



**Landmark Robert Rauschenberg
retrospective opens at
Guggenheim Museum
Bilbao in November**

MOST COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION OF ARTIST'S WORK
EVER ASSEMBLED WILL INCLUDE PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS,
SCULPTURE, AND PERFORMANCE AND TECHNOLOGY-
BASED PIECES

In a career that has spanned nearly fifty years, Robert Rauschenberg has redefined the art of our time. From November 21, 1998 to March 7, 1999, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao will present the first full career retrospective of Rauschenberg to be organized in Europe since 1980. Featuring approximately 300 works by the artist, including several newly created pieces, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* presents the full breadth of this artist's achievements and is the most comprehensive exhibition of his work ever organized.

"The Guggenheim has had a long, fruitful relationship with Robert Rauschenberg," said Thomas Krens, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. "We are delighted to be able to present the works of this pivotal twentieth-century artist and to demonstrate the range of his achievement."

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao would like to thank Philip Morris for its generous collaboration in the presentation of *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*.

COVER IMAGE

Barge, 1962–63 (detail)

Oil and silkscreened ink on canvas, 202.9 x 980.4 cm

Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa and

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

Rauschenberg was born in 1925 in Port Arthur, Texas. He began to study art after his discharge from the United States Navy in 1945, and attended North Carolina's Black Mountain College. There he studied with the former Bauhaus master, Josef Albers, and solidified friendships with the composer John Cage and the dancer/choreographer Merce Cunningham. Between 1949 and 1954, Rauschenberg introduced the mediums, materials, and motifs that have occupied him ever since. He worked in photography, made his first monoprints, and became involved in performance. After settling in New York in 1949, Rauschenberg encountered the Abstract Expressionists, and began to incorporate their gestural brushwork into his own paintings. He deviated from their pictorial purity, however, with references beyond the canvas. For example, numerals and diagrams were incorporated into *22 The Lily White* (ca. 1950), pebbles and dirt were impressed into the dark pigment of the *Night Blooming* (1951) paintings, and newspaper collage formed the ground of the series of black paintings.

In 1952, Rauschenberg introduced his method of combining disparate subjects, for example in his collages on Italian shirtboard, and the use of found materials, as in his *Scatole Personali* (c. 1952). These early works were laboratories for the Combines, begun in the mid-fifties, where real world images and objects were brought into the realm of abstract painting, thus blurring boundaries not only between painting and sculpture but also between art and life. *Odalisk* (1955/1958), one of Rauschenberg's first true Combines, incorporates such objects as a stuffed rooster, electric lights and a pillow with autobiographical materials, including family photographs and a miniature of one of his blueprints. Expanding upon Marcel Duchamp's concept of the *readymade*, Rauschenberg gave new significance to ordinary objects, such as a patchwork quilt or an automobile tire, by juxtaposing them with unrelated items and placing them in the context of art. When the Combines were first shown at Egan Gallery in December 1954, critics were baffled by these works, which challenged existing definitions of art. Rauschenberg was sustained during these years through an intellectual dialogue with Cage and Cunningham, as well as with the artist Jasper Johns, who shared his interest in deriving art from the commonplace.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, found images became paramount in Rauschenberg's visual vocabulary. Reproductions from newspapers and magazines were incorporated into his drawings, prints, and paintings as he perfected techniques of solvent-transfer, lithography, and silkscreening. With the silkscreened painting series, made between 1962 and 1964, Rauschenberg became identified with Pop art, partly as a result of his use of a commercial means of reproduction and his emphasis on media subjects, ranging from baseball to the Vietnam War. Rauschenberg's growing reputation as the leading artist of his generation was sealed by his first solo museum exhibition, held in 1963 at the Jewish Museum in New York, and the Grand Prize for Painting at the Venice Biennale, which he was awarded the following year.

Throughout his career, and particularly during the 1960s, Rauschenberg became involved in several collaborative ventures that moved him outside the confines of his studio. Rauschenberg's approach to art as an inclusive form engaging all the senses led naturally to his work in performance. Between 1954 and 1964, he designed sets, costumes, and lighting for both the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and the Paul Taylor Dance Company. His early stage designs included freestanding Combines such as *Minutiae* (1954), as well as what he called "live décor," in which human action became "scenery." In the early 1960s Rauschenberg worked closely with the Judson Dance Theater, a collective comprising such dancers and visual artists as Trisha Brown, Robert Morris, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Carolee Schneemann. Its primary objective was to liberate movement from all formal conventions. Between 1963 and 1967, Rauschenberg choreographed and performed in at least eleven documented performance pieces. Eliminating the customary division between performer and scenic element in these works, which ranged from *Pelican* (1963) to *Urban Round* (1967), he emphasized the interaction with specially designed costumes and stage props. In his ensemble pieces, such as *Spring Training* (1965), *Map Room II* (1965), and *Linoleum* (1966), disparate actions—some intentionally dancerly, others entirely pedestrian—were performed simultaneously. The pieces were often accompanied by audio collages made from electronically amplified noises, compilations of prerecorded music, and found sounds.

With Billy Klüver, a Bell Laboratories engineer he met in 1960, Rauschenberg explored technology's potential applications to the visual arts and theatre. In 1966, he and Klüver established E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology), an organization devoted to promoting interaction between artists and engineers in order to realize technically challenging artistic concepts. Rauschenberg created interactive, technologically-driven installations such as *Oracle* (1962–65), which accentuate the relationship between seeing and hearing. A five-part sculpture constructed from scrap-metal objects, *Oracle* emits the sounds of radio broadcasts, which viewers can manipulate by adjusting a control system programmed to scan multiple stations simultaneously.

With his move in 1970 to Captiva, Florida, Rauschenberg retreated temporarily from urban imagery, favouring an abstract idiom and the use of natural fibres, such as fabric and paper. The *Cardboards* (1971) and *Venetians* (1972–73) reveal his fascination with the inherent colour, texture, and history of found materials. The beautiful and disparate effects of cloth, ranging from cotton to satin, are explored in the *Hoarfrosts* (1974–75) and *Jammers* (1975–76) series. Collaborations at paper mills in France and India resulted in works where paper pulp itself was elevated to an art form.

The National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., mounted a mid-career retrospective in 1976, when Rauschenberg was selected as the artist to honour the American Bicentennial. Given the opportunity to reexamine his early work, Rauschenberg returned to past concerns in his *Spreads* (1975–82) and *Scales* (1977–81) series, incorporating transferred and screened images and assemblage in often large-scale installations.

Rauschenberg's early interest in photography was renewed in 1979, when he incorporated projections of his own black-and-white photographs into a set design for the Trisha Brown Dance Company's *Glacial Decoy*. From this point on, images incorporated into Rauschenberg's work in all mediums were drawn almost exclusively from his own photographs.

During the 1980s, Rauschenberg undertook two long-term projects. The first, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981 to present), is a multipart work-in-progress, which currently comprises 195 paintings and sculptures, and spans approximately 330 metres. Often described as Rauschenberg's visual autobiography, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* presents significant developments in the artist's career, with sections referring to past motifs and techniques as well as current trends in his art. It may be regarded as the ultimate serial work for an artist who conceives in series.

The Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) project (1984–1991) represented the culmination of his belief in the power of art and artistic collaboration to bring about social change. Travelling to eleven countries throughout the world, Rauschenberg explored diverse cultures, materials, and artistic traditions. He mounted an exhibition of his work in each country, often where artistic experimentation had been suppressed, seeking to spark a dialogue and to achieve mutual understanding through the creative process.

The ROCI pieces launched several of Rauschenberg's metal painting and sculpture series begun in the mid-1980s. The metal paintings have a wide range of effects, from the brilliantly coloured enamels of the *Urban Bourbons* (1988–95) to the dark monochrome of the *Night Shades* (1991). The *Gluts*, begun in 1986, are made from scrap-metal objects, such as gas station signs and automobile parts, that are transformed into wall and freestanding sculptures.

Since 1992, Rauschenberg has used an Iris printer to make digital colour prints of his photographs. It is this technology that allows for the high-resolution images and luminous hues in the recent large-scale works on paper, the *Anagrams* (1995–1997) and *the Anagrams [A Pun]* (1997–present). In 1996, Rauschenberg transferred the Iris prints to wet plaster in the *Arcadian Retreats* (1996), a fresco series that provided him

with an entirely new avenue of exploration. Works from this series will be on view to the public for the first time in this exhibition.

Installation

Before its installation at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* was shown first in New York in the fall of 1997, and was presented simultaneously at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum on Fifth Avenue, the Guggenheim Museum SoHo and the Guggenheim Museum at Ace Gallery. The exhibition then travelled to Texas to The Menil Collection, Contemporary Arts Museum, and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. From there it went to the Museum Ludwig, in Cologne, Germany.

Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective encompasses the full breadth of this artist's wide-ranging achievements. The exhibition unfolds chronologically in the Museum's second and third floor galleries, highlighting Rauschenberg's painting and sculpture while capturing his practice of working simultaneously in diverse mediums. Featured also will be Rauschenberg's work as a draftsman, photographer, and printmaker, as well as a presentation of Rauschenberg's significant collaborations in the performing arts (Room 204) and in technology-based works (Room 209). Selections from Rauschenberg's most recent painting series, *Anagrams [A Pun]* (1997 to present) are shown in Room 304, together with *Earth Pull* (1998), a light and sound piece that Rauschenberg conceived especially for this site in the Museum. Finally, *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981 to present) is spectacularly installed in the unique exhibition space known as the Fish gallery (104), and can be seen for the first time in an uninterrupted space.

Exhibition Curators

The guest curators of the exhibition are Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson, both of The Menil Collection, Houston. Walter Hopps was curator of Rauschenberg's mid-career retrospective at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., in 1976, and of the exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, which travelled to the Guggenheim Museum SoHo in 1992-93.

Hopps and Davidson have organized *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* in collaboration with a curatorial team at the Guggenheim Museum that includes Nancy Spector, Curator, who is responsible for the segment of the exhibition devoted to Rauschenberg's performance-related activities; Julia Blaut, Assistant Curator; and Joan Young and Elizabeth Carpenter, Project Curatorial Assistants.

Catalogue

A fully illustrated, 631-page catalogue, published by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, is accompanied by a Spanish translation of all texts. The catalogue includes an introduction by Walter Hopps and essays by Trisha Brown, Ruth Fine, Billy Klüver with Julie Martin, Rosalind Krauss, Steve Paxton, Nancy Spector, and Charles F. Stuckey.

For press information:

Nerea Abasolo

Communications Responsible

Teléfono: 34/(9)4/ 4359008

Fax: 34/ (9)4/ 4359010

E-mail: nabasolo@guggenheim.org

Slides

Untitled [Hotel Bilbao], ca. 1952

Engravings, printed paper, paper, fabric, pencil,
and glue on paper, mounted on paperboard

Collection of the artist

Odalisk, 1955/1958

Combine: oil, watercolor, pencil, crayon, paper, fabric, photographs,
printed reproductions, miniature blueprint, newspaper, metal, glass,
dried grass, and steel wool, with pillow, wood post, electric lights, and
Leghorn rooster, on wood structure mounted on four casters

Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Ludwig Donation

Able Was I Ere I Saw Elba II (Japanese Recreational Clayworks), 1985

Transfer on high-fired Japanese art ceramic

Private collection

Often called the most important American artist of the second half of the twentieth century, Robert Rauschenberg defines and symbolizes the excitement, the experimentation, and the sheer electricity of the American art scene from the 1950s until the present. His early use of found objects in combination with paint in three-dimensional works, his experimentation with new printmaking and transfer techniques, and his journeys into the worlds of technology and performance have made him one of any time.

At Philip Morris, we have sponsored the contemporary arts for forty years. Since the earliest days of our corporate-contributions program, we have supported art that explores new ideas, forms, and techniques. Through our program, we have funded shows of Pop art, Conceptualism, and Abstraction, all movements that Rauschenberg has touched upon in his long and fertile career. We are proud to be the worldwide sponsor of the definitive retrospective of one of America's premier creative forces. This exhibition will show an international audience how one artist's significant contributions and immense influences have helped shape the course of postwar American art.

Matteo L. Pellegrini
Chairman, Philip Morris Spain