

MOCA

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Media Preview

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MOCA Grand Avenue

ACCLAIMED MOCA ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG EXHIBITION COMES HOME

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines

Opens in Los Angeles May 21 after Critical and Popular Success in New York

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines

MOCA Grand Avenue/250 South Grand Avenue/Downtown Los Angeles

May 21–September 4, 2006



Robert Rauschenberg

Small Rebus, 1956

Oil, graphite, paint swatches, paper, newspaper, magazine clippings, black-and-white photograph, United States map fragment, fabric, and three-cent stamp on canvas
35 x 46 x 1 3/4 inches

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Panza Collection



Robert Rauschenberg

Monogram, 1955-59

Oil, paper, fabric, printed paper, printed reproductions, metal, wood, rubber shoe heel, and tennis ball on canvas with oil on Angora goat and rubber tire on wood platform mounted on four casters

42 x 63 1/4 x 64 1/2 inches
Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Los Angeles—*Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, the landmark exhibition organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA), that was a critical and popular success during its New York run (at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 20, 2005–April 2, 2006), **comes home May 21**, when it opens in more than 11,000 square feet of gallery space as MOCA's major summer presentation. On view **May 21–September 4, 2006**, the exhibition, which is curated by MOCA chief curator Paul Schimmel, has been greeted with superlatives and promises to be the Los Angeles visual art event of the summer. From Los Angeles, the exhibition will embark on a two-stop European tour, with showings at Centre Georges

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Pompidou, Paris (October 4, 2006–January 15, 2007); and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (February 17–May 6, 2007).

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines is made possible by the Jane and Marc Nathanson Foundation.

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines can be seen as the most important focused exhibition of Robert Rauschenberg's work to date—it is the first project ever mounted to be fully devoted to this body of his most influential and groundbreaking works. These artist-dubbed Combines (best described as freestanding and wall-hung objects combining painting and sculpture) were produced between 1954 and 1964, a fertile period in the artist's extraordinary, long (and still continuing) career. It was in the Combines that Rauschenberg reimagined the medium of collage, incorporating everyday objects but doing it on a scale—and with an aggressive three-dimensionality—that breaks rather than encourages illusion. The Combines take this aesthetic to an exhilarating extreme, with many of them moving off the wall altogether to become freestanding objects, through a process called assemblage. Rauschenberg was unbound in the materials he chose to bring together, from the newspaper clippings and photographs that the Cubists, Dadaists, and Surrealists used, to a magnificent junkyard of detritus—Coca-Cola bottles, pinup girls cut from magazines, rubber tires, and taxidermied animals are a small representation.

It is no exaggeration to say that Rauschenberg redefined American art when he invented the Combines. Still radical today, they are mixed-media process-and-product that explode through the traditional walls separating painting and sculpture, bringing the street into the studio (and vice-versa). In reopening the dialogue between the outside world and the hermetic interiority of art practice at that time, Rauschenberg brought back into the discussion the quotidian environment that a previous generation of artists—the Abstract Expressionists—had largely shut out. Breaking new ground across territories from photography to performance, Rauschenberg created some of the most innovative and complex art works of the last century, meticulously yet messily and gloriously linking art with everyday life. In the process, he gained recognition as one of the most important and influential artists of our time.

More than anything else in his oeuvre, the 162 Combines Rauschenberg created during that explosive decade provide undeniable evidence of both his crucial contribution to 20th-century art and his influence on such subsequent movements as Pop art, Neo-Dadaism Assemblage, Fluxus, Viennese Actionism, Nouveau Realisme, Arte Povera, Art & Destruction, and performance art—as well as his impact on such towering figures as Cy Twombly and Jasper Johns. The way in which Rauschenberg (who has been called the first postmodern artist) handles the materials in the at-once rough, lush, and poetic Combines provides a precise, physical, evolutionary link between the painterliness of Abstract Expressionism and the iconographic, subject-driven qualities of early Pop art.

The Museum of Contemporary Art and Robert Rauschenberg

Five years in the making, *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines* presents 70 of the finest examples of the medium available from public and private collections around the world. The core of the presentation is MOCA's own formidable group of 11 Combines—the largest number of Combines held by a single institution anywhere, as well as the most significant representation in the museum of any single artist. Given its status as one of the great contemporary art museums in the country—supported by its legacy of major exhibitions tracing the development of post-War American art, and its remarkable collection of the works of Rauschenberg and his contemporaries—MOCA is a most fitting institution to organize such a project. Jeremy Strick, director of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, notes that, “Within Rauschenberg's impressive oeuvre, the Combines stand out as the epitome of his visionary approach. MOCA's collection is blessed with 11 Combines—including *Untitled* (c. 1954, also known as *Man with White Shoes* or *Plymouth Rock*), *Interview* (1955), *Factum I* (1957), and *Coca-Cola Plan* (1958)—which were part of MOCA's first great acquisition, the collection of Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo.”

Curator Paul Schimmel explains, "It has been more than 50 years since the first Combine was made, but no complete survey of these works has been attempted until now. Although there have been hundreds of Rauschenberg exhibitions, with dozens that have included Combines, they have never been the focus of an exhibition, and until this point, the largest gathering of this historic body of work was at the artist's first retrospective in 1963. Within the 10-year span covered by the current exhibition, the Combines developed through at least five stages, beginning with the transitional Red Paintings of 1953–54. The collage works dating from 1954–55 anticipate later Combines in their incorporation of found materials, three-dimensional objects, and, above all, painterly application of color. The Combines of 1955–57 are dominated by more lyrical poetic works. The works of 1958–61 are increasingly gestural, set apart from previous Combines by the conspicuous incorporation of text. By the early 1960s, the Combines move toward dramatic larger-scale works, sometimes made within the context of performance."

Other prestigious institutions who have lent to the exhibition are The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Marx Collection, Berlin; The Art Institute of Chicago; the Hamburger Kunsthalle; the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; the Sonnabend Collection, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Robert Rauschenberg

Robert (né Milton) Rauschenberg was born in Port Arthur, Texas, on October 22, 1925. After briefly attending the University of Texas to study pharmacology, he was drafted into the Navy and spent some years caring for mental patients at naval hospitals in California. While there, he taught himself to use oil paints, making portraits of the other sailors for them to send home. On leave, he paid his first visit to a

museum—the Huntington Gallery in San Marino—where he was astounded to see the original 18th-century portraits he knew from the backs of playing cards: Thomas Lawrence's *Pinkie* and Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*. He told the writer Calvin Tomkins, "It sounds corny, but my moment of realization that there was such a thing as being an artist happened right there."

In the late 1940s, under the GI Bill, he attended Kansas City Art Institute and the Academie Julian, Paris, where he met artist Susan Weil. They later married and in 1951 had a son, Christopher. Rauschenberg then attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina where he studied with the great Bauhaus artist-educator Joseph Albers. At Black Mountain, Rauschenberg formed germinal friendships with avant-garde dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham and legendary composers John Cage and David Tudor. It was at Black Mountain that he participated in Cage's *Theatre Piece #1*, since acknowledged as the first "Happening." He moved to New York in 1949 and attended the Art Students League, where he worked with Morris Kantor and Vaclav Vytlačil until 1952.

Rauschenberg's first solo exhibition was held at Betty Parson's Gallery in New York in 1951. His inventive nature and enormous curiosity led him to travel the world and to create the art that reflected his experience. In 1952, he landed in Morocco with Cy Twombly, and then traveled to Rome, where he created his first small fetish constructed boxes, *Scatole Personali*—works that prefigured the Combines. Beginning in 1954, and continuing for a decade, Rauschenberg proceeded to completely reinvent collage with the group of works he called Combines. These revolutionary hybrids of painting and sculpture undermined illusion and the idea that a work of art must have a unitary meaning, and brought painting into three, indeed, almost four, dimensions—clearly leading the way to the time-based art of the "happening." With the Combines, Rauschenberg became the eye recording the moment.

In 1964—the year after his historic retrospective at The Jewish Museum, New York—he won the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennale with a presentation comprised almost completely of Combines. This victory cemented his reputation as one of the foremost artists working in the world at that time. Robert Rauschenberg currently lives and works in Captiva, Florida.

Exhibition Highlights

Proceeding chronologically, *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines* brings together the artist's iconic, best-known work in this medium with some of his rarely seen or unknown Combines in MOCA Grand Avenue galleries A and B, as well as the South Gallery. With 11,000 square feet of dedicated space and through a more strictly chronological presentation, the exhibition allows viewers to see the evolution of the Combine in a more concrete way, with each work given the space it needs to be fully appreciated—"space" being the operant word throughout this project. MOCA's installation presents 10 additional Combines to what was

shown in New York, including such rarely seen masterworks as *Untitled* (Red Painting) (1954; Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles); *Red Interior* (1954; Collection of David Geffen, Los Angeles); *Curfew* (1958; Collection of David Geffen, Los Angeles); *Forecast* (1959; Sandra Rotman Collection, Toronto); *Diplomat* (1960; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna); *Navigator* (1962) Museum Für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; and *Aen Floga* (1961; collection of the artist).

Another highlight to be mentioned is the stunning, creamy *Untitled* (1955, Stefan T. Edlis collection, Chicago), with its iconic toy parachute and sock. This essential Combine—shown in both the New York and Los Angeles presentations—has been seen by the public only a handful of times.

Collection (1954; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

This monumental, predominantly red work is considered to be one of the first Combines in Rauschenberg's oeuvre. The painted and collaged elements—consisting primarily of fabric and newspapers dating from 1954—are joined by wooden sculptural elements installed along the upper edge of the frame, creating a combination of sculpture and painting. Some canonical artworks (including Renoir's *Girl with Watering Can*, 1876) are incorporated into the work as printed images on fabric. These high-art icons have been reworked in their reproductions and then recontextualized yet again when Rauschenberg incorporates them into this piece. The artist uses reproductions of eminent works of art in many of the Combines, perhaps affirming his own place in this tradition.

Red Interior (1954; Collection of David Geffen, Los Angeles)

This work's grid-like composition, created by a careful arrangement of several found elements, is underscored by the inclusion of a newspaper comics page, which, with its gridiron composition, echoes the larger layout of the Combine. But disturbing the regularity of the grid is an area of ambiguous space that Rauschenberg creates by placing a porcelain pulley behind a transparent element. This object introduces three-dimensional space into what initially seems to be a two-dimensional plane. Creating an awareness of the picture plane's physicality is a theme that Rauschenberg explores throughout the Combine series.

Minutiae (1954; private collection, Switzerland)

This work was commissioned by Merce Cunningham as a stage set for his modern dance troupe's 1954 performance of the piece *Minutiae*. The freestanding Combine is in two sections that allowed the dancers to move through the work, "activating" it by their performance—the curtain would wave, bodies would move hazily behind the scrims, and lights and dancers would be randomly reflected in the small mirror in the center of the frontal element. This work evidences Rauschenberg's lifelong interest in performance and his close relationship to the Cunningham Dance Company at this time.

Interview (1955; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Panza Collection)

In *Interview*, Rauschenberg unites several disparate objects to create a cohesive artwork. The fusion of the elements is accomplished by stripping the individual items of their original context: he suspends a softball and fork in close proximity; a brick swings in front of a found painting; a pinup girl perches in the middle of an expressive painting. These novel juxtapositions create new meanings for the objects. Unifying the entire Combine is the liberal and expressive application of paint that simultaneously affirms the artist's presence in the creation of the work and challenges the legibility of the discrete objects for the viewer.

Satellite (1955; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Gift of Claire B. Zeisler and purchase with funds from the Mrs. Percy Uris Purchase Fund)

In this work, Rauschenberg thwarts the convention of four-sided, rectangular painting by adding a stuffed pheasant to the top of the Combine. The taxidermied bird struts above a collaged plane that, with its assemblage of fabrics, newspapers, and dripping paint, is closely related to the neighboring works. However, the integration of the avian element challenges the idea that a painting should exist solely as a two-dimensional artwork. The tailless pheasant moves toward the edge of the Combine as if in search of its missing feathers, but the artist has denied him that plumage, just as he denies his Combine a frame that would affirm its status as a traditional artwork.

Untitled (c.1954; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Panza Collection)

Rauschenberg has called this work his first "true" Combine, as it represents the first time he literally combined several two-dimensional planes to form a three-dimensional artwork. Its structure draws the viewer in to move around and look through the space. Openings on the front and back, scrim that simultaneously reveal and obscure, and mirrors that reflect and reconfigure—all bring the eye around and through the broad array of collaged images. And, by mounting the work on casters, thus giving it the potential for movement, the artist further underscores implied motion for the viewer. Images of family, friends, and fellow artists cover this work, adding a rich, personal iconography.

Odalisk (1955/58; Ludwig Museum, Cologne)

Odalisk is often viewed as the female counterpoint to the untitled male above, and this exhibition marks the first time they have been brought together since they left the artist's studio. Both three-dimensional works retain Rauschenberg's balance of sculptural shape and delicate, richly layered surface. In *Odalisk*, however, pinup girls from magazines, comic strips, reproductions of widely known Old Master paintings, and a photograph of the artist's mother all provide possible sources for the feminine reference of the title. A common motif in the history of art—particularly during the early 19th-century passion for orientalism—the odalisque was generally portrayed as a female concubine, usually seen reclining in a harem. An actual silk pillow at the bottom of the Combine evokes a plush, "exotic" setting. As in *Untitled*, the dominant gender

theme is wittily undermined—here a proud rooster tempers the female imagery, just as the Plymouth Rock hen subverts the overwhelmingly masculine imagery of *Untitled*.

Small Rebus (1956; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Panza Collection)

The kinetic motif in this Combine is developed by the many images incorporated into the composition that reference movement. Arranged above and below the central band of commercial paint chips, acrobats fly and a man sprints, their movement emphasized by fierce strokes of paint. On the opposite side of the composition, two couplings of humans and bulls straddle the paint chips. The lower work, a printed reproduction of Titian's *Rape of Europa* (1559–62), portrays the classical myth in which Zeus, disguised as a bull, abducts the beautiful Europa. The upper work, a matador fighting a bull, creates a masculine counterpart to the more feminine Old Master image.

Factum I (1957; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Panza Collection)

Factum II (1957; The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

The generation of New York painters that preceded Rauschenberg were, of course, the Abstract Expressionists. Including Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock, they believed that through spontaneous abstraction they would be able to convey strong emotional or expressive content in their paintings. Rauschenberg's response to this aesthetic was an attempt to create two identical Combines, with results that thereby challenged the predominant philosophy of the time that the act of painting was dependent on the emotional state of the artist at the moment of creation. The careful duplication of the work, reinforced by the doubling of many elements within the Combines, asserts that the compositions of *Factum I* and *Factum II* were conceived prior to their creation. And, in both cases, despite the expressive feel, the execution was meticulously controlled, announcing the deliberate choices involved in the artist's creative process.

Canyon (1959; Sonnabend Collection)

This work is generally considered an interpretation of another classical myth, that of Ganymede. Zeus, in the guise of an eagle, abducts Ganymede, taking him to Mount Olympus, where he becomes cupbearer to the gods. Underscoring this reading of the work is the large eagle flying out from the canvas, the photograph of the young boy (the artist's son, Christopher), and the dangling pillow that could represent the boy's backside seen as Zeus carries him aloft. Another myth—this one inspired by the Combine itself—centers on the origins of the taxidermied eagle. There are several accounts of how Rauschenberg acquired this bit of Americana, but the most widely accepted version indicates that the bird belonged to the last living member of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders before it came into the artist's possession.

Monogram (1955–59; Moderna Museet, Stockholm)

Rauschenberg purchased the Angora goat in this iconographical work from a second-hand office furniture store for \$15 in 1955. After shampooing and grooming the beast, he added some paint to cover damage to its muzzle—and to claim it as an artwork. He then spent the next four years working to integrate the goat into a Combine. By 1956 he had added the tire that girds the animal in an attempt to connect it to “something as unavoidable as the goat.” Finally, in 1959, the piece assumed its current form when, at the suggestion of Jasper Johns, the artist placed the goat in the center of a floor-based collage. Since then, it has remained in its unique pasture of urban debris joined only by a tennis ball—a wry scatological reference.

First Time Painting (1961; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Stiftung Sammlung Marx)

Rauschenberg made this work during the performance *Homage to David Tudor* in 1961 at the American Embassy Theater in Paris. Challenging the expectations of the audience, he arranged the canvas on stage so that the surface he was working on faced away from the crowd, and no one could see what he was doing with the Combine. He did, however, attach a microphone to the canvas so that the audience could essentially hear his working process. When the alarm clock that is attached to the painting rang, Rauschenberg stood up, picked up the painting, and walked off stage with it. The audience was never shown the completed work, but it exists today as a record of that performance.

Black Market (1961; Museum Ludwig, Cologne)

Black Market was conceived as an interactive work for the 1961 exhibition *Art in Motion*, in Stockholm. Originally, the suitcase on the floor was open and filled with objects that the audience was encouraged to take—the only condition being that they must replace what they took with something of their own and record both objects on clipboards attached to the canvas. These four clipboards corresponded to four numbered hand stamps in the valise with which the viewer was to stamp the object they left behind. Unfortunately, objects were soon being removed and not replaced. The artist, who has stated that he “could never get that [*Black Market*] to work right,” closed the suitcase, removed the notepads, and concluded the performance.

Gold Standard (1964; private collection)

Gold Standard was created during a live televised performance in Tokyo entitled *Twenty Questions to Bob Rauschenberg* that took place on November 28, 1964. During the performance, a Japanese art critic asked the artist various questions through a translator. Instead of answering them, Rauschenberg responded by attaching objects to a traditional Japanese gold screen. The critic, becoming frustrated with the artist's refusal to answer, then asked the translator to write the questions in English. When presented with the piece of paper, Rauschenberg glanced at it and then affixed it to the screen. Through these actions, the artist was incorporating aspects of the performance into the Combine as they happened, creating an instantaneous

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record of the event. Considered the last Combine, this work is an amalgamation of “high” and “low” culture—a blend of collage, paint, performance, and sculpture—and is representative of themes and motifs that run throughout the entire series. Indeed, it matches the standard set by all the preceding Combines.

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines is accompanied by a comprehensive, full-color, fully illustrated publication that is the first to catalogue the 162 works that have been identified as Combines. Co-published by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Steidl Verlag, the book is edited by MOCA's Paul Schimmel—chief curator and curator of the exhibition—and Lisa Mark, director of publications; with contributions by Schimmel and scholars Thomas Crow, Branden W. Joseph, and Charles Stuckey. The book is available at all four locations of the MOCA Store in hardcover (\$75) and softcover (\$45).

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines is organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and presented in New York in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Paul Schimmel is the curator of the exhibition.

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines is made possible by the Jane and Marc Nathanson Foundation.

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For 24-hour information on current exhibitions, education programs, and special events, call 213/626-6222 or access MOCA online at moca.org

NIGHT VISION: MOCA After Dark, The Museum of Contemporary Art's wildly popular summer weekly art celebration, returns for its second season of Saturday nights throughout the run of *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*. The 15-week late-night program (Saturdays, May 27– September 2, 2006, 6pm–12midnight) features—in addition to viewing of the exhibition—live music, art making, screenings, spoken word, DJs, and guided tours, as well as cash bar and light fare at Patinette Café. The series is sponsored by Motorola and Myspace—with a range of musical performances and DJ sets programmed collaboratively by MOCA and MM & Associates—and is free with museum admission.