

# 'Giant of American art': Rauschenberg show features rarely seen work



**Charles Runnells**

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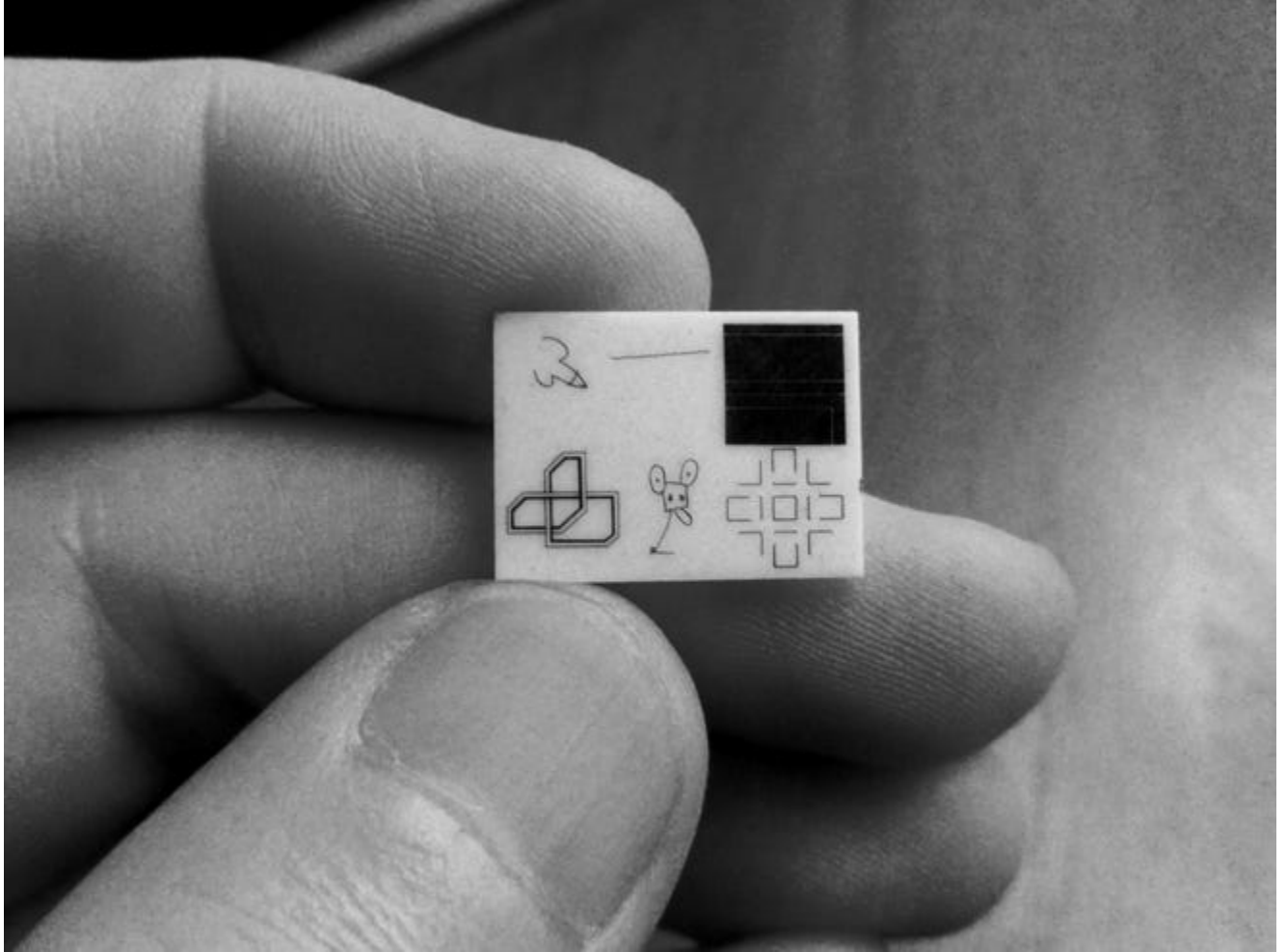
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- A new exhibit celebrates what would have been artist Robert Rauschenberg's 100th birthday.
- The show, "RAUSCHENBERG at 100," features rarely seen works from local private collections.
- Rauschenberg, known for his "combines," lived on Captiva Island from 1970 until his death in 2008.
- The free exhibit runs through May 2 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery Annex in Fort Myers.

Major exhibits have been happening all over the world to celebrate what would have been [Robert Rauschenberg's 100th birthday year](#). Now his namesake gallery in Fort Myers has opened its own show featuring rarely seen works from the late art icon.

"RAUSCHENBERG at 100: As Large As The World Is" opened Jan. 15 and showcases paintings and other work from local private collections.

Those works include a replica of [the famous, fingernail-sized "Moon Museum"](#) (the first-ever "space art" object that was allegedly snuck onto NASA's Apollo 12 lunar landing mission in 1969) and the "self portrait" triptych "Autobiography," created just before Rauschenberg bought his first home on Captiva Island.



Rauschenberg moved to Captiva in 1970 and lived there until his death in 2008. He was 82 years old.

The influential artist became famous in the 1950s for his “combines,” art pieces that combined sculpture and painting using found objects. His most famous combine, “Monogram,” was made from a taxidermied, long-haired goat wearing a car tire.

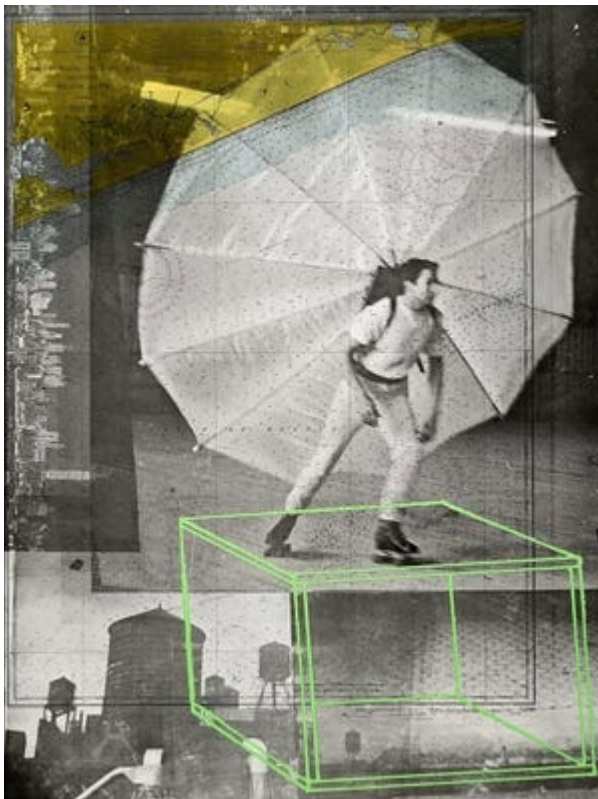
“Robert 'Bob' Rauschenberg’s significance and the continued influence of his artistic legacy can hardly be overstated,” says Jade Dellinger, director of [Bob Rauschenberg Gallery](#) on the Fort Myers campus of Florida SouthWestern State College. “I would argue that he is the most

influential visual artist of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — the progenitor of Pop Art and the precursor to Minimalism and Conceptualism.”

The exhibit continues through May 2 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery Annex, the gallery’s temporary home while its former space is being renovated.

Here’s more from our Q&A with Dellinger about the exhibit, Rauschenberg’s influence and more:

## **Rauschenberg exhibit showcases "*the giant*" of American art**



**The News-Press/Naples Daily News: Why is this such an important art exhibit?**

**Jade Dellinger:** Our friend, the Pulitzer Prize-winning art critic Jerry Saltz, points out that Rauschenberg was not simply “a giant” of American Art, but “*the* giant” of American Art. And Bob Rauschenberg made Captiva Island — here in Lee County — his permanent home and workplace for nearly four decades until his death 17 years ago.

“RAUSCHENBERG at 100: As Large As the World Is” is his first solo exhibition in our new Bob Rauschenberg Gallery Annex space. (It draws largely from never-before-exhibited works held locally in the private collections of some of his most intimate friends.

### **What are some of the most famous or notable pieces in the show, and why are those important?**

We are excited to exhibit unique works from his *Runts*, *Spreads*, *Anagram* and *Borealis* series for the first time publicly. And we will once again present Rauschenberg’s 1968 self-portrait triptych “Autobiography,” which tells his life story just before purchasing his first Captiva property and making his move to Florida.

We will also feature the collective artwork titled the “Moon Museum” (a 1969 piece created along with five other famous artists). That was the first-ever “space art” project and surreptitiously sited drawings by Rauschenberg, [Andy Warhol](#) and other collaborators on the lunar surface with the Apollo XII [moon mission](#).

### **A groundbreaking artist who lived in Southwest Florida**



## **What made Rauschenberg such a groundbreaking artist?**

Bob Rauschenberg defied convention and categorization, but he also influenced generations of artists through his art and life.

In the 1950's, Rauschenberg coined the term “combine” to describe his works — which were neither strictly paintings or sculpture, but something very new.

His global impact as the first Western contemporary artist to exhibit in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and elsewhere — under authoritarian and dictatorial regimes — was indeed groundbreaking. Major Chinese artists today, like Xu Bing and Ai Wei Wei, still define art in China as “before and after Rauschenberg.”



### **Where did the show's title come from?**

When he was interviewed in the gallery many years ago, Rauschenberg was asked why he was so committed to showing his work locally when he had every opportunity to exhibit in the most prestigious museums internationally. His reply was, "Fort Myers is as small as your mind is... It can be just as large as the world is!"

I started adding that line to most of my email as soon as I arrived at this post (as director of Bob Rauschenberg Gallery). It was a deeply-

held belief for Rauschenberg, and it illustrated his profound philosophy on the interconnectedness of local and global perspectives.

## **First solo Rauschenberg at FSW's Bob Rauschenberg Gallery Annex**



**This exhibition is the first solo Rauschenberg show curated specifically for the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery Annex. But he's had a lot of shows at the main gallery, right?**

The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery was founded as The Gallery of Fine Art in 1979 on the Lee County campus of Florida Southwestern State College/FSW (then Edison Community College). In 2004, it was renamed the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery to honor and commemorate our longtime association and friendship with the artist.

Over more than three decades, until his death, the gallery worked closely with Rauschenberg to present world premieres and more than a dozen exhibitions, including multiple installations of the “ $\frac{1}{4}$  Mile or Two Furlong Piece.”

The artist insisted on naming the space the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery (versus the “Robert Rauschenberg Gallery”) as it was consistent with the intimate, informal relationship he maintained with both our local Southwest Florida community and FSW.

**More information about FSW’s Rauschenberg exhibit**



"RAUSCHENBERG at 100: As Large As The World Is" continues through May 2 in FSW's Bob Rauschenberg Gallery Annex.

The annex is in the library at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway S.W., Building J, south Fort Myers.

Admission is free.

Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday. It's closed on Sundays and holidays.

