

Liam Otero, "Week in Reviews: Robert Rauschenberg at Gladstone," *White Hot Magazine*, May 11, 2025



Week in Reviews: Robert Rauschenberg at Gladstone, Process-Driven Abstraction at Elza Kayal, A-Vent-Space at Greenpoint Gallery, and more

By LIAM OTERO May 11, 2025



Installation view of Robert Rauschenberg: Sympathy for Abandoned Objects at Gladstone Gallery, Chelsea.

***Robert Rauschenberg: Sympathy for Abandoned Objects* at Gladstone Gallery, Chelsea (on view through June 14)**

2025 is a milestone year because this is the centenary of Robert Rauschenberg's birth. As such, museums and galleries all over the world are staging exhibitions honoring the life and legacy of one of the pillars of Modern & Contemporary Art, to which Gladstone Gallery's 21st Street location has now joined this prestigious roster. In collaboration with the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Gladstone Gallery's newest exhibition is a focused survey on Rauschenberg's work in sculpture, the first such show in over 30 years.

Concomitant with his painting and photography, Rauschenberg devoted decades to working in three-dimensions. With sculptures spanning the 1950s to the 1990s, Gladstone features an assortment of sculptural assemblages that Rauschenberg completed for different series or as standalone projects, including *Scatole Personali* (1952 - 1953), *Combines* (1954 - 1964), *Kabal American Zephyrs* (1981 - 1983, 1985, 1987 - 1988), and the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) (1984 -1991). Though he expressed a keen interest in experimenting with the formal parameters of sculpture through his use of found objects and other unconventional materials, Rauschenberg was also a committed environmentalist who was cognizant of the dangers of commercial and industrial waste (especially noteworthy in his *Gluts* series of the 1980s & 1990s). "One man's trash, is another man's treasure" should be the tagline for this exhibition as Rauschenberg collected innumerable discarded items that he deemed "treasures" suitable for a new lease on life in sculptural form. Gladstone makes this overarching point perfectly legible in their up-close and personal presentation of these objects on modestly sized plinths and bases that are intended to recall the scale of a human body - from infancy up through adulthood according to my discernment.



Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1925 - 2008), Mercury Zero Summer Glut, 1987, assembled metal.



Rauschenberg (American, 1925 - 2008), Untitled, c. 1953, wood box with lid and removable balsa wood-and-fabric cube.

Over 30 Rauschenberg sculptures are brought to the fore - most out in the open, while a few smaller works are in glass displays. The use of “sympathy” in the title rings true when viewing each object for one can tell that Rauschenberg fused his found materials under the gentlest conditions: an already dented can with a metallic decorative flower placed atop, a rusted toolbox filled with clay, or a lawn ornament positioned at the edge of an old gardening spade. Moreover, the material identity of the objects - be they desk fans, electric lights, wooden chairs, or fire hoses - are largely kept as they are, with little physical manipulation. Instead, these “abandoned objects” have been recontextualized to fulfill more creative ends for Rauschenberg in which they are given purpose and protection, much as a loving foster parent would graciously adopt an orphan and shower them with unconditional love.

This is an incredible opportunity to not only see Rauschenberg's sculptures, but to trace the longevity of Rauschenberg's sense of kinship with the neglected and discarded items that society deemed to be of no value and the reinvigoration he brings forth in these formerly "abandoned objects" that are now the focal points of a major gallery exhibition.