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National Gallery of Art

EXHIBITION BACKGROUNDER

Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange

National Gallery of Art
May 12 - September 2, 1991

**"I feel strong in my belief,
based on my varied and widely traveled collaborations,
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, hopefully seducing us
into creative mutual understandings
for the benefit of all."**

Robert Rauschenberg

In June 1982 Robert Rauschenberg traveled to China as a guest of the Anhui Province Artists' Association to work at the Xuan paper mill in Jingxian. His interaction with the artisans there convinced Rauschenberg to follow through on an idea that he had been considering since his 1976 retrospective exhibition at the National Collection of Fine Arts (now the National Museum of American Art) in Washington, D.C., and its subsequent U.S. tour. Over the years, the idea expanded from a fixed selection of works that would travel worldwide to a changing exhibition, continually evolving as the result of the artist's response to the varied cultures of the participating host countries.

On December 14, 1984, Rauschenberg announced to a group of ambassadors and art leaders assembled at the United Nations in New York the launching of the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) to foster a dialogue through the language of art that would contribute to world peace and understanding. It was decided that the exhibitions would take place in countries

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with little or no previous exposure to contemporary Western art and whose political and economic systems contrasted with those of the United States. In 1985 the National Gallery of Art agreed to exhibit a final anthology of the projected results. The exhibition in May thus becomes the ROCI/USA summary of the project with new work created especially for this final venue.

Rauschenberg was born in Port Arthur, Texas, in 1925. By the time the ROCI tour began in 1985, he had already made substantial contributions to the art of the twentieth century and was recognized worldwide as a master artist. He also supported social justice, artist's rights, peace, and preservation of the environment. "In many ways," wrote Donald Saff, ROCI's creative director, "ROCI can be considered a logical extension and predictable result of Rauschenberg's love of art and people."

Rauschenberg and his ROCI collaborators traveled to Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Beijing, Lhasa, Japan, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Berlin, and Malaysia. The funding for the undertaking was provided almost exclusively by Rauschenberg. In each location he collected images and materials, interacted with artistic communities, learned from local artistic traditions, and explored the cities and countryside.

The first ROCI exhibition opened in April 1985 at the Rufino Tamayo Museum in Mexico City. It included many of Rauschenberg's monochromatic paintings from the 1970s, which set the foundation and provided a historical retrospective for his new audiences, in addition to bright, colorful pieces inspired by his travels in Mexico. As the traveling exhibition evolved over a six-year

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period, it featured works from each host country as well as from previous ROCI venues. Rauschenberg donated a work of art to each country and exhibition catalogues include contributions by local poets, writers, or journalists.

Throughout the ROCI tour, museum directors often reported record-breaking crowds and there was much critical praise in the local press. In Lhasa the exhibition opened to a fireworks display and the entire art department of a Chinese university spent one a month in Beijing studying the works in the show. By 1989, more than two million people had viewed the ROCI exhibitions. That same year, ROCI/USSR became the first one-man show of a Western abstract artist in the Soviet Union.

More than one hundred of the works created for ROCI will be presented in the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., May 12 through September 2, 1991. It will also include new works created for ROCI/USA, and photographs taken by the artist and videotapes shot by his staff during the tour, in addition to selected works from the early 1980s.

According to National Gallery curator of twentieth-century art Jack Cowart, among the paintings, works of sculpture, and editioned objects in the exhibition are some of "the best work Robert Rauschenberg has produced in decades." Cowart wrote, "For ROCI the artist consciously developed new technical processes, new surfaces, a new palette, and in some cases, a new point of view. Virtually every new painting made for ROCI contains explosive, highly charged colors, frequently on reflective metal

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surfaces. They are large-scale, lively works, filled with lush texture and shimmering light."

The first series of ROCI/Mexico works are the most traditional and are closest to his 1960s and 1970s compositions and color printing techniques. One exception is Altar Peace (1985), which juxtaposes painting and sculpture; thin, flat silkscreen and textured pools of pigment; matte and reflective surfaces; high color and shadowy monochrome. This work establishes much of the formal and narrative repertoire of subsequent ROCI works.

He used "found" objects and local materials innovatively: lottery tickets from Mexico, patterned silks woven by the nomads of Samarkand, and Onoto bean pigment used by the Panare Indians of Venezuela. In addition he made photographs that he silkscreened onto various surfaces in the ROCI works, giving viewers quick autobiographical and documentary glimpses of things, people, and places visited, and challenging them to see the world in new ways.

Malaysian Flower Cave (1990) is the last ROCI work for the foreign venues of the exhibition and it successfully blends his liberated color and broadly applied pigment, mounted fabrics and silkscreen images. This work also summarizes the artist's general ROCI views of the conflicts between urban and indigenous cultures: bound skulls and historic architecture are placed against an oil derrick, cars and bikes oppose a view of a native river village, tropical vegetation plays against geometric Batik scarves.

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R.C.C.I. BROCHURE BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Art is communication, and its language is universal.

This simple truth underlies one of the boldest art projects of our time, a four-year odyssey that will take Robert Rauschenberg to more than twenty countries, many of which have had little or no direct contact with contemporary American art. In each country, he will invite native artists to help him create a cumulative body of work, a testament to his belief in the collaborative power of art.

For two decades, ever since he won the grand prize at the 1964 Venice Biennale, Robert Rauschenberg has been recognized as one of the most influential living artists. His entire career has been a form of collaboration: a collaboration with the materials of everyday life, which he incorporated into his ground-breaking early collages and "combines"; a collaboration with dancers, musicians, and theater people, from Merce Cunningham to Laurie Anderson; a collaboration with scientists and engineers, with printers and poets, and with a large, anonymous public that is not part of the international art world.

Last year he visited the Far East, where his collaborations with Chinese and Japanese artists and artisans produced many of the works that were shown recently at The Museum of Modern Art and at

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a three-gallery Rauschenberg exhibition in SoHo. Building on this successful experience, the artist conceived the ambitious plan that he calls "Rauschenberg: Overseas Culture Interchange" (R.O.C.I.).

The project's core is a traveling exhibition of 150 works that Rauschenberg has made during the last ten years. Parts of this collection will be shown in the host countries, along with the new works that Rauschenberg and teams of indigenous collaborators will make on the spot.

"My idea is not only to show my work there," he says, "but to make work in each setting, to use their materials, to deal with students, to collaborate with the major artist, poet or writer in each country, touching on every aspect of art."

His four-year itinerary will take him to Australia, Japan, China, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Central and South America. In each country the core collection will be augmented by a new body of work, becoming in the process a unique instrument of cultural exchange. The complete exhibition in its final form will come home in 1988, for showings now being negotiated with several major museums.

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Widespread television and press coverage in the host countries is expected. In addition, Rauschenberg will direct a film and videotape record of the project. For each country visited the artist will design a poster, using images and materials from that country's culture. He will produce an inexpensive illustrated catalog with written contributions by local poets and critics in their own language, and a more extensive volume in English on the artist and his work. In addition, a Rauschenberg artwork will remain in every host country. At its conclusion, the whole expedition will be documented in a Rauschenberg-designed volume, with anecdotes, photographs, statements by participants, and color reproductions of all works made.

The R.O.C.I. Project is the culmination of Rauschenberg's ambition to be a universal artist in an age of fragmentation and doubt. "What I'm up to," he says, "is a natural development of my deciding, years ago, that the whole world was a potential palette, and that art is the most serious and dignified way to approach another culture."

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R.O.C.I. BROCHURE (CT)

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Widespread television and press coverage in the host countries is expected. In addition, Rauschenberg will direct a film and videotape record of the project. For each country visited there will be a poster designed by the artist, and three illustrated catalogs (magazine, hardcover, and deluxe edition) in the appropriate language. The whole expedition will also be documented in a Rauschenberg-designed volume, with anecdotes, photographs, statements by participants, and color reproductions of all works executed.

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Rauschenberg's Tour de Force

By MARY LYNN KOTZ

He conceived the global tour to forge communication with other nations.

FOR ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG all the world's a canvas — and a palette. Up to his elbows in paper pulp in China, in mud-manure straw clay in India, in red-brown tribal face-paint in a Venezuelan village on the Amazon or a mixture of sands from Israel, Mr. Rauschenberg takes materials and images, techniques and information from cultures around the globe and uses them in his art.

"In the early years, I found everything I needed on the streets of New York," Mr. Rauschenberg said in November at the Tokyo opening of his exhibition, called R.O.C.I./Japan, for which an Osaka showing is planned this summer. "People threw all sorts of things away, right around the corner. Now, my studio's gotten a lot bigger." His "studio" is the 22 countries of R.O.C.I., the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, now at midpoint on a global tour de force. R.O.C.I. (pronounced "Rocky") is an ambitious nonprofit project conceived by Mr. Rauschenberg in the early 1980's to forge communication with other nations through the language of art.

■

"He is trying to introduce the world to itself," said Dr. Donald Saff, artistic director of R.O.C.I. With an advance staff, Mr. Rauschenberg goes into a country to work with local artists and artisans. After producing the art, he returns to a major museum in that country to exhibit the work done there and in other R.O.C.I. nations, in what amounts to a mammoth artistic chain letter displayed at a huge public exhibition. In Japan, he worked in the town of Shigaraki with a group of chemists at the factory of Otsuka Chemical — a firm that perfected a method for producing permanent screen-printed images on clay — to create daring new ceramic paintings.

R.O.C.I.'s logo is the Oriental symbol of the turtle that carries the world on its back. ("Rocky" is also the name of Mr. Rauschenberg's 27-year-old pet turtle.) Since R.O.C.I.'s birth in Mexico City in 1985 with 230 pieces, it has attracted millions of viewers in Mexico, China, Tibet, Chile, and Japan. (In China, 70,000 showed up during the first week alone.) After its Osaka show this summer, R.O.C.I. will travel next to Sri Lanka, other Far Eastern countries, and then around the world.

Each R.O.C.I. exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue written by leading poets, writers and journalists of that country, such as the writers Octavio Paz in Mexico and José Donoso in Chile. In each country, Mr. Rauschenberg leaves as a gift to the people of that nation a work of his art made there. He also sends a piece to the National Gallery of Art in Washington for a major exhibition planned for 1990.

Integral to each R.O.C.I. exhibition are hundreds of his black-and-white photographs, parts of which also become silk-screened images in his paintings. They are accompanied by continuously running color videotapes on 10 to 15 video monitors ("video verité" as Dr. Saff describes it) — scenes and sounds of the countries as seen through Mr. Rauschenberg's eyes.

Mr. Rauschenberg has committed a vast portion of his own resources to the venture. "My pockets are empty," he told the Tokyo audience, not entirely in jest. "But to be government-sponsored would defeat the idea of the project. It has to be from people to people. We want to communicate our human kinship. I trust art to do that. Certainly politics isn't doing a very good job."

In the Tokyo exhibition, one of the most vivid images was a giant Japanese fish kite of hot pink cloth floating in a sea of poured blue and white acrylic paint. Bright collages are made of rich silks from Japan. From other cultures there are vibrant sweeps of turquoise, purple, orange and yellow swirling over and around silk-screened photographs of faces and things, humble or grand, from Mexico to Sri Lanka.

In Mr. Rauschenberg's body of work there is a distinct line of demarcation between art produced before and after he began his serious journeys about the globe. In the images, first-hand observation now broadens the the irony and the social commentary that have always permeated Mr. Rauchenberg's work.

For the last 10 years, Mr. Rauschenberg has been working in countries where an American artist is a rare creature. Using native materials or learning ancient techniques from local artisans, he has produced, for example, immense pieces imprinted with flamboyant colors and a multiplicity of religious symbols from Mexico; paper sculptures from China that are translucent, luminous and at the same time rigid; gleaming copper-plate wall pieces emblazoned with images of a hovel, a crucifix or a bird from Chile, and delicate drawings made in a hotel room in Sri Lanka. The body of work changes and grows as it moves to major shows in different countries.

"To communicate is the goal," says Mr. Rauschenberg. "And yet the energy that emerges from this most basic collaboration is rewarding in itself." Collaboration is Mr. Rauschenberg's modus operandi. From his joint efforts in the late 1940's with his former wife, Susan Weil, to multimedia performance art with Merce Cunningham and John Cage in the 1960's, to suites of prints and sculptures in studios at Universal Limited Art Editions on Long Island, Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles and GraficStudio in Tampa, Fla., he has always worked closely with others. In his own working compound in Captiva, Fla., he is surrounded by young artist assistants.



Terry Van Brunt

Robert Rauschenberg working recently on a piece in Naples.

Even his art "collaborates." He mixes media, objects and images, causing them to relate to each other in a new way. In a new piece called "Awn," for example, an awning he bought from a Mexican street merchant is the field for a silk-screened image of an ancient stone dog. From economic necessity as much as esthetic curiosity ("I couldn't afford canvas"), Mr. Rauschenberg began — and continues — to work with such commonplace objects as weathered boards, a chair, a shirt, a piece of brick wall.

Collaboration is what Mr. Rauschenberg expects of his viewers as well. Many of his pieces have moving parts; others are activated by the viewer simply walking by, causing a silky scrim or a row of light-as-air Mexican wheat bags to waft gently. Some pieces have mirrors, so the viewer is actually a part of the work. As Mr. Rauschenberg told his Japanese audience: "I want to make you work hard. I don't want to give you any 'answers.'"

The international participation — the deep connections Mr. Rauschenberg has made with Chileans and Tibetans, Moroccans and Venezuelans, is taking his life and art in an expanded, profound direction. Related images, materials and concepts from his R.O.C.I. experiences also appear in "Quarter-Mile or Two Furlong Piece," his 750-foot-long painting in the new special exhibitions gallery of the 20th-century wing at New York's Metropolitan Museum. His global images, translated into other new series, have made their way to Europe this spring with major openings last month in Dusseldorf, West Germany, and Naples, and another show currently in Stockholm. His photographs are a basis for much of his imagery, and for his work in this hybrid field Mr. Rauschenberg received last week the International Center of Photography Award in Art for a visual artist who has made an important use of photography in mixed media.

Mr. Rauschenberg's aim, he says, is to show viewers around the world new ways of seeing and appreciating the cultures often overlooked by Western art.

In India, at the Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad, the artist's collaborators were a throng of papermakers of the untouchable caste, descendants of the people with whom Mahatma Gandhi founded the Ashram. Bamboo and fabric were integrated into the paper itself with thin strings, and then laminated.

■

"For the first time, I wasn't embarrassed by the look of beauty — of elegance," said the artist. "Because when you see someone who has only one rag as their property, but it happens to be beautiful, pink and silk — you see that beauty doesn't have to be separated."

Mr. Rauschenberg became intrigued by the clay of Indian houses. "It's made out of manure — either camel or cow — and mud and straw, and it's a beautiful look — very primitive," he said. "But I had to change the recipe." Soon, another set of Indian collaborators began working with Mr. Rauschenberg to make editions of clay sculptures from his mud inventions.

In Anhui, China, at what is said to be the world's oldest paper mill, Mr. Rauschenberg learned to make delicate, see-through, sculpted paper. He inserted cutouts from everyday graphics — a leg and shoe here, a sliced apple there, an upside-down bicycle — into their ancient, honored paper. Below the bottom of the paper — which was white, edged with gold and embossed with Chinese calligraphy — he hung a brightly colored circle of embroidered silk.

In Israel, he found art weighted with angst. "I told them they need art that can lift their spirits," Mr. Rauschenberg said. He tried to show his Israeli artist friends "new ways of looking" by incorporating common discards into his work there. In the process he became friends with Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem "who was so proud of his clean streets he was astonished I'd found anything at all."

In Venezuela, the artist met with members

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Mary Lynn Kotz is the author of "Rauschenberg Himself," to be published by Harry Abrams.

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Rauschenberg

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of 10 separate Indian tribes, photographing scenes that appear in many of his new works. Among the Panare Indians there, he crushed berries from the onoto plant into a pigment with which he colored many of the paintings. The result of his work with the Otsuka chemists in Japan — silk-screening images and transferring them to clay — was a collection of bright, enormous free-standing and wall-hung ceramic paintings. Many had mystical and playful titles such as "Pneumonia Lisa" or "Able was I ere I saw Elba," in which a Jacques-Louis David "Napoleon" is aswirl in Rauschenberg pictures.

The impact of Chile's trauma, along with the colors and materials of the Far East, has shaped what is perhaps Mr. Rauschenberg's most dramatic departure from his past art. One especially compelling Chilean piece is a standing, three-dimensional construction that was in the R.O.C.I. exhibition in Japan — a man-sized aluminum sculpture shaped like a cross with an embroidered white satin priest's vestment laminated onto both sides. Part of the vestment is patched with peasant cotton. Its title is "Altar Peace Chile."

Mr. Rauschenberg says that "Altar Peace Chile" and the hundreds of other works made for R.O.C.I. are intended as a contribution to peace. This passion to make a personal impact on the state of the world has engaged the artist in mid-life. His entire new body of work for R.O.C.I. was designed to affect "the way people see each other. I try to use my art to communicate that you, yourself, must take responsibility for life on earth." □

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RAUSCHENBERG'S ISLAND

Robert Rauschenberg travels all over the world on the strength of his reputation as a painter and the fortune he's made from his art. But what he really likes is a great bowl of chili, his three dogs, and the peace of a sunny little island in Florida.

Seasoned with Jack Daniels Sour Mash and cackling like a loon, Robert Rauschenberg steps out into the noonday sun in his lush compound on Captiva Island. His dogs are just back from the vet, freshly shampoo'd. A broken water heater has prevented Rauschenberg from enjoying the same luxury today. But, as the painter exclaims above the barking in his Texas twang, small inconveniences are easy to take on this remote barrier island south of Tampa, Florida.

Though Rauschenberg may sometimes miss the "luxurious waste" of New York streets, much of which he incorporated into his art, he has called Captiva home for the past 18 years. "When you're successful, life gets too fancy," he explains.

"In the late '60s, life was falling apart all around me to such a degree that I started thinking everyone's disasters were my fault," he goes on, dogs capering about his cobra-skin boots. "Someone recommended I go see the second-best astrologer in the world.

"If you want to be in second place, nobody's going to fight you for it," he suddenly giggles.

BY DIANE SOLWAY

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On Rauschenberg's compound: The Bay house (for guests)

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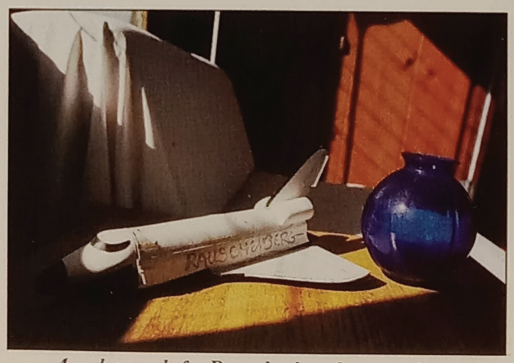
Rauschenberg at work on "The Quarter Mile" painting in his studio

"Anyway, the astrologer said, 'My god, how have you gotten through this period?' He said I must go to the sun and the water when I feel distressed. Every time I came to Captiva something magic happened. I had this ghost of having been here before."

The tone of life on Captiva is quiet and relaxed. The 35-acre compound is shielded from a neighboring condominium complex by tall palms, feathery casrina trees, gumbo limbos, hibiscus and mangroves. Scattered around the grounds are a studio, a print shop, and houses for guests and Rauschenberg's staff of four.

Sweeping into his front yard is the shimmering Florida Gulf, where the 60-year-old artist spends many afternoons fishing and windsurfing. His dogs are a constant presence, frequently demanding Rauschenberg's attention, which he freely gives. His Samoyed, Laika, was such an island favorite that when she died, the artist's neighbors voted to name the lane they share after her.

"Want to hear a good dancing dog story?" asks Rauschenberg, erupting into fits of laughter. "Well I used to have this maid in New York in the late '60s, who insisted on wearing a uniform, which was just embarrassing in the house of an artist who is working very hard to pay the rent. I was giving a party for Margot Fonteyn and the maid—Agnes—smelled that this was a special deal, so she insisted on buying a new uniform, a nylon maid costume to embarrass my household. Nureyev came to the party and we were all dancing all over the place. Nureyev went up to Agnes and asked her to dance and she said (he now imitates her cross tone of voice), 'I've been watching you. You're too stiff. I'd rather dance with this dog here.' Whereupon she picked up my late dog, Kid, and danced off with him, leaving Nureyev in the wings."



A rocket made for Rauschenberg by an assistant

By the time he settled on Captiva, Rauschenberg's reputation as an international artist and one of the most influential of his generation was firmly established. In 1964, he'd become the first American painter to win the prestigious Venice Biennale and his work then, as now, was in great demand by collectors and museums throughout the world. He had set his mark on the course of art history, first with his all-white and all-black paintings of the early '50s (which met with little approval), and later with his "combines," assemblages of every imaginable object and material from beach tar, clocks, auto tires and neckties to stuffed chickens and even a stuffed Angora goat. He believed that a painting was more like the real world when it was

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The fish house, the artist's ideal hideaway

made out of the real world. "A pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting with than wood, nails, turpentine, oil and fabric," he once remarked. Today, he adds: "It's your dignity you're giving to the object."

Standing at the counter dividing his kitchen from the living room, he tops off his whiskey and consults with assistants who wander in and out of the spare, white house. Here, a large work made of paint and images transferred from photographs taken on a recent trip to Venezuela commands one wall; a lamp with a shade made of cardboard from China occupies a low table. The color TV here, and in his studio, is on 24 hours a day. "The TV is another window," says Rauschenberg, a smile igniting his face. "You can focus on it or not."

Trusting that serendipity will flavor the results, Rauschenberg, an avid cook, takes the same approach to his cooking that he does to his art: From a ragout of ideas and ingredients, using whatever is handy, he makes it up as he goes along. "My mother always told me, 'What you don't have, you don't need.' Accident and luck are the important elements." His rambling conversation reflects that outlook. One moment he is talking about politics in sports, the next about the best way to make chili. "My mind goes in every direction," he says. "I just barely zero in on an idea, then I start thinking of all its extensions."



The drawbridge safeguards solitude.

Tanned and relaxed in January following openings of exhibitions in Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Tibet and China (he was the first foreigner to have a one-man show in Beijing and illustrated Time's 1985 Man of the Year cover with a collage of Premier Deng Xiaoping), Rauschenberg seems remarkably energetic and as youthful as his staff, all of whom are half his age. Born in the small Gulf Coast refinery town of Port Arthur, Texas, he was recently honored in Houston with a show marking him the city's official sesquicentennial artist.

The other shows, however, represent the first part of the painter's ambitiously global, extravagantly Texan undertaking: to send his art on a five-year odyssey to 22 countries, its daunting expense borne largely by himself.

Not a retrospective, R.O.C.I. (Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange—named for the artist's pet turtle Roci) is an evolving exhibit featuring works inspired by Rauschenberg's stay in each nation and made with local materials. These works, in turn, are taken to the next country on the itinerary, giving the public a look at the world as seen through Rauschenberg's eyes. "If it

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Cavorting with Starr, C-Sea and Tanya in his living room

A RAUSCHENBERG PAINTING: FROM $26.30 TO $600,000

Though Rauschenberg moved to New York in 1949 to pursue his career as a painter, his work did not begin to sell for another 10 years. In the early '50s, a composer friend told Rauschenberg that he wanted to buy one of the black paintings but simply couldn't afford the price, a slim $300. Rauschenberg offered him the painting for the cash in his pocket, which turned out to be the odd sum of $26.30, a refund he received that day from the telephone company. Today that same painting might fetch $600,000, says one of the artist's dealers, Leo Castelli (the other is Illeana Sonnabend, Castelli's ex-wife), who first gave Rauschenberg a show in 1959.

"The early combines are practically priceless," says Castelli, recalling that a collector recently turned down $1,750,000 for "an important early work from 1959-60." Castelli, himself a collector of Rauschenbergs, estimates the market value for the artist's current small drawings at $20,000; his larger paintings at $150-$200,000.

Rauschenberg's work is represented in virtually every major international collection of contemporary art, including that of Cologne's Museum Ludwig, Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, Stockholm's Moderna Museet, London's Tate Gallery, New York's Museum of Modern Art, Whitney and Guggenheim Museums, as well as numerous private collections.

isn't an adventure, I don't see anything to recommend the profession," he says. "I want to show different cultures that art can be made out of anything. My idea is to gather up a bit of the world, to collect the world."

Rauschenberg regards himself more as a reporter-commentator than artist. "I resent the fact that somehow the illusion of the fine life is to be able to sleep through anything, to sleep through war, poverty, the world around us," he says. "I want to shake people awake. I want to make them aware of the individual responsibility both for themselves and for the human race."

No doubt this missionary zeal stems in part from Rauschenberg's boyhood desire to become a preacher. "But then I found out that my church strongly disapproved of dancing," he says, recalling that he "danced up a storm at his opening in Houston" the week before. "To back out of the church, I said I'd become a vet—I'd save dogs instead."

At Captiva, Rauschenberg cannot begin work until the dailiness of life is tended to: the dogs fed, the business of ROCI looked after, the dishes washed. That done, he heads to his studio, a stark, white building 100 yards from his house, to begin work with his chief assistant Terry on his "Quarter Mile" painting. Rauschenberg is 500 feet into "the world's largest painting," a work composed of photographs, silkscreened images, lithography and oil-on-canvas that he jokingly suggests showing at a race track. "But I feel very let down when I finish a piece. When I hit a quarter-mile, I may just keep going. It's a way of not finishing."

Scattered throughout the studio and grounds are scraps of junk collected from Rauschenberg's travels: a rusted tricycle, a Peruvian wheel and bags of colorful swatches of Thai cloth. His images come from everywhere—from the more than 40 magazines to which he subscribes as well as from newspapers and catalogues which his assistants sift and organize into labeled boxes. The most provocative images are tacked to Rauschenberg's "Muse" board in his print studio.

As Rauschenberg holds a silkscreen in place over a large panel, Terry, resting on knee pads on top of the enormous table, pours lavender paint over the screen and forces the paint through the porous silk design with a squeegee. "One more time?" he asks Rauschenberg.

"No, that's nice and light," answers Rauschenberg. "If you push it, you

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BOB RAUSCHENBERG'S "COMBINE" CHILI

"I think chili is a philosophy," says Rauschenberg, "a sophisticated dish built out of scraps." However, since his refrigerator doesn't provide enough scraps, "I usually shop a couple of days for my leftovers. Hot is paramount. A variety of meat tastes and textures (ground meat, chopped gizzards and calves livers, chicken) is necessary to give it that second-day awareness."

Start with onions and chili peppers; cook them in oil until they are soft. Start adding other stuff, like green peppers, meat, more hot peppers and stock or water to cover. Simmer a couple of hours, until the mixture is thick and add spices (chili powder, oregano, cumin) to taste to make the chili fiery, yet tolerable.

Do not add tomatoes or beans.

Sour cream and cool guacamole can be used as first aid.

Serve frozen mango, watermelon and Key lime pie for dessert.



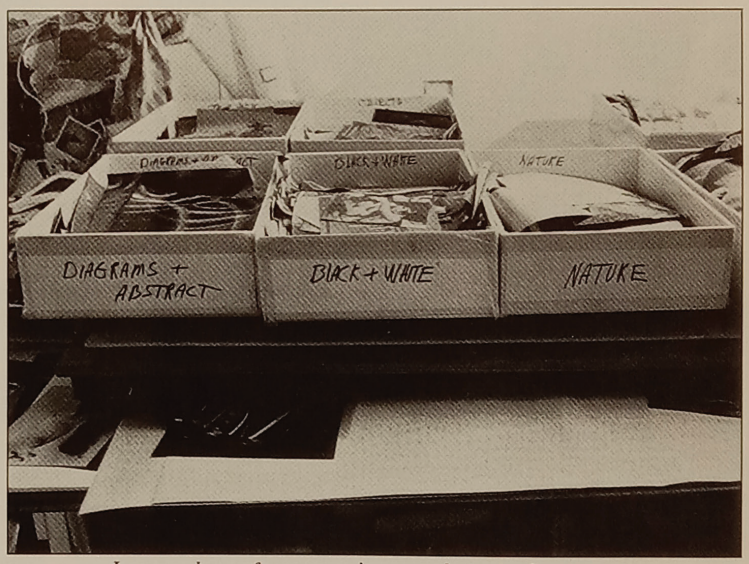
In the kitchen

just get contrast and lose all the half tones."

It wasn't until Rauschenberg left his hometown at age 18 to go into the Navy that he realized there was such a thing as an artist. "When I was a child it was very easy to grow up in Port Arthur without ever seeing a painting," he has remarked. In the Navy, he did portraits for friends to send back home—drawn in the latrine "because that's the only place they kept the lights on at night." When he decided to "have a new life as an artist," the first thing he did en route to art school in Kansas City was change his first name. "I was called Mihhhhhlton," he says, imitating his parent's Southern pronounciation of the dread name. "The name had to go." Later, he studied with the celebrated teacher Josef Albers, who hated his work, but whom Rauschenberg credits with teaching him self-discipline.

"I matured in a generation that was artistically full-blown and refused to kneel," he says. "So much of the art world today is dealing. There is a great deal of money and comfort in 'style,' but I don't think art is publicity or style; I think it comes out of either a deep meaning or some kind of special understanding."

When in need of solitude, the artist retreats to his hideaway on Captiva, the "fish house." Built on stilts in the bay, the fish house is connected to the shore by a dock equipped with a bell, to warn of approaching visitors, and a drawbridge. "I bought this house to prevent it from being turned into a nightclub or yacht club," says Rauschenberg, who in his early lean days slept on fish boxes salvaged from the market near his loft on Fulton Street in Manhattan and lived on a strict food budget of 15 cents a day.



Imagery drawn from magazines, catalogues and newspapers

"My parents never approved of my painting," he recalls gently, uncorking a bottle of Moet et Chandon in the living room of the simple frame house. Behind him, the sky is suffused with rose light. "After I'd become a somewhat successful painter, I remember my father said one day in one of our rare conversations, that he wanted to talk to me and I thought, 'Oh good' because I hadn't ever remembered his saying that before. Suddenly he said, 'Now I know why you wanted to be a painter.' And I thought, 'My god, this is a real breakthrough' and then he said, 'If I ever thought there was any money in it. . . .' Well, it was almost a wonderful moment."

"In all my success, I could be a flop overnight because of my aesthetic restlessness," Rauschenberg says. "I'm always asking, 'Is this enough?' I prefer laughter over honor." M

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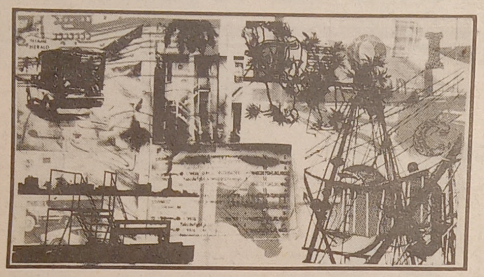


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Dec. 30

A Special Issue About The Times Of Our Lives



The Cover

by Robert Rauschenberg

What you see on the front and back covers of today's magazine is not a mistake. It is, in fact, two pages out of art and publishing history. It is the first time an original work of art has been printed by a newspaper. Until today, newspapers and magazines have merely *reproduced* works of art. Today's cover is not a reproduction. It is the largest edition (about 650,000) of an original artwork ever printed. It was created for you by Robert Rauschenberg, considered by many the finest artist in the United States. For more about Rauschenberg and about how the cover was created, see the story by Calvin Tomkins on page 20.

Ten Years And Counting

by Charles Whited

10 *On this last Sunday of the 1970s, The Herald's thoughtful columnist recalls the decade in a frank and unusual way. He tells how the events of the last 10 years have changed his life and the way he thinks. He wonders, among other things, about technology, energy, God, the changing faces of South Florida and "The Perfect Peace."*

The Public's Private Views

by our readers

28 There is more to the previous decade than what was reported in the newspaper. Parents have died, children have been born, marriages have been made and broken. In brief, personal essays, our readers share the news of their life.

Florida Futures

by Al Burt

34 We can learn only so much about ourselves by looking back. We must look ahead, too. Our "In Florida" columnist makes some educated guesses about how the events of the last few years will affect our fortunes.

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The man who created the most public work of private art in history

By CALVIN TOMKINS

When you picked up the cover of today's magazine, you saw two pages out of history. It is the first time that an artist has ever made an original edition of lithographs for millions of people to see — on the same day. It is, in a sense, the biggest gallery opening in history. The cover was created by Robert Rauschenberg, the most influential living American artist.

Who is Robert Rauschenberg, and how can we make such claims about what we have done? We asked Calvin Tomkins, author of the best-selling Living Well Is the Best Revenge *and other books on contemporary culture — including a biographical study of Rauschenberg and his circle that will appear next spring — to introduce the artist and explain why he was the natural choice to work with us on this unprecedented journalistic project.*

Ten years after his first New York show in 1951, most critics and some of the older artists still dismissed Robert Rauschenberg's work as a joke. Paintings made out of dirt and growing grass? "Combines" that included flattened umbrellas, rusty license plates and flashing light bulbs? A sculpture whose central feature was a stuffed angora goat with an automobile tire around its middle? He had to be kidding, right? The younger artists knew better. They saw that in everything he did, Rauschenberg was asking a question: What is art? He was asking it more energetically than anyone else, with greater wit and persistence and imagination. Sooner or later he would have to be taken seriously.

Like a lot of Americans, Rauschenberg grew up in a place where such questions did not arise. As a boy in Port Arthur, Tex., it never occurred to him that his ability to draw accurate likenesses of people and animals was anything special. He never even realized that there was such a thing as being an artist until he was 19 and in the Navy; on a furlough he visited the Huntington Art Gallery in San Marino, Calif., where he saw original oil paintings for the first time. They impressed him enormously.

After the war he went to art school on the G.I. Bill. Went to Paris because he had heard that was the place to become an artist (it wasn't, not any more). He came back and studied under Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, then under Vaclav Vytlacil and Morris Kantor at the Art Students League in New York. One day he walked into a life class and heard a fellow student asking Kantor what possible justification there could be for what Rauschenberg was doing — instead of working from the model, he had painted a maze-like design in white, with numbers scratched into the pigment with a lead pencil. Rauschenberg never forgot Kantor's reply: "Kantor said it wasn't his sort of thing, but he didn't see any reason why I shouldn't be doing it. His attitude was, 'Well, why not?' "

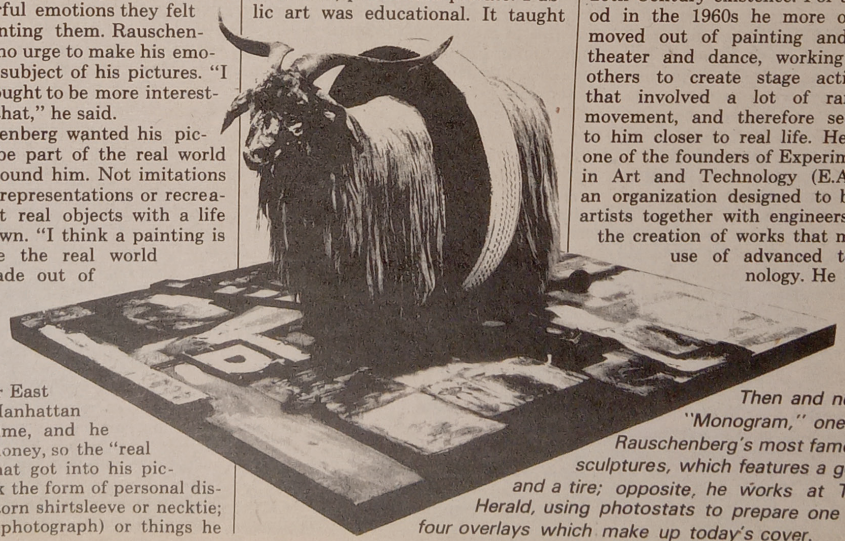
Not many artists were as loose as Kantor in those days. Abstract Expressionism was fast becoming the dominant school. Soon art students all across the country would be imitating the agitated brushwork and the "spontaneous" dripped or spattered look of paintings by Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, the first American artists to achieve an internationally acclaimed new style. Rauschenberg took a lot from Pollock and de Kooning, but he rejected a lot more. The Abstract Expressionists wanted their paintings to evoke the powerful emotions they felt while painting them. Rauschenberg had no urge to make his emotions the subject of his pictures. "I felt they ought to be more interesting than that," he said.

Rauschenberg wanted his pictures to be part of the real world he saw around him. Not imitations of it, not representations or recreations, but real objects with a life of their own. "I think a painting is more like the real world if it's made out of the real world," he said. He was living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan at the time, and he had no money, so the "real world" that got into his pictures took the form of personal discards (a torn shirtsleeve or necktie; a family photograph) or things he picked up on the street (as everyone knows, you can find anything on a New York street). His motive was curiosity: to find out what made a picture. The Cubists had invented collage. If it was all right to put a fragment of printed oilcloth or newspaper into a painting, as they had, then why not an old sneaker? Why not the quilt from your bed, for that matter, as Rauschenberg did in his notorious *Bed* (it was spring, and he didn't need it for sleeping). Why not an angora goat bought from a junk dealer for $15 down, the rest on account? If his motive was curiosity, his basic theme was "multiplicity, variety, and inclusion," as he phrased it. Rauschenberg excluded nothing on principle. It was all part of his big question: What is art?

People used to know what art was, or to think they did. Art had two sides, public and private. Public art was educational. It taught you which gods to worship and why, or reminded you of leaders and battles and acts of state. Private art was a form of wealth. Rich patrons engaged artist-artisans to make beautiful objects (paintings, sculptures, chairs, gravy boats) that would embellish their households and make them feel even richer. Things got confused toward the end of the 19th Century, when so much wealth was redistributed and so many artists decided to work for themselves rather than for some beastly bourgeois. Public art went into a long decline. Private art became more and more private, i.e. more incomprehensible to everyone but artists and critics. The whole concept of beauty was out the window.

In our century the confusion vastly deepened. Public art ceased to educate, or even to reflect official attitudes; the notion of "interpreting" art became all but meaningless. Private art did not cease to be a form of wealth, of course, but embellishment was not what it had in mind. ("No, painting is not made to decorate apartments," said Pablo Picasso. "It is an instrument of war, for attack and defense against the enemy.") With Abstract Expressionism, the private struggle of the artist was what mattered; the painting was a record of that struggle, and the struggle often seemed more important to the artist than the painting did.

Rauschenberg's whole career has been in one sense a breaking down of the barriers between art and life, public and private, the self and the world. Instead of looking inward, into his own feelings and emotions, he looks out at the life around him, the noisy, immediate, tangible life of city streets and billboards and politicians and athletes and everyday supermarket rush-hour late 20th Century existence. For a period in the 1960s he more or less moved out of painting and into theater and dance, working with others to create stage activities that involved a lot of random movement, and therefore seemed to him closer to real life. He was one of the founders of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), an organization designed to bring artists together with engineers for the creation of works that made use of advanced technology. He also

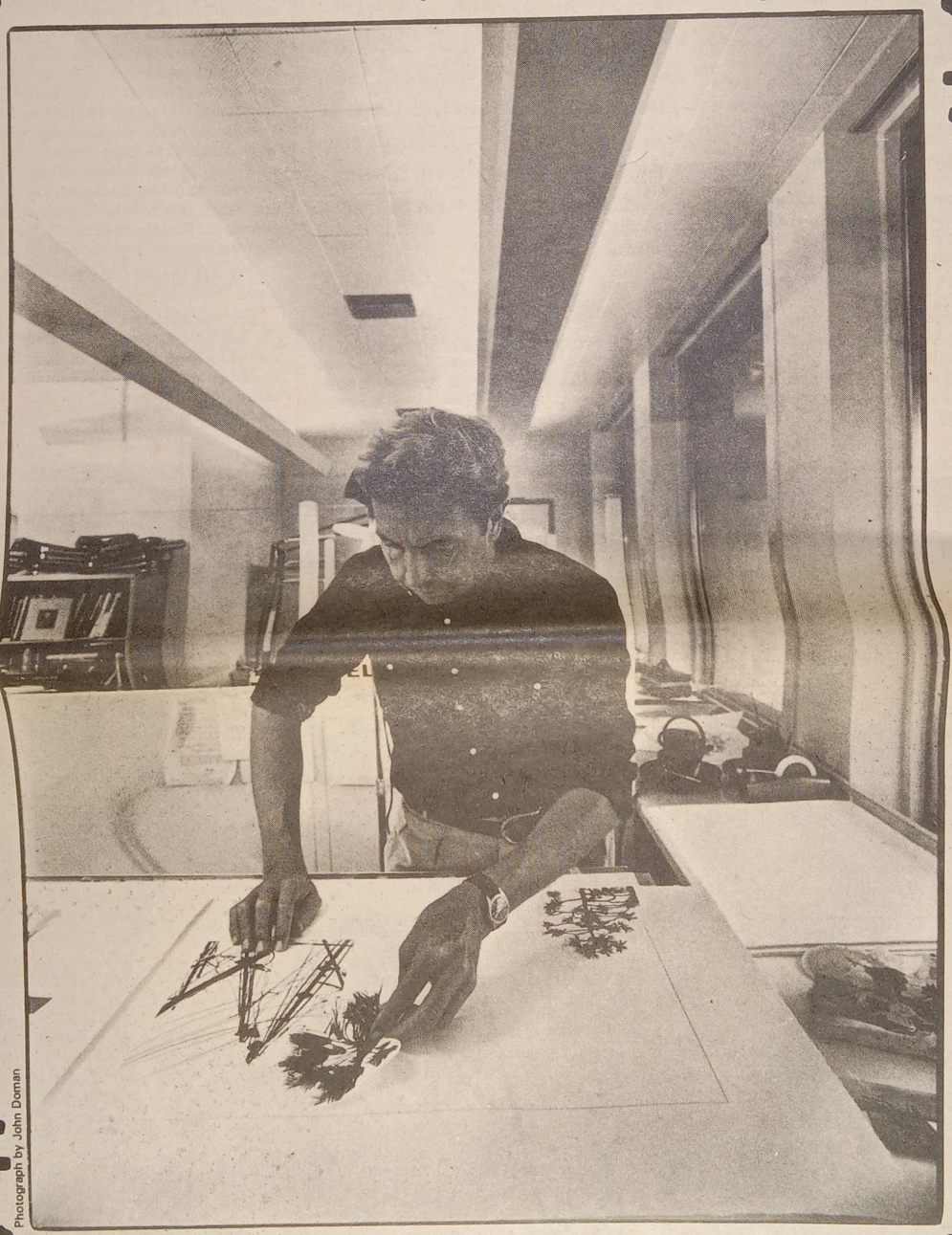


Then and now: "Monogram," one of Rauschenberg's most famous sculptures, which features a goat and a tire; opposite, he works at The Herald, using photostats to prepare one of four overlays which make up today's cover.

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RAUSCHENBERG



Photograph by John Dorman

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RAUSCHENBERG



Photograph by Leon Rosenblatt

For Rauschenberg, the first step in the creation of the cover was to make photographs of South Florida. Here, he searches for images of Cape Florida on Key Biscayne. He also visited parts of Miami, Coconut Grove, Coral Gables and Miami Beach.

started CHANGE, Inc., an emergency fund for artists to which his $1,000 fee for today's cover has been donated. His pictures were selling for anywhere between $20,000 and $100,000 by then, so he could afford to do other things.

He experimented with lithography in unheard-of ways, taking impressions of leaves and flowers and old lead type faces, pushing the medium to see how far he could take it. In 1968 he assembled a 54-foot-long collage drawing called *Currents*, made out of clippings from daily newspapers; it was an attempt to sum up in graphic form the legacy of the 1960s, that catastrophic decade that saw so many private worlds overwhelmed by the immediacy of public events. He had come to think of himself as an artist-reporter responding to the news from the Apollo moon landing to the death of Janis Joplin. It was with this in mind that the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C., decided to make its Bicentennial exhibition in 1976 a massive Rauschenberg retrospective. No other American artist could approach him as a witness to his time.

An artist who keeps in such close touch with the world around him could hardly help being interested in the technology of mass communications. Rauschenberg was immediately receptive, therefore, when Leon Rosenblatt, the art director of Tropic, got in touch with him recently at his Florida home, on Captiva Island, about designing the decade-end issue. Rosenblatt, a 31-year-old Miamian, is an artist himself. While working at freelance illustration in New York, he became fascinated by the idea of using large photostat cameras (designed for commercial reproduction) to make original works of art that could be produced in huge quantity: "Stat-Art." It took him two years to work out the complex process, which he did as a master's thesis project at the University of Miami. The Herald, meanwhile, was in the process of changing over from rotogravure to offset reproduction, and had already acquired the largest and most advanced photostat cameras made.

When Rosenblatt joined The Herald in 1978, he went to work on his boss, Lary Bloom, to give Stat-Art a tryout, with Rauschenberg as the pioneer artist-in-residence. The result is this week's cover: an original Rauschenberg, using images from photographs he made around South Florida, laid out by the artist, photostated to size in The Herald's editorial art department, supervised by him at every stage of the printing process, and distributed in an edition of more than 600,000 copies. Surely the most public work of private art in history.

But can it really be art? The Sunday paper?

Can you think of any reason why not?

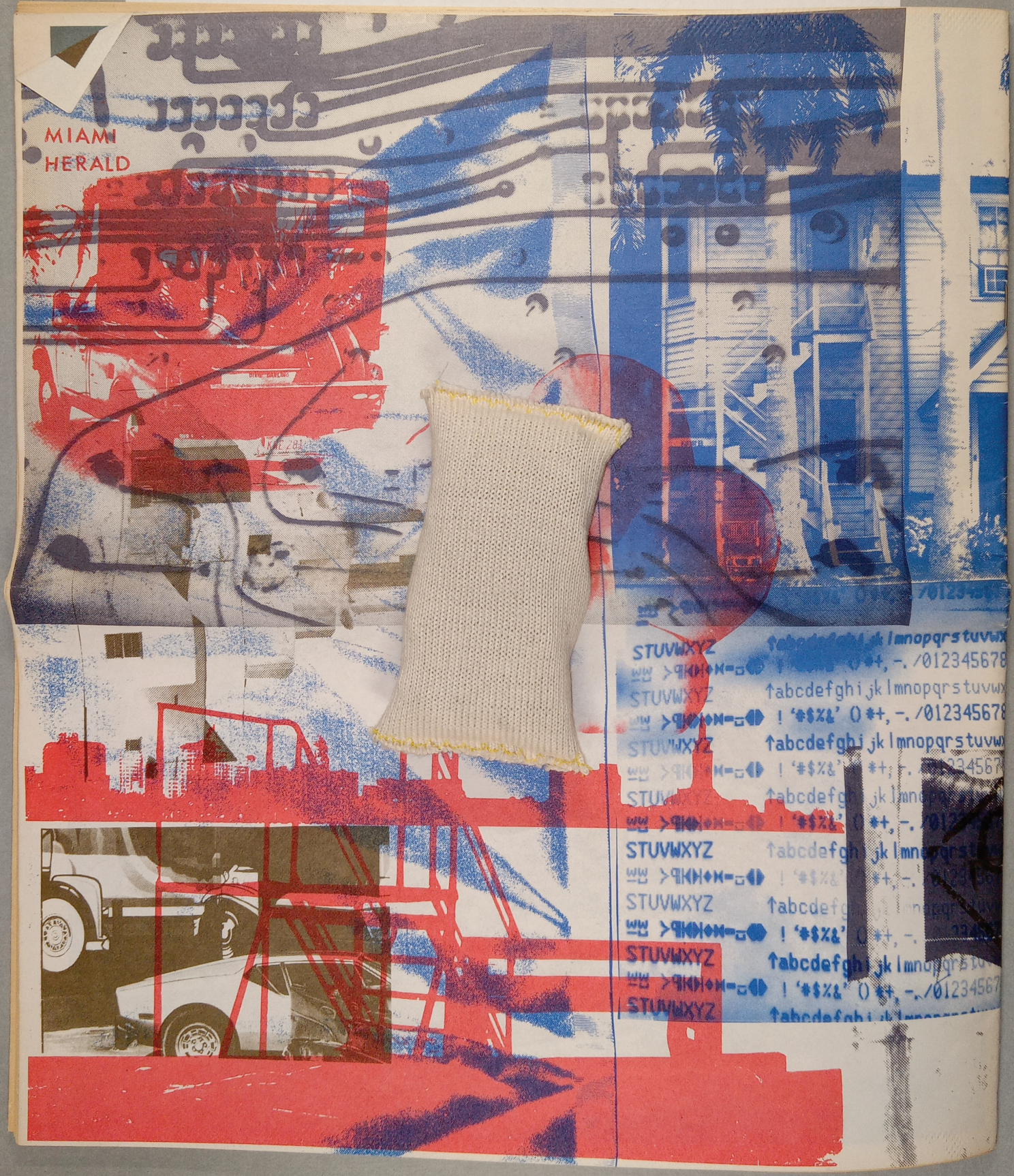
Look at it this way

Now that you have an original work of art in your house, what do you do with it? You could, of course, put it in the garbage. Or, you could frame it and put it over the fireplace.

How to frame it? Simple. Open the magazine, lay it flat against a piece of rag board (a backing available at frame shops) and frame the entire magazine under glass.

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Art

ART VIEW

JOHN RUSSELL

Rauschenberg and Johns: Mr. Outside And Mr. Inside

It is by a conspicuous coincidence that a show devoted to Jasper Johns's paintings of "The Seasons" should be on view through March 7 at the Leo Castelli Gallery, 420 West Broadway, while simultaneously there can be seen in the new Lila Acheson Wallace wing at the Metropolitan Museum what may well be the single largest work of contemporary art ever to be mounted in a great American museum. The work in question is "1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece" by Robert Rauschenberg, who rather more than 30 years ago was jointly responsible with Jasper Johns for a historic shift in the ambitions of art. Quite apart from that coincidence, major early paintings by both Rauschenberg and Johns can be seen through March 7 in Part 1 of Leo Castelli's 30th-anniversary show at 142 Greene Street. Quite clearly, therefore, this is a good moment at which to look back at careers that have left a permanent mark upon the history of 20th-century art.

When Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg first came before the public in the mid-1950's, they were widely regarded as vandals, saboteurs and wreckers. When faced with Johns's flags and targets, one well-known New York abstract artist said, "If that's painting, I might as well give up." And when Rauschenberg painted directly onto his own narrow bed and hung it up on the wall, you would have thought from the rumpus that he had violated some kind of loyalty oath. Who were these two, anyway, to dump on the American art scene just as it was beginning to be acclaimed the world over?

But then, with time, it became clear that far from being an act of frivolity that verged on a Federal offense, Johns's "Flags" had brought back into painting a sensuous delicacy of touch that had had few equals since Georges Seurat was painting on cigar boxes in the 1880's. It also became clear that far from aiming to create an ephemeral sensation, he was a partisan of the long, solitary, hermetic haul. His paintings were about multiplicities of meaning, rather than about their ostensible subjects, and it was his ambition, as far as possible, to banish himself from them. (In 1971 he said in an interview that "I have attempted to develop my thinking in a way that the work done is not me.")

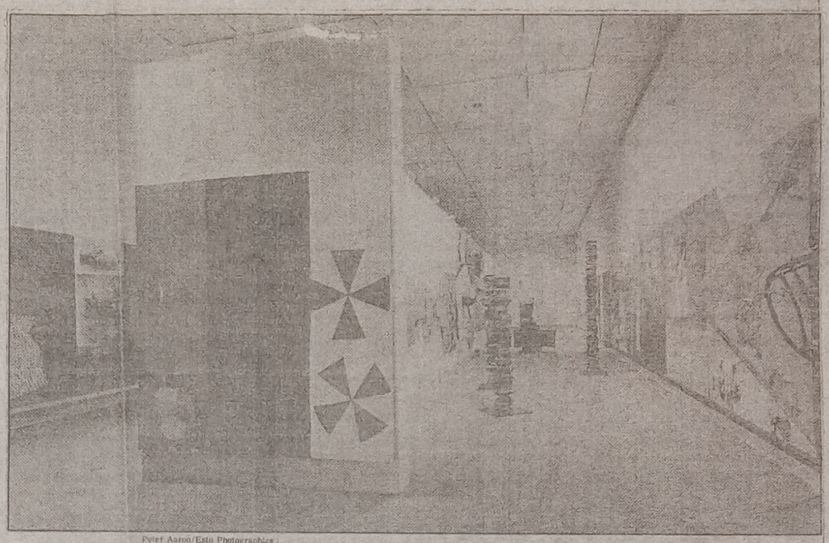
Already in 1955, a close look would have disposed of the notion that Johns and Rauschenberg were [illegible] Johns's work was about paradox and introspection. Rauschenberg wanted, on the contrary, to reach out to the whole world and welcome it into his work. (In 1961 he said that "there is no reason not to consider the world as one gigantic painting.")

Then as now, they both seemed to a foreign observer to be deeply, unalterably American. When Johns drew a penetrating poetry of his own from a light bulb, a drawer, a beer can, a wire coathanger, the numbers from 0 through 9 and the alphabet from A through Z, the result had philosophical overtones, but it also had echoes of the plain speaking and plain dealing that John Frederick Peto, for one, had brought to the painting of common objects in the 19th century. In his "combine paintings," in which found objects and ready-made images of every imaginable kind were combined with passages of pure painting, Rauschenberg dealt with the poetics of metropolitan glut in much the same way that Charles Ives in his Fourth Symphony had dealt with the manifold sound structure of New England in an era when music came live, and raw, and unamplified.

As time went by, their differences became ever more marked. Johns developed a complicated code system that often seemed intended to cover his tracks. But, when cracked in however small a degree, that system could have a universal poignancy. As Johns is well known to be a close reader of Hart Crane, we have no trouble relating the outstretched hand and elongated arm that have long been a part of that system to Crane's suicide by drowning. Equally well, many other seemingly cryptic images in Johns's work relate to poetry, to older art and to private perturbations. Though for years turned away at the front door of Johns's work, autobiography soon found a way in at the back — so much so, that in recent years Johns has developed into one of the great American soliloquists.

Rauschenberg, by contrast, went further and further in the direction of literally letting the whole world into his work. The enormous installation at the Met has in part the character of a travel diary, for Rauschenberg in recent years has been a great globetrotter in the cause of multinational understanding. The result has an aerial fancy, allied to an unbounded generosity of spirit.

It moves fast and travels light. Sound plays a key role in it. If it has in it something of a



Peter Aaron/Esto Photographics



Above, Robert Rauschenberg's enormous installation in the new Wallace wing at the Met—It has in part the character of a travel diary. At right "Study for Fall" by Jasper Johns, part of the artist's cycle, "The Seasons," at Leo Castelli's main gallery.

for presentation. His is an art that has always reached out to us. (Sometimes, it has encouraged us to activate it by our very presence.) Veteran admirers of Merce Cunningham and his dance company will remember that when Rauschenberg toured with them in foreign parts as set designer he would improvise his décors from one night to the next, using whatever he found in the unfamiliar street.

The huge piece at the Met still has that quality. Like a supersonic Ariel, Rauschenberg conjures delight from the air and moves on, unseen by us but already wreaking an almost incorporeal magic beside us, above us and sometimes beneath us. Johns, meanwhile, is as if walled up in his studio, surrounded by objects that speak to him the way the scales, the bell, the hammer, the millstone, the pair of compasses, the ladder and the cryptic polyhedron speak to Melancholy as she was evoked by Albrecht Dürer in 1514.

"The Seasons" reminded this visitor on more than one count of Dürer's celebrated engraving. Though based initially upon a painting by Picasso of the Minotaur moving his house, Johns's new cycle is fundamentally a four-part meditation on the mutability of things. Like Dürer, Johns has chosen for the cycle a classic, "given" structure. We know from the start that — in the words of Hart Crane — we shall "walk the dozen particular decimals of time," with plenty of natural detail to help us to tell January from July.

But the sense of Johns's "Seasons" is not meteorological. As in Dürer's "Melancholy," the four skies are full of flaring, flaming portents. Yet — as in Dürer, again — the real drama is inward. Just as we have somehow so in "The Seasons" we have to unpuzzle the equally peculiar but not less haunting connotations of the rope, the ladder, the Alpine sign that says "Watch out for falling ice!" and all the other clues that Johns has left around. It is a terrible moment — as poignant as any in recent painting — when the rope is loosened, the ladder breaks and the furniture of memory slides down in disorder. "Fall" is the title of that painting, and it is well named. "Winter" and "Spring" persuade us, however, to

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Art

ART VIEW

JOHN RUSSELL

Rauschenberg and Johns: Mr. Outside And Mr. Inside

It is by a conspicuous coincidence that a show devoted to Jasper Johns's paintings of "The Seasons" should be on view through March 7 at the Leo Castelli Gallery, 420 West Broadway, while simultaneously there can be seen in the new Lila Acheson Wallace wing at the Metropolitan Museum what may well be the single largest work of contemporary art ever to be mounted in a great American museum. The work in question is "1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece" by Robert Rauschenberg, who rather more than 30 years ago was jointly responsible with Jasper Johns for a historic shift in the ambitions of art. Quite apart from that coincidence, major early paintings by both Rauschenberg and Johns can be seen through March 7 in Part 1 of Leo Castelli's 30th-anniversary show at 142 Greene Street. Quite clearly, therefore, this is a good moment at which to look back at careers that have left a permanent mark upon the history of 20th-century art.

When Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg first came before the public in the mid-1950's, they were widely regarded as vandals, saboteurs and wreckers. When faced with Johns's flags and targets, one well-known New York abstract artist said, "If that's painting, I might as well give up." And when Rauschenberg painted directly onto his own narrow bed and hung it up on the wall, you would have thought from the rumpus that he had violated some kind of loyalty oath. Who were these two, anyway, to dump on the American art scene just as it was beginning to be acclaimed the world over?

But then, with time, it became clear that far from being an act of frivolity that verged on a Federal offense, Johns's "Flags" had brought back into painting a sensuous delicacy of touch that had had few equals since Georges Seurat was painting on cigar boxes in the 1880's. It also became clear that far from aiming to create an ephemeral sensation, he was a partisan of the long, solitary, hermetic haul. His paintings were about multiplicities of meaning, rather than about their ostensible subjects, and it was his ambition, as far as possible, to banish himself from them. (In 1971 he said in an interview that "I have attempted to develop my thinking in a way that the work done is not me.")

Already in 1955, a close look would have disposed of the notion that Johns and Rauschenberg were virtually interchangeable newcomers, bent primarily on outrage. Johns's work was about paradox and introspection. Rauschenberg wanted, on the contrary, to reach out to the whole world and welcome it into his work. (In 1961 he said that "there is no reason not to consider the world as one gigantic painting.")

Then as now, they both seemed to a foreign observer to be deeply, unalterably American. When Johns drew a penetrating poetry of his own from a light bulb, a drawer, a beer can, a wire coathanger, the numbers from 0 through 9 and the alphabet from A through Z, the result had philosophical overtones, but it also had echoes of the plain speaking and plain dealing that John Frederick Peto, for one, had brought to the painting of common objects in the 19th century. In his "combine paintings," in which found objects and ready-made images of every imaginable kind were combined with passages of pure painting, Rauschenberg dealt with the poetics of metropolitan glut in much the same way that Charles Ives in his Fourth Symphony had dealt with the manifold sound structure of New England in an era when music came live, and raw, and unamplified.

As time went by, their differences became ever more marked. Johns developed a complicated code system that often seemed intended to cover his tracks. But, when cracked in however small a degree, that system could have a universal poignancy. As Johns is well known to be a close reader of Hart Crane, we have no trouble relating the outstretched hand and elongated arm that have long been a part of that system to Crane's suicide by drowning. Equally well, many other seemingly cryptic images in Johns's work relate to poetry, to older art and to private perturbations. Though for years turned away at the front door of Johns's work, autobiography soon found a way in at the back — so much so, that in recent years Johns has developed into one of the great American soliloquists.

Rauschenberg, by contrast, went further and further in the direction of literally letting the whole world into his work. The enormous installation at the Met has in part the character of a travel diary, for Rauschenberg in recent years has been a great globetrotter in the cause of multinational understanding. The result has an aerial fancy, allied to an unbounded generosity of spirit.

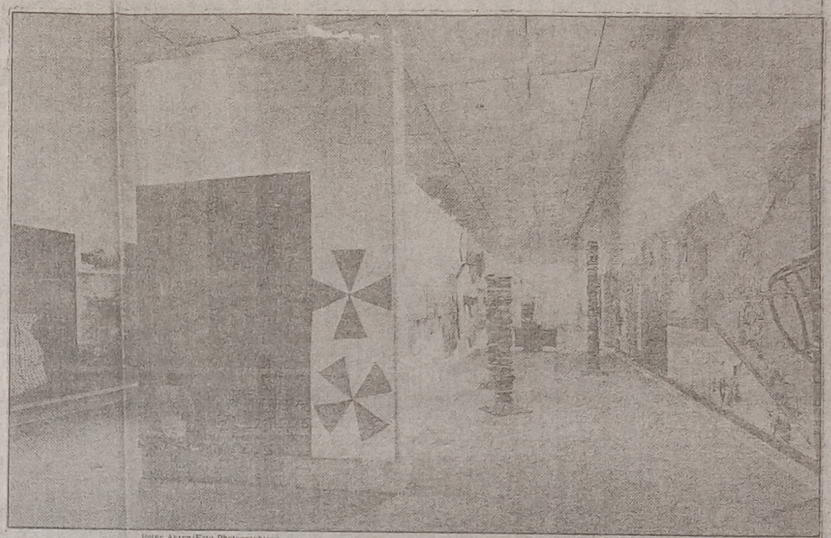
It moves fast and travels light. Sound plays a key role in it. If it has in it something of a thinking man's Epcot, it also demonstrates that Rauschenberg has lost none of his genius for presentation. His is an art that has always reached out to us. (Sometimes, it has encouraged us to activate it by our very presence.) Veteran admirers of Merce Cunningham and his dance company will remember that when Rauschenberg toured with them in foreign parts as set designer he would improvise his décors from one night to the next, using whatever he found in the unfamiliar street.

The huge piece at the Met still has that quality. Like a supersonic Ariel, Rauschenberg conjures delight from the air and moves on, unseen by us but already wreaking an almost incorporeal magic beside us, above us and sometimes beneath us. Johns, meanwhile, is as if walled up in his studio, surrounded by objects that speak to him the way the scales, the bell, the hammer, the millstone, the pair of compasses, the ladder and the cryptic polyhedron speak to Melancholy as she was evoked by Albrecht Dürer in 1514.

"The Seasons" reminded this visitor on more than one count of Dürer's celebrated engraving. Though based initially upon a painting by Picasso of the Minotaur moving his house, Johns's new cycle is fundamentally a four-part meditation on the mutability (as much as on the multiplicity) of meaning. The use of the four seasons, each in turn, insures for the cycle a classic, "given" structure. We know from the start that — in the words of Hart Crane — we shall "walk the dozen particular decimals of time," with plenty of natural detail to help us to tell January from July.

But the sense of Johns's "Seasons" is not meteorological. As in Dürer's "Melancholy," the four skies are full of flaring, flaming portents. Yet — as in Dürer, again — the real drama is inward. Just as we have somehow to unriddle the strange collocation of objects that is strewn around the feet of Melancholy, so in "The Seasons" we have to unpuzzle the equally peculiar but not less haunting connotations of the rope, the ladder, the Alpine sign that says "Watch out for falling ice!" and all the other clues that Johns has left around. It is a terrible moment — as poignant as any in recent painting — when the rope is loosened, the ladder breaks and the furniture of memory slides down in disorder. "Fall" is the title of that painting, and it is well named. "Winter" and "Spring" persuade us, however, to walk in step with nature, and to believe that

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Peter Aaron/Esto Photographics



Above, Robert Rauschenberg's enormous installation in the new Wallace wing at the Met—It has in part the character of a travel diary. At right "Study for Fall" by Jasper Johns, part of the artist's cycle, "The Seasons," at Leo Castelli's main gallery.

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Untitled 1950 Rauschenberg monoprint.

Early Robert Rauschenberg

ART, From C1

known world of abstract expressionism, he produced distinctive and accomplished abstract expressionist paintings, all-white paintings and all-black paintings, made a decade before minimalism was an issue. He also made sculptural assemblages, large and small, boxed and unboxed, made of stones and mica, nails and metal scraps. And he made delicate, poetic collages, combining shirt cardboards and old engravings he picked up during a nine-month trip to Italy and North Africa with fellow artist Cy Twombly in 1952.

They're all here, along with other earlier works predating conceptual art by nearly a decade: a series of photographs taken in Italy during that trip showing Twombly gradually descending a flight of marble steps, his head cropped, and the famed de Kooning drawing that Rauschenberg persuaded the artist to give him and then erased. All properly framed and labeled "Erased de Kooning Drawing by Robert Rauschenberg," it was seen as a nihilistic dada gesture at the time but was an attempt to show the validity of "unmaking" art as well as making it, says Hopps.

The show clarifies and corrects several other misconceptions, not only about the chronology of these early years, but about the existence of several very early works that even Hopps had assumed were lost or destroyed. Since Hopps organized his large Rauschenberg retrospective at the National Museum of American Art in 1976 (which included some 30 of these works), Hopps and Rauschenberg have located more than 100 additional ones carefully tucked away by friends like Twombly, Jasper Johns (whom he didn't meet until 1954), Cage and artist Susan Weil, Rauschenberg's wife during this period. All have lent major works to this show.

The surprises begin in the first room, and include four life-size figures in silhouette—all monoprints on blueprint paper made as experiments with Weil. The most striking is a haunting, acrobatic double image of Rauschenberg nude, made in 1950 by a slow process that involves lying on the paper and repeatedly exposing it to light. Twombly had carefully put this one away after one of the four—it is not clear which—was shown at the Museum of Modern Art.

Also in this amazing first room are other works from 1949-50 (you have to keep reminding yourself that Rauschenberg was only 24 or 25 at the time), including two paintings not seen together since Rauschenberg had his first show at Betty Parsons (dealer to Pollock, de Kooning and others) in 1951. One of them, a primarily white abstraction with cruciform shapes titled "Crucifixion and Reflection," Hopps considers one of his most important rediscoveries and acquisitions for the Menil. Next to it is "Mother of God," a work that seems to presage Adolph Gottlieb's floating orbs. This work, made from a torn map and black paint, belongs to Rauschenberg, as the result of a concerted effort in the '70s to find some of these lost early works.

Here, as in the galleries that follow, photographs are integrated with the paintings, just as they always have been in Rauschenberg's art. Among them: two acquired in 1952 by Edward Steichen for the Museum of Modern Art—one a tufted black buggy seat photographed as a flat, abstract object. They were the first Rauschenbergs to enter a museum.

Rauschenberg returned to Black Mountain College several times during this period, both for the free studio space and the stimulation of working further with composer Cage, whose interest in silence as a musical element surely reverberates in Rauschenberg's all-white paintings of 1951. An entire gallery is filled with them here—single square, a diptych, a triptych etc. Made with rollers and white house paint, these non-illusionist objects anticipate minimalism by a decade. Intended for what Rauschenberg hoped would be his next show at Betty Parsons—a show that never materialized because of objections to these paintings—they were never shown until 1963 in the retrospective at the Jewish Museum in New York that marked his arrival as a star in the art world—a full decade after the latest works in the Corcoran show were made.

In the years that the present show embraces, Rauschenberg was married, divorced, had a son, Christopher, and was supporting himself by decorating shop windows and working as the janitor for the Stable Gallery, which succeeded Betty Parsons. Nothing stopped him: The white paintings were followed by often large, heavily textured black paintings covered with black enamel, and then ever richer paintings with blue-black, and brown, and dirt, and—increasingly—bits of fabric and collage.

"After the white paintings," says Hopps, "there is an increasing objectness about the work, and you're on your way to Brice Marden, minimalism, and all kinds of things that came later." The beauty of this show is that you don't have to take his or anyone else's word for it. It's all there for you to see.

And savor. Influences aside, there are endless unfamiliar paintings and collages and assemblages to simply relish for their sheer beauty. Yet you can't help but sense, as the show comes to an end in 1953, that the "Combines," like the famed "Rebus" and "The Bed," are just around the corner. The show has an epilogue, which introduces Rauschenberg's latest portfolio of prints—facsimiles of some of the delicate collages in this show. But it really ends, appropriately, with "Yoicks," a bright red painting with strips of polka-dotted yellow cloth glued to the surface. The piece virtually shouts that the age of abstract expressionism is about to give way to something entirely new—and, as it turns out, it did so in the Rauschenberg combines. Though that's where this show ends, most people think of the combines as the first important works the artist made.

They'll never think it again after this show.

Curiously, it is the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, funded in part from the now-famous auction of Warhol's cookie jars and other possessions, that has paid for the comprehensive monograph and revised chronology of Rauschenberg's early years, now being prepared by Hopps. It will not be ready until next fall when this exhibition opens at the Menil, but a helpful 40-page brochure with some illustrations has been prepared for the Corcoran show, which continues through Aug. 11. After the showing at the Menil Collection, Houston (Sept. 27 to Jan. 5, 1992) the exhibition will travel to Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art in February, and to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art next May.

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Art

Rauschenberg, Bright & Early

Accomplished Works of the Young Artist, at the Corcoran

By Jo Ann Lewis
Special to The Washington Post

If the National Gallery's glitzy, overblown Rauschenberg show has left you cold, the Corcoran has a magnificent antidote: "Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s." Opening today, this thrilling show is guaranteed to restore some real understanding of Rauschenberg's greatness, both as an artist and as a prodigious innovator who changed the course of art.

The evidence is all here, clear as crystal, in 101 little-known works assembled by former Corcoran director Walter Hopps, now curator of the Menil Collection in Houston. All date from the first five years Rauschenberg spent in and out of New York, starting in 1949, when he was only 24. No country bumpkin from Port Arthur, Tex., Rauschenberg had in fact arrived in Manhattan with three solid years of classical art training under his belt. Thanks to the GI Bill, following a stint in the Navy, he had attended the Kansas City Art Inst., the Academie Julien in Paris, Black Mountain College in North Carolina. There, the rigorous training of Josef Albers and the inspiration of John Cage had mixed with his own originality to produce the extraordinary eruption of work on view in this exhibition—much of it thought to have been lost until now.

If the National Gallery's "ROCI" show is about Rauschenberg's wanderlust, wealth and prolificacy at age 65, the Corcoran show is about his originality, poverty and prolificacy at 25. Dropping full-blown into the threadbare and little-

See ART, C8, Col. 2

Benjamin Forgey's Cityscape column will resume next week.



Rauschenberg's 1950 life-size double image of himself on blueprint paper.