

‘RAUSCHENBERG: China/America Mix’ first solo show of artist’s work at Rauschenberg Gallery since 2008 memorial

By TOM HALL
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Florida SouthWestern State College and lead sponsor FineMark National Bank & Trust have announced the first solo exhibition of Bob Rauschenberg’s work at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery since his memorial in 2008.

RAUSCHENBERG: China/America Mix will be the artist’s sixteenth one-man show at the College since the Gallery was founded in 1979.

RAUSCHENBERG: China/America Mix also celebrates the 10-year anniversary of the Gallery’s renaming and dedication in the artist’s honor, and will include the first installation in more than a decade of his monumental 100-foot-long 1984 photograph, *Chinese Summerhall*.

Widely-acknowledged as one of the most important artists of the 20th Century, Rauschenberg is credited with pioneering the transition from European modernism to American pop art and was a highly popular Lee County resident for nearly four decades. His effect still looms large around the globe, but nowhere is this more evident than in China.

Inspired by his 1982 visit to Jing Xian and his work at the ancient Xuan Paper Mill on his 7 [Chinese] *Characters* collages (included in this exhibition), Rauschenberg returned to China in 1985 to mount his Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) exhibition at the National Gallery in Beijing. Open to the public for less than three weeks, Rauschenberg’s ROCI/China show attracted more than 300,000 visitors and is still considered a seminal cultural event. To this day, the most recognized Chinese artists acknowledge his great influence and broader impact in describing art in China “before... and after Rauschenberg.”

As the artist once noted, “ROCI [was] an attempt to create universal art, imbued with cultures of various peoples, in order to contribute to the cause of peace.” In China in particular, “while photographing the environs, a sense of China unfolded in the viewfinder of Rauschenberg’s Hasselblad,” Dr. Donald Saff observed. “The enthusiasm of his working methodology was his diplomacy and his art was magic for the people’s spirit.”

The RAUSCHENBERG: China/America Mix exhibition will open to the public from 7-9 p.m. on Bob Rauschenberg’s October 22nd birthday with musical performances by longtime friends Dickie Landry, Kat Epple and Sonic Combine. A pre-opening lecture on “Rauschenberg in China” will be presented from 6-7p.m. by distinguished guest Dr. Donald Saff, who not only served as Founder of USF’s Graphicstudio, but as Artistic Director of Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange/ROCI.

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). On June 4, 2004 the Gallery of Fine Art was renamed the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery to honor and commemorate its long association and friendship with the artist. Over the three plus decades prior to his death, the Gallery worked closely with Rauschenberg to present world premiere exhibitions including multiple installations of the ¼ 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. ■