

GLADSTONE

Mark Westall, "Gladstone debuts an exhibition of over 30 rarely seen sculptures by Robert Rauschenberg,"
FAD Magazine, April 9, 2025

FAD magazine

GLADSTONE DEBUTS AN EXHIBITION OF OVER 30 RARELY SEEN SCULPTURES BY ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

By Mark Westall • 9 April 2025



Robert Rauschenberg, Three Traps for Medea, 1959, combine: oil, paper, fabric, metal, and glass bottle on wood with fabric, metal, string, hair, and plumb bob on wire, 24 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 16 inches (61.3 x 63.8 x 40.5cm) © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, courtesy of the Foundation and Gladstone Gallery.

Presented in collaboration with the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation on the occasion of the artist's Centennial, Gladstone presents the first survey of Rauschenberg's sculptural practice in thirty years, spanning his production from the 1950s through the late 1990s.

Examining Rauschenberg's sculptures through the lens of scale, the exhibition showcases over 30 sculptures that relate in size to the human body, whether floor-, pedestal-, or wall-based. Drawing from myriad media and disrupting the distinction between abstraction and empirical representation, Rauschenberg's sculptures are rooted in his career-long dedication to artistic experimentation.

Robert Rauschenberg is renowned for blurring the line between artistic genres, painterly gesture, and three-dimensionality. The artist maintained a robust sculptural practice throughout his long and prodigious career. Underscoring the artist's remarkable use of found and readymade materials, the works on view are assembled from industrial detritus, everyday objects, decorative items, and organic forms. They are the result of improvisatory gestures—gathering, twisting, combining, adhering, tying—that Rauschenberg described as responses to items found in his environment, “treasures” that he would bring back to his studio, seeing in them a potential for new form. Claiming a “sympathy for abandoned objects,” he created a body of strictly sculptural work that is rarely presented as such.

For this exhibition, Gladstone will present key works from various series, including the Scatole Personali (1952–53), Elemental Sculptures (1953/59), Combines (1954–64), Kabal American Zephyrs (1981– 83/1985/1987–88), Gluts (1986–89/1991–94), and the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI; 1984–91) in an installation designed by Selldorf Architects to reveal the continuity of his unique vocabulary within an expansive set of sculptural positions.

Given Rauschenberg's protean imagination, this exhibition also features a number of his sculptures that were not aligned with specific series and exist on their own formal terms. Key loans from institutional and private collections augment the selection of work from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation to further argue for the artist's keen sculptural sensibility, even if he resisted aligning himself with one medium. This exhibition traces the trajectory of Rauschenberg's creative output as a whole, with the three-dimensional objects serving as key touchpoints in an expansive and almost uncategorizable oeuvre. The last survey of Rauschenberg's purely sculptural output prior to this show was in 1995 at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

This exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue designed by Chris Svensson with an essay by sculpture expert, Lisa Le Feuvre, Executive Director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation, entries on each of the individual sculptural series represented, and detailed exhibition histories.

Robert Rauschenberg, Sympathy for Abandoned Objects, May 1st – June 14th, 2025, Gladstone 530 West 21st Street

Opening Reception: May 1, 6PM–8PM – Gladstone debuts an exhibition of over 30 rarely seen sculptures by Robert Rauschenberg

About the artist

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008): born on October 22, 1925 in Port Arthur, Texas, Robert Rauschenberg worked in what he called the gap between art and life. Over the course of his sixty-year career, Rauschenberg's art embodied a spirit of experimentation with new materials and techniques. Dubbed an enfant terrible for his assemblages of urban detritus (the Combines of 1954–64), Rauschenberg engaged a radically minimal palette in the years following his 1970 decampment to Captiva Island in the Gulf of Mexico, off the Florida coast. Although he demurred from affiliations with any particular movement, he has been called a forerunner of essentially every postwar artistic development since Abstract Expressionism.

In addition to his own artmaking practice, Rauschenberg became an advocate for artists and the creative community at large. In September 1970, he founded Change, Inc., a non-profit organization that helped artists with emergency expenses. From 1984–91, he personally funded the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI), traveling to ten countries outside of the United States to spark cross-cultural dialogue through art.

Rauschenberg died on May 12, 2008 in his Captiva studio. His artistic legacy and his lifelong commitment to collaboration with artists, performers, writers, artisans, and engineers worldwide was recognized long before his death. His expansive artistic philosophy lives on through his highly innovative and influential work to the present day.

About the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation: The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation builds on the legacy of artist Robert Rauschenberg, emphasizing his belief that artists can drive social change. Rauschenberg sought to act in the “gap” between art and life, valuing chance and collaboration across disciplines. As such, the Foundation celebrates new and even untested ways of thinking.

About Rauschenberg100: Robert Rauschenberg's (1925-2008) strong conviction that engagement with art can nurture people's sensibilities as individuals, community members, and citizens was key to his ethos. The Centennial celebrations seek to allow audiences familiar with him and those encountering the artist for the first time to form fresh perspectives about his artwork. A year of global activities and exhibitions in honor of Rauschenberg's Centennial reexamines the artist through a contemporary lens, highlighting his enduring influence on generations of artists and advocates for social progress. The Centennial's activation of the artist's legacy promotes cross-disciplinary explorations and creates opportunities for critical dialogue.