



The Museum of Modern Art

*Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends*

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## 800. Introduction

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: Oh, I love collaborating, because art can be a really lonely business, if you're really just working from your ego.

LEAH DICKERMAN: That was artist Robert Rauschenberg. He broke art wide open, letting in objects and practices and ideas from the everyday world.

VIRGINIA DWAN: He knew how to put objects together in a way that was always wonderful and even objects which were not wonderful in themselves at all. I felt exhilarated by his work.

CALVIN TOMKINS: It was really in Bob's studio that I began to get an idea of what art could be or how many different things it could be.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Collaboration was key to Rauschenberg's thinking.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: When you have two people thinking at the same time about a single outcome, or object, well then, it's just like multiplied and mirrored back and forth, 'til—'til it becomes, you know, like—like a whole group of brains and feelings and solutions.

SIDNEY FELSEN: Bob made everyone feel they were an important part in the making of his art. There was excitement, electricity.

BRICE MARDEN: You're influenced by him just as a human. He was a really great human being. He's like a bigger figure than just being some painter. I mean, he's a visionary.

LEAH DICKERMAN: You've just heard from collector and dealer Virginia Dwan, critic Calvin Tomkins, printmaker Sidney Felsen, and artist Brice Marden.

Rauschenberg's collaborations with artists, dancers, musicians, writers, engineers and even people who make cutting-edge technology, set the course for the art of the present day.  
Welcome to the exhibition, *Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends*.

**801. Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil, *Double Rauschenberg*, c. 1950**

LEAH DICKERMAN: *Double Rauschenberg* was one of the blueprints that Rauschenberg made with artist Sue Weil, his wife. And it was made after the first stint that they had at Black Mountain College, a liberal arts college that encouraged experimentation and an unconventional use of materials.

One of the questions that they're asking themselves in making this work is, how can you make a mark on a paper besides brushing a stroke of paint? And that's a question that occupies Rauschenberg throughout his career.

Here is Sue Weil.

SUSAN WEIL The idea of it is, you're using the sun, that's the medium, and the unexposed blueprint paper.

LEAH DICKERMAN: They took turns positioning themselves on paper and then holding up a light to expose the surrounding areas.

SUSAN WEIL: You could draw with light, because where you aimed it is where the paper got the whitest. It was just so magical.

We went to the Museum of Modern Art and Edward Steichen was the head of the photography at that time. We showed him some blueprints, and he just loved them and talked about a camera-less photography. And we just had a great old time. And he showed a blueprint in the museum—a contemporary photography show. So that was very exciting for us.

**802. Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Black Painting with Asheville Citizen)*, c. 1952**

LEAH DICKERMAN: *Asheville Citizen* was one of a group of black paintings that Rauschenberg made when he came to Black Mountain College for the second time. The first time that he was there, he was very much a student. But the second time, he was a young artist in his own right. And you can sense that he's trying to reinvent himself, to make a mark on the world.

He applied paint in a new way, not as a stroke of oil paint with a brush that stood as an index of a creative genius or an artistic ego, but, rather, thickly across the surface of the work, almost like matter itself. So paint became physical. And with *Asheville Citizen*, he also applied sections from the local newspaper that was based in Asheville, North Carolina, outside of where Black Mountain College was.

One thing that's interesting about this newspaper is, it's still readable. It's making you encounter something that's found, part of an everyday world, and have this experience of thinking about the stuff of daily life.

Our conversation department has uncovered something wonderful using x-ray technology. To hear about it, press 8021 and then the search button.

ALT for wands: Our conservation department has uncovered something wonderful using X-ray technology. To hear about it, press the play button on your keypad.

## 8021. Asheville Citizen, level two

ELLEN DAVIS: My name is Ellen Davis, and I'm a paintings conservation fellow at MoMA.

The painting is long and vertical, constructed of two panels. You can see lots of cracks where there's white showing through. And you can also notice an area of unusual texture at the lower center portion of the upper panel. It gave us some clues that there was something beneath the surface that we wanted to learn more about. So we decided to x-ray the painting, and we were very pleasantly surprised to find that beneath the surface on both the top and the bottom panel are figurative portraits.

The top stretcher bar is signed with the name Weil, and Susan Weil was Robert Rauschenberg's wife at the time. And the dimensions of each of the panels is very close to a French number 30 portrait size canvas, and both Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil studied painting together in Paris in 1948. So it's possible that these are both portraits from their time in Paris.

This is absolutely typical for Rauschenberg, to reuse materials and to repurpose used materials. This is in some ways an early example of that.

**803. Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting*, 1951, remade 1960s**

LEAH DICKERMAN: These "White Paintings" may not be prepossessing, but they're among the most radical statements about painting made in the middle of the 20th century.

They are blank canvases stretched in units of various combinations. And the paint is basic house paint applied with a roller. And the result is a canvas that acts as a screen, is sensitive to the ambient effects of a room, to the flickering qualities of light, and shadow, and weather.

Here's Robert Rauschenberg:

RAUSCHENBERG: I called them clocks. If one were sensitive enough that you could read it, that you would know how many people were in the room, what time it was, and what the weather was like outside.

LEAH DICKERMAN: When the White Paintings were shown at the Stable Gallery in 1953, Rauschenberg's friend, the composer John Cage wrote a statement accompanying them.

And the statement went, in part, "To whom: no subject, no image, no taste, no object, no beauty, no message, no talent, no technique, no why, no idea, no intention, no art, no object, no feeling, no black, no white, no and."

He didn't make them all by himself. And in fact, that whole idea that it doesn't matter much who makes them is key to the work of art. In the 1960s, Rauschenberg asked his studio assistant, the artist Brice Marden, to make a new set.

BRICE MARDEN: They weren't exact replicas, but they were the same size, shape, and everything. And he said, "Paint them so they look like they haven't been painted. No hand, just



put a coat of paint on them.” And that’s what I did.

**804. Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Scatole personali)* (Personal boxes), 1952-53**

LEAH DICKERMAN: After Rauschenberg finished his second stint at Black Mountain College, he and Cy Twombly decided to travel together. And he made these works the *Scatole Personali* in North Africa and Italy.

Rauschenberg wrote a statement about these works: "The material used for these constructions were chosen for either of two reasons: the richness of their past, like bone, hair, faded cloth, and photos, broken fixtures, feathers, sticks, rocks, string, and rope; or for their vivid, abstract reality, like mirrors, bells, watch parts, bugs, fringe, pearls, glass, and shells. In one case, the skull of a bird has been decorated in a rich, false history, and tassels with a bell on a string attached in a reminiscence of her song. Others, stringed like totems, hang pretentiously boasting of their fictitious past."

One thing I think is interesting in this statement is the way that he keeps talking about a false history, the idea that these works seem to gesture to a past that's not clearly there. And here there's something very precious and intimate about the work. It's meant to be open so that you can peek inside and discover treasures. I think it evokes this archeological impulse, the way that you discover things that you don't completely understand and a past you don't completely know. But what these things mean together is left up to you.

**805. Robert Rauschenberg with John Cage, *Automobile Tire Print*, 1953**

LEAH DICKERMAN: Here's Robert Rauschenberg talking about this piece, *Automobile Tire Print*, which he made with his friend John Cage in 1953.

RAUSCHENBERG: I was living on Fulton Street. Fulton Street is almost empty of any kind of traffic on the weekends. So I got some typewriter paper and glued them all together. And then I called John, and asked him, you know, like if he could come down on the weekend. And had some black house paint, which is what I was working with, And—And he drove down in his Model A. I poured it in—in front, and told him to drive just as straight as he could. You know, “Be careful,” I said, “Keep going straight,” you know? And—and John was fascinated by the fact that we were doing this. And he did a good job.

He was the printer and the press.

**806. Robert Rauschenberg with Willem de Kooning and Jasper Johns, *Erased de Kooning*, 1953**

LEAH DICKERMAN: Rauschenberg said that the idea of making an erased drawing came out of his work on the White Paintings. He asked himself the question, could you make a drawing solely out of erasing?

RAUSCHENBERG: When I just erased my own drawings, it wasn't art yet. And so I thought, Aha, it has to be art. And Bill de Kooning was the—was the best-known acceptable American artist, well known, that could be indisputably considered art. And so—

I was on a very low-budget situation. But I bought a bottle of Jack Daniels. And hoped that—that he wouldn't be home when I knocked on his door. And he was home. And we sat down with the Jack Daniels, and I told him what my project was. He understood it. And he said, "I don't like it. But, you know, I—I understand what you're doing." And he went through one portfolio, and he said, "No. It'll have to be something that—that I'll miss." So I'm—I'm gjust sweating, shitless, ya know? And then I'm thinking, like—like, It doesn't have to be something you're gonna miss. [*they laugh*] And—then he went through a second portfolio. Which I thought was kind of interesting, things he wouldn't miss and things he would miss and—and then— and—and he pulled something out, and then he said, "I'm gonna make it so hard for you to erase this." And it took me about a month, and I don't know how many erasers, to do it.

It's not a negation, it's a celebration. It's just the idea.

**807. Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955**

LEAH DICKERMAN: Rauschenberg was always using materials around him. With "Bed," he started with a quilt, given to him by Dorothea Rockburne, an artist he had met at Black Mountain College. He added a pillow, and he drips strokes of paint that seem to evoke the gestural painting of abstract expressionist artists. And across the pillow are these rough, almost graffiti-like strokes in pencil that look an awful lot like Cy Twombly's drawings at that time. So suddenly, the work of art no longer suggests that it's the kind of thing that's made in isolation, but rather a work of art as something that comes out of a network of relationships and friendships.

Rauschenberg later said that he thought it was the friendliest work he ever made, and that he was worried that someone might just crawl in.

Rauschenberg's son, Christopher, grew up with his father's Combines. To hear his memories, press 8071 and then the search button.

ALT FOR WANDS: Rauschenberg's son, Christopher, grew up with his father's Combines. Press the PLAY button on your keypad to hear his memories.

## 8071. Rauschenberg's Combines

CHRISTOPHER RAUSCHENBERG: When people come up to a painting of my dad's, there's not a meaning in there that they're supposed to get. There's a whole series of conversational openings based on what is your experience, what is your mood today. And you might come up to a Combine painting that you've looked at fifty times, that you looked at yesterday, but you're a slightly different person today than you were yesterday. And suddenly, a part of it that wasn't speaking to you, you start in a conversation with that. It's completed by you coming and looking at it and going into conversation with it.

People were freaking out because they couldn't tell if it was painting or sculpture. So he had to make up a word to scare 'em off. And so "Oh okay. They're combines," which is you know – it's fun because they're farm machines. He was very interested in language and wordplay.

**808. Robert Rauschenberg, *Minutiae*, 1954**

LEAH DICKERMAN: *Minutiae* came out of a set of collaborations among Merce Cunningham, the choreographer; John Cage, the composer; and Rauschenberg. And it's one of many in these years. Cunningham and Cage together had pioneered ideas of chance and indeterminacy in making works of art — the idea that you could create two works independently and then put them together, and something would come out of the chance associations produced.

And that's the way that *Minutiae* was designed. Cunningham choreographed a piece. Cage created a score, both independently. And then, Cunningham asked Rauschenberg also to create something independently. But he didn't want the work that Rauschenberg created to just sit there on the stage as a backdrop. He wanted something that the dancers could use, a work, he said, that his dancers could move through.

So Rauschenberg, in this context, created his first freestanding combine, something that wasn't hung on the wall but could stand on the floor.

And it might have prompted some of his thinking about what he sometimes described as getting the room into the picture, that is, a breaching of the boundaries between the work of art and the space beyond.

**809. Robert Rauschenberg, *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, 1958-60**

LEAH DICKERMAN: In the middle of 1958, Rauschenberg took on a project that would occupy him across the course of the next two and a half years. He wanted to create illustrations for *Dante's Inferno*, a work that was written over 600 years before. And to work on these drawings, he set a series of rules for himself. He would only read one canto at a time, and then he'd make a drawing. He wouldn't read ahead and so he could respond to it with a kind of freshness.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: When I started the Dante illustrations, I had been working purely abstractly for so long, it was important for me to see whether I was working abstractly because I couldn't work any other way, or, or whether I was doing it out of choice. So I really welcomed, insisted, on it—on the challenge of being restricted by a particular subject, which meant that I would have to be involved in symbolism. Well, I spent two and a half years deciding that yes, I could do that.

LEAH DICKERMAN: He developed an innovative technique for the drawings. It was a solvent transfer technique, choosing photo-based images from popular illustrated magazines, like *Sports Illustrated*, or *Life* and *Time*. He would soak the images with lighter fluid, flip them over, and rub on their back with an empty ballpoint pen. And that would transfer the image to a sheet of drawing paper. Then, he added touches of wash, and gouache, and crayon, and pencil. In this way, he was mixing images that were snipped from the flow of the contemporary media world with traditional fine art media. And he called them "Combine" drawings.



**810. Robert Rauschenberg, *Canyon*, 1959**

LEAH DICKERMAN: Rauschenberg said his friend, the artist Sari Dienes, first spotted the taxidermied eagle that's used in *Canyon*. It was in the trash outside of one of the apartments at Carnegie Hall where Sari Dienes lived.

Rauschenberg took the eagle back to the studio in order to put it into a painting. And that's an extraordinary thing if you think about it, putting an eagle in a painting. How do you put something so large, so physically awkward onto the surface of a canvas? But he managed it. The eagle extends into the space of the viewer. It starts to break down the boundary that we expect between the space of the artwork and the space of ordinary life.

On the back of the canvas are all manners of things that he encountered in his daily life, things from his studio and from his living space. But all this junk also evoked the ancient myth of Ganymede, the tale in which Zeus swooped down to earth in the form of an eagle to steal a beautiful young boy. That's a story that resonated for Rauschenberg as a young gay artist working in New York before Stonewall. So this work is modern and age-old at the same time.

**811. Robert Rauschenberg, *Monogram*, 1955-59**

LEAH DICKERMAN: Here's Rauschenberg with the story of this work, *Monogram*.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: I was working with stuffed animals and it was more to, like, continue their life, because I always thought, it's too bad they're dead, and so I thought I can do something about that. There again I'm on the street (laugh) — all my stories start "I was on the street," — and I pass this shop that was a second-hand office supply place. And I saw this magnificent goat there.

First, I tried to put it on a flat plane, and it was obviously too massive. It had too much character. It looked too much like itself that I couldn't compete with my painting.

So I took it off the wall, put it out in the room and built an upright panel, but then it looked like he was a beast of burden. He kept looking as though he was supposed to pull it. He still refused to be abstracted into art. It looked like art with a goat. And so I put the tire there and then everything went to rest, and they lived happily ever after.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainier remembers her first sighting of *Monogram*.

YVONNE RAINIER: I went to I think it must have been his first show at the Castelli Gallery on East Seventy-seventh Street. I saw the goat. I always say I nearly rolled on the ground with laughter. It was so refreshing after Abstract Expressionism. I mean he was still an expressionist using paint in that way, but so irreverent. I think my own sense of humor and irreverence began when I saw that show, and it opened up a whole new set of possibilities.

## 812. Jean Tinguely, *Homage to New York* 1960

LEAH DICKERMAN: We're looking here at a film of a performance event by Swiss artist Juan Tinguely called *Homage to New York*.

Tinguely would create these clanking, clattering sculpture machines, works that moved and works that made noise. And he decided to make a giant sculpture for the garden of the Museum of Modern Art, that was intended to self-destruct with a push of the button on the evening of the event in March 1960.

In making the *Homage to New York*, Tinguely worked with Bell Labs engineer Billy Klüver. As Klüver tells the story, Rauschenberg was drawn to that collaborative process. He was so caught up with the process that he decided to contribute a work of his own. That's what you see here in front of you.

JULIE MARTIN: Bob contributed what he called a mascot to the sculpture, *Money Thrower*

LEAH DICKERMAN: Julie Martin collaborated with Rauschenberg and Billy Klüver for many years at Experiments in Art and Technology, a group that fostered collaboration between artists and engineers.

JULIE MARTIN: At a certain point in the destructive process, gun powder exploded and springs were sprung apart, and silver dollars were flung into the audience.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Rauschenberg and Klüver would collaborate together on many projects across the course of the next decade.

JULIE MARTIN: I think meeting with Billy Klüver and having access to new technology gave him the possibility of making works that could always change, that could react to the presence of

the viewer, that the viewer could become responsible for creating. But this kind of collaboration was always very exciting.

**813. Robert Rauschenberg, *Trophy IV (for John Cage)*, 1961**

LEAH DICKERMAN From 1959 to about 1962, Rauschenberg made a series of works that he called trophies. All of these works were dedicated to key people in his life, people who had important impact on his thinking as an artist, including the choreographer Merce Cunningham; Teeny and Marcel Duchamp; Jean Tinguely, the artist who'd created the self-destructing *Homage to New York*; artist Jasper Johns; and the composer John Cage.

The trophy he made for John Cage is seen here. A large suspended boot drops to hit a piece of metal. And a single clanging note is rung in homage to the composer.

Robert Rauschenberg:

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG Every now and then, you wanna thank somebody back who has given you so much, then there's a new trophy. It's just a special kind of thanks that has been in a series of my life's work. This is the one for John Cage. We were soul mates right from the very beginning, philosophically or spiritually. He told me that he had to learn Zen. And I didn't know what Zen was. And I still don't. So I'm real Zen. *[laughs]* And he said I was natural Zen.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Here is Rauschenberg playing the piece.

*SFX: Audio from Rauschenberg at SFMOMA*

#### 814. Robert Rauschenberg, *Homage to David Tudor*

LEAH DICKERMAN: *Homage to David Tudor* was a collective event that was staged by Robert Rauschenberg but also the artists Niki de Saint Phalle, Jasper Johns, and Jean Tinguely at the American Embassy in Paris in June, 1961.

They decided what to do independently. And then, the contribution became part of a whole. Niki de Saint Phalle hired the second-best sharpshooter in the world to shoot at one of her works. And the work was embedded with bags of paint that then burst and dripped on the painting. Jasper Johns signaled the program's intermission by carrying his painting *Entr'acte* onto the stage. *Entr'acte* means "intermission" in French.

Rauschenberg produced *First-time Painting* in front of the audience. And the way he did it was extraordinary. He turned the back of the painting so that the audience couldn't see what he was doing. But at the same time, he attached contact microphones to the painting, so they could hear each brush stroke, ch-ch-ch-ch, while he painted in front of them. And then, when an alarm clock went off, he stopped painting. That's a question that painters always ask themselves. How do you know when a painting is done?

Now painting becomes a concert, an orchestration of sound. But it's a sound of everyday life. It's just like the way that Rauschenberg pulls things from the real world into his paintings.

**815. Robert Rauschenberg, *Pelican*, 1963**

LEAH DICKERMAN: Rauschenberg has become well known for the sets and costumes that he developed for Merce Cunningham's productions and for Trisha Brown's productions later on. But it's not as well known that Rauschenberg himself was a choreographer. *Pelican*, in the video that you see here, was the first of the works that he choreographed. He looked for a space for the event and secured a roller skating rink. He took his cue from the venue, and he asked his dancers to perform on roller skates.

Here is dancer Alex Hay talking about performing the work:

ALEX HAY: I did *Pelican* with Bob. He asked me if I would do the skating. Well, I hadn't skated in years and years and years, but you don't forget it, and I guess Bob was the same way. It was sort of like a scary piece to do because we had these big cargo chutes that were extended on steel rods, and we had backpacks. The problem was when we had to circle around Carolyn Brown and not engage these two cargo chutes. I guess they were about 8 feet wide, extended. But we managed quite well. We didn't collide or fall down or anything like that. I guess that was good.

## 816. Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive I*, 1965

LEAH DICKERMAN This silkscreen includes an image of John F. Kennedy, whom Rauschenberg greatly admired. After the assassination, Rauschenberg was uncertain whether he should use the image. But he decided to go ahead, as a way of honoring Kennedy's memory.

In the silkscreen process, he creates an inventory bank for himself of about 150 silkscreens all drawn from popular media. And with this vocabulary, he mixes and recombines these images in a variety of ways. So it's almost as if Rauschenberg is thinking digitally even before he has digital technological capacities.

Critic Calvin Tomkins has been looking at Rauschenberg's work since the mid-1950s. He often visited Rauschenberg's studio.

CALVIN TOMKINS: He would do four or five big canvases at once, out on the floor you know, of the screens he had made up. He wasn't doing them with exact measurements so the calibration is perfect. He'd gotten bored with that, so they were slightly out of register, and the colors would get confused.

He worked in a kind of effortless way. There was no stress. It seemed like he didn't do much stopping and thinking and stepping back to look. He would just put down a screen and squeegee the color over it, and then pick it up and he'd look at it for a minute or so.

It seemed like such a free, open, almost casual way of working. But there was this sort of uncanny precision of his own design sense.



### 817. Robert Rauschenberg, *Oracle*, 1962-65

LEAH DICKERMAN: *Oracle* is a work that came out of a collaboration with Billy Klüver, a Swedish engineer working with Bell Labs. Klüver and Rauschenberg went to the junk yard, and put together this five-part, found-metal assemblage sculpture. And they fitted this sculpture with cutting-edge wireless transistor circuitry that was being developed at Bell Labs at the time. These sculptural elements would pull sound from the radio waves; some static, some voices, some bits of song into a fragmented image of the contemporary sound world.

Julie Martin collaborated with Rauschenberg and Klüver.

JULIE MARTIN: The idea was to have five radios in one of the pieces. And then their sound would be broadcast to amplifiers and speakers in the other four pieces. And it was just very difficult. There was too much interference. Billy and Harold Hodges worked for several years on systems. Finally, there developed on the market a crystal-controlled FM transmitter which they could use to transmit the sound from the control console to the other pieces.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Bell Labs was the place where transistor technology was being developed. And of course, transistors are the foundation block for the digital world that we know today. Rauschenberg saw technology as part of the adventure of contemporary life, and he always wanted to integrate the most cutting-edge, the most avant-garde technology.

JULIE MARTIN: And Billy always said that as you walked among the pieces, it felt like you were walking down the street on, say, the Lower East Side on a summer day when the windows are open, and you hear snatches of radios coming from different places.

**818. Robert Rauschenberg, *Mud Muse*, 1968-71**

JULIE MARTIN: This work is *Mud Muse*.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Julie Martin collaborated with Rauschenberg.

JULIE MARTIN: And the idea was that sound would make this mud bubble. However, it turned out you would have to use sound much too high, and it would pierce people's eardrums. So they worked out a system so that sound opens the different valves around the bottom of the tank, releases air, and you get the mud bubbling.

The night before the opening at the museum, Bob asked some musician friends to come in. They played music to *Mud Muse*. It was recorded. The bubbles were recorded. And then *Mud Muse* now dances to the sound of its own dancing, so to speak.

GUNNAR MARKLUND: The sound from the bubbles is the same sound that activate the sound.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Gunnar Marklund installs and maintains *Mud Muse* at Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

GUNNAR MARKLUND: In discotheques in the 70s, they had this disco sequencers, so you could see lightbulbs blinking to the music and this is the same system, so if you have a bubble sound that was very low, low range, then you could see some kind of bubbles bubbling, and then you go up in the high range, other bubbles was bubbling.

JULIE MARTIN: Another thing that's very interesting is it's a driller's mud called bentonite, which holds a lot of water, so that you're able to have a mud that's quite viscous and doesn't clog up.

It's a sculpture that makes everybody happy. Don't know why the mud does, but somehow you watch *Mud Muse* and it just makes you happy.

### **819. Various Artists, *The Moon Museum*, 1969**

LEAH DICKERMAN The Moon Museum was the brainchild of Forrest Myers, who was a sculptor and a member of EAT, the group that Rauschenberg had founded with Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer at Bell Labs, and Bob Whitman too. Forrest Myers was excited about the plan to land a man on the moon in 1969. And he said his idea was to get six great artists together and to make a tiny little museum that would be on the moon.

He reached out to Fred Waldhauer, who seized on the new ceramic technologies that were used for telephone circuits. Waldhauer helped make a ceramic chip the size of a postage stamp that was inscribed with six prints. Andy Warhol made stylized initials that look a bit like a rocket ship or perhaps a penis. Rauschenberg made just a simple straight line. David Novros made a black square. Forrest Myers made a computer drawing of a linked symbol called 'interconnection.' Claes Oldenburg made a Mickey-Mouse-like figure. And John Chamberlain made a circuit-like diagram.

According to the story that Fred Waldhauer told, one of engineers secretly attached a copy of the Moon Museum to the leg of a lunar lander, disguising it with the gold foil wrapping that was used for insulation. And the work was sent to the moon. Of course, we don't know if this is true. But that ambition to send a work that was the embodiment of American cultural achievement to the moon suggests something of the ambition of these artists at the beginning of the space age.

**820. Robert Rauschenberg, *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*, 1966**

LEAH DICKERMAN: The pioneering video artist Charles Atlas has worked closely with video footage of *9 Evenings*.

CHARLES ATLAS: *Nine Evenings* was an event that took place in New York City in 1966. Engineers from Bell Labs worked with a group of very well-known artists, and they made pieces that incorporated elements of technology.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Here's Julie Martin:

JULIE MARTIN: Bob Rauschenberg did a piece called *Open Score*. Pete Kaminski at Bell Labs had made a very small FM transmitter that could fit in the handle of the tennis racquet. And there was a contact mic at the head of the racquet so that each time the ball hit, a very loud *bong* was transmitted. In addition, each time the racquet hit a ball, the sound turned off a light. When the space was completely dark, the space was flooded with infrared light, and infrared-sensitive cameras picked up the images of the people on the floor. And a crowd of 500 people did very simple choreography — wave a handkerchief; take off a coat, put it back on; hug the person next to you.

CHARLES ATLAS: Around the corner you'll see an installation I made based on the documentary materials that exist from *Nine Evenings*—16-millimeter black-and-white film footage, and a bit of color film footage also. I made a nine-channel sync composition with nine projectors and nine screens, mounted in a forest of pipes. It's like, a maze in a way, but there's no end goal. It's sequential. Instead of the dancers moving around the audience, the audience is moving around the dancers. Hopefully, you'll get that feeling of experimentation and rawness in technology.

## 821. Robert Rauschenberg, *Cardboards*, 1971-72

LEAH DICKERMAN: In 1970, Rauschenberg moved from New York to Captiva Island, off the coast of St. Petersburg, Florida. *Nabisco Shredded Wheat* is one of the works from the Cardboard series that he made soon after.

Here's Donald Saff, who worked with Rauschenberg in making the Cardboard series.

DONALD SAFF: Rather than walking around the city and finding material, he decided to work with what he could find. There are the sand and there's always something being shipped in in a cardboard box. And so the first works were, OK, "This is what's available to me, this is what I'll make."

LEAH DICKERMAN: Here's critic Calvin Tomkins.

CALVIN TOMKINS: There is a major change in the work he did after moving there. He used to say, "Not much washes up on the beach here." In New York, you could always walk around the block and find something discarded, an automobile tire or something you could lug back and put in a painting.

I think the work becomes very different and he never again collaborates with other artists in the way he collaborated with John and Merce. And for Bob, the whole idea of collaboration was just central. He spoke of himself as collaborating with materials. How did he put it? He didn't want to make materials do something that he wanted. He wanted to collaborate with the materials so they could realize their own qualities.

**822. Robert Rauschenberg, *Jammers (series)*, 1974-1976**

LEAH DICKERMAN: In 1975, Rauschenberg went to Ahmedabad, India at the invitation of the Serabhais, who were a wealthy, cultured family. Rauschenberg operated in India in a way that was like he did in any neighborhood, where he gathered material around him. And he was struck by the sheer beauty and sensuality of the silk fabrics that he saw.

The way that Rauschenberg chose to work with these silk fabrics was not to do very much to them at all. He doesn't really alter the fabric. He drapes it so that it can continue to be loose and to billow, to shimmer, as light hits it.

Fashion designer Asha Sarabhai was with Rauschenberg when he purchased this fabric in India.

ASHA SARABHAI: The Khadi shops, which is where we went with Bob, were shops that came about post-independence, after Gandhi had died. But Gandhi was very instrumental in making the whole Khadi movement a nationwide practice.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Khadi refers to hand-woven, hand-spun fabrics which Gandhi believed were the backbone of India, a way to reestablish India's presence in the textile industry, which the British had undermined.

ASHA SARABHAI: People put together the most extraordinary combinations of print and plain, and I'm sure that was something that struck Bob as well, because it's a very powerful visual image, that in spite of often really dire poverty, people still look extraordinary.

LEAH DICKERMAN: And it was a kind of extraordinary beauty, a luxury that he hadn't really allowed himself, personally. He was even made uncomfortable by this display of beauty. I think he resisted the idea that art should be pretty, as many New York intellectuals did.

### 823. Robert Rauschenberg, *Glut (series)*, 1986-97

LEAH DICKERMAN: Rauschenberg went to Houston, Texas, in 1985 for an exhibition of his work. He saw that the Texas economy had been hard hit by an oil glut. All around him he could see gas stations that were closed and drilling rigs that were shut down and cars abandoned by the side of the road and oil barrels flattened.

When he went back to his studio in Captiva, he started making assemblages from scrap metal that he had collected from junkyards. Here, in this work, you can see that there's a stop sign and used oilcans.

Lawrence Voytek, who was Robert Rauschenberg's master art fabricator for many years, discusses making the *Gluts* with Rauschenberg.

LAWRENCE VOYTEK: We were at the scrapyard. They must have torn down a gas station or something. Bob just said, "I want all of that." This pile ended up out in Captiva. And Bob just said, "Hold this up here, put a screw there, put a screw there. Hold this up here. Let's mount this here."

He was in love with the nature of the materials and how they looked in their abandoned states. This color came about because it was living a life and it was you know a back of a truck that was banged into and ripped off and thrown in the ground and started to rust. And now it had a skin that an iguana would die for. He was very sensitive to the way everything looked. Wherever he traveled he would see the beauty in what man has made and its weathering.

**824. Robert Rauschenberg, *Glacial Decoy*, 1979**

LEAH DICKERMAN: In 1970, Tricia Brown set up her own dance company. *Glacial Decoy* was one of the first works that she made for the proscenium stage after years of making works in places where dances were not normally performed. She asked Rauschenberg to create sets and costumes for the work, and that was the beginning of a 16-year, incredibly productive and fertile collaboration.

Here's Tricia Brown:

TRICIA BROWN: Bob wants to play. He has a great envy of dance because it's alive, the people make it, and it's fragile in the fact that it disappears as soon as the dancer leaves the space.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Rauschenberg created a slideshow of 620 photographs that he had taken around Captiva that were changing combinations, and the image would seem to migrate from one screen to the next, left to right, echoing the passage of the dancers in a kind of montage machine.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: I do pay a lot of attention to the attitude of the choreography. The movement as it would pass into the wings, then someone else would replace the person that had just disappeared, and continue the movement, and it would slide across. And so, I didn't want to do a fixed image stage, and so I did that with the photographs. And as one would come up, then it would be passed on, and then, you know, on and on, and—and just continuous.



**825. Robert Rauschenberg, *Set and Reset*, 1983**

LEAH DICKERMAN: *Set and Reset* was another collaboration by Robert Rauschenberg and Tricia Brown. Rauschenberg worked on the set and the costumes, and the score was by the artist Lori Anderson. Rauschenberg created a sculptural object that he called *Elastic Carrier*, and it hung above the dancers. It was stretched with a kind of fabric so images could be projected onto it. The images were stock footage that he found along with found sound, and he edited it together in this mix.

Here's Tricia Brown speaking about *Set and Reset*, with the score by Lori Anderson, behind her.

TRICIA BROWN: In *Set and Reset*, the communication between him was direct, almost as if he lived inside of me, or me inside of him. There were correspondences that, that were uncanny.

LEAH DICKERMAN: Here's David White, a longtime friend of Rauschenberg's and senior curator at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.

DAVID WHITE: The costumes for the dancers was a very gossamer white fabric, almost like wedding veil, a very open weave. And so the images were silkscreened on this fabric on a great big table. And when the fabric was lifted off, there was this residue of ink that had gone through. Bob was not one to just waste something of that sort.

**826. Robert Rauschenberg, *Mirthday Man (Anagram [A Pun])*, 1997**

LEAH DICKERMAN: *Mirthday Man* is a work in the Anagram series that Rauschenberg made in the 1990s. Here he's using a very early Macintosh system. He'd select from hundreds, even thousands, that he would take, and his assistants printed these digitized images on transparent sheets with a large Iris inkjet printer. And because the ink that he used was water soluble, he could transfer the images onto a support using only a sponge or water or rags.

Lawrence Voyteck was Robert Rauschenberg's master art fabricator for many years.

LAWRENCE VOYTEK: And you wet zones and then you start burnishing and rubbing. It's starting to turn into this skin. And you're getting bumps and bruises and it's almost like you're putting tattoos down. He had these natural sponges. Bob was able to just kiss the colors he wanted and get deeper into other colors. So there's a lot of real subtle hand work.

LEAH DICKERMAN: The work was completed on a single day, his 72nd birthday. And at the very center is a full-scale x-ray of his body, that was taken in the 1960s and appears in some of the works that we've seen earlier in the show. He called that image a portrait of his inner man. It adds a sense of vulnerability of the body, contemplation of the ephemerality of life. And he sets that image in relationship to Florida palm trees and a fire engine from the station near his New York studio. So this work, I think, is particularly reflective, a kind of memento mori on the rich life that he had lived.