

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ANNOUNCES ACQUISITION OF *REBUS*, MAJOR EARLY WORK BY ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Acquisition of Large Combine Painting Enriches Significant MoMA Holdings of One of 20th Century's Key Artists

New York, June 17, 2005—The Museum of Modern Art has acquired *Rebus* (1955), a major early combine painting by Robert Rauschenberg (American, b. 1925), one of the most influential artists of the 20th century, MoMA Director Glenn D. Lowry announced today. The three-panel combine painting, nearly 11 feet long, will augment the ten paintings and 183 works on paper by Rauschenberg already held by MoMA, creating one of the world's most significant museum collections of this artist's work. *Rebus* is painted with oil on canvas with applied paper, fabric, pencil, newspaper and printed reproductions, and is anticipated to go on view in the fourth-floor Painting and Sculpture galleries in mid-July.

Mr. Lowry said, "In 1952, The Museum of Modern Art was the first institution to collect work by Robert Rauschenberg, and we remain committed to the work of this extraordinary artist. Rauschenberg's impact on the art world and continuing influence on succeeding generations of artists is enormous. We are profoundly grateful to Jo Carole and Ronald Lauder for their generosity to make this acquisition possible."

John Elderfield, the Museum's Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, said, "The Museum's first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., had hoped to acquire Rauschenberg's *Rebus* in the early 1960s but was unable to do so. We are delighted that this great work has now finally entered the collection. *Rebus* is broadly acknowledged as a landmark in the development of Rauschenberg's art in moving beyond the nostalgia of his earlier combine paintings toward a new, more specific means of representation of images that might be encountered in the urban environment. The images--from photographs of running athletes to a comic strip and a reproduction of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*--jostle with each other, the artist says, 'like pedestrians on a street'."

The period following Rauschenberg's arrival in New York in 1949 was one of his most prolific. This fertility was matched by the work's innovative qualities. By 1955, when *Rebus* was made, Rauschenberg had produced four bodies of significant work: White Paintings (1950–51), Black Paintings (1951–54), Red Paintings (1953–54) and the first of the combines, a term coined by Rauschenberg to describe his technique of attaching cast-off items, such as rubber tires or old furniture, to a traditional support, often splashed with paint. The artist said that *Rebus* was intended to be "a record of the immediate environment and time." In mocking the seriousness of high art, Rauschenberg anticipated an attitude that would become more widespread among

successive generations of artists, for example, the Pop artists who appreciated Rauschenberg's relish for everyday objects.

Rebus joins four other major early works by Rauschenberg in the Museum's collection: *Bed* (1955), the artist's most controversial combine; *Rhyme* (1956), a smaller, intense work; *Factum II* (1957), one of a pair of paintings using identical images; and *First Landing Jump* (1961), a combine with bulky sculptural elements and the first Rauschenberg to incorporate the wiring of an electric light fixture as a visual element in the work. In addition, the Museum owns six later paintings by Rauschenberg and the famous work on paper *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno* (1959–60).

Rebus is a partial and promised gift of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder and Museum purchase.

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