Rauschenberg while they were not for many others.” Laurence Getford, interview by the author, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in New York, 24 January 2014.
  46. Both Valerie Hillings and Jane Sharp confirmed in conversations with Kristine Stiles that Rodchenko’s monochrome triptych was not known in the U.S. until the “early 1960s” (Hillings, email 30 March 2014) or perhaps even as late as the early 1970s (Sharp, conversation 1 April 2014). While Rodchenko is mentioned in Camilla Gray’s pioneering book *The Russian Experiment in Art, 1863–1922* (1971), Gray neither pictures nor cites the monochrome triptych.
  47. Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 38.
  48. The engraving studio of Fernando Franco de Sarabia published the books in Spain. Plates from the book are reproduced in Denys Riout, *Yves Klein: L’Aventure monochrome* (Paris: Gallimard Éditions, 2006), 29.
  49. Marie Raymond quoted in Riout, *Yves Klein*, 30–31, as quoted in Yves Klein Archive: [http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio\\_us.html](http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio_us.html).
  50. Yves Klein Archive: [http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio\\_us.html](http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio_us.html).
  51. Pierre Restany, “THE MINUTE OF TRUTH,” for the invitation card to Klein’s *Yves, Propositions Monochromes* at the Colette Allendy Gallery (21 February–7 March 1956), quoted in Yves Klein Archives: [http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio\\_us.html](http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio_us.html).
  52. Yves Klein, *Le Dépassement de la problématique de l’art* (La Louvière, Belgium: Editions de Montbliart, 1959), quoted in Yves Klein Archives: [http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio\\_us.html](http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/documents/bio_us.html).
  53. Klein first used models covered in IKB to imprint canvases at a party at Robert Godet’s apartment, 5 June 1958.
  54. Rauschenberg quoted in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 65.
  55. Andrew Forge, *Rauschenberg* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1972), 4.
  56. Catherine Craft, *Robert Rauschenberg* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2013), 24.
  57. Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 45–46.
  58. “Robert Rauschenberg’s *Erased de Kooning Drawing*,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Video, *Making Sense of Modern Art* (December 1998): <http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/24> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGRNQER16Do>.
  59. Ibid.
  60. Ibid.
  61. Ibid.
  62. Rauschenberg quoted in Maxine de la Falaise McKendry, “Robert Rauschenberg,” *Interview* 6, (May 1976), 36, cited in Joseph, *Random Order*, 63.
  63. Kristine Stiles in her seminar on Robert Rauschenberg (Fall 2013–Spring 2014), Duke University.
  64. Leonid Lerman, telephone conversation with Kristine Stiles, 21 February 2014.
  65. Kristine McKenna, “Two Soviet Artists Conquer the West: 12 years after emigrating, Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid receive critical praise and see their works sell like hotcakes,” *Los Angeles Times* (28 January 1990): [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-01-28/entertainment/ca-1366\\_1\\_vitaly-komar-and-alex-melamid](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-01-28/entertainment/ca-1366_1_vitaly-komar-and-alex-melamid).
  66. Ibid.
  67. Jane Sharp, presentation to the author, 4 November 2013.
  68. Ekaterina Degot, “‘What Did The Artist Mean By That?’ Yuri Albert at MMoMA Moscow,” *The Collector Tribune: The Daily for Art Collectors* (26 February 2014), from *e-flux* (ca. January 2014): <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/yuri-albert-and-ekaterina-degot/>.
  69. Ibid.
  70. Karen Rosenberg, “Roadside Reflections on Your Land, My Land,” *New York Times* (5 February 2009): [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/06/arts/design/06grah.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/06/arts/design/06grah.html?_r=0).
  71. Sean O’Hagan, “Paul Graham: ‘The photography I most respect pulls something out of the ether,’” *The Guardian* (9 April 2011): <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/apr/11/paul-graham-interview-whitechapel-ohagan>. Upon seeing the bleached out photographs in the series’ catalogue, *American Night* (2003), many critics returned their books to the publisher, believing there had been a printing error. See O’Hagan.

72. “#1 Paul Graham’s American Trilogy,” *British Journal of Photography* 159 (December 2012), 15.
73. “Paul Graham: American Night,” MoMA P.S.1 (2012): <http://momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/198>.
74. Stiles Seminar 2013–14.
75. This occurred during the period of the failed CIA-sponsored paramilitary Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and the subsequent period during which the United States and Soviet Union came to the brink of war in October 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis.
76. Bruce Conner, *Bruce Conner: Drawings, 1955–1972* (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1975), n.p.
77. Bruce Conner, conversation with Kristine Stiles, San Francisco, early 1980s.
78. Anna Halprin & others, *Collected Writings* (San Francisco: San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop, 1974).
79. See Kevin Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 224, 226. Conner made 23 KENWOOD AVENUE while living in Newton, Massachusetts (seven miles from downtown Boston), where he and his family shared a communal house for a brief time with Timothy Leary, the psychologist who co-founded the notorious Harvard Psilocybin Project. Between early 1960 and March 1962, Leary and others conducted experiments on the naturally occurring psychedelic effects of psychoactive drugs, research they continued until he was fired in the spring of 1963 after administering psilocybin to an undergraduate student off-campus. That Conner did not use LSD to make art is one thing, but that he used the drug in the environment of the times is of little question.
80. Peter Boswell, *2000 BC: The Bruce Conner Story Part II* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), 56.
81. Paul Cummings, “Interview: Bruce Conner Talks with Paul Cummings,” *Drawing* 16 (September–October 1994): 57.
82. *Bruce Conner*, n.p.
83. Cummings, “Interview: Bruce Conner,” 57.
84. Boswell, *2000 BC*, 56.
85. Cummings, “Interview: Bruce Conner,” 57.
86. *Ibid.*, 57.
87. Jack Rasmussen, *After Bruce Conner: Anonymous, Anonymouse, and Emily Feather* (Washington, D.C.: American University Museum, 2005), 30.
88. Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner*, 226.
89. Cummings, “Interview: Bruce Conner,” 59. In addition, Cummings notes that Conner avoided any color but black and white in the drawings because the brightly hued felt-tip pens “faded a lot quicker.”
90. Rasmussen, *After Bruce Conner*, 5.
91. *Bruce Conner*, n.p.
92. Cummings, “Interview: Bruce Conner,” 57.
93. *Ibid.* Other monochrome painters, like Klein and Reinhardt, were interested in Buddhist thought, and some writers consider Reinhardt’s black paintings to be connected to the mandalas because “in their square format, their regular, non-relational structure, and their effect on the viewer, . . . [they] fulfill the requirements of a mandala.” Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 41.
94. Rose, *Monochromes*, 76.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*, 55.
97. Rosetta Brooks, “Rauschenberg: Round the Block Once or Twice,” *Modern Painters* (December 2005–January 2006): 74.
98. Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 28.
99. David White, interview by the author, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in New York, 24 January 2014.
100. Roberts, *White Painting*: [http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/essay/white\\_painting](http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/essay/white_painting).
101. Thomas Buehler, registrar for the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, conversation with the author, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in New York, 23 January 2014.
102. “Robert Rauschenberg, letter to Betty Parsons (18 October 1951)”: [http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/research\\_materials/document/WHIT\\_98.308\\_034](http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25855/research_materials/document/WHIT_98.308_034).



CAT. 64

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)*, ca. 1953. Bricks, mortar, steel spike, metal rod, and concrete; 14 ¼ × 8 × 7 ¾ inches (36.2 × 20.3 × 19.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## *Rock Paper Scissors: Materiality, Process, Society*

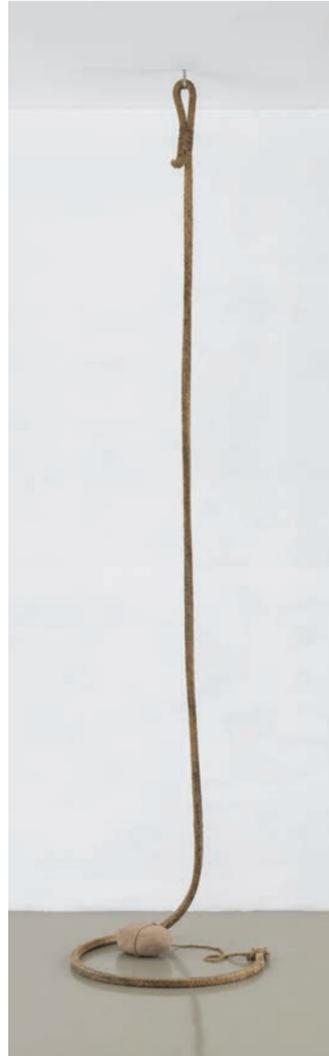
JACQUELINE SAMY

“Rock, Paper, Scissors” is a contest of hand commands, dating from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) in China. The game has been deployed in various forms throughout history, including as a sport, a metaphor for war, a competitive strategy for selling paintings,<sup>1</sup> and a court-ordered resolution to a legal case.<sup>2</sup> It has also been played throughout history in various artistic contexts. Summoned as a paradigm for Robert Rauschenberg’s enduring commitment to facture, or making, this essay explores his and other artists’ acute attention to the materiality of art.

Rauschenberg’s appreciation for found objects dates from the beginning of his career and is vivid in his *Fettici Personali* (Personal Fetishes) (see fig. 2), constructed in Italy in the fall of 1952 and spring of 1953. Regarding his inspiration and selection of the objects that comprise *Fettici Personali*, Rauschenberg remarked:

The material used for these constructions were chosen for either of two reasons: the richness of their past—like bone, hair, faded cloth and photos, broken fixtures, feathers, sticks, rock, string and rope; or for their vivid abstract reality: like mirrors, bells, watch parts, bugs, fringe, pearls, glass and shells. You develop your own ritual about the objects.<sup>3</sup>

During this period, Rauschenberg also visited the then ill Italian painter Alberto Burri in Rome, bringing with him one of his fetish works as a healing gift. Trained as a physician, Burri served in World War II on the side of the Axis and was captured in 1944 and sent to a prisoner of war camp in Hereford, Texas, until 1946. During his incarceration, Burri began to paint on empty burlap and mail sacks, creating torn, stitched, ragged, and oil-painted works, some of which he exhibited in 1947 in Rome. With surfaces scarred by holes that emphasized the paintings’ brute physicality, the works became metonymies of the wounded bodies that he had sutured and attempted to save during the war. An admirer of Burri’s later series of *Sacchi* (collage constructions comprised of burlap sacks which he started circa 1949), Rauschenberg expressed his own affinity for the intrinsic character and quality of materials in his work *Fettici Personali*. Together with Burri’s works, Rauschenberg’s early constructions anticipated the advent of *Arte Povera*, founded and named by the Italian critic



CAT. 74

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Venetian)*, 1973. Rope, string, and stone; extended: 178 inches (452.1 cm), dimensions variable. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

facilitate deeper comprehension of their fundamental proportion, size, weight, materiality, and the cohesion of parts. Twenty years later, he returned to fabricating similar objects, such as *Untitled (Venetian)* (1973; CAT. 74). Consisting of a rope tethered to the ceiling by a steel hook, Rauschenberg finished the sculpture with a large stone tied to the bottom that anchors the object to the floor. Structuring the interplay of gravitational forces and the swing of the rope, Rauschenberg amplified the essential behavior of the materials, antedating by over a decade artists' attention to process in the late 1960s.

Germano Celant in 1967, a movement in which artists used conventionally non-artistic, or “poor,” materials and emphasized process.

Upon his return to New York in 1953, Rauschenberg embarked on a series of *Elemental Sculptures*, nineteen small works combining stone, rusted metal, wood, and other objects that he scavenged from various construction sites around his Fulton Street studio.<sup>4</sup> The nine remaining sculptures testify to his poetic interest in, and archaeological appreciation of, mid-twentieth-century Manhattan. Characterized by its brown-gray urban coloring, *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)* (CAT. 64), made from bricks, concrete, wood, and disintegrating metal evinces Rauschenberg’s appreciation of an object’s weathered virtue: age, dirt, grime, and rust. “The most interesting things on Fulton Street were the rocks that were dug up every day,” he explained. “So I made a series of rock sculptures.”<sup>5</sup> Emphasizing the empirical aspects of the roughly hewn bricks and mortar, from scale and volume to balance and mass, Rauschenberg presented these minimal sculptures without embellishment, paying homage to their austere dignity, a way of working that he described as “re-nourishing something that’s been abandoned.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition, he encouraged viewers to interact with the work’s components, a facet that would



CAT. 8

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *WHEEL COLLAGE*, 1958. Assemblage on Masonite (terrycloth fabric, iron wheel, rhinestone studs, paint rag, torn paper, newspaper classifieds), 21 7/8 × 24 × 3 3/4 inches (55.6 × 61 × 9.5 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Anonymous gift, 2012.7.1. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

The San Francisco artist Bruce Conner began making assemblages in the mid-to-late 1950s and, along with Rauschenberg (eight years his senior), was included in William C. Seitz’s groundbreaking exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1961. Recognized in his twenties as a pivotal American assemblage artist, Conner’s *WHEEL COLLAGE* (1958; CAT. 8) is an early example of his style before he became more widely known for his use of women’s silk stockings, jewels, and other expressive materials, as well as for the erotic/thanatotic qualities of his early-to-mid-1960s assemblages.

A rare and seldom exhibited work, the spare *WHEEL COLLAGE* is encrusted with weathered torn newsprint that covers its surface. The poetry of the abstract composition resides in the way Conner related its constituent parts. Balancing materiality, process, and concept, he made a subtle and critical connection between the work’s textual and visual elements. Although barely visible, when one examines the texts on the newsprint, some read:

Drills Deep; Drills Heavy; Drills Radial; Boring Machines; Tools; Machinery; Filers; Directory of . . . Assigned a . . . [C]ode Number . . . condition as listed is \_\_\_\_\_ as statement by \_\_\_\_\_ . . . publisher assumes no responsibility for \_\_\_\_\_ Numbered, listed addresses of machinery supply companies (Los Angeles, Santa Fe).

The rusty old wheel in the upper right corner amplifies the references to the material aspects of industrial processes and machinery, as well as to the deep brown and golden tones of the aging newspaper. In the center of the assemblage, Conner placed two paint rags that add color to the work’s nearly monochromatic austerity:



one beige and stained with a grey-green paint, the other a moss green towel that he embellished with several rhinestone studs. The paint cloths reinforce the content of the newsprint (or builders' catalogues) by tying the labor of the artist to that of those who labor.

Just as Conner concentrated on the imbricate relationship between the materials and the theme of the work in WHEEL COLLAGE, Rauschenberg's *San Pantalone (Venetian)* (1973; see CAT. 73) features materials that recall the origins of the series in Venice. Barnacle-encrusted tarpaper is combined with wood, metal, rope, and a coconut that extends from a cord to the floor below the relief sculpture. The undulation of the work's humble tarpaper brings to mind the roll of the sea, while the burned and tortured quality of the materials symbolizes the history of San Pantalone, the martyred saint who, after being repeatedly tortured, was decapitated, a result memorialized by Rauschenberg in the coconut.<sup>7</sup> Inspired by his many visits to Venice, the city held special significance for Rauschenberg as the first American artist to win the Grand Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1964. But the *Venetian* series also pays homage to many aspects of the city from its clergy and churches to its "aqua alta," or the high water that floods the city in the rainy season.

The Russian artist Nikolai Panitkov works with materials in a more conceptual and political way. In *Stuff Up the Hole, Stuff Up the Crack* (1987; CAT. 52), Panitkov first created a monochrome white painting before punching a hole in its center, which he then plugged with a cork. Next he framed the work and stuffed cotton batting into the cracks around the work's frame. While this "stuffing" of cracks denotes the materiality and construction of the work, Panitkov's conception connotes the censorship and silencing of the voices of those who sought to challenge the communist regime

CAT. 52

Nikolai Panitkov (b. 1952), *Stuff Up the Hole, Stuff Up the Crack*, 1987. Paint, wood, fabric, and cork; 33 × 33 × 5 inches (83.8 × 83.8 × 12.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of 17 contemporary artists, 1995.16.18. © Nikolai Panitkov. Courtesy the artist and E.K. Art Bureau, Moscow, Russia

CAT. 53

Lia Perjovschi (b. 1961), *Our Withheld Silences*, 1989. Strips of paper, textile, printed text, and mixed media; 27 inches diameter (68.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Anonymous gift, 2007.12.3. © Lia Perjovschi. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

during the closing years of the Soviet Union. This painting may also be an index of Panitkov's participation in the Collective Actions Group in Moscow, a group of conceptual artists whose work focused on events, or "actions," staged on the outskirts of Moscow, especially in the Izmaylovskow field. Following these events, the Collective Actions Group reconvened at various members' apartments, especially that of Andrei Monastyrski, the primary theoretician of the group. There, in their intimate surroundings, the group proceeded to discuss the theoretical content of their actions. Panitkov has explained: "We were working on conceptual matters, a worked-out worldview, because dissidence with its social criticism did not interest us very much. Social struggle does not solve existential problems."<sup>8</sup> While the artist conceived of *Stuff Up the Hole, Stuff Up the Crack* separate from the aims of the Collective Actions Group, the work's content alludes to the "existential problem" that to exercise free will and determine one's fate, one must be able to act, action that the stringent Soviet censorship and state control prevented, outside of metaphorical "actions" in a field.

Similarly between 1988 and 1991, the darkest years of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's censorship, Lia Perjovschi cut up the pages of a French travel guide into tiny strips, creating a series of round books that camouflaged their source. In *Our Withheld Silences* (1989; CAT. 53), she refers to the state's confiscation of passports as a means to suppress Romanian citizens' longing to escape their entrapment. The work also attests to the discrete symbolic forms of communication, or doublespeak, that artists throughout the former Soviet block and within the Soviet Union itself used to render discourse that was threatening to the state impenetrable. Yet her title, *Our Withheld Silences*, boldly attests to the matter symbolized by the object: self-censorship results from the suppression of individual will.

At the other end of the spectrum is the Ukrainian artist Shimon Okshteyn, a native of Chernivtsi, formerly a city in the Romanian area of Bukovina, which was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1944 by Stalin and is now part of Ukraine. Okshteyn moved to the United States in 1980 and has said that he was strongly influenced by Rauschenberg's Combines.<sup>9</sup> In 1995, he found an armchair on the streets of New York, carried it back to his studio, covered the object in canvas, and then painted it black and white with expressive brush strokes. Next, he painted a technical drawing of the armchair, linking the fabrication of the self-assembled piece of furniture to the chair itself. Finally, he placed *Armchair* (1995; CAT. 49) at a tilt in front of the painting, uniting a Rauschenberg-like Combine with a Warhol-like diagram into an entirely original, hybrid work of art. "It's an armchair but not an armchair, because it tilts," he explains, adding, "*Armchair* was very conceptual, as any object that the artist touches becomes something else."<sup>10</sup>



The found object that Okshteyn admires in Rauschenberg's oeuvre is epitomized by Rauschenberg's *Cardboard* series. Begun in 1970 in his New York studio and continued after his permanent move to Captiva Island, Florida, in the late fall of that year, Rauschenberg completed the series in 1971.<sup>11</sup> In working with the cardboard boxes, Rauschenberg exercised austerity and truth to the materials, and resisted embellishing their surfaces. At the same time, he also manipulated the boxes as material by tearing, bending, and flattening, but also leaving them stained and dented as he found them. "I was trying to wean myself off urban imagery," he said. "I was in a different environment. Cardboard boxes are everywhere."<sup>12</sup> As Susan Davidson points out, the titles of the *Cardboards* are as "found" on the boxes themselves.<sup>13</sup> The title of *Olympic / Lady Borden (Cardboard)* (1971; CAT. 72), for example, refers especially to the brand name of an ice cream company that is printed, along with numbers and shipping information, on the surface of the boxes. Enlivened by the marks of use, the boxes affirm their previous lives and stories, which Rauschenberg identified as, "A silent discussion of their history exposed by their new shapes."<sup>14</sup> He also explained: "A desire built up in me to work in a material of waste and softness. Something yielding with its only message a collection of lines imprinted like a friendly joke."<sup>15</sup>

Rescuing and reconditioning discarded materials is emblematic of Rauschenberg's dialogue with the history of the found object, from Cubism to Dada and Surrealism. In addition, when *Cardboards* are viewed within the context of Pop Art, such as Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), they pose a counterpoint to the celebration of the market and, in Rauschenberg's words, the "pervasive . . . commodity condition,"

about which he asked, "Can one not look into the thing's residual use value? For what happens to commodity when it leaves the supermarket shelf?"<sup>16</sup> Separating himself from Pop, Rauschenberg aligned himself with the ecological movement in his consideration of disposability and the materialism of modern life. Indeed, the environmental movement dates its inception to the *first Earth Day*, April 22, 1970, an event that nearly coincided with Rauschenberg's work on the *Cardboards*, and for which he created the poster *Earth Day* "to benefit the American Environment Foundation [in] Washington, D.C."<sup>17</sup>

While the *Cardboards* marked an important new direction in his work, the precedent for his use of cardboards must be remembered in his own oeuvre, for Rauschenberg used the paperboard inserts from laundered shirts in Italy during the years 1952 and 1953 to create works like *Untitled (Optical Device)* (1952) nearly twenty years earlier.<sup>18</sup> These paperboards provide the support for drawings, collage, and the application of inexpensive prints culled from Rome flea markets. *Untitled (Optical Device)* features an intricate engraving featuring an old-fashioned optical device that mirrors a portrait of a woman, who appears on the far right side of the work upside down. The engraving appears with pink tissue paper around it and is framed by strips of graph paper Rauschenberg cut and glued around it. While this work differs in every way from *Cardboards*, still the paperboard support may be seen as their antecedent. The mixed-media assemblage is striking for its miniature size and portability, subtle and elegant composition, and Rauschenberg's use of simple materials that evoke a wide variety of associations and recall his interest in the collages and boxes of the American artist Joseph Cornell.

Rauschenberg made a prodigious attempt to dignify humble materials, perhaps most eloquently expressed in his *Pages* and *Fuses* series, the result of a four-day visit in 1973 to the fourteenth-century paper mill Moulin à Papier Richard de Bas in Ambert, France. There, in collaboration with the mill's director, Marius Peraudeau, he realized twelve works that constitute the concurrent *Pages* and *Fuses* series, including the intricate and minimal *Page 2 (Pages)* (1974; CAT. 75), ennobling even the most modest of materials: paper. Working with plain paper pulp to which he added twine and rags, Rauschenberg enhanced the texture of the paper while sculpting one of the most ancient images in human history: the circle. The work's circle also contains a hole in the center recalling the Zen Buddhist *ensō*, the form that symbolizes the universe and enlightenment, as well as *mu*, or the void. While being a consummate work in paper, the complexity of this otherwise simple object, as just noted, includes its implied references to Eastern philosophy. For this reason, *Page 2* accords with Bruce Conner's many mandala drawings, and is displayed in the room of this exhibition entitled "Bruce Conner One Man Show (with Rauschenberg)."

CAT. 49

Shimon Okshteyn (b. 1951), *Armchair*, 1995. Mixed media, 92 × 73 3/4 × 42 inches overall (233.7 × 187 × 106.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Michael K. Chin, 1997.18.1. © Shimon Okshteyn

CAT. 72

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Olympic / Lady Borden (Cardboard)*, 1971. Cardboard, 78 × 47 × 12 inches (198.1 × 119.4 × 30.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



The period during which Rauschenberg worked on *Pages* and *Fuses* was brief, yet productive, and led to other collaborations with local artisans abroad, and eventually to the prodigious collaborative efforts of the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) (1984–91). His global view and commitments led the renowned museum director Walter Hopps to describe the ethos of Rauschenberg as one representative of “universal consciousness.”<sup>19</sup>

Rauschenberg sustained a form of democratic attention to materiality, process, and facture that drew on his modernist antecedents. Although he altered their often-combative political positions, in his *Studies for Currents* (see CAT. 68–71) and the resulting monumental *Currents* (1970), he faced the world of radical and frequently disturbing and violent cultural, social, and political change decidedly, yet with the simple means of newspapers and scissors in order to place before the public a testimony to his times. Rauschenberg’s embrace of simplicity, directness, and his abiding belief in the world continues to draw the admiration not only of the public but also of other artists for how he ratified the exploration of every aspect and every material from everyday life. In this manner, Rauschenberg encouraged a visual conversation, symbolically represented in “Rock Paper Scissors” that weaves through many generations and artists’ oeuvres.<sup>20</sup> In his words:

All material has its own history built into it. There’s no such thing as “better” material. The strongest thing about my work, if I may say this, is the fact that I chose to ennoble the ordinary.<sup>21</sup>

CAT. 75

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Page 2 (Pages)*, 1974. Molded handmade paper, 22 inches diameter (55.9 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

NOTES

1. Carol Vogel, “Rock, Paper, Payoff: Child’s Play Wins Auction House an Art Sale,” *New York Times* (29 April 2005): <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/29/arts/design/29scis.html>. “Pierre Feuille Ciseaux” (Rock Paper Scissors) is an experimental laboratory for producing comics, formerly held on the grounds of a seventeenth-century salt factory Saline Royale, Arc et Senans, in rural France.
2. A Florida judge ordered two attorneys to play the game in Orlando in order to resolve a debate. See “Order of the Court,” *CNNMoney.com/Fortune* (7 June 2006): [http://money.cnn.com/2006/06/07/magazines/fortune/judgerps\\_fortune/](http://money.cnn.com/2006/06/07/magazines/fortune/judgerps_fortune/). See also Ken Fisher, *Rock, Paper, Scissors: Game Theory in Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
3. Robert Rauschenberg quoted in Leah Dickerman, *Rauschenberg Canyon* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 3–5.
4. Robert Rauschenberg quoted in Julia Brown Turrell, “Talking to Robert Rauschenberg,” in *Rauschenberg Sculpture*, ed. Julia Brown Turrell (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 1995), 65.
5. *Ibid.*, 67.
6. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: A Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Picador, 2005), 37.
7. The tomb of the saint, who was a personal physician to the Emperor Maximian (250–310 CE), is in the Church of San Pantalone Martyr in Venice.
8. Panitkov quoted in Matthew Jesse Jackson, *The Experimental Group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism, Soviet Avant-Gardes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 137.
9. Shimon Okshteyn, interview by Kristine Stiles, 5 November 2013.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Robert Rauschenberg’s artist’s statement in a brochure for his *Cardboards* series (Los Angeles: Gemini G.E.L., 1971), 4–5.
12. Robert Rauschenberg quoted in Josef Helfenstein, preface to *Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboards and Related Pieces*, by Yve-Alain Bois (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 7.
13. “Complete walk-through with Susan Davidson and David White” in “Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboards and Gluts,” 5 June 2012: <http://vernissage.tv/blog/2012/06/05/robert-rauschenberg-cardboards-and-gluts-robert-rauschenberg-foundation/>.
14. Helfenstein, preface to *Rauschenberg: Cardboards*, 9.
15. *Ibid.*, 9.
16. *Ibid.*, 12.
17. Susan Davidson and Joan Young, “Chronology,” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 571.
18. Kristine Stiles in her seminar on Robert Rauschenberg (Fall 2013–Spring 2014), Duke University.
19. Walter Hopps, *Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: The Menil Collection: Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), 64.
20. The ethos belying materiality and process has been present in avant-garde art through the ages, at least since the Impressionists’ focus on color and brushstroke in the rendering of everyday life.
21. Barbara Rose, *Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 58–59.



CAT. 67

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Audition (Carnal Clock)*, 1969. Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on Plexiglas in metal frame with concealed electric lights and clock movement, 67 × 60 × 18 inches (170.2 × 152.4 × 45.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York.  
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## *Auditions in the Carnal House: Eroticism and Art*

JACQUELINE SAMY

The history of eroticism in art is as ancient as art itself, and is a story of the confluences of identity, society, and politics, which have shaped and enriched cultures for millennia. While artists have produced an infinite variety of erotic representations, a binary may be identified within this multifaceted genre between subtle strategies of concealment and more conspicuous strategies of erotic confrontation. Techniques of concealment that veil eroticism include serial imagery, fragmentation, and depersonalization of the erotic subject; while techniques of conspicuous eroticism that deliberately expose the body trespass on the interstice between aesthetics and taboo. Yet while seeming to be polar opposites, these two extremes of representation are in fact complicit in the production of erotic imagery, mutually reinforced and charged by gender and sexual differences. Addressing the increasing fascination with erotic imagery in contemporary life, the painter David Salle observed, “Eroticism is the generational word for authenticity,” a prospect that nevertheless, becomes “more distorted the closer you get to it.”<sup>1</sup>

Robert Rauschenberg understood the paradoxical dynamism of erotic approach (with its diminishing clarity) and erotic avoidance (with its stark lucidity) when he created his *Carnal Clock* series in 1969. “Part of my project,” he explained, “was about working out my own shyness to photograph my friends’ intimate parts.”<sup>2</sup> This comment attests to Rauschenberg’s attempt to grapple with his own erotic identity, that of other artists, and the manner in which to approach and reconcile sexuality in art. Taking the *Carnal Clock* as a leitmotif for the many derivatives of the sensual gaze, I explore Rauschenberg’s depictions of the erotic in tandem with the genre’s prevalence within the works of Bruce Conner, Andy Warhol, Mickalene Thomas, and David Salle.

### **Concealment/Confrontation**

*Audition (Carnal Clock)* (1969; CAT. 67) is one of fifteen kinetic sculptures in the *Carnal Clock* series. Intertwining vision, motion, and sound, the clocks are embedded with timing mechanisms that recall Rauschenberg’s long incorporation of technology in his work, from fans, lights, motors, and radios in his Combines to collaborating with artists and engineers in *Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT)*, a

collaborative initiative involving artists with engineers, scientists, and technology that Rauschenberg helped to found in 1967. The timing mechanisms in the *Carnal Clock* are calibrated to turn on and illuminate the entire sculpture for two minutes at noon and at midnight. The sound of the self-timing mechanism jars viewers, a sonic alert potently suggestive of something about to occur. Once illuminated twice daily, the clocks starkly reveal the visual material that Rauschenberg silkscreened in a grid onto the reflective Plexiglas panels of each sculpture. Such images include the artist's own photographic assortment of grainy black and white images depicting both his own and others' genitals; animals that conjure various sexual associations historically attributed to them (the turtle signifying the penis with its predilection for erect extension or retreat into itself); plants suggesting phallic or vaginal forms; and ordinary objects imbued with erotic implication, such as Rauschenberg's oft-repeated pictures of fire hydrants. Together such images, illumination, and sound of the works when they turn on and off draw the viewers of *Carnal Clock* into what Sigmund Freud theorized in 1920 as the juxtaposition between the life principle (Eros), expressed in creativity, species survival, desire, and joy, and Thanatos (the death instinct), encapsulating negativity.<sup>3</sup>

However striking these images appear when illuminated, they are most commonly viewed during the daily twenty-three hours and fifty-six minutes when only sections of the grid are luminous. During these many hours, viewers primarily see their own reflections on the surface as they overlap with the salacious material below, a facet that compels identification by viewers/voyeurs, inciting their own erotic thoughts. In this regard, Rauschenberg organizes an interactive visual and sexual mise-en-scene in *Carnal Clock*, such that when caught looking at one's self mirrored on erotic imagery, desire is unmasked and may be witnessed by others, who are themselves also looking, thereby inducing everyone to become self-conscious about who is looking at whom and why. Rauschenberg himself alluded to the self-inflicted humiliation the works engender, describing the series as a "racy [and] an embarrassing project."<sup>4</sup>

The works are indeed playfully lewd and often impel discomfort, a notion that implicates both Rauschenberg and his viewers in scopophilia, or the erotic, voyeuristic pleasure of looking. Moreover, *Audition* (one of the two *Carnal Clocks* that Rauschenberg maintained in his own private collection) underscores how he intended the sculpture to entice viewers to try out (audition) their own lustful (carnal) appetites. In mirroring their spectators, the works betray the artist's intention to expose viewers' repressed scopic desires, inhibitions, and perhaps even shame. Furthermore, as one must wait for the works to illuminate, Rauschenberg achieves something akin to the effect of a peepshow, one that only exacerbates suspense and

viewers' desire to see the "show." At the same time, the works further prove that the closer one attends to looking, the more unrecognizable and/or elusive the images of sex and eroticism become.

Once accustomed to Rauschenberg's playful eroticism, his widespread use of sexual puns and symbols throughout his oeuvre become more apparent, and otherwise innocent images appear saturated with lascivious meaning and content. An open tulip in *Angostura (Carnal Clock)* for instance, when rotated ninety degrees and placed next to an image of a vulva, becomes a penis about to penetrate the female sexual organ. The images of turtles that often feature prominently in Rauschenberg's visual vocabulary appear in several of the *Carnal Clocks* and are repeated in other works like *Meditative March (Runts)* (2007; see CAT. 90), where his pet turtle Rocky becomes a phallic analog. Rauschenberg also explored the potential for various erotic juxtapositions: crumpled bed sheets and elephant trunks anthropomorphize to connote wrinkled and rough, smooth and hairless textures of the skin and their relationship to the body and a bed as a site of sex; sinkholes and tires suggest orifices for penetration; the hand and pointing finger of the Emperor Constantine in *Cy + Relics, Rome* (1952; see CAT. 59), juxtaposed to Cy Twombly, conjure sexual acts; Moscow's Kotelnicheskaya Embankment building and Lenin's tomb in *Soviet/American Array VII* (1988–91; see CAT. 85) and the various ancient pillars depicted in *Contest (Arcadian Retreat)* (1996; see CAT. 89), all might be considered as pictorial metaphors for erections. The fire hydrants that abound in Rauschenberg's work may be read by some as the "fire hydrant position," a euphemism for the sexual tripod headstand with legs bent and spread eagle while being entered from either behind or the front. Industrial workmen, uniformed guards, army generals, firefighters, and fire hoses, as in *The Proof of Darkness (Kabal American Zephyr)* (1981; see CAT. 79) with its phallic hose and lighted blue tip, also recur in Rauschenberg's imagery.

More significantly, Rauschenberg's repetition of stock images imbued with erotic connotations achieves subversive affect in the context of his oeuvre and toys with his viewers' conscious and unconscious erotic associations. This effect is analogous to what the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss observed about artists' pictorial repetitions: the willful effort to encourage viewers to search for hidden meaning in a work of art.<sup>5</sup> Thus by repeating the conspicuous fire hydrant image, for instance, Rauschenberg alters the perception of this particular useful object, trapping the viewer into equivocating between its obviously innocent connotation and the potential for erotic consideration. This strategy enabled the artist to maintain ambiguity in his art, concealing iconography at the same time as he starkly reveals it. For once one begins to identify erotic images in his art, they begin to appear everywhere. Rauschenberg understood this very well: "I wanted [the works] to grow

out themselves, to contain their own contradictions and get rid of the narrative,” he explained, adding that such a process “is the sex of picture making.”<sup>6</sup>

The “sex of picture making” is equally prevalent in Bruce Conner’s film *MARILYN TIMES FIVE* (1968–73; fig. 8), which features Arline Hunter, the Marilyn Monroe lookalike and *Playboy* magazine’s most famous “Playmate of the Month” for August 1954. Hunter was also the star of the 1948 silent film *The Apple-Knockers and the Coke* (1948), which Conner appropriated and exhaustively edited into *MARILYN TIMES FIVE*. Conner’s film features the topless Hunter languorously rolling and moving around on a bed as she plays with an apple, both a metaphor for Eve and women’s biblical fall from grace, as well as for Hunter’s voluptuously perfect breasts, or “knockers.” Hunter drinks seductively from a Coke bottle suggesting fellatio, languidly lip-synching to the tune “I’m Through With Love,” sung by Monroe in her renowned 1959 film *Some Like It Hot*. Conner repeats the song in its entirety five times throughout the film. That repetition is the structure for five slight variations of the same imagery of Hunter in the 1948 film.

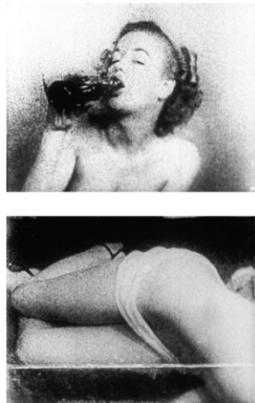


fig. 8

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *MARILYN TIMES FIVE (FIVE PARTS)*, 1968–73 (stills). 16mm film transferred to video (black and white with sepia-tone tint, sound), 13:30 minute loop. Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.37. Courtesy of the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California and Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, California. © Conner Family Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

The film, the song, Hunter’s body, and her gestures and movements are overwhelmingly seductive and erotic. At the same time, the film becomes increasingly unbearable to watch, even as it is impossible to take one’s eyes off the starlet on the bed. The song transforms the ordeal of the endurance test for the audience into an audition from hell. For every time Monroe’s haunting lyrics taper off, the song stops, only to begin again in mind-numbing repetition, inflecting the film with crippling sadness and empathy for Hunter. Hunter’s role as a mere sex object is reiterated in the lyrics of “I’m Through With Love”:

Why did you lead me to think you could care?  
 You didn’t need me for you had your share  
 Of slaves around you to hound you and swear  
 With deep emotion and devotion to you  
 Goodbye to spring and all it meant to me  
 It can never bring the thing that used to be  
 for I must have you or no one  
 And so I’m through with love.

Both poetic and tragic, *MARILYN TIMES FIVE* pays homage to Monroe, who died in 1962. Monroe’s absence adds further poignancy to the erotic estrangement enacted by Hunter. In this way, Conner filters Monroe through several layers of indexical remove, especially in the grainy, degraded black and white footage of the original 1948 film. Hunter is merely Monroe’s doppelgänger, despite her uncanny resemblance to the famous star. The lethargic pace of the song and the film, together



with its repetition, are Conner’s techniques for orchestrating an unsettling eroticism that denies narrative closure until the final termination of the fifth iteration, when all erotic content has been flattened out and deadened by repetition, and the prolonged ordeal grinds to a halt. In *MARILYN TIMES FIVE*, Conner pivots the concept and experience of eroticism on its head, massacring the beauty of Monroe’s appeal to expose the sinister commodity fetishism of her persona, while commenting on the tireless repetition of pornography. Through his artful manipulation of time, *MARILYN TIMES FIVE* holds its viewers frustratingly captive in a state of arousal and denial.

The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty pointed out that “perception is not a question of deliberately taking up a position or engaging in a particular act, but a holistic and integrated pre-reflective experience.”<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty felt that perception was also “never a static affair, but an active bodily involvement with the world . . . where the body-subject stands in an ongoing living dialogue and reciprocal relationship with its existential environment, of which the symbols of science are merely second order expression.”<sup>8</sup> He also argued that such experiences marked “the horizon [that] consists of our previous experiences and future expectations.”<sup>9</sup> Taking these observations into consideration, I posit that Conner’s *MARILYN TIMES FIVE* and Rauschenberg’s *Audition (Carnal Clock)* together display eroticism that densely entraps viewers/voyeurs in an “audition,” requiring them to negotiate the precarious balance between arousal, discomfort, and the infuriating denial of closure that both works purvey. In this regard, the notion of the audition is subversively manifest in twofold ways: *Audition (Carnal Clock)* embarrasses the voyeur while *MARILYN TIMES FIVE* transforms the viewing experience from arousal into that of an endurance test.

### Serial // Fragmentation

Erotic seriality and fragmentation are two aspects of the photographic work of Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol, seductive strategies seen in Rauschenberg’s *Cy + Roman Steps (I, II, III, IV, V)* and in *Portfolio II (I–VI)*, both of 1952, as well as in

CAT. 60

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Cy + Roman Steps (I, II, III, IV, V)*, 1952. Suite of five gelatin silver prints, 15 × 15 inches each (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Warhol's four Big Shot Polaroid photographs *Nude Model (Male)* (1977) and his three gelatin silver prints of Steve Rubell (1982). All of these photographs demonstrate both artists' use of their cameras as an extension of the eye, or as prostheses for both recording and possessing the object of desire.

In the five photographs comprising *Cy + Roman Steps* (CAT. 60), Rauschenberg manipulates focal distance and viewpoint to capture Twombly's descent down the staircase of the Campidoglio in Rome. Gradually shifting the camera angle, Rauschenberg eventually focuses entirely on Twombly's groin in the last image, leaving the staircase as mere backdrop to his and the viewer's gaze. A similar effect can also be seen in the six evocative, albeit non-sequential, photographs that Rauschenberg took of Twombly in *Portfolio II* (see CAT. 61). Four images emphasize Twombly's hands and his long slender fingers and four attend to his face, both in profile and directed at the camera. Twombly also appears in different clothes: a suit and tie, a work shirt and sweater, and a full-length coat that suggests a cape. Together these two serial works vacillate between the firsthand encounter and its photographic product. In both progressions, Rauschenberg employs a fractured visual language, condensing the desire of corporeal reality into its photographic indexical trace. Temporality and spatiality mutually reinforce each other in order to accentuate the erotic charge between Rauschenberg, Twombly as his subject, and the viewer. Rauschenberg manipulates spatial specificity to erotic ends through Twombly's various positions and Rauschenberg's deliberate shifting of focal depth. Moreover, by cropping and concealing Twombly's face, both in his motion down the Roman steps and in the image of him in a long coat, Rauschenberg accomplishes a kind of anonymous striptease in the former, and conspicuous seduction in the latter.

Warhol achieves a similar mode of fragmentation in *Nude Model (Male)* (CAT. 101–04) through the use of serial images that differ from those of Rauschenberg, notably by Warhol's conspicuously graphic depictions that strikingly depersonalize the figure. Here, concealment does not arise by virtue of any visual occlusion, but rather through the fragmentation and positioning of the model such that he is rendered anonymous. *Nude Model* is part of a body of Big Shot Polaroids that Warhol made between 1970 and 1987, and that formed the most consistent thread of his photographic practice from 1976 to 1977. The works satisfied both Warhol's infamous voyeuristic and scopic drives, as well as his necessity for aesthetic control. The Big Shot camera permitted the artist to simultaneously photograph his subject up close with graphic attention to his body while also remaining aloof, granting Warhol instant gratification. Warhol directly referred to the process of fragmentation in a series of photographic collages he created for *Playboy* in the 1970s: "You can get close to your subject, one piece at a time."<sup>10</sup>



Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Nude Model (Male)*, 1977. Polacolor Type 108 prints, 4 ¼ × 3 ¼ inches each (10.6 × 8.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. clockwise from top left CAT. 101 Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.104. CAT. 102 Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.102. CAT. 103 Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.101. CAT. 104 Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.105. © 2014 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

In this regard, Warhol's Big Shot photographs of his model's body parts become portraits, an impersonal mode of concealment that permitted the artist voyeuristic indulgence without any commitment to an identifiable individual. By attending to the topography of the body desirable to him as a gay man rather than to his sitter's identity, Warhol accentuated and possessed the man's genitals, only then to distance himself by describing the images as "abstractions" and "landscapes," translating intimacy into aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> Warhol expressed himself this way in a 1977 conversation with Bob Colacello, editor of Warhol's *Interview* magazine, when Colacello confronted Warhol with leaving pornographic photographs on his desk at night. Colacello deferred his own irritation by explaining to Warhol that the images might be offensive "to all the girls that work here." Warhol responded, "Just tell them it's art, Bob. They're landscapes." Then, holding up a photograph of "fist-fucking," Warhol added: "I mean, it's so so . . . so abstraaaaact."<sup>12</sup>



Andy Warhol (1928–1987), Steve Rubell, 1982. Gelatin silver prints. Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. clockwise from top left CAT. 105 10 × 7 7/8 inches (25.4 × 20 cm). Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.124. CAT. 106 10 × 7 7/8 inches (25.4 × 20 cm). Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.125. CAT. 107 7 7/8 × 10 inches (20 × 25.4 cm). Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.126. © 2014 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

Warhol's Nude Model series is starkly different from his gelatin silver series of photographs of Steve Rubell (1982; CAT. 105–07) in both form and mode of erotic portrayal. Warhol depicted the strikingly handsome and affable Rubell, entrepreneur and co-owner of the famous New York nightclub Studio 54, in a series of candid views as Rubell reclined in a deck chair whilst on vacation in Montauk.<sup>13</sup> Capturing the erotic effect of the bare-chested Rubell in his swimming trunks, Warhol also pictures his confident air of playful nonchalance as Rubell vamps for the camera, glancing mischievously down at his crotch in one image, and covering his genital region in playful erotic concealment in another. Warhol's prosaic and lighthearted photographs of Rubell convey the sense of their friendship, despite what appears to be Warhol's pervasive desire for his subject. The Rubell photographs also differ from such singular shots as Warhol's Unidentified Man (n.d.) and Jon Gould (n.d.), both of which recall Colacello's view that Warhol "obviously loved men" and that his pictures of men show them to be "pretty extraordinary."<sup>14</sup>

While Warhol enjoyed the objectification and depersonalization of most of his male subjects, such an approach gave him meticulous control over his expansive photographic documentation, from where to crop a torso to the precise positioning of his subjects' genitals. Warhol's control ensured the formal consistency of his photographs and his signature emotional flatness. Adding to this, he argued, no doubt in characteristic tongue-in-cheek manner, "Art should appeal to prurient interests because people are alienated by each other, and porn gets you excited about people."<sup>15</sup>

The contrast between Rauschenberg and Warhol could not be starker in so far as Rauschenberg did not self-identify as homosexual, according to the artist's friend, the curator Walter Hopps, who correctly pointed out that Rauschenberg was "pan-sexual" and that he "had intimate, long relationships with women, men, his beloved

dogs, and the very Earth itself."<sup>16</sup> That being said, Rauschenberg's photographs of Twombly are "coded, open and closed, public and private, silent and self-expressive," as the art historian Jonathan Katz has repeatedly insisted in other contexts:

For all of Rauschenberg's assertions of randomness in his art making, the fact is that there is little that is random about these works, as even a cursory reading of their surfaces makes clear. But given the content of their references, and the McCarthyite cultural context of the time, it's no wonder that Rauschenberg sought to camouflage his intentions. Queer artists, not surprisingly, did what queers have always done, because it was all they could do, constructing distinctions through the re-contextualization of the extant codes of culture in such a way as to carry affections unrecognized under the very nose of dominant homophobic culture.<sup>17</sup>

As far as Warhol was concerned, he "refused to play along and be hypocritical and covert" about his sexuality, which "really incensed a lot of people who wanted the old stereotypes to stay around."<sup>18</sup> To this Warhol added: "I often wondered, don't the people who play these image games care about all the people in the world who can't fit into stock roles?"<sup>19</sup>

Rauschenberg deliberately avoided fixed narrative interpretations of himself and his work, and he fiercely protected his private life, while Warhol, by contrast, nourished what he called the "nelly" queer identity of his homosexuality, which he simultaneously paraded and defended, even as he also staunchly withheld information about his private life. Given Warhol's devotion to making queer reality visible, it is paradoxical that, with regard to their personal lives, and the manner in which identity is manifest in each artist's work, Warhol was the wild extrovert to Rauschenberg's decided introvert, even if, as public figures, they were just the opposite: Rauschenberg being vivacious and gregarious, while Warhol being urbanely silent.<sup>20</sup>

### Concealment and Confrontation

Rauschenberg's *Pneumonia Lisa* (1982; CAT. 81) and *All Abordello Doze 2* (1982; CAT. 80), two works from his *Japanese Recreational Claywork* series, have formal similarities, but stage a binary between concealment and confrontation. Both works emerged from Rauschenberg's brief yet productive visits to Japan on two separate occasions within the same year: from July 15 to August 31, and again from September 22 to October 8. During this time, the artist initiated collaboration with the Otsuka Ohmi Ceramics Company in Shigaraki where he worked with local chemists to produce glazes with which he could silkscreen photographs onto traditional Japanese



ceramics. The process resulted in two series of works: *Japanese Clayworks*, ceramic pieces combined with imagery from ancient and modern Japan printed on photographic decals and painted with glazes and fired at phenomenally high temperatures; and the *Japanese Recreational Clayworks*, to which both *Pneumonia Lisa* and *All Abordello Doze 2* belong, a series consisting of ceramic paintings in which the artist reworked iconic images from the Western art historical canon such as Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503–17) and Gustave Courbet's *Sleep* (1866).

*Pneumonia Lisa* exemplifies Rauschenberg's esoteric mode of erotic concealment, arrived at through a combination of techniques including superimposition, textural variation, and the layering of disparate imagery. The work incorporates four conjoined paneled repetitions of *Mona Lisa* that include, from left to right, the face of Sandro Botticelli's *Venus from The Birth of Venus* (ca. 1486) superimposed onto the face of the *Mona Lisa*, with the legs of a bay horse protruding from behind the *Venus's* head;<sup>21</sup> *Mona Lisa* over-painted with expressionistic brushstrokes, and the conspicuous outline of an oversized hammer over her torso; two photographs of figurines of Japanese Sumo wrestlers that Rauschenberg placed on their side, such that one appears on the bridge of *Mona Lisa's* nose; and finally, the full figure of *Mona Lisa* overlaid with a photograph of the orange fender of a motorcycle playfully decorated with a Mickey Mouse decal. The work is notable for the ironic pastiche with which Rauschenberg imbued each panel, depriving the *Mona Lisa* of her potent and storied eroticism. By so altering the reception of her image, however, Rauschenberg brings viewers closer to her, severing them from a habitual and inherited reception of the work in order to reintroduce the viewer to the painting.

In *All Abordello Doze 2*, Rauschenberg confronts eroticism head on, appropriating Courbet's *Sleep* (1866), a painting commissioned by Khalil-Bey, a Turkish diplomat

CAT. 81

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Pneumonia Lisa* (*Japanese Recreational Claywork*), 1982. Transfer on high-fired Japanese art ceramic, 32 ¼ × 86 ½ inches (81.9 × 219.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



and collector of erotica, who also commissioned Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1866) and purchased Dominique Ingres's *The Turkish Bath* (1862). Courbet's painting was derived from one of three poems about lesbian lovers in Charles Baudelaire's censored book *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), and *Sleep* caused a controversy when it was first exhibited in 1872 for its depiction of lesbian lovers, then unlawful in France. Whether Rauschenberg researched this history or not, he certainly grasped the powerful erotic affect of the sated sleeping lovers in *All Abordello Doze 2*.

Rauschenberg brings dramatic attention to the women by over-painting, in a flourish of white expressive brushstrokes, Courbet's detail of an end table with a flower-filled porcelain vase in the upper right hand corner, and by superimposing the pair of Sumo wrestler figurines seen in *Pneumonia Lisa* over parts of the sleeping women's faces and torsos. With the latter, he doubles the erotic complexity of the work, bringing the lesbian lovers into a potentially homoerotic situation with the Sumo wrestlers, and even suggesting the possibility of a heterosexual tryst, or ménage à quatre. Finally, the title of *All Abordello Doze 2* brings the work into the context of a bordello and the eroticism of sex for hire, as well as into the ancient tradition of Japanese shunga, the term for erotic imagery, which literally means "picture of spring," a euphemism for copulation.

With the exception of the Carnal Clock series, Rauschenberg maintains decorum even when overtly picturing sex as in *All Abordello Doze 2*. Similarly, in her

CAT. 80

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *All Abordello Doze 2* (*Japanese Recreational Claywork*), 1982. Transfer on high-fired Japanese art ceramic, 53 ¼ × 52 ½ inches (134.9 × 133.4 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



CAT. 95

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971), *Lovely Six Foota*, 2007. Chromogenic print, edition 5/5, 56 ¼ × 67 ¾ inches (143 × 171.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Christen and Derek Wilson (T'86, B'90, P'15), 2010.12.1. © Mickalene Thomas and Mickalene Thomas Studios, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Courtesy Lehmann Maupin Gallery, Hong Kong, China and New York, New York

*Lovely Six Foota* (2007; CAT. 95), Mickalene Thomas depicts a statuesque, African American woman seated comfortably in a lavish domestic setting, her blouse unbuttoned to expose the edge of one of her breasts. Thomas shows the woman with her legs wide apart, increasing scopis desire by strategically occluding her genitals in the darkness of shadows. At once the emblem of lasciviousness, reinforced by a posture laden with sexual innuendo, Thomas nonetheless dispels and refutes the African woman as signifier of excessive sexuality by picturing her as aloof, even slightly suspicious with an air of self-possession, a cogent counterpoint to normative phallic-centric and misogynistic images of the erotic female subject in art. Her gaze unflinchingly directed at the viewer, Thomas's model exudes a confident, even brazen allure tinged with the slightest hint of desire. The artist turns the notion of demure femininity on its head, rejecting the submissive gaze in order to subvert the patronizing Orientalized female, all while presenting her in a setting laden with an array of gorgeous, orientalized colors, fabrics, and patterns.

In striking contrast to Thomas, David Salle's diptych *The Monotonous Language* (1981; CAT. 91) is soaked in misogyny that strips its female subject of all agency and places her in a position of extreme vulnerability and perhaps even entrapment. In addition, domestic objects like Eero Saarinen's "womb chair," graphically drawn over her womb, assault the female subject; and, with her genitalia pressed into the



CAT. 91

David Salle (b. 1952), *The Monotonous Language*, 1981. Oil on canvas, 72 × 96 inches (182.9 × 243.8 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. 50th Reunion Gift of Tom (T'66) and Charlotte Newby, 2013.20.1. Art © David Salle / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

foreground and legs spread to reveal her vulva, the woman's contorted pose requires her to crane her head backwards to stare directly at the viewer. She shares the picture plane with a sketch of a household interior reminiscent of the 1950s superimposed on her body, alluding to the erotic underbelly of domesticity. The diptych conspicuously juxtaposes this obscene figurative scene, with a loosely painted abstraction featuring a corporeal pink blob, equally suggestive of the female genitalia.

Salle has defended his work, typified by this painting, under the pretense of the conceptual conflation of irony, paradox, and parody, nonchalantly dismissing accusations that such work is pornographic with the comment that his forms are of an "appropriated sexuality."<sup>22</sup> Salle reiterates his defense of pornography:

The great thing about pornography is that something has been photographed. And what is further compelling about pornography is knowing that someone did it. It's not just seeing what you're presented with but knowing that someone set it up for you to see.<sup>23</sup>

But for her part, the feminist art historian Linda Nochlin has pointed out, "So deeply ingrained are the [binary] conventions of eroticism, that the nude male image . . . connote[s] notions of power, possession, and domination, while the image of the nude female [is] one of submission, passivity, and availability."<sup>24</sup> Salle operates

directly in this contradiction, by confronting the male nude as an adversary whose independent existence within all of his art must be assimilated to an intrinsically male desire. By being converted to abstractions, subsumed through layers of superimposition and banal imagery, his female figures are thus enfeebled by these very stylistic manipulations.<sup>25</sup> The barrier that these abstracted images creates, between the sensuous immediacy the images purvey and its confrontational erotic charge, resides at the heart of Salle's title, *The Monotonous Language*.

In conclusion, I return to Salle's comment quoted at the beginning of this essay to suggest that eroticism, as a measure of authenticity, remains illusive and becomes ever the more so the closer one approaches. Moreover, erotic display lures viewers/voyeurs into an "audition," where they must find equilibrium between arousal and discomfort and exhibitionism and voyeurism, as well as a host of binaries that artists intentionally leave unresolved. More particularly, Rauschenberg's clever use of the word "audition" in *Audition (Carnal Clock)* ushers viewers into the theater of their most intimate selves in order to undermine and, thereby, transform the experience of viewing into an interactive exchange of erotic selves.

#### NOTES

1. Kevin Power, David Salle: *Seeing It My Way* (Munich: Staatgalerie Moderner Kunst, 1989), 11.
2. Barbara Rose, *Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 100.
3. Freud juxtaposed Eros against Thanatos, or the death drive expressed in aggression, sadism, destruction, violence, and death. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C. J. M. Hubback from 2nd German ed. (London and Vienna: International Psycho-Analytical, 1922). See also Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1949).
4. Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 100.
5. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, trans. Clair Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic, 1963), 206–31.
6. Melissa Geiger, *Rauschenberg's "Oracle," "Soundings," and "Carnal Clocks": A Socio-historical Critique* (State College, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, UMI Dissertation Publishing, 2005), 116.
7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 1958), 12–13.
8. *Ibid.*, 34.
9. *Ibid.*, 37.

10. Bob Colacello, *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 338–39.
11. *Ibid.*, 413.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Studio 54 opened in 1977 and was closed in 1980 after Rubell and his partner, Roy Cohn, were arrested, tried, and imprisoned for tax evasion. Warhol frequently socialized at Studio 54, and this set of three photographs was shot seven years before Rubell, who was closeted for most of his life, died of hepatitis and septic shock complicated by AIDS.
14. Alan Cumming, "Foreword," in *Andy Warhol: Men* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004), 6.
15. Thomas Waugh, "Cockteaser," in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, ed. Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and Jose Esteban (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 47.
16. Hopps as quoted in Kim Martineau, "The Rauschenberg Debate: A Yale Professor Exposes A Part of the Artist He'd Rather Keep Private," *The Courant* (30 January 2004): [http://articles.courant.com/2004-01-30/news/0401300908\\_1\\_robert-rauschenberg-jonathan-katz-images](http://articles.courant.com/2004-01-30/news/0401300908_1_robert-rauschenberg-jonathan-katz-images).
17. Jonathan Katz, "Lovers and Divers: Interpictorial Dialog in the Work of Jasper Johns and Jasper Johns," in *Frauen/Kunst/Wissenschaft* 25 (June 1998): 24. See the essay online at: <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzLovers.html>. Among the many authors addressing the subject of homosexuality in Rauschenberg's work, Katz has written the most extensively on the subject, penning some eleven essays, among them "The Art of Code: Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg," in *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 44–52.
18. Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 211.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Kristine Stiles in her seminar on Robert Rauschenberg (Fall 2013–Spring 2014), Duke University.
21. The legs of the horse may be a reference to the thoroughbred racehorse that was named "Rauschenberg" after the artist by admiring collectors. See Martineau, "The Rauschenberg Debate."
22. Mira Schor, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism and Art Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 3.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 84.
25. For an expanded discussion of these issues, see Carol Duncan, "Maybe Feminism has Just Begun," in *Mobile Fidelities: Conversations of Feminism, History and Visuality*, by Martina Pachmanová (Prague: One Woman Press, 2006), 126.



CAT. 85

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Soviet/American Array VII*, 1988–91. Photogravure on paper, artist's proof, 78 ½ × 51 ½ inches (199.4 × 129.9 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## *Soviet/American Array: Robert Rauschenberg and Soviet Unofficial Artists*

TAYLOR ZAKARIN

Robert Rauschenberg met the Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky in 1978 when Tatyana Grosman introduced them. So began their collaboration on a set of six visually engaging prints with texts by Voznesensky and images by Rauschenberg, undertaken at Grosman's Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE). This suite of prints would be included in Rauschenberg's exhibition at the Central House of Artists in Moscow in 1989, itself one of the sites of his Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI).<sup>1</sup>

In an interview in 1978, Voznesensky discussed the release of his most recent collection of poems, *Nostalgia for the Present*, and observed, "There is one word in Russian for present and honest and reality."<sup>2</sup> In her translator's note, Vera Dunham explains, "In Russian the word *nastoyashee* means not only 'present,' but also 'real,' 'genuine,' or 'authentic.'"<sup>3</sup> While these terms describe Rauschenberg's approach to art, being present was often not possible for artists living in the Soviet Union. Yet, despite seemingly different worlds on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain, Rauschenberg and Soviet unofficial artists created art that reveals a compelling and little-explored history of exchange, including a shared focus on an array of common visual vocabularies and political strategies, ranging from employing national newspapers (as a medium for reflection on political and cultural unrest in their respective nations) to subverting nationalistic discourses and imagery. This essay examines the surprising intersections across the Cold War divide.

### **American Array**

Rauschenberg began his career at the end of the 1940s when the United States became one of the two undisputed economic and military world powers, and during the rise of mass commercialization and American "Levittown" culture, a euphemism for planned communities.<sup>4</sup> Despite celebrating individuality, innovation, and the often-overlooked objects and events of everyday life, ironically Rauschenberg was considered a precursor of Pop Art and an advocate of mass culture. That culture came into being, in part, when veterans received benefits from the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act (the GI Bill), giving them access to education and housing in suburban homes like the four-room Levittown houses,

which reinforced the importance of the nuclear family as the primary driver of U.S. prosperity.<sup>5</sup> Families also contributed to the growth of two important economic sectors: the motor vehicle industry<sup>6</sup> and the housing industry.<sup>7</sup> With prosperity came the expansion of the white middle class, more leisure time, the rise of American commercial culture, and a demand for more variety and availability of goods. As a result, the advertising industry exploded, exploiting the new technology of television and turning the previously aural medium of radio into a powerful new visual tool.<sup>8</sup>

Such rapid changes encouraged the cultural homogeneity that authors like Sloan Wilson in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) and William H. Whyte in *The Organization Man* (1956) depicted as stultifying. Whyte lamented the passing of the ideology of rugged American individualism and the growing pressure to conform. The Company Man replaced the Marlboro Man, a symbol from 1954 until 1999 of the virile American smoker; and women were relegated to the caricature of robotic housewives, who dressed immaculately, wore pearls, were enamored with their household appliances, and catered to their husbands and children. Wilson and Whyte's predictions proved prescient. The false veneer of the 1950s economic boom descended into chaotic nightmare in the 1960s, augmented by the searing rise of the Cold War, which came close to nuclear cataclysm in 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Exempted by the "American Dream," African Americans expanded the civil rights movement, which, together with the growing involvement in Vietnam under President John F. Kennedy, resulted in widespread unrest in the U.S. On June 11, 1963, just hours after President Kennedy's "Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights," in which the President insisted on the moral imperative of civil rights, the civil rights activist Medgar Evers was shot in the back and killed. Five months later, JFK was assassinated on November 22, 1963. A tragic spate of assassinations followed: Malcolm X on February 21, 1965; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968; and Senator Robert F. Kennedy on June 16, 1968, among others. The violence of the civil rights movement increased, with riots in the inner cities; the generational divide, already emerging with the 1950s Beat generation's rejection of conformity and mass consumerism, expanded in the Hippie generation's "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" and its resistance to the Vietnam War.

For a conscientious citizen like Rauschenberg, who served in World War II, the overwhelming social discord could not be ignored. He later explained that he had felt assaulted by current events and, not surprisingly, his personal life and work became increasingly political. Following JFK's assassination, Rauschenberg included the former president's image in a number of works, such as *Retroactive I* (1963). He

also worked on a poster to benefit the civil rights organization Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1965, collaging images of New York City and JFK with "a Native American, the Statue of Liberty, and the statue of a Civil War soldier."<sup>9</sup>

Also in 1965, Rauschenberg lobbied to support the passage of a bill to establish the National Endowment for the Arts and contributed funds to the *Peace Tower* in Los Angeles, a fifty-eight-foot tower covered with over 400 different artists' work and designed by the sculptor Mark di Suvero and others. In 1968, the Youth International Party (or Yippies), organized by anarchist activists Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin alongside the Black Panthers, fought the police in the streets of Chicago during the Democratic National Presidential Convention. That year Rauschenberg completed *Political Folly*, a transfer drawing with "images of Democratic presidential candidates Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy and the Grant Park antiwar demonstrations in Chicago."<sup>10</sup> He exhibited *Political Folly* in *Response to Violence in Our Society*, a Chicago show on the demonstrations and police brutality that erupted during the Democratic Convention.

Then, in August of 1969, the cult led by criminal psychopath Charles Manson perpetrated satanic murders, including that of the eight-month pregnant actress Sharon Tate. Left-wing groups began to fragment as the decade ebbed, and 1969 witnessed the anti-imperialist, anti-racist Weather Underground detach alliance with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and issue its "Declaration of a State of War" against the U.S. government, a statement that presaged their terrorist bombings. On December 4, 1969, a unit of the Chicago Police Department, along with the FBI, killed Black Panther Fred Hampton in his sleep. Five months later, on May 4, 1970, a unit of the Ohio Army National Guard fired on students, killing four and wounding nine others as they peacefully protested the Vietnam War on the campus of Kent State University.

By 1969, when Rauschenberg started *Studies for Currents* (CAT. 68–71), the American social fabric was unraveling. The political chaos, social bedlam, and generational anarchy led to these thirty-six collages. Measuring 30 by 30 inches and each photo-mechanically transferred to screens for printing at Styria Studios in Glendale, California, *Studies for Currents* in turn led to Rauschenberg's crowning meditation on the state of the nation: *Currents*, a sixty-foot-long silkscreen that he produced in 1970. In *Currents*, Rauschenberg personally came to terms with his dismay over the disorder, violence, and destruction of the period. Each unique collage included news clippings from the January and February editions of the *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other newspapers. Rauschenberg employed headlines to detail the immense political unrest, as well as disturbing events in society in general: "B-52's Raid Despite Foes Truce," "GM Locomotive Workers Stress



Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), 1970. Cut-and-torn newspaper, solvent transfer, and gouache on illustration board; 30 × 30 inches each (76.2 × 76.2 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. Clockwise from top left CAT. 68 *Study for Currents* #9. CAT. 69 *Study for Currents* #13. CAT. 70 *Study for Currents* #15. CAT. 71 *Study for Currents* #24. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Pension Issue,” “Cop Stabbed in the Back on 1-Man Patrol in Harlem,” “Speed M-16s To Laos To Match Red Rifles,” “Philosopher-Pacifist Bertrand Russell Dies,” and on and on.

A range of images supplemented these stories, and as Rauschenberg explained: “The world condition permitted me no choice of subject or color and method/composition.”<sup>11</sup> The aim of these works was “to shake people awake”:

I want people to look at the material and react to it. I want to make them aware of individual responsibility, both for themselves and for the rest of the human race. It has become easy to be

complacent about the world. . . . I made [Currents] as realistically as I could, as austere as possible, in the most direct way I knew how, because, knowing that it was art, people had to take a second look, at least, at the facts they were wrapping their garbage in.<sup>12</sup>

Uncharacteristically strident for Rauschenberg, current events directed his thinking and emotions at the time. The curator Britt Salvesen nevertheless concluded: “Art, Rauschenberg suggests, has constructive potential amid general disintegration.”<sup>13</sup> In accord with his effort to help others, and his belief in the potential of art, Rauschenberg established Change, Inc., in 1970. This nonprofit worked to provide emergency grants to artists of up to \$1,000 of Rauschenberg’s own money, as he believed that by helping artists, he could foster creativity in an otherwise bleak time.

That same year, *Time* magazine commissioned a cover by Rauschenberg to herald the new decade, but when the work he created—*Signs* (1970; fig. 9)—featured a summation of the violent 1960s, *Time* rejected the piece. *Signs* “was conceived to remind us of the love, terror, violence of the last ten years,” Rauschenberg explained, “Danger lies in forgetting.”<sup>14</sup> *Signs* unites various images from the 1960s such as stills from Abraham Zapruder’s film of JFK’s assassination and photographs of astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the body of Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, riots, Vietnam soldiers, and Rauschenberg’s fellow Port Arthur-bred friend, singer Janis Joplin. Although reporting on the tumultuous state of the country, Rauschenberg also introduced ironic humor in the form of a military jeep that reads “Convoy Following.” But the “convoy” is, in fact, an image of a peace vigil. In another section, Rauschenberg placed a photograph of Robert Kennedy with his mouth open adjacent to Joplin’s breast, and he made protestors appear as concertgoers cheering her on.

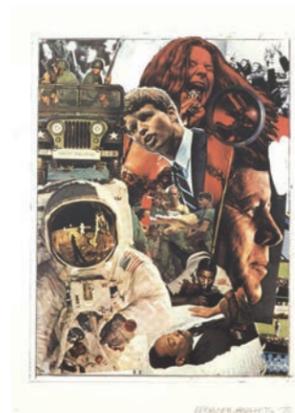


fig. 9 Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Signs*, 1970. Screenprint (published by Castelli Graphics, New York), edition of 250, 35 ¼ × 26 ¾ inches (89.4 × 67.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Gift of Leo and Jean-Christophe Castelli in memory of Toiny Castelli. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Nearly fifteen years later in 1984, Rauschenberg expressed his continuing concern for the world when he announced ROCI. An evolving exhibition, ROCI would find him working with local artists and artisans in countries from Cuba, Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela to China, Tibet, Japan, and Malaysia. He also went to East Germany and to the Soviet Union, funding nearly the entire venture himself in order to remain free of financial obligations to corporations or the government, which might constrain his work and require him to follow a particular state or institutional protocol or ideology. That same year, when asked by the *New York Times* to comment on “your fondest wishes for the arts in 1984,” Rauschenberg responded:

Peace is not popular because it is equated with a stoppage of aggressive energies. Starting a new use, aggressively, of our unique curiosities, our impatience with ignorant cruelty and encouraging the most general personal contributions will make war ashamed of itself and art clear.<sup>15</sup>



CAT. 98

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013), *Image #7* from the series *House with an Attic*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, artist's proof, 29 3/4 × 21 1/4 inches (75.9 × 54 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.1. Art © Oleg Vassiliev / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



CAT. 99

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013), *Image #21* from the series *House with an Attic*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, edition 9/40, 29 3/4 × 21 1/4 inches (75.2 × 53.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.3. Art © Oleg Vassiliev / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



CAT. 100

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013), *Image #24* from the series *House with an Attic*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, artist's proof, 29 3/4 × 21 1/4 inches (75.6 × 53.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.2. Art © Oleg Vassiliev / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

## Soviet Array

In spite of consistent political pressure to embrace collective identity in the former USSR, Soviet unofficial artists like Yuri Albert, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, Vera Khlebnikova, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Leonid Lerman, Igor Makarevich, Pavlo Makov, Shimon Okshteyn, Boris Orlov, Nikolai Panitkov, Leonid Tishkov, and Oleg Vassiliev, among others, created work of individual distinction, commenting on a society of uniformity and suppression.

Similar to Rauschenberg's use of newspapers in *Currents*, Vassiliev also used newspapers to comment on various states of Russian and Soviet society. Vassiliev cut up issues of *Pravda*, the ideological organ of the communist Central Committee from 1912 to 1991 whose title in Russian means "Truth." "When I draw on a newspaper, a sort of material witness to the times," Vassiliev explained, "I either take its transformation into account, or ignore it."<sup>16</sup> *House with an Attic* (1992) is an outstanding example of a series of prints in which Vassiliev used *Pravda*. His suite of thirty lithographs is divided into three themes. In prints one through fifteen, Vassiliev carries on a visual dialogue with Anton Chekhov's short story *House with an Attic: An Artist's Story* (1896), nostalgically remembering nineteenth-century Russia prior to the revolution. Print sixteen, a transition print from the past to the present, is devoted to Vassiliev's own family history. Prints seventeen through thirty address twentieth-century Soviet history.<sup>17</sup> "The present



CAT. 97

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013), *Chistoprudny Boulevard*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, edition 9/40, 29 3/4 × 21 1/4 inches (75.2 × 53.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.4. Art © Oleg Vassiliev / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

is saturated with the past," Vassiliev once commented, "as a live sponge is saturated with water."<sup>18</sup>

In her extensive study of this body of Vassiliev's work, the art historian and curator Bettina Jungen writes that the first print visually summarizes the artist's misery in contemporary Soviet culture. It "features the artist's self-portrait in front of a . . . dilapidated nineteenth-century Moscow manor [captured] by the realist landscape painter Vasili Polenov . . . in his painting *Grandmother's Garden* (1878)."<sup>19</sup> While establishing the overarching theme of the series, by print *Image #5* (1991) Vassiliev has introduced himself standing outside of the frame looking at the house with the attic. But in *Image #7* (1992; CAT. 98), he steps inside the frame and the visual narrative entwines Vassiliev's life with that of Chekhov.

*Image #21* (1992; CAT. 99) moves the drama of history into the present, as a large figure in black boldly steps forward, with an image of a tiny, forward striding Lenin represented in his head. The composition suggests that the massive black figure has no mind of his own, only what he has learned from the teachings of Lenin. "The black silhouette to the right depicts Nikita Khrushchev [and] the black figures wearing hats to the left represent the Soviet nomenklatura—holders of important administrative positions."<sup>20</sup> By *Image #24* (1992; CAT. 100), Vassiliev has turned his focus to critical contemporary events such as the nuclear power plant disaster at Chernobyl on April 26, 1986. "The headline under the hunched-up figure in work boots reads, 'The trouble of Chernobyl is our trouble, too,'" explains Jungen, who adds: "The sentence refers to the threatening clouds in the upper half . . . of radioactive fallout all over Russia, Europe, and other parts of the world."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Vassiliev chose his newspaper topics carefully, selecting such headlines as "Tired of Wandering," "No Forum About Economy," and "The Pain of Chernobyl is Our Pain," among others.<sup>22</sup>

In *Chistoprudny Boulevard* (1992; CAT. 97), Vassiliev refers to one of the celebrated boulevards on Boulevard Ring in central Moscow.<sup>23</sup> An old woman in a heavy coat walks forward under the looming monument of *Aleksander Griboyedov* by Aleksander Manuilov, mounted in 1959 near the Chistye prudy metro station. Griboyedov, a famous Russian diplomat and playwright, is dressed in a suit with a cloak thrown over his shoulder. Author of *Woe from Wit* (1822–24), a comedy in verse satirizing post-Napoleonic Moscow society, the play was prohibited during Griboyedov's lifetime and only fragments were published. Nonetheless, Griboyedov's

lines and characters are legendary, especially Chatski, the hero who satirizes bribery, class ambition, and pretention in Russian society. Chatski is the first example in Russian literature of the “superfluous man,” perhaps represented by Vassiliev in the nameless woman in the foreground. “You see regret for ‘the old world, destroyed to its foundations,’” Vassiliev observes. “Soviet reality [is] inextricably intermixed with the romantic theme of an empty abandoned house; and scenes of nature, terribly close to me.”<sup>24</sup> For Vassiliev, Soviet life was one of disrepair dominated by party politics, disgruntled citizens, and a general sense of existential anxiety and hopelessness. Despite these sentiments, the death of Joseph Stalin rocked Vassiliev’s foundation. “After Stalin died in 1953, those absolutes were subject to revision, they were erased from official memory,” Amei Wallach explains, and “Vassiliev and his friends experienced a crisis of identity.”<sup>25</sup> In *House with an Attic*, Vassiliev utilized Chekhov to demonstrate the morass of the Soviet Union, explaining, “We have seen how the ‘bright and progressive young things’ turned into demagogues, and what came of that. I am certain that Chekhov intuitively sensed the absurdity and horror of the abyss that a realized utopia presents.”<sup>26</sup> Stalin’s death left a legacy of thirty years of ruthless, rigid rule in which all aspects of Soviet life were controlled, including the role of the artist, who was compelled to serve the ideological imperatives of Communist party policies. While in control, Stalin collectivized society and culture, both in rural communities and cities, leaving little room for individualism. Such efforts are manifest, from the collectivization of agriculture (with the *kolkhoz*, or collective farms) to the urban communalization of city apartments.

Expanding such social and economic controls, in 1934 Stalin mandated the Doctrine of Socialist Realism at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, and appointed Andrei Zhdanov in 1946 to direct Soviet cultural policy. Zhdanov divided the world into imperialist (epitomized by the U.S.) and democratic (represented by the Soviet Union) factions that underscored the Cold War divide. “Zhdanovian Doctrine” would soon guide the arts in the Soviet Union until Stalin’s death, even though Zhdanov fell out of favor with Stalin in 1947 and died in 1948.<sup>27</sup> His doctrine forbade political art, satire that exposed the folly of the Party and its programs (i.e. collectivization or industrialization), religious art, erotic art, and formalistic art. The last of these categories, formalism, is particularly notable as the prohibition distinctly banned artistic creation outside of the Neoclassical and Baroque styles common to Socialist Realism.

Art was to be accessible, easily understood by the masses, and advance the mission and message of the state. The Ministry of Culture, the Academy of Arts, and the Union of Artists all policed artists. The latter was the most significant as the intermediary between artists and their potential employers, providing funding and

supplies and helping to organize exhibitions. The Union also produced publications, the best-known being the magazine *Ikusstvo* (Art). The most important aspect of the artists’ Union was that “political conformity [and] failure to comply with regulations could result in dismissal and loss of all privileges,” Elena Kornetchuk writes. “An artist could be dismissed for political reasons,” she adds, “as well as for such seemingly minor reasons as failure to pay membership dues for two consecutive years.”<sup>28</sup> Following Stalin’s death, much artistic production continued to depict the leader, manifesting his lasting power and influence over the Soviet Union. However, debates over Socialist Realism led to relaxation of artistic styles and, in 1954, the dissident painter Eli Beliutin, a painting instructor in Moscow at the Textile Institute, formed the Free Studio of Art focusing on more uninhibited techniques in painting.

Nikita Khrushchev, first Secretary of the Communist Party from 1953 to 1964, encouraged these modest changes in the Soviet art world, an unanticipated result of his renowned 1956 February speech “On the Personality Cult and its Consequences.” Although he had participated in Stalin’s reign of terror, Khrushchev eased Stalin’s stranglehold on the diverse peoples of the USSR and denounced many of Stalin’s practices. Thus began “Khrushchev’s Thaw,” which continued until his ouster in 1964. During the course of this modest relaxation of Stalinist controls, Khrushchev allowed daring exhibitions of contemporary Western art in which Soviets came face-to-face with Western abstraction, reviving the memory of the birth of abstraction in the Soviet Union during its revolutionary years, 1913 to 1933.

The Khrushchev period hosted The Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students on July 28, 1957. The first such exhibition held in the Soviet Union, 4,500 works by artists from over fifty-two countries filled its art spaces, and it drew 34,000 visitors from 130 countries.<sup>29</sup> In 1959, the American National Exhibition was held in Sokolniki Park in Moscow, including Rauschenberg and other American contemporary artists. This exhibition emerged from the state-sponsored exchange staged by the U.S. and the Soviets, which had the latter exhibiting Soviet technological and artistic triumphs in New York, and the former exhibiting consumer goods (as well as contemporary art) in Moscow.

This period of relative openness culminated in December 1962 with the exhibition at Manezh, a Neoclassical building adjacent to Red Square, where the show *Thirty Years of Moscow Art* was held. It featured primarily Socialist Realist paintings, but a presentation of newer, innovative works also took place. Following the opening, along with other artists, members of Beliutin’s studio displayed their work in three smaller exhibition rooms on the second floor of the Manezh, a bold action signaling an effort to change contemporary conditions for art. Three days after visiting the exhibition, however, Khrushchev began a “purge of liberals in the artistic

establishment” with the result that some artists were banned from exhibiting publicly.<sup>30</sup> This suppression, however, gave way to an increase in unofficial underground art, which would continue to grow in the Brezhnev era.

Leonid Brezhnev replaced the autocracy of Khrushchev and his predecessors when he became the First Secretary in 1964 of a collective leadership. Economic reforms followed until the mid-1970s when the Soviet economy stopped growing and political corruption ensued. While the Soviet Union’s status as a superpower continued under Brezhnev, economic slowdown, known as “stagnation,” characterized the culture during his era (1976 to 1986). Selective censorship continued, and the “remaining liberals and liberal sympathizers were gradually weeded out of all the official unions, committees, schools and journals,” and continued adherence to Socialist Realism as state policy ruled the day.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile artists turned to “their historical, philosophical, religious, and national roots, as well as to radical western art: surrealism, abstract expressionism, pop art, and other avant-garde movements, all of which were frowned upon.”<sup>32</sup> These influences led to the “dissident,” or “unofficial,” art of the 1970s, which continued until the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, when the USSR acknowledged twelve independent republics and created the Commonwealth of Independent States. Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party (1985–91) and President of the Soviet Union (1990–91), resigned on Christmas day, handing over power to Boris Yeltsin, the first President of Russia.

Stagnation fueled the growing fire of Soviet unofficial artists in literature (with self-published underground samizdat publications) and in art (with undercover, self-run exhibitions in private apartments known as “APT-Art”). Although closely and constantly monitored and forbidden to exhibit publicly, artists desired to show their work, a desire that outweighed the risks. Already in 1969, the dissident painter Oskar Rabin had begun proposing outdoor exhibitions in an effort to exploit “a loophole in government regulations.”<sup>33</sup> While he had attempted to follow the ideological aesthetic dictates of the state and paint, “slick, syrupy, ‘safe’ things . . . easily [understood] by the ‘powers that be,’” Rabin eventually “destroyed these paintings one by one” because he could no longer “bear to look at them.”<sup>34</sup> “Celebrated in the West as the ‘Solzhenitsyn in painting’” for how he “honestly and eloquently reflected the mood in society during the 1960’s and 1970’s,” Rabin turned to European expressionism, using distorted perspectives and collaging “fragments of newspapers, stickers and labels.”<sup>35</sup>

Together with the poet Aleksandr Glezer, Rabin was the major force behind the “Fall Open-Air Show,” installed on September 15, 1974, in an empty field in the Cheryomushki district on the outskirts of Moscow, a site selected with the explicit

intention of avoiding a “public disturbance.”<sup>36</sup> The exhibition was to take place “from 12 to 2 P.M. at the end of Profsouzmaya and Ostrovitianov streets,” and the invitation included eleven artists.<sup>37</sup> Aware that governmental resistance might occur, Rabin and Glezer contacted Christopher S. Wren of the *New York Times* to report on the show. Indeed, on the day of the exhibition government workers arrived to plow it down with bulldozers. The state’s crude show of force earned the exhibition the affectionate nickname “The Bulldozer Show.”<sup>38</sup> The next day on the front page of the *New York Times* Wren’s article appeared with a large photograph captioned, “A water truck pursues crowd from the scene of an outdoor art show in Moscow after authorities halted exhibition.”

Four days after this event, the artists delivered an ultimatum to the government: either they would return to that spot and attempt the show again, or they must be given permission to exhibit at another location. Their courageous act resulted on September 29 in the “Second Fall Open-Air Show of Paintings,” held in Izmailovskiy Park outside of Moscow. Following this presumed victory, permission to hold and contribute to exhibitions in official galleries was given. The decision did not go uncontested, as the state systematically penalized many of the artists, sending some to insane asylums, others to the military, and still others to be observed and constantly threatened by the KGB. As Michael Scammell has written, “The exhibitions of the mid-1970s, therefore, were not the harbingers of better things to come, but a swan song . . . the result—on the surface at least—was a decade of stifling conservatism, reaction, and conformity.”<sup>39</sup> Lacking a better alternative, many unofficial artists began emigrating to the West: Ernst Neizvestny, Oscar Rabin, Aleksandr Rabin, Leonid Lamm, and Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, among others, all moved to Paris, London, or New York.

Meanwhile, Boris Orlov, originally associated with the Sots Art movement, continued to satirize while mourning the glory of the Soviet empire. Referring to himself as an “imperial artist,” Orlov creates sculptures that reckon with the symbols of Soviet power and greatness, all the while saturated in irony and kitsch. In bronze works like *The General* (1989; CAT. 50) and *Russian General* (1990; CAT. 51), Orlov considers the grandeur of the Soviet past, utilizing the imagery of the former ruling military elite by appropriating its insignia of power in the symbolism of the decorative medallions and ribbons of military regalia. “We read Western existentialists,” Orlov remembers. “The key was irony. Irony was soaked in everything—the whole social art is ironic, as well as post modernism. This term originated in the 1980s, but we realized we had been doing it in the 1970s.”<sup>40</sup> Orlov also explores the fall of the history of the Soviet empire in sculptures of airplanes that mock its cult of aviation airplanes, “a paraphrase of imperial eagles, a new symbol of the empyrean and



CAT. 50

Boris Orlov (b. 1941), *The General*, 1989. Painted bronze, 16 × 20 × 6 inches (40.6 × 50.8 × 15.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Drs. Irene and Alex Valger, 2000.24.4. © Boris Orlov. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

CAT. 51

Boris Orlov (b. 1941), *Russian General*, 1990. Painted bronze, 17 × 24 × 6 inches (43.2 × 61 × 15.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Anatole and Maya Brekerman, 1999.14.2. © Boris Orlov. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

sublime.”<sup>41</sup> Orlov’s airplanes appear to have been shot down and in decay, a blatant metaphor for the state of the nation.

Departing from the aura of nationalist symbols, Yuri Albert asks: “What is art?” Answering, “One might say [my work] is about the possibility of making art in an area where all arts are coming to an end or have already ended. Also about what it means to understand or not understand.”<sup>42</sup> Albert’s monochrome series *Alphabet for the Blind* represents his consideration of the challenges to and state of contemporary art. All of the nine works belonging to *Alphabet for the Blind*, like *About Beauty* (1988–89; see CAT. 2), include Russian braille texts that articulate different conceptual concerns and were made by gluing plastic children’s toy balls covered in black paint to each black monochrome canvas. The texts range from “Inspiration is not sold, but a painting may be sold,” to “It is better to have seen once than to have listened a hundred times.” *About Beauty* seems to recall Leo Tolstoy’s famous comment, “What a strange illusion it is to suppose that beauty is goodness,” among a host of philosophical comments regarding aesthetic theory. *About Beauty* seductively tempts us to brush our fingers lightly across the braille text, but the painting’s status as Art halts viewers, who are socialized not to touch paintings, from such direct engagement. Drawing attention to language and communication, Albert also comments on the elite status of art and its institutions, while suggesting that art must be experienced, touched, and explored, giving voice to those who are unheard: the blind and the uninitiated.

Like Albert, Nikolai Panitkov is interested in communication and language, particularly as it pertains to censorship and the suppression of creativity. Panitkov was an original member of the Collective Actions Group (KD), which formed in 1976, and his *Stuff up the Hole, Stuff up the Crack* (1987; see CAT. 52) is an unusual work in the context of the group’s conceptual and performance-related art. But if considered as a political critique, when Panitkov flips the canvas so that its wooly backing fills the space between the frame and the painting’s white monochrome surface, he visualizes the effort to jam the holes in the fabric of the USSR just at the moment of its demise. The cork pushed through its center, like a gag on the mouth, also points to state censorship and its cousin, self-censorship. These associations bring an entirely different body of considerations to Rauschenberg’s comment “I think a painting is more like the real world if it’s made out of the real world.”<sup>43</sup> For in Panitkov’s work, and in the real Soviet world of 1987, reality could only be hinted at even if it was overflowing its frame.

### Soviet/American Array

Before leaving the Soviet Union, first for Israel and then for the U.S., Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid were key practitioners of unofficial art in 1970s Moscow. The artists met while studying at the Stroganov Moscow Higher Industrial Art School, and participated in many of the unofficial art happenings, including APT-

Art shows and the Bulldozer Exhibition. Their work was among the first Soviet dissident art exhibited in the U.S., smuggled out of the Soviet Union by private collectors and friends. Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York gave them their first U.S. exhibition in 1976, two years before the artists arrived in New York City. Considered the founders of Sots Art, a Soviet form of pop art satirizing Soviet Socialist imagery, Komar and Melamid began painting in a style they termed “Nostalgic Socialist Realism” after leaving the USSR. This style mimicked the Baroque/Neo-classical state-imposed Socialist Realism of the Stalin era. Undercutting the purpose of these nationalistic dictates and rendering



CAT. 40

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid (b. 1943 and b. 1945), *Stalin with Hitler’s Remains* from the series *Anarchistic Synthesism*, 1985–86. Oil on canvas, 84 ¼ × 60 ¼ inches (214 × 153 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1992.8.1. © Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

CAT. 41

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid (b. 1943 and b. 1945), *The Wings Will Grow* from the series *American Dreams*, 1999. Screenprint on paper, edition 10/46, 41 ½ × 27 ½ inches (105.4 × 69.9 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of J. Gibson Waitzkin, 1999.5.1. © Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



them kitsch, Komar nonetheless advised in 2002: “To imagine is to remember.”<sup>44</sup>

Following the “nostalgic” period, Komar and Melamid embarked on their *Anarchistic Synthesis* series, the title being a reference to the Russian anarchist Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum, or Volin, and his essay *Anarchist Synthesis*, included in a book edited by renowned anarchist Sébastien Faure.<sup>45</sup> *Stalin with Hitler’s Remains* (CAT. 40) belongs to this series, begun when the artists turned their attention to the pluralism (read: anarchism) of Western art during the 1980s. The painting pictures

Hitler shrouded in a white cloth, baroque light dramatically highlighting his form. Stalin stands with a white physician’s coat draped over his shoulder pointing to Hitler’s corpse. Below this superbly rendered realistic image, the artists hinged a white monochrome panel, recalling those that Rauschenberg painted in 1951, as much as Malevich’s work of 1918 (see fig. 4). But unlike Rauschenberg’s pristine surface, or Malevich’s tilted white square on a white field, in the middle of Komar and Melamid’s monochrome, the artists painted the title of the work in block letters, perhaps summoning, as much as satirizing, conceptual art.

In their *American Dreams* series, Komar and Melamid shifted to an examination of the patriotic symbolism of their new home in the U.S. Still drawing on Socialist Realism, they suggest a parallel between the “cult of personality” of George Washington and that of Lenin or Stalin.<sup>46</sup> Fascinated with American kitsch versions of the “father of the nation,” they explored U.S. national symbols, such as the bald eagle and the stars and stripes. In *The Wings Will Grow* (1999; CAT. 41), they portray Washington with a globe, a column, and drapery, symbols appropriated from Edward Savage’s famous painting *The Washington Family* (1789–96). In Komar and Melamid’s work, Washington holds the eagle/baby uncomfortably, “as though he is not used to it,” a reference both to the instability of the American Dream and the relative infancy of the United States.<sup>47</sup> The artists appropriated the baby’s body from



fig. 10

Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606–1669), *Ganymed in den Fängen des Adlers* (The abduction of Ganymede), 1635. Oil on canvas, 69 ½ × 51 inches (177 × 129 cm). Collection of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. Public domain



fig. 11

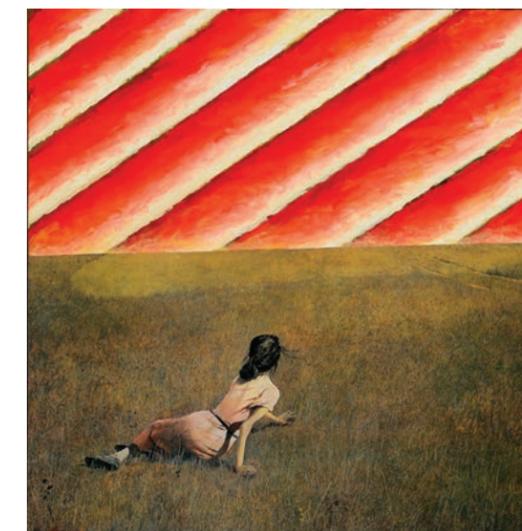
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Canyon*, 1959. Oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, wood, canvas, buttons, mirror, taxidermied eagle, cardboard, pillow, paint tube and other materials; 81 ¾ × 70 × 24 inches (207.6 × 177.8 × 61 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Gift of the family of Ileana Sonnabend, 1982.2012. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Rembrandt’s *The Abduction of Ganymede* (1635; fig. 10), which depicts Zeus in the guise of an eagle abducting a beautiful child. As a result, Washington assumes the role of Zeus, and the work seems to imbed a critique of the European rape of Native American land.

Rauschenberg, too, was absorbed in Americana and nationalistic imagery—seldom as kitsch, but sometimes as irony—as it related to mass media and print culture. In fact, Rauschenberg’s combine *Canyon* (1959; fig. 11) utilizes the same mythological tale of the rape of Ganymede appropriated by Komar and Melamid. Famous for its taxidermied bald eagle surrounded by a diverse array of photographs, Rauschenberg added his own photograph of his son, Christopher, to the Combine, as well as a deconstructed white shirt, a drum, a postcard of the Statue of Liberty, and a bed pillow hanging down from the canvas, among various other objects and collage elements. “*Canyon* . . . is often taken to refer to the classical myth of Ganymede,” Catherine Craft observes, explaining the classical figure as “a youth abducted by Zeus in the form of an eagle, and especially Rembrandt’s rendition of the story.”<sup>48</sup> In this vein, Rauschenberg may have considered the photograph of his son to represent Ganymede and the pillow to present the young boy taken in his sleep.<sup>49</sup>

While Komar and Melamid reflected on the anarchistic synthesis of art in the U.S., appropriating images from an array of sources, including some of the same artists from whom Rauschenberg borrowed, Leonid Lerman embarked on *The Phantom of Malevich* series, his reflection on the impact of Kazimir Malevich’s art in the history

of abstraction and landscape painting. “Since Malevich emerged, his ghost is strolling about the world,” Lerman explains, “This is the ghost of a new world-view towards art, a new set of values.”<sup>50</sup> In his study for *Other Horizons* (1992; CAT. 43), Lerman draws a comparison between Western masterpieces and Malevich’s legacy, appropriating Andrew Wyeth’s *Christina’s World* (1948), and picturing Christina crawling on the grass under a bright Malevich sky composed of



CAT. 43

Leonid Lerman (b. 1953), *Study for Other Horizons*, 1992. Oil on offset print, 37 × 37 inches (94 × 94 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.14.3. © Leonid Lerman. Courtesy McKee Gallery, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

bars of red that sweep diagonally across the upper register of the picture. Another work in the series, *Evening at Volga* (1992), turns to Isaac Levitan, the Russian master of landscape painting. For this work, Lerman appropriates both Levitan's picture and its title, but introduces Malevich's Suprematist planes hovering over the landscape. A member of the Peredvizhniki (The Wanderers), who abandoned the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts because of its restrictions, Levitan represented a radical new way of depicting Russian history and the inequities of contemporary life. Lerman views Levitan as "the Chekhov or Dostoyevsky in literature, able to convey mood, [for] when you stare in this deeply felt landscape, you hear the music."<sup>51</sup>

While Lerman was working on *The Phantom of Malevich* series, Dennis O'Neil, a printmaking professor at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C., began collaborating with artists on printmaking in what would eventually be called the Moscow Studio that he established in 1991. O'Neil credits Rauschenberg with his own interest in prints, and when he visited Moscow for the first time in 1989 and noticed the paucity of artists working in printmaking, he became determined to work with Russian artists to develop the medium. O'Neil remembers:

Based on the trial success of a three-week workshop at Senejh, an artist colony seventy miles outside of Moscow, operated by the Soviet's Union of Artists, I was invited to create a more permanent studio on Gogolevsky Boulevard in central Moscow in 1992. In 1993, the final home of the Moscow Studio was established in partnership with the Russian Academy of Art on Laverinshky Per. across the street from the Tretyakov Gallery and two miles from the Kremlin.<sup>52</sup>

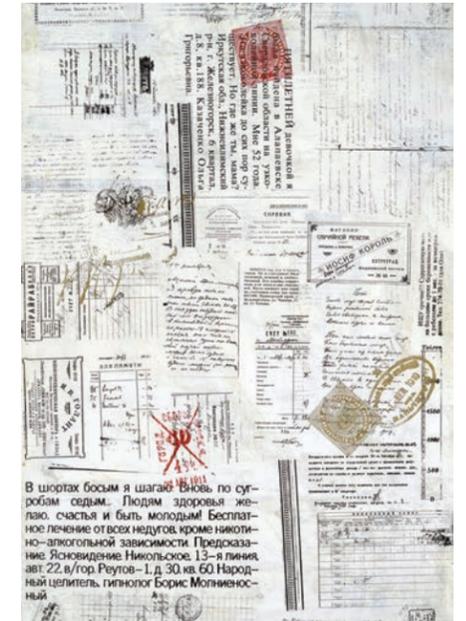
Nevertheless, O'Neil insists that Moscow Studio was never a school but a place where he worked "collaboratively with Russian artists six months of the year," before returning to Washington.<sup>53</sup> O'Neil also raised funds for printmaking technology and supplies to bring to Moscow to bridge "the great distance between his own studio in Washington and Moscow."<sup>54</sup> He expressed the mission of Moscow Studio to be "a conduit [and] a place that is open to all kinds of ideas, clear-cut ideas about how [the Soviet artists] see their country evolving politically, socially, artistically."<sup>55</sup>

O'Neil also initiated *Wallpaper Project*, in which a number of Russian artists embarked in the mid-1990s, among them Igor Makarevich, Elena Kudinova, Pavlo Makov, Leonid Tishkov, and Vera Khlebnikova. As O'Neil recalls:

All the wallpaper was printed in Moscow at the Moscow Studio in 1995 or '96. I brought a large roll of fabric backed vinyl paper to Moscow and "commissioned" eight artists to make their own wallpaper. (It was curated in the sense that I selected the artists to



CAT. 47  
Pavlo Makov (b. 1958),  
*Fountain of Exhaustion* from  
*The Wallpaper Project*, 1996.  
Screenprint on wallpaper,  
36 ¼ × 25 ½ inches (92.1 ×  
64.8 cm). Collection of the  
Nasher Museum of Art at Duke  
University, Durham, North  
Carolina. Gift of Gibby and Buz  
Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.5.  
© Pavlo Makov. Photo by Peter  
Paul Geoffrion



CAT. 38  
Vera Khlebnikova (b. 1954),  
*Wallpaper* from *The Wallpaper  
Project*, 1996. Screenprint on  
wallpaper, 36 ¾ × 25 ½ inches  
(92.4 × 64.8 cm). Collection  
of the Nasher Museum of  
Art at Duke University,  
Durham, North Carolina.  
Gift of Gibby and Buz  
Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.4. © Vera  
Khlebnikova. Photo by Peter  
Paul Geoffrion

make it.) It was exhibited in Moscow first. I think it was at the Central House of Artists. I wasn't there for the exhibition, since I was commuting to Moscow then. (After 1993, I was there every other two months through the end of 1996.) I did bring a strip or two back of each artist's wallpaper to DC to be used in the exhibition *The Moscow Studio: 1991–96* at the Corcoran Gallery in December [of 1996]. I made some wallpaper too as did my master printer for the project, Yaroslav Karpoulin, who lives here [in D.C.] now. The other artist was Alexi Simeonov.<sup>56</sup>

While Makov's *Fountain of Exhaustion* (CAT. 47) is devoted to abstraction, O'Neil remembered that Khlebnikova's print (CAT. 38) "dealt with the traditional way of preparation of an old wall for wall papering: to paste newspaper first as a liner holding the plaster firmly together before it was papered." Her *Wallpaper* was first painted to imitate an old white wall, then old newspaper clippings were attached, many of which were receipts from generations ago of the purchase of wallpaper. In preparing for the "new," her work was a look back at these long kept clippings that became the repaired walls' delicate foundation.<sup>57</sup>

Leonid Tishkov, perhaps the best known of the artists participating in the *Wallpaper Project*, was trained as a physician, but left medicine to enter the "elaborate world



CAT. 96

Leonid Tishkov (b. 1953), *Wallpaper* from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996. Screenprint on wallpaper, 36 ¼ × 25 ¼ inches (64.1 × 92.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Gibby and Buz Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.2. Art © Leonid Tishkov / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York

of character and symbols.”<sup>58</sup> His *Wallpaper* (CAT. 96) features an assembly of anthropomorphic Dabloids, which he described as “miraculous and versatile creature[s] . . . made up of an autonomous leg with a small head at its top.”<sup>59</sup> In Tishkov’s cosmology, Dabloids mutate, symbolizing “a conjunction of high and low,” with the head “in heaven” and the leg “down . . . firm and big,” representing the “image of man.”<sup>60</sup> Tishkov’s first exhibition in the U.S. took place at Duke University in 1993, organized by Michael P. Mezzatesta, then director of the former Duke University Museum of Art.<sup>61</sup>

CAT. 46

Igor Makarevich (b. 1943), *Wallpaper* from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996. Screenprint on wallpaper, 36 ¼ × 25 ¼ inches (91.8 × 64.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Gibby and Buz Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.3. © Igor Makarevich. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

Igor Makarevich (CAT. 46) also explores the human condition through the fantastical figure of Buratino, the Soviet version of Pinocchio. Makarevich’s Buratino is a “disturbing perversion of the children’s story” where “the character becomes a metaphorical figure for the shared goal of his contemporary official Soviet culture and Russian avant-garde artists: to create and promote an identity.”<sup>62</sup> Fashioning an entire world for his Buratino, Makarevich’s wallpaper includes different characters: Skater, Reader, Horn Player, Football, Artist, Skier, Stranger, Master Builder, and Young Buratino.<sup>63</sup> Interested in rethinking “the image of the cheerful wooden puppet,” Makarevich also quotes Thomas Mann to observe: “The history of the soul is the history of pain.”<sup>64</sup>

## Russian-American Romance

In his effort to break through the history of pain, Robert Rauschenberg declared in 1989: “My goal is to open people’s eyes to the surrounding reality, to deepen mutual understanding between people and to aspire for peace.”<sup>65</sup> Rauschenberg took ROCI to Moscow that year. Due to the relationship between the Russian government and Armand Hammer, an American oil magnate and art collector, and the efforts of Donald Saff, who served as the artistic director of ROCI, Rauschenberg met Vassily Zakharov, the Soviet Minister of Culture, and an invitation from the Union of Artists to exhibit in the USSR was forthcoming. ROCI USSR took place at the Tretyakov Gallery in the Central House of Artists in Moscow, making it the first solo exhibition of a Western post-WWII artist in the Soviet Union. Reflecting on the momentous event, poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko remembered: “For us, his exhibit is one of the symbols of a spiritual *perestroika* of our society.”<sup>66</sup> A line of 145,000 people wove through the halls of the exhibition. According to *Moscowskie Novosti* or *Moscow News*, Rauschenberg “not only brought his masterpieces, but also walls, lights, ninety gallons of paint; everything down to the last nail. He contributed to the exhibition not just talent, but also tremendous capital.”<sup>67</sup>

Rauschenberg opened the show with his print series *Soviet/American Array*, which he had printed at Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) in West Islip, Long Island. Rauschenberg made the series at ULAE, where he had previously collaborated with Voznesensky. The works interweave images saturated with bright colors and photographs of New York construction workers interlaced with Moscow subway stations; St. Basil’s Cathedral in Red Square greets the Empire State Building and the former World Trade Center in one work. *Soviet/American Array VII* (1988–91; CAT. 85) specifically contrasts what appears to be a New York City apartment building with the Kotelnicheskaya Embankment Building in Moscow, among various other less recognizable images clearly taken from Rauschenberg’s travels throughout Moscow and New York. Most notable is how difficult it is to discern which images represent the USSR and which the U.S., which are from Moscow and which from New York. Rauschenberg turns images from the two Cold War nations, which stressed their differences for over forty years, into a poetic montage of an inextricably interconnected life, neither Soviet nor American, but an imbricate array of both. Concurrent with Rauschenberg’s 1989 Soviet iteration of ROCI, a group of Russian artists organized an exhibition with Aydan Salakhova, director of Moscow’s first independent art gallery, First Gallery. The exhibition *Rauschenberg to Us—We to Rauschenberg* consisted of works made in tribute to Rauschenberg by the Soviet artists, and served as the first exhibition at the first commercial gallery in Russia. This moment might be considered the crowning accomplishment of Rauschenberg’s

intention for ROCI: to meet different artists in their own locales and come together in conversation and peace.

Following the success of this show, the Soviet Minister of Culture enlisted Salakhova to organize an exhibition for the 1990 USSR Pavilion at the 44th Venice Biennale, the theme of which was “Future Dimension,” and Rauschenberg was invited to exhibit in the Soviet pavilion. Following the theme, Rauschenberg sent a huge painting *Orrery (Borealis)* (1990). Its display in the Soviet pavilion marked the first time that an artist at the Venice Biennale exhibited in a national pavilion that did not belong to his or her own country.

In *Orrery (Borealis)*, Rauschenberg reached beyond his aim to capture the world, instead seizing the entire universe as an inspiration. As a model of the solar system, an orrery shows the interactions and movements of the planets through time as driven by a clock mechanism. *Borealis*, Latin for northern, is most often joined with the word Aurora, or sunrise. Together the Aurora Borealis signifies the northern lights. Thus, *Orrery (Borealis)* signifies time and the planets, while its colors suggest the hues of the northern lights, with its brass base and swaths of red and brown. The work includes the depiction of eight main objects and images, suggesting a correspondence with the eight planets of the solar system. The painting also boasts parts of a Sousaphone (related to the tuba and helicon and used in marching bands) attached to the surface. Images of double chairs, a white cloth hanging on a clothesline, the imprint of a placard, a primate, a clock, and a telegraph pole interlace the ordinary with the extraordinary, and the majesty of the planets with the ancient history of timekeeping. Despite conjecture about the cosmic meaning of these elements, *Orrery (Borealis)* is “not just a miniaturized view of the world, not just the music of the spheres, not just a world clock, but a multimedia search for a new light in a world that is growing cold, a search for Ptolemaic warmth.”<sup>68</sup>

Rauschenberg’s Moscow ROCI exhibition, together with the installation of *Orrery (Borealis)* in the Soviet Union’s pavilion at the Venice Biennial, may have played some small part in improving cultural relations between the USSR and the U.S. at this crucial moment of *perestroika*, just as Yevtushenko suggested. Certainly Rauschenberg’s collaboration with Andrei Voznesensky in 1978 had an impact on the poet when Voznesensky wrote the first Russian rock opera, *Yunona I Avos* (1981). It included the poem “Russian-American Romance” whose verse reads:

In my land and yours they do hit the hay / and sleep the whole  
night in a similar way. / There’s the golden Moon with a double  
shine. / It lightens your land and it lightens mine. / At the same  
low price, that is for free, / there’s the sunrise for you and the  
sunset for me. / The wind is cool at the break of day, / it’s neither

your fault nor mine, anyway. / Behind your lies and behind my lies  
/ there is pain and love for our Motherlands. / I wish in your land  
and mine some day / we’d put all idiots out of the way.

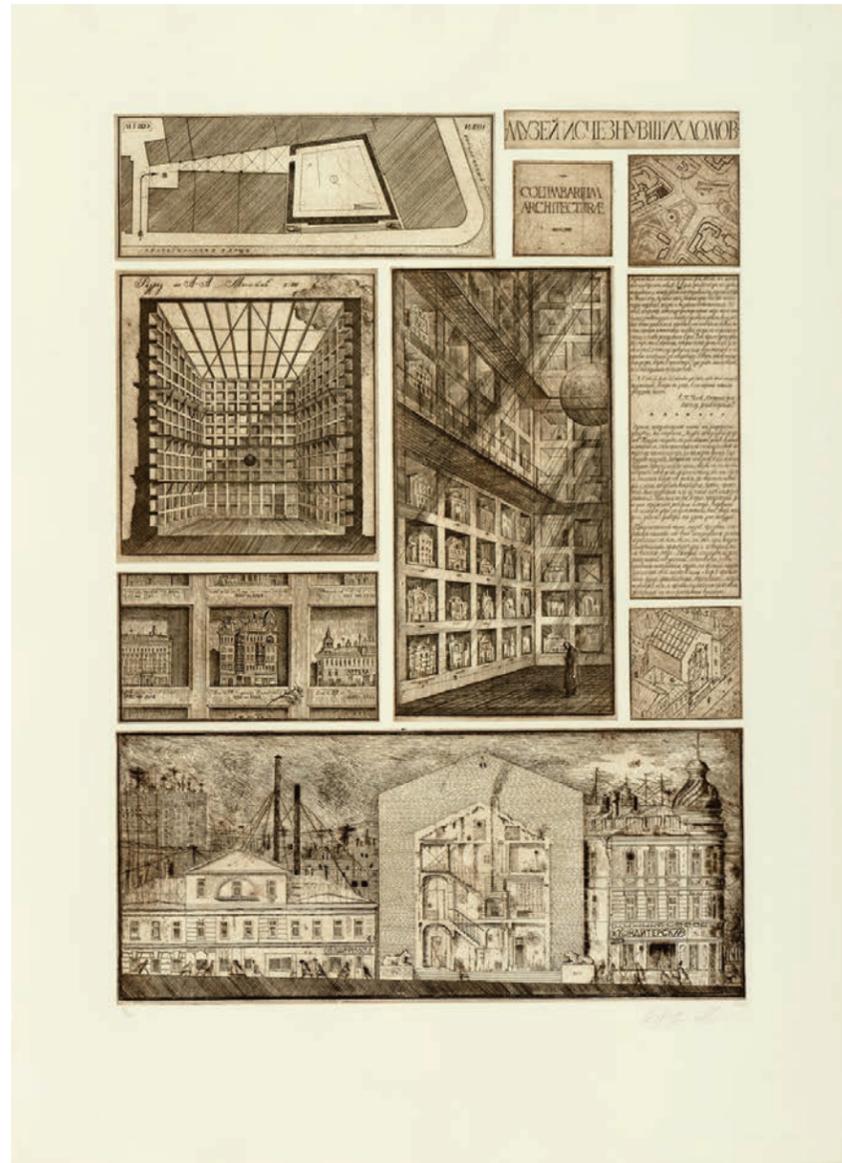
The title of this poem, “Russian-American Romance,” may have been in Rauschenberg’s mind when he conceived of his prints *Soviet/American Array*, such that the conversation between Rauschenberg and Soviet poets, artists, and cultural establishment remained in dialogue. This view is best summed up by Rauschenberg himself: “I’m looking forward to the day when we can declare that it’s not a Russian show, it’s not an American show, that all art is international.”

## NOTES

1. The co-created works include: *Picture Gallery*, *Echo When*, *Seagull—Bikini of Gold*, *From a Diary*, *Long Island Beach*, and *Darkness Mother*.
2. Donald Miller, “A Poetic Interest in Reality,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (25 August 1978): 9.
3. Andrei Voznesensky, Vera Sandomirsky Dunham, and Max Hayward, *Nostalgia for the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 259.
4. Levitt & Sons, Inc., built Levittown on Long Island in Nassau County, New York, between 1947 and 1951.
5. The 1950s baby boom reached its peak with a population increase of almost 20% over the course of the decade accompanied by rapid suburban expansion.
6. The number of privately owned cars more than doubled during this period.
7. Moreover, with the merger of the two major labor union organizations, the AFL and the CIO, under the leadership of George Meany, the unified AFL-CIO (The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) helped factory workers secure increased wages up to an all-time high average of roughly \$80 a week.
8. NBC, ABC, and CBS, which all initially controlled networks of radio stations, turned their attention to creating television networks.
9. Susan Davidson and Joan Young, “Chronology,” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 563.
10. *Ibid.*, 569.
11. Britt Salvesen, “New Acquisition: Rauschenberg *Currents*,” *Unframed: the LACMA Blog* (24 April 2012): <http://lacma.wordpress.com/2012/04/24/new-acquisition-robert-rauschenberg-currents/>.
12. Robert Rauschenberg quoted in Armin Zweite, *Robert Rauschenberg* (Dusseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen and DuMont, 1994), 48–49.

13. *Currents* did not only document the social upheaval. As Salvesen further noted, “Rauschenberg undertook to bring ‘serious journalism’ into the fine-art realm with *Currents*,” and “sustained observation” of the massive silkscreen “reveals an art-world subtext, with articles documenting Expo ’70 in Osaka, Japan, and a new work by Richard Serra.” See Salvesen, “New Acquisition.”
14. Robert Rauschenberg and Dieter Ruckhaberle, *Robert Rauschenberg: Werke, 1950–1980*, (Berlin: Staatliche Kunsthalle, 1980), 97.
15. Robert Rauschenberg as quoted in “If You Had Your Fondest Wishes for the Arts,” *New York Times* (1 January 1984): 16.
16. Oleg Vassiliev, “Regimes of Phrases,” interview by Margarita Tupitsyn, in *Oleg Vassiliev: Memory Speaks (Themes and Variations)*, by Andrew Solomon, Amei Wallach, and Yevgenia Petrova (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2004), 17.
17. Different authors refer to the title of this suite by several different names: *The House with a Mezzanine: An Artist’s Story*; *The House with a Mezzanine*; *The House with an Attic: An Artist’s Story*; *The House with an Attic*; and *The House with the Attic*. The Nasher Museum’s set of four prints uses the title *House with an Attic*, which is consistent with the lavish book of the same name, published by Øivind Johansen Editions in 2013, that contains thirty original, signed prints by Vassiliev, whose lithographs were printed at the Michael Woolworth Atelier, Paris.
18. Oleg Vassiliev, “On Memory (Introduction for an Unwritten Essay on the Space of the Painting,” in *Oleg Vassiliev: Memory Speaks*, 19. The art historian and curator Bettina Jungen, a specialist on Vassiliev, writes, “Vassiliev deliberately did not give his prints titles in order not to narrow the viewer’s perception.”
19. Bettina Jungen’s caption for Vassiliev’s lithograph *House with an Attic Image #1* in Øivind Johansen Editions’s 2013 publication of the series *House with an Attic*. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent quotes for the four Nasher prints derive from Jungen’s captions for the book online at the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College: [http://museums.fivecolleges.edu/detail.php?museum=all&t=objects&type=ext&f=&s=&record=0&maker=vassiliev&op-earliest\\_year=%3E%3D&op-latest\\_year=%3C%3D](http://museums.fivecolleges.edu/detail.php?museum=all&t=objects&type=ext&f=&s=&record=0&maker=vassiliev&op-earliest_year=%3E%3D&op-latest_year=%3C%3D).
20. Bettina Jungen, telephone conversation with Kristine Stiles, 6 March 2014.
21. Jungen, *The House with the Mezzanine*, #24: [http://museums.fivecolleges.edu/detail.php?museum=all&t=objects&type=ext&f=&s=&record=23&maker=vassiliev&op-earliest\\_year=%3E%3D&op-latest\\_year=%3C%3D](http://museums.fivecolleges.edu/detail.php?museum=all&t=objects&type=ext&f=&s=&record=23&maker=vassiliev&op-earliest_year=%3E%3D&op-latest_year=%3C%3D).
22. These headlines were translated by Pamela Kachurin from two works by Oleg Vassiliev: *House with an Attic, Image #24* and *Chistoprudny Boulevard*.
23. This print does not belong to the official series of lithographs *House with an Attic*, published in Paris by Øivind Johansen in 2013, in the collection of the Mead Museum at Amherst College. But it is one of many that Vassiliev created for the series. Jungen points out that if the individual prints are later titled, that often reflects viewers’ “thirst” for interpretation. Bettina Jungen, email to Kristine Stiles, 5 March 2014.
24. Oleg Vassiliev, “The House with Mezzanine: An Artist’s Story (Based on A.P. Chekhov),” in *Oleg Vassiliev: Memory Speaks*, 66.
25. Amei Wallach, “Oleg Vassiliev, The Treachery of Memory, the Space of Light,” in *Oleg Vassiliev: Memory Speaks*, 11.
26. Vassiliev, “The House with Mezzanine: An Artist’s Story (Based on A.P. Chekhov),” 66.
27. This situation was not unlike how some conservatives in the U.S. considered the “-isms” of modernism. For example, in 1949 Congressman George A. Dondero held forth in Congress as follows: “Cubism aims to destroy by designed disorder. Futurism aims to destroy by the machine myth. . . . Dadaism aims to destroy by ridicule. Expressionism aims to destroy by aping the primitive and insane. . . . Abstractionism aims to destroy by the creation of brainstorms. Surrealism aims to destroy by the denial of reason. . . .” Congressman George A. Dondero, “Modern Art Shackled to Communism,” from a speech given in the United States House of Representatives, published in *Congressional Record*, First Session, 81st Congress Tuesday, 16 August 1949, reprinted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 497.
28. Elena Kornetchuk, “Soviet art under government control: from the 1917 Revolution to Khrushchev’s thaw,” in *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience, 1956–1986: The Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection, the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (New York: Thames and Hudson in association with the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1995), 43.
29. Michael Scammell, “Art as Politics and Politics in Art,” in *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience, 1956–1986: The Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection*, 49.
30. *Ibid.*, 51.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 52.
33. Andrei Erofeev, *Non-Official Art: Soviet Artists of the 1960s* (East Roseville, Australia: Craftsman House: G+B Arts International, 1995), 65.
34. Oskar Rabin quoted on “Oskar Rabin,” Saatchi Gallery: [http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/rabin\\_oskar.htm?section\\_name=breaking\\_the\\_ice](http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/rabin_oskar.htm?section_name=breaking_the_ice).
35. *Ibid.*
36. Majlena Braun, “A Case Study: Repression,” in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomas Pospiszyl, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 66.
37. Rabin, Evgenii Rukhin, Vladimir Nemukhin, Nadezhda Elskaia, Yuri Zharkikh, Boris Shteinberg, Alexander Melamid, Vitaly Komar, Vasily Sitnikov, Valentin Vorobiev, and Igor Kholin. See the “Chronology of Events,” in *Primary Documents*, 66.
38. Among the artists in the exhibition were Vladimir Bougrine, Eduard Drobitsky, Igor Holin, Valery Klever, Vitaly Komar, Alexander Melamid, Lidiya Masterkova, Koryun Nahapetyan, Vladimir Nemukhin, Eduard Shteinberg, Borukh (Boris Shteinberg), Nikolai Smoliakov, Oleg Tselkov, Edouard Zelenine, and Alexandr Zhdanov.
39. Scammell, “Art as Politics and Politics in Art,” 55.
40. Elena Verkhovskaya, “Boris Orlov Interview with Elena Verkhovskaya,” in *Andy Warhol’s Interview* (27 February 2013): <http://www.interviewrussia.ru/art/hudozhnik-boris-orlov-iz-nashey-zhizni-ushla-passionarnost>.
41. Irina Kulik, “Boris Orlov” in Tsukanov Family Foundation, *Breaking the Ice: Moscow Art 1960s–80*: <http://www.moscowart.net/artist.html?id=BorisOrlov>.

42. Yuri Albert, interview by Nina Dyzhkova, video recording, March 2012, Moscow: <http://www.contemporaries.mmoma.ru/en/personality.php?id=43>.
43. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: A Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Picador, 2005), 7.
44. Allison Leigh-Perlman, *Future Ruins: Time, Memory and History in the Work of Komar and Melamid* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Studies in Slavic Cultures VIII, August 2009), 15.
45. Kristine Stiles in her seminar on Robert Rauschenberg (Fall 2013–Spring 2014), Duke University.
46. Ronald Feldman Gallery, “Komar & Melamid: American Dreams, 18 October–15 November 1997”: <http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhknm97.html>.
47. Michael Amy, “Komar and Melamid at Ronald Feldman,” *Art in America* 86 (April 1998): <http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1998/k&m%20in%20art%20in%20america.html>.
48. Catherine Craft, *Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2013), 52.
49. Rauschenberg’s 1961 work *Election* continues his exploration of nationalistic and patriotic themes and images, albeit in a much more literal sense. When he gave *Election* to President Kennedy, Rauschenberg sent a letter explaining the significance of the objects and icons he pictured in the print. He wrote that the presence of the eagle, the references to Greek antiquity, and the use of George Washington reiterated “the content of the drawing” as related to both “art and politics.” He also referred to popular culture and mass media, noting that his use of purple to depict Jacqueline Kennedy was meant to resemble her image on the television. Rauschenberg continued to use President Kennedy’s image after his assassination, although his countenance assumes a haunting aura. In 1961, Rauschenberg sent *Election* to John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy. Along with the work, the artist included a letter: “This drawing should belong to you or me. If you enjoy it I would be deeply honored if you accept it. My concern with the election, primarily your becoming our next president, interrupted a 2-1/2 year project of illustrating Dante’s *Inferno*. That fact + a need to celebrate your victory in my own medium is the subject. It is the only drawing in which the Dante image is used outside of the illustrations. (Small figure, lower right hand corner next to large D). The Greek head and Washington reiterates that the content of the drawing is art and politics. Red, white + blue is your color. The headlined, televised, radioed purple is Jacqueline’s. The rest is, I think, self-explanatory, including the formal fading waves of ‘Dick + Pat’ in the upper right.” See Davidson and Young, “Chronology,” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, 559.
50. Vasili Agafonov, “Leonid Lerman Interview with Vasily Agafonov,” *Novoye Russkoye Slovo* (12 January 1993). Translated by Alexander Choklin.
51. Leonid Lerman, telephone conversation with Kristine Stiles, 21 February 2014.
52. Dennis O’Neil, email to Kristine Stiles, 20 March 2014.
53. Ibid.
54. Beth Joselow and Dennis O’Neil, “The Moscow Studio: American Perspectives,” in *The Moscow Studio: A Five-Year Printmaking Retrospective 1991–1996*, by Beth Joselow (Alexandria, VA: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1996), 13. Eventually, working in Moscow with his colleague Marte Newcombe at their own expense, O’Neil received a grant from Dick Kelsey of TW Graphics in Los Angeles.
55. Ibid.
56. Dennis O’Neil, email to Kristine Stiles, 31 December 2013.
57. Dennis O’Neil, email to Kristine Stiles, 20 March 2014.
58. Dennis O’Neil, “Leonid Tishkov Interview with Dennis O’Neil,” *Hand Print Workshop International* 1 (September 1998): 7.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. See Michael P. Mezzatesta, “Foreword” and “Dabloids and Mother Earth—Notes on Russian Folk Culture and the Art of Leonid Tishkov,” in *Leonid Tishkov: Creatures* (Durham: Duke University Museum of Art, 1993), 6–7 and 164–71.
62. “Igor Makarevich,” *Institute for Russian Contemporary Art*, <http://irca.ch/makarevich-igor>.
63. Buratino’s different names translated by Pamela Kachurin.
64. Elena Elagina and Igor Makarevich, “Classics of Conceptualism? Sounds Ridiculous,” *ArtKhronika* (October 2009): 68, <http://www.galeriebluesquare.com/uploads/84d9da9eff-99b0ad69981138bc0c618b.pdf>.
65. Rauschenberg quoted by Vita Chan-Magomedova, “Exhibitions: Contemporary Art in Moscow,” *Investia* (9 February 1989). Translated by Alex Rudinski.
66. Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *Rauschenberg’s Overseas Culture Interchange*, originally published in Russian in *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: ROCI USSR* (Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery, Central House of Culture, 1989), 52.
67. Andrei Voznesensky, “Voice of America,” *Moscow News* (12 February 1989). Translated by Alex Rudinski.
68. Hiltrud Reinhold, “Orrery Boreali,” in *Robert Rauschenberg*, by Armin Zweite (Cologne: DuMont, 1994), 74.



CAT. 4

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955), *Columbarium Architecture (Museum of Disappearing Buildings)* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1984 (printed 1990). Etching on paper, edition 18/30, 42 ¼ × 30 ¾ inches (107.3 × 78.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.3. Art © Alexander Sawich Brodsky and Ilya Utkin / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

## Four Brodsky and Utkin Etchings and Rauschenberg's Fresco Contest

KATHERINE HARDIMAN

The Russian artists Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin met while students at the Moscow Architectural Institute (MArchI).<sup>1</sup> By the time they graduated in 1978, the hardline communist Leonid Brezhnev had succeeded Nikita Khrushchev as First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. Brezhnev governed the Soviet Union with an iron hand and continued the “purely utilitarian” architectural style that Khrushchev had instituted after Joseph Stalin’s death in 1953.<sup>2</sup> Stalin had commissioned numerous neoclassical edifices known as “Empire Style” that were meant to evoke the image of Soviet power, prosperity, and cultural sophistication. However, he neglected to develop housing projects and left the population in cramped communal apartments. Khrushchev made it his business to provide cheap mass housing, razing many fine eighteenth- and nineteenth-century homes, which he replaced with multi-block apartments that, though bleak and uniform, provided citizens with their own flats.<sup>3</sup> Although their contemporaries considered Stalinist architecture “in hideous bad taste,” Brodsky and Utkin “always loved it” for its modicum of quality over the drab Khrushchev-era buildings.<sup>4</sup>

Once Brodsky and Utkin entered the professional world, they learned firsthand the restrictions on creativity and individuality imposed on Soviet architects; during the three years that they worked in an architectural office in Moscow “nothing [they designed] was built.”<sup>5</sup> Instead, they were charged with designing details for preconceived structures and worked “with an enormous bureaucracy.”<sup>6</sup> “You’re not free,” Brodsky remembered. “You do something, then you have to show it to everybody above, and they all make changes. Then there’s the frustration—if they build it—of explaining, ‘It’s not my project.’”<sup>7</sup>

To preserve their integrity, Brodsky and Utkin began creating fantastical structures in exquisite and detailed drawings, which they submitted to international architectural competitions and for which they began “collecting awards, to the juror’s amazement, not to mention that of the designers themselves.”<sup>8</sup> Together, with other colleagues inventing similar fanciful structures on paper, Brodsky and Utkin earned the title of “Paper Architects.”<sup>9</sup> Initially a “derogatory term used to berate the Soviet avant-garde of the 1930s,” the title came to be a badge of honor by the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> Like other young Paper Architects, Brodsky and Utkin embraced their label and

continued to enter competitions, gaining the creative freedom denied by the Soviet state. On the whole, their works exhibit what Leah Ollman describes as a “nostalgia” for the traditions of old Russia, whose “lost values” they preserve in etchings that display a longing for classical building materials like marble and glass.<sup>11</sup> Brodsky remarked: “We long to work in stone.”<sup>12</sup> Stone or no stone, Brodsky and Utkin remain undaunted. “There’s nothing in our projects . . . that couldn’t be built,” They explained. “We’ve always secretly hoped that some day we could build one of them. For no reason at all.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1989 and 1990, Brodsky and Utkin put together their portfolio *Projects*, a corpus of some thirty-five etchings. These works attest to their status as “architects of the imagination,” the term Jamey Gambrell used to describe them.<sup>14</sup> Brodsky and Utkin derived their unusual designs from brief descriptions of conceptual themes the competitions they entered imposed on contestants.<sup>15</sup> While still never having constructed a building, the pair were admitted to the Architects Union in the 1980s based solely on their prize-winning etchings, all of which follow a similar formula with “trademark architectural elements—the frontal view, the section, the aerial, the plan.”<sup>16</sup> In addition, on each etching a short, descriptive text functions as an architectural label. The art historian Robert L. Pincus described the artists’ intentions this way: “[T]heir art is not about architecture, in any technical sense. It is an argument for a new sense of play . . . ask[ing] us to revive a concept of the city popular in the 18th and 19th centuries: of the metropolis as theater.”<sup>17</sup> The four etchings discussed here from *Projects* contain references to classical mythology or Greco-Roman architecture and sculpture, buildings the pair primarily knew from photographs and magazines as Soviet travel restrictions prevented them from travel abroad. These four etchings represent Brodsky and Utkin’s theater. But rather than understood as “play,” they offer sobering critiques of oppression and inspiring examples of the survival of the imagination.

### *Columbarium Architecture*

*Columbarium Architecture* (1984; CAT. 4) shows several views of a “Museum of Disappearing Buildings.” Brodsky and Utkin invented the recessed vaults of a columbarium in an attempt to lay out an edifice for the funerary storage and preservation of countless antique buildings destroyed by the Soviet government and replaced with poorly constructed, concrete, box-like, system-built apartment complexes.<sup>18</sup> *Columbarium Architecture* includes a typical city plan with aerial, frontal, and section views; white borders divide its ten sections, each with a separate image. The two largest divisions present a frontal view of the building and a more detailed look into the interior courtyard. Four divisions comprise the upper band, two of which

include text. One division shows a bird’s-eye view of the structure that hints at the irregular plan of the columbarium with its discrete side entrance and dominating large courtyard or plaza. In the middle ground, a view of the empty columbarium, its walls filled with uniform niches large enough to hold a six-storied house, can also be seen in the detail of three alcoves, each occupied by a distinct ornate home and labeled with the original location and lifespan of the structure. Another view shows a corner of the towering courtyard with its numerous boxes, some of which are empty, but most of which contain a unique home. A visitor stands in the middle of the space, staring at one of the homes as if mourning the implications of the wrecking ball hovering above. The etching’s companion drawing *Columbarium Habitabile*, to which I shall soon turn, elaborates on the story of the wrecking ball.

A central text offers the objective of the “Museum of Disappearing Buildings,” together with an excerpt from Anton Chekhov’s *The Old House (A Story Told by a Houseowner)* (1887):

They had to tear down an old house in order to build a new one in its place. I led the architect through the empty rooms and among other things told him various stories. Torn wallpaper, dirty windows, blackened furnaces—all this bore the traces of recent life and evoked memories. On this very staircase, for instance, a drunken group once carried a dead man; they tripped and tumbled downstairs along with the coffin; the living were painfully bruised, but the deceased was very serious and shook his head as if nothing had happened when they lifted him from the floor and placed him in the coffin once again. There are three doors in a row: young ladies lived there; and as the frequently entertained guests, they dressed better than all the other inhabitants and punctually paid the rent. The door at the end of the hallway leads to the laundry where they washed clothes during the daytime and at night drank beer . . . and in this room a poor musician lived for ten years. When he died they found twenty thousand in his feather bed.<sup>19</sup>

This excerpt emphasizes residents’ memories of buildings and the structures worthy of preservation. To Chekhov’s text, Brodsky and Utkin add:

The museum that we propose is called upon to preserve the memory of all disappearing buildings, regardless of whether, during their lifetime, they were architectural monuments or were visited by great and famous people. Each disappearing building, even the most unprepossessing, is an equal exhibit in the museum. After

all, each is suffused with the soul of its architect, builders, inhabitants, and even the passersby who happened to cast an absent-minded glance its way.<sup>20</sup>

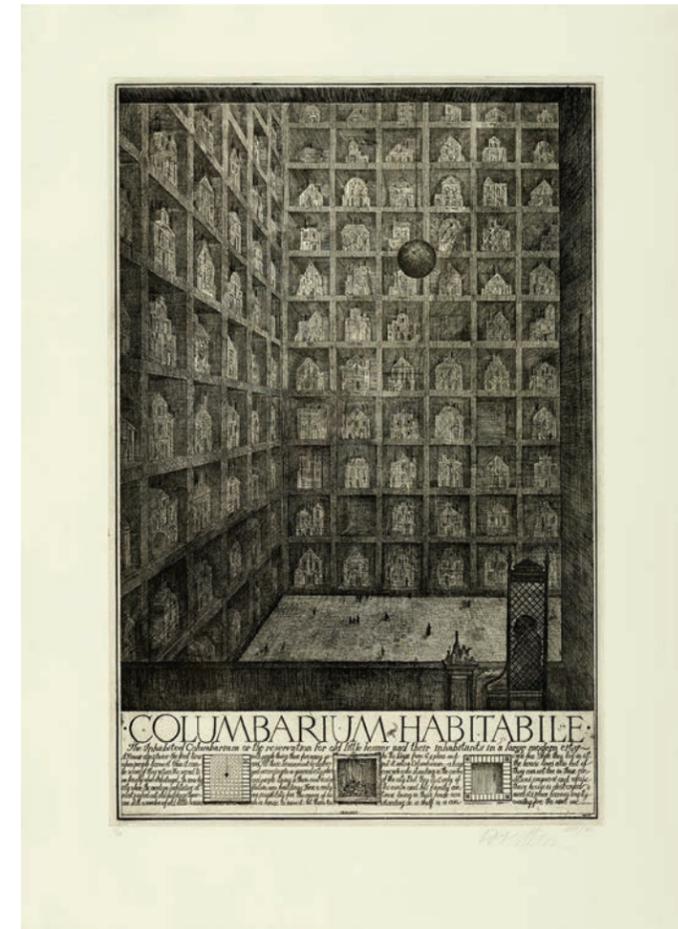
Attesting to the significance of history in living memory and the indisputable value of the architectural past in the lives of residents and citizens at large, the façade of the columbarium resembles a traditional interior of a three-story house. This unconventional frontage blurs public and private space typical of how countless Soviet families of all classes lived in communal apartments, sharing everything with little privacy. These dreary complexes all had a courtyard of the type in this etching where children played and residents socialized, designed to enable everyone to know everything about everyone else. In *Columbarium Architecture*, Brodsky and Utkin appropriate aspects of Soviet housing to expose its architecture of surveillance, destruction of the past, and ruination of tradition.

### *Columbarium Habitabile*

In *Columbarium Habitabile* (1989; CAT. 6), Brodsky and Utkin concentrate more closely on the “Museum of Disappearing Buildings.” The wrecking ball of *Columbarium Architecture* menaces some eight stories above the courtyard, like the tyranny of the state ready to smash its citizens. The etching’s text explains that if occupants abandon their home in the columbarium, the building will be demolished, leaving a niche free for a new house and family. The floor of the gigantic room is strewn with tiny residents and visitors scurrying about like insects beneath the destroyer. An unidentified figure in the foreground sits in a large chair with a table laid out for tea, looking out at an imposing courtyard. The high lattice back of his chair, together with his leisurely attitude, gives the figure a somewhat official presence. Does he control the fate of the houses, survey the activities of their inhabitants, or rest in the interstice of their fate? Through his eyes, viewers contemplate the destiny of the homes on the brink of disappearance.

At the base of the etching, the plate’s title appears in large block letters, together with a melancholy text by Brodsky and Utkin:

A House dies twice—the first time when people leave it[;] then it can be saved if they return. The second time finally when it’s destroyed. . . . In some big city where the modern architecture almost pushed out old buildings there are still a number of old little houses with people living there for many years. All these houses must be destroyed according to a general city plan and



CAT. 6

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955), *Columbarium Habitabile* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1989 (printed 1990). Etching on paper, edition 18/30, 42 ¼ × 30 ¾ inches (107.3 × 78.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.4. Art © Alexander Sawich Brodsky and Ilya Utkin / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

the people living in them must [re]ceive flats in new buildings. There is only one possibility for the owner of such a house to save it: let them take the house and put into a Columbarium—a huge concrete cube standing in the center of the city. But they do it only if the owner and his family continue living in their house—now standing on a shelf in a concrete box. While they live in it the house lives also . . . but if they cannot live in these conditions any more and refuse their house is destroyed . . . and its place becomes empty waiting for the next one.<sup>21</sup>

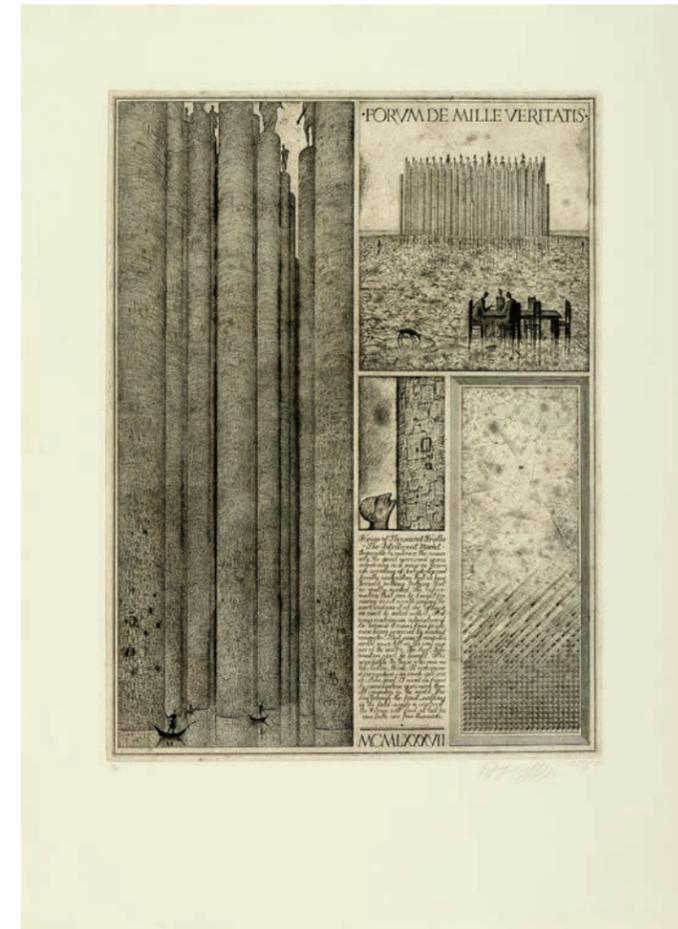
With clarity and brevity, these Paper Architects describe the Soviet attitude toward the old Moscow buildings and the imperative of the “general city plan” to destroy

them. Evicted and directed to an apartment, tiny and dull in a new complex, the animate effect of the old home recalls Arjun Appadurai's review of how "things" attain value and political currency: "Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged [which] makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*, construed broadly [and that] justifies the conceit that commodities, like persons, have social lives."<sup>22</sup> Appadurai makes it clear that "things"—for him—"have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with."<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, he admits that from the perspective of the "anthropological problem," objects do have meaning "inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" and that understanding these paths enables one to "interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things," as well as grasp from a "methodological point of view [that] it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context."<sup>24</sup>

Poignantly visualizing the human animation of a home in *Columbarium Habitabile*, Brodsky and Utkin also address the purpose of their fictional museum: its politics. If a home is about to be demolished, residents can choose to save it by moving into the columbarium. But at what cost? The artists suggest that the price is their lives. Enduring the paradox of purgatory in a Marxist state, the souls of sinners will never be expiated, will never pass on to heaven, but will be sustained indefinitely in the columbarium "on a shelf in a concrete box." If they move to the block apartment building, they will live, but be numbed to life. In this regard, the artists seem equally to contemplate the purgatory of art once it arrives in a museum.

### *Forum de Mille Veritatis*

*Forum de Mille Veritatis* (1987; CAT. 5) moves away from satire and parody of the Soviet Union and takes up the theme of a competition devoted to "The Intelligent Market." The drawing "was supposed to be devoted to the age of information . . . where all this [computer technology] was taken to the extreme [and] where you could get information in a second from anywhere in the world," the artists explain. However, they did "not much like all this overload of information," so rather than creating an etching about technology, they made one about "information coming from other people."<sup>25</sup> The etching contains four sections of various sizes with images that describe a forum filled with magnificent towering columns; a fifth division contains the narrative text. The columns, peaked by different classical figurative monuments, ascend from a sea in which three tiny gondolas manned by miniscule figures glide through deep water. An aerial view reveals the forum to be a large rectangle, one end densely populated by columns, the other completely barren. On the empty side, men sit and talk at a table. A small central box shows a detail of a figure staring



CAT. 5

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955), *Forum de Mille Veritatis* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1987 (printed 1990). Etching on paper, edition 18/30, 42 × 31 inches (106.7 × 78.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.14. Art © Alexander Sawich Brodsky and Ilya Utkin / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

up the side of one column, inscribed with various notes and messages that, upon closer inspection, also cover all of the columns. Brodsky and Utkin write that these messages are like the "little advertisements . . . pasted up on lampposts, on the corners of buildings" in cities like Moscow.<sup>26</sup>

The enigma of the forum is partially revealed in the etching's text, "Forum of Thousand Truths / The Intelligent Market / Impossible to embrace the immen- / sity":

We spend years and years; wandering in a maze of fever- / ish  
searching of knowledge and / finally understand that we have /  
learned nothing. Nothing that / we really need. The infor- / mation  
that can be bought for / money is not worth paying. We / can't

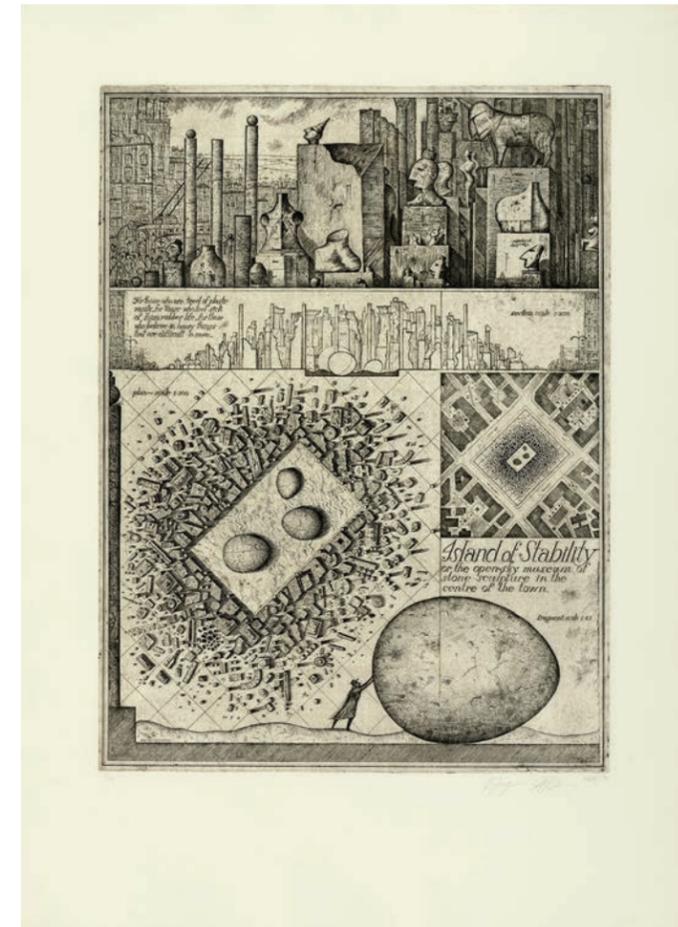
embrace it at one glimpse. / We can't be sated with it. It al- / ways contains an admixture of / lie[s] because it comes from people, / even being perceived by means of / computer[s]. But [no] com- / puters / would [ever] tell us the very esse- / nce of the matter. The Real Info- / rmation can't be bought. It is / accesib[l]e to those who can wa- / tch, listen, think. It is disperse- / d everywhere—in each spot, cra- / ck, stone, pool. A word in friend- / ly conversa- / tion gives more [information] than / all computers in the world. Sai- / ling through the forest, walking / in the field—maybe a visitor of / the Forum will find at last his / own truth—one from thousands.<sup>27</sup>

To counter the glut of information in contemporary life, an imaginary forum in which truth cannot be found on columns, metaphors for digital coding is discovered in human interaction:

[P]eople glide through this forest, looking for something. And then they come out onto the shore. On a huge, dirty field full of puddles and muck, there's a table and chairs, and some people sitting there, completely exhausted by their search. They're talking. And that information is the very information they need. That's what the idea was, in a very simplified form.<sup>28</sup>

### *Island of Stability*

“Museum of Sculpture,” the topic of a competition, provided the impetus for Brodsky and Utkin’s *Island of Stability* (1989–90; CAT. 7) in which they explore the human predilection for prizing the “lightweight, transitory, ephemeral objects clamoring for our attention” rather than the “symbol of something genuine, something stable.”<sup>29</sup> Two aerial views of the site show that the museum takes up one square city block, and a central piazza is empty save for three gigantic eggs that represent “a very beautiful, mysterious, magical, natural form that we’ve always felt drawn to.”<sup>30</sup> A disorganized jumble of stone sculptural fragments surrounds the eggs. The etching’s divisions offer views of the museum’s contents, which include classical columns and stone busts, among a multitude of other objects, some precariously balanced atop pillars. A bustling city surrounds this stone island. On the edges of the upper divisions are tall buildings, cars, and streetlights with pedestrians milling about. At the bottom of the etching, a man in a coat and hat struggles to push a gigantic egg.<sup>31</sup> This image recalls the myth of Sisyphus, the deceitful trickster and king of Ephyre (later Corinth), condemned by the gods to forever push an enormous boulder up a



CAT. 7

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955), *Island of Stability* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1989–90. Etching on paper, edition 18/30, 42 1/8 × 30 3/8 inches (107 × 77.8 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.20. Art © Alexander Sawich Brodsky and Ilya Utkin / RAO, Moscow / VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

hill, which inevitably rolled back down, requiring the repetition of the command. The text by Brodsky and Utkin on the etching is unequivocal:

Island of Stability / or the open-sky museum of / stone sculpture in the / centre of the town. / For those who are tired of plastic / vanity, for those who feel sick / of foam and rubber life, for those / who believe in heavy things / that are difficult to move . . .<sup>32</sup>

### **Contest, an Arcadian Retreat**

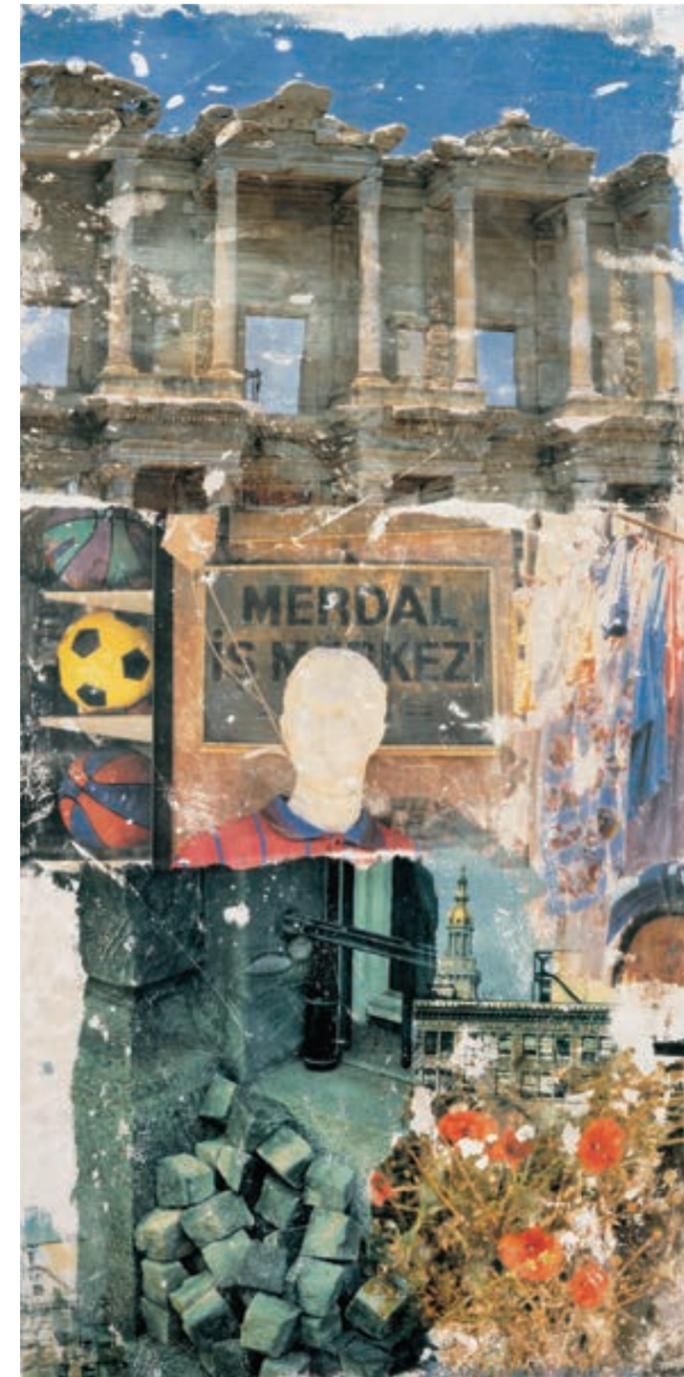
Brodsky and Utkin’s compassion for the struggles of the present in the context of the memory of the past brings them into conversation with the verbal paradoxes of

the titles of works in Robert Rauschenberg's *Arcadian Retreat* series, comprised of twenty-five inkjet transfer and wax works on fresco panels that he produced in the mid-1990s. The series evolved from a trip he took to Istanbul and Ephesus in June of 1996 when he participated in the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Cities Summit).<sup>33</sup> The conference considered sustainable urban development, a theme that Rauschenberg explored in his *Arcadian Retreat* series to which both *Contest (Arcadian Retreat)* (CAT. 89) and *Catastrophe (Arcadian Retreat)* belong. In these works, both of 1996, Rauschenberg contrasted the series' theme with the work's title to suggest the opposition between an "arcadia" in which life is lived harmoniously, and a "contest" or "catastrophe" in which life is a labor. Rauschenberg's process of digital printing on plaster panel was a technique he developed with Donald Saff, with whom he had dreamed for thirty years of working in fresco. Despite the highly advanced technological approach, all of the works in the *Arcadian Retreat* series retain the antique appearance of fresco with its uneven and eroded surfaces. In addition, just as Brodsky and Utkin gave their drawings a sepia-toned and aged veneer, Rauschenberg intentionally imbued his works with an ancient appearance, reminiscent of the fragment of a Pompeiian wall painting that Saff gave to him as a gift in 1995.<sup>34</sup> Rauschenberg's photograph of the Library of Celsus at Ephesus, in the upper register of *Contest*, seems to refer to the persistent inspiration of the ancient world in the present, such that it becomes the fantasy of an ideal past in the cacophony of contemporary culture. In addition, his placement of a pile of cobblestones—an image that Rauschenberg often used in his work—at the base of *Contest* reinforces the idea that a sustainable world is built on the knowledge of history. This emphasis also recalls Brodsky and Utkin's stress on preserving the past in a columbarium (or in an "island of stability") as a refuge from the present.

Bernice Rose writes that in such works Rauschenberg creates a "cosmos" and "version of Paradise" that represents an "aesthetic instant in which past and present meet on equal terms."<sup>35</sup> But in proposing this rosy view of his work, she misses Rauschenberg's critical commentary in his oxymoronic titles, and thus fails to grasp that he asks viewers to consider the challenge of making the world a better place based on an understanding of its contradictions rather than on dreaming of a utopian society. Brodsky and Utkin's message is similar, partnering with Rauschenberg in a realistic, sober view of the contests of the present. Moreover, in their meditations on quality in life, the three artists use inspiring images of architecture as the backdrop for, and elevation of, the otherwise mundane objects of the world. Despite visualizing entirely different histories, contexts, and geographical locales, Rauschenberg, Brodsky, and Utkin address the timeless theme of eternal longing for an ideal world in the midst of the pressing details of everyday reality.

CAT. 89

Robert Rauschenberg  
(1925–2008), *Contest*  
(*Arcadian Retreat*), 1996.  
Fresco in artist's frame, 74 ½  
× 38 ½ inches (189.2 × 97.8  
cm). Robert Rauschenberg  
Foundation, New York, New  
York. © Robert Rauschenberg  
Foundation / Licensed by  
VAGA, New York, New York



## NOTES

1. Kirsten A. Conover, "Architecture: From Flat Fantasies to Real-World Designs: Free of Communist Constraints, 'Paper Architects' Move to Three Dimensions," *Washington Post* (12 May 1994): E13.
2. Tino Kyuntsel, "Seven Sisters, emblems of Soviet grandeur, light up Moscow skyline," *Russia: Beyond the Headlines* (25 October 2011): [http://rbth.ru/articles/2011/10/25/seven\\_sisters\\_emblems\\_of\\_soviet\\_grandeur\\_light\\_up\\_moscow\\_skyline\\_13591.html](http://rbth.ru/articles/2011/10/25/seven_sisters_emblems_of_soviet_grandeur_light_up_moscow_skyline_13591.html).
3. Ibid.
4. Jamey Gambrell, "Brodsky & Utkin: Architects of the Imagination," *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 21 (September–October 1990): 128, [http://www.feldmangallery.com/media/brodskyutkin/general%20press/1990\\_bnu\\_print%20collector's\\_gambrell.pdf](http://www.feldmangallery.com/media/brodskyutkin/general%20press/1990_bnu_print%20collector's_gambrell.pdf).
5. Gambrell, "Brodsky & Utkin," 129. See also Isabelle Wasserman, "Exhibit focuses on Soviet pair's mixture of architecture and art," *The San Diego Union* (22 October 1989): E6.
6. Andrew Solomon, "Paper Tsars," *Harper's & Queen* (London, February 1990): 118.
7. Lois Nesbitt, "Russia's Paper Provocateurs," *Metropolitan Home* 22 (October 1990): 60.
8. Constantin Boym, "Notes from the Underground," *ID* (May–June 1989): 31. The pair's first prize came with their etching *Crystal Palace* (1982) which they submitted to the Central Glass Co. Competition *Japan Architect*, Tokyo, Japan. See Lois Nesbitt, *Brodsky & Utkin: The Complete Works* (New York; Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), n.p.
9. Nesbitt, "Preface," in *Brodsky & Utkin*, n.p.
10. Leah Ollman, "2 Soviet Architects Build on Imagination," *Los Angeles Times* (11 November 1989): F1, [http://articles.latimes.com/1989-11-11/entertainment/ca-974\\_1\\_san-diego-county](http://articles.latimes.com/1989-11-11/entertainment/ca-974_1_san-diego-county).
11. Ibid., 31.
12. Nesbitt, "Russia's Paper Provocateurs."
13. Gambrell, "Brodsky & Utkin," 131.
14. Ibid., 125.
15. Ibid., 130.
16. Ollman, "2 Soviet Architects": F10.
17. Robert L. Pincus, "Visionary skylines by visionary artists," *The San Diego Union* (5 November 1989).
18. Kyuntsel, "Seven Sisters."
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Nesbitt, *Brodsky & Utkin*, n.p.
22. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3.
23. Ibid., 5.
24. Ibid.
25. Gambrell, "Brodsky & Utkin," 130.
26. Ibid. The artists prepared an installation based on *Forum de Mille Veritatis* for Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York. For this, "tall sonotubes, covered with hundreds of photocopies of personal notices and graffiti-like drawings, were placed on a shiny black plastic floor to replicate a lagoon." See Nesbitt, *Brodsky & Utkin*, n.p.
27. Ibid.
28. Gambrell, "Brodsky & Utkin," 131.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Brodsky and Utkin created an enormous plaster version of this egg, titled *Portrait of an Unknown Person or Peter Carl Fabergé's Nightmare* (1989); it was also displayed at the San Diego State University Art Gallery. See Pincus, "Visionary Skylines." According to Ronald Feldman, the artists' former gallerist, it later came to his New York gallery by truck, where it was displayed alongside the installation related to *Forum de Mille Veritatis*. Feldman says that he suggested the egg's exhibition in the U.S. to Hugh Davies, the director of the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego (now the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego) after Davies called Feldman asking for suggestions of contemporary Russian artists for a show themed on Fabergé eggs. See Nesbitt, *Brodsky & Utkin*, n.p.
32. Nesbitt, *Brodsky & Utkin*, n.p.
33. Julia Blaut, "Transfer Works on Paper, Fabric, and Fresco, 1992–1997," in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 518.
34. Roni Reinstein, "Catastrophe (Arcadian Retreat)," Rauschenberg Research Project, July 2013, SFMOMA: [www.sfmoma.org/documents/research/CAT\\_97.827/SFMOMA\\_RRP\\_Catastrophe\\_Arcadian\\_Retreat.pdf](http://www.sfmoma.org/documents/research/CAT_97.827/SFMOMA_RRP_Catastrophe_Arcadian_Retreat.pdf).
35. Ibid.



CAT. 65

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Self-Portrait* [for *The New Yorker* profile], 1964. Ink and graphite on paper, 11  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 8  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches (30.2 × 22.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## *I Am If I Say So, Bob & Bruce*

EMMA HART

The importance placed on artists' identity and authorship dates to Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568). Robert Rauschenberg and Bruce Conner sought to undermine the enduring emphasis in art history on artists' lives long before the critique of biography began in the 1970s. Both artists rejected the concept of a fixed identity and its artistic correlate in authorship, and enjoyed unseating predictable ways of interacting with and interpreting their art. They turned to conceptual strategies to supplant conventional notions of identity and authenticity, anticipating the advent of conceptual art. Both worked in a wide range of mediums and resisted all categorization. Conner early rejected being identified with either assemblage or film, while Rauschenberg rejected efforts to view his art first through the lens of his biography. Approaching these questions in very different ways and through different means, Rauschenberg and Conner arrived at similar ends, redirecting viewers away from the artist to the artwork without ever simplifying consideration of the work in only formal terms.

Conner intentionally complicated the process of categorization; once he became known for one medium, he would switch to another. He also faked his death several times; hired a surrogate, Henry Moss, to stand in for him in public events; and launched a brief and irreverent foray into the political arena by running for a public office in 1967, a position he never intended to hold. Conner also often refused to have his photograph taken and even sometimes declined to sign his works. His anxiety about being photographed stemmed from his desire to watch undetected as viewers reacted to his art.<sup>1</sup> In obscuring his identity, Conner tried not to interfere with the communication of his art, commenting: "The work should represent itself alone. [. . .] The insistence on displaying conspicuous names on works is an interference."<sup>2</sup> He continued, "The personality of the artist is a limiting factor in the function of the works. It predisposes people because they know the person or the economics of their place in the art world in relationship to another artist."<sup>3</sup> The art historian Kevin Hatch recognized this point in his aptly titled book *Looking for Bruce Conner*. "It is clear," Hatch wrote in measured understatement, "the artist enjoyed countering expectations and exposing shibboleths."<sup>4</sup>

While Rauschenberg made no attempts to hide his identity, he changed his first name in 1947 "from Milton to Bob (subsequently Robert) after considering the most

common names he could think of while sitting all night in a Savarin coffee shop.”<sup>5</sup> In this regard, it could be said that Rauschenberg shed his past for an unknown but anticipated future, rarely looking back. Furthermore, after living in New York for some twenty years, he boldly moved to Captiva Island, Florida, in 1970. Far from the putative center of the art world (just like Conner, living in San Francisco), Rauschenberg then continued to produce highly original art, using new materials and technological processes, and confounding the ability of many to keep abreast of his enormous production in silks and satins, metals and ceramics, frescos and cardboards, as well as prodigious inventive use of his own accomplished photography. For his part, Conner considered the New York art world’s inbred self-importance to expose its provincialism, sarcastically stating, “If it is not in New York, it is ‘not seen.’ It is not taken seriously unless it has come to New York.”<sup>6</sup>

I am aware of the irony of seeking to unpack a topic that plunges the study into the very territory that Rauschenberg and Conner resisted. Yet, in what follows, I attempt to navigate their individual explorations and shared interest in identity and authenticity without falling into the biographical trap.

### If I Say So I Am

In 1961 when French gallery owner Iris Clert invited artists to submit a portrait of her for an exhibition at her gallery, Robert Rauschenberg sent the following telegram:

THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF IRIS CLERT IF I SAY SO.

Clert, a “black-haired beauty who used to carry around little stickers reading ‘Iris Clert, the world’s most advanced gallery,’ which she would affix to people’s hands or clothing at parties,” clearly sought a portrait by the vivacious, handsome Rauschenberg to display along with the other artists’ pictures of her.<sup>7</sup> But his telegram called into question the art historical tradition of portraiture to which Clert was bound, switching the emphasis from the sitter and the artist’s visual moniker to Rauschenberg’s refusal to serve the patron in the manner expected. That Rauschenberg merely “forgot” to make the portrait, as Calvin Tomkins reported, is beside the point.<sup>8</sup> That Rauschenberg insisted on his conceptual dictate—text as portrait—is the point. Asserting concept over image, Rauschenberg overturned normative art historical dictates and conditions of a portrait.<sup>9</sup>

Whether or not in 1961 Rauschenberg knew Marcel Duchamp’s defense of *Fountain*, the commonplace urinal he turned upside down in 1917 and signed “R. Mutt,” is doubtful but open to question. Nonetheless, Duchamp’s point resonates with Rauschenberg’s telegram to Clert:

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.<sup>10</sup>

Rauschenberg first saw Duchamp’s work in 1953 but did not meet him until 1960, and John Cage, having met Duchamp in the 1940s, may have tutored Rauschenberg about Duchamp’s art. Nevertheless, Rauschenberg came to his own radical positions on his own even if he had absorbed the significance of Duchamp’s insistence on the authority of the artist over the work. In 1951 at the age of twenty-five, for example, Rauschenberg precociously anticipated his influence in art history when he painted his *White Paintings* (see CAT. 58), monochromes that brought him in 1953 to his ask for, receive, and then erase a drawing by Willem de Kooning (see fig. 7), another unprecedented action. In such works, Rauschenberg established his artistic prowess to name rather than to be a name.

Eight years after Rauschenberg’s telegram to Iris Clert, the French philosopher Michel Foucault would write, “Name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text.”<sup>11</sup> In his essay “What is an Author?” Foucault further argued that readers, not the author, determine the meaning of a text: “It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work’s relationship with the author, nor to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships.”<sup>12</sup> Foucault continued:

An author’s name is not simply an element in a discourse; it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others.<sup>13</sup>

While Foucault troubled the context of the author, Rauschenberg seized the opportunity—as an artist—to command that this IS a portrait of so-and-so, “If I say so.” His radical act of authorial authority underscored the purpose, perhaps even the duty, of the artist to *construct* the structure, architecture, intrinsic form, and internal relationships of a work of art, and the obligation of the viewer to *interpret* it.

Rauschenberg pressed this idea in another direction in 1964, when the *New Yorker* magazine did an extensive profile article on him. Again challenging the conventions of portraiture, Rauschenberg gave the magazine his thumbprint as a “self-portrait.” Only three years after his telegram to Iris Clert, Rauschenberg’s thumbprint

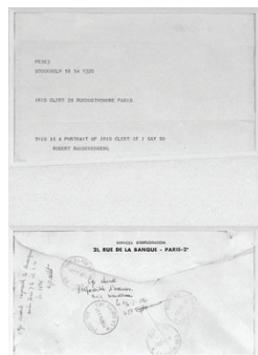


fig. 12  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *This Is a Portrait of Iris Clert If I Say So*, 1961. Ink on paper with two paper envelopes, 17 ½ × 13 ⅝ inches (44.5 × 34.6 cm). The Ahrenberg Collection, Switzerland. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



continued to comment on the status of what is, and who determines, a portrait and, thus, an identity. By submitting his thumbprint, Rauschenberg also updated the ancient concept of a picture of the face as the marker of uniqueness. This brought portraiture in conversation with forensics, as well as with institutional practices of the state, from the police and the penal system to the military. In this regard, Rauschenberg may have slyly nodded to his then-criminal identity in the early 1960s as a bisexual. That said, while a thumbprint is a distinctive characteristic of the body, no two thumbprints are the same; and while the print may be an index of a unique individual, the thumbprint reveals nothing about selfhood, personality, character or the distinctive qualities that make a person an individual.

The very same year that the *New Yorker* article appeared with Rauschenberg's thumbprint, Bruce Conner had been busy discovering a plethora of people in the United States named Bruce Conner. He then began to think of a way to unite them all:

I had collected about 14 Bruce Conners so I thought we'd have a convention, hire a hotel ballroom. On the marquee it would say WELCOME BRUCE CONNER. You would walk in and get a button that said, "Hello! My name is Bruce Conner," and you would have a program with a person named Bruce Conner who would introduce the main speaker, whose name was Bruce Conner.<sup>14</sup>

In preparation for the convention that never was, Conner commissioned buttons to be manufactured reading, I AM BRUCE CONNER (CAT. 10) and I AM NOT BRUCE CONNER (CAT. 9). Shortly after making the buttons, Conner delivered some I AM NOT BRUCE CONNER buttons to a gymnasium in Los Angeles named "Bruce Conner's Physical Services." Conner also sent Christmas cards containing both buttons to all of the Bruce Conners that he had found in the U.S.

Bruce Conner (1933–2008). Offset lithograph on metal pin buttons. *left to right* CAT. 10 "I AM BRUCE CONNER" BUTTON, 1964 (issued 1983). 1 ¼ inches diameter (3.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.26. CAT. 9 "I AM NOT BRUCE CONNER" BUTTON, 1964 (issued 1967). 1 ½ inches diameter (3.8 cm). Collection of the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

Conner continued his own investigation into what may only be described as ubiquitous anonymity by refusing to sign anything for three and a half years. Then in 1965, he used his thumbprint to authenticate fourteen prints that he made at Tamarind Institute, a lithography studio and workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "I couldn't sign anything," he stated, "but I would put my thumbprint on it which I considered to be a more authentic documentation of the artist than his signature."<sup>15</sup> According to Jean Conner, "While at Tamarind, Bruce took the largest stone there and printed his thumb print. The prints were then signed with his thumb print so the thumb print is the reverse of his signature thumb print."<sup>16</sup> As art historian Jack Rasmussen comments, "The intrusion of an artist's signature, or signature style, [are] documentations of the artist's ego and should not alter the viewer's experience of the work of art. In fact, it [keeps] viewers from being able to look at work with a fresh eye, to be surprised at something truly new."<sup>17</sup>

Nine years after authenticating works with his thumbprint, Conner was offered a teaching job at San Jose State College (now University), but predictably unpredictable Conner became furious when required to submit fingerprints to finalize his appointment.<sup>18</sup> However, after considerable dispute with both the college and the state, he finally agreed to be fingerprinted at the Palo Alto police station. Many conversations, meetings, and memos later, as Joan Rothfuss explains:

[F]ollowing the fine-art model, a limited edition of twenty sets of fingerprints was produced at the Palo Alto Police Department, printed on official police forms, and signed by Conner in the box labeled "signature of a person fingerprinted". In 1974 they became part of the multiple PRINTS [CAT. 22], a steel lockbox containing copies of correspondence, receipts, forms, and photographs related to the incident.<sup>19</sup>

More specifically the lockbox includes: correspondence with California State College administrators; correspondence with faculty in the Art History Department at San Jose State College; a receipt from the payroll supervisor confirming reception of Conner's fingerprints; Conner's official fingerprints; and photographs of both of Conner's hands, among other images and objects such as the key to the box and its waxed envelope.

One letter in the box is to art historian Kathleen Cohen, then Chair of San Jose State College's Department of Art and Art History. In the letter dated December 10, 1973, Conner expresses his hesitation about the college's fingerprinting policy. "This appears to mean that the fingerprints are solely a tool for gaining information for determining my capabilities as a teacher of art in the one Spring Semester of 1974,"



CAT. 22

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *PRINTS*, 1974. Steel lockbox, paper envelopes with typewritten text, photocopies on paper, black-and-white photographs with typewritten text, metal keys, plastic bags, clear plastic folders with plastic binding clips, paper folders, fingerprint form, ink fingerprints; edition 19/20; box closed: 2 3/8 × 16 × 10 1/2 inches (6 × 40.6 × 26.7 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor in honor of Kimerly Rorschach, 2013.14.1. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

he cautioned.<sup>20</sup> Here Conner calls attention to the inherent irony of using a physical mark to determine one's fitness for a position. He continues to substantiate why he is stipulating that his fingerprints must be returned to him after his period of employment and why he is insisting that his prints have immense value:

My fingerprints have a value in themselves as works of Art. Unless they are sold or leased under agreement with me then they can not be reproduced without my permission. Their value has to be secured against loss or damage. My own copyright for the fingerprints will be filed with the Library of Congress.<sup>21</sup>

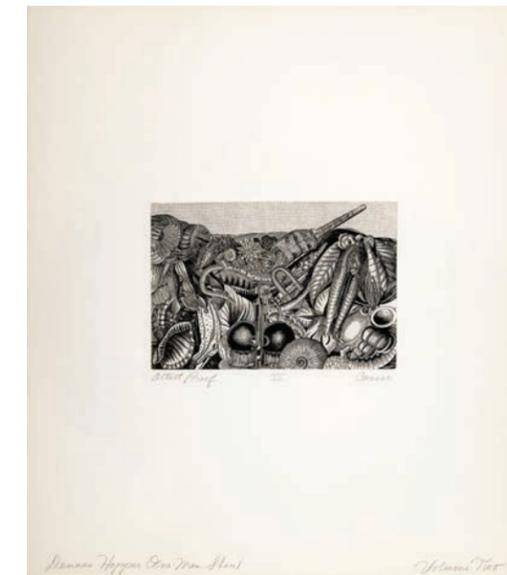
Conner hyperbolically states that he will copyright his fingerprints with the Library of Congress to make a point, insinuating that they are so valuable that they merit their own copyright so no one else can use or copy them. Conner takes his fingerprints' inextricable link with his identity one step further to declare that the prints do not only define him as a person, but they also authenticate the art he creates. As such, he should have complete control over who has access to the prints: "I control the use of my fingerprints, an absolute means of identification, as a means of absolute definition of my art."<sup>22</sup>

The metal lock box also contains several photographs documenting nearly every step in Conner's fingerprinting process. One photograph taken by the art dealer and gallerist Paula Kirkeby depicts Conner standing next to Police Officer Don Simerly. The photograph captures the moment that Conner and Officer Simerly sign fingerprint forms at the Palo Alto Police Station. The most prominent aspect of the photograph is the large sign behind them that states in all caps PREVENT BURGLARY. Conner no doubt included this photograph in the lock box for how the sign justified his argument about and resistance to being fingerprinted as if he was a criminal rather than an artist taking a teaching position.

Another example of Conner's mercurial exploration of identity began after meeting the actor and artist Dennis Hopper in 1960, with whom he established a lifelong friendship. In 1959, the year before their meeting, Conner had begun working on collages that included imagery from nineteenth-century wood engravings, which would eventually become what Conner called *THE DENNIS HOPPER ONE MAN SHOW* (1971–73). An example of one of the prints in this series is *THE DENNIS HOPPER ONE MAN SHOW, VOLUME II, NO. 7* (CAT. 21). In this work, Conner creates a surreal universe constructed predominately from images of fauna and flora recalling scientific botanical illustrations. Conner performed his collage technique with such dexterity that transitions between images are nearly undetectable. These works call to mind the German surrealist artist Max Ernst's collages for how unexpected juxtapositions intensify the possible associations suggested in the constructed

reality. In addition, Conner's precise unification of forms in collage parallels his exacting discipline in editing film.

Eventually Conner proposed to the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles that it exhibit the works under Dennis Hopper's name. Attributing the work to Hopper, Conner sought to address the actor's performativity and the fact that he made his living by impersonating fictive or real characters. By accrediting the works to Hopper, who had not made them, Conner further stipulated that the works would only become genuinely Conner's



CAT. 21

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *THE DENNIS HOPPER ONE MAN SHOW, VOLUME II, NO. 7*, 1972. Etching on paper, artist's proof, 20 1/4 × 17 5/8 × 1 1/2 inches (51.6 × 44.8 × 1.1 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.5. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

own when Hopper himself walked into the gallery and encountered “his own” art, which in fact it was not. That moment of paradoxical surprise would produce authentic, surreal-like aesthetic experience. Wilder apparently was not amused, and refused to exhibit Conner’s series under Hopper’s name. Later, Susan Inglett explained another aspect of the engraved collages: they would only be “resurrected . . . as an artwork and as foil for a larger conceptual project [when] Conner returned the collages to their original printed state, producing twenty-six etchings bound in three black leather volumes and titled collectively THE DENNIS HOPPER ONE MAN SHOW VOLUMES I–III.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the DENNIS HOPPER ONE MAN SHOW underscored Conner’s interest in how the work of art might trump its author. That is, as long as he could get away with the prank or, more to the point, as long as he could tolerate the anonymity. Conner’s interventions into originality, authorship, identity, and role-playing must be seen to have anticipated discourses related to postmodern identity, summarized by the literary critic Homi K. Bhabha as “the struggle for the soul of the subject.”<sup>24</sup> Conner certainly encouraged the enactment of multiple identities that would come to be associated with postmodernism, already questioning the unitary concept of a soul and the master narrative of fixed identity. The cultural theorist Stuart Hall also described how the postmodern subject is one that “assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self.’”<sup>25</sup>

A comment by Conner on the restrictions of the art world seems to expand on Hall’s observation: “There are different people in a single person,” Conner explained, adding that “the art business has been functioning on the absurd requirement and expectation that only one personality can be present in an artist.”<sup>26</sup>

Commenting on Conner’s position, Hatch observes: “To take Conner on his own terms, it is necessary to consider both aspects of his persona—the prankster, toying with artistic identity and convention, and the meticulous and earnest creator of exquisitely finished artworks—and further, to understand the latter in terms of the former.”<sup>27</sup> A portrait photograph taken by Mimi Jacobs (CAT. 37) visually illustrates Conner’s complexity for how the portrait captures his intense probing eyes, as well as his whimsy.



CAT. 37

Mimi Jacobs (1911–1999),  
Untitled (Photo of Bruce  
Conner), 1975. Gelatin silver  
print, 12 × 10 inches (30.5 ×  
25.4 cm). Nasher Museum  
of Art at Duke University,  
Durham, North Carolina.  
Promised gift of anonymous  
donor, L.13.2012.39. © 2014  
The Estate of Mimi Jacobs



CAT. 20

Bruce Conner (1933–2008),  
BRUCE CONNER for SUPER-  
VISOR, 1967. Poster, 11 ½ ×  
7 ½ inches (29.2 × 19.1 cm).  
Collection of the David M.  
Rubenstein Rare Book & Man-  
uscript Library, Duke Univer-  
sity, Durham, North Carolina.  
© Conner Family Trust, San  
Francisco, California / Artists  
Rights Society (ARS), New  
York, New York

CAT. 19

Bruce Conner (1933–2008),  
“1972 BC” BUMPER STICK-  
ER, 1972. Print in colors on  
paper, adhesive backing, 3 ⅝  
× 12 inches (9.2 × 30.3 cm).  
Nasher Museum of Art at  
Duke University, Durham,  
North Carolina. Promised  
gift of anonymous donor,  
L.13.2012.35. © Conner  
Family Trust, San Francisco,  
California / Artists Rights  
Society (ARS), New York,  
New York

Conner’s prankster side is vivid in two works of ephemera he produced. In his 1967 spoof of a political bid for San Francisco Supervisor, Conner made a campaign poster that featured him as a toddler. Other publicity stunts included a poster showing him painting an elephant in a psychedelic pattern with the word LOVE on its side, and the public performance of his satirical “election speech,” which was a recitation of a list of desserts. This metaphorical commentary surely mocked the sugarcoated rhetoric of politicians. Another example of a playful and penetrating double entendre was the enigmatic bumper sticker he designed in the fall of 1972 for his exhibition at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery, which simply read: 1972 B.C.

Simultaneously altering and avoiding a unitary identity, Conner firmly believed that “freedom implied the possibility that many selves with conflicting ideas could reside within the same consciousness.”<sup>28</sup> This sentiment highlights Conner’s insistence on remaining illusive, like quicksilver. That Conner did not always appear coherent conforms to the fact that he did not always feel himself to cohere. While acutely aware of and knowledgeable about himself, Conner constantly fluctuated between being in and out of control. An instance of how he regulated his world is his meticulous process of drawing mandalas (see CAT. 14, #100 MANDALA). At the same time, Conner also seemed to careen like a car without breaks, perhaps best expressed by his activities in punk clubs in the late 1970s and early 1980s when he photographed and participated in that raucous scene in San Francisco (see essay “Bruce Conner’s Mabuhay Punks”). Despite swings of personality, Conner’s abiding sense of irony and extremely astute intelligence held his work—and him—in check.

In a 1990 interview, Conner told the writer Robert Dean: “If I were to attempt to define what I was doing, I [would be] putting a limitation on the work.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, according to David White, senior curator at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Rauschenberg “never defined his work because then it would be terminal.”<sup>30</sup> As a means to avoid the end of his art, in 1984 Rauschenberg launched the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI). He began traveling internationally to work with and learn from local artists and artisans, expanding his canvas to include the world. Travel permitted Rauschenberg to involve himself critically in other cultures.<sup>31</sup> Rauschenberg had always related curiosity to the expression of one’s identity. But he came to realize this more fully while traveling in China, where he was shocked by the isolation of people and their seeming lack of curiosity. “Without curiosity, you can’t have individuality. It just doesn’t exist,” he opined, adding that, “without curiosity or individuality, you’re not going to be able to adjust to the modern world.”<sup>32</sup>

While working in Chile for ROCI, Rauschenberg learned how to use metal as a canvas for paint, tarnishes, enamel, and screen-printed images, resulting in paintings like *Litercy* (1991; see CAT. 87) from his *Phantom* series. Mirroring the surrounding space, as well as the viewer, the image on the metal constantly changes. In *Litercy*, he experimented with cropping, enlarging, and angling to transform several images into a montage such that the original photographs lose their temporal and spatial specificity. This mirrored reflective surface, with its swaths of brushed on tarnish, draws the viewer directly into Rauschenberg’s world, signified by the words “Bob’s Hand” and a pointing finger, almost as if Rauschenberg repeats the message of his telegram: “. . . if I say so.”

While he insisted on his authority, a comment Rauschenberg made in 1965 complicates this reading. “I was busy,” he said, “trying to find ways where the imagery and the material and the meanings of the painting would not be an illustration of my will but more like an unbiased documentation of my observations.”<sup>33</sup> Even this comment is multifaceted. Taken literally, it means exactly what the artist often repeated: he wanted to create images reflective of the world rather than influenced by his mode of observation. But considering the fact that Rauschenberg provided not only a multidimensional visual experience in *Litercy*, but also a textual distortion in the misspelling of the work’s title (which should have been “literacy”), it is possible to understand that together word and image have a destabilizing impact on the reception of the work. Providing multiple layers of deformation, *Litercy* draws unsuspecting viewers into the visual and verbal world of Rauschenberg’s lifelong struggle with dyslexia, thereby introducing his unusual mode of seeing and knowing.

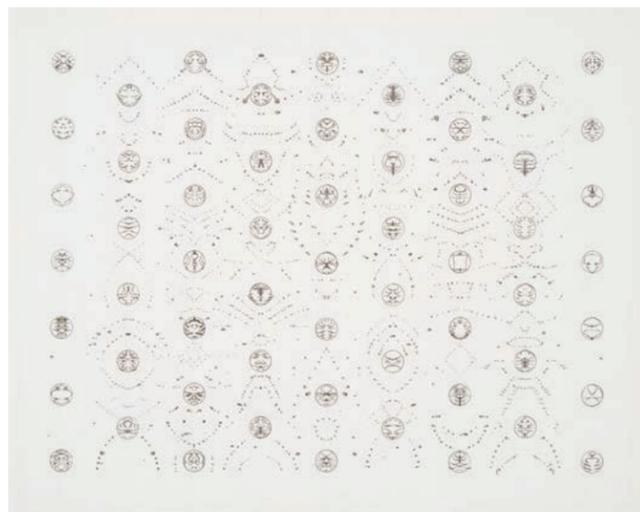
Long before his dyslexia was discovered, Rauschenberg developed an early negative self-image derived primarily from his difficulty in school where he was considered

not very bright and even expelled from college. Only later did he come to realize his disability and, typical of Rauschenberg, worked hard to improve his reading and spelling. Nevertheless, he remembered that the painter Jasper Johns was “often critical of things like my grammar.”<sup>34</sup> Poignantly, Rauschenberg explained: “But you don’t let a thing like that bother you if you have only two or three real friends.”<sup>35</sup> Clearly Rauschenberg was hurt, and worked even harder to improve himself. Viewing first drafts of his handwritten letters prove this point. Although the ideas he expresses are complex and communicated in an eloquent, poetic way, his handwritten letters are full of numerous spelling mistakes, suggesting how tortuous it was for him to write.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, a separate sheet of paper that correctly lists all his misspelled words accompanies many of his handwritten letters.

This archival material proves Rauschenberg’s determination to learn from and correct his own mistakes, painstakingly looking up words and trying to memorize their correct spelling. But the fact that he received the “Outstanding Disabled Achiever Award” from First Lady Nancy Reagan in 1985, just six years before permitting himself to use a misspelled word in the title to his painting *Litercy*, suggests that his notorious sense of humor and *joie de vivre* also allowed him to comment ironically on his own literacy, namely his inability to read and write with ease. Subverting not only his imagery but also his words, *Litercy* is not only a painting but also a picture of how Rauschenberg conquered his own disability, simultaneously drawing viewers in and helping us to experience his augmented vision of the world.

Though Conner was not dyslexic, he was acutely aware of the ways in which the mind processed words, stating: “I didn’t have much faith in words. They seemed to get twisted around a lot and I had more faith in vision. I had the assumption that visual information could not be denied or distorted as easily as words.”<sup>37</sup> As the dyslexic writer Philip Schultz, who, like Rauschenberg, only learned the diagnosis of his disability in adulthood, explains: “The act of translating what for me are the mysterious symbols of communication into actual comprehension has always been a hardship to me.”<sup>38</sup> Schultz continues, “I was suffering the mysterious, perplexing, and previously unacknowledged manner in which I received and absorbed all information of any import.”<sup>39</sup> This understanding of the dyslexic led Ken Gobbo, a specialist in dyslexia and autism, to hypothesize that Rauschenberg’s dyslexia “may have allowed him to see the possibilities of incorporating the objects of his every day life into his art.”<sup>40</sup> In his own words, Rauschenberg explained:

It is my own personal psychosis that it is only by the background that you can see what is in front of you. Only by accepting all that surrounds you can you be totally self-visualized. And at the same time, your self-visualization is a reflection of your surroundings.<sup>41</sup>



While Rauschenberg's voracious appetite for materials and for documenting and visualizing the world around him resulted in his expansive imagery, Conner's often-detached inward focus (particularly on his drawings) resides at the other end of the spectrum. Hatch attributes Conner's drawings to what he calls the "anxieties that haunted him: his fears of being 'pinned down,' labeled, reified."<sup>42</sup> Peter Boswell reckons with the complexity of Conner's drawings in a different way, writing that Conner "thrive[d] on ambiguity, on an elusiveness based not on an unwillingness to commit, but on an all-embracing aspiration to transcend specificity, espousing instead the notion that change and metamorphosis are essential components to life and art."<sup>43</sup> But a third view of Conner's drawings, one closer to my own, is that of Jack Rasmussen, director and curator of the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center. Rasmussen writes about Conner's INKBLOT drawings: "His works communicate on a subliminal level. They surprise and seduce our eyes, while causing us to question our own beliefs and values."<sup>44</sup> When asked about the INKBLOT works, Conner stated, "The goal is to get people closely involved in the works and to make works that are intimate. They require the viewer to move into the drawings."<sup>45</sup> To this I would add, that Conner's aim—like that of Rauschenberg—was also to include the viewer, which is precisely what the INKBLOT drawings do.

The carefully controlled INKBLOT drawings entail tiny detailed renderings of abstract images that highlight the artist's technical expertise. Such meticulous, repeated patterns invite viewers' deep contemplation. In fact, they request endless psychological involvement, as their complexity constantly reveals new relationships and associations. When asked about the physical process of making inkblots, Conner stated: "It's determined ahead of time where the inkblots will be placed and

organized. A ruler is used to mark out the pages and an implement to score the paper. Sometimes it starts as preplanned, but then it may be altered very soon after the process starts."<sup>46</sup> This sentiment further illustrates how Conner permitted himself to be in and out of control and to embrace both discipline and spontaneity.

The INKBLOT series also calls to mind the Swiss Freudian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Herman Rorschach, who developed the Rorschach Inkblot Test. In this test, a subject is shown ten inkblots one after another and asked to describe the objects or figures in each. Rorschach theorized that the test could measure, or at least access, unconscious aspects of the personality that an individual projects onto stimuli in the world. Conner intended for viewers of the INKBLOT drawings to project their unconscious ideas and emotions onto his work in tandem with the thoughts and desires that prompted the drawings. The result bound Conner's vision to the psychological projections of viewers, enabling them to make associations both about the image and their maker.

"A picture is more like the real world when it is made from the real world," Rauschenberg once said.<sup>47</sup> Conner felt a similar connection to the world when constructing assemblages, stating: "There's a point in time when I started self-consciously gluing down the world around me and making it mine."<sup>48</sup> Asserting their authority as the author of the work from diametrically different positions, Rauschenberg and Conner both arrived at results that demand intense engagement from the viewer. Conner first drew inward to focus viewers psychologically on themselves in order to create their own individual meanings, always inevitably related to his own. Rauschenberg instead focused outward, bringing images of everyday objects into paintings, Combines, and photographs, and picturing the quotidian on mirrored surfaces such that viewers appear in his altered reality. In these two very different ways, Bob and Bruce are alike, producing art from a shared insistence on "I am" from their "say so."

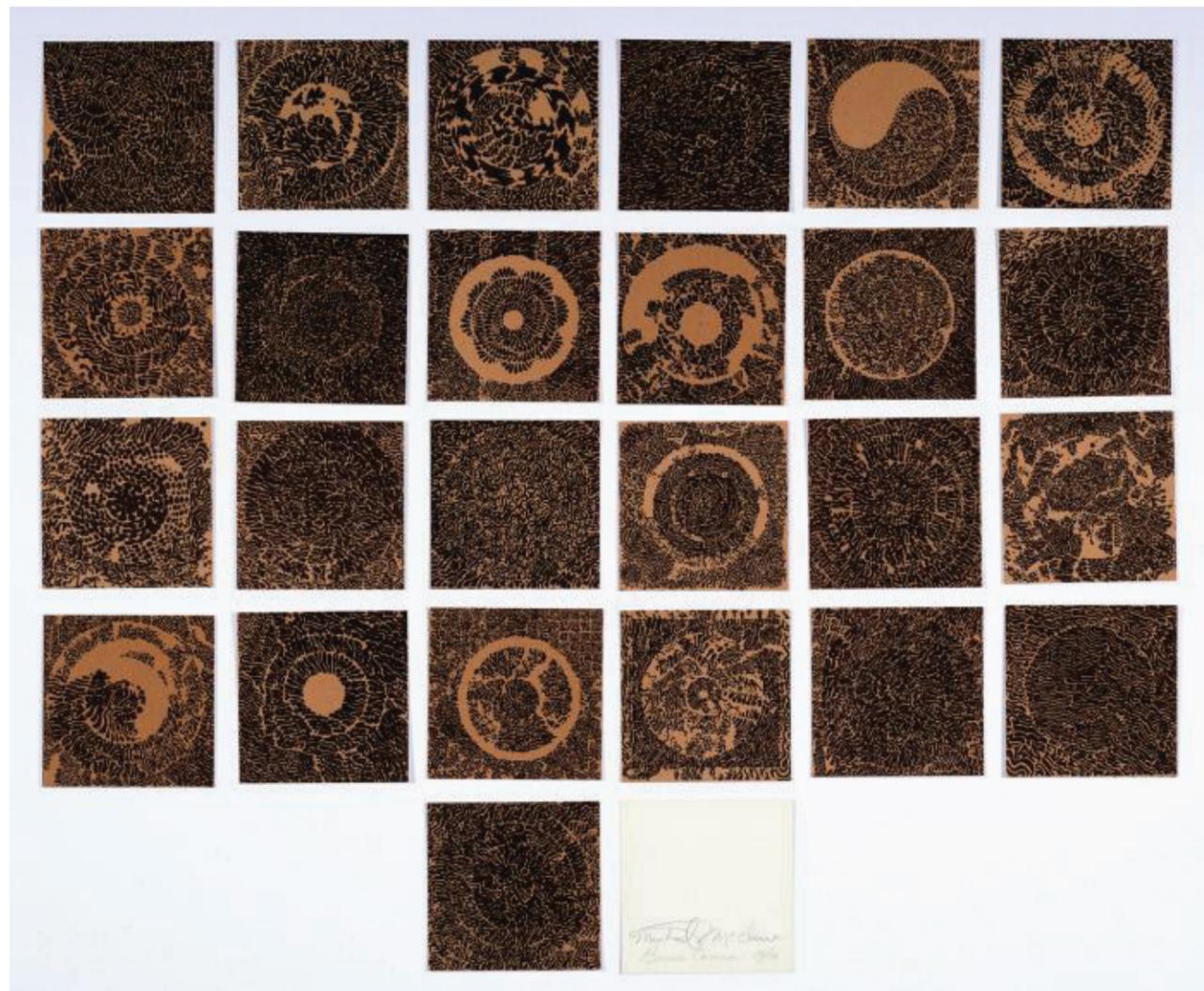
## NOTES

1. Joan Rothfuss, "Escape Artist," in *2000 BC: The Bruce Conner Story Part II* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), 160.
2. Jack Rasmussen, "Interview: Bruce Conner" in *After Bruce Conner: Anonymous, Anonymouse, and Emily Feather* (Washington, DC: American University Museum, 2005), 5.
3. Bruce Conner, interview by Peter Boswell, 15 June 1983. Cited in *2000 BC*, 172.
4. Kevin Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 8.
5. Joan Young and Susan Davidson, "Chronology," in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 551.

## CAT. 3

ANONYMOUSE (Bruce Conner) (1933–2008), INKBLOT DRAWING, JULY 25, 1999, 1999. Pencil, pen, and ink on Strathmore Bristol paper; 23 1/8 × 29 inches (58.7 × 73.7 cm). On loan from the Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemisegger families in honor of Peter Lange, L.2.2014.31. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

6. Paul Cummings, "Interview with Bruce Conner," (16 April 1973), Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC. Found in Natasha Poor, *Dirty Art: Reconsidering the Work of Robert Rauschenberg, Bruce Conner, Jay Defeo, and Edward Kienholz* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI, 2007), 11.
7. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 192.
8. Ibid.
9. Kristine Stiles in her seminar on Robert Rauschenberg (Fall 2013–Spring 2014), Duke University.
10. Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," *Blind Man* [New York] 2 (1917): 5; reproduced in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Source Book of Artists' Writings*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 917.
11. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 63, no. 3 (1969): 73–104; reprinted in David Lodge and Nigel Wood, eds., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (New York: Pearson Education, 2000), 179.
12. Ibid., 175.
13. Ibid., 178.
14. Bruce Conner quoted in Mary Fuller, "You're Looking for Bruce Conner, The Artist, Or What Is This Crap You're Trying to Put Over Here?" in *Current* (May–July 1976): 8; quoted in Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner*, 5.
15. Rothfuss, "Escape Artist," 177.
16. Jean Conner, note to the author, 26 May 2014.
17. Rasmussen, *After Bruce Conner*, 44.
18. The request for fingerprints was not specific to Conner as eight years earlier, in 1966, the chief counsel of the California state colleges advised: "There is no question but that fingerprints may lead to information relevant to an employee or prospective employee's fitness for a position." This statement appears in documents in Conner's lock box for PRINTS. In fact, the act of fingerprinting was growing in popularity in the U.S. since its first systematic use in 1902, and then in 1903, when the New York State prison system began uniformly printing prisoners. The U.S. military followed when the Army, Navy, and finally the Marine Corps began using fingerprints between 1905 and 1908. Congress established the Identification Division of the FBI in 1924, and by 1971 had processed 200 million fingerprint cards.
19. Rothfuss, "Escape Artist," 177.
20. Bruce Conner, "Letter to Kathleen Cohen," 10 December 1973, in Bruce Conner's PRINTS.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. "With the completion of Volume III in 1973, Conner and the printer re-worked the negatives of Volume I using the experience garnered over the course of the project. New plates were made at the time . . . as TAKE TWO, D.H.O.M.S, VOLUME I." Susan Inglett, I.C. Editions press release, November 2001: <http://www.iceditions.com/artists.php?id=26>.
24. Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 440.
25. Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, Anthony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 277.
26. Rasmussen, *After Bruce Conner*, 7.
27. Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner*, 7.
28. Rothfuss, "Escape Artist," 160.
29. *Bruce Conner: Assemblages, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings Collages, 1960–1990* (Santa Monica: Michael Kohn Gallery, 1990), n.p.
30. David White, interview by the author, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in New York, 24 January 2014.
31. Two years before he began ROCI, while working in a paper mill in China, Rauschenberg insisted that the work he made be marked with the mill's insignia despite the injunction by Communist law that goods made at the mill were to be only marked with the stamp: Made in the People's Republic of China. Rauschenberg's excitement about working in the mill was clearly infectious, as subsequently the Chinese government broke the rule and allowed the mill imprint to be used, which was the first time since 1949 (when the Communist state took power) that an individual mill's insignia was present on an object. Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 15–19.
32. Ibid., 19.
33. Dorothy Seckler, "Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," Smithsonian Archives of American Art (21 December 1965), 2.
34. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 199.
35. Ibid.
36. The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in New York City generously provided access to Rauschenberg's letters.
37. Rasmussen, *After Bruce Conner*, 30.
38. Philip Schultz, *My Dyslexia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 26.
39. Ibid., 20.
40. Ken Gobbo, "Dyslexia and Creativity: The Education and Work of Robert Rauschenberg," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 30 (2010): <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1268/1298>.
41. Barbara Rose, *Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 72.
42. Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner*, 197.
43. Peter Boswell, "Bruce Conner: Theater of Light and Shadow," in *2000 BC: The Bruce Conner Story Part II* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), 27.
44. Rasmussen, *After Bruce Conner*, 44.
45. Rasmussen, *After Bruce Conner*, 5.
46. Ibid., 7.
47. Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, 16.
48. *Bruce Conner*, Michael Kohn Gallery, n.p.



## *The Oracle in the CARDS: Robert Rauschenberg, Bruce Conner, and Michael McClure*

TAYLOR ZAKARIN

In the late 1940s, Bruce Conner and Michael McClure were considered odd outsiders at their Wichita high school for their shared interests in art, music, and poetry.<sup>1</sup> By 1970, both were living in San Francisco, Conner working as an artist and McClure as a poet. That year, the childhood friends collaborated on CARDS (CAT. 17). An elegant, yet unassuming, small fabric-covered box with a tiny hinge clasp, it contains twenty-five cards, each printed on one side with a lithograph of a Conner mandala drawing and on the other side with a poem by McClure, comprised of one word on each of the card's four edges.

Before meeting again in San Francisco, both artists also had studied at Wichita State University (WSU) where, Conner remembered, they had staged a “Dada” event in “1952 or 1953.”<sup>2</sup> Conner explained that their show followed an exhibition of faculty works and took place in a hallway:

[We served] lukewarm tap water and soggy pretzels. The show had some gilded soup bones that Coleta Eck had made. Dave Haselwood had a toothbrush framed in an ornate frame and it was called “Professor Emeritus.” Michael McClure had a sculpture that he had started to do at one time. . . . I had a painting called Old Nobodaddy, and some of my recent drawings, and a collage that I had done in high school.<sup>3</sup>

After two years at WSU, Conner’s good friend Corban Lepell convinced him to transfer to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln where Lepell was studying. It was there that Conner met his future wife, the artist Jean Marilyn Sandstedt. After graduating, Conner received a scholarship to the Brooklyn Museum Art School and began showing at the Alan Gallery in New York. Then, with a scholarship to the University of Colorado, he joined Jean, who was working on her MFA. They married in 1957 and immediately after the wedding boarded a plane to San Francisco, where McClure had moved several years earlier. Conner was twenty-two.

### CAT. 17

Bruce Conner and Michael McClure (1933–2008 and b. 1932), CARDS, 1970–71. Lithograph in colors on paper, fabric-covered box; edition 19/50; box closed:  $\frac{5}{8} \times 4 \frac{3}{8} \times 4 \frac{1}{8}$  inches (1.6 × 11.1 × 10.5 cm),  $3 \frac{1}{2} \times 3 \frac{1}{2}$  inches each card (8.7 × 8.7 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.4. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York



CAT. 17  
 Bruce Conner and Michael McClure (1933–2008 and b. 1932), CARDS, 1970–71. Reverse

McClure had already participated with poets Philip Lamantia, Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder in the now legendary “Six Gallery Reading” on October 7, 1955, the event at which Allen Ginsberg first read his poem *Howl* (1955). *Howl* begins:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving  
 hysterical naked,  
 dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an  
 angry fix,  
 angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the  
 starry dynamo in the machinery of night,  
 who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking  
 in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops  
 of cities contemplating jazz,  
 who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan  
 angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated . . .

With Beat poets Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Kenneth Rexroth in attendance, this event marked the advent of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance and is a hallmark of the Beat Generation to which Conner also belonged. The Beats rejected the hypocrisy of normative materialist culture exemplified by the fantasy of the American dream, and explored spiritual and sexual liberation, ecological consciousness, experimentation with mind-expanding drugs, and Eastern religion and mysticism.<sup>4</sup>

During this period, Conner was involved with the poets while producing such works as *WHEEL COLLAGE* (1958; see CAT. 8). In 1959, Conner founded the “Rat Bastard Protective Association,” a loose group of artists including Wallace Berman, Joan Brown, Jay DeFeo, Wally Hedrick, George Herms, Manuel Neri, and Michael McClure. Conner also planned to do a poetry book using “a whole series of drawings” that he had made, each “ten by ten inches using felt tip pens.” He explained:

The drawings all had large, central mandala shapes with circles in the corners. It changed from one drawing to the other. I related to them as a kind of writing like the symmetry of the image. I imagined that they were transparent. I thought of several drawings in a book and it would be as if you could see from one page through to another, one area of one drawing relating to another drawing . . . I was thinking to position the words symmetrically . . . I suggested to [McClure] that he make a deck of cards. He put the words at the top of each card as well as down at the other end of the card. They could be shuffled and they would have all variety of combinations.

He selected the words that he wanted to be in the deck. He produced one, within a week and a half. I think he gave me a copy of it. He did another one which was printed. He has actually done several of them since then. Shuffle them and then put them down, like you're playing a game. Put one in the center, at the side, in the middle and so on.<sup>5</sup>

McClure had begun working on his “word sculptures” in 1966. His first consisted of thirty individual cards, all encased in a glassine envelope. The first two cards in the deck list information such as the title and author, followed by the remaining twenty-eight cards, each of which has two words, one printed on each end. On the flip side, the cards have images of a lion and trees paired with small squares in each corner. Words range from “space” and “empty” to “swirl” and “rainbow,” and some words are repeated multiple times. By arranging the cards in different ways, the deck serves as a mnemonic device for remembering a dream.<sup>6</sup>

McClure worked with Conner on his next word sculpture, increasing the number of words per card to four and printing a single word on each edge of the square card. Additionally, no words are repeated such that the deck of twenty-five bears 100 different words. The words McClure selected range from names for various objects, body parts, and aspects of nature to descriptive poetic terms. No two words are repeated either in image or text. When Jean Conner asked McClure how these words were selected, he responded, “The words were mine. They were simply intuitive.”<sup>7</sup> Removing the cards from their box, a participant may arrange them in different poetic phrases. On the verso of each card is a print of a Conner felt-tip pen mandala drawing.

The word “mandala” refers to a circle in Sanskrit, and is a ritual symbol in both Buddhism and Hinduism. The mandala is used as a visualization device for meditation, or to indicate a sacred space. When discussing Conner’s MANDALA drawings, the art historian Kevin Hatch notes that the limitations of the felt-tip pen as a medium (a small variety of strokes) create a “dizzying oscillation between ground and figure” that keeps “the eye, for however long it looks . . . in constant motion; denied a cohesive image.”<sup>8</sup> Hatch also points out that the MANDALA drawings represent a “sublime temporality, a time beyond measure.”<sup>9</sup> As such, these drawings serve as vehicles for spiritual contemplation. As the mandala traditionally appears as a circle within a square space, Conner’s mandalas within the square shape of CARDS transform the work into a meditative instrument.<sup>10</sup> Conner and McClure created two editions. The first consisted of two-inch, black and white cards enclosed in a glassine envelope. The second (in this exhibition) is comprised of the brown,

lithographed cards encased in the brown box that Conner covered in fabric with the simple word CARDS printed on the front.<sup>11</sup>

CARDS unite both McClure’s and Conner’s aims and oeuvre, despite the differing mediums in which they worked. Just as Conner’s collages, assemblages, and films often brought together disparate objects that had been discarded or overlooked, asking the viewer to imagine these elements in a new light bereft of cultural stigmas and normative associations, McClure’s use of words eliminates hierarchy in language, bestowing each individual word with integrity and importance, and harmonizing all the elements of the work. With this in mind, Conner’s contribution can be viewed as a physical manifestation of McClure’s poetry, and McClure’s poetry the textual corollary of Conner’s mandalas. Conner combined distinct elements in such a way that subverted and transformed them by juxtaposition with something surprising, just as McClure’s “word sculptures” brought into conversation qualities of words that might otherwise have been disregarded. Together in CARDS, the artist and the poet produced something beautiful, unexpected, and evocative.

In late 1974, four years after completing CARDS, Conner and McClure, along with Robert Rauschenberg and other artists and poets, participated in the groundbreaking exhibition *Poets of the Cities: New York and San Francisco, 1950–1965*, which opened at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition catalogue for *Poets of the Cities* provides a veritable trove of information about the overlap and intersection of East and West Coast artists of the period, and is a valuable publication for thinking about the relationship between Conner and Rauschenberg.<sup>12</sup>

In his catalogue essay, Neil A. Chassman, art historian and curator of the exhibition, discusses how and why he drew the artists and poets of the period together. All these figures, in unison but in different ways, sought something akin to Ginsberg’s concept of “ecstatic radicalism,” meaning a joyous embrace of radical change.<sup>13</sup> Chassman explained that while the Beats criticized “the American dream, the dream of science, with the actual sordidness of human relationships and the environmental realities,” some also embraced a broadminded acceptance of the world *as it is*, and he cited Rauschenberg and Ginsberg as such individuals:

The particular objects incorporated into a work (at certain times actual objects) do not serve primarily formal ends, nor do they, as is sometimes maintained, continue to present their unusual associational context. Instead they hover between context and something else. The non-judgmental acceptance of them (Rauschenberg does not think of these objects as ugly or debased no matter how sordid or mundane their origins—an aspect of approach quite similar to Ginsberg) places them in the realm

between art and life—it's like coming to terms with the impossible which is really nothing more than an attitude of allowing directed towards the possible.<sup>14</sup>

The attitude of “the possible,” Chassman felt, related to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s “notion of *releasement towards things*, of letting things be, through an uncovering, [which] is the process of Rauschenberg [and] Ginsberg.” Chassman added, “They don’t like to boss the work around too much. Uncovering can only occur in a non-judgmental atmosphere which, through the mode of acceptance and incorporation, lets lights come on.”<sup>15</sup> For Chassman, the best examples of Rauschenberg’s mode of acceptance were his matte black paintings (see CAT. 56). “They are very important,” Rauschenberg had explained to him, “they first taught me to see.”<sup>16</sup> Fifteen years earlier Rauschenberg had expanded this idea when he told John Cage that he was “trying to check my habits of seeing, to counter them for the sake of greater freshness. I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I’m doing.”<sup>17</sup> Reinforcing the idea of re-envisioning the world, Lana Davis noted that, “Rauschenberg considers himself successful only when he does something that resembles the lack of order he senses.”<sup>18</sup>

Exhibiting Rauschenberg’s expansive approach to the assemblage of objects, *Poets of the Cities* included *Oracle* (1962–65; fig. 13). Davis offers a succinct account of the evolution of this complex multimedia sculpture/installation, a description that reveals Rauschenberg’s working process:

The following developments began in 1962: that of a silkscreen painting and a “concert piece” which grew out of an earlier paintings of 1959, *Broadcast*, in which three radios were incorporated. The concert project was originally conceived as five paintings with remote controls. Rather than a merge, a separation occurred. The five panels became *Ace*, a basically flat painting (1962), with a minimum of combine matter or collage elements; these became absorbed into the surface, representing a transition to another medium which would allow the same possibilities of collaboration and discovery.<sup>19</sup>

Through such transitions, Rauschenberg eventually arrived at *Oracle*, which consists of a console with steps that one can mount; a length of industrial duct in funnel form; a window frame with duct; a car door; and a cistern that pumps water through a shower spray into a tank.<sup>20</sup>

As the electrical engineer Billy Klüver remembered, “[Bob] wanted to build an interactive environment, where the temperature, sound, smell, lights etc. would change as



fig. 13  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Oracle*, 1962–65. Five-part found-metal assemblage with five concealed radios: ventilation duct; automobile door on typewriter table, with crushed metal; ventilation duct in washtub and water, with wire basket; constructed staircase control unit housing batteries and electronic components; and wooden window frame with ventilation duct; dimensions variable. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

you moved through it.”<sup>21</sup> The technology to achieve the environment Rauschenberg imagined did not exist at the time. But, as Klüver points out:

After many discussions, and years of work, in 1965 on the 15th of May, *Oracle* opened at the Leo Castelli gallery. It ended up being one of Bob Rauschenberg’s most beautiful works and is now at Beaubourg in Paris. *Oracle* is a sound environment made up of five AM radios, where the sounds from each radio emanates from one of the five sculptures. The viewer can play the sculpture as an orchestra from the controls on one of the pieces, by varying the volume and the rate of scanning through the frequency band. But they can not stop the scanning at any given station. The impression was that of walking down the Lower East Side on a summer evening and hearing the radios from open windows of the apartment buildings. All of the material for the sculptures Bob had found on the streets of New York. Although this sounds simple, the electronics behind the piece as it now works at Beaubourg is very complicated.<sup>22</sup>

Together, Klüver’s and Davis’s descriptions of *Oracle* inform on how Rauschenberg “releases towards things” in such a way as to enable art to evolve over time and to permit the objects to lend themselves to his changing and ordering selections.

Of equal significance, in the context of Conner and McClure's collaboration, is how such a visually different installation as *Oracle* compares conceptually with CARDS, in so far as both works provoke and emphasize the prophetic role of an object. From Conner's mandalas and McClure's solitary words to Rauschenberg's installation, in which each object issues its own sounds, these two dissimilar works are both interactive, enabling viewers to become users who may enter altered mental states with prescient potential. In this way both *Oracle* and CARDS "turn on the lights" of the mind, releasing viewers' thoughts "towards things," unfettering language and vision from their instrumental use to their imaginative role in meaning making. Finally, while Davis described the affect of *Oracle* as an "epiphany of the everyday,"<sup>23</sup> her formulation may be expanded to include Conner and McClure's CARDS. For *Oracle* (in its enigmatic combination of sound-making objects) and CARDS (in its juxtaposition of word and image) both offer the extraordinary in the ordinary.

#### NOTES

1. Bruce Conner, "Oral history interview with Bruce Conner," interview by Paul Cummings, Smithsonian Archives of American Art (16 April 1973): <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-bruce-conner-12017>.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. For an expanded definition of the Beats, see Allen Ginsberg, "A Definition of the Beat Generation," *Friction* 1 (Winter 1982), revised for Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950–1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1995).
5. "Oral History Interview with Bruce Conner."
6. According to Jean Conner, "In 1966 Dave Hazelwood printed an untitled book. The cover and pages were 10" x 10". The cover was the 25 mandalas that were later enlarged and became the 25 cards for the boxed edition. Inside the book was a seven page untitled poem by Michael McClure interspersed with 10" x 10" mandalas (five) drawings by Bruce." Jean Conner, letter to the author, 26 May 2014.
7. Jean Conner, letter to the author, 26 May 2014.
8. Kevin Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 236.
9. Ibid., 245.
10. Tom Anderson, "Mandala: Constructing Peace through Art," *Art Education* 55 (May 2002): 33–39.
11. On July 17, 1976, McClure and Ginsberg gave a talk at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. At this lecture, McClure discussed a 1976 deck he created with Conner, titled DREAM TABLE, which utilized Conner's inkblot imagery. At Naropa, McClure presented

the concept of the *Personal Universe Deck*, which is effectively what he and Conner had created together. "I don't use [the cards] as seeds for poems and I don't consider the deck to be a poem," McClure explained, adding, "Decks are word sculptures. I consider them to be a way of creating spontaneous, subjective, stochastic imagery reflecting the personal self. It is better not to think of this as poetry. Remove yourself from that aspect of it. This needs alchemical, transformational possibilities. . . . Think of it as an alchemic word experiment." In his commentary McClure also noted that, "a word that sounds bad to your ear by itself may sound beautiful in combination with ninety-nine other words that enable the word to express its beautiful aspects." Michael McClure, "Michael McClure Poetry Workshop, Class 3," *Naropa Archive Project* (3 July 1978): [https://archive.org/details/Michael\\_McClure\\_Poetry\\_Workshop\\_class\\_3\\_July\\_1978\\_78P088](https://archive.org/details/Michael_McClure_Poetry_Workshop_class_3_July_1978_78P088).

12. In addition to artists like Conner, Rauschenberg, Lee Bontecou, George Brecht, John Chamberlain, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, and Jackson Pollock, dancers, musicians, and filmmakers were also included in the exhibition along with poets not only from New York and San Francisco, but also from Black Mountain College like Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and others. Indeed, Olson was the rector "and dominant spirit" of Black Mountain during its halcyon days and, as Calvin Tomkins points out, was "a six-foot-seven-inch, two-hundred-and-fifty-pound poet whose enormous energy was committed to turn Black Mountain into the true 'arts center.'" See Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 72–73. Olson was rector during the period that Rauschenberg created his black and white monochromes.
13. Neil A. Chassman, "Poets of the Cities: Levelling of Meaning," in *Poets of the Cities: New York and San Francisco, 1950–1965* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1974), 27.
14. Ibid., 27–28.
15. Ibid., 30. See Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, trans. Fred Kersten (Pfullingen, Germany: Neske, 1974), 64.
16. Ibid., 27.
17. Rauschenberg quoted in John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 106. ↵
18. Lana Davis, "Robert Rauschenberg and the Epiphany of the Everyday," in *Poets of the Cities*, 41.
19. Ibid., 49.
20. Ibid.
21. Billy Klüver, "Oracle (1965)" in ArtMuseum.net: [http://www.w2vr.com/archives/Kluver/04\\_Oracle.html](http://www.w2vr.com/archives/Kluver/04_Oracle.html).
22. Ibid.
23. Davis, "Epiphany of the Everyday," 41.



## Bruce Conner's Mabuhay Punks

EMMA HART

Bruce Conner's photograph ROZ OF NEGATIVE TREND: SUSPENDED ANIMATION (1978; CAT. 31) is a gritty black and white image that captures both the aggressive energy of a hardcore punk rock show and the character of a punk rock performer. Conner shoots his subject up close and personal. Neck veins popping, Roz sweats profusely in his ripped shirt. A fan extends his arm into the picture to touch the singer or grab his beer. Conner snaps his picture with the beer bottle in mid-air as it slips from Roz's fingers, fizzing out in all directions. Never holding back while photographing punk rock shows at the Mabuhay Gardens, Conner documents his immersion in the scene, breaking the boundary between spectator and performer and providing a lens into the punk world of late 1970s when Mabuhay Gardens, or Fab Mab, emerged as the center of the San Francisco punk club milieu.

In *Hardcore California*, Peter Belsito cites the 1976 arrival in San Francisco of musician Mary Monday as the impetus for the Mab's rise to fame in the West Coast punk rock scene. She joined the band the Britches, which had recently arrived in San Francisco from Portland, and happened upon the Mabuhay Gardens on Broadway Street in San Francisco's stretch of North Beach, an area known for its poets, cafes, and strip clubs. At the time, dancing Filipino girls provided the Mab's primary source of income, and the club was in desperate need of more business. In an effort to boost its income, Ness Aquino, the leaseholder of Mabuhay Gardens, offered the space for rent for \$75 a night.<sup>1</sup> Mary Monday remembered her first encounters with Aquino:

It would have never worked at that point if I had gone in there and been totally Punk Rock, because he wouldn't have understood. So what I agreed on with him was that I'd put on a "show" with costumes and props and skits. The deal was that I could come in on a Monday evening to try it out . . . the show ran for three weeks and kept building until Ness was so happy about it that I could do whatever I wanted.<sup>2</sup>

As Monday points out, punks began their association with Mabuhay Gardens carefully: Aquino was a known conservative. The result? An explosion of punk music at the Mab.

CAT. 31

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), ROZ OF NEGATIVE TREND: SUSPENDED ANIMATION from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 20 ¼ × 16 ¼ × ¾ inches (51.4 × 41.3 × 2.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.23. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

Just as the Mab began booking Mary Monday, the entrepreneur Dirk Dirksen arrived in San Francisco in search of a nightclub where he could document contemporary music. He found the Mab, and soon became its music promoter and emcee. Shortly after the Britches started playing regularly, an arts and music rag called *Psychone* released its first issue. After its release, Dirksen invited *Psychone* editor Jerry Paulsen to see one of the Britches' performances. This initiated a short relationship between the Mab and Paulsen, who became its ticket collector. As the Mab grew in popularity, dozens of bands lined up to book shows, and Paulsen began promoting the bands in his magazine. Even though the club's reputation was growing, *Psychone* was unable to make a profit and the magazine printed its last issue in June of 1977.<sup>3</sup> Fortuitously, CBS aired nationally a documentary on English punks that very June, and San Francisco punk artists and musicians got a boost when KPIX Channel 5 (a San Francisco CBS affiliate) launched its own program on the Mabuhay Gardens' punk scene.<sup>4</sup>

Just a few blocks away from the Mab, at the corner of Broadway and Columbus Avenue, the writer V. Vale worked at the notorious City Lights Bookstore. Co-founded by Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Lights came to international attention in 1956 when Ferlinghetti published Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* (1955). San Francisco police seized the book, arrested Ferlinghetti, and had him tried on obscenity charges. Ferlinghetti won in a landmark First Amendment court case that established a legal precedent for the publication of controversial literary work with redeeming social value. Vale approached both Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg for funds to start his own magazine about the emerging punk scene at the Mab, believing that "punk represented the need for freedom, both socially and artistically."<sup>5</sup> They each gave Vale \$100 and he launched the first issue of *Search & Destroy* (1977–79), a punk newspaper that morphed into the celebrated counter-culture magazine *RE/Search* (1980–present).

Belsito sites Vale's publication as indispensable to the time: "The young scene's thirst for a radical but informed source of information and a suitable graphic style was quenched in June with the premier issue of . . . *Search and Destroy*."<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, just prior to launching the magazine, Vale met Conner at the Mab, where Conner, then forty-five, could often be found hanging out, dancing, and photographing musicians and the club scene. Vale invited Conner to contribute his punk photographs to *Search & Destroy*, pictures that would add significant caché to the publication, as Conner had become a legendary figure in San Francisco for his drawings, assemblages, and films, but also as an eccentric, prickly contrarian.

Photographing shows at the Mab deepened Conner's involvement with punk art, music, and culture, and he relished likening his experience there to combat photography:



I had always liked the idea of action photos. . . . Like—sport events. Basketball. They're floating in the air, part of this suspended sphere, and they've got these beatific looks on their faces, they're in anguish. Or combat photography. I always thought, gosh, combat photography. Maybe I could work on that.<sup>7</sup>

Conner's appreciation of action photography had a counterpoint in his own experience in the pits and trenches, as he embraced the aggressive moshing, drinking, and dancing in the raw, gritty punk scene. "I'm up there in the front with my knee pads," Conner explained of his experience photographing the Avengers, "and the stage was shin high, so I was always damaged: I had to protect my camera!"<sup>8</sup> In *Untitled* (Bruce Conner taking pictures at a Johnny Rotten Conference, San Francisco, early March 1980), Elizabeth Sher caught Conner in the very act of thrusting himself into the flurry of action in the name of his art (1980; CAT. 94). As he integrates himself in the scene, Conner crouches down and intensely focuses on his subjects, capturing a genuine punk moment. Conner had nothing but enthusiasm for the raucous authenticity of the punk scene and his photographs both document the shows as historical events and capture their emotional vitality in works of art. Conner's photographs live in the interstice between an historical record and an art image, capturing the spirit of the place and activity in space and time.

CAT. 94  
Elizabeth Sher, *Untitled*  
(Bruce Conner taking pictures  
at a Johnny Rotten press  
conference, San Francisco),  
1980. Gelatin silver print, 10  
× 8 inches (25.4 × 20.3 cm).  
Nasher Museum of Art at  
Duke University, Durham,  
North Carolina. Promised  
gift of anonymous donor,  
L.13.2012.38. © Elizabeth Sher  
All Rights Reserved

Conner was “a key figure at the Mab, despite being characterized as a late-1950s Beat, assemblage, and funk artist and filmmaker,” according to Kristine Stiles, Conner’s assistant at the time.<sup>9</sup> She adds that Conner had not found such kindred artistic spirits since the 1950s as the artists performing at the Mab, and describes the cultural situation in San Francisco in the late 1970s like this:

From 1960 to 1980, the Bay Area was the site of rapidly altering beliefs, a situation that resulted from the compression of different generational countercultures between which the 1970s were pressed. The pessimism, anger, and rejection of mainstream American culture smoldering in the Beats skipped a generation to become punk abnegation, while hippie entrepreneurial impulses morphed into the upwardly mobile professionalization of yuppies. Most artists coexisted in this congested hyper-pluralism, such that their interaction produced effects “multiplicatively (one might even say chemically).” In addition, everyone knew everyone. Ideas cross-fertilized generations, groups, and communities, and artists intermingled fully with poets, musicians, filmmakers, photographers, critics, and scholars.<sup>10</sup>

Conner and V. Vale were among the many “bridge figures” that “reached out” and contributed to the “overlapping intersecting communities [that] pulsed through the period with an earnest and simultaneously irreverent wry sense of collective purpose.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Conner’s affinity for photographing the musical groups merged with his filmmaking when he collaborated with the new wave band DEVO on a film for the group’s song “Mongoloid.” Conner set his film MONGOLOID (1978; see fig. 16) to their music, montaging 1950s television advertisements with educational and industrial film footage. As film scholar Bruce Jenkins explains, Conner’s brilliance was his “use of a popular medium to comment on popular culture; appropriation from the culture leading back into culture.”<sup>12</sup>

Conner’s genius for syncopating film imagery to the beat and rhythm of music finds a corollary in his punk photographs, which become metonymies for the loud, aggressive, and fast-paced music. Capturing a different aspect of the chaotic dissonant scene, Conner’s photographs silence the noise, stripping the Mab down to its raw, visual core. In ROZ MAKES A GIANT STEP FOR MANKIND: NEGATIVE TREND (1978; CAT. 30), Conner shoots the musician as he leaps in mid-air, still screaming into his microphone. It is possible to imagine Roz hitting the ground, crashing into and knocking over furniture, leaving the place in the shambles that Conner pictures in ROZ LEAVES THE CHAIRS IN DISARRAY: NEGATIVE



CAT. 30

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), ROZ MAKES A GIANT STEP FOR MANKIND: NEGATIVE TREND from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.3. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

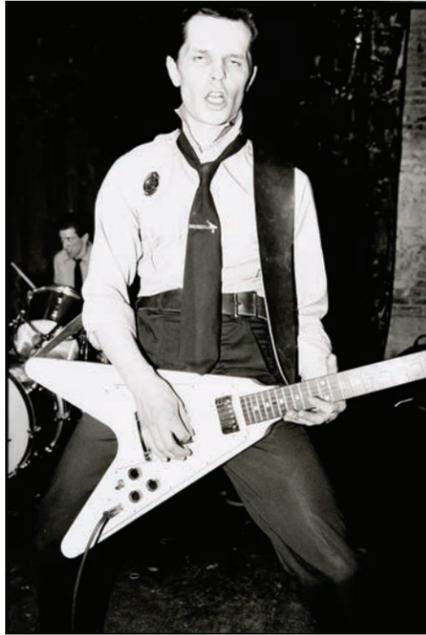
CAT. 29

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), ROZ LEAVES THE CHAIRS IN DISARRAY: NEGATIVE TREND from MABUHAY GARDENS PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.8. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

TREND (1978; cat 29). This photograph, taken during a raucous show, pictures the floor of the Mab littered with trash, and one can imagine the stink of beer, sweat, and the heat of the performers’ and dancers’ energy. Chairs and tables are overturned and punks hang around enthusiastic about the dismantled state of the Mab, a metaphor for the state of the world outside that they deplored.

With few exceptions, Conner’s photographs hush the moments of mayhem, creating a silent space to experience and interact with the punk scene visually, as if viewers also stand in the trenches at the Mab. Conner displayed an array of images of the Mab’s environment, such as the scene he depicts in WOMEN’S ROOM AT THE MABUHAY (1978; CAT. 32). There in the bathroom, two women stand at the sinks, a paper towel dispenser hangs on the wall. The rest of the surfaces are covered with graffiti written in marker and spray paint. The graffiti writings vary from people’s names, such as “Marian E was here,” to more comical musings, such as “Sid Vicious is a light weight,” “Never mind the media,” and “Iggy is God.” One woman grins at Conner, while he has overprinted the face of another, presumably to protect her identity.

In FRANKIE FIX: CRIME (1978; CAT. 26), Conner shows the self-conscious, ironic side of Frankie, a guitarist with Crime. The band formed in San Francisco in 1976 and that same year released the first single by a West Coast punk band featuring



CAT. 26

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), FRANKIE FIX: CRIME from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 11 × 8 ½ inches (27.9 × 21.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.1. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York



CAT. 32

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), WOMEN'S ROOM AT THE MABUHAY from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 11 × 14 inches (27.9 × 35.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.6. © Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York

the songs “Hot Wire My Heart” and “Baby You’re So Repulsive.” In Conner’s photograph, the tall, slender Frankie strikes an aggressive, leg-spread stance, holding his guitar tightly against his body. Dressed in black pants, a black tie, and a white shirt with the collar nattily turned up, Frankie only lacks the ubiquitous vest characteristic of Crime’s mockingly formal attire. He faces the camera boldly and sings. Although this photograph differs significantly from WOMEN’S ROOM AT THE MABUHAY, both illustrate Conner’s ability to convey a strong sense of the atmosphere and

quality of the experience inside the Mab, leaving a pictorial record of a unique loud, boisterous, and highly creative moment in the history of San Francisco music, art, and film culture.

The unique strength of Conner’s punk photographs is how he stilled the excited and wild punk scene, heightened viewers’ visual acuity, and offered a rare opportunity to see action arrested, which is typically experienced sonically. Drawing on his expertise in editing film footage to music, Conner reversed his process in his punk photographs. Immersing himself in sound, Conner quieted music to animate the visual.

NOTES

1. Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (Berkeley: Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1983), 68.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 73.
4. Ibid., 74–75.
5. V. Vale, “About Us,” *RE/Search Magazine Online*: <http://www.researchpubs.com/about/>.
6. Belsito and Davis, *Hardcore California*, 75.
7. Greil Marcus, “Bruce Conner at the Mabuhay Gardens, San Francisco, 1978,” *Aperture* 183 (Summer 2006): 65.
8. Ibid.
9. Kristine Stiles, “Negative Affirmative: San Francisco Bay Area Art, 1974–1981,” in *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974–1981*, ed. Paul Shimmel (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011), 30.
10. Ibid., 27–28. Stiles quotes within her text Richard Edward DeLeon’s *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975–1991* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 9, 13. See also Dennis J. Coyle, “The Balkans by the Bay,” *The Public Interest* 91 (Spring 1988): 67–68.
11. Stiles, “Negative Affirmative,” 28.
12. “Devo and the Dark Psychodelia of Bruce Conner’s Pop Apocalypse,” *DANGEROUS MINDS* (15 October 2013): [http://dangerousminds.net/comments/devo\\_and\\_the\\_dark\\_psychodelia\\_of\\_bruce\\_conners\\_pop\\_apocalypse](http://dangerousminds.net/comments/devo_and_the_dark_psychodelia_of_bruce_conners_pop_apocalypse).



CAT. 88

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Faux-Tapis)*, 1995. Collaged fabric on two bonded aluminum panels, 128 ½ × 121 × 2 inches overall (326.4 × 307.3 × 5.08 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## Rauschenberg's Photography: Documenting and Abstracting the Authentic Experience

LAUREN ACAMPORA

Robert Rauschenberg's *Untitled (Faux-Tapis)* (CAT. 88) is an enormous, two-panel construction, one in a series of five that he realized in 1995. The work is comprised of batik fabrics collaged together with "false tapestries" created from the transfer of his own photographs onto cloth using a wax-based technique developed in a Sri Lankan batik workshop. He then bonded the various true and fake (*vrai et faux*) fabrics to aluminum supports. Close examination discloses the photographic transfers, or "faux tapis," to be a large rose, a singular water lily, the trunk of a banyan tree, signage, the upended wheel of a bulldozer, and his dog "Kid." Rauschenberg interspersed the rectangles of the *faux tapis* with both colorfully printed and solid batiks that he purchased on a trip to Sri Lanka in 1983. In this abstract patchwork composition, he juxtaposed the found batiks and the commissioned "faux" tapestries to ground the work firmly in two social realities: traditional Sri Lankan culture and everyday life in the United States.

Removing the found tapestries from their traditional context and function, Rauschenberg fabricated something "false" in the service of art, but created something "true" as art. Such conundrums are typical of his works, especially the many that incorporate photography. Photographs are inherently linked to an actual physical source while also separated from reality through the medium's innate process of abstraction, a dichotomy that the artist exploited in his works. Careful not to imbue his art with pre-determined meanings or philosophical frameworks, he once declared to a studio assistant, "I never speak metaphorically."<sup>1</sup> In deliberately rejecting metaphor, Rauschenberg aimed to represent things as authentic in themselves. To achieve this end, he often altered the precise context of his imagery, challenging viewers' ability to identify the image in a predictable way in order to emphasize things as they are.

Throughout his career, Rauschenberg used photography to explore the contradictory qualities of photographic representation in varied applications of the medium. He produced both stand-alone prints and developed his well-known transfer method in order to incorporate photographs in collages and on paintings, silk-screens, tapestries, ceramics, and metal. In his lifelong investigation into the possible uses and functions of the photographic image, Rauschenberg struck a virtuoso equilibrium between the documentary aspect of photographs (by imbuing his works

with cultural and historical import) and the medium's potential for abstraction (by manipulating images to alter pre-conceived meanings), balancing his photographic results between the medium's inherent technological objectivity and his own subjective framing.

Moreover, although it has gone unremarked, Rauschenberg's use of photography in paintings and Combines must be understood as a critical break from the visual conventions of the New York School of painters in so far as photography enabled him to alter the traditional attributes of both the picture plane and the object in the round. At the same time, his photographs fix things, places, and people relative to his own existential experience. In this sense, Rauschenberg's exploration of photography may be said to connect to philosophical aspects of the abstract expressionist ethos, however much he staunchly denied existentialism in his work, distancing himself from its angst and criticizing artists' self-pity.

This essay examines Rauschenberg's varied utilization of the medium, as he relies on the documentary quality of photographs to depict personal, historical, and cultural context and meaning. Simultaneously, he recontextualizes, fragments, and abstracts reality to allow for a multiplicity of readings, which I explore through the unexpected lens of his concern with authenticity and its phenomenological relationship to Christian Existentialism.

### Photography's Documentation

The incorporation of photographs in Rauschenberg's artworks serves to ground them in a certain place and time. Rauschenberg began working with photography at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1951. Enrolling in a seminar organized by photographer Hazel-Frieda Larsen, he was exposed to the work of visiting professors Harry Callahan, Arthur Siegel, and Aaron Siskind. Rauschenberg often acknowledged his debt to Larsen, though he was uninterested in her emphasis on the technical aspects of photography. Producing a traditional fine quality print was not his concern. "Perfection is not one of the goals," he stated, "because it's a dead end."<sup>2</sup>

In January of 1952, Edward Steichen purchased two of Rauschenberg's photographs for the Museum of Modern Art in New York: *Untitled (Interior of an Old Carriage)* (1949) and *Untitled (Cy on Bench)* (1951). This purchase came six years before the institution acquired any of his other artworks. That summer, he returned to Black Mountain where he produced several photographic portfolios. During this period, Rauschenberg began asserting himself as an artist, discovering how he could make an original contribution to art through what he called "a series of self-imposed detours."<sup>3</sup> *Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (II)* (CAT. 63) of 1952 is his first



self-portrait as a young artist. Lying on a mattress, lost in a moment of vulnerable self-awareness, Rauschenberg rests in front of one of his black paintings; light reflects from the floor to fill the lower two thirds of the image. The photograph communicates self-awareness and discipline, qualities of Rauschenberg's existential state of being and consciousness.

Rauschenberg also photographed fellow Black Mountain student and artist Cy Twombly, as well as his work, helping Twombly to win a travel fellowship from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Twombly invited Rauschenberg to join him on his journey, and the two romantically involved artists departed for Europe in August of 1952, settling in Rome just before Rauschenberg's divorce from his wife Susan Weil was finalized. While abroad, Rauschenberg continued to experiment with photography, bringing only a Rolleicord twin-lens reflex camera with him. The insightful pictures he took of Twombly in Rome are revealing biographically. In *Cy + Roman Steps (I, II, III, IV, V)* (see CAT. 60), Twombly descends the iconic marble stairs of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Aracoeli, a thirteenth century church on the highest summit of the Campidoglio in Rome. Rauschenberg's photographic viewpoint remains relatively fixed from image to image, excluding Twombly's head and his body, which occupies an increasingly large portion of the frame as he approaches the camera. In the final photograph, Twombly appears only from waist and crotch to upper thighs in an image that is sexually charged. This photographic window into Rauschenberg's intimate personal history demonstrates his careful attention to Twombly's body, gestures, and clothing, highlighting the individual perspective of one subject regarding another.

CAT. 63

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (II)*, 1952. Gelatin silver print, 3 ¼ × 5 ⅞ inches (8.3 × 14.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Upon his return to the U.S., Rauschenberg gave up photography in order to focus on painting. This decision would prove premature, as he explained in 1981:

Both of them [photography and painting] were total dedications.

I decided that my next photographic project was to walk across the United States and photograph it foot by foot in actual size.

I figured that in twenty years I would be in jail in Ashland for trespassing if I followed through with that idea. So I decided maybe I'd just go on painting. Then the paintings started using photographs. I've never stopped being a photographer.<sup>4</sup>

In retrospect, Rauschenberg's fascination with and incorporation of photography in his work was only beginning, as he collaged media images and personal photographs alongside other various found elements in his Combine paintings.<sup>5</sup> Rauschenberg relied on the solvent-transfer process as a means to include photographs in his work. This process remained central to his artistic concepts throughout his career, although he continually modified his transfer techniques with the invention of new technologies.

Rauschenberg frequently transferred found photographs to drawing paper by coating them with lighter fluid and rubbing the reverse side with a pencil. But by the spring of 1962, he began experimenting with printmaking at the invitation of Tatyana Grosman, founder of Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) in West Islip, New York, where Jasper Johns had been working since 1960. During this time, Rauschenberg began producing lithographs, transitioning to silkscreen paintings soon afterwards. His silkscreens feature images drawn from a variety of magazines, including *National Geographic*, *Life*, *Esquire*, *Boxing & Wrestling*, and he compiled a library of pictures, sorting them into various categorized files from which he selected photographs to be sent to commercial screenmakers. Determined not to confine himself to any one medium or style, Rauschenberg abandoned his collection of silkscreens after being awarded the International Grand Prize in painting at the Venice Biennale in 1964, finding other ways to incorporate appropriated photography into his art, and transferring images onto Plexiglas, fabric, metal, and various other materials.

Demonstrating a predilection for mass media imagery throughout the first half of his career, Rauschenberg's dedication to taking his own photographs was not reignited until 1979, when he designed a set and costumes for Trisha Brown's *Glacial Decoy*.<sup>6</sup> He projected a series of his black and white photographs taken in Fort Myers, Florida, onto four screens at the rear of the stage. The soundtrack for the dance became the clicking of slides changing every four seconds. Reflecting on the experience several years later, Rauschenberg explained that in order to edit and

select images for the dance production he had "to take approximately a thousand new photographs in a short period of time" and he "became addicted again" to photography, which "heightened" his "desire to look," and became a "fertilizer to promote growth and change in any artistic project."<sup>7</sup> His "desire to look" underscores Rauschenberg's eagerness to reproduce the truth and beauty that he perceived in the world. His experience with Trisha Brown and Co., combined with a growing concern for the liability of featuring found photographs in his works, eventually prompted Rauschenberg to turn to his own photographs, which he primarily used for the next twenty-seven years until his death.<sup>8</sup>

With his return to practicing photography, Rauschenberg directly confronted the challenge of passing time and how his pictures transformed an ephemeral existential experience into an eternal image. This aspect of his work is vivid in how he used the camera to document his travels. For example, in 1980, he bought a 1936 Phaeton Ford and spent a month driving from New York to Captiva Island, Florida, with his assistant Terry Van Brunt. Traveling less than forty miles each day, they frequently stopped for Rauschenberg to photograph in cities from Atlantic City and Baltimore to Charleston and Savannah. He titled his collection of these and other locales *In + Out City Limits*.<sup>9</sup> Over a hundred of Rauschenberg's photographs from this series, together with twenty-eight photographs taken between 1949 and 1965, were included in *Rauschenberg Photographie*, an exhibition organized in 1981 by curator Alain Sayag at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. His high contrast photographs focus on the textures and details of ordinary objects: a towel hanging on a clothing line, the hull of a boat, the trunk of a tree painted white, a bucket on a floral tablecloth. Rauschenberg's careful attention to light, shadows, the shapes of his subjects, and the qualities of their forms emphasize his effort to capture the genuine conditions of the world around him.

*Untitled* (1984; CAT. 83), a collage of fabric and images on hand-cut paper, features photographs from his travels with Twombly in 1952, interspersed with others from Rauschenberg's *In + Out City Limits* project. In the bottom right, the pair appears in a double exposure taken in Venice that Rauschenberg accidentally superimposed over a photograph of ancient spolia from Constantinople, Byzantine columns, and Renaissance towers. The collage emblemizes a formative moment in both the artists' cultural and interpersonal experiences in Europe. Such works narrate and index both intentional and unintentional autobiographical references to his existential experience of the period.

According to Barbara Rose, "Rauschenberg's art extends a moral tradition of the artist as witness, functioning as time capsules, a composite of what he witnessed not in a single place or country but on television, in newspapers, and in his travels



CAT. 83

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled*, 1984. Screenprint with fabric and photo collage on hand-cut paper, edition 9/75, 31 7/8 × 26 3/8 inches (81 × 67 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Blake Byrne (T'57), Susan and David Gersh, Bea Gersh, and Carol and David Appel; 2006.9.1. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

all over the world.”<sup>10</sup> His morality is perhaps most evident in his creation of the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) in 1984, a project through which he would collaborate with artists in eleven different countries, concluding in 1991 with an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.<sup>11</sup> Throughout his travels, Rauschenberg constantly amassed “an ever-growing archive of images”<sup>12</sup> that reveal his achievement in documenting new environments and bridging cultural gaps, especially in politically unstable regions. This strong impulse to serve the world recalls his Christian Fundamentalist upbringing and background. Although Rauschenberg stopped attending church by 1960 and no longer claimed

to be affiliated with any particular Christian denomination, he practiced what he understood as his social and spiritual responsibility to lead an authentic life in his role as an artist witness.

This position is clear in comments he made in 1965 on his “34 Drawings for Dante’s *Inferno*” project: “The one thing that has been consistent about my work is that there has been an attempt to use the very last minutes in my life and the particular location as the source of energy and inspiration, rather than retiring to some kind of other time, or dream, or idealism.”<sup>13</sup> With its picture of an astronaut, echoing Rauschenberg’s fascination and future involvement with NASA, *Canto XXX* (1959–60; fig. 17) of the Dante drawings exemplifies his effort to imbue his art with social import, translating Dante’s *Inferno* into a genuine representation of the period and the artist who made it.<sup>14</sup> His own comment here suffices: “I always wanted my works—whatever happened in the studio—to look more like what was going on outside the window.”<sup>15</sup>



fig. 17

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Canto XXX: Circle Eight, Bolgia 10, The Falsifiers: The Evil Impersonators, Counterfeiters, and False Witnesses* from the series *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante’s Inferno*, 1959–60. Transfer drawing, watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper; 14 1/2 × 11 1/2 inches (36.8 × 29.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Given anonymously. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Continuing to produce art with a distinctly international perspective, after 1991, he virtually abandoned his older methods of image transfer and transitioned to newer technologies, using an Iris inkjet printer to produce digital color prints with biodegradable vegetable dyes and then transferring them to paper using water and an electric press. Utilizing this transfer process in photographic works for the remainder of his life, Rauschenberg reached new levels of cultural mediation evinced by works like the fresco painting *Contest (Arcadian Retreat)* (1996; see CAT. 89). *Contest* includes transfer photographs that he took on a trip to Turkey and that picture contemporary Turkish culture in the midst of the famous ruins at Ephesus and Cappadocia.<sup>16</sup> These photographs of the nation’s glorious past mingle in the urban landscape: a Turkish sign reads “Merdal Business Center”; colorful soccer balls jostle with a basketball; laundry hangs on a line; and the renowned Library of Celsus at Ephesus (ca. 117 CE) shares the fresco with the Manhattan Municipal Building, recognizable by its gilded statue, *Civic Fame*, designed by Adolph A. Weinman.

The subject matter of *Contest* represents a mixture of different geographical locales and shows Rauschenberg’s methods of blending the ancient with the contemporary in order to offer a visual synthesis of historical epochs. Such works justify Jaklyn Babington’s description of Rauschenberg as “a cultural archeologist [and] a master of collecting, editing, and assembling the imagery of society, the environment, life, and time.”<sup>17</sup> Rauschenberg, nonetheless, countered his impulse to document his environment by attending to the inherent abstraction in picture taking. In the case of the *Arcadian Retreat* series, Rauschenberg’s use of an unconventional plaster canvas reminds viewers that the medium, despite seemingly capturing reality, is actually an abstraction of one—just as carefully fabricated as a traditional fresco painting.



CAT. 82

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Solar Elephant (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1982. Solvent transfer, fabric collage, acrylic, wood door, wood mallet, metal spring, and string on wood support; 104 × 83 × 15 ¼ inches (264.2 × 210.8 × 40 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

### Photography's Abstraction

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes insists, “A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents), or at least it is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent.”<sup>18</sup> Barthes asks his audience to take into account the processes of framing, lighting, exposure, printing, and cropping, emphasizing that even the most straightforward photograph is always an abstraction of reality. Rauschenberg considered the process to be even more direct. “What you see in front of you is a fact,” he commented. “You click when you believe it’s the truth.” He went on to note that “information is waiting to become in essence a concentration . . . [that] can be projected back into real life, into your recognition.”<sup>19</sup>



CAT. 90

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Meditative March (Runt)*, 2007. Inkjet pigment transfer on poly laminate, 61 × 73 ½ (154.9 × 186.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Despite his inclination to evoke a strenuously reliable image of reality, albeit highly condensed, Rauschenberg’s photographic truth lent itself to abstraction through the processes of transference, recontextualization, juxtaposition, and fragmentation, and his insistence to actively involve viewers in the creation of a work’s meaning.

The solvent-transfer process that he employed for much of his career is a form of abstraction itself. As Rosalind Krauss explained, Rauschenberg’s “unified stroke” and the “act of rubbing” created “slippage between one image and the next.” She concludes that the “rubbing’s visual blur promotes the sensation that the images are ‘veiled.’”<sup>20</sup> The curator and photographer Van Deren Coke amplified this process when he observed that playing upon “the tension between the real and the illusory. . . . Rauschenberg is willing to raid this real world to introduce fragments of it and the illusion of stereometric depth to his paintings and prints—not for their own sake—but for comparison.”<sup>21</sup>

Rauschenberg also removed photographs from their normative context, juxtaposing them with a variety of other objects, images, and materials. This is especially evident in such works as *Solar Elephant* (1982; CAT. 82), a Combine containing a found wooden door with a hanging wooden mallet between two wall-like structures. Newspaper and magazine clippings, as well as photographs, cover the work’s surface like wallpaper to create an entirely fictive realm of people, animals, planetary forms, hydraulic diagrams, and five paint- or embroider-by-number panels of cloth.



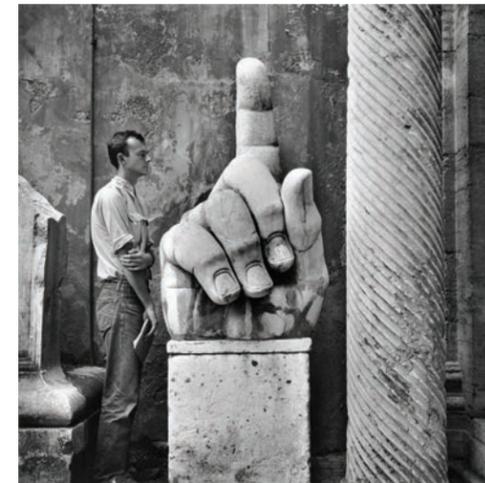
CAT. 86

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Wild Strawberry Eclipse (Urban Bourbon)*, 1988. Acrylic and enamel on galvanized metal and mirrored aluminum, 84 3/4 × 193 × 2 inches (215.3 × 490.2 × 5.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Rauschenberg continued such methods of recontextualization in his final series, *Runts* (2007), drawing upon his own encyclopedic archive of photographs, transferring seemingly unrelated images onto polylaminate synthetic material mounted on aluminum panels, and juxtaposing surprising images that provoke new associations. The press release for the exhibition exclaimed: “Rauschenberg has replaced the eye of mass media with his own.”<sup>22</sup>

This new approach, coming late in his life, is vivid in *Meditative March* (2007; CAT. 90), also from the *Runts* series. Here Rauschenberg brings together photographs of elephants, an image of a turtle, fortune telling signs, a no trespassing sign, and photographs of a blue fire hydrant. Laurence Getford, Rauschenberg’s former studio assistant, noted that when Rauschenberg was unable to move about freely in his later years, he dispatched his assistants with cameras, instructing them to take photographs of “uninteresting things,” emphasizing his belief that “the unimportant was as important as the important.”<sup>23</sup> The eclecticism of *Meditative March* is the result of such a process. Without any discernable narrative, Rauschenberg leaves “room,” in his words, “for everyone’s imaginations to create meaning.”<sup>24</sup> Encouraging a multiplicity of readings, he asks viewers to take responsibility for the act of interpretation, thereby engaging in a moment of aesthetic freedom. Indeed, while on tour for ROCI, he told an audience in Japan: “The function of art is to make you look somewhere else—like into your own life—and see the secrets that are in the shadows, or in the way the light falls somewhere.”<sup>25</sup>

Turning to metal as a canvas, Rauschenberg took this approach one step further by physically reflecting viewers in the works. *Wild Strawberry Eclipse* (1988; CAT.



CAT. 59

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Cy + Relics, Rome*, 1952. Gelatin silver print, 15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

86) brings onlookers closer to their own lives through mirroring. Reconnecting the existential gap, Rauschenberg unites subject and object on the shiny, silkscreened, enameled, mirrored, and anodized aluminum surface of the brightly colored painting with its expressionistic brushstrokes. *Wild Strawberry Eclipse* includes his own photographs, many taken in Cuba, such as a closed pair of shutters, a group of laborers, the rear end of a station wagon, and a line of laundry. Becoming part of his Cuban experiences, viewers enter Rauschenberg’s world and interact in an abstract existential encounter.

Rauschenberg also emphasized the abstract act of photographing by dissecting the boundaries of the photograph itself. The same afternoon that he photographed *Cy + Roman Steps*, he also captured Twombly in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in *Cy + Relics, Rome* (CAT. 59). Twombly stands awe struck by the massive hand severed from a sculpture of Emperor Constantine in the courtyard of the palazzo. The formal structure of the photograph frames Constantine’s fragmented hand as it is measured against Twombly’s body on its left with an ancient Roman column on its right. Rauschenberg’s contact sheet attests to the fact that he took several exposures of Constantine’s hand without Twombly in the frame. Each one is shot at an increasingly greater distance in order to incorporate more of the surrounding environment in his investigation of temporal and spatial fragmentation.

### Photography as an Existential Medium

Thinking about Rauschenberg’s work, Walter Hopps once wrote: “To capture time is to fracture time.”<sup>26</sup> In many of the artworks examined above, Rauschenberg utilized photography to do just that.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, the medium of photography could be said to relate to existential philosophy since the photograph “reproduces to infinity [what] has occurred only once,” as Barthes would explain, adding: “The photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially.”<sup>28</sup> This fact prompts Barthes to declare: “Death is the *eidos* [or essence] of photography.”<sup>29</sup> The photograph as a self-conscious preservation of a subject, who threatens to disappear, is deeply related to its inherent existential dilemma of representing something always already lost.

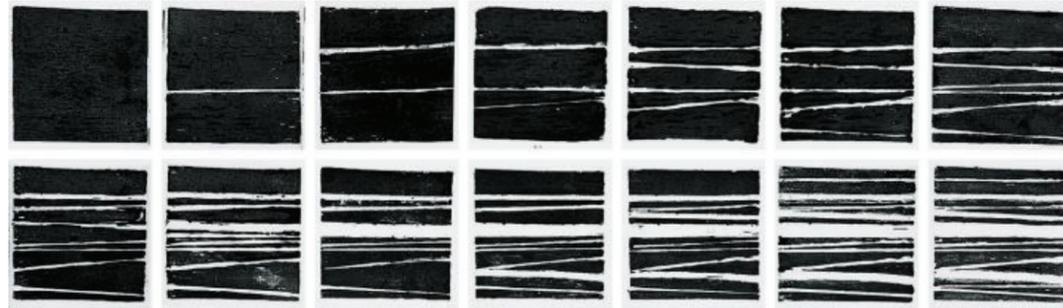


fig. 18

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *This Is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time*, 1948. Pencil on tracing paper and fourteen woodcuts on paper, bound with twine and stapled; 12 1/8 × 8 7/8 inches each (30.8 × 22.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

In this way, despite his strong rejection of the negativity of existentialism, a relationship exists between Rauschenberg’s use of photography throughout his oeuvre and the existentialism of many abstract expressionist artists. For while it is true that he challenged the verticality of abstract expressionist work through what Leo Steinberg theorized as his “flatbed picture plane,”<sup>30</sup> and he created what others would theorize as a “different order of experience,”<sup>31</sup> Rauschenberg’s use of photography must be understood to link to the work of his predecessors, even as it simultaneously laid the foundation for an entirely different perspective on art.

Philosophical existentialism exists in many different forms. Although the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel coined the term in the twentieth century, the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is considered to be the philosophical father of existentialism, even if it was Jean-Paul Sartre’s interpretation that dominated the post-war period.<sup>32</sup> The foundational concepts of existentialism—that existence precedes essence, that an individual lives in a state of free will, and that one is responsible for determining one’s own fate—have the capacity to create meaning in a meaningless world. Following World War II, existentialism was instrumental in the analysis of individuality, freedom, anxiety, authenticity, and death. Existentialism also became the lens through which to define the highly expressive abstract painting associated with European Art Informel, as well as figurative sculpture and painting by artists like Alberto Giacometti and Francis Bacon, and eventually American abstract expressionist work. Under the influence of Sartre’s emphasis on the free, autonomous individual, the art critic Harold Rosenberg framed “action painting,” especially that of Jackson Pollock, as an existential “encounter” with the work as a form of self-realization.<sup>33</sup> Even the influential French art critic Pierre Restany would observe: “It was difficult not to see Pollock as an Existentialist at the time.”<sup>34</sup>

This point of view was precisely the sort of “existentialism” that Rauschenberg vehemently sought to avoid. “I’m never sure what the impulse is psychologically,” he insisted, “I don’t mess around with my subconscious. . . . If I see any superficial subconscious relationships that I’m familiar with—clichés of association—I change

the picture.”<sup>35</sup> Rauschenberg further asserted that it was “extremely important that art be unjustifiable.”<sup>36</sup> In an interview with Dorothy Seckler, he remembered during his first few years in New York that he was in “awe of the painters,” but he also “found a lot of artists at the Cedar Bar . . . difficult . . . to talk to,” as he was “busy trying to find ways where the imagery and the material and the meanings of the painting would be not an illustration of [his] will but more like an unbiased documentation of [his] observations.”<sup>37</sup>

Rauschenberg’s determination to rid his work of any ascription of philosophical existentialism has been highly successful, with many prominent artists, critics, and art historians taking him at his word. In 1961, John Cage wrote: “Perhaps after all there is no message [in Rauschenberg’s work]. In that case one is saved the trouble of having to reply.”<sup>38</sup> Two years later, clearly following Cage, Alan Solomon in the catalog for Rauschenberg’s 1963 retrospective at the Jewish Museum declared: “There are no secret messages in Rauschenberg’s work, no program of social or political discontent transmitted in code, no hidden rhetorical commentary on the larger meaning of Life or Art, no private symbolism available to the initiate.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, whatever existential challenges Rauschenberg experienced in his life, he flatly refused to dwell on them, and he had little patience for those who did. In 1987, Barbara Rose told the artist: “You’ve never done depressing art.” Rauschenberg answered, “I hate it.”<sup>40</sup>

### Art as a Spiritual Medium

Rauschenberg’s distaste for psychological self-analysis was motivated by a desire for the pursuit of joy in his life rather than interrogation of the past. He expressed this characterological trait early in life. While aspiring to become a preacher in his youth, he relinquished this aim when he discovered that his fundamentalist denomination forbade dancing and playing cards. “I just wasn’t that interested in sin,” he said years later, “I don’t like negative input.”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Rauschenberg remained involved in organized religion for many years. In the fall of 1948, he painted a scene for the newly constructed baptistery of his parents’ church;<sup>42</sup> and he continued to attend services of different religions during his first few years in New York. He also characterized much of the work he showed at the Betty Parsons Gallery in May of 1951 as belonging to a “short lived religious period.”<sup>43</sup> While most were lost in a fire, the works that remain include *Crucifixion and Reflection* (1950), *Mother of God* (ca. 1950; see fig. 3), *22 The Lily White* (1950), and *The Man with Two Souls* (1950). *Mother of God* particularly evinces Rauschenberg’s spiritual journey, which he renewed again and again, long after he left organized religion, in his renowned generosity and service to others.



Rauschenberg's spirituality may best be compared to Christian Existentialism, especially as he expressed aspects of Christian values in his choice of projects. A comment on why he initiated ROCI is a good example: "I don't think it came from religion," he stated. "I think it came from caring."<sup>44</sup> However, "caring," as a spiritual imperative, originates in the West in the "Golden Rule" preached by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This commandment parallels earlier Mosaic law: "Whatever is hurtful to you, do not do to any other person." Thus does duty toward one's fellow beings reside at the core of the Abrahamic religions, with the commandment to "love thy neighbor," a particular aspect of Christian teaching. Although Rauschenberg gave up the idea of a religious calling, Leo Castelli, Rauschenberg's long-time art dealer, commented on the artist's impulse in organizing and carrying out ROCI. "Bob once wanted to be a preacher," Castelli noted, concluding: "he is a preacher still."<sup>45</sup> Walter Hopps also identified Rauschenberg's deep humanity: "He loves with such equal intensity: men, women, children, dogs, trees, rocks . . . all of life."<sup>46</sup>

In the context of his photography, Rauschenberg's care culminated in his return to a decidedly religious subject in 1996 when he accepted a commission by the Vatican to create a work to commemorate Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, the Capuchin Catholic, who, after dying in 1968, was sainted for his corporeal physical manifestation of the stigmata. Rauschenberg's work on the Padre Pio project was to be installed in the architect Renzo Piano's Padre Pio Pilgrimage Church, or Shrine, in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy. Rauschenberg worked on designing a photographic collage for its massive stained glass tympanum, using an innovative new transfer process that he was developing in collaboration with Bill Goldston at ULAE.<sup>47</sup>

A small-scale prototype of the work, entitled *The Happy Apocalypse* (1999; fig. 19), made from inkjet pigment transfers of photographs onto a polylamine surface, shows that Rauschenberg drew inspiration from the Book of Revelation. The left side of the work contains images of storms, hurricanes, tidal waves, and fragments of monuments, including the Eiffel Tower, Westminster Abbey's Big Ben, and the

Statue of Liberty. According to Rauschenberg, these images were meant to evoke "fragments [and] memories of manmade monuments in destructive transformation," and to convey the magnitude of loss suffered during the apocalypse.<sup>48</sup>

In the center of the work, Rauschenberg placed a photograph that he took of a satellite dish, which he purchased, brought to his compound on Captiva Island, and had painted gold. Topped by a diagram of the world, the golden satellite dish represented Rauschenberg's idea of an all-knowing God; and he called the satellite dish "the tool or symbolism of spiritual wisdom."<sup>49</sup> The right side of the mockup for the tympanum exudes a "quieter pastoral energy phasing into crystalline of spiritual reality," with photographs of flowers, trees, rocks, waves, mountains, clouds, animals, and planetary forms interspersed with expressionistic strokes of pale blue, pink, and orange paint.<sup>50</sup> When a Franciscan prior, who was involved with the project, suggested that Rauschenberg would be a Catholic by its completion, Rauschenberg dryly responded: "And I suppose you'll be an artist."<sup>51</sup>

In a 1997 *Vanity Fair* article on the artist, art historian John Richardson remarked: "While [Rauschenberg] is a spiritual man, he is no believer, and he intends to steer clear of overt religious references." Rauschenberg's unique interpretation of the biblical apocalypse is evidence that, despite working with the Catholic Church, his spirituality remained unaffiliated. That he pictured God as a gold satellite dish was anything but blasphemous. On the contrary, it seems to have been Rauschenberg's way to create a "Happy Apocalypse" rather than a dire end to the world. But that unconventional image of the Christian God would lead to the demise of his involvement in the project.

A letter from Renzo Piano to Rauschenberg in November 1997 predicted the unfortunate end. Piano warned Rauschenberg against pursuing his idea of a "positive Apocalypse" or "Apocalisse Allegra," as it might "offend Monsignor Crispino Valenziano," their Vatican coordinator, who, the architect diplomatically explained, was a "very sensitive man."<sup>52</sup> Piano was correct: Valenziano rejected Rauschenberg's representation of God as a satellite dish and requested that the artist incorporate the Madonna into the piece instead. This pedestrian request was too much for Rauschenberg to bear. On February 5, 2000, he responded in a letter that testifies to Rauschenberg's critical acumen, his sense of humor, and most of all his insight into Monsignor Crispino Valenziano's lack of imagination.

"What were halos?" Rauschenberg asked the Monsignor, "Fashion or stylistic acceptable affectations of antiquities to celebrate the extravagance of the sponsor or the holiness of the biblical story?" After his opening salvo, Rauschenberg got to the point:

fig. 19

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *The Happy Apocalypse*, 1999. Inkjet pigment transfer, acrylic, and graphite on polylamine; 96 × 250 × 2 inches (243.8 × 635.2 × 5.1 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Texas. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

Contemporary symbolism has to follow and change with the recognizable experience. The antenna is communication and mystery of the miracle of the “all knowing” with the majestic aura of the halo. It is boundless, encircling the world inspired by all space.<sup>53</sup>

Completing these two brief paragraphs, Rauschenberg put the letter down without signing it. The following day, Rauschenberg returned to his letter, adding the date—February 6, 2000—under the paragraph that he wrote the day before, and continuing:

After overnight deliberation, I came to the following realization and conclusion; this is my opinion: I feel that God is born inside of each one of us. My God does not use wrath, threats, revenge or heavenly bribes to control or to teach justice, compassion, and goodness. I am disqualifying myself from this holy project. I am either spiritually under- or over-qualified.<sup>54</sup>

With this letter, Rauschenberg asserted his refusal to reduce the ubiquity of God to halos or the Madonna when his aim had been to show that “souls are unworldly radiances moving into holy infinity,” that God is a benign being “born inside each one of us,” and that in the twenty-first century the “mystery of the miracle of the ‘all knowing’” is manifest in the omnipotent surveillance of the satellite dish. Rauschenberg abandoned his four-year-long project, but not before adding a pointed reference to the lack of ethics of the Church. Writing that he hoped to “work with Renzo in the future without moral compromise,” Rauschenberg more than implied that the Church had pressured him to concede his artistic integrity and right to represent the munificence and deific omnipresence of God in the way that he saw fit.

Rauschenberg closed the letter and, with it, his association with the Vatican. He was, he wrote, “eternally grateful to have been selected by the Vatican Commission and to be associated with the miracles of Saint Pio.” He signed his letter: “You all have my love.” Rauschenberg’s letter demonstrates his undeniable moral superiority in his insistence upon standing for the right for every generation to represent its concept of God according to its beliefs and its era. That Rauschenberg put aside a project to which he had given some four years of his life affirms his spirituality, something akin to Christian Existentialism in its expression of commitment, generosity, love, and joyous embrace of humanity over which an omniscient God prevails like a satellite dish!

Rauschenberg’s unwavering attitude toward God very much aligns with Kierkegaard’s religious construal of existentialism. Kierkegaard understood routinized State

Christianity as an obstacle to living an authentic life, for its promotion of passivity over a passionate declaration of belief.<sup>55</sup> Authenticity represented the ideal of becoming “true to the originality of one’s own being in spite of societal or cultural obstacles.”<sup>56</sup> In a Christian elucidation, Kierkegaard referred to this routine of conformity as the “leveling” of mass-culture and modern society, and urged individuals to undergo the “laborious task of facing reality, making a choice and then passionately sticking with it.”<sup>57</sup> In this Kierkegaardian sense, Rauschenberg pursued an authentic life in his refusal to compromise his beliefs and in his sense of personal responsibility.

Rauschenberg rarely addressed politics directly in his art, commenting that he “never thought that problems were so simple politically that they could, by me anyway, be tackled directly.”<sup>58</sup> By the end of the 1960s, he did, as Roni Feinstein observed, “shift his focus from local concerns . . . to a broader involvement with American politics and society,” and finally “to an engagement with global issues, international cultures and the state of the world.”<sup>59</sup> His increasing interest in the world at large could be said to embody concepts of how one arrives at existential freedom through action that itself emerges from alienation and anxiety.<sup>60</sup> The German philosopher Paul Tillich was among those who theorized Christian Existentialism based in concepts of “anxiety” defined as “the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing.”<sup>61</sup> Tillich continues: “It is not the realization of universal transitoriness, not even the experience of the death of others, but the impression of these events on the always latent awareness of our own having to die that produces anxiety.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, an underlying knowledge of and anxiety concerning death represents a critical element of existential struggle.

Although he did not explore death explicitly, Rauschenberg certainly did so implicitly, as if coming to terms with his own anxiety. This is best demonstrated in the *Hoarfrost* series of the mid-1970s, with its evocation of the transience of both nature and the photographic image.<sup>63</sup> He first encountered the word “hoarfrost” in the late 1950s while reading Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, the first part of his epic poem *The Divine Comedy* (1308–21). Rauschenberg was enchanted by how the natural phenomenon of frost heralds a sometimes subtle and sometimes dramatic change in the seasons. Over a decade later, he arrived at the idea of the *Hoarfrost* series when he noticed how the cheesecloth that he used to clean lithographic stones retained newsprint images from the transfer-printing process. Drawing an analogy between the fleeting morning hoarfrost and the specter of images that he printed on the cotton gauze, silk chiffon, and satin fabric, Rauschenberg called attention to the fragile life of images that disintegrate over time. He also captured this transience in *Rome Flea Market (III)* (1952; CAT. 62), picturing a tarpaulin’s rough, tattered surface, and



CAT. 77

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Hoarfrost)*, 1975. Solvent transfer on fabric, and fabric collage with cardboard; 83 × 49 ¼ × 6 ½ inches (210.8 × 125.1 × 16.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



acutely visualizing its decaying and damaged material, as if the tarp was death itself. This sensitivity to death comes through again in Combine paintings like *Canyon* (1959) and *Monogram* (1959) with their taxidermied animals suggesting “the absent body” described by Lisa Wainwright: “[ I ]t is our body evoked, our humanity questioned, our impending death wishfully forestalled, our sublime unknowing fetishistically unfulfilled.”<sup>64</sup> Finally, in *The Happy Apocalypse*, Rauschenberg devoted himself to the afterlife, an action that expressed a form of anxiety about life’s ephemerality, at the same time as it embodied and summoned memory of Tillich’s advocacy of “the courage to be.”

CAT. 62

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Rome Flea Market (III)*, 1952. Gelatin silver print, 15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York



CAT. 55

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Quiet House—Black Mountain*, 1949. Gelatin silver print, 15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## Afterword

At the beginning of his artistic life, Rauschenberg took up a camera to picture the touching beauty and silence of *Quiet House—Black Mountain* (1949; CAT. 55). A site of meditation, Quiet House was built as a memorial to Mark Dreier, a nine-year-old boy killed in 1941 in an automobile accident. He was the son of Black Mountain faculty members Theodore and Barbara Dreier. Eschewing the emotionally charged environment, Rauschenberg pictured sunlight on chairs and the texture of the rough cement wall. Light permeates the space, transporting viewers into the existential spiritual moment when he pointed his camera at an otherwise ordinary scene to reveal its extraordinary presence.

“I have never believed in just one possibility,” Rauschenberg said, “there are always polarities.”<sup>65</sup> While I have argued that Rauschenberg’s photographs both possess and access his innate existential states of being, his art evades any reductionist theory. Still, his intense morality, ontological anxiety, and concern for authenticity are irrefutable. More poignantly, his relentless quest for joy betrays his pain. These aspects of the artist are most vivid in the extraordinary reach and application of photography in his art. Robert Rauschenberg produced culturally informed, historically grounded, highly abstracted, existentially charged, and spiritually driven works of art that call into question the meaning of art in the life of the artist, and artifice and veracity in the service of life and art itself.

## NOTES

1. Laurence Getford, interview by the author, New York, 24 January 2014. Hereafter Getford/Acampora.
2. Alain Sayag, “An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg” in *Robert Rauschenberg, Photographs* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), n.p.
3. Susan Davidson, “Mother of God,” Rauschenberg Research Project, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (July 2013): [http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/37592/essay/mother\\_of\\_god](http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/37592/essay/mother_of_god).
4. Barbara Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 75.
5. In *Rebus* (1955), for example, he included a portion of an election poster, two pictures of running athletes, a fragmented comic strip, newspaper clippings, a child’s drawing of a woman, family photographs, an image of a pinup model from a girly magazine, and cheap reproductions of an Albrecht Dürer self-portrait and Sandro Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (1486). All of this imagery is strewn across nearly eleven feet of canvas, interspersed with dripped paint, cloth fragments, and graffiti-like brushstrokes.
6. Rauschenberg’s son, Christopher, had been working as an artist photographer full-time since 1973, and co-founded the Oregon Center for Photographic Arts in Portland, Oregon, now known as Blue Sky Gallery, with four other photographers in 1975. At the time that his father began working on *Glacial Decoy*, Christopher Rauschenberg was the proprietor of Blue Sky Gallery, and influenced Rauschenberg’s continued interest in the medium as, according to Mary Lynn Kotz, he “encouraged Rauschenberg in his new photographic work.” Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 230.
7. Sayag, “An Interview,” n.p.
8. Gay Morris, “When Artists Use Photographs: Is It Fair Use, Legitimate Transformation or Rip-Off?” *Artnews* 80 (January 1981): 102. Rauschenberg’s return to practicing photography in 1980 coincides with the settlement of a lawsuit brought against him and Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles (the printing studio that produced his *Hoarfrost* series) by Morton Beebe, who sued for copyright infringement of his photograph of a diver that Rauschenberg used in *Pull (Hoarfrost)* (1974). Neither Rauschenberg nor Gemini G.E.L. admitted wrongdoing, arguing that, “Rauschenberg’s process of transfer, collage, and reversal transforms the printed imagery.”
9. This undertaking inspired Rauschenberg to travel to and photograph other locales as well, and he exhibited several series of photographs in the city of their origin, including Fort Meyers, Charleston, Baltimore, Boston, New York, and Los Angeles. ULAE published books of his photography collections from two destinations, *Photos In + Out City Limits: Boston* and *Photos In + Out City Limits: New York C.*, in 1981 and 1982.
10. Barbara Rose, “Seeing Rauschenberg Seeing,” *Artforum International* 47 (2008): 432.
11. Roni Feinstein, “Rauschenberg: Solutions for a Small Planet,” *Art in America* 86 (February 1998): 73.
12. Rose, “Seeing Rauschenberg Seeing”: 432.
13. Dorothy Seckler, “Oral History Interview with Robert Rauschenberg,” 21 December 1965, Smithsonian Archives of American Art: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-robert-rauschenberg-12870>. Rauschenberg also pointed out in this comment that he worked on the series during the Nixon and Kennedy run for election, which clearly motivated his activism.
14. On July 16, 1969, Rauschenberg watched the launch of Apollo 11 at Cape Canaveral, Florida, at the invitation of the NASA Art Program. Having been asked by the NASA Art Program to commemorate the first manned spaceflight to the moon, Rauschenberg enjoyed unrestricted access to NASA’s Florida facilities during his visit. The experience inspired his *Stoned Moon* series (1969–70), thirty-four lithographs that combine hand-drawn passages, images of the lush Florida landscape, and references to the industrial aesthetic of the space race.
15. Rosalind Krauss, “Perpetual Inventory” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 220.
16. Rauschenberg conceived of the central idea for the *Arcadian Retreat* fresco series with Donald Saff, founder of Saff and Company, a pioneering firm working in collaboration with artists to produce unique editions, paintings, and sculptures; they ultimately invented a printing process for producing frescoes by developing a solvent that would dissolve vegetable dyes in wet gypsum plaster. Rauschenberg was inspired to pursue this new medium by a fragment of an ancient Pompeian fresco that Saff had given him. The technique paired well with his photographs, taken on a visit he made to Turkey in conjunction with the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in June 1996, for which he again designed a poster. He had long been interested in classical sculpture and mythology, and visited a number of archaeological sites in Ephesus and Cappadocia following the conclusion of the conference.
17. Jaklyn Babington, “Robert Rauschenberg, 1967–1978,” *Artonview* 51 (September 2007): 29.
18. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 5.
19. Sayag, “An Interview,” n.p.
20. Krauss, “Perpetual Inventory,” 215–16.
21. Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph: From Delacroix to Warhol* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1972), 243.
22. Jennifer Benz Joy, “Runts: Robert Rauschenberg’s New Series of Paintings from 2007 Opens this Week,” Pace Wildenstein Gallery (8 January 2008): [http://pace-production.s3.amazonaws.com/file\\_objects/old\\_pace\\_pdfs/11240/](http://pace-production.s3.amazonaws.com/file_objects/old_pace_pdfs/11240/).
23. Getford/Acampora.
24. Barbara Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 77.
25. Robert Rauschenberg, ROCI/Japan Press Conference (unpublished transcript), Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo (21 November 1986), as quoted in Kotz, *Art and Life*, 41.
26. Jessica Mostow, “Robert Rauschenberg and Photography,” Pace/MacGill Gallery (14 August 2013): [http://www.pacemacgill.com/site\\_PDFs/press\\_releases/Rauschenberg-PR-2013.pdf](http://www.pacemacgill.com/site_PDFs/press_releases/Rauschenberg-PR-2013.pdf).
27. Rauschenberg had already fragmented time in his 1949 woodcut print, *This is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time* (fig. 18), the first of many of his works to

- play with temporal movement. In its fourteen sequential prints, he “progressively striated with incised lines” the wood block, transforming the prints from a solid black square into a complex space punctuated by thirteen white lines, thereby presenting his subject, temporality, in purely abstract terms. However, though his subject is abstract, its metamorphosis as he captured its growth can be read as an anthropomorphic illustration of a life cycle’s beginning stages. In choosing to illustrate this evolution of abstract forms in a visually minimalistic way, Rauschenberg both suppressed and emphasized such a reading. His examination of the fragmentation of time and space invites ontological analysis even more so in his photographic works.
28. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 4.
  29. Ibid., 15.
  30. Steinberg also identified photography as the flatbed’s “diametric opposite,” in that it “threatened to evoke a topical illusion of depth,” as explained in Leo Steinberg, “Other Criteria,” in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 81. Rosalind Krauss agreed, arguing that the “combination of framing and veiling” inherent in Rauschenberg’s photography represents a return to the diaphane, and the window model of the picture plane, as she wrote in Krauss, “Perpetual Inventory,” 216. Thus, photography may pose a visual link between Rauschenberg’s work and that of his predecessors, in addition to a philosophical one.
  31. Tom Folland, “Robert Rauschenberg’s Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration,” *The Art Bulletin* 92 (2010): 356.
  32. Justin Wolf, “Modern Art Concept: Existentialism in Art,” The Art Story Foundation, 2014: <http://www.theartstory.org/definition-existentialism.htm>.
  33. Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Art News* 51 (December 1952): 22.
  34. Natasha Poor, *Dirty Art: Reconsidering the Work of Robert Rauschenberg, Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, and Edward Kienholz*. Unpublished Dissertation (New York: City University of New York, 2007), 85.
  35. Krauss, “Perpetual Inventory,” 209.
  36. Robert Rauschenberg, “Note on Painting” (1963) in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 322.
  37. Seckler, “Oral History.”
  38. John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1961), 105.
  39. Alan Solomon, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1963), n.p.
  40. Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, 76–77.
  41. Ibid., 10.
  42. Ibid., 70.
  43. Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 26.
  44. Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, 86.
  45. Leo Castelli, interview by Mary Lynn Kotz, New York, 22 April 1987, as quoted in Kotz, *Life and Art*, 41.
  46. Ibid., 269.
  47. Eric Minh Swenson, “Robert Rauschenberg: A Conversation With Stanley Grinstein and Bill Goldston,” Leslie Sacks Contemporary (February 2012): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6WtygD6JpI>.
  48. Robert Rauschenberg, letter to Mario Codognato, 20 August 1999, in the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation archives, box labeled “Padre Pio Project, 1996–2000.”
  49. Ibid.
  50. Ibid.
  51. John Richardson, “Rauschenberg’s Epic Vision,” *Vanity Fair* 445 (1997): 278.
  52. Renzo Piano, letter to Robert Rauschenberg, 19 November 1997.
  53. Robert Rauschenberg, letter to Monsignor Crispino Valenziano, 5–6 February 2000.
  54. Ibid.
  55. Kristoffer Holt, “Authentic Journalism? A Critical Discussion about Existential Authenticity in Journalism Ethics,” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality* 27 (2012): 5.
  56. Ibid.
  57. Ibid.
  58. Seckler, “Oral History.”
  59. Feinstein, “Rauschenberg,” 67.
  60. Jean-Paul Sartre expressed this sentiment succinctly in a comment related to the May 1968 revolution in France: “For me the movement in May was the first large-scale social movement which temporarily brought about something akin to freedom and which then tried to conceive of what freedom in action is.” See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 52. Sartre wrote as early as 1943 in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* published by Gallimard in Paris: “There is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom. . . . There can be a free for-itself only as engaged in a resisting world. Outside of this engagement the notions of freedom, of determination, of necessity lose all meaning.” See Part Four, Chapter 1: Being and Doing, Freedom, 629.
  61. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 35.
  62. Ibid.
  63. It is important to remember that while working under Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in the fall of 1948, Rauschenberg studied the basic Bauhaus methods of *Werklehre*, using materials to develop a combination of “structure, texture, and facture,” and cultivating an understanding of and respect for the inherent properties and ephemerality in the finite life of materials. See Joan Young and Susan Davidson, “Chronology,” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Hopps and Davidson, 551.
  64. Lisa Wainwright, “From Norman Bates to Annette Messager: Taxidermy for a Reason,” *The New Art Examiner* 23 (May 1996): 22.
  65. Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, 77.



CAT. 61

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Portfolio II (I–VI)*, 1952 (printed 1998). Six gelatin silver contact prints mounted on paperboard, 5 7/8 × 3 1/4 inches each (14.3 × 8.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, New York. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

## Conner's Films and Rauschenberg's Filmic Time

LAUREN ACAMPORA

Bruce Conner produced twenty-five films between 1958 and 2008, leaving a documentary on the famous gospel singers The Soul Stirrers unfinished at the time of his death, and in the trust of the filmmaker Michelle Silva to finish. Conner experimented largely in black and white with both found and self-produced footage, and worked with original and pre-existing musical tracks. From a formal and thematic standpoint, Conner's films have little in common. Yet despite their stylistic differences and range of content, the films share an underlying organizational structure. Silva, with whom Conner worked on his films from 2003 until his death, summarized Conner's style this way: "He created literally a cinematic slot machine . . . images meet, they diverge, and they meet again . . . his editing style ensures that the viewer will never experience the work the same way twice."<sup>1</sup> Silva refers to Conner's deconstructive editing methods, which include repeating frames, playing frames in reverse, and combining frames with flashing leader edited in a rhythmic pattern that forges an emotive connection to the film's corresponding soundtrack. Conner himself admitted that his cinematic style was an outgrowth of his collage, itself a foundation for assemblage: "Well of course, the films themselves are collections like assemblage which I did make in the 1950s."<sup>2</sup> The film theorist Bruce Jenkins described the results of Conner's editing as "an artwork as much as it is a motion picture."<sup>3</sup>

Conner's handmade films must be understood as an extension of his own visual artworks, as well as in dialogue with contemporary art and avant-garde film. More specifically, a strong correlation exists between Conner and Robert Rauschenberg, whose silkscreen works have a distinct filmic quality. Indeed, the diversity of imagery and kinetic energy of Rauschenberg's art in all mediums evokes a kind of "channel surfing," as well as the temporal frame-by-frame development of film.<sup>4</sup> There is a remarkable affinity between Conner's quick editing, appropriation of images of popular culture, and recombination of commercial films and Rauschenberg's transfer, cropping, and juxtaposition of images from everyday life.

Rauschenberg, too, used his own photography in fragments and montage that invoke a visual virtual kinetics. An interest in kinetic imagery is evident even in Rauschenberg's earliest photographs. For example, the photographs he took of Cy Twombly at Black Mountain College in *Portfolio II (I–VI)* (1952; CAT. 61) resemble a series of film stills as Twombly continuously reorients himself within a defined space, his pose and clothing varying from picture to picture. Brian O'Doherty once

likened Rauschenberg's early works, especially his Combines, to "the perceptual modality initiated by film, television, and advertising."<sup>5</sup> The artist's close examination of temporal movement and his reflection of popular culture initiated new approaches to artmaking that filmmakers could also adopt.

When asked why he began making films, especially his first film, *A MOVIE* (1958; fig. 14), Conner explained that he had "waited for someone to make that movie," but that when "no one did . . . I decided it was my job to make *A MOVIE*."<sup>6</sup> The film begins with an introduction and countdown, which leads directly into a frame that reads "The End," despite the fact that *A MOVIE* continues for another ten minutes. Footage of men riding horseback, galloping over hillsides in high-speed chase scenes, is followed by clips of destructive automobile races with cars spinning out of control, flipping over and being enveloped in clouds of dust. Conner pairs this opening footage with Ottorino Respighi's fast-paced first movement of his symphony *Pines of Rome* (1924) to exaggerate the urgency and violence of the filmic action. Approximately two and a half minutes into *A MOVIE*, a car speeds off the edge of a cliff and crashes down rocky terrain before dropping off into a valley. This scene fades into a frame that announces the end of the film for the second time. The suspenseful, high-pitched musical score ceases, and after a frame that reads "A Movie" flashes on the screen, Respighi's slower, ominous second movement begins.

The nine minutes of *A MOVIE* that remain, often referred to as its second half, encompass a wide range of imagery, including movies of water skiing accidents, footage of planes exploding in air, and a clip of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge oscillating and collapsing. Conner interspersed these flashes of death and destruction with tightrope walkers, men playfully riding tricycles, surfers and parachuters in action, and a short glimpse of soft-core pornography. "Conner's judicious choice of sound excerpts enhances the drama inherent in each found scene," William Moritz and Beverly O'Neill observe, adding, "In the tight-rope walking sequence . . . the fear the acrobats will fall is allayed by the music's [Respighi's second movement's] delicate, mysterious tones emphasizing the moment's truly magical and gravity-defying properties."<sup>7</sup> Near the end of the film, underwater footage shows scuba divers encountering schools of fish and exploring a shipwreck overcome with algae, barnacles, and seaweed, suggesting new life amidst the wreckage of humankind. Conner ends *A MOVIE* with sunlight glistening on the water's surface shot from below, an image synchronized with Respighi's fourth and last movement as the film fades to black and trumpets triumphantly declare its end.

Referring to Respighi's music and his own found footage, from newsreel and Castle Home Movies to dramatic films and westerns, Conner modestly, but honestly, said: "The only thing I made, and what I own, are the splices." Highlighting the tension

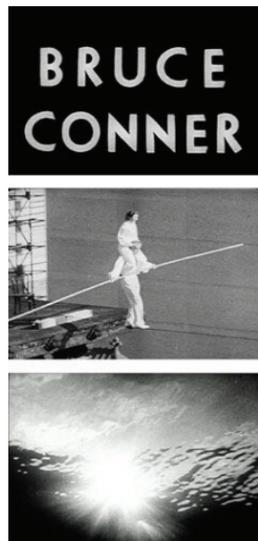
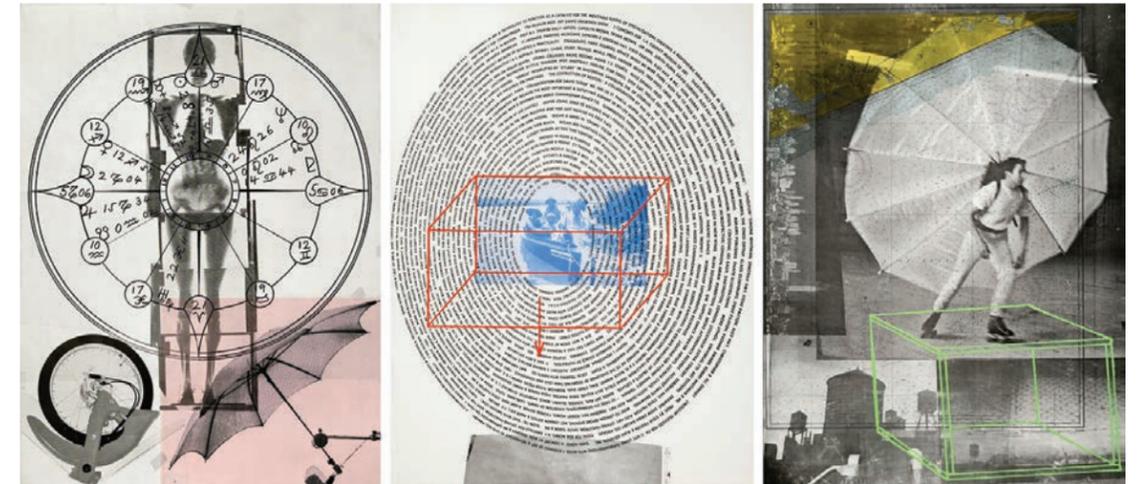


fig. 14  
Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *A MOVIE*, 1958 (stills). 16mm film (black and white, sound), 12:00 minute loop. © Conner Family Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Courtesy the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California and Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, California



CAT. 66

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Autobiography*, 1968. Offset lithograph on paper, 66 1/8 × 145 1/2 inches overall (168 × 369.5 cm), 66 1/8 × 48 3/4 inches each (168 × 123.8 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Marian B. Javits, 1991.15.1. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

between ownership and appropriation, Conner projected his name in capital letters for thirty seconds at the commencement of the film, later commenting that it was "silly [because] Bruce Conner doesn't own any of that film."<sup>8</sup> Conner's editing genius, his rejection of classical filmic narrative, and his defiance of traditional filmmaking practices were, indeed, all his own trademarks. His bold decision to use blank film leader as an image reveals the artist's hand, exposing how he rejected standard filmmaking procedures, leaving invention open.<sup>9</sup>

Thinking about Rauschenberg's relation to Conner's film work, one must recall that Rauschenberg's "flatbed" method contributed to viewing visual imagery in a horizontal rather than vertical way.<sup>10</sup> This horizontal approach lent painting, collage, and assemblage to filmic time. Already in his first Combines of 1954, Rauschenberg drew on and organized seemingly random materials into a montage-like format, throwing into question the meaning of ownership and originality, all the while being completely unique. In this regard, Rauschenberg's three-paneled lithograph *Autobiography* (1968; CAT. 66) is inherently similar to *A MOVIE* in its organizational structure. The first panel of *Autobiography* includes a lithographic transfer of an X-ray of Rauschenberg's skeleton, overlaid with a chart for his astrological sign, Libra, and two other images that recur frequently in his work, a bicycle tire and a photographer's strobe light umbrella. The second panel features a fingerprint-like whorl of text that lists key moments in Rauschenberg's life, describing major personal and professional events. A childhood photograph of Rauschenberg boating with his family, silkscreened in blue, interrupts the spiral of words at its center, and the red outline of a block and a downward-pointing arrow superimposed on the



fig. 15

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *REPORT (BEGINNING AND CONCLUSION)*, 1963–67 (still). 16 mm film transferred to video (black and white, sound), 13:00 minute loop. Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.15.2013.1. © Conner Family Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Image courtesy the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California and Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, California

image determine its orientation. The third and final panel includes a photograph of Rauschenberg on roller-skates with a parachute-like apparatus radiating from his back in *Pelican* (1963), a performance he choreographed to a score he created from found radio, music, and television sounds. Images of skylines from New York and Rauschenberg's hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, flank the photograph, which is overlaid with the outline of a cube.

While *Autobiography* and *A MOVIE* differ in visual content and medium, both works share structural and temporal similarities, telling a story while simultaneously remaining open to interpretation. Thus, the print (*Autobiography*) parallels the film (*A MOVIE*) in its presentation of a loose non-sequential narrative arranged to be hung either vertically or horizontally in a frame-by-frame format; and *A MOVIE* parallels *Autobiography* in being a work of filmic art that emerged from the combined discoveries of Rauschenberg and other artists working in painting and photography. These artists laid the groundwork for avant-garde film by Conner and others like Stan Brakhage and Carolee Schneemann.

Both Conner and Rauschenberg also incorporated historical events in their imagery, commenting obliquely on the political conditions of their time. In his quasi-documentary film *REPORT* (1963–67; fig. 15), Conner meditated on President John F. Kennedy's assassination in an effort to come to intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic terms with the President's death on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.<sup>11</sup> Appropriating segments of newsreels showing the Dallas parade route before, during, and after the assassination, Conner repeated selected frames, methodically dissecting the few minutes of the murder.<sup>12</sup> *REPORT* begins with footage of the President and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy waving from the back of the presidential limousine as they drive through the streets of Dallas on the day of his death. The car's sleek black hood, flanked by miniature American flags precedes Jacqueline Kennedy's smile and the President's casual wave, only to disappear in seconds as their car continues on, leaving the cameraman behind. Conner paired this footage with an audio track of a panicked radio announcer who eventually confirms, "There has been a shooting."

Repeating the shot of the motorcade, Conner's fast editing imbues the President's limousine with a staccato-like motion that replicates the emotional experience of the tragic event as it recurs in memory. Flashing film leader then appears as the narrator becomes increasingly anxious. Combining historical fact and feelings, *REPORT* includes two of Conner's signature cinematic devices: alternating black and clear leader, flashing at an increasingly fast speed; and using academy leader countdowns to punctuate the passing time.<sup>13</sup> The second half of *REPORT* contains

metaphorically charged stock footage of a fallen matador being carried off by spectators, a man climbing a telephone pole to mount an American flag on top, and a drop of milk splashing upwards in slow motion. *REPORT* culminates in the image of a young woman pressing a button marked "sell," while the last words of the audio describe Kennedy "heading downtown to the Trade Mart," a moment that some critics argue represents the commercialization of Kennedy's persona and death.

Bruce Jenkins argues, "The epilogue is filled with brilliant examples of Duchampian mismatches of image and sound, of logic and meaning, each of which serves to expose the workings of the normally over-determined system of mass communications and its role in shaping public opinion."<sup>14</sup> But rather than Duchamp, Conner's editing could be said to be more closely aligned with that of Rauschenberg; in particular, *REPORT* resonates strongly with Rauschenberg's painting *Retroactive I* (1963). *Retroactive I* includes a press photograph of John F. Kennedy speaking at a televised news conference. Rendered in blue with only Kennedy's tie painted in green, Rauschenberg juxtaposed the President with an astronaut parachuting in mid-air, a yellow image of a box of oranges, and a green image of a glass of what appears to be milk. A hazy grey cloud of paint, which some have imagined as a mushroom cloud, hovers above Kennedy's head, obscuring a black and white photograph of a construction worker in a hard hat. Kennedy's extended index finger points to a red enlargement of the 1962 photograph by Gjon Mili published in *Life* magazine and composed of successive frames of a single figure in movement.<sup>15</sup>

Conner's appropriation in *REPORT* corresponds to Rauschenberg's appropriation of the Mili and other photographs in *Retroactive I*. Both artists edit and contrast pre-existing visual content as a means to surreptitiously comment on contemporary events. Rauschenberg's description of his work as "retroactive" is related to this stylistic approach, as well as to the fact that he began the print before Kennedy's death, struggled with whether to finish the work after the President's assassination, and finally "retroactively" felt the need to reflect on historical events.<sup>16</sup> "I was bombarded with TV sets and magazines by the excess of the world," Rauschenberg explained. "I thought an honest work should incorporate all of these elements, which were and are a reality."<sup>17</sup>

With its grainy quality, disjointed combination of photographs and status as an "emblematic reading as the embodiment of a national tragedy,"<sup>18</sup> *Retroactive I* set a standard for the representation of political events that Conner would pursue in his film *CROSSROADS* (1976).<sup>19</sup> Made with declassified footage from "Operation Crossroads"—the 1946 American military test of two hydrogen bombs in the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands, a site of many U.S. tests in the 1940s and 1950s—*CROSSROADS* is Conner's longest and slowest cinematic work. With its



CAT. 33

Bruce Conner (1933–2008),  
BRUCE CONNER MIDNITE  
FRIDAY, MAR. 9 . . . , 1979.  
Xerox flyer, 13 ½ × 8 ½ inches  
(34.3 × 21.6 cm). Collection of  
the David M. Rubenstein Rare  
Book & Manuscript Library,  
Duke University, Durham, North  
Carolina. © Conner Family  
Trust, San Francisco, California  
/ Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York, New York

twenty-three shots of the same nuclear explosion shown from a variety of different angles, *CROSSROADS* reminds viewers of the dichotomy of the bomb's fascinating beauty and horrific violence. Addressing the threat of nuclear annihilation, Conner selected a closing shot in which nothing is visible but white mist and the vague silhouette of a ship. In 1979, Conner used a still from *CROSSROADS* for a flyer announcing a screening of his films at the Roxie Theater in San Francisco, collaging the powerful image of the mushroom cloud as his head over a photograph of himself in a military jacket and a tie with a symbol of an atom on it. Nonetheless, he refused to be held to any singular political message, remarking, “When I talk about [the films], I talk about the process [of] making them, or the way they affect other people.”<sup>20</sup>

CAT. 12

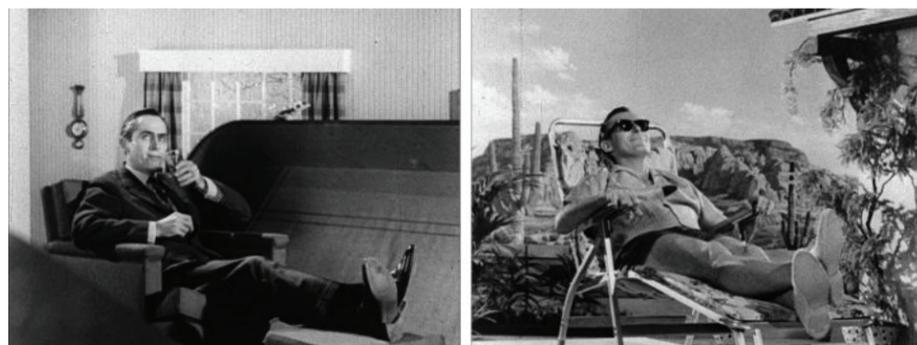
Bruce Conner (1933–2008),  
BREAKAWAY, 1966 (still).  
16 mm transferred to video  
(black and white, sound),  
5:00 minute loop. Courtesy  
of the Conner Family Trust,  
San Francisco, California and  
Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles,  
California. © Conner Family  
Trust / Artists Rights Society  
(ARS), New York, New York

Rauschenberg, too, addressed war in his 1971 *Poster for Peace*. The silkscreen includes a cacophony of images, from a wave, a dead bird, and a torn newspaper clipping to two horizontal black and white photographs of a curtain and two vertical photographs of a telephone, both reading like filmstrips. A black and white image of a hand with nails painted black holds a lit match, and a skull with cartoon light bulbs above it appears in the bottom-right corner of the poster. Below the skull,

the word “by” is positioned above violent red ink markings, as if the name of an author has been crossed-out. This trio of images suggests the death of ideas and authorship, and implies a loss of artistic creation in the wake of war and violence. But Rauschenberg also intended for his poster to provoke action by the viewer. To encourage this, he outlined two empty rectangles and wrote a message around the smaller box: “CUT THE WORD ‘PEACE’ FROM ANY FRONT PAGE HEADLINE AND GLUE IT INTO THIS SPACE / CUT IT OUT AND GIVE A PARTY. . . .” Above the larger box, he wrote: “GLUE INTO THIS SPACE — ANY ASSORTMENT OF INFORMATION FROM ANY SINGLE DAYS NEWSPAPER.”

Rauschenberg’s and Conner’s direct efforts to address assassination, nuclear war, and peace were rare in both artists’ oeuvres. Even more rare, for Conner, was to work with a live model as he did in his 1966 film *BREAKAWAY* (CAT. 12), his film of the twenty-three-year-old singer Antonia Christina Basilotta—better known as Toni Basil—dancing provocatively to her own pop hit “Breakaway” composed by Ed Cobb. Conner’s high contrast work shows the beautiful, sultry singer spinning and thrashing against a sea of black as she sings “I’ve got to get away, I’ve got to break away.” Basil first appears in a series of striking poses aimed to seduce the filmmaker, wearing a black lace bra and dark leggings with circular cutouts that reveal her bare legs. Through his precise editing, Conner increasingly fragments Basil’s seductive striptease until, at the climax of the song, she leaps nude with outstretched arms into the air in a protracted thirty-six-frames-per-second image, while her voice belts the last words of the line: “I’m gonna break away from all the chains that bind, and everyday I’ll wear what I want and do what suits me fine.” Conner’s abstract depiction of Basil rhythmically moving to the sound of her voice-over is hypnotic and highly erotic.<sup>21</sup> As Anthony Reveaux writes, “The camera captures her movements in gestural, expressive light smears. . . . Intercut rhythmically with strophes of black leader, she gyrates in graceful, stroboscopic accelerations.”<sup>22</sup> The apparition of Basil’s body, together with Conner’s controlled cutting and splicing techniques, reach an apogee in repetition and reiteration of structure, form, and meaning.<sup>23</sup>

Rauschenberg’s unique methods of transferring photographic imagery parallel the production of such abstract imagery in film. The experimental and innovative materials that he employed throughout his career heighten this level of abstraction, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, when he worked with reflective metals. This practice is particularly vivid in *Litercy (Phantom)* (1991; see CAT. 87).<sup>24</sup> Created by transferring silkscreen negatives onto mirrored aluminum using clear epoxy, *Litercy* pictures a man with his back to the camera, a tree in bloom, and an obscured sign that reads “wate[r].” These images share the surface with a negative version of Rauschenberg’s 1980 photograph *New Jersey*, which contains two found building signs: “Bob’s”



and “Hand.” Photographing the two together to read “Bob’s Hand,” Rauschenberg included the graphic sign of a pointed index finger in the frame. *Litercy* could be said to deploy visual strategies and mirroring that are akin to Conner’s reversal and repetition of sound and imagery halfway through *BREAKAWAY*.

Rauschenberg and Conner also shared an interest in the transformation of mundane elements, an inclination that both artists inherited from Surrealism, with its commitment to recovering the sur-reality invisible to, but a component of, all aspects of everyday life.<sup>25</sup> Surrealism is perhaps most apparent in Conner’s film *MONGOLOID* (1978; fig. 16), a film set to the sardonic, socially critical song of the same name by the new wave band DEVO. *MONGOLOID* represents Conner’s return to films timed to the beat of music, as his calculated use of found footage is suggestive of the narrative lyrics. The song contemptuously describes a man who leads a normal life as if he is a person with Down syndrome, or someone with “one chromosome too many.” DEVO repeatedly sings: “Mongoloid, he was a mongoloid, happier than you and me. And he wore a hat, and he had a job, and he brought home the bacon, so that no one knew.” Derisively and irreverently mocking social conformity as a cognitive disability, Conner captures DEVO’s lyrics in a series of images of an average businessman with a suitcase closing over his head as he fantasizes in his office about being transported to a lounge chair in a tropical locale.<sup>26</sup>

Editing his images to the beat of music, and relying on sound and rhythm as an organizing principle of his films, Conner anticipated music videos and MTV by thirty years.<sup>27</sup> The mass production of music videos earned Conner’s extreme animosity, and he was reported to have quipped: “I’m called the Father of MTV but I want a blood test; and if I am the father of MTV I should have used a thicker condom.”<sup>28</sup> Conner’s putative rejection of his paternity of MTV recalls how, when the Ford Foundation awarded him a \$10,000 grant for filmmaking in 1964, Conner—ever

the contrarian—made *LEADER* (1964), a movie using only film leader and intended by the artist “to ruin my reputation as a filmmaker.”<sup>29</sup>

Despite his best efforts to undermine his own success, Conner’s reputation as a filmmaker flourished, and he is rightfully considered one of the most influential filmmakers in the history of avant-garde cinema. Rauschenberg was similarly resistant to being typecast. Upon winning the International Grand Prize in painting at the Venice Biennale, he immediately telephoned his assistant, Tony Holder, and instructed him to destroy the remaining 150 silkscreens in his New York studio as a preventative measure against self-repetition. Clearly, Conner and Rauschenberg had much more in common than film and filmic time. In this sense, it is all the more intriguing that Rauschenberg was also engaged with musical culture, and was invited in 1977 by the new wave band Talking Heads to design the jacket for their album *Speaking in Tongues*. It was released in 1983, and Rauschenberg won a Grammy for his design. That Rauschenberg and Conner shared the context of new wave is confirmed by a meeting of the two artists in 1977, when Conner arrived at the opening of Rauschenberg’s retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and signed the back of the shirt that Rauschenberg was wearing.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1. Curtis Tamm, ed., “Bruce Conner—Intro / Three Screen Ray: Interview with Toni Basil, Gerald Casale, David James, Bruce Jenkins, Michael Kohn, and Michelle Silva,” MOCAtv (October 2013): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prf7dsuKD7k>.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. The Pace Wildenstein Gallery’s press release for an exhibition of Rauschenberg’s final series, *Runts* (2007), described the works as “channel surfing montages.” Jennifer Benz Joy, “Runts: Robert Rauschenberg’s New Series of Paintings from 2007 Opens this Week,” *Pace Wildenstein Gallery* (8 January 2008): [http://pace-production.s3.amazonaws.com/file\\_objects/old\\_pace\\_pdfs/11240/](http://pace-production.s3.amazonaws.com/file_objects/old_pace_pdfs/11240/).
5. Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 122.
6. Bruce Conner, Lecture at American Culture Center, Tokyo (2 October 1979). Hereafter, Bruce Conner, Lecture.
7. William Moritz and Beverly O’Neill, “Fallout—Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner,” Center for Visual Music: <http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/library/WMConnerFallout.htm>.

fig. 16

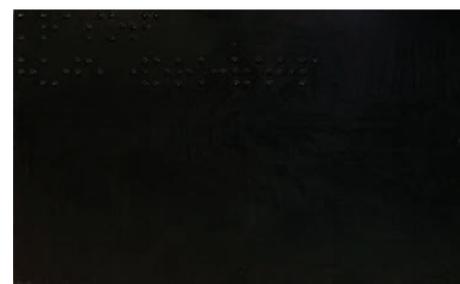
Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *MONGOLOID*, 1978 (stills). 16mm film (black and white, sound), 3:30 minute loop. © Conner Family Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York. Courtesy the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California and Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, California

8. Bruce Conner, Lecture. Jean Conner, the artist's wife, recalls that Conner repeated his name in large letters repeatedly throughout the film such that he would never have to put his name on another film. Many of his following films did not include his name, though in some cases it was added later. Jean Conner, letter to Kristine Stiles.
9. When he conceived of A MOVIE, Conner also intended it to be broadcast in a "large, assemblage environment"—lights, sound, and music would vary with each viewing, and the room would be filled with a variety of other textures and objects. The film would also be played on a loop, spliced from the end of the film to the beginning again in a rear project machine such that it would play continuously, uninterrupted. Bruce Conner, Lecture.
10. For more information on Rauschenberg's "flatbed" method, see my essay "Rauschenberg's Photography: Documenting and Abstracting the Authentic Experience" in this catalogue.
11. The film took five years to complete, and the film shown today is its eighth version. Bruce Jenkins, "Bruce Conner's Report: Contesting Camelot" in *Masterpieces of Modernist Cinema*, ed. Ted Perry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 240.
12. Steve Rose, "Abraham Zapruder: The Man Behind History's Most Infamous Home Movie," *The Guardian* (14 November 2013): <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/nov/14/abraham-zapruder-film-kennedy-killing-parkland>.
13. REPORT is Conner's first film with a quasi-documentary function. The film's audio track tells a narrative story that Conner abstracts through serial repetition of clips, including a long section of television coverage of the presidential tour through Dallas, paired with audio of a Dallas reporter describing the motorcade route, which suddenly transforms into chaos and terror.
14. Jenkins, "Bruce Conner's Report," 161.
15. Gjon Mili's 1950 photograph *Nude Descending a Staircase* parodied Marcel Duchamp's 1912 painting of the same name, and appeared in *Life* 53 (26 October 1962): 76.
16. Rauschenberg said of his *Retroactive* series: "I almost couldn't finish it. He [John F. Kennedy] died while I was on tour. I had already spent so many thousands of dollars having the silkscreens done. It wasn't the money so much as the attitude about celebrating a murder. If I stopped I was damned, and if I continued I was damned. In no way could it be untrue." Barbara Rose, *Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 74.
17. Rosalind Krauss, "Perpetual Inventory," in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 220.
18. "Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive I*," Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art: <http://www.thewadsworth.org/robert-rauschenberg-retroactive-i>.
19. Conner had earlier commented on and protested the death penalty in his sculpture CHILD (1959–60).
20. Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1988), 245.
21. Tyler Park has suggested that the film evokes the female nude in Man Ray's film *Return to Reason* (1923), in which a figure writhes rhythmically in front of a window as sunlight filtered through venetian blinds casts an abstract pattern of shadows onto her torso. Tyler Park, *Underground Film: A Critical History* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 165.
22. Anthony Reveaux, *Bruce Conner* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1981), 5.
23. Just as Man Ray may have inspired Conner, the influence of BREAKAWAY on Conner's peers has been immeasurable. The actor, director, and producer Dennis Hopper, a close friend of Conner's, held the lights during the filming of BREAKAWAY while Basil danced. Hopper cites Conner's editing in the film as a formative influence on the acid trip scene in Hopper's 1969 film *Easy Rider*, which also featured Basil. BREAKAWAY is also lauded as a significant precursor of music video. Curtis Tamm, ed., "Bruce Conner—Breakaway: Interviews with Toni Basil, Bruce Jenkins, and Dennis Hopper," MOCAtv (October 2013): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CHfEASLzG8&list=PLldkjkOBv9VRNKWw4cez1CchJzqOSAQH>.
24. The title of the work is Rauschenberg's misspelling of the word "literacy." As a dyslexic, Rauschenberg found spelling and reading difficult, but accepted his disability and permitted himself the freedom to show it in inventive ways, as in this title.
25. Kristine Stiles in her seminar on Robert Rauschenberg (Fall 2013–Spring 2014), Duke University.
26. Toni Basil introduced Conner to DEVO, urging him to attend their show at the Mabuhay Gardens in San Francisco in 1978, where Conner had already become culturally affiliated with the punk scene, frequently photographing the bands and audience members at shows. Conner approached DEVO only four weeks after their show with the idea of his film, MONGOLOID. "Bruce Conner—Mongoloid: Interviews with Toni Basil, Gerald Casale, David James, and Bruce Jenkins," MOCAtv (October 2013): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7bfwdzv9BA&list=PLldkjkOBv9VRNKWw4cez1CchJzqOSAQH>.
27. Conner also produced MEA CULPA and AMERICA IS WAITING in 1981, using sound by Brian Eno and David Byrne.
28. "Opening Night—Bruce Conner: In Memorium, Part 1," *Portland Documentary & Experimental Film Festival* (6 May 2009): <http://pdxfest.blogspot.com/2009/05/opening-night-bruce-conner-in-memorium.html>.
29. Ronald Bergan, "Obituary: Bruce Conner" *The Guardian* (9 October 2008): <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/oct/09/art1>. Conner's resistance to being identified with filmmaking resembled his earlier rejection of being categorized with the movement that the art historian Peter Selz christened "Junk" or "Funk," referring to California assemblage art.
30. Jean Conner, letter to Kristine Stiles, 26 May 2014.



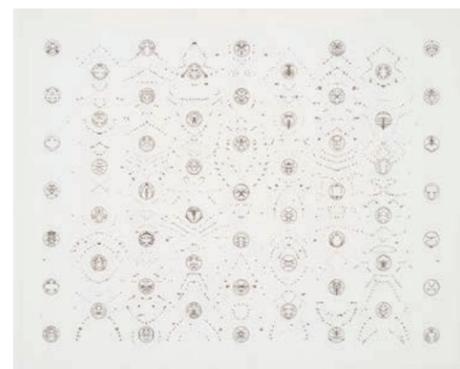
CAT. 1

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957), *Marble Chair*, 2008. Marble. 47 ¼ × 22 × 18 ¼ inches (120 × 56 × 46 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase with funds provided by the estate of Wallace Fowle, 2011.15.1



CAT. 2

Yuri Albert (b. 1959), *About Beauty* from the series *Alphabet for the Blind*, 1988–89. Paint on Masonite. 48 × 79 ¾ inches (121.9 × 202.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of 17 Contemporary Russian Artists, 1995.16.1



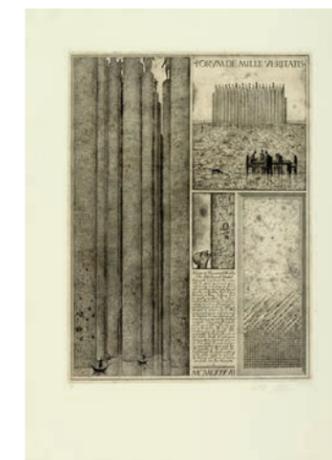
CAT. 3

ANONYMOUSE (Bruce Conner) (1933–2008), INKBLOT DRAWING, JULY 25, 1999, 1999. Pencil, pen, and ink on Strathmore Bristol paper. 23 ½ × 29 inches (58.7 × 73.7 cm). On loan from the Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemisegger families in honor of Peter Lange, L.2.2014.31



CAT. 4

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955), *Columbarium Architecture (Museum of Disappearing Buildings)* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1984 (printed 1990). Etching on paper, edition 18/30. 42 ¼ × 30 ¾ inches (107.3 × 78.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.3



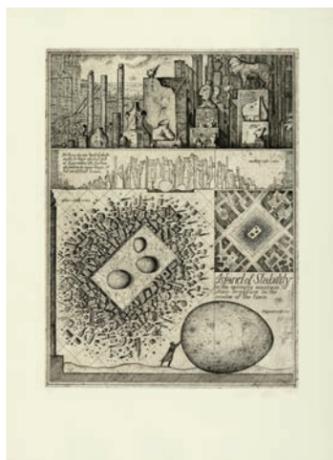
CAT. 5

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955), *Forum de Mille Veritatis* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1987 (printed 1990). Etching on paper, edition 18/30. 42 × 31 inches (106.7 × 78.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.14



CAT. 6

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955). *Columbarium Habitabile* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1989 (printed 1990). Etching on paper, edition 18/30. 42 ¼ × 30 ¾ inches (107.3 × 78.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.4



CAT. 7

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (b. 1955 and b. 1955), *Island of Stability* from the portfolio *Projects*, 1989–90. Etching on paper, edition 18/30. 42 ¼ × 30 ¾ inches (107 × 77.8 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.12.20



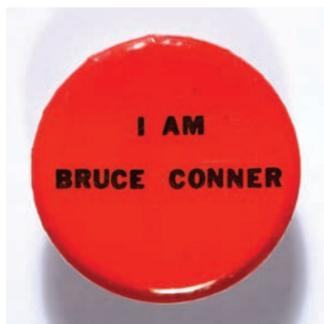
CAT. 8

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *WHEEL COLLAGE*, 1958. Assemblage on Masonite (terrycloth fabric, iron wheel, rhinestone studs, paint rag, torn paper, newspaper classifieds). 21 7/8 × 24 × 3 3/4 inches (55.6 × 61 × 9.5 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Anonymous gift, 2012.7.1



CAT. 9

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), "I AM NOT BRUCE CONNER" BUTTON, 1964 (issued 1967). Offset lithograph on metal pin button. 1 ½ inches diameter (3.8 cm). Collection of the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California



CAT. 10

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), "I AM BRUCE CONNER" BUTTON, 1964 (issued 1983). Offset lithograph on metal pin button. 1 ¼ inches diameter (3.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.26



CAT. 11

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *UNTITLED D-1 (INK DRAWING MADE TO BE HUNG IN THE SUN TO DISAPPEAR OVER TIME)*, 1965–71. Black felt-tip pen on paper. 29 3/8 × 23 3/8 × 3/4 inches (74.6 × 60.6 × 1.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.22



CAT. 12

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *BREAKAWAY*, 1966. 16 mm transferred to video (black and white, sound) 5:00 minute loop. Courtesy of the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco, California and Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, California



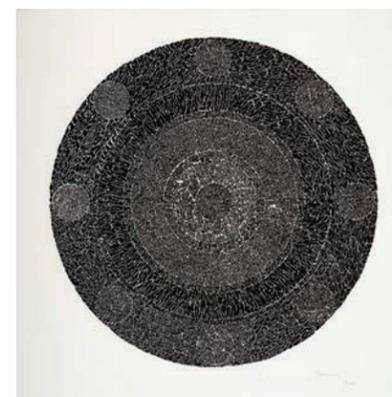
CAT. 13

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *Film canister for REPORT*, 1967. Metal, patina, paper and plastic labels. 1 × 9 ½ × 9 ½ inches (2.5 × 24.3 × 24.3 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.15.2013.1. Courtesy of Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, California



CAT. 14

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), #100 *MANDALA*, 1970. Offset lithograph on paper, edition 10/50. 29 ½ × 29 ¼ inches (74.9 × 74.3 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Anonymous gift in honor of Blake Byrne (T'57), 2012.7.2



CAT. 15

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), #115, ca. 1970–74. Offset lithograph on paper, edition 8/85. 12 ¼ × 12 ¾ inches (31 × 32.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.8



CAT. 16

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), #117, 1970–71. Offset lithograph on paper, edition 6/90. 11 × 13 inches (27.9 × 33 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.13



CAT. 17

Bruce Conner and Michael McClure (1933–2008 and b. 1932), CARDS, 1970–71. Lithograph in colors on paper, fabric-covered box; edition 19/50. Box closed: 3/8 × 4 3/8 × 4 1/8 inches (1.6 × 11.1 × 10.5 cm), 3 1/2 × 3 1/2 inches each card (8.7 × 8.7 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.4



CAT. 18

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), #125, 1971. Offset lithograph on paper, artist's proof. 14 1/4 × 14 1/4 inches (36.2 × 36.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.14



CAT. 19

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), "1972 BC" BUMPER STICKER, 1972. Print in colors on paper, adhesive backing. 3 3/8 × 12 inches (9.2 × 30.3 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.35



CAT. 20

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), BRUCE CONNER for SUPERVISOR, 1967. Poster. 11 1/2 × 7 1/2 inches (29.2 × 19.1 cm). Collection of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina



CAT. 21

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), THE DENNIS HOPPER ONE MAN SHOW, VOLUME II, NO. 7, 1972. Etching on paper, artist's proof. 20 1/4 × 17 3/8 × 1/2 inches (51.6 × 44.8 × 1.1 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.5



CAT. 22

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), PRINTS, 1974. Steel lockbox, paper envelopes with typewritten text, metal keys, plastic bags, clear plastic folders with typewritten text, plastic binding clips, paper folders, fingerprint form, ink fingerprints; edition 19/20. Box closed: 2 3/8 × 16 × 10 1/2 inches (6 × 40.6 × 26.7 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor in honor of Kimerly Rorschach, 2013.14.1



CAT. 23

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), Lower center element from SAN FRANCISCO DANCERS' WORKSHOP POSTER, 1974. Offset lithograph on paper. 8 1/2 inches diameter (21.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.9



CAT. 24

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), BILLY: UXA from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.5



CAT. 25

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), DE DETROIT: UXA from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.4



CAT. 26

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), FRANKIE FIX: CRIME from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 11 × 8 1/2 inches (27.9 × 21.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.1



CAT. 26

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), JOHNNY STRIKE AND FRANKIE FIX: CRIME from MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.2



CAT. 28

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *THE MUTANTS* (left to right) SUE, BRENDAN, FREDDY AND SALLY from *MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS*, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 11 × 8 ½ inches (27.9 × 21.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.7



CAT. 29

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *ROZ LEAVES THE CHAIRS IN DISARRAY: NEGATIVE TREND* from *MABUHAY GARDENS PHOTOS*, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.8



CAT. 30

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *ROZ MAKES A GIANT STEP FOR MANKIND: NEGATIVE TREND* from *MABUHAY GARDENS PHOTOS*, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 11 × 8 ½ inches (27.9 × 21.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.3



CAT. 31

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *ROZ OF NEGATIVE TREND: SUSPENDED ANIMATION* from *MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS*, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 20 ¼ × 16 ¼ × ¾ inches (51.4 × 41.3 × 2.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.23



CAT. 32

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *WOMEN'S ROOM AT THE MABUHAY* from *MABUHAY GARDENS PUNK PHOTOS*, 1978. Gelatin silver print. 11 × 14 inches (27.9 × 35.6 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.43.6



CAT. 33

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *BRUCE CONNER MIDNITE FRIDAY, MAR. 9 . . .*, 1979. Xerox flyer. 13 ½ × 8 ½ inches (34.3 × 21.6 cm). Collection of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina



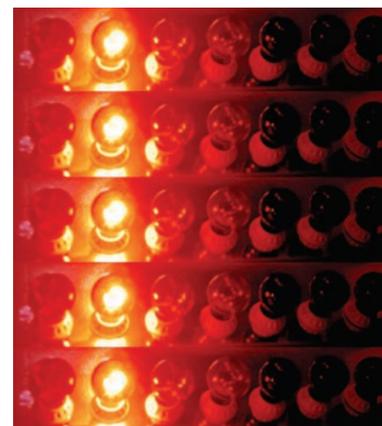
CAT. 34

Bruce Conner (1933–2008), *DEUS EX MACHINA* from the *CHRIST SERIES*, 1987. Print with hand coloring on paper, mounted on board. 6 ¾ × 6 inches (17.5 × 15.2 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.40



CAT. 35

Paul Graham (b. 1956), *Man walking with blue bags, Augusta* from the series *American Night*, 2002. Lightjet Endura chromogenic print, edition 3/3. 74 ¾ × 93 ¾ inches (189.5 × 238.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Floyd H. Bradley III and Martha Hummer Bradley in honor of Floyd H. Bradley, Jr. (T'45) and Carol Lake Bradley (WC'43), 2010.11.1



CAT. 36

Lyle Ashton Harris (b. 1965), *Untitled (Oak Bluffs)* from the series *The Watering Hole*, 1996. Duraflex photograph, edition 2/6. 48 × 44 inches (121.9 × 111.8 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of Blake Byrne (T'57), L.4.2007.10



CAT. 37

Mimi Jacobs (1911–1999), *Untitled (Photo of Bruce Conner)*, 1975. Gelatin silver print. 12 × 10 inches (30.5 × 25.4 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.39



CAT. 38

Vera Khlebnikova (b. 1954), *Wallpaper* from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996. Screenprint on wallpaper. 36 ¾ × 25 ½ inches (92.4 × 64.8 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Gibby and Buz Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.4



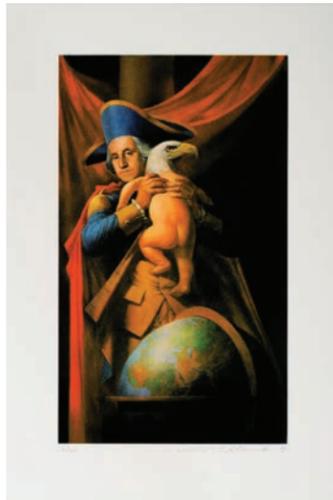
CAT. 39

Georgy Kiesevalter (b. 1955), *Ars Brevis*, 1988. Paint, wood, and neon. 41 ¼ × 67 ½ inches (104.8 × 171.5 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of 17 Contemporary Russian artists, 1995.16.8



CAT. 40

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid (b. 1943 and b. 1945), *Stalin with Hitler's Remains* from the series *Anarchistic Synthesis*, 1985–86. Oil on canvas. 84 ¼ × 60 ¼ inches (214 × 153 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1992.8.1



CAT. 41

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid (b. 1943 and b. 1945), *The Wings Will Grow* from the series *American Dreams*, 1999. Screenprint on paper, edition 10/46. 41 ½ × 27 ½ inches (105.4 × 69.9 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of J. Gibson Waitzkin, 1999.5.1



CAT. 42

Leonid Lerman (b. 1953), *Evening at Volga*, 1992. Oil on offset print. 33 ¾ × 22 ¼ inches (85.7 × 56.5 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.14.2



CAT. 32

Leonid Lerman (b. 1953), *Study for Other Horizons*, 1992. Oil on offset print. 37 × 37 inches (94 × 94 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.14.3



CAT. 33

Leonid Lerman (b. 1953), *Improvisation in Red and Blue*, 1993. Oil on offset print. 32 ¾ × 40 inches (83.2 × 101.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 1995.14.1



CAT. 45

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960), *Warm Broad Glow*, 2005. Neon and paint, edition 1/7. 4 × 48 inches (10.2 × 121.9 cm.) Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of Blake Byrne (T'57), L.4.2007.22



CAT. 46

Igor Makarevich (b. 1943), *Wallpaper* from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996. Screenprint on wallpaper. 36 ¼ × 25 ¼ inches (91.8 × 64.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Gibby and Buz Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.3



CAT. 47

Pavlo Makov (b. 1958), *Fountain of Exhaustion* from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996. Screenprint on wallpaper. 36 ¼ × 25 ½ inches (92.1 × 64.8 cm) Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Gibby and Buz Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.5



CAT. 48

Shimon Okshteyn (b. 1951), *There are many forms but few classics*, 1988. Neon and screenprint on stainless steel. 80 ¼ × 124 ¼ inches (203.5 × 315 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Robert E. Falcone, 1998.21.10



CAT. 49

Shimon Okshteyn (b. 1951), *Armchair*, 1995 Mixed media 92 × 73 ¾ × 42 inches overall (233.7 × 187 × 106.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Michael K. Chin, 1997.18.1



CAT. 50

Boris Orlov (b. 1941), *The General*, 1989. Painted bronze. 16 × 20 × 6 inches (40.6 × 50.8 × 15.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Drs. Irene and Alex Valger, 2000.24.4



CAT. 51

Boris Orlov (b. 1941), *Russian General*, 1990. Painted bronze. 17 × 24 × 6 inches (43.2 × 61 × 15.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Anatole and Maya Brekkerman, 1999.14.2



CAT. 52

Nikolai Panitkov (b. 1952), *Stuff Up the Hole, Stuff Up the Crack*, 1987. Paint, wood, fabric, and cork. 33 × 33 × 5 inches (83.8 × 83.8 × 12.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of 17 contemporary artists, 1995.16.18



CAT. 53

Lia Perjovschi (b. 1961), *Our Withheld Silences*, 1989. Strips of paper, textile, printed text, and mixed media. 27 inches diameter (68.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Anonymous gift, 2007.12.3



CAT. 54

Michelangelo Pistoletto (b. 1933), *Clothes (Panni)* from the *Drape Suite*, 1981. Screenprint in colors on polished mirror stainless steel, edition 17/60. 47 ¼ × 39 ½ inches (120 × 100.3 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Mrs. Stanley Levy, 1986.7.1



CAT. 55

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Quiet House—Black Mountain*, 1949. Gelatin silver print. 15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



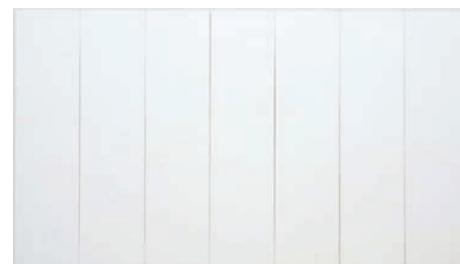
CAT. 56

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled* [matte black triptych], ca. 1951. Oil on canvas. 72 × 108 inches (182.9 × 274.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 57

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Night Blooming)*, ca. 1951. Oil, asphaltum, and gravel on canvas. 82 ½ × 38 ¾ inches (209.6 × 97.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 58

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *White Painting* [seven panel], 1951. Oil on canvas. 72 × 125 inches (182.9 × 317.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 59

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Cy + Relics, Rome*, 1952. Gelatin silver print. 15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 60

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Cy + Roman Steps (I, II, III, IV, V)*, 1952. Suite of five gelatin silver prints. 15 × 15 inches each (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



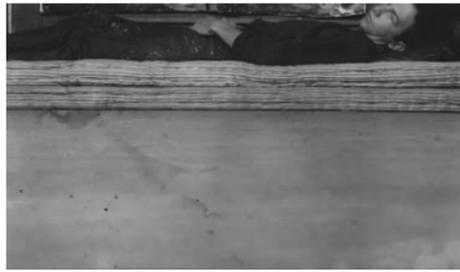
CAT. 61

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Portfolio II (I–VI)*, 1952 (printed 1998). Six gelatin silver contact prints mounted on paperboard. 5 ½ × 3 ¼ inches each (14.3 × 8.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 62

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Rome Flea Market (III)*, 1952. Gelatin silver print. 15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 63

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (II)*, 1952. Gelatin silver print. 3 ¼ × 5 ½ inches (8.3 × 14.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



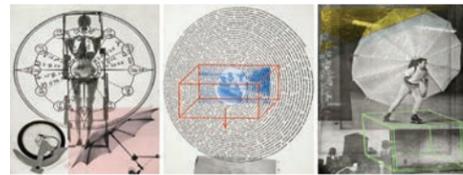
CAT. 64

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Elemental Sculpture)*, ca. 1953. Bricks, mortar, steel spike, metal rod, and concrete. 14 ¼ × 8 × 7 ¾ inches (36.2 × 20.3 × 19.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 65

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Self-Portrait [for The New Yorker profile]*, 1964. Ink and graphite on paper. 11 ⅞ × 8 ⅞ inches (30.2 × 22.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 66

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Autobiography*, 1968. Offset lithograph on paper. 66 ⅞ × 145 ½ inches overall (168 × 369.5 cm), 66 ⅞ × 48 ¾ inches each (168 × 123.8 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Marian B. Javits, 1991.15.1



CAT. 67

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Audition (Carnal Clock)*, 1969. Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on Plexiglas in metal frame with concealed electric lights and clock movement. 67 × 60 × 18 inches (170.2 × 152.4 × 45.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 68

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Study for Currents #9*, 1970. Cut-and-torn newspaper, solvent transfer, and gouache on illustration board. 30 × 30 inches (76.2 × 76.2 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 69

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Study for Currents #13*, 1970. Cut-and-torn newspaper, solvent transfer, and gouache on illustration board. 30 × 30 inches (76.2 × 76.2 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 70

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Study for Currents #15*, 1970. Cut-and-torn newspaper, solvent transfer, and gouache on illustration board. 30 × 30 inches (76.2 × 76.2 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 71

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Study for Currents #24*, 1970. Cut-and-torn newspaper, solvent transfer, and gouache on illustration board. 30 × 30 inches (76.2 × 76.2 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 72

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Olympic / Lady Borden (Cardboard)*, 1971. Cardboard. 78 × 47 × 12 inches (198.1 × 119.4 × 30.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 73

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *San Pantalone (Venetian)*, 1973. Barnacle-encrusted tar paper, wood, metal, rope, and coconut. 70 × 92 × 8 inches (177.8 × 233.7 × 20.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 74  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Venetian)*, 1973. Rope, string, and stone. Extended: 178 inches (452.1 cm), dimensions variable. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 75  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Page 2 (Pages)*, 1974. Molded handmade paper. 22 inches diameter (55.9 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 76  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Mirage (Jammer)*, 1975. Sewn fabric. 80 × 69 inches (203.2 × 175.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 77  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Audition (Carnal Clock)*, 1969. Mirrored Plexiglas and silkscreen ink on Plexiglas in metal frame with concealed electric lights and clock movement. 67 × 60 × 18 inches (170.2 × 152.4 × 45.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 78  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *The Ancient Incident (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1981. Wood-and-metal stands and wood chairs. 86 ½ × 92 × 20 inches (219.7 × 233.7 × 50.8 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 79  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *The Proof of Darkness (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1981. Fire hose, lead plate, and blue airport runway light. Dimensions variable. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 80  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *All Abordello Doze 2 (Japanese Recreational Claywork)*, 1982. Transfer on high-fired Japanese art ceramic. 53 ½ × 52 ½ inches (134.9 × 133.4 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 81  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Pneumonia Lisa (Japanese Recreational Claywork)*, 1982. Transfer on high-fired Japanese art ceramic. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



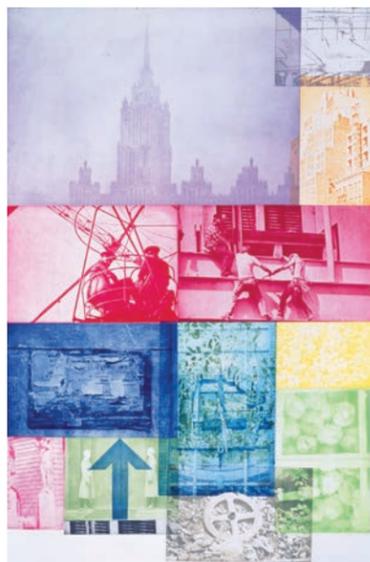
CAT. 82  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) *Solar Elephant (Kabal American Zephyr)*, 1982. Solvent transfer, fabric collage, acrylic, wood door, wood mallet, metal spring, and string on wood support. 104 × 83 × 15 ¾ inches (264.2 × 210.8 × 40 cm) Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 83  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled*, 1984. Screenprint with fabric and photo collage on hand-cut paper, edition 9/75. 31 ¾ × 26 ¾ inches (81 × 67 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Blake Byrne (T'57), Susan and David Gersh, Bea Gersh, and Carol and David Appel; 2006.9.1



CAT. 84  
Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Summer Glut Breeze*, 1987. Assembled metal. 71 × 70 ½ × 15 inches (180.3 × 179.1 × 38.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 85

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Soviet/American Array VII*, 1988–91. Photogravure on paper, artist's proof. 78 ½ × 51 ½ inches (199.4 × 129.9 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 86

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Wild Strawberry Eclipse (Urban Bourbon)*, 1988. Acrylic and enamel on galvanized metal and mirrored aluminum. 84 ¾ × 193 × 2 inches (215.3 × 490.2 × 5.1 cm) Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



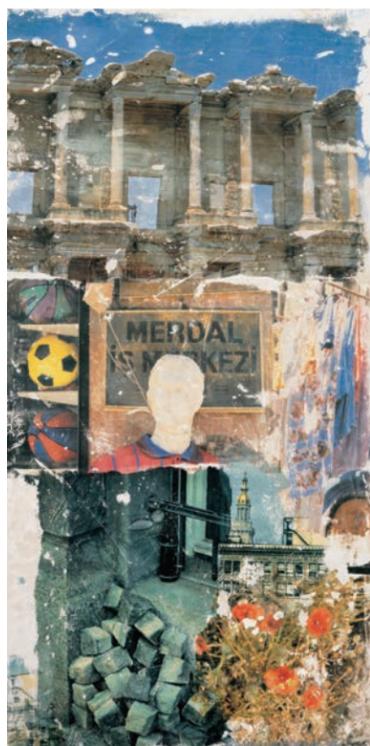
CAT. 87

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Self-Portrait [for The New Yorker profile]*, 1964. Ink and graphite on paper. 11 ¾ × 8 ¾ inches (30.2 × 22.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 88

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Untitled (Faux-Tapis)*, 1995. Collaged fabric on two bonded aluminum panels. 128 ½ × 121 × 2 inches overall (326.4 × 307.3 × 5.1 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 89

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Contest (Arcadian Retreat)*, 1996. Fresco in artist's frame. 74 ½ × 38 ½ inches (189.2 × 97.8 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



CAT. 90

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), *Meditative March (Runt)*, 2007. Inkjet pigment transfer on poly laminate. 61 × 73 ½ inches (154.9 × 186.7 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation



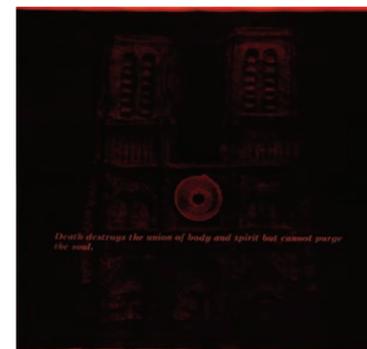
CAT. 91

David Salle (b. 1952), *The Monotonous Language*, 1981. Oil on canvas. 72 × 96 inches (182.9 × 243.8 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. 50th Reunion Gift of Tom (T'66) and Charlotte Newby, 2013.20.1



CAT. 92

Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko (b. 1962 and b. 1962), *Untitled* from the series *Controlling the Inorganic Control*, 1991. Photo emulsion on linen. 48 × 40 inches (121.9 × 101.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Robert E. Falcone, 1998.21.5



CAT. 93

Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko (b. 1962 and b. 1962), *Untitled* from the series *Controlling the Inorganic Control*, 1992–93. Photo emulsion on linen. 40 × 38 inches (101.6 × 96.5 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Robert E. Falcone, 1998.21.4



CAT. 94

Elizabeth Sher, *Untitled (Bruce Conner taking pictures at a Johnny Rotten press conference, San Francisco)*, 1980. Gelatin silver print. 10 × 8 inches (25.4 × 20.3 cm). Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Promised gift of anonymous donor, L.13.2012.38



CAT. 95

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971), *Lovely Six Foota*, 2007. Chromogenic print, edition 5/5. 56 ¼ × 67 ¾ inches (143 × 171.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Christen and Derek Wilson (T'86, B'90, P'15), 2010.12.1



CAT. 96

Leonid Tishkov (b. 1953), *Wallpaper* from *The Wallpaper Project*, 1996. Screenprint on wallpaper. 36 ¼ × 25 ¼ inches (64.1 × 92.1 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Gibby and Buz Waitzkin, 2001.34.13.2



CAT. 29

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013), *Chistoprudny Boulevard*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, edition 9/40. 29 ¾ × 21 ½ inches (75.2 × 53.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.4



CAT. 98

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013), *Image #7* from the series *House with an Attic*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, artist's proof. 29 ¾ × 21 ¼ inches (75.9 × 54 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.1



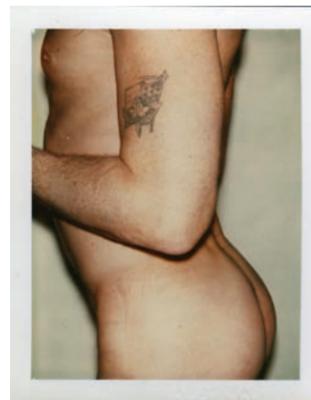
CAT. 99

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013), *Image #21* from the series *House with an Attic*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, edition 9/40. 29 ¾ × 21 ½ inches (75.2 × 53.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.3



CAT. 100

Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013) *Image #24* from the series *House with an Attic*, 1992. Lithograph on paper, artist's proof. 29 ¾ × 21 ½ inches (75.6 × 53.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, 1995.19.2



CAT. 101

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Nude Model (Male)*, 1977. Polacolor Type 108 print. 4 ¼ × 3 ¼ inches (10.6 × 8.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.104



CAT. 102

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Nude Model (Male)*, 1977. Polacolor Type 108 print. 4 ¼ × 3 ¼ inches (10.6 × 8.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.102



CAT. 103

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Nude Model (Male)*, 1977. Polacolor Type 108 print. 4 ¼ × 3 ¼ inches (10.6 × 8.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.101



CAT. 104

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Nude Model (Male)*, 1977. Polacolor Type 108 print. 4 ¼ × 3 ¼ inches (10.6 × 8.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.105



CAT. 105

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Steve Rubell*, 1982. Gelatin silver print. 10 × 7 ¾ inches (25.4 × 20 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.124



CAT. 106

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Steve Rubell*, 1982. Gelatin silver print. 10 × 7 ¾ inches (25.4 × 20 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.125



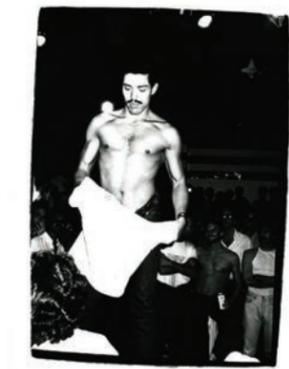
CAT. 107

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), *Steve Rubell*, 1982. Gelatin silver print. 7 ¾ × 10 inches (20 × 25.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.126



CAT. 108

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), Jon Gould, n.d. Gelatin silver print. 9 7/8 × 8 inches (25.1 × 20.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.113



CAT. 109

Andy Warhol (1928–1987), Unidentified Man, n.d. Gelatin silver print. 9 7/8 × 8 inches (25.1 × 20.2 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.9.120

## Shuffle: A Rauschenberg Artwork Lending Library <sup>A</sup>

### HISTORY

In 2014, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation piloted the Shuffle program, an artwork lending library, to encourage academic exhibitions of Rauschenberg's artworks. The program made available selections from the Foundation art collection for exhibition in art institutions throughout the United States. Joining philanthropic initiative with the goal of nurturing the artist's legacy, Shuffle loans were underwritten by the Foundation. Projects ranged from a focused presentation of a single artwork to exhibitions of numerous works. Committed to audience development and new scholarship, the program sought to connect with university and regional museums, and encouraged dialogue with partnering institutions' collections.

The program drew its name from Rauschenberg's Synapsis Shuffle (1999), a painting comprised of fifty-two parts, as in a deck of cards. The work is realized when collaborators choose and assemble at least three and no more than seven panels, generating myriad variations. Every participant who arranges and re-arranges the parts is credited as a composer of the work. Past players include musician David Byrne, artist Chuck Close, choreographer Merce Cunningham, curator Walter Hopps, and gallerist Ileana Sonnabend.

In the spirit of its namesake, the program invited collaboration with partnering institutions to start conversations, continue arguments, and foster new perspectives. The proposition: take Rauschenberg's works as inspiration, counterpoint, or at their most basic, as objects of contemplation and deep looking. Shuffle was both a tribute to the artist's life and oeuvre as well as a venture to cultivate his public. Its spirit continues today through the Foundation's expanded collaborations and programming.

The program, under this name, was closed in 2015; however, it sparked a variety of continuing collaborations that are still active today.

## CREDITS

The exhibition *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* is organized by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation and curated by Kristine Stiles, France Family Professor of Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University with the curatorial assistance of Duke undergraduates Lauren Acampora, Katherine Hardiman, Emma Hart, Jacqueline Samy, and Taylor Zakarin.

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## EXHIBITION SUPPORT

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## WEBSITE

Designed and developed by Son&Sons

The website is made possible by Shuffle: A Rauschenberg Artwork Lending Library, a program of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.

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