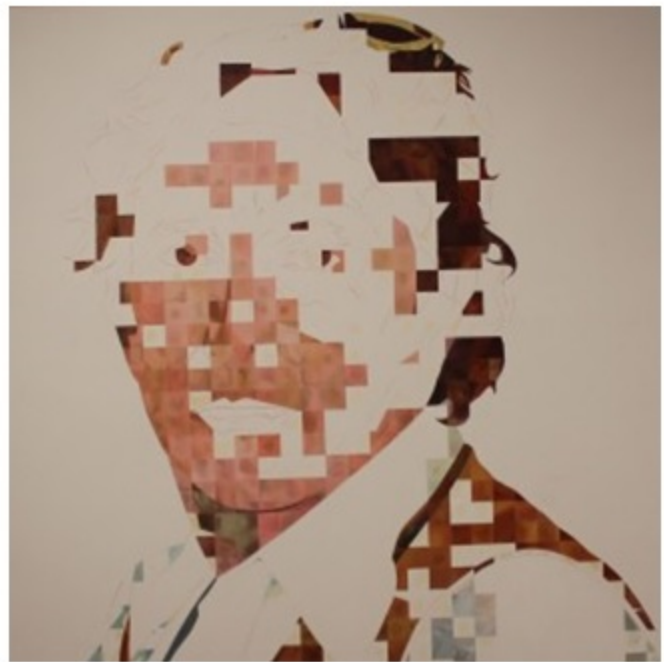


Theo Wujcik was within five degrees of Robert Rauschenberg

By **TOM HALL**
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On view now through August 8 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College is Theo Wujcik: Artist's Artist. The exhibition features nine large-scale acrylic-on-canvas paintings that Wujcik completed during the final six months of his life, a period in which he sapped increasingly of energy and vitality by cancer of the stomach, lungs and brain. The exhibition also includes a number of small edition prints, silverpoint drawings and paintings that Wujcik rendered of the gallery's namesake.

Director Jade Dellinger has gone on record a number of times since assuming the reins of BRG that he intends to expand the reach of the gallery and the legacy of local icon Bob Rauschenberg, who maintained his studio, print workshop and living quarters inside a 20-acre compound on Captiva Island until his death in 2009. Artist's Artist helps meet this mission by explicating the relationship between Wujcik and Rauschenberg.



Wujcik trained as a master printer at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop and Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles and the Detroit Lithography Workshop before being recruited by Donald Saff in 1970 to oversee printmaking at the University of South Florida's then-fledgling Graphicstudio. At Tamarind, Wujcik had served as a printer for prominent Los Angeles artists John Altoon, Billy Al Bengston and Ed Moses. At Gemini G.E.L., Wujcik created prints for Jasper Johns. As co-founder of the Detroit Lithography Workshop, he produced a portfolio of ten lithographs. And as the shop manager at Graphicstudio, he worked with Richard Anuszkiewicz, Ed Ruscha, James



Rosenquist and Bob Rauschenberg.



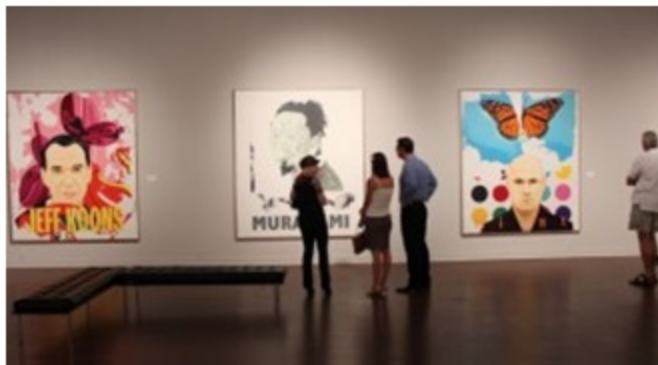
These collaborations inspired Wujcik to feature the artists he worked with as a printer or knew as friends in a series of subtle stipple engravings and metalpoint black-and-white drawings.

Technically superior and uncannily lifelike, a number of the resulting portraits were acquired by such prestigious museums as the New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the National Gallery, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Detroit Institute and the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut. Three compilations containing Bob Rauschenberg from this period are in Artist's Artist, including one on loan from Wujcik curator and local art consultant Barbara Anderson Hill.

After changing emphasis, and venturing over the ensuing three decades into abstract, pop and mixed media genres and media, Wujcik returned to portraiture at the end of his career and life. During the six months preceding his death on March 29, 2014, Wujcik crafted eleven stunning Blue Chip paintings. Once again, Wujcik gave props to Bob Rauschenberg. But unlike the "brightly-colored interpretations of Jim Rosenquist, Takashi Murakami, Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons and numerous other artist-colleagues and friends," notes the Rauschenberg Gallery, Wujcik rendered friend and collaborator Rauschenberg in monotone white, grays and black. On loan from Wujcik's former wife Susan Johnson, it is this work that greets BRG visitors as they pass through the automatic storefront doors at the entrance to Building L.



The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery was founded as The Gallery of Fine Art in 1979 on the Lee County campus of Florida South Westem 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. ■