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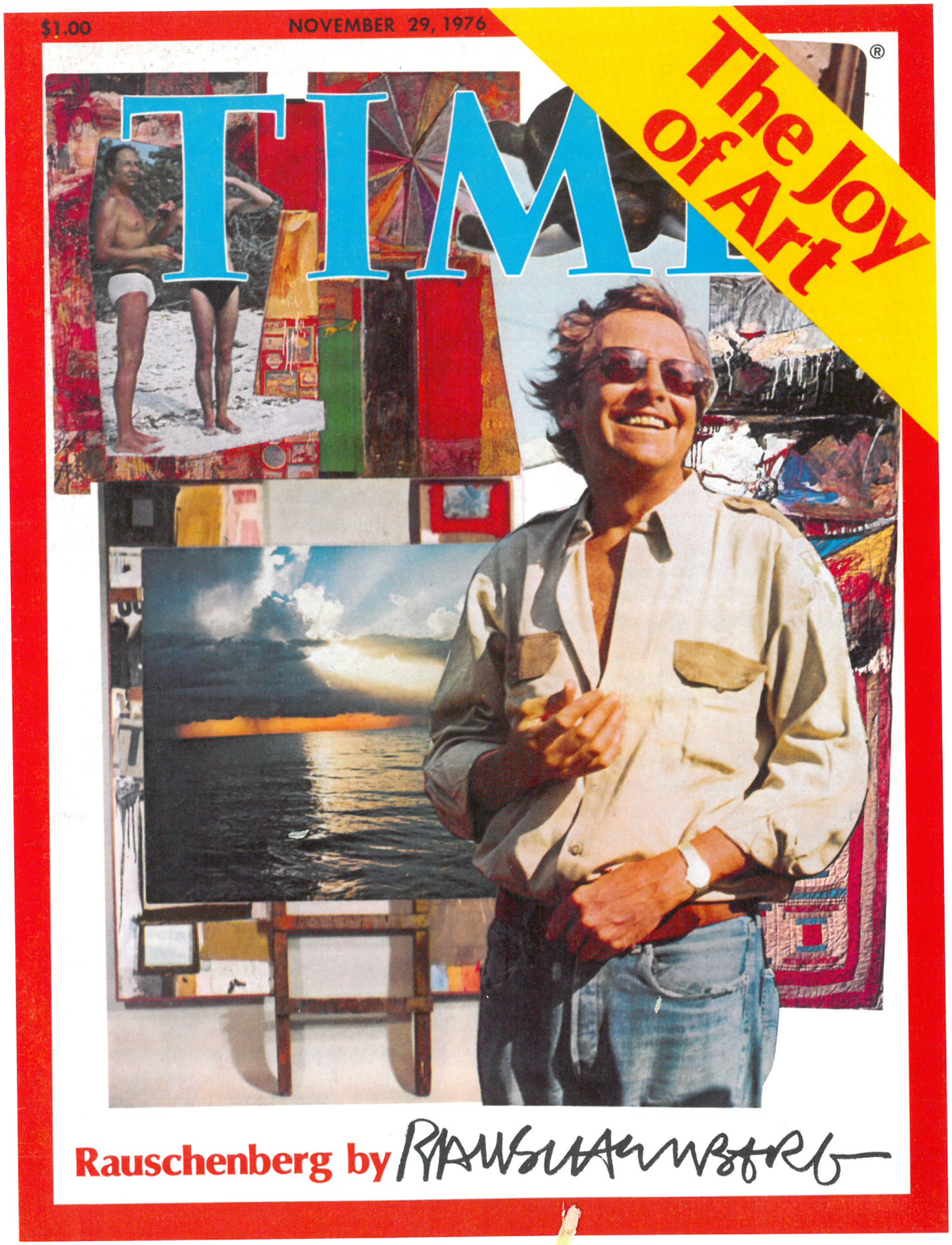
Robert Rauschenberg. Cover of "The Joy of Art," *Time* 108, no 22 (November 29, 1976). The cover includes images of details of *Charlene* (1954), *Bed* (1955), *Winter Pool* (1959), the artist's pet turtle, a seascape from Captiva, Florida, a partly obscured image of Rauschenberg with his son Christopher, and in the foreground, Rauschenberg himself



ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Five Propositions

ACHIM BORCHARDT-HUME

In November 1976, in one of its periodic attempts to grapple with what was happening in contemporary art, *Time* magazine published a cover story with the title "Rauschenberg by Rauschenberg." The colorful cover showed a suntanned Rauschenberg laughing, hair tousled by the wind, shirt unbuttoned. The background was formed by a montage of details from his landmark Combines *Charlene* (1954; plate 91), *Bed* (1955; plate 97), and *Winter Pool* (1959; plate 153), along with photographs of a sunset and of the artist in skimpy white swimming trunks beside the seemingly disembodied legs and crotch of a boy (the artist's son, Christopher) on the beach. The general sense of summery hedonism (all the more appealing in a November issue) was underscored by a yellow banner across the cover's top-right-hand corner bearing, in bright red letters, the slogan "The Joy of Art." No reader would have missed the tongue-in-cheek reference to *The Joy of Sex*, the illustrated sex manual by British author Alex Comfort, first published in 1972 to spend over seventy weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Feeding on a new glamour in contemporary art, especially following the critical and commercial success of American Pop art, this irreverent equation of art and sex, accompanied by visuals more reminiscent of a drinks ad than of sober reportage, was markedly different from the way artists had been conventionally portrayed twenty years earlier, when the Combines were made. Yet there was something oddly apt about the constellation *Time* magazine suggested of Rauschenberg, his art, the world, and the notion of serious play.

Rauschenberg's career spanned an extraordinary six decades: from the end of World War II, when, as a twenty-year-old draftee in the Navy Hospital Corps, he realized that he could indeed become an artist, right up to the early twenty-first century, which saw him use innovative digital printing techniques and embrace a growing number of campaign causes. Along the way, in the 1950s and '60s he played a pivotal role in the creation of an original American avant-garde, in the 1970s developed a new type of abstraction rooted in his perceptiveness toward common materials such as cardboard and textiles, and through much of the 1980s took his art around the globe. If this arc is to be fully comprehended it has to be seen against the backdrop of the dramatic changes in the material, visual, and political culture of the United States and beyond in those decades: from the Cold War, a newly flourishing consumerism, the rise and fall of the Kennedys, and the moon landings to the fall of Communism and the dawn of the digital age.

Rauschenberg was an artist with a promiscuous curiosity and a ravenous appetite for life. From an early age and throughout his career, he was a keen traveler as much as an astute observer and self-aware citizen of his native United States; he liked meeting people, cultivated friendships, kept falling in love, and was a keen collaborator; he was passionate about sharing his studio with animals, including his pet tortoise Rocky, who first appeared in *Spring Training* (1965) with a lit flashlight strapped to its shell. Crucially, he never shied away from experiment, switching readily between painting, photography, printing, and sculpture; abstraction and figuration; traditional art object and performance; working in a studio and improvising in situ, often in far-off places.

From early on, the world by which Rauschenberg was surrounded flooded into his art. The lack of hesitation with which the young artist opened the door to it remains astonishing. Where Abstract Expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman had set art purposefully apart from a postwar American culture that they saw as mundane, Rauschenberg encountered the same culture with a perpetual sense of excitable wonderment, which—unlike that of his peer Andy Warhol—was void of ironic detachment. While he certainly held art and its history in the same high esteem as earlier U.S. artists—that comes across strongly in interviews—he refused to see it as separate from life. To the contrary: for him, the experiences of art and life were intimately entwined. This is not to say that he wanted to make an art that was autobiographical—far from it. Rather, he wanted his work to create a confluence between art, life, and the world that could be generously shared with the viewer.

This may explain why Rauschenberg's chosen materials so often include what one may commonly call "stuff": discarded newspapers, cardboard boxes, paint charts, fabrics, fans, magazine images, car parts, tires, ironing boards, stuffed animals, light bulbs, radios, the list goes on. Stuff is to the world what the body is to being human. Excluding either may seem to create a superior plane of art, the mind, and ideas; in the long run, though, this purity may be found to be lacking in fundamental aspects of being alive. Rauschenberg's art is always that. The fusion he dared and achieved between the stuff of the world and the materials and strategies traditionally associated with "high" art is the very thing that gives his work such vitality, setting it apart from the self-referential medium-specificity of most mid-century modernism and making it such a fruitful point of departure for those who came after.

While Rauschenberg's work is characterized by an inexhaustible delight in trying new things, it is also underpinned by a remarkable consistency of approach. Equally, while richly diverse in appearance across different media and different periods in time, it is also unmistakably his. To this end, let us consider five paradigms that inform the current exhibition.

AVAILABILITY

In an often quoted anecdote, Rauschenberg describes the genesis of his iconic Combine *Bed*. He depicts himself as a destitute young artist who, deprived of access to conventional but costly art materials, turns to things at hand, in this case a patchwork quilt that had been given to him by his fellow artist Dorothea Rockburne. Having run out of canvas, Rauschenberg stretches the quilt across a wooden stretcher, making it the support for a painting while integrating its geometric pattern into the final work.[1]

No matter how often this account is repeated, it retains an element of improbability. The carefully placed pillow alone, so effectively underscoring the work's visceral relationship with the human body, suggests that Rauschenberg was nowhere near as naïve in making *Bed* as his story suggests. In fact, rather than simply asking the blanket to serve as a ground, Rauschenberg deployed it in an act of transformation if not transfiguration, turning it from an object of both practical and sentimental value into one that entered a new reality, namely that of art.

This act of transfiguration was not based on theoretical, premeditated thought but was motivated by an object that at this

1. Thomas Gainsborough. *The Blue Boy*. 1770. Oil on canvas, 70 5/8 × 48 3/4 in. (179.4 × 123.8 cm). The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California

2. Thomas Lawrence. *Sarah Goodin Barrett Moulton: "Pinkie"*. 1794. Oil on canvas, 58 1/4 × 40 1/4 in. (148 × 102.2 cm). The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California

particular time and place was "available." This attitude toward the "availability" of unorthodox materials, which can be traced as far back as Rauschenberg's time at Black Mountain College and his *Werklehre*, material studies, with the former Bauhaus master Josef Albers, pervades his work throughout his career. It informs his early pieces and classic Combines as much as later series such as the Early Egyptians and the set for Trisha Brown's dance *Lateral Pass*, made respectively from cardboard and other urban detritus found in the streets of Paris, for a show at the city's Musée Galliera in 1973, and from metal parts from junkyards in Naples when Brown was performing at the Teatro di San Carlo in 1985.

A similar approach characterizes Rauschenberg's reaction to and use of the flood of images available through the ever wider circulation of print and the even greater visual affluence of television. The images used in the silk screen paintings from the early 1960s amply illustrate this point, their very availability leveling distinctions between images loaded with symbolic meaning, such as the portrait of the recently assassinated U.S. President John F. Kennedy; seemingly arbitrary motifs, such as a repeated glass of water; and recognizable quotations from art history, such as Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* (1647–51) or Rubens's *Venus in front of the Mirror* (1614–15). Reproduction democratized the unique masterpieces of art history by making them available in an unprecedented way. It may be worth remembering that Rauschenberg once said he first wanted to become an artist when he chanced upon Joshua Reynolds's portrait *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784), Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* (1770; fig. 1), and Thomas Lawrence's *Pinkie* (1794; fig. 2) at the Huntington, in San Marino, California, while on leave from his military duties in San Diego in the mid-1940s: he instantly recognized the latter two from a popular set of playing cards that carried reproductions of them on the reverse.[2] Which is not to say that Rauschenberg was immune to the effect of the physical encounter with the unique work of art; to the contrary, he reacted strongly to the paintings when he saw them, and would later recall how struck he was by the exceptional tonality of the Reynolds, with its symphony of sepia browns, and by Gainsborough's and Lawrence's painterly virtuosity. This dynamic between the broad availability of an image or object, on the one hand, and the specific qualities of the individual object, on the other—the particular cardboard box versus the generic cardboard box—would remain important to Rauschenberg throughout his career.

Time and again, Rauschenberg accounted for changes in his work as motivated by the availability of new materials: the thrown-away cardboard boxes he used in Captiva in 1971–72 (plates 216–21),

in whose steady replacement by plastic crates he saw the forces of a rapidly accelerating corporate capitalism; the silks in the Indian textile center of Ahmedabad, which led him to create his sumptuous Jammers (1975–76; plates 229–32, 234); or the scrap metal he turned into his series of Gluts (1986–92; plates 236–43), including the Neapolitans (1987; plates 242, 243). In all of these cases Rauschenberg was neither actively seeking out these materials nor was he a Surrealist under the spell of a singular association-rich found object. Instead, he retained an openness of mind to what the world offered him as a potential solution to every artist's burning question: What next? As Rauschenberg himself said, "I enjoyed the fact that I didn't know what my materials would be from day to day and there was real adventure about just knowing that you need something in order to make something out of and just looking around and seeing what there was. . . . My interest wasn't so much in rubbish as it was in—in just availability."[3]

COLLABORATION

Rauschenberg's Combine *Short Circuit* (1955; plate 95) is a veritable paean to friendship. The upper-right-hand niche holds an early painting by his former wife, Susan Weil (they had divorced in 1953), while the upper-left one hides a small flag painting by Jasper Johns, who had kept a studio in the same Fulton Street building as Rauschenberg at a crucial moment in both artists' development. In 1965, Johns's canvas was stolen, and Rauschenberg invited the artist Elaine Sturtevant to replace it with a replica. The whole is unquestionably Rauschenberg's work, but would not make sense without the parts that are not.

Rauschenberg's early enthusiasm for working collaboratively was infused with the utopian spirit of the historical avant-gardes as digested through the optimism of the United States and its emerging youth culture after World War II. Black Mountain College in North Carolina, which Rauschenberg first attended in 1948, had recruited key members of its teaching staff from the German Bauhaus and encouraged collaborative activities among its students. In one of his earliest examples of collaboration, in around 1950 Rauschenberg worked with Weil to produce an extraordinary group of blueprints with both artists switching between the roles of model and producer (plates 1–4). This project was soon followed by intense exchanges with a group of intimate friends and sometimes lovers, including Johns, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Cy Twombly. A Rauschenberg photograph from 1952 shows Cage at the wheel of his Model A Ford (p. 36, fig. 7), which the following year Rauschenberg asked him to drive slowly across twenty sheets of paper to produce *Automobile Tire Print* (plate 58). It was also Cage who, in acknowledging the debt of his piano composition *4′33″* (1952; p. 91, figs. 1, 2) to Rauschenberg's White Paintings (1951; plates 9–14), determined the reading of the latter as airport landing strips ready to receive light and shadow.

Following Rauschenberg's participation in Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* (1952) at Black Mountain, in 1954 he collaborated for the first time on a Cunningham dance, *Minutiae*. His work for the production is a hybrid between painting, sculpture, and stage set, a portal for the dancers to move through (plates 88, 89). *Minutiae* coincided with the transition of Rauschenberg's Red Paintings into his landmark Combines. Over the next decade he would contribute set, costume, and lighting designs to over twenty Cunningham performances. Working and traveling with the Cunningham company alerted him to forms of cultural production that were inconceivable without collaboration, although it is noteworthy to the understanding of collaboration in this context that Cunningham's work characteristically fused otherwise disjointed forms of dance, music, and stage elements, asking them to coexist rather than lose their individual identity.

In 1964, when an exhibition of Rauschenberg's recent silk screen paintings won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale, singling him out for individual success—he was the first U.S. artist to win the prize—he tellingly reacted by asking his assistant to destroy the screens used to make the paintings and by embarking on an intensified period of dance and performance. In 1963 he had made his first contribution to the Judson Dance Theater, *Pelican*, in which, together with Per Olof Ultvedt and Carolyn Brown, he had danced on roller skates with a parachute strapped to his back. Rauschenberg lived with one of the group's choreographers and principal dancers, Steve Paxton, who also appeared often in Rauschenberg's performances of the time. *9 Evenings* in 1966 marked a high point in this spirit of collaboration, involving, among others, Cage, Paxton, Lucinda Childs, Öyvind Fahlström, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, David Tudor, and Robert Whitman. This Dionysian event was the brainchild of Rauschenberg and the maverick engineer Billy Klüver, with whom Rauschenberg also founded Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), a groundbreaking venture to foster dialogue among science, technology, and art.

Although the dystopian end of the 1960s—the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy, race riots, anti–Vietnam War protests—

3. Robert Rauschenberg. *Signs*. 1970. Screen-print, comp.: 35 3/16 × 26 3/4 in. (89.4 × 67.9 cm), sheet: 43 × 34 in. (109.2 × 86.4 cm). Publisher: Castelli Graphics, New York. Edition: 250. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Leo and Jean-Christophe Castelli in memory of Toiny Castelli

cooled Rauschenberg's initial faith in the redemptive powers of working collectively, some of their innate potential never waned for him (fig. 3). His extensive activity as a printmaker, for instance, would have been unthinkable without the collaboration of Sidney Felsen, just as Donald Saff was essential to the success of the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) throughout the 1980s. And from the late 1970s until the early '90s, Rauschenberg collaborated with Trisha Brown on such seminal works of contemporary dance as *Glacial Decoy* (1979; plate 267) and *Set and Reset* (1983; plates 268–70). Until the very end of his career, visitors to his Captiva studio were struck by the volume of the activity there, by the many hands involved in making the late series of large screen prints and transfers—technical formats beyond the remit of a single artist working in isolation—and by the spirit of generosity that prevailed among those involved.

Nor did Rauschenberg's inclusiveness stop at the point of making; it often involved the viewer. His White Paintings become complete only through the presence of the viewer and his or her shadow, just as his later metal paintings absorb the viewer's reflection into their dense layers of imagery. *Black Market* (1961; plate 177) was originally intended to invite the viewer to continually change the objects in its boxes and register their shifting content on the clipboards attached to the canvas. And *Soundings* (1968; plates 210, 211), an E.A.T. work that reacts directly to the presence of the viewer and to the soundscape in the gallery, creates a viewing situation that perfectly triangulates the relationship between the artist, the artwork, and the viewer as participant.

All of this goes to show that Rauschenberg saw himself not as an artist working in existential solitude but as an artist in continuous dialogue: "My whole area of art has always been addressed to working with other people. You see, I personally love the sensual contact of collaborating. Ideas are not real estate."[4]

MOVEMENT

One gets the impression that Rauschenberg rarely stood still. The pervasive image of the artist is of someone in motion, be it abseiling from the ceiling into a drum filled with water in *Elgin Tie* (1964), on roller skates in *Pelican* (plates 187–89), roaming the streets of Lower Manhattan, or traveling the world. Brought up in a strict Christian household, the shy young Rauschenberg had loved dancing as a means of escape, and dance and performance were cornerstones of his art even in his student days at Black Mountain.

Movement is an implied quality in many of Rauschenberg's works from early on. Untitled (Double Rauschenberg), one of the blueprints he made with Weil in around 1950, suggests an acrobat act in which one human figure undertakes a headstand on top of another (plate 1). The title implies that Rauschenberg served as model for both figures, which suggests that he must have held the pose twice, for as long as the paper was repeatedly exposed to light, but the image suggests the very opposite of this enforced stasis. The same is true for Weil's lifted skirt in another blueprint (plate 2). Similarly, the momentum encapsulated in *Automobile Tire Print* is invigorated by the cumulative extent of the work's twenty glued-together sheets of paper, presented so that, like a Chinese scroll painting, they resist being taken in at one glance and ask the viewer to walk their full length instead.

The strong dynamic in *Automobile Tire Print* between horizontal (the paper laid flat on the ground during the process of making) and vertical (being displayed upright on the wall) is a repeated strategy in Rauschenberg's early work.[5] From the Night Bloomings series (c. 1951; plate 7), in which the canvases were pressed to the ground to pick up surface matter, to *Bed*, its upright

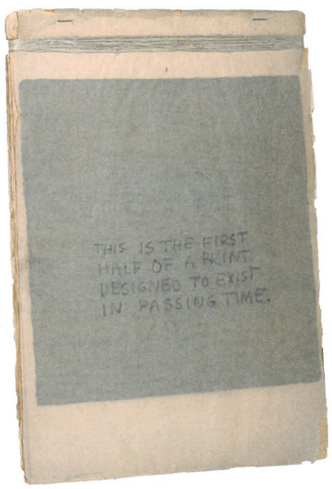
4. Hans Namuth. *Jackson Pollock, 1950*. Jackson Pollock working on *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* (1950) in his studio in East Hampton, New York, summer 1950. *One: Number 31, 1950* (1950) hangs in the background. Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona

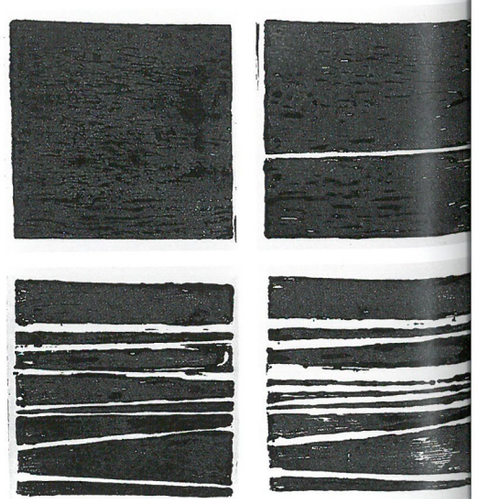
orientation improbable given the image, the act of moving an originally horizontal object to vertical plays a key role in defining the encounter with the viewer. These are works that literally got up, just as much as in *Monogram* (1955–59; plate 108) the canvas seems to have laid down from an initially upright position to serve as a ground for the paint-splattered Angora goat to stand on. Vertical elevation and horizontal abjection, an interplay central to painting after Pollock, for Rauschenberg are inseparable (fig. 4).

Not only are many Combines hybrids between wall-bound painting and floor-bound sculpture—or, as art historian Leo Steinberg famously called them, "flatbed pictures" that "though they hung on the wall, . . . kept referring back to the horizontals on which we walk and sit, work and sleep"—they also often oppose the conventional view of the work of art as static by incorporating actual movement.[6] As discussed, *Short Circuit* includes compartments that can be opened or closed, while *Black Market* was intended as a work in constant flux. Later Combines are even more overt in their use of moving elements: *Pantomime* (1961; plate 174), for example, includes a set of fans that were originally meant to actually blow, creating a still life that was anything but.

Movement gained even greater importance in the works Rauschenberg made as part of his collaboration with Klüver and other engineers and scientists. The five elements that make up *Oracle* (1962–65; plate 179) are suggestively placed on wheels, making their arrangement able to change from one installation to the next. A radio broadcast emits from one of the elements; another initially contained a stream of running water, giving this group of metal sculptures a quality of coming to life. The same is true of later, still more ambitious E.A.T. works such as *Soundings* (plates 210, 211) and *Mud Muse* (1968–71; plate 215), which evade the condition of inertia that historically defines both painting and sculpture by being reactive, whether to the audience or, in the case of *Mud Muse*, to its own burbling noises.

What is especially striking is how Rauschenberg mobilizes movement even in the context of conventionally static imagery. His transfer prints, such as the illustrations for Dante's *Inferno* (1958–60; plates 109–42), made by dousing newsprint with lighter fluid and then rubbing the image onto a clean sheet of paper, contest that an image is bound to its original medium. Instead, it becomes moveable, a strategy exploited even further in the silk-





5, 6. Robert Rauschenberg. *This Is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time*. 1948. Cover and interior. Graphite on tracing paper and fourteen woodcut prints on paper, bound with twine and staples, 12 1/8 × 8 7/8 in. (303.8 × 22.5 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York

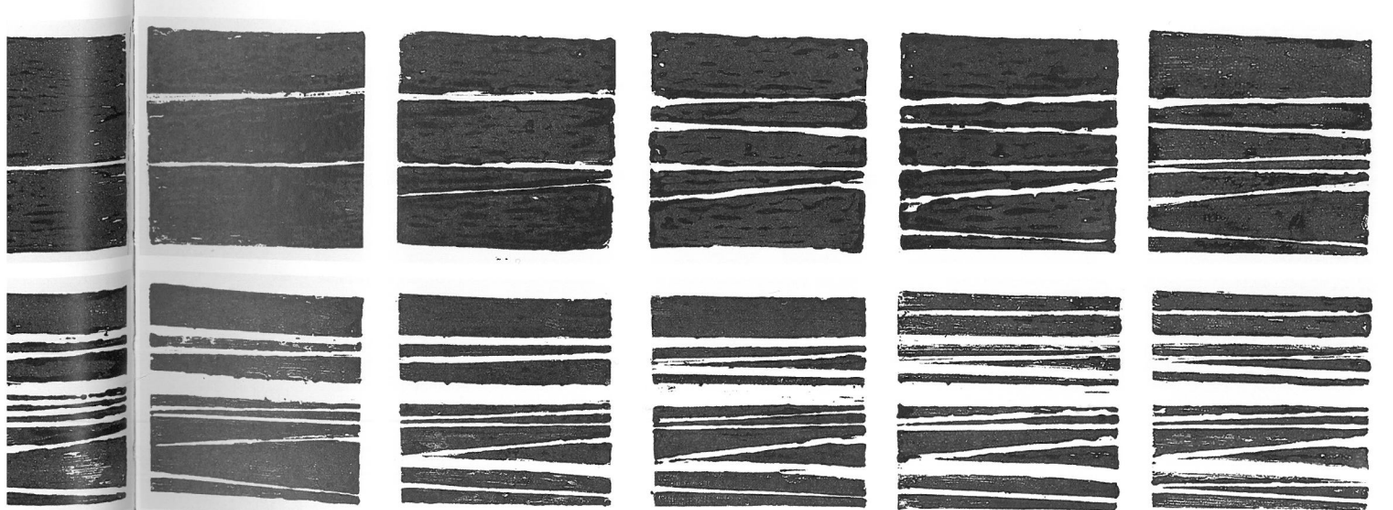
screen paintings of the early 1960s. This unfixed quality is also central to the 1970s descendants of the Dante drawings, the Hoarfrosts (1974–76; plates 226, 227), whose images are printed on translucent muslin and silk, the veils—and as a result the images—gently undulating in the slightest breeze. By virtue of this moving imagery, the Hoarfrosts behave very differently from conventional collage, replacing its hard-edged juxtapositions of distinct image components with soft layers that refuse to find a fixed form or message.

Rauschenberg's plays with moving images matched his delight in the moving body. For *Glacial Decoy*, one of his collaborations with Trisha Brown, he created a four-screen slide projection made from several hundred black-and-white photographs he had taken near Captiva, marking his personal return to photography. Mostly mundane in subject matter, albeit enlarged to a grand scale, these images were choreographed into a visual ballet that served as an autonomous backdrop to the movement of the dancers. *Hiccups* (1978; plate 233), an over-sixty-feet-long frieze of transfer prints made the previous year, activates the interplay among disparate images by different means. Here, the individual elements are to be ordered afresh every time the work is installed, with the metal zippers that connect them acting as a suggestive allusion to the transient nature of any one lineup. In later works these possibilities for continuous recomposition are projected onto the retinal movement of the viewer: through their density and lack of singular focal point, "superflat" inkjet-transfer works such as the Anagrams (1995–97; plates 275–77), Scenarios (2002–6; plate 278), and Runts (2006–8; plates 279–81) keep the viewer's eye continually roaming across their surface.

TIME

This Is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time (1948; figs. 5, 6) is one of the few works to have survived from Rauschenberg's early years at Black Mountain. To produce this fourteen-sheet series of woodcuts, Rauschenberg scored a wood block with a pattern of lines growing steadily denser between each impression, so that the abstract image morphs from solid black toward an even balance of black and white stripes as the series progresses. The sheets are bound into a booklet; when that booklet is closed, only the topmost print—the first, solidly black stage of the woodcut—is visible. At first, it seems as though the central theme of this unassuming work is to make manifest the process of making, and the inevitable passing of time entailed by that process. Note, however, that the title insists on the futurity of time: "a print designed *to exist in* passing time." Whereas the sequence of images records a series of past actions—time gone—the words assert what lies ahead: time to come. *This Is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time* is a world apart from the portraits of children by Gainsborough and Lawrence that Rauschenberg had encountered only a few years before. Whereas those works seek to transcend time through painting, the young Rauschenberg acknowledges time as an inescapable dimension of all that exists.

Time and the force field between the moment of making, which inevitably will recede farther into the past, and the moment of viewing, which can never be anything but present tense, are also central to other early works such as the White and Black Paintings (1951–53; plates 9–15, 17–20, 66, 68). The former, per Rauschenberg's instructions, can be remade if need be, the pristine whiteness of



7. Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez. *Las Meninas*. 1656. Oil on canvas, 10 ft. 5 1/4 in. × 9 ft. 5/8 in. (318 × 276 cm). Museo Nacional del Prado

their surface, ready to receive the play of light and shadow, being more important than the authenticity of the painted object. What matters is not so much when and where they were made *then* but whether they will do the job *here and now*. In contrast the Black Paintings are irrevocably linked to their moment of origin. Although thick black paint obliterates most of the textual information originally conveyed by the newspapers glued to the canvases, rare glimpses allow the odd printed date or headline to show through. The black paint here acts like the passing of time: new news rapidly becomes old news before losing its news value altogether. Both the White and the Black Paintings combine a simultaneous paucity and richness of visual information that make the viewer acutely aware of the duration of the act of looking. Duration as an element of the experience of a work of art remained of keen interest to Rauschenberg, as is evident from his comments on *Broadcast* (1959; plate 170) a Combine painting that integrates live radio: "Listening happened in time. Looking also had to happen in time."[7]

Just as painting as an object implicitly seeks to transcend time, painting as an activity shares the temporality of performance, a truism laid bare for all to see in popular documentaries such as Henri-Georges Clouzot's 1956 film *The Mystery of Picasso*. Rauschenberg elaborated on this tension to tantalizing effect when he created *First Time Painting* (plate 182) onstage at the Théâtre de l'Ambassade des États-Unis, Paris, in 1961, during a program titled *Hommage à David Tudor* (plates 184, 185). (Other participants were Johns, Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Tudor himself.) Facing the audience, Rauschenberg turned the canvas's back to the spectators, leaving them in the dark as to what he was painting. Instead they could hear the amplified sound of his brushes. After a set period of time, an alarm clock fixed to the canvas rang, upon which he downed his tools. The canvas was then wrapped in paper and carried offstage. It was only the next day, when a show of Rauschenberg's opened at the Galerie Daniel Cordier, that those patient enough to go could view *First Time Painting* from the front. It is hard not to see this performance as a pun, whether conscious or not, on Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656; fig. 7), a great allegory of painting that entails a similar spatial setup of canvas, artist, and viewer. Unlike that work, though, the situation Rauschenberg created seems to make light of questions of inspiration, including the crucial dilemma of how to begin and how to end a painting. While his brushwork recalled that of the Abstract Expressionists, his modus operandi could not have been more different, his overt theatricality starkly contrasting against the older generation's existentialist introspection.

Rauschenberg allowed himself to be filmed at work a number of times. On a U.S. television documentary filmed in 1962 and broadcast the year after, he could be seen working at night on his epic silk-screen painting *Barge*, which he largely completed over the course of twenty-four hours (adding finishing touches later in the year and in early 1963). In 1964, Japanese television captured him at work on *Gold Standard* (plate 186). Whereas similar recording processes had thrown an earlier generation of artists into crisis—notably Pollock, who, after being filmed by Hans Namuth in 1950, seems to have felt he had given away his soul and started to drink again—Rauschenberg apparently suffered no such dilemma. He was happy to be seen advancing a painting or a Combine in ways similar to a performance, something finite in time and often driven by a set of actions in response to a set of props.

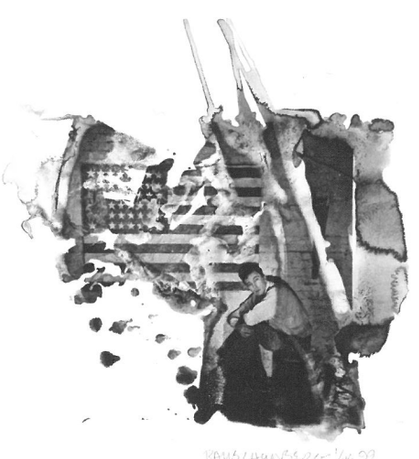
Which is not to say that Rauschenberg always worked quickly: many Combines evolved over years and went through different stages. *Monogram* was begun in 1955 and finished in 1959; the goat was affixed to a vertical canvas before being placed on a different, horizontal one. Nor was the time invested necessarily proportional to the size of a work. Whereas the thirty-two-foot-long *Barge* was

8–10. Robert Rauschenberg. Three prints from the series Ruminations. 1999. Top: *'Topher* [Christopher Rauschenberg]. Photolithograph, comp. (irreg.): 37 13/16 × 25 9/16 in. (96 × 65 cm), sheet: 39 × 27 1/2 in. (99 × 69.8 cm). Bottom, left to right: *John* [Cage]. Photolithograph, comp. (irreg.): 25 3/16 × 33 7/8 in. (64 × 86 cm), sheet: 29 1/2 × 38 13/16 in. (75 × 98.6 cm). *Jap* [Jasper Johns]. Photolithograph, comp.: 18 1/2 × 18 1/8 in. (47 × 46 cm), sheet: 19 11/16 × 25 13/16 in. (50 × 65.5 cm). Publisher and printer: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Emily Fisher Landau

mostly executed in a very speedy manner, the Dante drawings marked a serious 2 1/2-year commitment. One marvels at the task Rauschenberg set himself in illustrating the *Inferno*, especially in the context of his dyslexia.[8] The process of transfer drawing was a slow and painstaking one, as was the challenge of reordering many images lifted from the contemporary press into a coherent narrative. The duration of this process seems to mimic the duration of Dante's journey through the underworld, with the final work demanding a comparable attention and time from the viewer to decipher Rauschenberg's visual story. Far from straightforward illustration, the drawings create a separate account that appears to follow its own compositional logic as much as it does the medieval text.

While deploying images from contemporary sources and including images of popular figures such as U.S. President John F. Kennedy and former presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, the Dante drawings ultimately transcend their temporal context. When asked to participate in a special issue of *Life* celebrating Dante's 700th anniversary, in 1965, Rauschenberg chose a far more explicit way to link Dante's description of hell to current affairs: whereas the drawings series was meant to last, for the ephemeral magazine he chose images directly relating Dante's text to recent events, from the Holocaust to nuclear warfare, apartheid, and contemporary U.S. politics. While referring to the same narrative, each project relates to time in a very different way.

Late in life, Rauschenberg reflected on his own passing in time. For Ruminations (1999; figs. 8–10), the last series of prints



11. Rauschenberg on the beach with Windsurfer, Captiva, Florida. Late 1970s–early 1980s. Photograph: Terry Van Brunt. Photograph: Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

he saw through to completion himself, he looked back to a group of early photographs in which he had captured key relationships, whether with family, friends, or art world luminaries: his friend, fellow artist, and former wife, Susan Weil; his son, Christopher; his sister, Janet, and his parents; friends and lovers including Cage, Cunningham, Johns, and Twombly; his longstanding gallerist and supporter Ileana Sonnabend. In these prints the original photographs appear to be fading, as if not just the photographic images but memory itself had fallen victim to the corrosive powers of time. Where his late inkjet paintings, such as the Runts and Anagrams, with their visual density and open-ended combinations of images, create a hyperpresent not unlike that of the Internet, time as measured by the individual, Rauschenberg seems to insist, remains subject to the laws of forgetting and remembering, with no clear separation between past and present. As he had stated in 1973, "This is my continuous battle. What interests me in everything is temporality."[9]

TRAVEL

While the studio was both psychologically and practically an important place for Rauschenberg, it rarely demarcated an impenetrable boundary designed to shut out the world. Nowhere is Rauschenberg's interest in the world beyond the studio more pronounced than in his multifarious travels.

In the decade before he settled into the Fulton Street studio alone, Rauschenberg moved in quick succession from his native Port Arthur, Texas, to San Diego, to complete his military service; back to Port Arthur; on to Los Angeles, Kansas City, and then Paris, to study at the Académie Julian, where he met Susan Weil; subsequently the couple moved between New York, Outer Island in Connecticut, and Black Mountain in North Carolina, not to mention a honeymoon in Bermuda. Not long after, Rauschenberg traveled with Twombly, first to Charleston, South Carolina, and then to New Orleans, Key West, and Cuba before crossing the Atlantic to journey in Italy, Morocco, and Spain. It was here that he invented his *Scatole personali* (Personal boxes, 1952–53; plates 42–52), modern-day reliquaries not of the remnants of saints but of mementoes testifying to his personal journey of discovery; his *Feticci personali* (Personal fetishes, 1952–53; plates 53–55), works invoking the atavistic powers of objects and materials to similar effect; and his North African collages (1952; plates 31–38), executed on cardboard laundry shirt-boards and combining engravings found in flea markets and secondhand book shops with local printed matter to celebrate the pleasant feelings of displacement and of mixed, disjointed impressions brought on by travel.

Once back in New York, Rauschenberg spent most of the 1950s there, some exhibition-related travel aside. In this period his principal focus was the Combines, which offered a stark retort to the concurrent triumph of heroic American painting, especially Abstract Expressionism. Significantly, it was also a period when the debris of the city—things carelessly discarded on the street, from magazines and disused street signs to unwanted pieces of furniture and curiosities such as a stuffed eagle—would make its strongest entry into his work.

Before long, though, the studio once more seemed not enough. Between 1961 and 1964, Rauschenberg toured extensively with the Cunningham Dance Company, not only across the United States but to far-off destinations including India and Japan. Those countries left deep impressions on him, and the journey to Japan coincided with the end of the Combines: *Gold Standard*, with a golden Japanese folding screen at its center, is generally seen as the last Combine, and as marking a point of transition to the subsequent E.A.T. works. In 1977, after a falling out lasting more than a decade, Rauschenberg reunited with Cage and Cunningham to collaborate on *Travelogue* (plate 235), which staged a sequence of disparate choreographies to a set by Rauschenberg that showed

clear parallels to his slightly earlier Jammers, themselves inspired by his time in Ahmedabad in 1975. He had visited Ahmedabad before—with none other than Cunningham and Cage, during their tour more than a decade before, when they had stayed at the Le Corbusier–designed house of the Sarabhais, a prominent family of scientists and entrepreneurs as well as avid collectors of textiles. *Travelogue*, in its title as much as its aesthetics, celebrates the circularity of these connections.

Rauschenberg's travels with the Cunningham company sensitized him early on to the limitations of the channels of distribution and dialogue available to visual artists. In the 1960s and '70s, the international network of art institutions and commercial galleries was largely West-centric; dance companies were far more mobile. It may have been this awareness, Rauschenberg's growing commitment to human rights and free expression, and his rejection of U.S. foreign politics that led him to concentrate much of his energy—and considerable personal finances—throughout the 1980s on ROCI, a global art tour that took him and a team to ten countries: Chile, China, Cuba, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Tibet, the USSR, Venezuela, and Germany—originally planned to be East Germany, but by the time the trip happened the Berlin Wall had fallen. In each country Rauschenberg would show work and collect the materials to make new works, one of which he would donate to his hosts. Some of the pitfalls of this initiative aside—from its troubled finances, and challenges to secure venues in various countries, to Rauschenberg's rock-star image—there can be no doubt that he was genuinely driven to establish a greater connection between the world of art and the world beyond it, and by doing so to assert that art could provoke social change.

Rauschenberg's works from the 1970s on increasingly reference the places where they were made, or by which they were inspired. To give but some examples: the Venetians (1972–73; plates 222, 223, 225) pay homage to the city where he celebrated his first great international triumph, in 1964, and for which he nurtured an enduring affection; the Japanese Clayworks (1982–85) drew on the skills of the craftsmen at the Otsuka Ohmi Ceramics Company in Shigaraki, just as *7 Characters* (1982), seven collages based on Chinese letters, were created in collaboration with papermakers at the Xuan Paper Mill in Jingxian during a preparatory trip for ROCI; similarly, the Neapolitans (1987; plates 242, 243) are the fortuitous outcome of a stage set for Trisha Brown not reaching Italy in time.

By this time Rauschenberg had left New York for the island of Captiva, in southern Florida, as his principal place to live and to work. The Jammers, as much as they honored India, also referenced his new tropical home, and the Windsurfers sailing within sight of his studio (fig. 11). Captiva was where he produced much of his late work, including many paintings populated by his own photographs. These works often fuse images taken close to home with others taken far away. The large-scale *Port of Entry [Anagram (A Pun)]* (1998; plate 277), for instance, references both key places in the United States, such as the neighborhood around Rauschenberg's old New York studio on Lafayette Street, and places he traveled to—a statue in Belgium, for instance, or the prominent depiction of a woman in Tibet, photographed when Rauschenberg had visited the country as part of ROCI.

To understand Rauschenberg's later work is to see how much his iconographic framework had broadened by the late 1990s. It is also to appreciate that, to the end, he never closed his work off to new impressions, techniques, and materials and continued to invite the world into his art.

1. See, e.g., Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: A Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg*, 1980 (rev. ed. New York: Picador, 2005), pp. 125–26.
2. Ibid., p. 17.
3. Rauschenberg, in an interview with John Jones, January 13, 1966, p. 7. John Jones Collection (TGA 201520), Tate Archive.
4. Rauschenberg, quoted in Jack Cowart and James Elliot, *Prints of the Untitled Press, Captiva, Florida: Works by Cy Twombly, Brice Marden, David Bradshaw, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Petersen, Hisachika Taka Hashi [sic] and Robert Whitman*, exh. cat. (Hartford, Conn.: The Atheneum, 1973), repr. in Mirta d'Argenzio, ed., *Robert Rauschenberg: Travelling '70–76*, exh. cat., Museo d'Art Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples (Milan: Electa, 2008), p. 43.
5. While Rauschenberg did on occasion show *Automobile Tire Print* flat on the ground—in the exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg: Prints 1948/1970*, at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, August 6–September 27, 1970, for example—the work was mostly displayed wall-mounted.
6. Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, 1972 (repr. ed. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 87.
7. Rauschenberg, quoted in Gene R. Swenson, "Rauschenberg Paints a Picture," *Artnews* 62, no 2 (April 1963):45.
8. Rauschenberg asked a friend, Michael Sonnabend, to read the cantos aloud to him, though considering the duration of the project it is likely that he read many cantos on his own. The Rauschenberg Foundation holds the artist's copy of the version of Dante's *Inferno* translated by John Ciardi, a translation praised for its readability (p. 164, figs 1, 2).
9. Rauschenberg, in Irmeline Lebeer, "Entretien avec Robert Rauschenberg," *Chroniques de l'Art Vivant* no. 43 (October 1973):15–18, repr. in Lebeer, *L'art? C'est une meilleur idée! Entretiens* (Nîmes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, and Paris: Centre national des arts plastiques, 1997), p. 133. The original French reads "C'est mon combat perpétuel. C'est la temporalité qui m'intéresse en chaque chose."