

# Claims Department





Welcome to Claims Department! I'm Chris, but you know that. I can't have gained an audience this far out, now, can I? You can reach me at [garcia@computerhistory.org](mailto:garcia@computerhistory.org) or [johnnyeponymous@gmail.com](mailto:johnnyeponymous@gmail.com)

I'm pleased to report that the San Jose WorldCon is right around the corner! I can't wait, largely because it'll be the first time I've seen a great many of my friends in about five years. That's one of the big reasons I love WorldCons, because for the better part of a week in August, it's where my friends live.

The GarciaZine production line continues. There are two Drink Tanks working, with a third big issue, all about Musicals, coming down the pipe for the fall. Journey Planet has been slowing, largely because I've had life and James has a WorldCon to chair, but they're still happening. I'm pleased to say that Claims Department will have a few issues this year, which makes me happy.

Podcasting stopped in May while I helped take care of the boys during Vanessa's recovery from her double mastectomy. This made me sad. I love Podcasting. Upside is I now get to create podcasts for work. More on that later.

This issue is all about art, and specifically, Modern and Conceptual Art. You've been warned.



Robert Rauschenberg

at SFMoMA



Back at Emerson, just about every year, we'd get a visit from Robert Rauschenberg. Sometimes he would show up to MassArt, but he always stopped by. It was well-known that after his talk, he'd go to get a drink, and that students who he had just spoken to were 'encouraged' to go and chat with him. By encouraged, I mean no one ever said "Do not, under any circumstances, bother Mr. Rauschenberg." In fact, I distinctly remember it being phrased as "Mr. Rauschenberg is very busy, so let's leave him alone."

I wouldn't say we were friends, but we spoke. As I've found with every Pop Artist I've met (and yes, he was a Pop Artist, even if he was not 'just' a Pop Artist) he used to watch wrestling, and even went to MSG for shows at times. Just like Warhol, Johns, and Lichtenstein. I only remember one specific conversation, about his magazine storage methods. He subscribed to literally thousands of magazines at the time, and it was something our art prof had made sure to mention. He simply gave that Rauschenberg smile and said "If you get that much material, you only need two things: shelving and an assistant."

When SFMoMA, the MoMA of the West!, announced they were putting together the largest Rauschenberg Retrospective ever, and the first since his death, I was psyched! It was an artist I knew a little, and work that I knew and loved. The massive impact of his work on me meant I knew I would be seeing it more than once, and come out loving him more than when I walked in. This happens to be exactly what happened, and even more importantly, it was my best of all possible exhibits! I interviewed Sarah Roberts, co-curator of the exhibit, and then did my walk through.

Walking into the exhibit, you're thrown into a first room that shows early Rauschenberg's earliest significant period. There were constructs, boxes and displays that were certainly following the examples set by Duchamp and Joseph Cornell. There were Rauschenberg's black paintings. These are cool, as he would crumble up newspaper and then paint over them, leaving areas



where you could see through to the printing below. They show his starting point for the work he would conquer the 1960s with, this idea of art being layered upon the rest of the world, the outside world, the mundane world, if you like.

Then, there were the blueprint photos. Basically, you take a lamp, you take a piece of blueprint paper, and you turn the lamp on with something standing between it and the paper, and it leaves these amazing images! These were done during his time at Black Mountain College with his wife-to-be, Susan Weil. These are haunting images of Weil, some of them double exposures, but the one that got me the most was called Sue, which was Weil, in profile, topless, it seems, but wearing a diaphanous skirt and holding a cane. It's a wonderful image, and from a period of his works that I was totally unaware of. I loved it so much! These are pieces that remind me of Man Ray, only with a certain more immediate, less structured feel.

Off that room was another room which was really dominated by a single work, and a work I hate as art, but I love as Art Practice. You see, Bob was friends with John Cage, and they often collaborated. Bob had an idea, and an interesting one. What could he use to make marks? What about a car tire? So, he joined a bunch of pieces of paper together and had Cage drive his Model A Ford through a thing of paint and then on to the paper, leaving a print. This, more than anything else, is an incredibly Cage-ian idea. The mark or the sound isn't the art piece, instead it is the record of an event, a moment. Rauschenberg understood that idea, perhaps even better than the older Cage, and implemented it throughout his career. Automobile Tire Print is not a great work of art, but it is a great concept within art.

In the same room is one of Rauschenberg's earliest surviving works, This is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time. It is a series of woodblock prints, bound together, and after each impression, he would carve another line into the woodblock, meaning it evolved after each pressing. I love this as a concept, and it is again that idea of the mark being the record of a moment, an act, and in this case, Rauschenberg is recognizing that the act inevitably changes the path of the work throughout its creation.

Then there's Erased deKooning Drawing. One of the true masterpieces of American Conceptual Art, and one of the things that people point to as proof that Modern Art is bullshit. They're wrong. It is basically an argument that destruction can be artistic, or more







aply, that all creation is, in a sense, destruction, and here Rauschenberg is merely taking it to the next level. He asked Willem deKooning to create a drawing specifically for him to erase. deKooning, a merciless intellectual and a bit of a pedant, decided to try and make it as hard as possible for Rauschenberg to erase it, so he used multiple mediums to create the image. Bobby was not to be dissuaded! He managed to erase the image, and frame it, leaving a few lingering ghost images on the page, and some eraser crumbs. Then, Jasper Johns made a frame, and Rauschenberg explicitly said that the frame was a part of the work. Again, it is way more important than it is an amazing art work, but I love the idea so much.

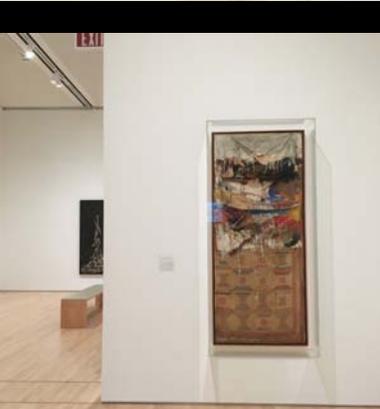


You leave that room, and you have to walk back through that entry room, and then when you look through the doorway, an Angora Goat is staring back at you.

This is the room with the works that feel most Rauschenbergian to me, personally. It is the room of his combine paintings, and in the middle is Monogram. I have seen it several times, but this one, with it in the middle of the room, surrounded by all the other works that made me a giant Rauschenberg fan, allowed me to see it in a new light. While most of the visits I'd made to see it focused on the goat, or the tire around its middle, I spent a lot of time looking at the canvas the goat rested on. The canvas is much like the black paintings that Rauschenberg had been doing, only less obscured, more celebrated, perhaps. The newspaper imagery was obvious, and had 0 to do with the item placed upon it. That was what Rauschenberg was a master of: placing things that do not belong next to each other and making both of them completely meaningless. This is what so many people hate about his work, I understand. It is what makes me love it; there is no meaning to the selection of imagery other than the fact that Rauschenberg decided they needed to go with one another. In other words, the artist is greater than meaning, or even better, the Artist's Intention is primary, even over the desire to make sense of the art they produce. It is the left-over thought from Abstract Expressionism, it would seem.



In this room are three of my favorite Rauschenberg pieces: Monogram, Bed, and Minutiae. Sadly, Canyon, featuring a bald eagle, was unable to travel. Sigh.





Bed is one of the best works that has incredibly deep roots that have sprouted amazing numbers of new shoots into the sky, including Tracy Emin's My Bed. It is a bed, splattered with abstract expressionist splatters. It's a piece I love seeing when I visit MoMA in New York. This is, in a way, Rauschenberg light. It's not as heavy as many of the other combine paintings in the room, but it does ask the question of what the role of the mundane life of an artist means to the Art World life of an artist.



Let us look then, you and I, at Minutiae. It is a floor piece, designed to be free-standing, a set-piece for a dance piece arranged by Merce Cunningham. The way it presents in the room, at the far end when you enter the first time, beyond Monogram, and it feels like a screen in a classic home, an eye draw, like a Chinese painted screen placed at the end of a ballroom. The work is a bit simple, but when you watch the dance on the screen above the piece, you see how it interacts with—out the dancers directly interacting with the piece. It is the colors and movements, each as precise as this work is within Rauschenberg's oeuvre. The combination of the work and the dance is far more powerful than either on its own, but in the room, with its placement, it invites deeper movement into the concepts of Rauschenberg's breadth.

There's a wonderful series of pieces that explain the creation and concept of Monogram. There are amazing drawings and description and video on the work. Amazing stuff.





The next room is more work in this vein, and some of it was really interesting, and largely stuff I had never experienced. Pantomime, or as I called it, That Painting with Two Fans. The fans work! The idea seems to be that the painting interacts, both conceptually and physically, with the environment it's placed in. It's the actual painting that the fans are placed in that impresses me. Rauschenberg worked in the Abstract Expressionist mode, and this, as far as painting goes, is easily the best I've ever seen from him. It calls up Clyfford Still and early Rothko. I love it.

When you walk out of that room, you go into the room that I was excited for. It was the 1960s room of silk screen paintings. These of collage screened images, and some of his most iconic. Scanning. Retroactive, his untitled work featuring Merce Cunningham, and on and on. This is the Rauschenberg that is without doubt a Pop Artist. He is taking images, some contemporary and some classical, magazine shots and his own work, and creating amazing work. The room is amazing, and it speaks to the concept of Rauschenberg as a synthesizer of lost moments.

After that room, there was another, which I don't quite remember, but then it was to the room with Oracle. Oracle is, without doubt, the most stupefying of all Rauschenberg's works. It's a bunch of car parts. And there are lights. And the sound of AM Radios. It was done as a part of Experiments in Art & Technology (EAT) along with Hodges and Kluver from Bell Labs. It's not a bad piece, but it just doesn't do much for me.

The next room brought me back. From all the works created as a part of EAT, it is Mud Muse. It is a mud table, technically Bentonite mixed with water, that is sound activated, causing the mud to bubble. It is endlessly relaxing, but more importantly, it is very Rauschenberg. The bubbling leaves traces that dissipate, yet another way of making a mark with intention, but also not entirely intentionally. That is one of the things Rauschenberg always reveled in - the ability



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to be the same side of the same coin.

The next room was... well, I'm not sure. I love his work with cardboard boxes opened on the walls. I think they are the most beautiful. I don't know what it is, but I find them charming and lovely and calming. The rest of the works in there, simple hanging cloths and a bathtub with a hanging sort of fabric over them. I just didn't connect with those works, but I did with those cardboard pieces. There's one much like it that was on display at the Cantor Museum at Stanford, which I loved.

The next room was mostly fabric works, which were very cool, but also a touch distant to me. I'm not sure why. Once I made it through a room with a long single work (I honestly don't remember it over than feeling that it was a codex-like version of his 1960s screened works), I arrived at the AMAZING room of 80s works called gluts. I love these, the sensation of damage, of the car crash, of what art means in the context of simulated destruction. In a way, these

felt a lot like the Erased de Kooning, that they were the recontextualization of signs by destroying them and then presenting them.

The best thing in that room was easily Untitled (Spread) which was a wooden panel screened much like the 1960s works, but with a distinct US Flag motif, and two umbrellas open, looming ahead of the panel. It's an impressive work, and one that doesn't seem to call back to his earlier work as much as define the concepts he had been working with becoming more fully integrated.

The last room was work from the 90s and early 2000s. Again, he seems to be calling back to those screened works of the 1960s, but he was working digitally, and it was a bit more spare, but still with that amazing eye.

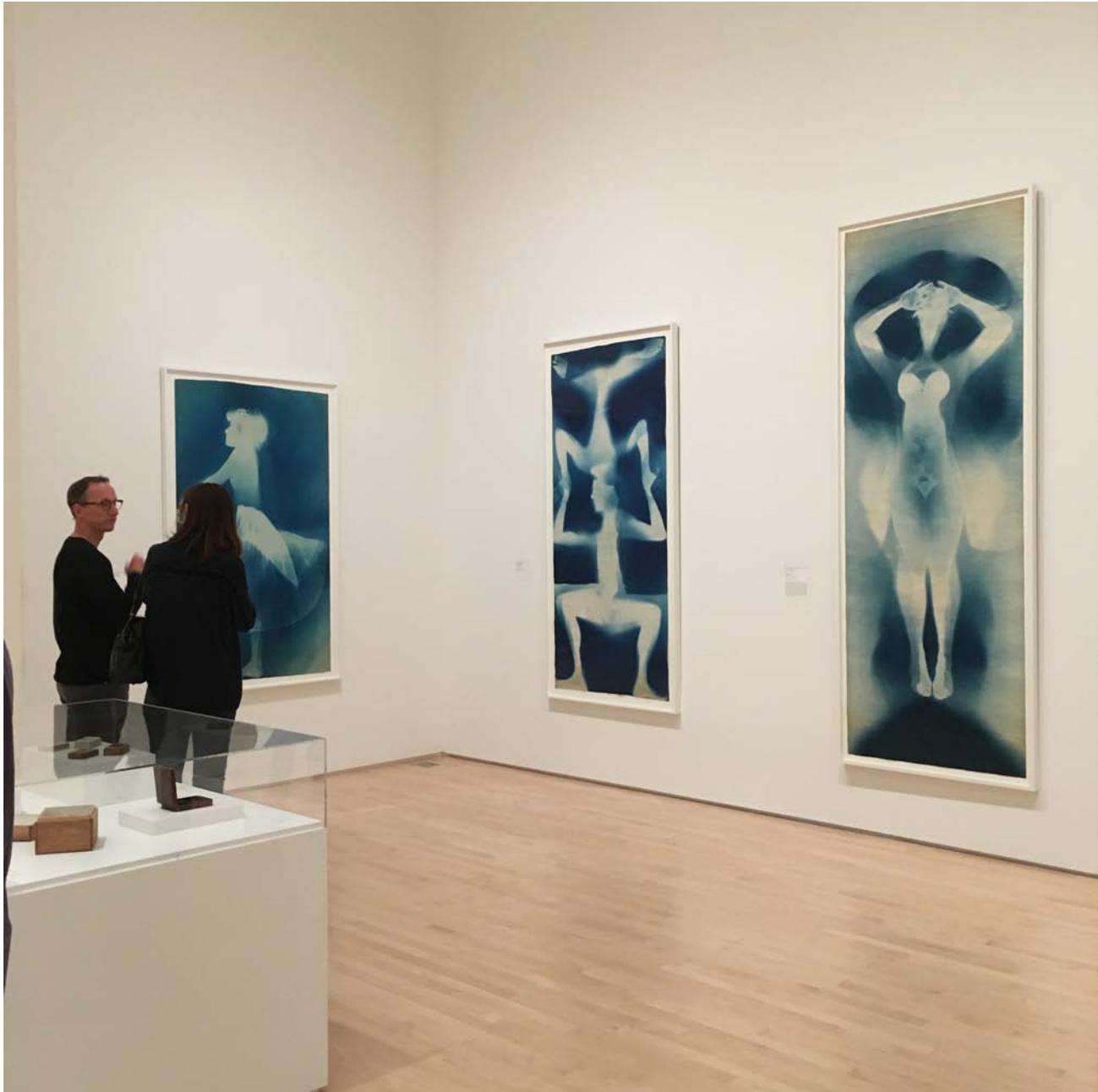
Overall, this was a massive and amazingly thorough exhibition of one of the most MASSIVELY significant artists of the last 100 years. It is not too much of a stretch to say that Rauschenberg was the American Duchamp, with ideas such as the Combine, not to mention the technology works done as a part of EAT, making as significant a mark on the Art World as the Ready-made had.







# From an Interview with Sarah Roberts





Chris Garcia: I'm here today with -

Sarah Roberts: Sarah Roberts.

Chris Garcia: Excellent. And you, what's your official title?

Sarah Roberts: My title is the Andrew W. Mellon Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA.

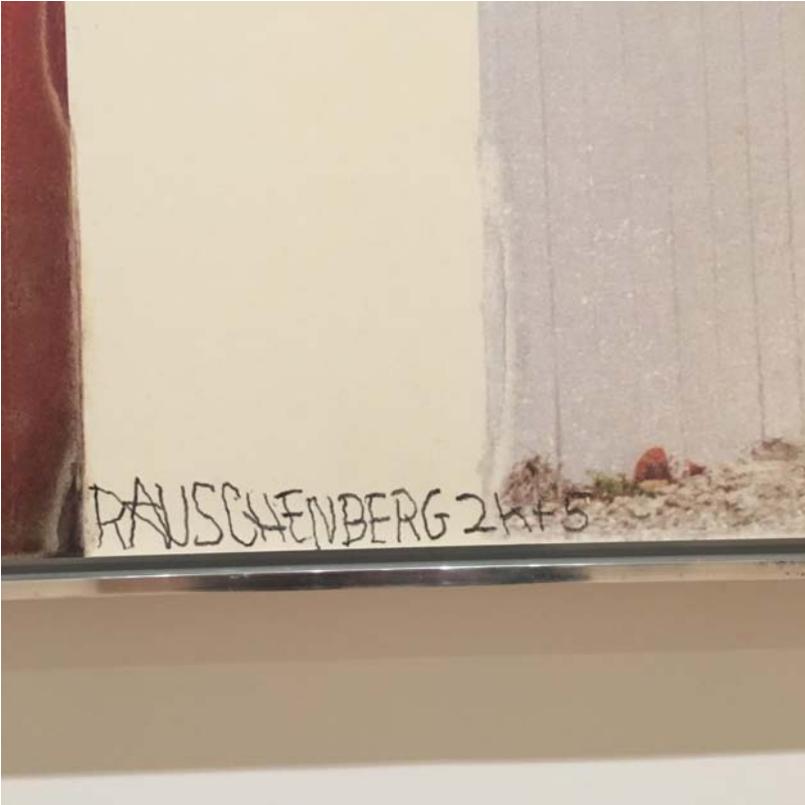
Chris Garcia: An officially named curatorship, you have my extreme jealousy. So now, you were the lead curator on the current Rauschenberg exhibit?

Sarah Roberts: I co-organized it with my colleague Gary Garrels who's the senior curator of painting and sculpture.

Chris Garcia: Oh, okay. And so let's start there. Could you just give a brief overview of what kind of exhibit this is?

Sarah Roberts: So it's a major career retrospective. It's the first retrospective since the artist passed away in 2009, and the first since 1997, '98, which was a major traveling exhibition organized by the Guggenheim. And this show was technically co-organized by curators at Tate, in London, and Museum of Modern Art in New York. They kind of put





together the original checklist and idea.

But SFMOMA has a really long history with Rauschenberg, and a really deep Rauschenberg collection. So we were brought in as partners really early on, and we pretty thoroughly re-worked the exhibition for our own presentation.

Chris Garcia: And what percentage would you say of the work actually is from SFMOMA's collection?

Sarah Roberts: That's a good question, and at one point we had the actual numbers written down on a piece of paper which I don't have in front of me. But we have, we have about 90 works in the museum's collection overall. Certainly not all of those are in the show. But I think we have about 25 to 30 SFMOMA works in the show out of about 140.

Chris Garcia: Oh, wow. Wow, I absolutely cannot wait to see it today. It's gonna be so exciting. Now, when you're approaching doing an exhibit like this with an artist whose work is so widely varied, how do you sort of, where do you sort of start with that?

Sarah Roberts: It's a tough one because he had a very long career and a very prolific career. And that's one thing if you're talking about an artist who's working in a fairly consistent style or a fairly narrow range of media. But he worked with everything, and he went in so many different directions. It is very hard to kind of come up with a straightforward storyline.

And so I think the way we thought about it was that we wanted to present that kind of omnivorous aspect of his work, the fact that he was working in so many directions and such a kind of an explosive kind of creativity. That we wanted to contain that in the show, and create a pretty balanced representation across his entire career. And then pull out two or three threads that do connect works, or pop up over time in different bodies of work.



Sarah Roberts: So it's fairly chronological, and then within the chronology it's organized around areas of focus or particular bodies of work.

Chris Garcia: What about your experience of Rauschenberg? Because I know you are deeply, deeply involved.

Sarah Roberts: Yeah, a long time.

Chris Garcia: Yeah. I miss him. He was a great guy.

Sarah Roberts: So interestingly, I never met him. For as long as I've worked on him, on his art, I never met him. So we got a grant, at SFMOMA we got a grant from the Getty Foundation to produce an online scholarly collection catalog. And we had flexibility to choose whatever topic we wanted. And we chose our Rauschenberg collection, because he's really been a cornerstone artist of most of our holdings. And we have a tremendous Rauschenberg collection. But also the way that we talk about and present 20th century art we've generally positioned him as kind of a hinge or a watershed. And so we did this in depth research project and online collection catalog which was published in 2013. And I was the lead researcher and author on that. So I had the luxury of spending about four years working in depth researching almost exclusively Rauschenberg. A lot of time in the archive, went to visit his foundation, saw works all over the world. Met with studio assistants, interviewed people who knew him. It was a really fantastic deep dive into Rauschenberg.







RAUSCHAUER AP 5/20