

James Rosenquist

Illustrious Works on Paper, Illuminating Paintings

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CURATED BY Sarah C. Bancroft

WITH AN ESSAY BY Sarah C. Bancroft

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

James Rosenquist: Illustrious Works on Paper, Illuminating Paintings

Curated by Sarah C. Bancroft

Oklahoma State University Museum of Art, Stillwater
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Director's Acknowledgments

The New York Project, which begins this fall, is a series of three ambitious, annual exhibitions at Oklahoma State University Museum of Art Postal Plaza Gallery. Focused on influential artists who have worked in New York during the past half century, this project serves as a pivotal learning opportunity for students from Oklahoma State University (OSU) and the broader region—the chance to gain insight into a major artist's working process and view in person a cross section of his or her work. The New York Project offers an experience often limited to major urban centers of art and seldom found in more rural locations such as Stillwater, Oklahoma. The first exhibition in the series, *James Rosenquist: Illustrious Works on Paper, Illuminating Paintings*, demonstrates the arc of American artist James Rosenquist's diverse career. Sarah C. Bancroft is curating the exhibition, bringing her wealth of experience with Rosenquist's work, including co-curating the artist's full-career retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in 2003.

Fortunately, we have the extraordinary opportunity to launch our first exhibition in the series as a special experience limited to Stillwater. James Rosenquist's accessibility and willingness to engage students in a dialogue about his life's work have been key to developing the exhibition. Many of the thirty-eight objects on loan for this exhibition and illustrated in the catalogue have been made possible through the generosity of Rosenquist and his wife Mimi Thompson.

We are thankful to OSU alumnus Bill Goldston (BFA 1966), a partner and the architect of the New York Project. He brings many years of professional and personal association with the artists in this series and is truly making this project happen for the university. We are grateful to Rand Suffolk, Director, and Lauren Ross, Nancy E. Meinig Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art, at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for promoting our project by exhibiting Rosenquist's work at the Philbrook during our exhibition. We look forward to partnering with many more institutions throughout the series.

Thank you to our creative design team, Ed Schlossberg and Lee Berresford, for their catalogue design. It has been a pleasure working with Sarah Bancroft as this exhibit has taken shape. I would also like to express special thanks to the OSU Museum of Art staff: Shawn Yuan, Carla Shelton, Jordan Hays, Canyon Prusso, Carrie Kim, Shawna Goodwin, Jo Lynne Stephens, Casey Pankey, and Shelby Needham.

This exhibition as well as the accompanying publication and programs are made possible by generous support from OSU Museum of Art Founding Patrons Ken and Mary Ann Fergeson, Malinda and Dick Fischer, Bill Goldston and Riccarda de Eccher, Burns and Ann Hargis, Pamela and Stephen Holton, Jeanene and Ron Hulsey, Betty and Bob Kerns, Jamie Maher, James Pickel, Mary and Sash Spencer, Marilyn and Carl Thoma, Julie and Russ Teubner, Thomas N. Berry & Co., Jim Vallion,

and Michael Wilson; OSU Museum of Art Charter Members and Friends of Art; the OSU/A&M Board of Regents; the OSU Foundation; and Acquavella Galleries.

Concurrently with the launch of the New York Project, we celebrate the first anniversary of our opening in the Postal Plaza Gallery. I would like to express my thanks to all those who have contributed to the establishment of the museum, the renovation of the building, and our programming. Our thanks must also go to OSU President Burns Hargis and First Cowgirl Ann Hargis, who are the authors of the incredible vision for the OSU Museum of Art and who have helped us make the arts at OSU more visible.

— **Victoria Rowe Berry**, Director

Curator's Acknowledgments

At artist James Rosenquist's eightieth birthday party in New York City in November 2013, the idea of an exhibition for the Oklahoma State University Museum of Art was first broached by Bill Goldston. A great supporter of Oklahoma State University (OSU) and its museum, as well as of the artist himself, Bill was curious to know whether I might consider taking on such a project. Now, a year later, the exhibition and this accompanying catalogue have indeed come to fruition through the combined efforts of many. Firstly, I wish to thank James Rosenquist and his family for enthusiastically supporting the project from its inception and serving as key lenders. This project has provided an unexpected and joyful opportunity to reunite with artwork I first installed a decade ago—and to acquaint myself with the new work and series Rosenquist has undertaken since I co-curated his full-career retrospective for the Guggenheim Museum in 2003.

I am likewise grateful to the lenders to the exhibition whose generosity has made this presentation possible. Acquavella Galleries, the Fearer/Randel Collection, Richard L. Feigen & Co., John Rosenquist, and Universal Limited Art Editions have graciously parted with works from their collections for the benefit of the exhibition. Michael Findlay and Maeve Connell; Frances F. L. Beatty and John M. McGill; and Bill Goldston, Hayley Nichols, and Jill Czarnowski have patiently arranged viewings and provided a full array of information, insight, and images

that have greatly enhanced the project and the catalogue. The support of James Rosenquist's staff cannot be understated, as they have supplied a wealth of information and assistance and my gratitude is immense. Michael Harrigan's expertise and involvement has been invaluable, as he has reviewed all information pertaining to the artwork with an eagle eye and keen insight. Beverly Coe, Kevin Hemstreet, and Daniel Campbell have made vital contributions to the organization and installation of the exhibition. Kevin and Daniel are overseeing the installation of two key works from Rosenquist's personal collection, for which the museum and I are especially thankful.

I join Director Victoria Rowe Berry in thanking the marvelous OSU Museum of Art staff who have worked to bring this exciting project to fruition. For your patience, fortitude, hard work, and resolve, I am deeply grateful. Likewise, I must recognize University President Burns Hargis and his wife, First Cowgirl Ann Hargis, for their commitment to the growing vision of the museum and their acknowledgement of the museum's importance to OSU's cultural heritage and legacy. Finally, I share Director Berry's enthusiasm for the stunning exhibition catalogue, which has been designed by Ed Schlossberg and Lee Berresford and is complemented by editor Laura Santiago's diligent and sensitive review of all text.

I am honored to curate *James Rosenquist: Illustrious Works on Paper, Illuminating Paintings* as the first exhibition in the New York Project, a

multiyear undertaking that will bring major American artists to the OSU environs. It is my hope that this exhibition is a meaningful contribution to the university's artistic mission as OSU Museum of Art builds a vibrant destination museum that serves the Stillwater, Oklahoma, community and the greater region. To that end, thank you again for the opportunity to bring to your audiences the stellar work of the prolific and inimitable James Rosenquist.

— ***Sarah C. Bancroft***, *Curator*

James Rosenquist: Six Decades of Artmaking

When I was painting billboards, I didn't think the imagery meant anything, like throwaway images because of my experience painting the[m] over and over again. I thought I could use this imagery to create new, abstract compositions. . . . I thought I was injecting nothing images into abstract expressionist paintings, but it wasn't nothing. It was a big something.¹

— James Rosenquist

In the late 1950s, James Rosenquist was painting large-scale billboards and signs as a commercial artist in New York City. Born in North Dakota in 1933, his childhood interest in artmaking led him to enroll in art classes at the University of Minnesota (where he studied with Cameron Booth) and eventually at the Art Students League in New York City. “I saved \$300, sent my drawings to the Art Students League in New York and won an out-of-town scholarship for one year.”² Rosenquist was twenty-one years old when he moved to New York City. When his academic scholarship to the Art Students League ran out after the 1955–56 academic year, Rosenquist worked as a chauffeur, bartender, and child minder for the Stearns family at their estate in Irvington, New York.³ Wanting to strike out on his own, he moved back to the city in 1957 and joined the Sign-Pictorial and Display Union, Local 230 of the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades, and started painting signs across Brooklyn and Manhattan.⁴ As with his contemporaries Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Tom Wesselmann, and others—soon to become known as Pop artists—

this background in commercial art would deeply influence Rosenquist’s nascent fine-art career and radically change the face of the art world and the annals of art history in the next decade.

Rosenquist’s first union job in New York City was to paint a Hebrew National sign on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. Standing “on the boards” painting signs high above the city streets was laborious work. Rosenquist often painted the same advertisement time and again on billboards across the city. When seen from the street, the image of a product or an actor’s face—Marlon Brando in the movie *The Fugitive Kind*, a bottle of Schenley whiskey, an Oscar Mayer sausage, or an Arrow dress shirt, for instance—popped into resolution. From Rosenquist’s perspective, however, the brushstrokes that would materialize into a face or an object twenty feet tall were an abstract proposition. He was scaling up the large-scale advertising imagery from small, handheld photographs or movie stills, images pulled from magazines, sketches, and other sources that were provided for each job. He often drew a grid over these images and scaled up the imagery for the billboard using what he still calls



fig. 1 Rosenquist “on the boards” in Times Square, New York, ca. 1959. © Bettmann/CORBIS

“The Brooklyn Bridge” technique. (A small section of photograph could be scaled up to correspond with a much larger section of the billboard.)⁵ This technique would prove useful in Rosenquist’s fine-art career in the years to come, especially when he began painting billboard-sized works in the 1980s.

Rosenquist had chanced to meet abstract painters including Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Milton Resnick while hanging out at the Cedar Tavern, a local bar in Greenwich Village frequented by artists and poets. He hadn’t yet connected his daytime work painting commercial advertisements with his personal fine art, and was producing abstract works on paper in the mid to late 1950s, including the expressive ink drawing *Untitled* (1956, cat. no. 19) and the colorful acrylic, watercolor, and ink drawing *Untitled* (1956, cat. no. 20). The latter is an abstracted exploration of a comic strip, a precursor to the realism that would appear in Rosenquist’s work by 1960. (Works on paper—whether preparatory drawings, collages, or limited-edition prints and multiples—have continued to be an important part of Rosenquist’s practice to the present day. Artworks in their own right, these compositions reveal the artist’s interest and working practice in all media.)

After painting billboards across Brooklyn and Manhattan, Rosenquist “graduated” to painting signs in Times Square (fig. 1). The Astor Victoria sign was located in the heart of Times Square at Broadway and

Forty-Fifth Streets (it was a sign shared by the Astor and the Victoria theaters), and Rosenquist painted it on at least seven occasions. He recalls that the sign measured “395 feet long by 58 feet tall” and took up nearly an entire city block. Painting this sign was no small feat. “The texture of the wall in Times Square, it was what we called a ‘wall dog’ instead of a nice, clean surface. But I always painted a [sign that looked like it was painted on a] nice surface. When you repaint that sign [for the next advertisement or show], the previous paint is still there.”

Discussing his early painting *Astor Victoria* (1959, cat. no. 1), Rosenquist explains, “I was painting old lettering and signs and was fascinated by the texture underneath. It was about what was underneath what I was going to paint.” Using billboard enamel as well as oil paint, Rosenquist created distinct red lettering and tracings over layers of what appears to be scumbled paint—like the accretions of paint on a brick wall or billboard at close range. Whether intentional or not, this work references his commercial experience on the boards while expressing a bold new engagement with realistic subject matter from his daily life in his fine art. *Astor Victoria* is a notable bridge between the artist’s early, nonobjective explorations and the bold, Pop art compositions to come.

In 1960, Rosenquist quit his commercial art career after two colleagues died as a result of falling from a great height while painting signs. He rented artist Agnes Martin’s former studio space at 3-5 Coenties Slip

in Lower Manhattan, and began focusing on his fine-art practice. (His neighbors in the building included artists Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, and Jack Youngerman, and he shared his studio space for a time with Chuck Hinman.) There, Rosenquist painted *Coenties Slip Studio* (1961, cat. no. 3). Seemingly unrelated imagery coalesces on the shaped canvas to create a personal portrait of the artist’s working space. The painting is remarkable for the inclusion of everyday imagery of people and products at this time. “There was a big snow storm in 1961, which left four feet of snow on the streets, and so I painted this [work] with a reflection of the interior of the studio in a spoon, and a fried egg and a fork, because I was hungry, and then included a snow-covered car parked outside, and some hair. It was a portrait of the studio and my time there.”

Each individual image is painted at a different scale, a technique Rosenquist first developed in the early 1960s. “I thought if I painted things in different scales, it would make them hard to recognize, abstract, and the images would seep out slowly. I could make a more mysterious painting this way.” This technique came to define Rosenquist’s early Pop paintings, one of the first examples being the painting *Zone* (1960–61, fig. 2).⁶

Another painting from the early 1960s, *Reification* (1961, cat. no. 4), is a testament to Rosenquist’s engagement with philosophical questions of artmaking. The dictionary definition of reification is to make an



fig. 2 *Zone*, 1960–61
Oil on canvas
7 ft. 11 in. x 7 ft. 11½ in.
Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased
with the Edith H. Bell Fund, 1982

abstract idea real, to bring a concept to fruition or into concrete form. In essence, this is what artists, writers, and poets do each day. The first three letters of the title—R E I—are partially spelled out by strips of chromed steel and light bulbs socketed into rectangular fields of red and yellow painted on the small canvas. The work was electrified, and, originally, the light bulbs lit up. “When you change something, something simple like turning on a light bulb, it can change the whole look, so turning on the light bulb is the reification of an object.”⁷ As *Reification* has aged, some light bulbs have broken, others have burnt out—a process organic to the work—yet this composition still manifests the creative impulse, the light switch of an original idea and the act that charges and changes an artwork. What appears as a bold, bright, and graphic small-scale composition is a conceptually subtle and sophisticated convocation of ideas that plumbs the very role of the artist and the nature of the work that he materializes. Like an electric signboard above the streets of Times Square that is fully realized once it is turned on, Rosenquist has catapulted objects and imagery from his commercial art practice into the more lofty and intellectual concerns of a fine-art career.

The early 1960s would prove a crossroads in Rosenquist’s career. In 1962, he was given his first solo exhibition, at the Green Gallery in New York City (where all works promptly sold out), and he was included in the earliest exhibitions that grouped together artists working in a breakout

style called New Realism.⁸ (Eventually, this term would be replaced by *Pop art*, coined by art historian and curator Lawrence Alloway.) Although Rosenquist knew many artists working in Lower Manhattan, including Robert Indiana, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jack Youngerman, not everyone who became identified as a Pop artist knew each other, nor did they necessarily identify with the group. Key museum curators, gallerists, and some early collectors were making connections between the work of these artists, however, and soon began exhibiting and collecting their work as a group. Even the Museum of Modern Art acknowledged Pop art’s influence, hosting the Symposium on Pop Art in December of 1962. By 1964, Pop art had swept the art world. Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Tom Wesselmann, Andy Warhol, and Rosenquist were key artists within this new “movement.” Each artist had a distinct style, yet there were commonalities that defined Pop art in the early 1960s: the depiction of everyday, popular objects and the use of commercial techniques.

In 1964, at the suggestion of Jasper Johns, Rosenquist began working with Tatyana Grosman at her groundbreaking print workshop, Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE), on Long Island. Rosenquist made seven prints with ULAE over the next two years, including *Spaghetti and Grass* (1964–65, cat. no. 21), *Roll Down* (1965–66, cat. no. 22), and *Circles of Confusion I* (1965–66, cat. no. 23). With imagery culled from

popular culture, photographs, and advertising, the works question and address the material concerns of life in the twentieth century through mysterious compositions. These prints are closely related to Rosenquist’s early Pop art paintings. His working relationship with ULAE has continued for the past five decades, resulting in prints that reflect the various topics punctuating his paintings and drawings over time. Rosenquist has likewise created prints with other respected workshops in the United States including Richard Feigen Graphics, Tyler Graphics, Graphicstudio at University of South Florida, Petersburg Press, and Gemini G.E.L.

In the 1970s, Rosenquist’s commitment to printmaking was redoubled after a tragic car accident that severely injured Rosenquist’s young son and first wife, Mary Lou, and left him scrambling for resources. During this period, Rosenquist revisited various subjects first explored in landmark paintings from the 1960s. One of the largest is a portfolio of four contiguous prints related to his monumental history painting *F-111* (1964–65). The painting measures eighty-six feet long and was exhibited in the front room of the venerable Leo Castelli Gallery in 1965. With imagery from consumer society superimposed on the fuselage of the F-111 fighter-bomber plane (then in development by the U.S. military), the piece is a candy-colored critique of the military-industrial complex that fueled the thriving American economy at midcentury. Although the Day-Glo colors and saturated imagery are

visually appealing in the manner of advertising, for the artist the work was a critical antiwar statement. Rosenquist wanted the painting to invade the viewer's peripheral vision; installed along the four walls of the Castelli Gallery, it was indeed a panoramic experience. This interest in scale is likewise translated into the stunning portfolio of four *F-111* prints Rosenquist completed with Petersburg Press in 1974, *F-111 (south)*, *F-111 (west)*, *F-111 (north)*, and *F-111 (east)* (cat. nos. 25–28), which measure nearly twenty-five feet long when all four prints are installed cheek by jowl.

Off the Continental Divide (1973–74, cat. no. 29) is another groundbreaking print from the 1970s. It proved technically innovative and was the largest print ULAE had produced up to that point.⁹ For Rosenquist, a Midwesterner who had moved to New York City to study and to pursue a career as an artist, the subject matter of this work is “a metaphor for my past life and my future: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. . . . One way or another, you leave your home, you slip off the Continental Divide, which goes east or west.”¹⁰ The work is also a meditation on the horrible accident that devastated his family in 1971, as the artist put down the pages of his past and moved forward into an unknown future. *Off the Continental Divide* likewise references the move several artists of Rosenquist's generation and community had made from the Midwest to the art centers of New York City or Los Angeles, attesting

to that shared history, to the draw of the East and West Coasts with the possibility of a bright future or new start.

Rosenquist's work often reflects the political tenor of the times. In the 1970s, Rosenquist was arrested while protesting the Vietnam War. Spending a night in jail after his arrest, he noticed man-made markings etched into the jailhouse floor, the signs of a previous inhabitant marking time. His painting *Nails* (1973, cat. no. 5) reflects this experience. The straightforward graphic nature of the colored nails is satisfyingly simple, even straightforward, while the experiences that informed the composition are far more personal and esoteric:

Several things influenced me and came together when I produced Nails. I went to jail protesting the war in Vietnam in D.C. in 1972 and I was in a jail cell with two other people. I was trying to stay innocuous and be small, and was down by the floor, where there were little scratches, marking out time in jail. Then I remembered: in North Dakota as a kid, if you were lost in a blizzard and found a fence, a snow fence, then you could find your way back to the house or barn, so I called some of these nail paintings “Snow Fence” for finding the way home. I was thinking “What am I doing in jail, why am I lost in this blizzard, trying to find reality?”

By the mid-1970s, Rosenquist had moved his main studio space to Aripeka, Florida, located on the Gulf of Mexico about forty-five miles north of Tampa. (He continues to travel back and forth between the building he owns in New York City and his studio in Aripeka.) He built a stilt-house on the property, next to the water, with the open area beneath the ground floor serving as his first studio there. Rosenquist eventually constructed a massive studio space on the property, much like an airplane hangar, with skylights that allowed him to work in natural light during the daytime. In this ample space, he produced the largest paintings of his career, including a handful of paintings measuring seventeen feet high by forty-six feet long. Rosenquist eventually purchased more than ninety acres of land next to the gulf, with structures dotted across the property that included guest cottages and rental houses, a studio office, storage spaces, and more (fig. 3).

In the 1980s, the rich tapestry of the natural environment surrounding the studio began to emerge in Rosenquist's compositions. Flowers and plant life are spliced with images of women's faces from advertisements pulled out of magazines, as evidenced in the source collages for *The Kabuki Blushes* (1984, cat. no. 14) and *Welcome to the Water Planet II* and *Untitled* (1987, cat. no. 15), as well as in related paintings.¹¹ Other paintings, including *Sky Hole* (1989, cat. no. 6) and works from the *Welcome to the Water Planet* series, are meditations on ecology, the



fig. 3 Rosenquist standing outside his studio office in Aripeka, Florida, 2002, carrying a study for the sculpture *It Heals Up: For All Children's Hospital* (2002). © Gianfranco Gorgoni

environment, and the place of humankind in that equation. In *Sky Hole*, Rosenquist locates the artist in the space between the sky and Earth. “The artist is painting the sky above and the mud below and is stuck in the middle. What’s the middle ground, that’s the question. Trying to find out where you float, that’s always the question.” He credits the saw palmettos growing on his property with first inspiring the jagged splicing techniques in these works.

Lavish compositions of color and natural form, these artworks allowed Rosenquist to show two or more fields at once and to include ever more subject matter into a two-dimensional picture plane limited by height and length. *Sky Hole* features a macro and micro view of our environs, for instance—the immensity of the sky above, a close-up view of two fuchsia water lilies, and the cosmos below—and the artist cuts away wisps of this composition to reveal fleeting visions of women’s faces (a reflection of the two worlds he lives in: the natural idyll of Aripeka, and the cosmopolitan life of New York). Condensing distinct imagery into the bounds of a defined space, Rosenquist successfully explodes multiple fields and subjects of inquiry within the picture plane.

By the 1990s, depictions of outer space, technology, and the cosmos became more prominent in Rosenquist’s work. And by the early 2000s, he had begun a body of work focused on issues of perception in his *Speed of Light* series, including the painting *Coup d’oeil–Speed*

of Light (2001, cat. no. 8) and the print *The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light* (2001, cat. no. 37). *Coup d’oeil* means “corner of the eye” in French, and these abstract compositions are, for Rosenquist, meditations on the relativity of visual and mental perspective:

Drawing on the speed of light and Einstein’s theory of relativity—in which one spectator would see an event or fixed point differently from another spectator traveling at the speed of light—the paintings reflect upon the limited vision available to the viewer of the artwork (and indeed, the different reactions any two people would have to the same painting). . . . In the past, Rosenquist attempted to use representation to achieve abstract or mysterious narratives, but here he depicts concrete experience through abstraction. Cosmic in theme, the works tightrope between abstract yet literal splashes of paint and vortexes of illusionistic modeling, all depicted in a reverberating palette of yellows, blues, magentas, and greens.¹²

On April 25, 2009, a brush fire unexpectedly destroyed Rosenquist’s Florida home, studio, office, and much of his land. An immense amount of artwork, including his personal print archives and several paintings located in the studio building, were consumed by flames. In spite of this

devastating event, Rosenquist decided to rebuild from the ashes rather than calling it quits in Florida. He renovated a rental house on the property—located across a road from the sixty-two acres that had been burnt out—and moved the office as well as the living and studio spaces into these quarters. He started painting under the house and on the top floor. (Most homes located on the Gulf of Mexico are built on stilts to protect them from surging storms and floods.) The open-air studio under the house afforded Rosenquist the space to create a monumentally scaled work, *The Geometry of Fire* (2011, cat. no. 9), which he painted two years after the fire. Measuring eleven feet high by twenty feet long, this is the largest painting Rosenquist has undertaken since the fire. “What is the geometry of fire? There is no geometry, no explanation, no logic. It just happens, there’s nothing you can do about it, or control. This painting is an exclamation, a response to my studio and house burning down in Florida; it’s an angry title. The title is ultimately nondescriptive, because there is no such thing as geometry in fire, it’s just wild, totally reckless, an accidental illumination and immolation. Humans always want to inject geometry and meaning into nature, but it’s a mystery.”

Since the fire, Rosenquist has continued to create paintings, prints, drawings, and collages, traveling between New York City and his studio space in Aripeka. He has produced series of work that explore the concept of time, always pushing into new territory and exploring novel

ideas. Discussing how the work has changed since his career took off in the 1960s, Rosenquist comments, “I always paint what I want. People ask me all the time, ‘what inspires you?’ Well I just do something that I feel like doing. I show it and maybe nobody wants a work, then ten years later, somebody wants it for many times the original cost. I just paint what I feel like painting, from curiosity, and then people get it much, much later. I think I’m ahead of the time, the avant-garde.”

With Rosenquist, the questions keep coming and are reified on canvas and paper, with paint, ink, and collage. As an early Pop artist, Rosenquist held up a mirror to contemporary life at midcentury—and he continues to hold up the mirror, to the cosmos and beyond, and ask questions that the viewer, full of wonder and enchantment, may ponder alongside him. Rosenquist is still ahead of the curve, and his viewers run to catch up to his stellar vision.

— **Sarah C. Bancroft**

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Rosenquist quotations in the text and endnotes are from conversations between the artist and the author, summer 2014.

2. “At the University of Minnesota I met Cameron Booth, my first great teacher, who had studied with Hans Hoffman after the first war. He encouraged me to study with Hoffman at the Art Students League, but Hans had quit teaching by the time I arrived. I studied with all the great teachers at the Art Students League: George Grosz, Robert Beverly Hale, Vytlav Vytlačil, Morris Kantor, and others.”

3. “I left the Art Students League hungry. My friend, Ray Donarski, told me about a job as a bartender/chauffeur and houseman for the Stearns family in Irvington, New York. The father started Bear Stearns Stockbrokerage Company, and they were wealthy.”

4. Rosenquist “lived with Roland and Joyce Stearns, drove them to the flower show, tended bar, and met Romare Bearden, John Chamberlain, and many

others in 1956. Their mansion wasn’t my place,” so he quit, returned to New York City, and joined the Local 230 union.

5. For more information on Rosenquist’s billboard painting techniques, see James Rosenquist with David Dalton, *Painting Below Zero: Notes on a Life in Art* (New York: Knopf and Borzoi Books, 2009), chapter 2 (“Fuel Tanks and Egg Tempura,” 19–42) and chapter 3 (“Four Things You Need to Know to Paint the Sistine Chapel,” 43–66).

6. “When I was painting billboards, I didn’t think the imagery meant anything, it was just nothing, like throw-away images, because of my experience painting the images over and over again. I thought I could use this imagery to create new, abstract compositions. I was curious about inflating the imagery; if something was magnified, it almost wouldn’t look like itself. I didn’t realize I really was painting something. I thought I was injecting nothing images into abstract expressionist paintings, but it wasn’t nothing. It was a big something.” Rosenquist describes this process in

his memoir as well: “What attracted me to ads was the mystery, the strangeness of these bits of commercial propaganda—they were enigmas. I began thinking, What if I used generic fragments from ads and photos in *Life* magazine and juxtaposed them in different scales? And what if I made one of the images so large that close up it would initially be difficult to recognize? Wouldn’t I then have created an abstract effect using recognizable images? The images would be painted realistically, but made so big and collaged together so apparently arbitrarily that you wouldn’t understand it at first. In this way I could make a mysterious painting using the most banal materials.” Rosenquist, *Painting Below Zero*, 83.

7. Rosenquist also relates *Reification* to the later work of 2001 Turner Prize winner Martin Creed, whose installation *Work 227: The Lights Going On and Off* involved just that: lights that turned on and off at five-second intervals. “Remember the artist that won a huge prize in Europe for merely coming into a room, turning a light bulb on, and then leaving? He reified the view with light.”

8. For more information on Rosenquist’s early exhibition history, see Sarah Bancroft, “Chronology” and “Exhibition History,” in Walter Hopps and Sarah Bancroft, *James Rosenquist: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003), 368–87, 388–93.

9. This color lithograph was produced at Universal Limited Art Editions with master printer Bill Goldston; he developed a specialized, innovative technique with Rosenquist to achieve the look of the crumpled paper and the graduated spectrum of colors featured on the left side of the work. Ruth Fine has noted that, unusually, the imagery in this print was developed before the related painting *Slipping Off the Continental Divide* (1973); see Ruth E. Fine, “Off the Continental Divide and Other Risky Journeys,” in Walter Hopps and Sarah Bancroft, *James Rosenquist: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003), 51.

10. Rosenquist, *Painting Below Zero*, 32, 213–14.

11. Since the beginning of his career, works on paper—including drawings, source collages, and limited-edition prints—have played a significant role in Rosenquist’s practice. The source collages are particularly revealing of his working processes, as they are elemental to each painting. Gathering images from magazine advertisements, photographs, and other sources, Rosenquist creates new relationships and compositions by rearranging and juxtaposing the images in novel and revealing ways. Using the collage made from this disparate imagery as a source, he creates a much larger painting, usually with the same or a related title.

12. Sarah Bancroft, “Space and Scientific Phenomena,” in Walter Hopps and Sarah Bancroft, *James Rosenquist: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003), 230.

*James Rosenquist James Rosenquist James Rosenquist James Rosenquist **Paintings** Jam*



1 **Astor Victoria**, 1959
Billboard enamel and oil on canvas
67 x 82½ in.
Collection of the artist



2 **Necktie**, 1961
Oil on canvas
14 x 10 in.
Courtesy of John Rosenquist



3 **Coenties Slip Studio**, 1961
Oil on shaped canvas
34 x 43 in.
Collection of the artist



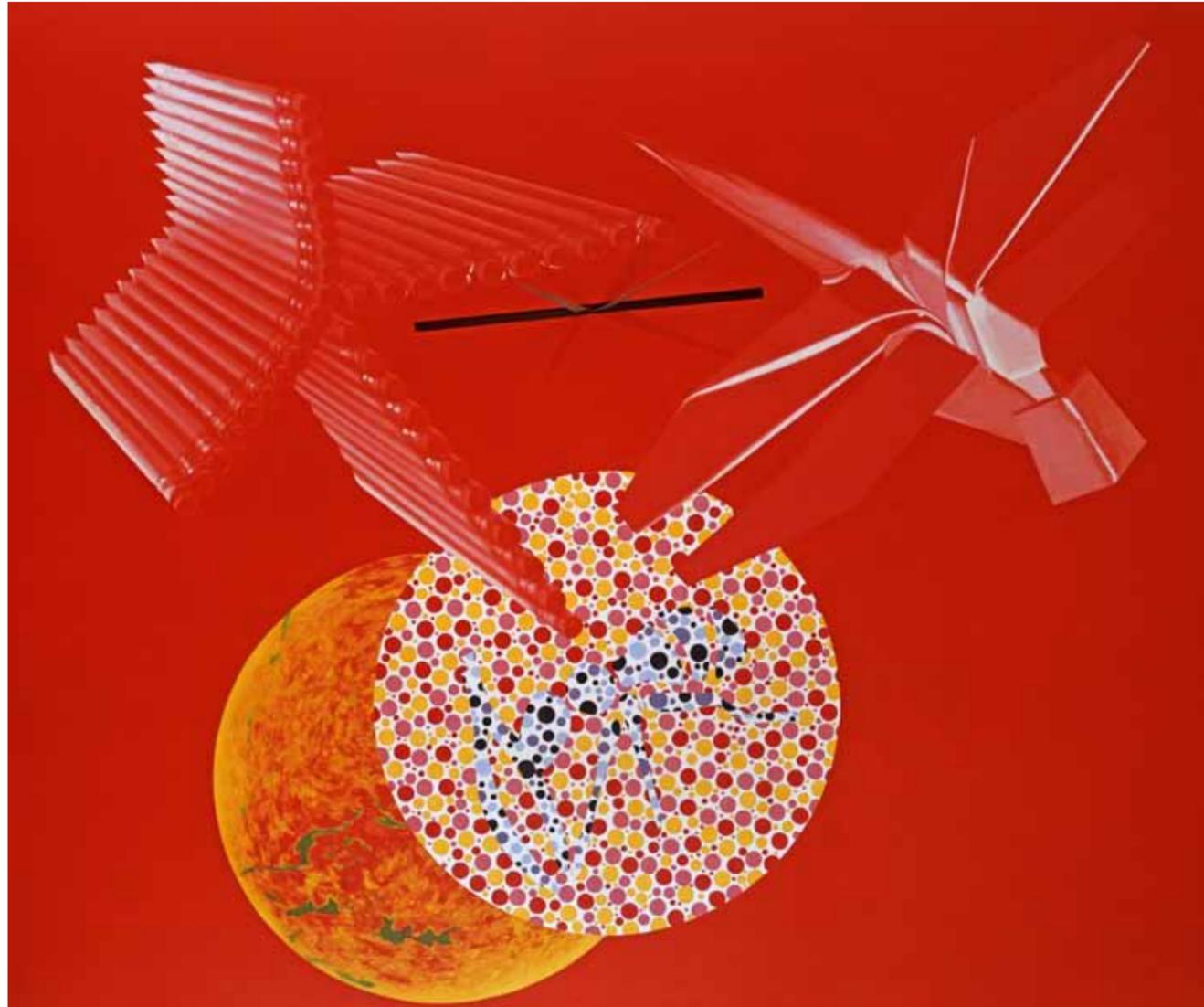
4 **Reification**, 1961
Oil on canvas and chromed steel,
with electric lights and sockets
24 x 30 in.
Collection of the artist



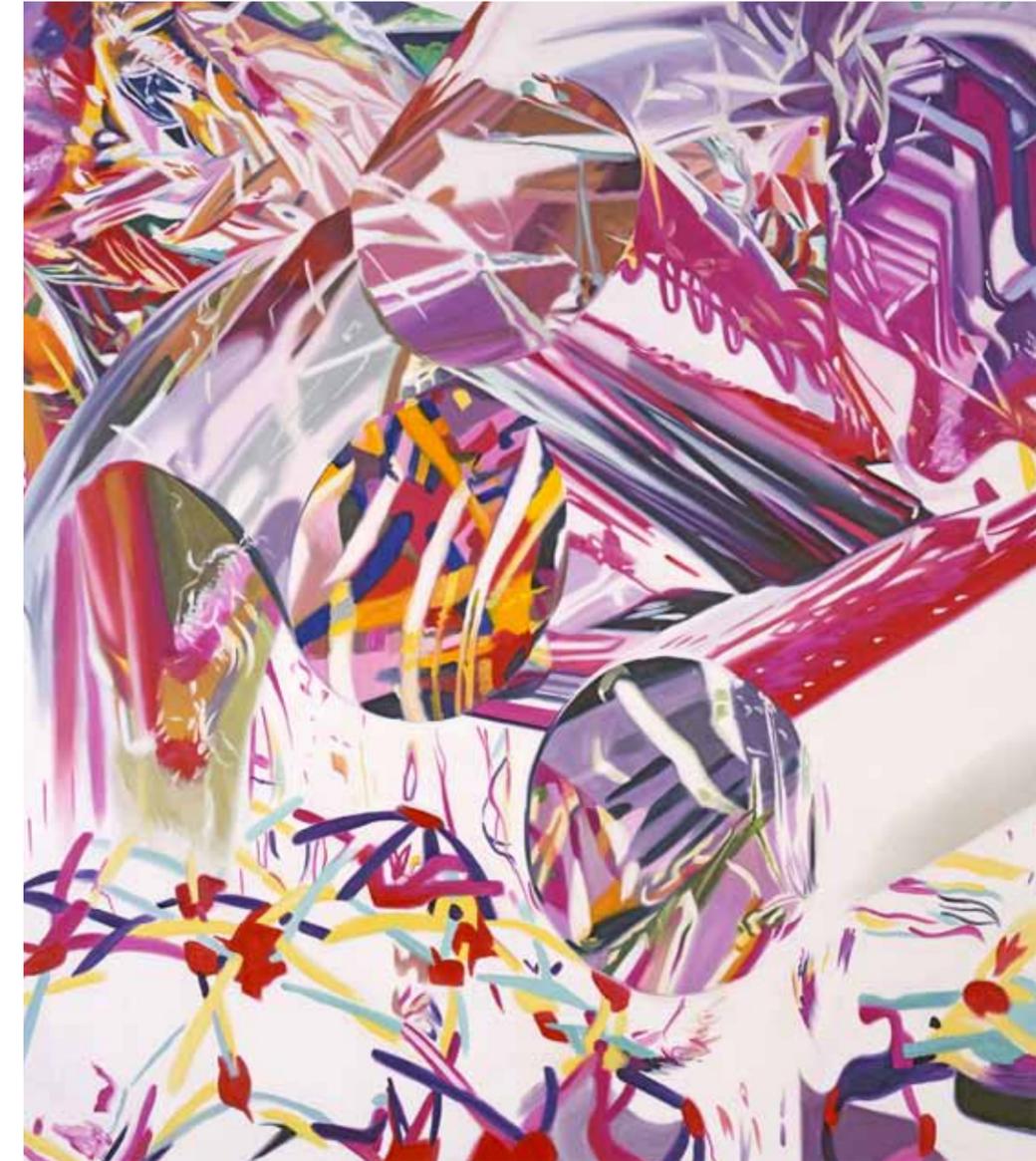
5 **Nails**, 1973
Oil on canvas
50 x 95½ in.
Collection of the artist



6 **Sky Hole**, 1989
Oil on canvas
108 x 55 in.
Collection of the artist



7 **Time Points**, 1991
Oil and acrylic on fenestrated canvas,
with clock mechanism and hands
73 x 86 in.
Courtesy of Acquavella Galleries

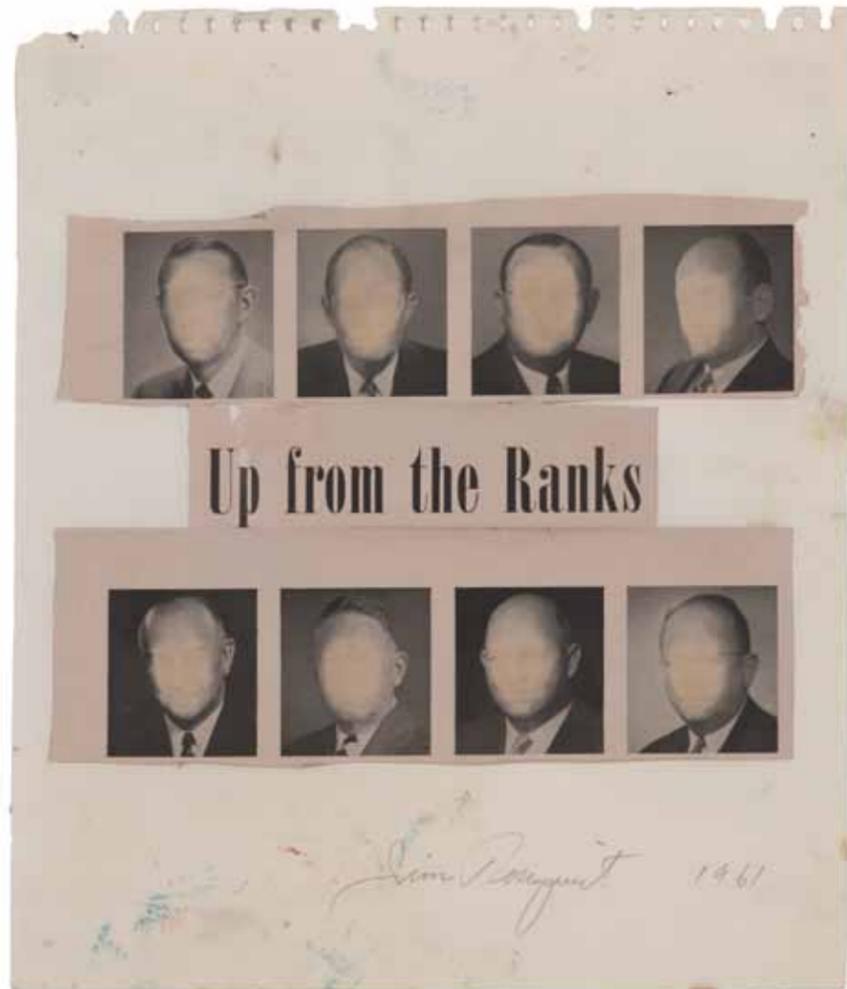


8 **Coup d'oeil-Speed of Light**, 2001
Oil on canvas
74 x 64 in.
Collection of the artist

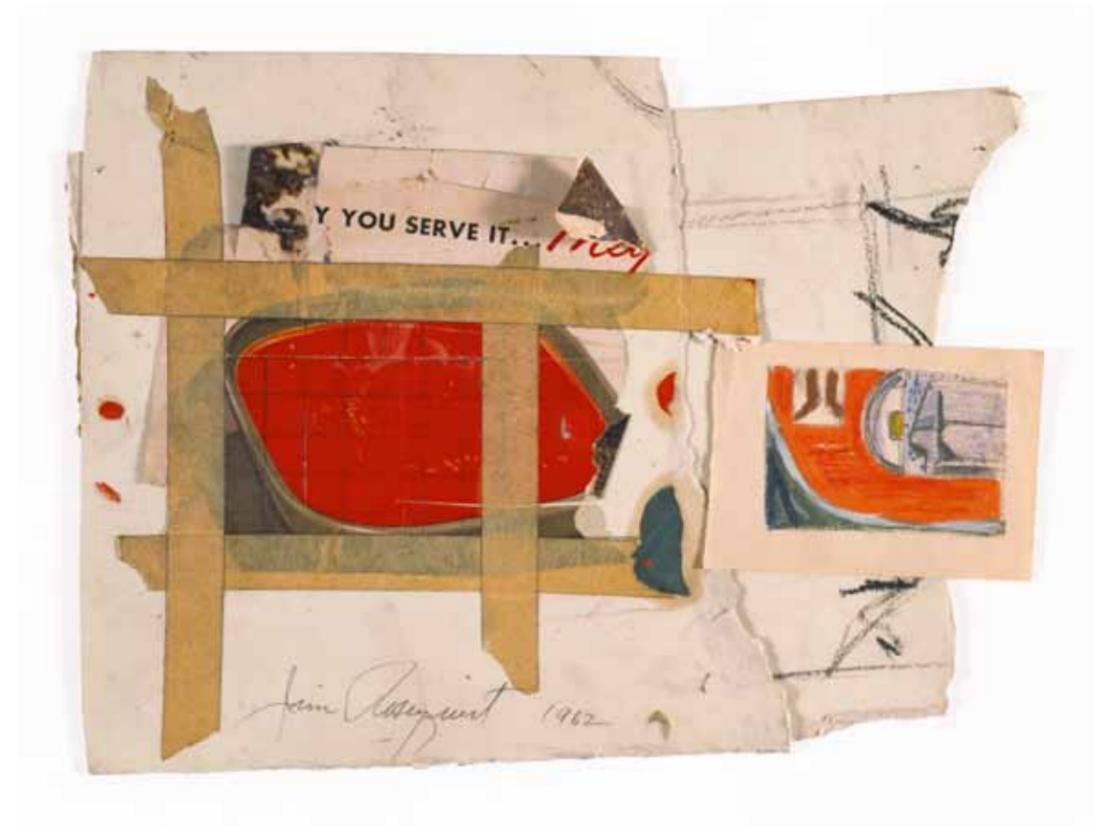
9 **The Geometry of Fire**, 2011
Oil on canvas
11 x 25 ft.
Collection of the artist



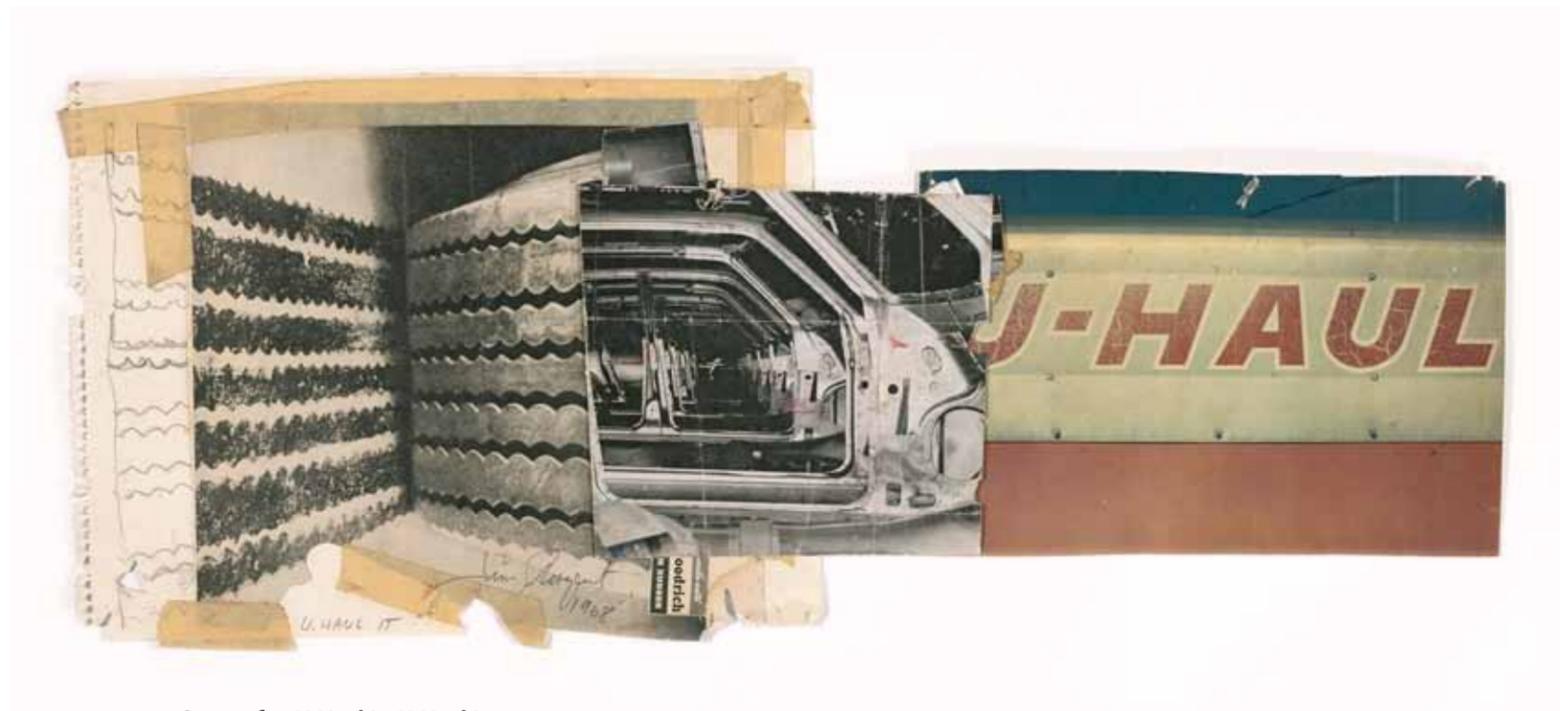
Rosenquist James Rosenquist James Rosenquist James Rosenquist **Source Collages** *Jam*



10 **Up from the Ranks**, 1961
 Collage on paper, with erasures
 14 x 11¾ in.
 Collection of the artist



11 **Source and preparatory study for In the Red**, 1962
 Collage and mixed media on paper
 9¼ x 12¾ in.
 Collection of the artist



12 **Source for U-Haul-It; U-Haul-It, One Way Anywhere; and For Bandini**, 1968
 Collage and mixed media on paper
 9 3/8 x 23 1/4 in.
 Collection of the artist



13 **Source and preparatory sketch for House of Fire**, 1981
 Collage and mixed media
 14 x 25 1/4 in.
 Collection of the artist



14 **Source for *The Kabuki Blushes***, 1984
Collage and mixed media on paper
12½ x 17¼ in.
Collection of the artist



15 **Source for *Welcome to the Water Planet II and Untitled***, 1987
Collage and mixed media on paper
12¼ x 7¼ in.
Collection of the artist

16 **Source for *Flowers Before the Sun***, 1989
Collage and mixed media on plywood
13¼ x 22⅞ in.
Collection of the artist





17 **Source for *The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light*, 2000**
Collage and mixed media on plywood
14 x 29½ in.
Collection of the artist



18 **Source for *The Geometry of Fire*, 2011**
Collage and mixed media on cardboard
13¾ x 29¼ in.
Collection of the artist

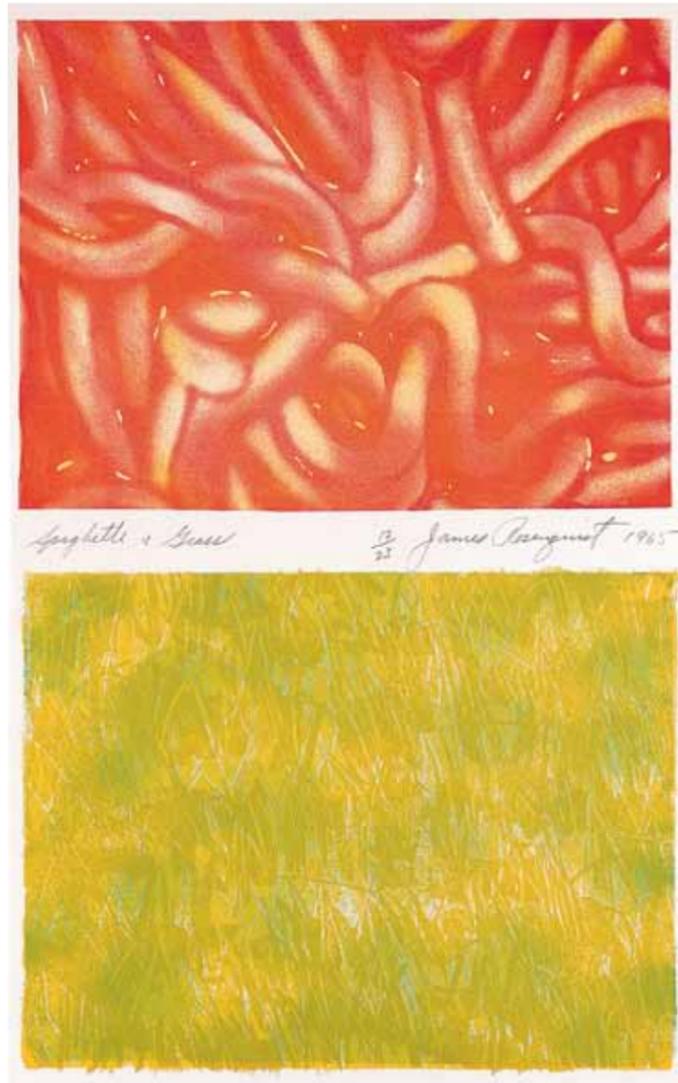
*enquist James Rosenquist James Rosenquist James Rosenquist **Prints & Drawings** Jam*



19 **Untitled**, 1956
Ink on paper
25 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 38 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.
Collection of the artist



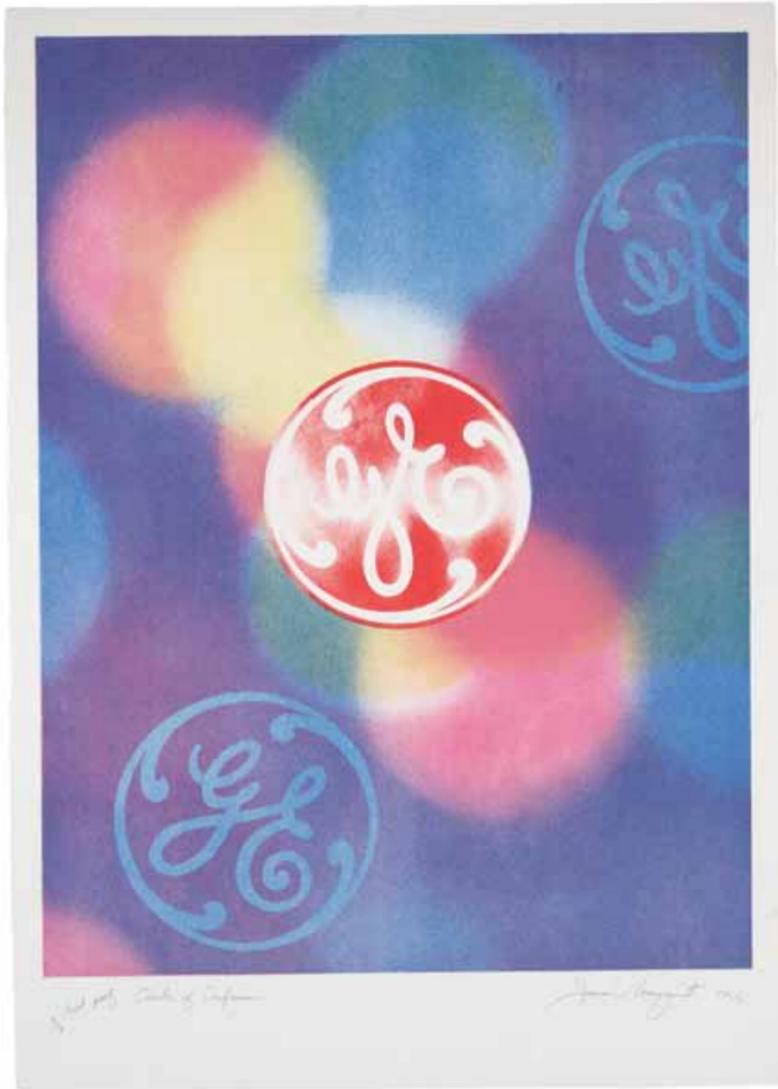
20 **Untitled**, 1956
Acrylic, watercolor, and ink on paper
25 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 38 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Collection of the artist



21 **Spaghetti and Grass**, 1964–65
Color lithograph
31 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 22 $\frac{3}{16}$ in.
Printer and publisher:
Universal Limited Art Editions
Edition of 23
Courtesy of the Fearer/Randel Collection



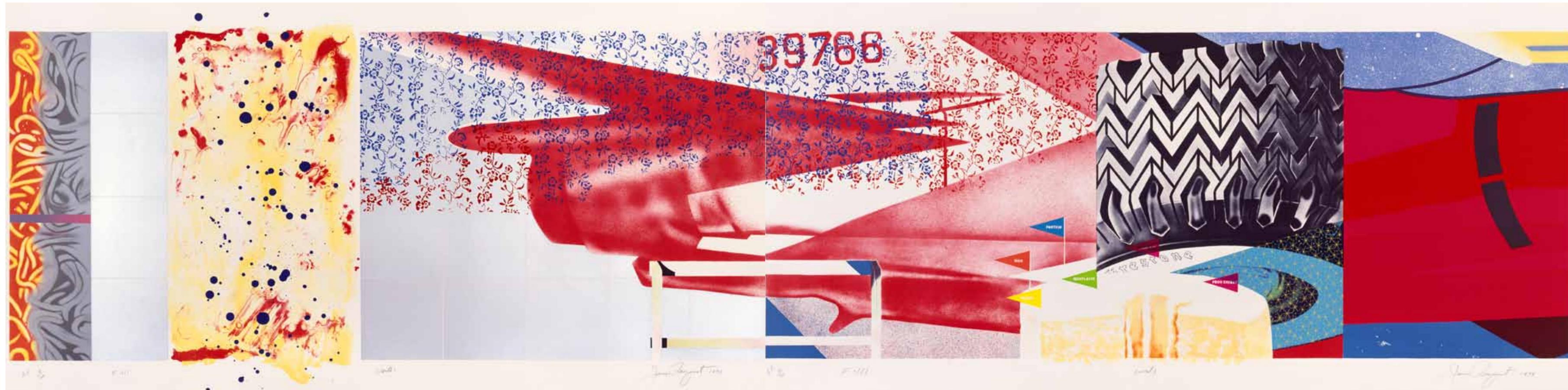
22 **Roll Down**, 1965–66
Color lithograph
38 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 29 in.
Printer and publisher:
Universal Limited Art Editions
Edition of 29
Courtesy of Universal Limited
Art Editions



23 **Circles of Confusion I**, 1965–66
 Color lithograph
 38½ x 28 in.
 Printer and publisher:
 Universal Limited Art Editions
 Edition of 12
 Courtesy of Universal
 Limited Art Editions



24 **Forehead I**, 1968
 Color lithograph
 33½ x 24½ in.
 Printer: Mourlot Graphics
 Publisher: Richard Feigen Graphics
 Edition of 121
 Courtesy of Richard L. Feigen & Co.



25 **F-111 (south)**, 1974
 Color lithograph/screenprint
 36½ x 70¼ in.
 Printer: Petersburg Press/Styria Studio
 Publisher: Petersburg Press
 Edition of 75
 Collection of the artist

26 **F-111 (west)**, 1974
 Color lithograph/screenprint
 36½ x 75¼ in.
 Printer: Petersburg Press/Styria Studio
 Publisher: Petersburg Press
 Edition of 75
 Collection of the artist



27 **F-111 (north)**, 1974
 Color lithograph/screenprint
 36½ x 70 in.
 Printer: Petersburg Press/Styria Studio
 Publisher: Petersburg Press
 Edition of 75
 Collection of the artist

28 **F-111 (east)**, 1974
 Color lithograph/screenprint
 36½ x 75 in.
 Printer: Petersburg Press/Styria Studio
 Publisher: Petersburg Press
 Edition of 75
 Collection of the artist

29 **Off the Continental Divide**, 1973–74
Color lithograph
42¹⁵/₁₆ x 79³/₁₆ in.
Printer and publisher:
Universal Limited Art Editions
Edition of 43
Courtesy of Universal
Limited Art Editions

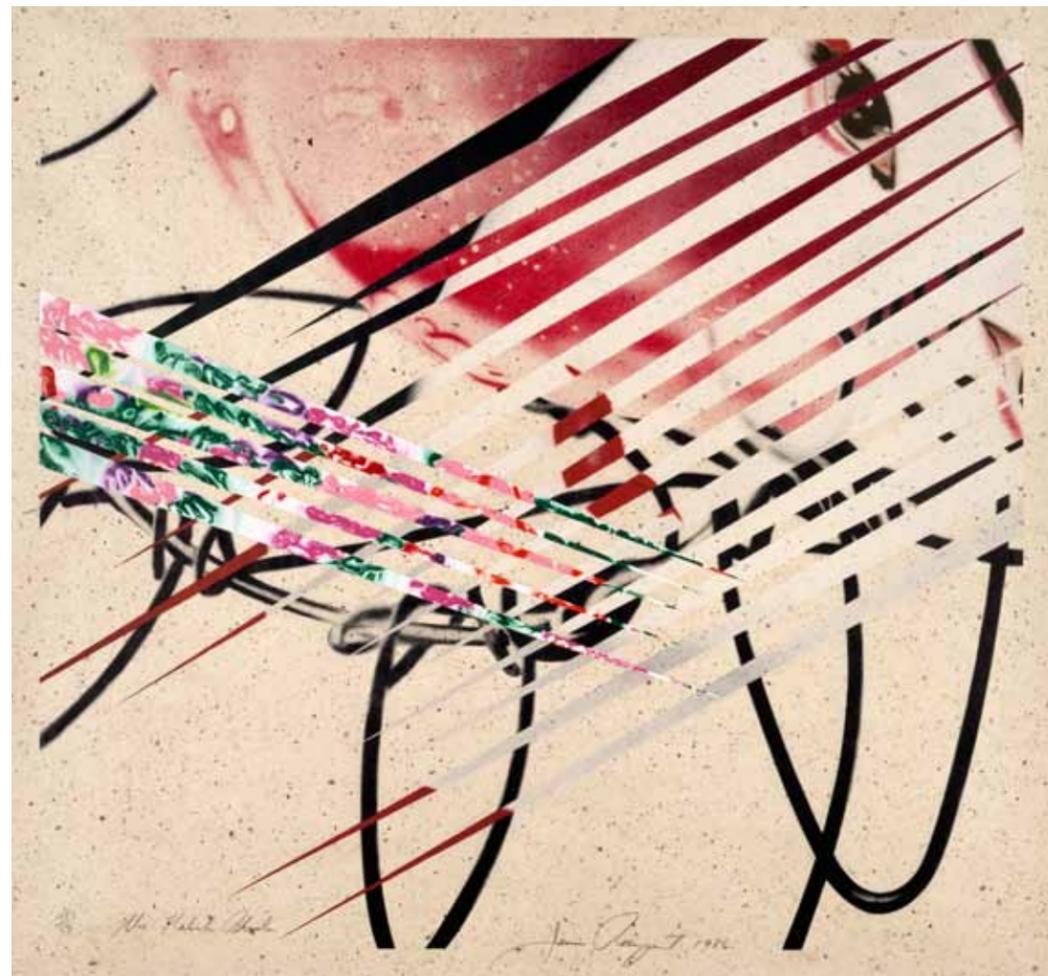




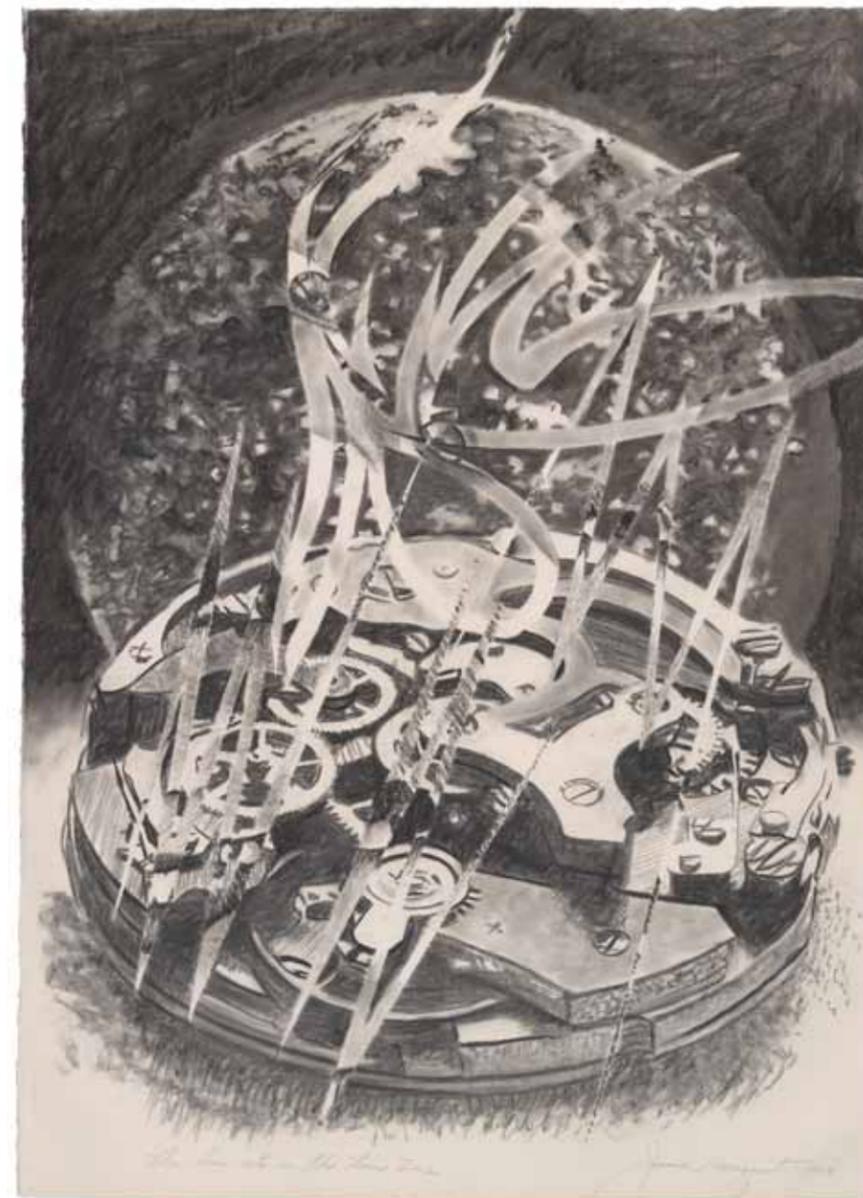
30 **Chambers**, 1980
 Color lithograph
 30¾ x 47¼ in.
 Printer and publisher:
 Universal Limited Art Editions
 Edition of 45
 Courtesy of Oklahoma State University
 Museum of Art



31 **Dog Descending a Staircase**, 1980–82
 Color lithograph/intaglio
 42 x 70 in.
 Printer and publisher:
 Universal Limited Art Editions
 Edition of 33
 Courtesy of Universal Limited Art Editions



32 **The Kabuki Blushes**, 1986
 Color lithograph, with acrylic monprint
 39 x 41½ in.
 Printer and publisher: Graphicstudio
 Edition of 59
 Courtesy of Richard L. Feigen & Co.



33 **The Sun Sets on the Time Zone**, 1989
 Charcoal on paper
 51¾ x 37 in.
 Collection of the artist

34 **House of Fire**, 1989
Colored pressed paper pulp/color lithograph
54½ x 119¾ in.
Printer and publisher: Tyler Graphics Ltd.
Edition of 54
Collection of the artist





35 **The Light Bulb Shining**, 1992
Color lithograph, with metal chain
52½ x 41½ in.
Printer and publisher:
Tyler Graphics Ltd.
Edition of 50
Collection of the artist



36 **After Berlin V**, 1998
Color lithograph
32¾ x 37½ in.
Printer and publisher: Graphicstudio
Edition of 80
Collection of the artist

37 **The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light**, 2001
Color lithograph
46¼ x 105¾ in.
Printer and publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions
Edition of 40
Courtesy of Universal Limited Art Editions



38 **To Infinity**, 2012

Framed color lithograph, with an etched
hand-colored rotating mirror

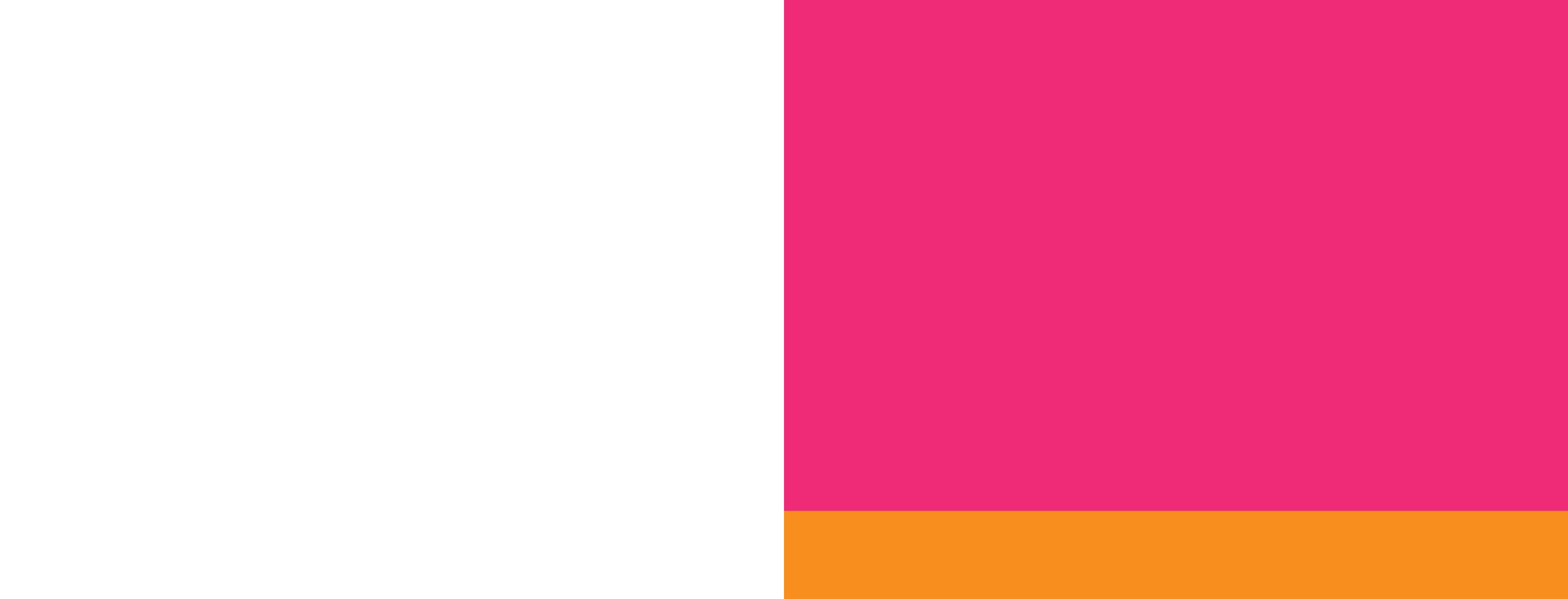
29³/₈ x 25³/₄ x 1⁷/₈ in.

Printer and publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions

Edition of 42

Courtesy of Universal Limited Art Editions





Lenders to the Exhibition

Acquavella Galleries

The Fearer/Randel Collection

Oklahoma State University Museum of Art

Richard L. Feigen & Co.

James Rosenquist

John Rosenquist

Universal Limited Art Editions

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