

The Museum of Modern Art

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PRESS PREVIEW:

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RAUSCHENBERG: 34 DRAWINGS FOR DANTE'S INFERNO, each drawing illustrating a canto of Dante's great classic poem, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from December 21 through March 20. Directed by William S. Lieberman, Curator of Drawings and Prints at the Museum, the exhibition has been shown abroad under the auspices of the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

In 1964-65, the exhibition was seen in London, Oxford and Cambridge, England; in Graz and Vienna, Austria; in Krefeld, Dortmund, Hamburg, Stuttgart and Berlin, Germany; in Oslo, Stockholm, Helsinki, Amsterdam, Belgrade and Brussels before returning to New York City for the present exhibition.

Rauschenberg was 35 years old when he began the sequence of illustrations for the poem in 1959, as was Dante when he began to compose the Inferno. He spent the next eighteen months in close study of the epic, drawing in strict chronological order, canto by canto, as he read, until the series was completed.

The rich, pictorial imagery of Dante's poem contains many references to specific personalities and events of his own day -- 14th century Tuscany; Rauschenberg similarly chooses an iconography derived from contemporary life, particularly from the world of sports. He also refers to political personalities and events of our own industrial and mechanized age of space. As Mr. Lieberman says, "The shock of identification with the 20th century lends prophecy to Dante's revelation, the images of which are already so pictorially conceived in verse."

Ingenuity characterizes Rauschenberg's method of drawing. According to Mr. Lieberman, "One technical device is essential to the startling and sustained visual impact of these illustrations, that is the transfer to the drawing sheet of images already printed, a technique Rauschenberg has pioneered and exploited as a draughtsman."

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Transfers are created by moistening areas of the drawing sheet with an immediate solvent for printer's ink -- turpentine or cigarette lighter fluid. The moistened area is then placed face down against a reproduction of a photograph from a magazine or newspaper; while moist this area remains relatively transparent and the verso of the printed image is rubbed with the head of an empty ballpoint pen or with a pencil. The transferred image lifts the ink with which the reproduction was printed and appears in reverse on the recto of the drawing. This technique gives the illusion of collage, and each drawing combines several transfers.

Rauschenberg's method is sometimes described as "combine drawing" -- it is a graphic demonstration of his concern with the balance of art and reality. The artist himself has said, "I don't want a picture to look like something it isn't. I want it to look like something it is. And I think a picture is more like the real world when it's made out of the real world."

Robert Rauschenberg was born in Port Arthur, Texas, in 1925. He studied at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1946-47; at the Academie Julien in Paris in 1947; with Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1948-49; and with Vaclav Vytlacil and Morris Kantor at the Art Students League in New York in 1949 and 1950.

After traveling to Europe and North Africa for two years, he returned to New York in 1953. His first one-man show in New York was at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951. He has had many since then, including a number of one-man shows at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York, as well as at galleries in Los Angeles, Paris, Milan, Rome and Florence.

His work was included in SIXTEEN AMERICANS (1959-60) and THE ART OF ASSEMBLAGE (1960) exhibitions held at The Museum of Modern Art, and in ABSTRACT DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLORS: U.S.A., which was circulated by the Museum under the auspices of its International Council to ten South and Central American countries in 1962-63.

In April, 1963, a major retrospective of Rauschenberg's work was held at the Jewish Museum in New York City and, in the summer of that year he received the first

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prize at the Fifth International Exhibition of Prints held in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia. The following year, he was awarded the first prize for painting at the Venice Biennale. This past month, he won a major prize at the 2nd Inter-American Bienial of Printmaking in Santiago, Chile.

Though he is best known for his painting, collages, prints and "combines," Rauschenberg has also designed sets and costumes for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and, more recently, the Paul Taylor Dance Company. He spent the latter half of 1964 touring 29 cities in Europe and the Far East as set designer, lighting expert and general stage manager for the Cunningham dance troupe.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Lynn Traiger, Assistant Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019.