

Robert Rauschenberg's World

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG'S WORLD from the series *New Friends, Old Friends:*
Works from the Collection

In the late 1950s, Robert Rauschenberg, along with Jasper Johns, laid the groundwork for the Pop Art movement and for artists such as Andy Warhol and James Rosenquist. Rauschenberg's early work ranges from performance art to something that became known as *combines* - paintings and occasionally sculptures that integrated discarded objects from everyday life. He also began making prints in the 1960s, going on to become an accomplished printmaker.

Robert Rauschenberg's World includes two mural-scaled, mixed-media prints on stainless steel as well as a selection of photo-lithographs on paper. Dating from the 1960s and 1990s, these works represent two important periods of experimentation and innovation in Rauschenberg's career.

On long-term loan from a private collection, the two prints on stainless steel are representative of the artist's continuing dedication to social concerns. They grew out of a six-year tour of Latin America, South America, Europe, and Asia, during which he created and exhibited works inspired by his travels and dedicated to promoting world peace and cultural awareness.

Rauschenberg's art can be found in major collections around the world including the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Dallas Museum of Art. He was the recipient of numerous awards including the National Medal of Arts, the Leonardo da Vinci World Award of Arts, and Distinguished Humanitarian Donor from Doctors Without Borders.

January 24, 2017, to June 10, 2017, at the OSU Museum of Art, Stillwater, OK, USA.

[Exhibition Photos](#) | [Educator Resources](#) | [OSU Museum of Art](#)

EXHIBITION CONTENT

New Friends, Old Friends: Works from the Collection

Robert Rauschenberg's World

Robert Rauschenberg's World marks the beginning of a new exhibition series featuring works from the Oklahoma State University Museum of Art collection. The choice of this exhibition was inspired by the generous offer of a long-term loan of three Rauschenberg prints, which are paired with three Rauschenberg prints in our collection. These selections focus on two periods of the artist's career—the 1960s, when Rauschenberg started making prints; and the 1990s, when an eight-year global tour led to a substantive body of new work and the creation of monumental screen prints on metal sheets.

A native of Port Arthur, Texas, Robert Rauschenberg (1925 – 2008) enjoyed a meteoric rise to fame. As an artist in his mid-twenties, he upended the New York art world with what he called “combines.” These works challenged Abstract Expressionism and its painterly registrations of emotion by pairing found objects and mechanically reproduced images with painted passages. In so doing Rauschenberg undermined the established divisions between painting and sculpture and between the handmade and the mechanically produced. With his first solo exhibition at the Jewish Museum in 1963, he gained recognition as a major artist of his generation.

By the early 1960s, Rauschenberg was moving on with his art, using the commercial process of screen printing for paintings composed of overlays of photographic images, from media sources as well as his own photographs. Printmaking also attracted his interest, and he made his first lithograph at Universal Limited Art Editions in 1962. Thereafter printmaking became an integral part of his art-making.

Beginning in the 1980s, Rauschenberg pursued long-term projects, notably the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI), which allowed him to test his belief in the power of art and artistic collaboration to foster social change on a global scale. In the course of touring twelve countries, he produced a diverse body of work, inspired by his experiences, the cultural traditions, the art, and

artists he encountered.

Throughout his career Robert Rauschenberg enjoyed enormous success, artistically and financially. He was hailed as a precursor of virtually every movement after Abstract Expressionism. His wealth enabled him to pursue his humanitarian concerns, ranging from ROCI to the establishment of his foundation, which continues to support artists and philanthropic art projects that address important social issues.

The Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange Project

Robert Rauschenberg was one of the most innovative artists of the second half of the twentieth century. Alongside his fertile creativity was a devotion to social concern, which intensified in his mid-life, notably with the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange Project (ROCI).

The Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange Project (ROCI) was an audacious, groundbreaking undertaking that spanned eight years, from 1984 to 1991. Rauschenberg traveled to twelve countries: Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Tibet, China, Japan, Cuba, the former Soviet Union, former East Germany (East Berlin), Malaysia, and finally the United States.

The artist worked against demanding circumstances of time and logistics, which were self imposed. At each stop he collaborated with local artists to produce new work and mount an exhibition. The exhibition evolved as the tour progressed and more art was added. Largely funded by Rauschenberg, the project aimed at fostering world peace through the art created, its collaborative process, and its viewing.

ROCI USA

The United States was the final stop on the ROCI global tour. With the assistance of Donald Saff and the staff at Saff Tech Arts, Rauschenberg developed for this series a printing technique using encaustic or hot pigmented beeswax that he called *fire wax*. In place of paper or canvas, the fire wax was screened on to shiny metal sheets, at times combined with hand-applied acrylic and tarnishing.

As had been his practice since the early 1960s, Rauschenberg layered photographic images to create montage compositions suggestive of everyday experiences of mass media. In this instance, however, he drew on photographs he had taken for this series, printing them in vivid colors.

He continued his usual strategy of abstracting images by enlarging and fragmenting them. The simplified forms resulting from screen printing together with the layering further impede identification of the imagery as do the mirror-like surfaces of the metal supports. These surfaces add an elusiveness to the images, merging reflections of the viewers' space with the print's pictorial world.

These two works from ROCI USA embody the interactive experience Rauschenberg intended for his viewers. The reflective surfaces grab the viewers' attention, drawing them into the picture space. Open ended in meaning, the juxtapositions of images challenge the audience to make connections among

them. What do palm trees and utility poles have to do with a commercial photography studio? How does a bicycle relate to a Venus sculpture? As he told an audience at the opening ROCI Japan, "I want to make you work hard. I don't want to give you any answers."

By visually positioning viewers in the prints and by engaging them intellectually to explore the possibilities of meaning here and in other ROCI works, Rauschenberg sought to activate viewers' social involvement. The works lobby for appreciation of both the connections and distinctions among cultures around the world as a necessary foundation for world peace.

Rauschenberg and Printmaking

Robert Rauschenberg famously declared "the second half of the twentieth century is not a time to start writing on rocks," meaning lithography was outmoded. Making a print at Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) print workshop, however, changed his mind.

Rauschenberg discovered that lithography was perfect for his hallmark practice of building compositions with layers of photo images and hand-rendered additions. Lithography also enabled him to vary the size and scale of each component image. He found the stone to have "the most flexible, responsive surface there is," having "the sensitivity and frailty of albino skin."

In the 1960s, the explosion of printmaking in the United States fostered experimentation and "the big print," —whose size vied with the increased size of paintings. Rauschenberg embraced both. His prints grew in size, and he collaborated with Bill Goldston, Director of ULAE to invent a process to transfer photographs directly to the lithographic plate. Along with the aesthetic rewards, the artist could reach broad audiences through the multiple artworks printmaking enabled.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Robert Rauschenberg's art has always been one of thoughtful inclusion. Working in a wide range of subjects, styles, materials, and techniques, Rauschenberg has been called a forerunner of essentially every postwar movement since Abstract Expressionism. He remained, however, free of any particular affiliation. At the time that he began making art in the 1940s and early 1950s, his belief that "painting relates to both art and life" presented a direct challenge to the prevalent modernist aesthetic.

The celebrated Combines, begun in the mid-1950s, brought real-world objects into the realm of abstract painting and countered sacred divisions between painting and sculpture. These works established an ongoing dialogue between mediums, between the handmade and the readymade, and between the gestural brushstroke and the mechanically reproduced image. Rauschenberg's lifelong commitment to collaboration with performers, printmakers, engineers, writers, artists, and artisans for

performer, pianist, engineer, writer, artist, and architect of the world—is a further manifestation of his expansive artistic philo

This text and the following chapter texts are adapted from an essay by Julia Blaut, "Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective," @Guggenheim (1997).

To read more about Rauschenberg's life, visit <http://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/artist>.

Art 21: Elegy for Robert Rauschenberg

Robert Rauschenberg

Make Art Out of Anything - Robert Rauschenberg

THE RULES ACCORDING TO RAUSCHENBERG

The American modernist rewrote all the rules... Robert Rauschenberg

Explore Rauschenberg's approach to art-making and the world around him through this engaging presentation from Tate.

Robert Rauschenberg - Pop Art Pioneer

THE RULES ACCORDING TO RAUSCHENBERG

RELATED READINGS

Below we have gathered additional readings, videos, and websites of interest, including academic contributions from OSU students over the years.

- **See Your Art and Make It, Too: Robert Rauschenberg at the OSU Museum of Art** - OSU student Audrey Gleason reviews the exhibition, "Robert Rauschenberg's World."

PROGRAMS

- Feb 2, 2017 - Opening reception, featuring Bill Goldston. 5 PM.
- Apr 21, 2017 - Lydia Perez, History Practicum student, led a discussion on race and gender while juxtaposing Rauschenberg's *Narcissus* and a musical number.
- We explored "Recycling" for storyLAB, Family Day, and in the artLAB.
- Groups of homeschoolers, preschoolers, and Scouts toured the exhibition.

Younger visitors found shapes in the artwork and practiced making shapes with our body through Yoga poses. We discussed the concept of story and developed stories that included ourselves in the mirrored works.

- University students explored concepts of community, artist intent, and social issues through group discussion.
- Queering the Museum - During Pride week at OSU, we covered labels and invited visitors to share their own interpretation of the works.



Is there something you'd like to see at the museum? We would love to hear from you.

Oklahoma State University Museum of Art

720 South Husband Street, Stillwater, OK 74074

405.744.2780 | museum@okstate.edu | museum.okstate.edu

Made with Microsoft Sway

Create and share interactive reports, presentations,
personal stories, and more.

Get started



