

Jade Dellinger: Collaborating through time and space

BY CATHY CHESTNUT OCT. 06, 2018 MIDNIGHT

Jade Dellinger was preternaturally drawn to the curatorial helm of the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, where he has brought in rigorous, collaborative and site-based shows that explore connections with the gallery's namesake, initiating a renewed relevancy to the world-famous artist who chose to be part of the local community.

It's clear that Jade has come full-circle when he recounts how, at the age of 14, he wrote a letter to Robert Rauschenberg care of the Mucky Duck, where the Captiva resident strolled and dined at sunset. Enclosed was \$10 for drinks. A week later, Jade, who grew up in Land O' Lakes, received a tube with a handwritten note from the great artist and a lithographic poster for his recent exhibition at the National Gallery in Beijing.



Andrew West Andrea Melendez/The News-Press/USA Today

Jade Dellinger inside the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on the FSW campus.

“It’s the first thing I put on my wall in my office,” Jade, 50, is happy to report.

After being hired by Florida SouthWestern State College in Fort Myers in September 2013, he set about having a to-scale model of the gallery created to better visualize and plan exhibitions. And he got busy bringing in collaborative shows such as “Yoko Ono Imagine Peace,” for which the conceptual artist designed a billboard that was erected in Fort Myers; visitors could take home a specialized flashlight and “Imagine Peace” button to spread the message. (Ono collaborated again in 2017 with the installation of an “I Love You Earth” billboard.)

From the beginning, Jade’s priority has been connecting the space with the global importance of Rauschenberg — one of the most influential artists of the second half of the 20th century, not only in the United States but around the world. Contemporary artists in China, such as Ai Weiwei, still point to the impact of Rauschenberg’s influence, Jade says.

Jade earned his undergraduate degree in art history at the University of South Florida, then lived in New York City, obtaining his master’s in arts administration from New York University. He was an independent curator for 20 years, first in

New York, working with contemporary artists — some Jade has invited here for their first museum shows. Jade returned to his roots, curating shows at the Tampa Museum of Art and the Contemporary Art Museum at the University of South Florida that traveled widely to other museums, from Miami to Mexico to Cincinnati.

The author of the illustrated biography of America's pioneering art rock group, "We Are Devo!: Are We Not Men?," Jade has also assisted in several catalogs and publications. He writes for national art magazines.

Jade also has an affinity for John Cage, to whom he also wrote in his youth and met in New York. Cage, a post-war avant-garde composer and music theorist, had a close friendship with Rauschenberg, and their work impacted each other — a phenomenon explored in some FSW exhibitions.

Rauschenberg firmly believed that art can change the world. To that end, Jade has traveled to Venezuela and Ukraine to give cultural exchange lectures on the artist through the U.S. State Department, often tied to historic arts milestones connected to Rauschenberg. This month will find Jade at a space museum in Slovenia.

It's no surprise that Jade has a rigorous season lined up for 2019, which marks the 40th anniversary of the gallery and the 15th since it was renamed for Rauschenberg. Running through December 8, "The Art of Peter Greenaway & Jack Kerouac" is the largest U.S. survey of the visual art by Jack Kerouac with more than 60 paintings and drawings, featuring newly commission works (inspired by "On the Road") by the British filmmaker Peter Greenaway. Next year, there will be a major Rauschenberg show, as well as an exhibition centered on John Cage. Jade is working with world-renowned photographer William Wegman (think: famous Weimaraner portraits) to



The Art of Peter Greenaway and Jack Kerouac is the exhibition on display at the Rauschenberg Gallery from September 14 through December 8.

curate an exhibition of his rare and never-before-seen photographs, video and drawings.

No matter the year or anniversary, “we always have to return to Bob,” Jade says. “A big part of my interest has been to leverage our history and Bob’s association with our gallery to find ways to extend his legacy. Everything we do is informed by him in a way.”

For decades, Rauschenberg could premiere ambitious new work at the gallery before debuting it in New York, including multiple installations of the “¼ Mile or Two Furlong Piece.” He also drew star power to the growing town: the works of James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein, Cy Twombly and other major artists. He had close friends, assistants and friends in town and an intimate connection with the community.

“What’s important is being true to the high bar Bob set in what this was and what it has become,” Jade says. “An artist of that stature and historical significance, that he engaged so deeply here is quite unique.”

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