

## FSW's Rauschenberg Gallery hosts biggest-ever U.S. exhibit of Jack Kerouac art

**Charles Runnells**, Fort Myers News-Press    Published 11:00 a.m. ET Sept. 24, 2018



(Photo: Charles Runnells/The News-Press)

People know Jack Kerouac as the famous author of “On the Road” and a pioneer of the Beat movement.

But there's another side to Kerouac that even some of his biggest fans don't know: He was a visual artist who painted and drew even as he was cranking out literary landmarks such as “On the Road,” “The Dharma Bums” and “Big Sur.”

Whatever medium he chose, it was all about spontaneity and creativity, says Jade Dellinger, director of **Bob Rauschenberg Gallery** (<http://www.rauschenberggallery.com/>) at Florida SouthWestern State College. It was a way for Kerouac to get his ideas out on paper, one way or another.

“There were periods for Kerouac when it was difficult for him to write,” Dellinger says. “He would turn to art when he couldn't find his words.”



**Author Jack Kerouac in an undated file photo** (Photo: JERRY BAUER, GNS)

**Review:** [Lab Theater's 'Anna,' set in Ybor cigar factory, features all-Latino cast](#) ([/story/entertainment/2018/09/18/review-lab-theaters-anna-tropics-features-all-latino-cast/1336669002/](#))

**Concert news:** [John Mellencamp to rock Fort Myers' Mann Hall](#) ([/story/entertainment/2018/09/13/john-mellencamp-rock-fort-myers-mann-hall/1289082002/](#))

A new Rauschenberg Gallery exhibit shines a light on that under-appreciated side of Kerouac with 72 paintings and drawings from the 1940s through the 1960s. It's the largest survey of Kerouac's visual art to be shown in the United States, Dellinger says.

The show — which also features four “On the Road”-inspired art pieces by British filmmaker Peter Greenaway — comes just weeks

after Rauschenberg Gallery closed its previous exhibit, [“Jack Kerouac & Ed Ruscha: On the Road.”](#) ([/story/entertainment/2018/06/18/kerouacs-120-foot-scroll-road-visits-fort-myers/699231002/](#)) That show featured Kerouac's famous 120-foot scroll manuscript for “On The Road.”

“The idea was always to do back-to-back Kerouac,” Dellinger says.

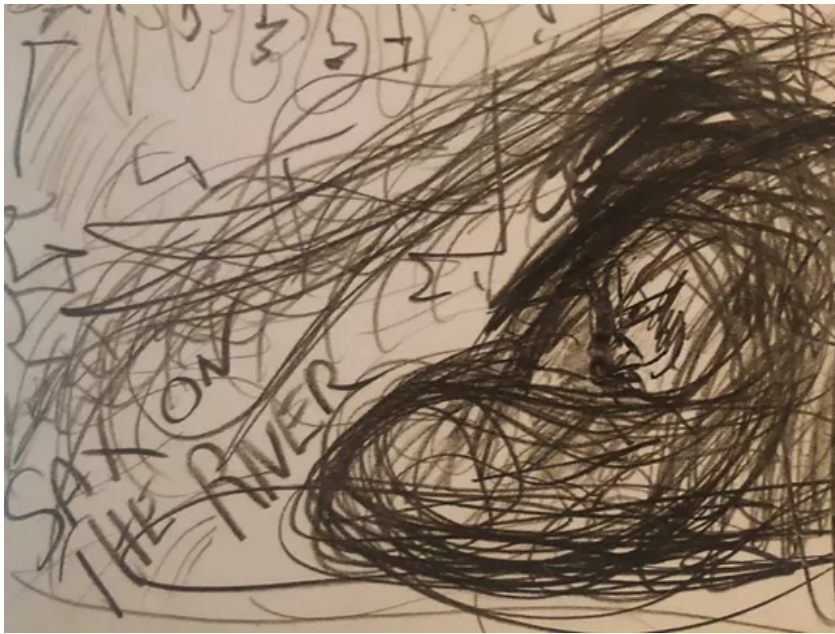


**Jack Kerouac depicts a sunset scene in this oil painting.** (Photo: Charles Runnells/The News-Press)

Kerouac's 1957 novel "On the Road" helped define the Beat Generation, a 1950s group of counter-culture writers that included Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. The novel is often listed as one of the top 100 most important books of all time.

The south Fort Myers show coincides with the recent release of the SKIRA art book "Kerouac: Beat Painting." Both the book and the Rauschenberg exhibit draw largely from the private collection of Switzerland resident Arminio Sciolli.

In an introduction to "Kerouac: Beat Painting," Sciolli describes ignoring the advice of so-called art experts and — along with his brother Paolo — buying 100 of Kerouac's artworks and personal items to be displayed in five floors of a gallery.



**"Sax on the River," a sketch by Jack Kerouac** (Photo: Charles Runnells/The News-Press)

Those pieces were also shown recently in art exhibits in Dubai and the influential Pompidou Centre in Paris — proving that even art experts can sometimes be wrong.

"Kerouac artworks were far from being appreciated, even by cognoscenti," Sciolli says. "It is true that some (of Kerouac's) early drawings or doodles might appear naive.

"But in 1958, Kerouac enters Soho Cedar Tavern determined to turn into a painter, and he succeeds thanks to widowed New York artist Dody Muller's teachings, but also meeting (and learning from artists) Franz Kline, Larry Rivers ... Willem de Kooning, Stanley Twardowicz and possibly Jackson Pollock."

It's not unusual for artists to delve into multiple genres, Sciolli says. Leonardo da Vinci was an inventor, an architect, a poet, a playwright, a painter, a sculptor and more.

"So Kerouac was also a musician playing harmonica and reading on recordings and a painter," he says, "besides (being) a writer with an incredible gift for words."



**An abstract painting by Jack Kerouac** (Photo: Charles Runnells/The News-Press)

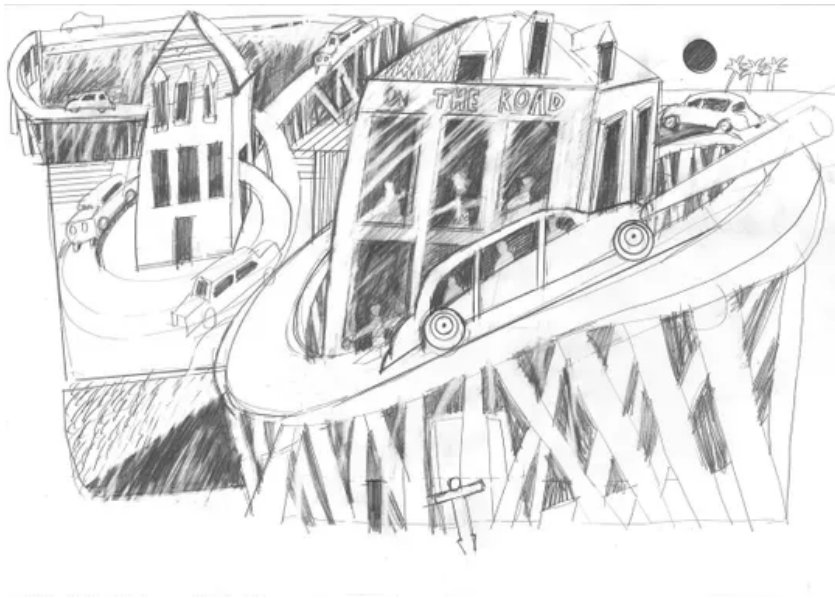
The art works in the exhibit are rare, precious items that help people better understand Kerouac, Dellinger says. That's why Rauschenberg Gallery had to take out a \$3 million insurance rider.

"These things are incredibly valuable," he says.

The exhibit isn't just about Kerouac, though. It also includes four drawings from acclaimed film director Peter Greenaway ("The Draughtsman's Contract," "The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover"). Greenaway wasn't available for a News-Press interview, but the book "Kerouac: Beat Painting" details how the pieces were created for a video project reinterpreting Kerouac's famous cross-country journeys.

Like Kerouac, Greenaway has worked in multiple mediums, and he was a visual artist before he became a filmmaker. "That's really evident when you see his films," Dellinger says. "They're incredibly visual."





A sketch from British filmmaker Peter Greenaway's inspired by the Kerouac novel "On the Road" (Photo: Special to The News-Press)

Still, most of the Rauschenberg exhibit focuses on Kerouac's work and also several personal items, including his clothes, tennis shoes and books displayed in a case. "We wanted to humanize him," Dellinger says.

Some of the art pieces are simple drawings, dashed off the top of Kerouac's head and not deeply thought out or conceived: The view from a hotel balcony in Tangiers, misshapen portraits of animals and unnamed people, or a furiously scribbled pastel piece called "Sax on the River" — which Dellinger says feels as if it was drawn while Kerouac listened to music and transferred the rhythm and beats he heard to paper.



This case at Fort Myers' Rauschenberg Gallery displays legendary author Jack Kerouac's clothes, shoes and books. (Photo: Charles Runnells/The News-Press)

But other works are more advanced and fully realized: A delicate portrait of artist (and former lover) Dody Muller, another portrait called "The Silly Eye" (believed to represent Beat writer Burroughs, thanks to the tell-tale bowler hat) or a swirling, violent brown tempest titled "Truman Capote" — the author who famously criticized Kerouac's work by saying, "That's not writing, that's typing."

Both Kerouac's scribbles and his more advanced art pieces show his need to create and to embrace spontaneity. "It's about the totality of his work," Dellinger says.



**Jack Kerouac's 1959 oil painting "Truman Capote"** (Photo: Charles Runnells/The News-Press)

Many of the pieces can be tied directly back to Kerouac's writing, as well. One untitled painting shows a blue ball and Kerouac's own handprint in blue paint, recalling Kerouac's many references to blue balloons in his writing. Another painting — "Woman in Blue with Black Hat" — depicts the character Joan Rawshanks, who also popped up in Kerouac's novel "Visions of Cody."

"Most people aren't aware of his work as a visual artist or how it connects with his work as a writer," Dellinger says. "I do think it connects in a really meaningful way."



Jack Kerouac's 1959 painting "The Silly Eye" is believed to be a portrait of Beat legend Williams S. Burroughs. The biggest clue: The signature bowler hat. (Photo: Charles Runnells/The News-Press)

Taken together, the paintings and drawings at Rauschenberg Gallery offer Kerouac lovers another way to appreciate the artist and his work.

Sciolli hopes the exhibit opens people's eyes to the multi-faceted nature of Kerouac's art, whatever the medium. And he offers this advice to people visiting the Fort Myers gallery: "The show is a feast for the eyes. Enjoy Kerouac's artworks."

Connect with this reporter: Charles Runnells (Facebook), @charlesrunnells (Twitter), @crunnells1 (Instagram)

#### **If you go**

**What:** "The Art of Peter Greenaway & Jack Kerouac" exhibit

**Where:** Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway S.W., Building L, south Fort Myers.

**When:** Now through Dec. 8. Gallery hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday

**Admission:** Free

**Info:** 489-9313 or [rauschenberggallery.com](http://www.rauschenberggallery.com/) (<http://www.rauschenberggallery.com/>)

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